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## Brief Explanations of the Technical Resources Used in this Commentary Series

### I. Lexical

There are several excellent lexicons available for ancient Hebrew.

- A. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. It is based on the German lexicon by William Gesenius. It is known by the abbreviation BDB.
- B. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, translated by M. E. J. Richardson. It is known by the abbreviation KB.
- C. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* by William L. Holladay and is based on the above German lexicon (#A).
- D. A new five volume theological word study entitled *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, edited by Willem A. Van Gemeren. It is known by the abbreviation NIDOTTE.

Where there is significant lexical variety, I have shown several English translations (NASB, NKJV, NRSV, TEV, NJB) from both “word-for-word” and “dynamic equivalent” translations (cf. Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, pp. 28-44).

### II. Grammatical

The grammatical identification is usually based on John Joseph Owens’ *Analytical Key to the Old Testament* in four volumes. This is cross checked with Benjamin Davidson’s *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

Another helpful resource for grammatical and syntactical features which is used in most of the OT volumes of “You Can Understand the Bible” Series is “The Helps for Translators Series” from the United Bible Societies. They are entitled “A Handbook on \_\_\_\_\_.”

### III. Textual

I am committed to the inspiration of the consonantal Hebrew text (not the Masoretic vowel points and comments). As in all hand-copied, ancient texts, there are some questionable passages. This is usually because of the following:

- A.. *hapax legomenon* (words used only once in the Hebrew OT)
- B. idiomatic terms (words and phrases whose literal meanings have been lost)
- C. historical uncertainties (our lack of information about the ancient world)
- D. the poly-semitic semantic field of Hebrew’s limited vocabulary
- E. problems associated with later scribes hand-copying ancient Hebrew texts
- F. Hebrew scribes trained in Egypt who felt free to update the texts they copied to make them complete and understandable to their day (NIDOTTE pp. 52-54).

There are several sources of Hebrew words and texts outside the Masoretic textual tradition.

1. The Samaritan Pentateuch
2. The Dead Sea Scrolls
3. Some later coins, letters, and ostraca (broken pieces of unfired pottery used for writing), but for the most part, there are no manuscript families in the OT like those in the Greek NT manuscripts. For a good brief article on the textual reliability of the Masoretic Text (A.D. 900’s) see “The Reliability of the Old Testament Text” by Bruce K. Waltke in the NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 51-67.

The Hebrew text used is *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* from the German Bible Society, 1997, which is based on the Leningrad Codex (A.D. 1009). Occasionally, the ancient versions (Greek Septuagint, Aramaic Targums, Syriac Peshitta, and Latin Vulgate) are consulted if the Hebrew is ambiguous or obviously confused.

# BRIEF DEFINITIONS OF HEBREW VERBAL FORMS WHICH IMPACT EXEGESIS

## I. Brief Historical Development of Hebrew

Hebrew is part of the Shemitic (Semitic) family of southwest Asian language. The name (given by modern scholars) comes from Noah's son, Shem (cf. Gen. 5:32; 6:10). Shem's descendants are listed in Gen. 10:21-31 as Arabs, Hebrews, Syrians, Arameans, and Assyrians.

In reality some Semitic languages are used by nations listed in Ham's line (cf. Gen. 10:6-14), Canaan, Phoenicia, and Ethiopia.

Hebrew is part of the northwest group of these Semitic languages. Modern scholars have samples of this ancient language group from:

- A. Amorite (*Mari Tablets* from 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in Akkadian)
- B. Canaanite (*Ras Shamra Tablets* from 15<sup>th</sup> century in Ugaritic)
- C. Canaanite (*Amarna Letters* from 14<sup>th</sup> century in Canaanite Akkadian)
- D. Phoenician (Hebrew uses Phoenician alphabet)
- E. Moabite (Mesha stone, 840 B.C.)
- F. Aramaic (official language of the Persian Empire used in Gen. 31:47 [2 words]; Jer. 10:11; Dan. 2:4-6; 7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26 and spoken by Jews in the first century in Palestine)

The Hebrew language is called "the lip of Canaan" in Isa. 19:18. It was first called "Hebrew" in the prologue of Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Ben Sirach) about 180 B.C. (and some other early places, cf. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, pp. 205ff). It is most closely related to Moabite and the language used at Ugarit. Examples of ancient Hebrew found outside the Bible are

1. the Gezer calendar, 925 B.C. (a school boy's writing)
2. the Siloam Inscription, 705 B.C. (tunnel writings)
3. Samaritan Ostraca, 770 B.C. (tax records on broken pottery)
4. Lachish letters, 587 B.C. (war communications)
5. Maccabean coins and seals
6. some Dead Sea Scroll texts
7. numerous inscriptions (cf. "Languages [Hebrew]," ABD 4:203ff)

It, like all Semitic languages, is characterized by words made up of three consonants (tri-consonantal root). It is an inflexed language. The three-root consonants carry the basic word meaning, while prefixed, suffixed, or internal additions show the syntactical function (later vowels, cf. Sue Green, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew*, pp. 46-49).

Hebrew vocabulary demonstrates a difference between prose and poetry. Word meanings are connected to folk etymologies (not linguistic origins). Word plays and sound plays are quite common (*paronomasia*).

## II. Aspects of Predication

### VERBS

The normal expected word order is VERB, PRONOUN, SUBJECT (with modifiers), OBJECT (with modifiers). The basic non-flagged VERB is the *Qal*, PERFECT, MASCULINE, SINGULAR form. It is how Hebrew and Aramaic lexicons are arranged.

VERBS are inflected to show

1. number—singular, plural, dual
2. gender—masculine and feminine (no neuter)

3. mood—indicative, subjunctive, imperative (relation of the action to reality)
  4. tense (aspect)
    - a. PERFECT, which denotes completed, in the sense of the beginning, continuing, and concluding, of an action. Usually this form was used of past action, the thing has occurred. J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*, says
 

“The single whole described by a perfect is also considered as certain. An imperfect may picture a state as possible or desired or expected, but a perfect sees it as actual, real, and sure” (p. 36).

S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew*, describes it as,
 

“The perfect is employed to indicate actions the accomplishment of which lies indeed in the future, but is regarded as dependant upon such an unalterable determination of the will that it may be spoken of as having actually taken place: thus a resolution, promise, or decree, especially of Divine one, is frequently announced in the perfect tense” (p. 17, e.g., the prophetic perfect).

Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. *From Exegesis to Exposition*, defines this verbal form as
 

“. . .views a situation from the outside, as a whole. As such it expresses a simple fact, whether it be an action or state (including state of being or mind). When used of actions, it often views the action as complete from the rhetorical standpoint of the speaker or narrator (whether it is or is not complete in fact or reality is not the point). The perfect can pertain to an action/state in the past, present or future. As noted above, time frame, which influences how one translates the perfect into a tense-oriented language like English, must be determined from the context” (p. 86).
    - b. IMPERFECT, which denotes an action in progress (incomplete, repetitive, continual, or contingent), often movement toward a goal. Usually this form was used of Present and Future action.
 

J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*, says,
 

“All IMPERFECTS represent incomplete states. They are either repeated or developing or contingent. In other words, or partially developed, or partially assured. In all cases they are partial in some sense, i.e., incomplete” (p. 55).

Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. *From Exegesis to Exposition*, says
 

“It is difficult to reduce the essence of the imperfect to a single concept, for it encompasses both aspect and mood. Sometimes the imperfect is used in an indicative manner and makes an objective statement. At other times it views an action more subjectively, as hypothetical, contingent, possible, and so on” (p. 89).
    - c. The added *waw*, which links the VERB to the action of the previous VERB(s).
    - d. IMPERATIVE, which is based on the volition of the speaker and potential action by the hearer.
    - e. In ancient Hebrew only the larger context can determine the authorial-intended time orientations.
- B. The seven major inflected forms and their basic meaning. In reality these forms work in conjunction with each other in a context and must not be isolated.
1. *Qal (Kal)*, the most common and basic of all the forms. It denotes simple action or a state of being. There is no causation or specification implied.



2. *Niphal*, the second most common form. It is usually PASSIVE, but this form also functions as reciprocal and reflexive. It also has no causation or specification implied.
3. *Piel*, this form is active and expresses the bringing about of an action into a state of being. The basic meaning of the *Qal* stem is developed or extended into a state of being.
4. *Pual*, this is the PASSIVE counterpart to the *Piel*. It is often expressed by a PARTICIPLE.
5. *Hithpael*, which is the reflexive or reciprocal stem. It expresses iterative or durative action to the *Piel* stem. The rare PASSIVE form is called *Hothpael*.
6. *Hiphil*, the active form of the causative stem in contrast to *Piel*. It can have a permissive aspect, but usually refers to the cause of an event. Ernst Jenni, a German Hebrew grammarian, believed that the *Piel* denoted something coming into a state of being, while *Hiphil* showed how it happened.
7. *Hophal*, the PASSIVE counterpart to the *Hiphil*. These last two stems are the least used of the seven stems.

Much of this information comes from *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, by Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, pp. 343-452.

Agency and causation chart. One key in understanding the Hebrew VERB system is to see it as a pattern of VOICE relationships. Some stems are in contrast to other stems (i.e., *Qal* - *Niphal*; *Piel* - *Hiphil*)

The chart below tries to visualize the basic function of the VERB stems as to causation.

<b>VOICE or Subject</b>	<b>No Secondary Agency</b>	<b>An Active Secondary Agency</b>	<b>A Passive Secondary Agency</b>
ACTIVE	<i>Qal</i>	<i>Hiphil</i>	<i>Piel</i>
MIDDLE PASSIVE	<i>Niphal</i>	<i>Hophal</i>	<i>Pual</i>
REFLEXIVE/ RECIPROCAL	<i>Niphal</i>	<i>Hiphil</i>	<i>Hithpael</i>

This chart is taken from the excellent discussion of the VERBAL system in light of new Akkadian research (cf. Bruce K. Waltke, M. O'Conner, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, pp.354-359).

R. H. Kennett, *A Short Account of the Hebrew Tenses*, has provided a needed warning.

“I have commonly found in teaching, that a student’s chief difficulty in the Hebrew verbs is to grasp the meaning which they conveyed to the minds of the Hebrews themselves; that is to say, there is a tendency to assign as equivalents to each of the Hebrew Tenses a certain number of Latin or English forms by which that particular Tense may commonly be translated. The result is a failure to perceive many of these fine shades of meaning, which give such life and vigor to the language of the Old Testament.

The difficulty in the use of the Hebrew verbs lies solely in the point of view, so absolutely different from our own, from which the Hebrews regarded an action;

the *time*, which with us is the first consideration, as the very word, ‘tense’ shows, being to them a matter of secondary importance. It is, therefore, essential that a student should clearly grasp, not so much the Latin or English forms which may be used in translating each of the Hebrew Tenses, but rather the aspect of each action, as it presented itself to a Hebrew’s mind.

The name ‘tenses’ as applied to Hebrew verbs is misleading. The so-called Hebrew ‘tenses’ do not express the *time* but merely the *state* of an action. Indeed were it not for the confusion that would arise through the application of the term ‘state’ to both nouns and verbs, ‘states’ would be a far better designation than ‘tenses.’ It must always be borne in mind that it is impossible to translate a Hebrew verb into English without employing a limitation (viz. of time) which is entirely absent in the Hebrew. The ancient Hebrews never thought of an action as past, present, or future, but simply as *perfect*, i.e., complete, or *imperfect*, i.e., as in course of development. When we say that a certain Hebrew tense corresponds to a Perfect, Pluperfect, or Future in English, we do not mean that the Hebrews thought of it as Perfect, Pluperfect, or Future, but merely that it must be so translated in English. The *time* of an action the Hebrews did not attempt to express by any verbal form” (preface and p. 1).

For a second good warning, Sue Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew*, reminds us,

“There is no way of knowing whether modern scholars’ reconstruction of semantic fields and sense relations in an ancient dead language are merely a reflection of their own intuition, or their own native language, or whether those fields existed in Classical Hebrew” (p. 128).

### C. Moods (Modes)

1. It happened, is happening (INDICATIVE), usually uses PERFECT tense or PARTICIPLES (all PARTICIPLES are INDICATIVE).
2. It will happen, could happen (SUBJUNCTIVE)
  - a. uses a marked IMPERFECT tense
    - (1) COHORTATIVE (added h), first person IMPERFECT form which normally expresses a wish, a request, or self-encouragement (i.e., actions willed by the speaker)
    - (2) JUSSIVE (internal changes), third person IMPERFECT (can be second person in negated sentences) which normally expresses a request, a permission, an admonition, or advice
  - b. uses a PERFECT tense with *lu* or *lule*

These constructions are similar to SECONDCLASSCONDITIONALSENTENCES in Koine Greek. A false statement (protasis) results in a false conclusion (apodosis).
  - c. uses an IMPERFECT tense and *lu*

Context and *lu*, as well as a future orientation, mark this SUBJUNCTIVE usage. Some examples from J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament* are Gen. 13:16; Deut. 1:12; I Kgs. 13:8; Ps. 24:3; Isa. 1:18 (cf. Pp. 76-77).

- D. *Waw*- Conversive/consecutive/relative. This uniquely Hebrew (Canaanite) syntactical feature has caused great confusion through the years. It is used in a variety of ways often based on genre. The reason for the confusion is that early scholars were European and tried to interpret in light of their own native languages. When this proved difficult they blamed the problem on Hebrew being a “supposed” ancient, archaic language. European languages are TENSE

(time) based VERBS. Some of the variety and grammatical implications were specified by the letter WAW being added to the PERFECT or IMPERFECT VERB stems. This altered the way the action was viewed.

1. In historical narrative the VERBS are linked together in a chain with a standard pattern.
2. The *waw* prefix showed a specific relationship with the previous VERBS (s).
3. The larger context is always the key to understanding the VERBS chain. Semitic VERBS cannot be analyzed in isolation.

J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*, notes the distinctive of Hebrew in its use of the *waw* before PERFECTS and IMPERFECTS (pp. 52-53). As the basic idea of the PERFECT is past, the addition of *waw* often projects it into a future time aspect. This is also true of the IMPERFECT whose basic idea is present or future; the addition of *waw* places it into the past. It is this unusual time shift which explains the *waw*'s addition, not a change in the basic meaning of the tense itself. The *waw* PERFECTS work well with prophecy, while the *waw* IMPERFECTS work well with narratives (pp. 54, 68).

Watts continues his definition,

“As a fundamental distinction between *waw* conjunctive and *waw* consecutive, the following interpretations are offered:

1. *Waw* conjunctive appears always to indicate a parallel.
2. *Waw* consecutive appears always to indicate a sequence. It is the only form of *waw* used with consecutive imperfects. The relation between the imperfects linked by it may be temporal sequence, logical consequence, logical cause, or logical contrast. In all cases there is a sequence” (p. 103).

#### E. INFINITIVE - There are two kinds of INFINITIVES

1. INFINITIVE ABSOLUTES, which are “strong, independent, striking expressions used for dramatic effect. . .as a subject, it often has no written verb, the verb ‘to be’ being understood, of course, but the word standing dramatically alone” J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*” (p. 92).
2. INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT, which are “related grammatically to the sentence by prepositions, possessive pronouns, and the construct relationship” (p. 91).

J. Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*, describes the construct state as

“When two (or more) words are so closely united that together they constitute one compound idea, the dependent word (or words) is (are) said to be in the construct state” (p. 44).

#### F. INTERROGATIVES

1. They always appear first in the sentence.
2. Interpretive significance
  - a. *ha* - does not expect a response
  - b. *halo'* - the author expects a “yes” answer

#### NEGATIVES

1. They always appear before the words they negate.
2. Most common negation is *lo'*.
3. The term '*al* has a contingent connotation and is used with COHORTATIVES and JUSSIVES.
4. The term *lebhilit*, meaning “in order that. . .not,” is used with INFINITIVES.
5. The term '*en* is used with PARTICIPLES.

## G. CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

1. There are four kinds of conditional sentences which basically are paralleled in Koine Greek.
  - a. something assumed to be happening or thought of as fulfilled (FIRST CLASS in Greek)
  - b. something contrary to fact whose fulfillment is impossible (SECOND CLASS)
  - c. something which is possible or ever probable (THIRD CLASS)
  - d. something which is less probable, therefore, the fulfillment is dubious (FOURTH CLASS)
2. Grammatical Markers
  - a. the assumed to be true or real condition always uses an INDICATIVE PERFECT or PARTICIPLE and usually the protasis is introduced by
    - (1) *'im*
    - (2) *ki* (or *'asher*)
    - (3) *hin* or *hinneh*
  - b. the contrary to fact condition always uses a PERFECT aspect VERB or a PARTICIPLE with the introductory PARTICLE *lu* or *lule*
  - c. the more probably condition always used IMPERFECT VERB or PARTICIPLES in the protasis, usually *'im* or *ki* are used as introductory PARTICLES
  - d. the less probable condition uses IMPERFECT SUBJUNCTIVES in the protasis and always uses *'im* as an introductory PARTICLE

## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS COMMENTARY

AB	<i>Anchor Bible commentaries</i> , ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols.), ed. David Noel Freedman
AKOT	<i>Analytical Key to the Old Testament</i> by John Joseph Owens
ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i> , James B. Pritchard
BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> by F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs
IDB	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> (4 vols.), ed. George A. Buttrick
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> (5 vols.), ed. James Orr
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JPSOA	<i>The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text: A New Translation</i> (The Jewish Publication Society of America)
KB	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner
LAM	<i>The Holy Bible From Ancient Eastern Manuscripts</i> (the Peshitta) by George M. Lamsa
LXX	Septuagint (Greek-English) by Zondervan, 1970
MOF	<i>A New Translation of the Bible</i> by James Moffatt
MT	Masoretic Hebrew Text
NAB	New American Bible Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NET	NET Bible: New English Translation, Second Beta Edition
NRSV	New Revised Standard Bible
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> (5 vols.), ed. Willem A. VanGemeren

NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
OTPG	<i>Old Testament Parsing Guide</i> by Todd S. Beall, William A. Banks and Colin Smith
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SEPT	The Septuagint (Greek-English) by Zondervan, 1970
TEV	Today's English Version from United Bible Societies
YLT	<i>Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Robert Young
ZPBE	<i>Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia</i> (5 vols.), ed. Merrill C. Tenney

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AS HISTORY

Christianity and Judaism are historical faiths. They base their faith on historical events (accompanied by their interpretations). The problem comes in trying to define or describe what is “history” or “historical study.” Much of the problem in modern theological interpretation rests on modern literary or historical assumptions projected back onto ancient Near Eastern biblical literature. Not only is there not a proper appreciation of the temporal and cultural differences, but also of the literary differences. As modern western people we simply do not understand the genres and literary techniques of ancient Near Eastern writings, so we interpreted them in light of western literal genres.

The nineteenth century’s approach to biblical studies atomized and depreciated the books of the Old Testament as historical, unified documents. This historical scepticism has affected hermeneutics and historical investigation of the Old Testament. The current trend toward “canonical hermeneutics” (Brevard Childs) has helped focus on the current form of the Old Testament text. This, in my opinion, is a helpful bridge over the abyss of German higher criticism of the nineteenth century. We must deal with the canonical text that has been given us by an unknown historical process whose inspiration is assumed.

Many scholars are returning to the assumption of the historicity of the OT. This is surely not meant to deny the obvious editing and updating of the OT by later Jewish scribes, but it is a basic return to the OT as a valid history and the documentation of true events (with their theological interpretations).

A quote from R. K Harrison in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, in the article, “Historical and Literary Criticism of the Old Testament” is helpful:

“Comparative historiographic studies have shown that, along with the Hittites, the ancient Hebrews were the most accurate, objective, and responsible recorders of Near Eastern history. Form-critical studies of books such as Genesis and Deuteronomy, based on specific types of tablets recovered from sites that include Mari, Nuzi, and Boghazköy, have shown that the canonical material has certain nonliterary counterparts in the cultures of some Near Eastern peoples. As a result, it is possible to view with a new degree of confidence and respect those early traditions of the Hebrews that purport to be historiographic in nature” (p. 232).

I am especially appreciative of R. K. Harrison’s work because he makes it a priority to interpret the Old Testament in light of contemporary events, cultures and genres.

In my own classes on early Jewish literature (Genesis - Deuteronomy and Joshua), I try to establish a credible link with other ancient Near Eastern literature and artifacts:

- A. Genesis literary parallels from the ancient Near East
  1. Earliest known literary parallel of the cultural setting of Genesis 1-11 is the Ebla cuniform tablets from northern Syria dating about 2500 B.C., written in Akkadian.
  2. Creation
    - a. The closest Mesopotamian account dealing with creation, *Enuma Elish*, dating from about 1900-1700 B.C., was found in Ashurbanipal’s library at Nineveh and several other places. There are seven cuniform tablets written in Akkadian which describe creation by Marduk.
      - 1) the gods, *Apsu* (fresh water-male) and *Tiamat* (salt water-female) had unruly, noisy children. These two gods tried to silence the younger gods.
      - 2) one of the god’s children, *Marduk*, helped defeat *Tiamat*. He formed the earth from her body.

- 3) *Marduk* formed humanity from another defeated god, *Kingu*, who was the male consort of *Tiamat* after the death of *Apsu*. Humanity came from *Kingu's* blood.
- 4) *Marduk* was made chief of the Babylonian pantheon.
- b. "The creation seal" is a cuniform tablet which is a picture of a naked man and woman beside a fruit tree with a snake wrapped around the tree's trunk and positioned over the woman's shoulder as if talking to her.
3. Creation and Flood - *The Atrahasis Epic* records the rebellion of the lesser gods because of overwork and the creation of seven human couples to perform the duties of these lesser gods. Because of (1) over population and (2) noise, human beings were reduced in number by a plague, two famines and finally a flood, planned by *Enlil*. These major events are seen in the same order in Gen. 1-8. This cuniform composition dates from about the same times as *Enuma Elish* and the *Gilgamesh Epic*, about 1900-1700 B.C. All are in Akkadian.
4. Noah's flood
  - a. A Sumerian tablet from Nippur, called *Eridu Genesis*, dating from about 1600 B.C., tells about *Zivsudra* and a coming flood.
    - 1) *Enka*, the water god, warned of a coming flood
    - 2) *Zivsudra*, a king-priest, saved in a huge boat
    - 3) The flood lasted seven days
    - 4) *Zivsudra* opened a window on the boat and released several birds to see if dry land had appeared
    - 5) He also offered a sacrifice of an ox and sheep when he left the boat
  - b. A composite Babylonian flood account from four Sumerian tales, known as the *Gilgamesh Epic*, originally dating from about 2500-2400 B.C., although the written composite form was cuniform Akkadian, is much later. It tells about a flood survivor, *Utnapishtim*, who tells *Gilgamesh*, the king of *Uruk* how he survived the great flood and was granted eternal life.
    - 1) *Ea*, the water god, warns of a coming flood and tells *Utnapishtim* (Babylonian form of *Zivsudra*) to build a boat
    - 2) *Utnapishtim* and his family, along with selected healing plants, survived the flood
    - 3) The flood lasted seven days
    - 4) The boat came to rest in northeast Persia, on Mt. Nisir
    - 5) He sent out three different birds to see if dry land had yet appeared
5. The Mesopotamian literature which describes an ancient flood draws from the same source. The names often vary, but the plot is the same. An example is that *Zivsudra*, *Atrahasis*, and *Utnapishtim* are all the same human king.
6. The historical parallels to the early events of Genesis can be explained in light of man's pre-dispersion (Genesis 10-11) knowledge and experience of God. These true historical core memories have been elaborated and mythologicalized into the current flood accounts common throughout the world. The same can also be said of: creation (Genesis 1-2) and human and angelic unions (Genesis 6).
7. Patriarch's Day (Middle Bronze)
  - a. Mari tablets - cuniform legal (Ammonite culture) and personal texts written in Akkadian from about 1700 B.C.
  - b. Nuzi tablets - cuniform archives of certain families (Horite or Hurrian culture) written in Akkadian from about 100 miles SE of Nineveh about 1500-1300 B.C.



They record family and business procedures. For further specific examples, see Walton, pp. 52-58.

- c. Alalak tablets - cuniform texts from Northern Syria from about 2000 B.C.
  - d. Some of the names found in Genesis are named as place names in the Mari Tablets: Serug, Peleg, Terah, Nahor. Other biblical names were also common: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Laban, and Joseph.
8. "Comparative historiographic studies have shown that, along with the Hittites, the ancient Hebrews were the most accurate, objective and responsible recorders of Near Eastern history," R. K Harrison in *Biblical Criticism*, p. 5.
9. Archaeology has proven to be so helpful in establishing the historicity of the Bible. However, a word of caution is necessary. Archaeology is not an absolutely trustworthy guide because of:
- a. poor techniques in early excavations,
  - b. various, very subjective interpretations of the artifacts that have been discovered,
  - c. no agreed-upon chronology of the Ancient Near East (although one is being developed from tree rings)
- B. Egyptian creation accounts can be found in John W. Walton's, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990. pp. 23-34, 32-34.
1. In Egyptian literature creation began with an unstructured, chaotic, primeval water. Creation was seen as developing structure out of watery chaos.
  2. In Egyptian literature from Memphis, creation occurred by the spoken word of Ptah.
- C. Joshua literary parallels from the ancient Near East
1. Archaeology has shown that most of the large walled cities of Canaan were destroyed and rapidly rebuilt about 1250 B.C.
    - a. Hazor
    - b. Lachish
    - c. Bethel
    - d. Debir (formerly called Kerioth Sepher, 15:15)
  2. Archaeology has not been able to confirm or reject the biblical account of the fall of Jericho (cf. Joshua 6). This is because the site is in such poor condition:
    - a. weather/location
    - b. later rebuildings on old sites using older materials
    - c. uncertainty as to the dates of the layers
  3. Archaeology has found an altar on Mt. Ebal that might be connected to Joshua 8:30-31 (Deuteronomy. 27:2-9). It is very similar to a description found in the Mishnah (Talmud).
  4. The Ras Shamra texts found at Ugarit show Canaanite life and religion of 1400's B.C.:
    - a. polytheistic nature worship (fertility cult)
    - b. El was chief deity
    - c. El's consort was Asherah (later she is consort to Ba'al) who was worshiped in the form of a carved stake or live tree, which symbolized "the tree of life"
    - d. their son was Ba'al (Haddad), the storm god
    - e. Ba'al became the "high god" of the Canaanite pantheon. Anat was his consort
    - f. ceremonies similar to Isis and Osiris of Egypt
    - g. Ba'al worship was focused on local "high places" or stone platforms (ritual prostitution)
    - h. Ba'al was symbolized by a raised stone pillar (phallic symbol)

5. The accurate listing of the names of ancient cities fits a contemporary author, not later editor(s):
  - a. Jerusalem called Jebus, 15:8; 18:16,28 (15:28 said the Jebusites still remained in part of Jerusalem)
  - b. Hebron called Kiriath-arba, 14:15; 15:13,54; 20:7; 21:11
  - c. Kiriath-jearim is called Baalah, 15:9,10
  - d. Sidon is referred to as the major Phoenician city, not Tyre, 11:8; 13:6; 19:28, which later became the chief city

# OLD TESTAMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY COMPARED WITH CONTEMPORARY NEAR EASTERN CULTURES

## Mesopotamian sources

1. Like most ancient literature the subject is usually the king or some national hero.
2. The events are often embellished for propaganda purposes.
3. Usually nothing negative is recorded.
4. The purpose was to support current status quo institutions or explain the rise of new regimes.
5. The historical distortions involve
  - a. embellished claims of great victories
  - b. earlier achievements presented as current achievements
  - c. only positive aspects recorded
6. The literature served not only a propagandistic function, but was also a didactic function

## Egyptian sources

1. They support a very static view of life, which was not affected by time.
2. The king and his family are the object of much of the literature.
3. It, like Mesopotamian literature, is very propagandistic.
  - a. no negative aspects
  - b. embellished aspects

## Rabbinical sources (later)

1. Attempt to make Scripture relevant by Midrash, which moves from the faith of the interpreter to text and does not focus on authorial intent nor historical setting of the text
  - a. *Halakha* deals with truths or rules for life
  - b. *Haggada* deals with application and encouragement for life
2. Peshet - later development seen in Dead Sea Scrolls. It used a typological approach to see the prophetic fulfillment of past events in the current setting. The current setting was the prophesied eschaton (coming new age).

It is obvious that ancient Near Eastern genres and later Jewish literature are different from Old Testament Scripture. In many ways the genres of the Old Testament, though often sharing characteristics of contemporary literature, are unique, especially in their depiction of historical events. The closest to Hebrew historiography is the Hittite literature.

It must be acknowledged how different ancient historiography is from modern, western historiography. Herein lies the problem for interpretation. Modern historiography attempts to be objective (non-propaganda, if this is possible) and to document and record in chronological sequence what “really happened!” It attempts to document “cause and effect” of historical events. It is characterized by details!

Just because Near Eastern histories are not like modern histories does not make them wrong, inferior, or untrustworthy. Western modern histories reflect the biases (presuppositions) of their writers. Biblical history is by its very nature (inspiration) different. There is a sense in which biblical history is seen through the eyes of the faith of the inspired author and for the purposes of theology, but it is still a valid historical account.

This historicity of the Old Testament is important to me as a way of advocating my faith to others. If the Bible can be demonstrated to be historical then its faith claims have stronger appeal to non-believers. My faith does not rest on the historical confirmation of archaeology and anthropology, but these help to introduce the message of the Bible, and to give it a credibility that otherwise it would not have.

To summarize then, historicity does not function in the area of inspiration, but in the area of apologetics and evangelism.

# GENRE AND INTERPRETATION: OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

## I. Opening Statements

- A. The relationship between the OT and other ways of the chronicling of events
  - 1. Other ancient Near Eastern literature is mythological
    - a. polytheistic (usually humanistic gods reflecting the powers of nature but using interpersonal conflict motifs)
    - c. Based on the cycles of nature (dying and rising gods)
  - 2. Greco-Roman is for entertainment and encouragement rather than the recording of historical events per se (Homer in many ways reflects Mesopotamian motifs)
- B. Possibly the use of three German terms illustrates the difference in types or definitions of history
  - 1. “Historie,” the recording of events (bare facts)
  - 2. “Geschichte,” the interpretation of events showing their significance to mankind
  - 3. “Heilsgeschichte” refers uniquely to God’s redemptive plan and activity within the historical process
- C. The OT and NT narratives are “Geschichte” which leads to an understanding of Heilsgeschichte. They are selected theologically oriented historical events
  - 1. selected events only
  - 2. chronology not as significant as theology
  - 3. events shared to reveal truth
- D. Narrative is the most common genre in the OT. It has been estimated that 40% of the OT is narrative. Therefore, this genre is useful to the Spirit in communicating God’s message and character to fallen mankind. But, it is done, not propositionally (like the NT Epistles), but by implication, summation or selected dialog/monolog. One must continue to ask why this is recorded. What is it trying to emphasize? What is its theological purpose?

This in no way is meant to depreciate the history. But, it is history as the servant and channel of revelation.

## II. Biblical Narratives

- A. God is active in His world. Inspired Bible authors chose certain events to reveal God. God is the major character of the OT.
- B. Every narrative functions in several ways:
  - 1. who is God and what is He doing in His world
  - 2. mankind is revealed through God’s dealing with individuals and national entities
  - 3. as an example specifically notice Joshua’s military victory linked to covenant performance (cf. 1:7-8; 8:30-35).
- C. Often narratives are strung together to make a larger literary unit which reveals a single theological truth.

## III. Interpretive Principles of OT narratives

- A. The best discussion I have seen about interpreting OT narratives is by Douglas Stuart in *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, pp. 83-84.
  - 1. An OT narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine.
  - 2. An OT narrative usually illustrates a doctrine or doctrines taught propositionally elsewhere.

3. Narratives record what happened—not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time. Therefore, not every narrative has an individual identifiable moral of the story.
  4. What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. Frequently, it is just the opposite.
  5. Most of the characters in OT narratives are far from perfect, and their actions also.
  6. We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. We are expected to be able to judge that on the basis of what God has taught us directly and categorically elsewhere in the Scripture.
  7. *All* narratives are selective and incomplete. Not all the relevant details are always given (cf. John 21:25). What does appear in the narrative is everything that the inspired author thought important for us to know.
  8. Narratives are not written to answer all our theological questions. They have particular, specific, limited purposes and deal with certain issues, leaving others to be dealt with elsewhere, in other ways.
  9. Narratives may teach either explicitly (by clearly stating something) or implicitly (by clearly implying something without actually stating it).
  10. In the final analysis, God is the hero of all biblical narratives.
- B. Another good discussion on interpreting narratives is in Walter Kaiser's *Toward Exegetical Theology*:
- “The unique aspect of the narrative portions of Scripture is that the writer usually allows the words and actions of the people in his narrative to convey the main thrust of his message. Thus, instead of addressing us through direct statements, such as are found in doctrinal or teaching portions of Scripture, the writer tends to remain instead somewhat in the background as far as direct teaching or evaluative statements are concerned. Consequently, it becomes critically important to recognize the larger context in which the narrative fits and to ask why the writer used the specific selection of events in the precise sequence in which he placed them. The twin clues to meaning now will be *arrangement* of episodes and *selection* of detail from a welter of possible speeches, persons, or episodes. Furthermore, the divine reaction to and estimate of these people and events must often be determined from the way the author allows one person or a group of people to respond at the climax of the selected sequence of events; that is, if he has not interrupted the narration to give his own (in this instance, God's) estimate of what has taken place” (p. 205).
- C. In narratives the truth is found in the whole literary unit and not the details. Beware of proof-texting or using OT narratives as a precedent for your life.

#### IV. Two Levels of Interpretation

- A. YHWH's redemptive, revelatory acts for Abraham's seed
- B. YHWH's will for every believer's life (in every age)
- C. The first focuses on “knowing God” (salvation); the second on serving Him (the Christian life of faith, cf. Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:6,11)

## **A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR: HOW CAN THIS COMMENTARY HELP YOU?**

Biblical interpretation is a rational and spiritual process that attempts to understand an ancient inspired writer in such a way that the message from God may be understood and applied in our day.

The spiritual process is crucial but difficult to define. It does involve a yieldedness and openness to God. There must be a hunger (1) for Him, (2) to know Him, and (3) to serve Him. This process involves prayer, confession, and the willingness for lifestyle change. The Spirit is crucial in the interpretive process, but why sincere, godly Christians understand the Bible differently is a mystery.

The rational process is easier to describe. We must be consistent and fair to the text and not be influenced by our personal, cultural, or denominational biases. We are all historically conditioned. None of us are objective, neutral interpreters. This commentary offers a careful rational process containing four interpretive principles structured to help us attempt to overcome our biases.

### **First Principle**

The first principle is to note the historical setting in which a biblical book was written and the particular historical occasion for its authorship. The original author had a purpose and a message to communicate. The text cannot mean something to us that it never meant to the original, ancient, inspired author. His intent—not our historical, emotional, cultural, personal, or denominational need—is the key. Application is an integral partner to interpretation, but proper interpretation must always precede application. It must be reiterated that every biblical text has one and only one meaning. This meaning is what the original biblical author intended through the Spirit's leadership to communicate to his day. This one meaning may have many possible applications to different cultures and situations. These applications must be linked to the central truth of the original author. For this reason, this study guide commentary is designed to provide a brief introduction to each book of the Bible.

### **Second Principle**

The second principle is to identify the literary units. Every biblical book is a unified document. Interpreters have no right to isolate one aspect of truth by excluding others. Therefore, we must strive to understand the purpose of the whole biblical book before we interpret the individual literary units. The individual parts—chapters, paragraphs, or verses—cannot mean what the whole unit does not mean. Interpretation must move from a deductive approach of the whole to an inductive approach to the parts. Therefore, this study guide commentary is designed to help the student analyze the structure of each literary unit by paragraphs. Paragraph and chapter divisions are not inspired, but they do aid us in identifying thought units.

Interpreting at a paragraph level—not sentence, clause, phrase, or word level—is the key in following the biblical author's intended meaning. Paragraphs are based on a unified topic, often called the theme or topical sentence. Every word, phrase, clause, and sentence in the paragraph relates somehow to this unified theme. They limit it, expand it, explain it, and/or question it. A real key to proper interpretation is to follow the original author's thought on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis through the individual literary units that make up the biblical book. This study guide commentary is designed to help the student do that by comparing the paragraphing of modern English translations. These translations have been selected because they employ different translation theories:

- A. The United Bible Society's Greek text is the revised fourth edition (UBS<sup>4</sup>). This text was paragraphed by modern textual scholars.

- B. The New King James Version (NKJV) is a word-for-word literal translation based on the Greek manuscript tradition known as the Textus Receptus. Its paragraph divisions are longer than the other translations. These longer units help the student to see the unified topics.
- C. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is a modified word-for-word translation. It forms a midpoint between NKJV and NJB. Its paragraph divisions are quite helpful in identifying subjects.
- D. The Today's English Version (TEV) is a dynamic equivalent translation published by the United Bible Society. It attempts to translate the Bible in such a way that a modern English reader or speaker can understand the meaning of the Greek text. Often, especially in the Gospels, it divides paragraphs by speaker rather than by subject, in the same way as the NIV. For the interpreter's purposes, this is not helpful. It is interesting to note that both the UBS<sup>4</sup> and TEV are published by the same entity, yet their paragraphing differs.
- E. The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) is a dynamic equivalent translation based on a French Catholic translation. It is very helpful in comparing the paragraphing from a European perspective.
- F. The printed text is the 1995 Updated New American Standard Bible (NASB), which is a word for word translation. The verse by verse comments follow this text.

### **Third Principle**

The third principle is to read the Bible in different translations in order to grasp the widest possible range of meaning (semantic field) that biblical words or phrases may have. Often a Greek phrase or word can be understood in several ways. These different translations bring out these options and help to identify and explain the Greek manuscript variations. These do not affect doctrine, but they do help us to try to get back to the original text penned by an inspired ancient writer.

### **Fourth Principle**

The fourth principle is to note the literary genre. Original inspired authors chose to record their messages in different forms (e.g., historical narrative, historical drama, poetry, prophecy, gospel [parable], letter, apocalyptic). These different forms have special keys to interpretation (see Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* or Robert Stein, *Playing by the Rules*).

This commentary offers a quick way for the student to check his interpretations. It is not meant to be definitive, but rather informative and thought-provoking. Often, other possible interpretations help us not be so parochial, dogmatic, and denominational. Interpreters need to have a larger range of interpretive options to recognize how ambiguous the ancient text can be. It is shocking how little agreement there is among Christians who claim the Bible as their source of truth.

These principles have helped me to overcome much of my historical conditioning by forcing me to struggle with the ancient text. My hope is that it will be a blessing to you as well.

Bob Utley  
 East Texas Baptist University  
 June 27, 1996

# **A GUIDE TO GOOD BIBLE READING: A PERSONAL SEARCH FOR VERIFIABLE TRUTH**

Can we know truth? Where is it found? Can we logically verify it? Is there an ultimate authority? Are there absolutes which can guide our lives, our world? Is there meaning to life? Why are we here? Where are we going? These questions—questions that all rational people contemplate—have haunted the human intellect since the beginning of time (Eccl. 1:13-18; 3:9-11). I can remember my personal search for an integrating center for my life. I became a believer in Christ at a young age, based primarily on the witness of significant others in my family. As I grew to adulthood, questions about myself and my world also grew. Simple cultural and religious clichés did not bring meaning to the experiences I read about or encountered. It was a time of confusion, searching, longing, and often a feeling of hopelessness in the face of the insensitive, hard world in which I lived.

Many claimed to have answers to these ultimate questions, but after research and reflection I found that their answers were based upon (1) personal philosophies, (2) ancient myths, (3) personal experiences, or (4) psychological projections. I needed some degree of verification, some evidence, some rationality on which to base my world-view, my integrating center, my reason to live.

I found these in my study of the Bible. I began to search for evidence of its trustworthiness, which I found in (1) the historical reliability of the Bible as confirmed by archaeology, (2) the accuracy of the prophecies of the Old Testament, (3) the unity of the Bible message over the sixteen hundred years of its production, and (4) the personal testimonies of people whose lives had been permanently changed by contact with the Bible. Christianity, as a unified system of faith and belief, has the ability to deal with complex questions of human life. Not only did this provide a rational framework, but the experiential aspect of biblical faith brought me emotional joy and stability.

I thought that I had found the integrating center for my life—Christ, as understood through the Scriptures. It was a heady experience, an emotional release. However, I can still remember the shock and pain when it began to dawn on me how many different interpretations of this book were advocated, sometimes even within the same churches and schools of thought. Affirming the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible was not the end, but only the beginning. How do I verify or reject the varied and conflicting interpretations of the many difficult passages in Scripture by those who were claiming its authority and trustworthiness?

This task became my life's goal and pilgrimage of faith. I knew that my faith in Christ had (1) brought me great peace and joy. My mind longed for some absolutes in the midst of the relativity of my culture (post-modernity); (2) the dogmatism of conflicting religious systems (world religions); and (3) denominational arrogance. In my search for valid approaches to the interpretation of ancient literature, I was surprised to discover my own historical, cultural, denominational and experiential biases. I had often read the Bible simply to reinforce my own views. I used it as a source of dogma to attack others while reaffirming my own insecurities and inadequacies. How painful this realization was to me!

Although I can never be totally objective, I can become a better reader of the Bible. I can limit my biases by identifying them and acknowledging their presence. I am not yet free of them, but I have confronted my own weaknesses. The interpreter is often the worst enemy of good Bible reading!



Let me list some of the presuppositions I bring to my study of the Bible so that you, the reader, may examine them along with me:

## I. Presuppositions

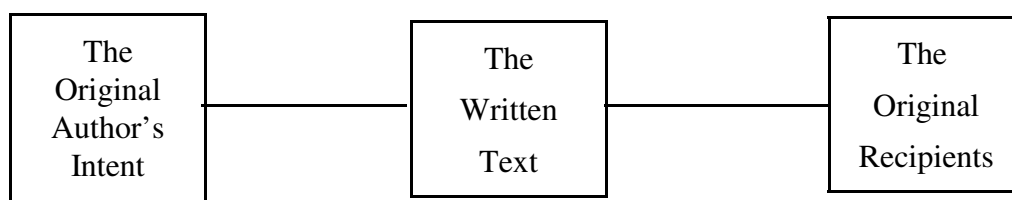
- A. I believe the Bible is the sole inspired self-revelation of the one true God. Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of the intent of the original divine author (the Spirit) through a human writer in a specific historical setting.
- B. I believe the Bible was written for the common person—for all people! God accommodated Himself to speak to us clearly within a historical and cultural context. God does not hide truth—He wants us to understand! Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of its day, not ours. The Bible should not mean to us what it never meant to those who first read or heard it. It is understandable by the average human mind and uses normal human communication forms and techniques.
- C. I believe the Bible has a unified message and purpose. It does not contradict itself, though it does contain difficult and paradoxical passages. Thus, the best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself.
- D. I believe that every passage (excluding prophecies) has one and only one meaning based on the intent of the original, inspired author. Although we can never be absolutely certain we know the original author's intent, many indicators point in its direction:
  1. the genre (literary type) chosen to express the message
  2. the historical setting and/or specific occasion that elicited the writing
  3. the literary context of the entire book as well as each literary unit
  4. the textual design (outline) of the literary units as they relate to the whole message
  5. the specific grammatical features employed to communicate the message
  6. the words chosen to present the message
  7. parallel passages

The study of each of these areas becomes the object of our study of a passage. Before I explain my methodology for good Bible reading, let me delineate some of the inappropriate methods being used today that have caused so much diversity of interpretation, and that consequently should be avoided:

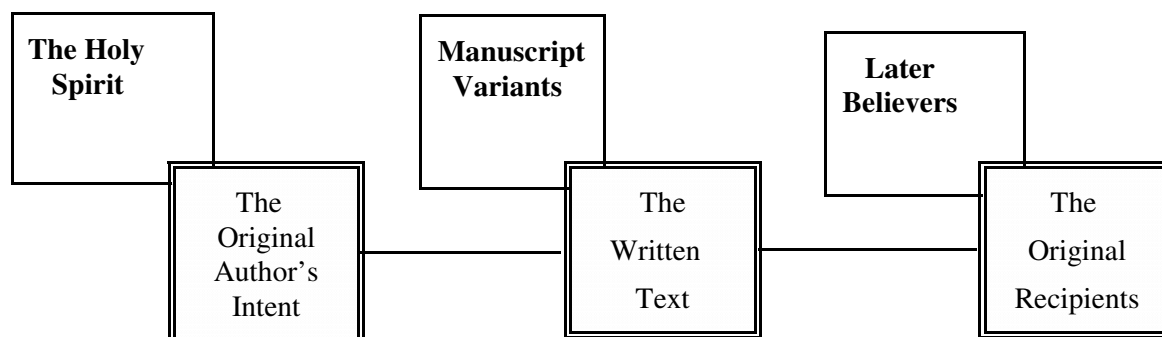
## II. Inappropriate Methods

- A. Ignoring the literary context of the books of the Bible and using every sentence, clause, or even individual words as statements of truth unrelated to the author's intent or the larger context. This is often called "proof-texting."
- B. Ignoring the historical setting of the books by substituting a supposed historical setting that has little or no support from the text itself.
- C. Ignoring the historical setting of the books and reading it as the morning hometown newspaper written primarily to modern individual Christians.
- D. Ignoring the historical setting of the books by allegorizing the text into a philosophical/theological message totally unrelated to the first hearers and the original author's intent.
- E. Ignoring the original message by substituting one's own system of theology, pet doctrine, or contemporary issue unrelated to the original author's purpose and stated message. This phenomenon often follows the initial reading of the Bible as a means of establishing a speaker's authority. This is often referred to as "reader response" ("what-the-text-means-to-me" interpretation).

At least three related components may be found in all written human communication:



In the past, different reading techniques have focused on one of the three components, but to truly affirm the unique inspiration of the Bible, a modified diagram is more appropriate:



In truth all three components must be included in the interpretive process. For the purpose of verification, my interpretation focuses on the first two components: the original author and the text. I am probably reacting to the abuses I have observed (1) allegorizing or spiritualizing texts and (2) “reader response” interpretation (what-it-means-to-me). Abuse may occur at each stage. We must always check our motives, biases, techniques, and applications, but how do we check them if there are no boundaries to interpretations, no limits, no criteria? This is where authorial intent and textual structure provide me with some criteria for limiting the scope of possible valid interpretations.

In light of these inappropriate reading techniques, what are some possible approaches to good Bible reading and interpretation which offer a degree of verification and consistency?

### III. Possible Approaches to Good Bible Reading

At this point, I am not discussing the unique techniques of interpreting specific genres but general hermeneutical principles valid for all types of biblical texts. A good book for genre-specific approaches is *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, published by Zondervan. My methodology focuses initially on the reader allowing the Holy Spirit to illumine the Bible through four personal reading cycles. This makes the Spirit, the text, and the reader primary, not secondary. This also protects the reader from being unduly influenced by commentators. I have heard it said: “The Bible throws a lot of light on commentaries.” This is not meant to be a depreciating comment about study aids, but rather a plea for an appropriate timing for their use.

We must be able to support our interpretations from the text itself. Three areas provide at least limited verification:

1. the original author's
  - a. historical setting
  - b. literary context

2. the original author's choice of
  - a. grammatical structures (syntax)
  - b. contemporary work usage
  - c. genre
3. our understanding of appropriate
  - a. relevant parallel passages
  - b. relationship between doctrines (paradox)

We need to be able to provide the reasons and logic behind our interpretations. The Bible is our only source for faith and practice. Sadly, Christians often disagree about what it teaches or affirms. It is self-defeating to claim inspiration for the Bible and then for believers not to be able to agree on what it teaches and requires!

The four reading cycles are designed to provide the following interpretive insights:

A. The first reading cycle

1. Read the book in a single sitting. Read it again in a different translation, hopefully from a different translation theory
  - a. word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
  - b. dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
  - c. paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)
2. Look for the central purpose of the entire writing. Identify its theme.
3. Isolate (if possible) a literary unit, a chapter, a paragraph or a sentence which clearly expresses this central purpose or theme.
4. Identify the predominant literary genre
  - a. Old Testament
    - (1) Hebrew narrative
    - (2) Hebrew poetry (wisdom literature, psalm)
    - (3) Hebrew prophecy (prose, poetry)
    - (4) Law codes
  - b. New Testament
    - (1) Narratives (Gospels, Acts)
    - (2) Parables (Gospels)
    - (3) Letters/epistles
    - (4) Apocalyptic literature

B. The second reading cycle

1. Read the entire book again, seeking to identify major topics or subjects.
2. Outline the major topics and briefly state their contents in a simple statement.
3. Check your purpose statement and broad outline with study aids.

C. The third reading cycle

1. Read the entire book again, seeking to identify the historical setting and specific occasion for the writing from the Bible book itself.
2. List the historical items that are mentioned in the Bible book
  - a. the author
  - b. the date

- c. the recipients
  - d. the specific reason for writing
  - e. aspects of the cultural setting that relate to the purpose of the writing
  - f. references to historical people and events
3. Expand your outline to paragraph level for that part of the biblical book you are interpreting. Always identify and outline the literary unit. This may be several chapters or paragraphs. This enables you to follow the original author's logic and textual design.
  4. Check your historical setting by using study aids.
- D. The fourth reading cycle
1. Read the specific literary unit again in several translations
    - a. word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
    - b. dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
    - c. paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)
  2. Look for literary or grammatical structures
    - a. repeated phrases, Eph. 1:6,12,13
    - b. repeated grammatical structures, Rom. 8:31
    - c. contrasting concepts
  3. List the following items
    - a. significant terms
    - b. unusual terms
    - c. important grammatical structures
    - d. particularly difficult words, clauses, and sentences
  4. Look for relevant parallel passages
    - a. look for the clearest teaching passage on your subject using
      - (1) "systematic theology" books
      - (2) reference Bibles
      - (3) concordances
    - b. Look for a possible paradoxical pair within your subject. Many biblical truths are presented in dialectical pairs; many denominational conflicts come from proof-texting half of a biblical tension. All of the Bible is inspired, and we must seek out its complete message in order to provide a Scriptural balance to our interpretation.
    - c. Look for parallels within the same book, same author or same genre; the Bible is its own best interpreter because it has one author, the Spirit.
  5. Use study aids to check your observations of historical setting and occasion
    - a. study Bibles
    - b. Bible encyclopedias, handbooks and dictionaries
    - c. Bible introductions
    - d. Bible commentaries (at this point in your study, allow the believing community, past and present, to aid and correct your personal study.)

#### IV. Application of Bible interpretation

At this point we turn to application. You have taken the time to understand the text in its original setting; now you must apply it to your life, your culture. I define biblical authority as "understanding what the original biblical author was saying to his day and applying that truth to our day."

Application must follow interpretation of the original author's intent both in time and logic. We cannot apply a Bible passage to our own day until we know what it was saying to its day! A Bible passage should not mean what it never meant!

Your detailed outline, to paragraph level (reading cycle #3), will be your guide. Application should be made at paragraph level, not word level. Words have meaning only in context; clauses have meaning only in context; sentences have meaning only in context. The only inspired person involved in the interpretive process is the original author. We only follow his lead by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But illumination is not inspiration. To say "thus saith the Lord," we must abide by the original author's intent. Application must relate specifically to the general intent of the whole writing, the specific literary unit and paragraph level thought development.

Do not let the issues of our day interpret the Bible; let the Bible speak! This may require us to draw principles from the text. This is valid if the text supports a principle. Unfortunately, many times our principles are just that, "our" principles—not the text's principles.

In applying the Bible, it is important to remember that (except in prophecy) one and only one meaning is valid for a particular Bible text. That meaning is related to the intent of the original author as he addressed a crisis or need in his day. Many possible applications may be derived from this one meaning. The application will be based on the recipients' needs but must be related to the original author's meaning.

## V. The Spiritual Aspect of Interpretation

So far I have discussed the logical and textual process involved in interpretation and application. Now let me discuss briefly the spiritual aspect of interpretation. The following checklist has been helpful for me:

- A. Pray for the Spirit's help (cf. I Cor. 1:26-2:16).
- B. Pray for personal forgiveness and cleansing from known sin (cf. I John 1:9).
- C. Pray for a greater desire to know God (cf. Ps. 19:7-14; 42:1ff.; 119:1ff).
- D. Apply any new insight immediately to your own life.
- E. Remain humble and teachable.

It is so hard to keep the balance between the logical process and the spiritual leadership of the Holy Spirit. The following quotes have helped me balance the two:

- A. from James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting*, pp. 17-18:

"The illumination comes to the minds of God's people—not just to the spiritual elite. There is no guru class in biblical Christianity, no illuminati, no people through whom all proper interpretation must come. And so, while the Holy Spirit gives special gifts of wisdom, knowledge and spiritual discernment, He does not assign these gifted Christians to be the only authoritative interpreters of His Word. It is up to each of His people to learn, to judge and to discern by reference to the Bible which stands as the authority even to those to whom God has given special abilities. To summarize, the assumption I am making throughout the entire book is that the Bible is God's true revelation to all humanity, that it is our ultimate authority on all matters about which it speaks, that it is not a total mystery but can be adequately understood by ordinary people in every culture."

- B. on Kierkegaard, found in Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 75:  
 According to Kierkegaard, the grammatical, lexical, and historical study of the Bible was necessary but preliminary to the true reading of the Bible. “To read the Bible *as God’s word* one must read it with his heart in his mouth, on tip-toe, with eager expectancy, in conversation with God. To read the Bible thoughtlessly or carelessly or academically or professionally is not to read the Bible as God’s Word. As one reads it as a love letter is read, then one reads it as the Word of God.”
- C. H. H. Rowley in *The Relevance of the Bible*, p. 19:  
 “No merely intellectual understanding of the Bible, however complete, can possess all its treasures. It does not despise such understanding, for it is essential to a complete understanding. But it must lead to a spiritual understanding of the spiritual treasures of this book if it is to be complete. And for that spiritual understanding something more than intellectual alertness is necessary. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and the Bible student needs an attitude of spiritual receptivity, an eagerness to find God that he may yield himself to Him, if he is to pass beyond his scientific study unto the richer inheritance of this greatest of all books.”

## VI. This Commentary’s Method

The *Study Guide Commentary* is designed to aid your interpretive procedures in the following ways:

- A. A brief historical outline introduces each book. After you have done “reading cycle #3” check this information.
- B. Contextual insights are found at the beginning of each chapter. This will help you see how the literary unit is structured.
- C. At the beginning of each chapter or major literary unit the paragraph divisions and their descriptive captions are provided from several modern translations:
1. The United Bible Society Greek text, fourth edition revised(UBS<sup>4</sup>)
  2. The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update (NASB)
  3. The New King James Version (NKJV)
  4. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
  5. Today’s English Version (TEV)
  6. The Jerusalem Bible (JB)

Paragraph divisions are not inspired. They must be ascertained from the context. By comparing several modern translations from differing translation theories and theological perspectives, we are able to analyze the supposed structure of the original author’s thought. Each paragraph has one major truth. This has been called “the topic sentence” or “the central idea of the text.” This unifying thought is the key to proper historical, grammatical interpretation. One should never interpret, preach or teach on less than a paragraph! Also remember that each paragraph is related to its surrounding paragraphs. This is why a paragraph level outline of the entire book is so important. We must be able to follow the logical flow of the subject being addressed by the original inspired author.

- D. Bob’s notes follow a verse-by-verse approach to interpretation. This forces us to follow the original author’s thought. The notes provide information from several areas:
1. literary context
  2. historical, cultural insights

3. grammatical information
  4. word studies
  5. relevant parallel passages
- E. At certain points in the commentary, the printed text of the New American Standard Version (1995 update) will be supplemented by the translations of several other modern versions:
1. The New King James Version (NKJV), which follows the textual manuscripts of the “Textus Receptus.”
  2. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is a word-for-word revision from the National Council of Churches of the Revised Standard Version.
  3. The Today’s English Version (TEV), which is a dynamic equivalent translation from the American Bible Society.
  4. The Jerusalem Bible (JB), which is an English translation based on a French Catholic dynamic equivalent translation.
- F. For those who do not read Greek, comparing English translations can help in identifying problems in the text:
1. manuscript variations
  2. alternate word meanings
  3. grammatically difficult texts and structure
  4. ambiguous texts
- Although the English translations cannot solve these problems, they do target them as places for deeper and more thorough study.
- G. At the close of each chapter relevant discussion questions are provided which attempt to target the major interpretive issues of that chapter.

# INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 11:24-13:18

- A. This section of Genesis begins the fuller discussion of the line of the Messiah through Abraham.
- B. Genesis' fifty chapters are concerned with the redemption of God's covenant people, not creation. Calling one to call all is the focus of the book.
- C. Abram is seen in his weaknesses as well as in his faithfulness. The God of election and mercy calls him out for his own redemptive purposes.
- D. God chose Abraham to choose a world (cf. 12:3c; Exod. 19:4-6; II Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6). God wants all people made in His image to be redeemed (cf. Gen. 3:15; Ezek. 18:23,32; I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9).
- E. The *Talmud* specifies seven blessings of the call.
  1. Abram would be the father of a great nation.
  2. He would be blessed in his lifetime.
  3. His name would be renowned.
  4. He would be a blessing to others.
  5. Those who honor him would be blessed
  6. Those who rejected him would be cursed.
  7. His influence would be universal.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:24-25

<sup>24</sup>Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah; <sup>25</sup>and Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he became the father of Terah, and he had *other* sons and daughters.

**11:24 “Terah”** “Terah” (BDB 1076) possibly means “tarrying,” “delaying,” or “migrating.” From Josh. 24:2 it is obvious that he and his family were polytheists. The names of his family suggest that they primarily worshiped the moon goddess *Zin* (see Special Topic at 12:4). She was worshiped in Ur, Tema, and Haran. However, Gen. 31:53 implies that he knew of YHWH.

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:26

<sup>26</sup>Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.



**11:26 “Abram, Nabor and Haran”** This might be the order of importance and not age. The name Abram (BDB 4) can mean (1) “exalted father”; (2) “exalter of father”; or (3) “the Exalted One is my father.” The name Nahor means “panting” or an Assyrian place name, while Haran means “mountaineer.”

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:27-30**

**<sup>27</sup>Now these are *the records of the generations of Terah*. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot. <sup>28</sup>Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. <sup>29</sup>Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. <sup>30</sup>Sarai was barren; she had no child.**

**11:27** See note at 25:12,19; 36:1,9; 37:2.

**11:28 “Haran died in the presence of his father Terah”** This is a Hebrew idiom for Haran dying before his father.

▣ **“the Ur of the Chaldeans”** The Chaldean culture developed (i.e., built on the strengths of the Sumerian culture) and thrived after Abram’s day.

**11:29 “and Iscah”** This person (BDB 414) and the reason for her presence in this verse is unknown. The rabbis (also Josephus, Jerome, and Augustine) say it is Sarai, but the text asserts that they have different fathers.

**11:30 “Sarai was barren”** The inability of Sarai, Rachel, and Rebecca to have children was one of the ways YHWH used to exhibit His power and control of human history and genealogy. Human sexual generation is not the key aspect to the lineage of the Messiah.

This same theological aspect to Israel’s history is also seen in the fact that the firstborn son never became the head of the family (i.e., in the Messianic line). Culturally the firstborn was the head of the clan, but not so among YHWH’s people. It was His choice!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:31-32**

**<sup>31</sup>Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. <sup>32</sup>The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.**

**11:31 “they went out together”** There is much discussion as to whether Terah took his family or if Abram took them. Some postulate God calling Terah but he lapsed back into idolatry. It seems to me that Abram is the focus of the entire section, not Terah. By leaving Ur Abram was leaving not only his extended family, but also their national deities. He left a comfortable, settled life to follow a new God who had spoken to him in rather cryptic fashion.

**11:32 “the days of Terah were two hundred and five years”** When one adds the years in 11:26 with those in 12:4, which equals 145 years, and subtracts this from 205, it becomes obvious that Terah lived 60 years after Abram left Haran. This seems to conflict with Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7:4. Several aspects of Stephen’s historical review conflict with our understanding of Old Testament history. Possibly he was using rabbinical interpretation. Others assert that Abram, though listed first in 11:26, was born much later and that Stephen was accurate.

# GENESIS 12

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Abram Journeys to Egypt	Promise to Abram	God's Call of Abraham	God's Call to Abram	The Call of Abram
12:1-3	12:1-3	12:1-3	12:1-2	12:1-3
(1-3)	(1-3)		(1-2)	(1-3)
			(3)	
12:4-9	12:4-9	12:4-9	12:4-5a	12:4-5
			12:5b-9	
				12:6-9
	Abram in Egypt	Sarah in Jeopardy (12:10-13:1)	Abram in Egypt	Abram in Egypt
12:10-16	12:10-13	12:10-16	12:10-16	12:10-20
	12:14-20			
12:17-20		12:17-13:1	12:17-20	

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:1-3

<sup>1</sup>Now the LORD said to Abram,  
“Go forth from your country,  
And from your relatives  
And from your father’s house,  
To the land which I will show you;  
<sup>2</sup>And I will make you a great nation,  
And I will bless you,  
And make your name great;  
And so you shall be a blessing;  
<sup>3</sup>And I will bless those who bless you,  
And the one who curses you I will curse.  
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

**12:1-3** It is often hard to tell the difference between Hebrew poetry and “elevated” prose. Notice how the English translations see the genre in the different verses.

	NASB/NKJV	JPSOA	NRSV	TEV/NJB/REB/NIV
Poetry	1b-3	1		3
Prose	1a	2-3	1-3	1-2

Obviously there are no textual markers, just the opinions of the translation committees.

These verses are repeated in the next few chapters with slight modifications and explanations, but this context is the great initial promise of God used by Paul in Romans 4 (i.e., Gen. 15:6). YHWH will act through Abram and his/His seed to reveal Himself to the whole world. Covenant (see Special Topic at 13:15) becomes the key concept of the Bible. The sovereign God initiates it and sets the agenda, but He has mandated that humans must respond appropriately and continually!

**12:1** “Now” “Now” and “had said” are both placed in this verse by translators who believe that these verses refer to a previous call of God at Ur (cf. Gen. 15:7; Neh. 9:7; Acts 7:2).

▣ **“LORD”** This is YHWH, the covenant name of God (cf. Exod. 3:14). Notice this call is based on God’s gracious invitation, not Abram’s worth (cf. vv. 10ff). God always takes the initiative (cf. John 6:44,65; Eph. 2:8-9).

### SPECIAL TOPIC: THE NAMES FOR DEITY

#### A. *El* (BDB 42, KB 48)

1. The original meaning of the generic ancient term for deity is uncertain, though many scholars believe it comes from the Akkadian root, “to be strong” or “to be powerful” (cf. Genesis 17:1; Num. 23:19; Deut. 7:21; Ps. 50:1).
2. In the Canaanite pantheon the high god is *El* (Ras Shamra texts)

3. In the Bible *El* is not usually compounded with other terms. These combinations became a way to characterize God.
    - a. *El-Elyon* (God Most High, BDB 42 & 751 II), Gen. 14:18-22; Deut. 32:8; Isa. 14:14
    - b. *El-Roi* (“God who sees” or “God who reveals Himself,” BDB 42 & 909), Gen. 16:13
    - c. *El-Shaddai* (“God Almighty” or “God the All Compassion” or “God of the mountain,” BDB 42 & 994), Gen. 17:1; 35:11; 43:14; 49:25; Exod. 6:3
    - d. *El-Olam* (the Everlasting God, BDB 42 & 761), Gen. 21:33. This term is theologically linked to God’s promise to David, II Sam. 7:13,16
    - e. *El-Berit* (“God of the Covenant,” BDB 42 & 136), Jdgs. 9:46
  4. *El* is equated with
    - a. YHWH in Ps. 85:8; Isa. 42:5
    - b. *Elohim* in Gen. 46:3; Job 5:8, “I am *El*, the *Elohim* of your father
    - c. *Shaddai* in Gen. 49:25
    - d. “jealousy” in Exod. 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15
    - e. “mercy” in Deut. 4:31; Neh. 9:31; “faithful” in Deut. 7:9; 32:4
    - f. “great and awesome” in Deut. 7:21; 10:17; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Dan. 9:4
    - g. “knowledge” in I Sam. 2:3
    - h. “my strong refuge” in II Sam. 22:33
    - i. “my avenger” in II Sam. 22:48
    - j. “holy one” in Isa. 5:16
    - k. “might” in Isa. 10:21
    - l. “my salvation” in Isa. 12:2
    - m. “great and powerful” in Jer. 32:18
    - n. “retribution” in Jer. 51:56
  5. A combination of all the major OT names for God is found in Joshua 22:22 (*El, Elohim, YHWH*, repeated)
- B. *Elyon* (BDB 751, KB 832)
1. Its basic meaning is “high,” “exalted,” or “lifted up” (cf. Gen. 40:17; I Kgs. 9:8; II Kgs. 18:17; Neh. 3:25; Jer. 20:2; 36:10; Ps. 18:13).
  2. It is used in a parallel sense to several other names/titles of God.
    - a. *Elohim* - Ps. 47:1-2; 73:11; 107:11
    - b. *YHWH* - Gen. 14:22; II Sam. 22:14
    - c. *El-Shaddai* - Ps. 91:1,9
    - d. *El* - Num. 24:16
    - e. *Elah* - used often in Daniel 2-6 and Ezra 4-7, linked with *illair* (Aramaic for “High God”) in Dan. 3:26; 4:2; 5:18,21
  3. It is often used by non Israelites.
    - a. Melchizedek, Gen. 14:18-22

- b. Balaam, Num. 24:16
- c. Moses, speaking of the nations in Deut. 32:8
- d. Luke's Gospel in the NT, writing to Gentiles, also uses the Greek equivalent *Hupsistos* (cf. 1:32,35,76; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48; 16:17)

C. *Elohim* (PLURAL), *Eloah* (SINGULAR), used primarily in poetry (BDB 43, KB 52)

1. This term is not found outside the Old Testament.
2. This word can designate the God of Israel or the gods of the nations (cf. Exod. 12:12; 20:3). Abraham's family were polytheistic (cf. Josh. 24:2).
3. It can refer to Israeli judges (cf. Exod. 21:6; Ps. 82:6).
4. The term *elohim* is also used of other spiritual beings (angels, the demonic) as in Deut. 32:8 (LXX); Ps. 8:5; Job 1:6; 38:7. It can refer to human judges (cf. Exod. 21:6; Ps. 82:6).
5. In the Bible it is the first title/name for deity (cf. Gen. 1:1). It is used exclusively until Gen. 2:4, where it is combined with YHWH. It basically (theologically) refers to God as creator, sustainer, and provider of all life on this planet (cf. Ps. 104).

It is synonymous with *El* (cf. Deut. 32:15-19). It can also parallel YHWH as Psalm 14 (*Elohim*) is exactly like Psalm 53 (YHWH), except for the change in divine names.

6. Although PLURAL and used of other gods, this term often designates the God of Israel, but usually it has the SINGULAR VERB to denote the monotheistic usage.
7. This term is found in the mouths of non-Israelites as the name for deity.
  - a. Melchizedek, Gen. 14:18-22
  - b. Balaam, Num. 24:2
  - c. Moses, when speaking of the nations, Deut. 32:8
8. It is strange that a common name for the monotheistic God of Israel is PLURAL! Although there is no certainty, here are the theories.
  - a. Hebrew has many PLURALS, often used for emphasis. Closely related to this is the later Hebrew grammatical feature called "the plural of majesty," where the PLURAL is used to magnify a concept.
  - b. This may refer to the angelic council, which God meets with in heaven and that does His bidding (cf. I Kgs. 22:19-23; Job 1:6; Ps. 82:1; 89:5,7).
  - c. It is even possible this reflects the NT revelation of the one God in three persons. In Gen. 1:1 God creates; Gen. 1:2 the Spirit broods and from the NT Jesus is God the Father's agent in creation (cf. John 1:3,10; Rom. 11:36; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:2; 2:10).

D. YHWH (BDB 217, KB 394)

1. This is the name which reflects Deity as the covenant making God; God as savior, redeemer! Humans break covenants, but God is loyal to His word, promise, covenant (cf. Psalm 103).

This name is first mentioned in combination with *Elohim* in Gen. 2:4. There are not two creation accounts in Genesis 1-2, but two emphases: (1) God as the creator of the universe (the physical) and (2) God as the special creator of humanity. Genesis 2:4 begins the special

revelation about the privileged position and purpose of mankind, as well as the problem of sin and rebellion associated with the unique position.

2. In Gen. 4:26 it is said “*men* began to call upon the name of the LORD” (YHWH). However, Exod. 6:3 implies that early covenant people (the Patriarchs and their families) knew God only as *El-Shaddai*. The name YHWH is explained only one time in Exod. 3:13-16, esp. v. 14. However, the writings of Moses often interpret words by popular word plays, not etymologies (cf. Gen. 17:5; 27:36; 29:13-35). There have been several theories as to the meaning of this name (taken from IDB, vol. 2, pp. 409-11).
  - a. from an Arabic root, “to show fervent love”
  - b. from an Arabic root “to blow” (YHWH as storm God)
  - c. from a Ugaritic (Canaanite) root “to speak”
  - d. following a Phoenician inscription, a CAUSATIVE PARTICIPLE meaning “the One who sustains,” or “the One who establishes”
  - e. from the Hebrew *Qal* form “the One who is,” or “the One who is present” (in future sense, “the One who will be”)
  - f. from the Hebrew *Hiphil* form “the One who causes to be”
  - g. from the Hebrew root “to live” (e.g., Gen. 3:20), meaning “the ever-living, only-living One”
  - h. from the context of Exod. 3:13-16 a play on the IMPERFECT form used in a PERFECT sense, “I shall continue to be what I used to be” or “I shall continue to be what I have always been” (cf. J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Old Testament*, p. 67). The full name YHWH is often expressed in abbreviation or possibly an original form
    - (1) *Yah* (e.g., Hallelu - yah, BDB 219, cf. Exod. 15:2; 17:16; Ps. 89:9; 104:35)
    - (2) *Yahu* (“iah” ending of names, e.g., Isaiah)
    - (3) *Yo* (“Jo” beginning of names, e.g., Joshua or Joel)
3. In later Judaism this covenant name became so holy (the tetragrammaton) that Jews were afraid to say it lest they break the command of Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11; 6:13. So they substituted the Hebrew term for “owner,” “master,” “husband,” “lord”—*adon* or *adonai* (my lord). When they came to YHWH in their reading of OT texts they pronounced “lord.” This is why YHWH is written LORD in English translations.
4. As with *El*, YHWH is often combined with other terms to emphasize certain characteristics of the Covenant God of Israel. While there are many possible combination terms, here are some.
  - a. *YHWH - Yireh* (YHWH will provide, BDB 217 & 906), Gen. 22:14
  - b. *YHWH - Rophekha* (YHWH is your healer, BDB 217 & 950, *Qal* PARTICIPLE), Exod. 15:26
  - c. *YHWH - Nissi* (YHWH is my banner, BDB 217 & 651), Exod. 17:15
  - d. *YHWH - Meqaddishkem* (YHWH the One who sanctifies you, BDB 217 & 872, *Piel* PARTICIPLE), Exod. 31:13

- e. *YHWH - Shalom* (YHWH is Peace, BDB 217 & 1022), Jdgs. 6:24
- f. *YHWH - Sabbaoth* (YHWH of hosts, BDB 217 & 878), I Sam. 1:3,11; 4:4; 15:2; often in the Prophets
- g. *YHWH - Ro'I* (YHWH is my shepherd, BDB 217 & 944, *Qal* PARTICIPLE), Ps. 23:1
- h. *YHWH - Sidqenu* (YHWH is our righteousness, BDB 217 & 841), Jer. 23:6
- i. *YHWH - Shammah* (YHWH is there, BDB 217 & 1027), Ezek. 48:35

▣ **“the LORD said”** This strongly implies specific verbal communication, not a revelation through a dream or vision, though that must remain a possibility. Verse 7 implies a physical appearance similar to 3:8-12; 4:9-15; 6:13-22; 8:15-19; 9:1-7,8-17.

▣ **“Abram”** On the possible meanings of the name see the note at 11:26.

Abram is not depicted as a special person. His family are polytheistic, probably worshipers of the moon god/goddess. As a matter of fact, Abram is disobedient in

1. not leaving his family
2. leaving Canaan for Egypt
3. getting his wife to lie in order to save him (twice)
4. lying to Pharaoh and Abimelech in order to save his life

Only in 22:15-18 does his faith shine through, even though it is alluded to in 15:6.

▣ **“Go forth from your country”** The VERB (BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) means “to go.” The marginal note of NASB asserts it implies “go for yourself.” It is assumed to relate to all three clauses of v. 1b,c,d. To what country does this refer, Ur or Haran? Notice that 11:31 speaks of Terah leaving Ur for Canaan, but settling in Haran. Ur and Haran were both centers for moon worship and Terah and his family, because of the supposed meanings of their names (however, the meaning of the family name is uncertain), may have been involved in the worship of the moon god/goddess *Sin, Nana* (cf. Josh. 24:2). This is why he was willing to move.

For Abram to leave his family and their birth land would be a public acknowledgment that he was leaving all inheritance claims behind. This break with his family may have also denoted a break with the family gods. This is why Terah and Lot accompanying him was forbidden by God and, therefore, so surprising. Was it an act of disobedience to YHWH’s call or was it a way to fulfill family expectations (i.e., care for parents) and at the same time, obey YHWH? As usual the literary genre of “historical narrative” (see several relevant appendices) does not specifically answer these kinds of questions. One must look at the whole narrative and “connect the dots.”

▣ **“from your relatives”** YHWH’s call was conditional on Abram’s response. Abram did not fulfill his part (go from your relatives and from your father’s house) immediately. Obedience is crucial (cf. 18:19; 22:18).

▣ **“from your father’s house”** Acts 7:4 says Terah died in Haran before Abram left, but combining 11:26 and 12:4 and relating this with 11:32, it seems Terah lived sixty years after Abram left. Possibly 11:26 is



the key. Abram may have been listed as the first child not because of age, but because of prominence. It seems Abram's culturally expected family duties were the biggest hindrance to God's call.

▣ **“To the land which I will show you”** From 11:31 we know this to be Canaan. Canaan is promised to

1. Abraham – Gen. 12:1; 15:18-21
2. Isaac – Gen. 26:3-5
3. Jacob – Gen. 28:13-15; 35:9-12
4. Israel – Gen. 15:16; Exod. 6:4,8; Deut. 4:38,40; 5:31; 19:10; 20:16; 21:23; Josh. 1:2,3,6,11,13,15; 2:9,24; 18:3; 21:43; 24:13

Abram's faith is characterized in Heb. 11:8. This promise of a special homeland becomes the focus of the OT (i.e., Israel was given a land by YHWH).

**12:2 “I will make you a great nation”** The word for nation (BDB 156) implies a homeland. It also implies many descendants (i.e., 22:17). It may even denote a new nation not mentioned in Genesis 10.

Verse 2 has three COHORTATIVE statements of YHWH's promised actions.

1. “I will make you a great nation” – BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense
2. “I will bless you” – BDB 138, KB 159 *Piel* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense
3. “I will make your name great” – BDB 152, KB 178, *Piel* COHORTATIVE

This promise of “a seed” will become the focused hope of one special seed/descendant, the Messiah, who will bring all nations to YHWH. Abraham is but one act in the full drama of redemption!

It is also theologically significant that original creation was blessed for growth (cf. 1:28; 9:1,7), but sin affected YHWH's desire. Now He starts again, but with one man, one family, one nation to develop into a redeemed people from all nations (a reversal of the Tower of Babel; they, too, wanted “a name” for themselves, 11:4). This passage is both a promised blessing and a conditional promise. However, the focus is on the undeserved blessing (grace act, 15:7-21; 28:13-15) by YHWH. This blessing/promise is conditional (cf. v. 1) on obedience (supreme example is Genesis 22) and from Gen. 15:5, faith. It becomes a paradigm for how to relate to God (cf. Romans 4; Galatians 3).

▣ **“make your name great”** The rabbis see this in the sense of pronouncing a blessing by his name. It implies that all people will know and respect him.

▣ **“you shall be a blessing”** This is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE amidst COHORTATIVES. “To be a blessing” implies an action on Abram's part. YHWH's blessing was to enable Abram to be a blessing and from v. 3, a universal blessing.

**12:3 “I will bless those who bless you”** YHWH's blessing will come through Abram's blessing. YHWH chooses to act, but in particular ways.

The VERBS in v. 3 form a pattern.

1. YHWH blesses – BDB 138, KB 159, *Piel* COHORTATIVE
2. those who bless Abram – BDB 138, KB 159, *Piel* PARTICIPLE
3. bless those who curse Abram – BDB 886, KB 1103, *Piel* PARTICIPLE
4. YHWH curses them – BDB 886, KB 1103, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

▣ **“the one who curses you I will curse”** There are two Hebrew words here for “curse.” The first means “to speak evil of” (BDB 886, KB 1103, cf. 8:21; 16:4,5; Exod. 21:17; 22:28; Lev. 19:14; 20:9 [twice]; 24:11,14,15,23; Deut. 23:4) and the second is the judicial curse of God (BDB 76, KB 91, cf. 3:14,17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25; 27:29 [twice]; 49:7; Exod. 22:28; Num. 5:18,19,22,24 [twice],27; 22:6 [twice],12; 23:7; 24:9 [twice]; Deut. 27:15-26; 28:16-19). Those who revile Abraham cut themselves off from YHWH and therein is the curse. YHWH reveals Himself primarily through Abram and his family (note Melchizedek, Job, Jethro).

▣

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, Peshitta **“and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”**

NRSV footnote,

JPSOA **“by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves”**

TEV **“and through you I will bless all the nations”**

TEV footnote **“All the nations will ask me to bless them as I have blessed you”**

NJB **“and all clans on earth will bless themselves by you”**

LXX **“and in you shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed”**

REB **“All the peoples on earth will wish to be blessed as you are blessed”**

REB footnote **“All the peoples on earth will be blessed because of you”**

The *Niphal* PERFECT (BDB 138, KB 159) stem is usually PASSIVE (LXX, NASB, “shall be blessed,” cf. 18:18; 28:14), but in 22:18 and 26:4 the *Hithpael* PERFECT stem is used, which is REFLEXIVE (“bless themselves”). It is possible that the *Hithpael* denotes a continuing action through time. It is significant that God includes all nations in His promise to Abram, which is significant in light of the universal rebellion of chapter 11. God chose Abraham to choose all humans made in His image (cf. Ps. 22:27; 66:4; 86:9; Isa. 66:23; 49:6; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8)! Also see note at 22:18.

This is really an important passage. It shows clearly God’s purpose of using Abram to reach all the world. The universal promise of Gen. 3:15 is being implemented, even amidst the purposeful rebellion of Noah’s children (i.e., Genesis 11 and 10). It is not only to those who show favor to Abram, but to those who will show favor to Abram’s seed (i.e., the Messiah). There was/is a universal purpose in YHWH’s choice of one to bring prophesied redemption through the special “One” of his descendants. In the big picture, this is not a text about an attitude toward Jews, but a faith response to the Jewish “promised One.”

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: BOB’S EVANGELICAL BIASES**

I must admit to you the reader that I am biased at this point. My systematic theology is not Calvinism or Dispensationalism, but it is Great Commission evangelism. I believe God had an eternal plan for the redemption of all mankind (e.g., Gen. 3:15; 12:3; Exod. 19:5-6; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 18; 36:22-39; Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28; 13:29; Rom. 3:9-18,19-20,21-32), all those created in His image and likeness (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). The covenants are united in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:28-29; Col. 3:11). Jesus is the mystery of God, hidden but now revealed (cf. Eph. 2:11-3:13)!

This pre-understanding colors all my interpretations of Scripture (i.e., Jonah). I read all texts through it! It is surely a bias (all interpreters have them!), but it is a Scripturally-informed presupposition.

## SPECIAL TOPIC: MESSIAH

This is taken from the my commentary note at Daniel 9:6. The difficulty in interpreting this verse is because of the possible meanings associated with the term Messiah or anointed one (BDB 603).

1. used of Jewish kings (e.g., I Sam. 2:10; 12:3)
2. used of Jewish priests (e.g., Lev. 4:3,5)
3. used of Cyrus (cf. Isa. 45:1)
4. #1 and #2 are combined in Psalm 110 and Zechariah 4
5. used of God's special coming, Davidic King to bring in the new age of righteousness
  - a. line of Judah (cf. Gen. 49:10)
  - b. house of Jesse (cf. II Sam. 7)
  - c. universal reign (cf. Ps. 2; Isa. 9:6; 11:1-5; Mic. 5:1-4ff)

I personally am attracted to the identification of "an anointed one" with Jesus of Nazareth because of

1. the introduction of an eternal Kingdom in chapter 2 during the fourth empire
2. the introduction of "a son of man" in 7:13 being given an eternal kingdom
3. the redemptive clauses of 9:24, which point toward a culmination of fallen world history
4. Jesus' use of the book of Daniel in the NT (cf. Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14)

## NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:4-9

**<sup>4</sup>So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup>Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. <sup>6</sup>Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite *was* then in the land. <sup>7</sup>The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup>Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. <sup>9</sup>Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.**

**12:4 "Abram went forth"** Josephus (*Antiq.* 1.8.1) says Abram left because his family refused his new message of revealed monotheism, which was unique in the Ancient Near East.

▣ **"Lot went with him"** Josephus (*Antiq.* 1.8.1) says Abram adopted Lot because he had no children. This is possibly another example of Abram trying to help God with His promise of descendants (cf. chapter 16). Taking Lot (and also his father Terah, cf. 11:31) seems to violate YHWH's directive of 12:1c.

▣ **"seventy-five years old"** The people mentioned early in Genesis (chapters 4-9) lived to extreme ages. It is uncertain why.

1. sin had not spoiled the earth
2. years were counted differently

3. literary symbolism (like pre-flood Sumerian kings)

Whatever the reason, Abram was still a “young” man.

When one compares this verse with Acts 7:4 and Gen. 11:32, there seems to be a sixty year discrepancy. However, probably Abram was not listed as the first son because of age, but rather renown (cf. *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, p. 49). Often modern interpreters treat the ancient Hebrew text and culture as if it were our own. Their view of “accurate” history and ours is not the same. One is not better than the other, just different.

▣ **“Haran”** In Genesis 11:26 “Haran” (BDB 248) is Terah’s son who died in Ur. Here it is a city (BDB 357) to the northwest. Both of the cities Ur and Haran were centers of worship to the moon god/goddess, *Zin*. The name means “roads” (BDB 357) in Sumerian and, therefore, was probably on a major trade route (Nineveh, Carchemish to Damascus). In Gen. 48:7 Jacob says he came from “Paddan” (BDB 804), which also means “roads” and may be another way of denoting Haran in Aram or Syria (cf. Deut. 26:5). It is also probably “the city of Nahor” (cf. Gen. 24:10) from which Jacob got his wife Rebekah, sister of Laban.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: MOON WORSHIP**

Moon worship was the most widespread mythology of the Ancient Near East starting with Sumer (the first known civilization). There was both a male and female aspect to the myth. Originally the moon god came from the rape of the grain goddess, *Ninlil* by *Enlil*, the sky god. *Enlil* was cast out of the pantheon and condemned to the underworld for his act, but when *Ninlil* found out she was with child she joined him. The child, *Sin* (or *Zin*), was allowed to climb into the sky each night.

The worship of the moon is designed by its different phases:

1. new moon – *Asimbabbar*
2. crescent moon – *Sin*
3. full moon – *Nanaa* (Sumerian “illumination” from *En-su*, “lord of wisdom”)

These names basically mean “wise lord” (i.e., *Suen*) or “illumination” (*Nanaa*), worshiped at Ur of the Chaldees. The city itself was often called the city of Nannar. The fertility pair were worshiped at ziggurats (large pyramids with flat tops) located in the city. The sun god (*Shamash*) was the firstborn of the couple and later *Ereshkigal* (the Queen of the Underworld) and *Nanna* (the Queen of Heaven/sky).

The cult was spread all across the ANE, but the major centers of worship were

1. Ur
2. Haran
3. Tema
4. Canaan
5. Mecca

Basically this mythology combined the fertility emphasis with astral worship.

The OT rejects astral worship (cf. Deut. 4:19; 17:3; II Kgs. 21:3,5; 23:5; Jer. 8:2; 19:13; Zeph. 1:5) and fertility worship (i.e., *Ba’al* and *Asherah*, Ugarit poems). The Hebrews, originally nomads, were very careful to resist moon worship because in general moon worship was characteristic of nomadic peoples who traveled at night, while the sun was much more generally worshiped by settled or agricultural peoples. Eventually nomads settled and then astral worship in general became the problem.

**12:5 “Abram”** This name (BDB 4) means “exalted father,” “exalter of father,” or “exalted one is my father.” See note at 11:26.

▣ **“Sarai”** The meaning of this form of Abram’s wife’s name is uncertain (BDB 979, KB 1354). The new form in 17:15 means “noble lady” or “princess” (BDB 979 II, KB 1354 II, cf. Jdgs. 5:29; I Kgs. 11:3; Isa. 49:23).

▣ **“persons they had acquired in Haran”** “Acquired” meant “made” (BDB 793). Jewish mysticism (*Kabbalah*) says Abram made people through magic to show God’s power. The rabbis say this refers to converts from Abram’s preaching, but in context it refers to bought slaves and servants, as well as their children.

▣ **“the land of Canaan”** The term “Canaan” (BDB 488) originally refers to a son of Ham (one of Noah’s sons, cf. Gen. 9:18,22,25,27; 10:15). Part of the area his descendants occupied took on this name. It came to mean “low land” as opposed to “high land” (low hills), therefore, it denoted the coastal plain from Egypt to Sidon in Phoenicia. However, after the Philistines settled on the southwestern coast, just north of Egypt, it came to denote the coastal area north of Philistia. As it was invaded by the Hebrews in the book of Joshua it came to refer to land on both sides of the Jordan River. The land of Canaan had about 100 miles of coast land and at its longest was about 180 miles in length and its width varied from 20 to 120 miles.

**12:6 “Shechem”** The name (BDB 1014) means “shoulder blade.” This city is located between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. It is the site of several momentous occasions: (1) the blessing and cursing of the covenant (cf. Deut. 11:29-30; Josh. 8:30-35); (2) covenant renewal service (cf. Josh. 24); (3) site of the meeting between Rehoboam (Solomon’s son) and Jeroboam (northern labor leader) after Solomon’s death, which resulted in a split between Judah and Israel (922 B.C.).

▣ **“oak of Moreh”** Moreh means teacher (BDB 435). Trees marked sacred sites for Semitic people. This was possibly the site of a Canaanite altar or oracle (cf. Gen. 35:4; Deut. 11:30; Jdgs. 9:37). The tree is a terebinth (BDB 18, “big tree”), possibly an oak (cf. LXX). A good source for information on the plants and animals mentioned in the Bible is UBS’, *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, second edition.

▣ **“the Canaanite was then in the land”** This is viewed by most commentators, even Ibn Ezra, as a later addition, but seen in light of Genesis 9, it implies that the land was populated by descendants of Canaan.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE PRE-ISRAELITE INHABITANTS OF PALESTINE**

A. There are several lists of peoples.

1. Genesis 15:19-21 (10)

- |              |              |               |             |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| a. Kenite    | d. Hittite   | g. Amorite    | j. Jebusite |
| b. Kenizzite | e. Perizzite | h. Canaanite  |             |
| c. Kadmonite | f. Rephaim   | i. Girgashite |             |

2. Exodus 3:17 (6)
  - a. Canaanite
  - b. Hittite
  - c. Amorite
  - d. Perizzite
  - e. Hivite
  - f. Jebusite
3. Exodus 23:28 (3)
  - a. Hivites
  - b. Canaanites
  - c. Hittites
4. Deuteronomy 7:1 (7)
  - a. Hittites
  - b. Girgashites
  - c. Amorites
  - d. Canaanites
  - e. Perizzites
  - f. Hivites
  - g. Jebusites
5. Joshua 24:11 (7)
  - a. Amorite
  - b. Perizzite
  - c. Canaanite
  - d. Hittite
  - e. Girgashite
  - f. Hivite
  - g. Jebusite

B. The origin of the names is dubious because of lack of historical data. Genesis 10:15-19 includes several of them as related to Canaan, a son of Ham.

C. Brief descriptions from the longest list in Gen. 15:19-21

1. Kenite
  - BDB 884
  - non-Israelite
  - names related to “forger” or “smith,” which could refer to metal working or music (cf. Gen. 4:19-22)
  - connected to the area of Sinai north to Hebron
  - name connected to Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law (cf. Jdgs. 1:16; 4:11)
2. Kenizzite
  - BDB 889
  - relative of Jews
  - a clan of Edom (cf. Gen. 15:19; 30:15,42)
  - lived in Negev
  - possibly absorbed into Judah (cf. Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:6,14)
3. Kadmonite
  - BDB 870 II
  - non-Israelite, possibly a descendant of Ishmael (cf. Gen. 25:15).
  - name relates to “easterner”
  - lived in Negev
  - possibly related to “the men of the east” (cf. Job 1:3)
4. Hittite
  - BDB 366
  - non-Israelite

- descendant of Heth
- from kingdom of Anatolia (Asia Minor, Turkey)
- were present very early in Canaan (cf. Genesis 23; Josh. 11:3)
- 5. Perizzite - BDB 827
- non-Israelite, possibly Hurrians
- lived in forested area of Judah (cf. Gen. 34:30; Jdgs. 1:4; 16:10)
- 6. Rephaim - BDB 952
- non-Israelite, possibly giants (cf. Gen. 14:5; Num. 33:33; Deut. 2:10-11,20)
- lived on eastern bank of Jordan
- line of warriors/heroes
- 7. Amorite - BDB 57
- northwestern Semitic people-group from Ham (cf. Gen. 10:16)
- became general designation for inhabitants of Canaan (cf. Gen. 15:16; Deut. 1:7; Josh. 10:5; 24:15; II Sam. 21:2)
- the name may mean “the west”
- the ISBE, vol. 1, p. 119, says the term denotes
  - a. the inhabitants of Palestine generally
  - b. the population of the hill country as opposed to the coastal plain
  - c. a specific people group with their own king
- 8. Canaanite - BDB 489
- from Ham (cf. Gen. 10:15)
- general designation of all the tribes in Canaan west of the Jordan
- meaning of Canaan uncertain, possibly “merchant” or “red-purple dye”
- as a people group they dwelt along the coastal plain (cf. Num. 13:29)
- 9. Gergashite - BDB 173
- from Ham (cf. Gen. 10:16) or at least “from a son of [i.e., the country of] Canaan,” ISBE, vol. 2, p. 1232)
- 10. Jebusite - BDB 101
- from Ham (cf. Gen. 10:16)
- from city of Jebus/Salem/Jerusalem (cf. Josh. 15:63; Jdgs. 19:10)
- Ezek. 16:3,45 assert they were a mixed race from Amorite and Hittite
- 11. Hivites - BDB 295
- from Ham (cf. Gen. 10:17)
- translated by LXX as Horite (cf. Gen. 34:2; 36:20-30; Josh. 9:7)
- possibly from the Hebrew word “cave,” therefore cave dwellers
- they lived in the highlands of Lebanon (cf. Josh. 11:3; Jdgs. 3:3). In II Sam. 24:7 they are listed next to Tyre and Sidon

**12:7 “The LORD appeared”** This is the common VERB “to see” (BDB 906) used in a specialized sense (i.e., a physical visual appearance of Deity, cf. 12:7 [twice]; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2,24; 35:1,9; 48:3). In v. 1 YHWH speaks to Abram, but here He appears! Often YHWH appeared in the form of “the angel of the LORD.”

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE ANGEL OF THE LORD**

It is obvious that Deity manifests Himself physically in human form in the OT. The question for Trinitarians becomes which person of the Trinity fulfills this role. Since God the Father (YHWH) and His Spirit are consistently non-corporal, it seems possible to suggest that these human manifestations are the pre-incarnate Messiah.

To demonstrate the difficulties one faces in trying to identify a theophany from an angelic encounter the following list is illustrative:

1. the angel of the Lord as an angel
  - a. Gen. 24:7,40
  - b. Exod. 23:20-23; 32:34
  - c. Num. 22:22
  - d. Jdgs. 5:23
  - e. II Sam. 24:16
  - f. I Chr. 21:15-30
  - g. Zech. 1:12-13
2. the angel of the Lord as theophany
  - a. Gen. 16:7-13; 18:2,16,17-21,22-33; 22:11-15; 31:11,13; 48:15-16
  - b. Exod. 3:2,4; 14:19 (13:21)
  - c. Jdgs. 2:15; 6:22-24; 13:3-23
  - d. Hosea 12:3-4
  - e. Zech. 3:1-5

▣ **“To your descendants I will give this land”** This was a great promise for Abraham’s descendants (lit. “seed,” cf. 13:15; 15:18), but Paul saw the singular “seed” as referring to the Messiah (cf. Gal. 3:16).

▣ **“so he built an altar there”** These altars were ways of commemorating special events or appearances (i.e., 8:20; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:7; Exod. 17:15; 24:4; Josh. 8:30; Jdgs. 6:24; 21:4; I Sam. 7:17; 14:35; II Sam. 24:25). Sacrifice was a way of expressing in a visible way one’s sense of God’s presence, care, and provision. The visible sacrifice became invisible in smoke and rose to God.

**12:8 “Bethel”** This means “house of God” (BDB 110). From 28:19 we learn that this city was originally called Luz until Jacob’s day. This later name and the last phrase of v. 6 imply that this account was recorded later and may have existed for a period as oral tradition. The exact time, person, and methodology of the composition of OT books is uncertain. See Introduction to Genesis, vol. 1A, D. 1.



▣ **“called upon the name of the LORD”** When one compares this verse and 4:26 with Exod. 6:7, there seems to be a contradiction. However, possibly the name was originally used without understanding its full covenant significance. This phrase implies a worship/ritual setting (cf. 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: “THE NAME” OF YHWH**

The use of “the name” as a substitute for YHWH Himself is parallel to the Exod. 23:20-33 use of “angel,” who is said to have “My name is in Him.” This same substitution can be seen in the use of “His glory” (e.g., John 1:14; 17:22). All are attempts to soften the personal anthropomorphic presence of YHWH (cf. Exod. 3:13-16; 6:3). YHWH is surely spoken of in human terms, but it was also known that He was spiritually present throughout creation (cf. I Kgs. 8:27; Ps. 139:7-16; Jer. 23:24; Acts 7:49 quotes Isa. 66:1).

There are several examples of “the name” representing YHWH’s divine essence and personal presence.

1. Deut. 12:5; II Sam. 7:13; I Kgs. 9:3; 11:36
2. Deut. 28:58
3. Ps. 5:11; 7:17; 9:10; 33:21; 68:4; 91:14; 103:1; 105:3; 145:21
4. Isa. 48:9; 56:6
5. Ezek. 20:44; 36:21; 39:7
6. Amos 2:7
7. John 17:6,11,26

The concept of “calling on” (i.e., worshipping) the name of YHWH is seen early in Genesis.

1. 4:26, the line of Seth
2. 12:8, Abraham
3. 13:4, Abraham
4. 16:13, Hagar
5. 21:33, Abraham
6. 26:25, Isaac

and in Exodus:

1. 5:22, speak in Thy name
2. 9:16, show My name through all the earth (cf. Rom. 9:17)
3. 20:7, do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (cf. Lev. 19:12; Deut. 5:11; 6:13; 10:20)
4. 20:24, where I cause my name to be remembered (cf. Deut. 12:5; 26:2)
5. 23:20-21, an angel (“since My name is in him”)
6. 34:5-7, Moses calls on (or “called out”) the name of the Lord. This is one of a handful of texts that describe YHWH’s character (cf. Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8; Joel 2:13)

Knowing someone by name implies an intimacy (cf. Exod. 33:12); Moses knows YHWH’s name and in 33:17, YHWH knows Moses’ name. This is the context where Moses wants to see God’s glory (cf. v. 18), but God allows him to see “His goodness” (v. 19), which is parallel to “the name” (v. 19).

The Israelites are to destroy “the names” of Canaan’s gods (cf. Deut. 12:3) and call on Him (cf. Deut. 6:13; 10:20; 26:2) at the special place He causes His name to dwell (cf. Exod. 20:24; Deut. 12:5,11,21; 14:23,24; 16:2,6,11; 26:2).

YHWH has a universal purpose involving His name.

1. Gen. 12:3
2. Exod. 9:16
3. Exod. 19:5-6
4. Deut. 28:10,58
5. Micah 4:1-5

▣ **“Ai”** This meant “heap of stones” (BDB 743) and was a city, or possibly the ruins of a city, close to Bethel.

**12:9 “journeyed on”** This literally means “pulled up tent pegs” (BDB 652, KB 704, *Qal IMPERFECT*). It reflects the nomadic life of Abram, as does “pitched his tent” in v. 8.

▣ **“Negev”** This means “the south” (BDB 616, cf. 13:1,3). It is not desert, but arid pasture land at certain times of the year.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:10-16**

**<sup>10</sup>Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. <sup>11</sup>It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; <sup>12</sup>and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup>Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you.” <sup>14</sup>It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup>Pharaoh’s officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. <sup>16</sup>Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.**

**12:10 “famine”** This is literally “empty stomach” (BDB 944). God tested Abram’s faith. He failed (cf. vv. 12-13)! The Bible shows humans, warts and all. Abraham is not special; YHWH is special!

**12:11** The wives of the Patriarchs were beautiful (cf. 12:11; 24:16; 26:7), but barren, women. YHWH showed His power, presence, and purpose by allowing each of them to produce descendants. This was His way of showing that He was in charge of Israel’s history, not human generations or planning.

**12:12 “they will kill me”** God had promised to make him a great nation, but here he tries to protect himself at his wife’s expense. In chapter 20 he repeated his action and in chapter 26 his son did the same thing.

**SPECIAL TOPIC: SATANIC ATTEMPTS TO THWART THE MESSIANIC LINE (I.E., GEN. 3:15)**

**IN GENESIS**

- A. Cain's rebellion, Genesis 4
- B. Mixing of human and angelic lines, Genesis 6
- C. Tower of Babel rebellion, Genesis 11
- D. Abram giving of Sarai to Pharaoh, Genesis 12
- E. Birth of Ishmael to Hagar (Sarah's servant), Genesis 16
- F. Abram giving Sarah to Abimelech, Genesis 20
- G. Sacrifice of Isaac, Genesis 22
- H. Rivalry between Esau and Jacob, Genesis 25, 32
- I. Isaac gives his wife to Abimelech, Genesis 26
- J. Trickery and rivalry of Laban, Genesis 29-31
- K. Jacob merging with Shechem, Genesis 34
- L. Rivalry between Jacob's children, Genesis 37
- M. Judah's faithlessness and promiscuity related to Tamar, Genesis 38

**12:13 “Please say that you are my sister”** This seems strange to us, but (1) they were half brother and sister (i.e., same father, cf. 20:12) and (2) from Nuzi Tablets we learn that this custom of marrying within families was common in Hurrian upper society or (3) else simply calling wives “sisters” was common (as in Egypt and Song of Songs 4:9,10,12; 5:1,2).

**12:15 “Pharaoh”** This title (BDB 829) is used of Egyptian kings from the eighteenth dynasty forward. The etymology of the Egyptian word is “great house.”

**12:16 “gave him”** Abram's wealth did not all come from Pharaoh (cf. 12:5b).

▣ Although sheep and cattle, as well as donkeys, were common domestic stock and a source of wealth in the ancient world (i.e., Abram was given a dowry price for Sarai), camels were not widely domesticated until later (i.e., end of the second millennium B.C.). There is some archaeological evidence for domesticated camels earlier in the second millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia, but only for the elite class (see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 311).

Also notice in this verse that the slaves and servants are listed with the property (cf. 20:14; 26:14; 30:43; 32:5)!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:17-20**

<sup>17</sup>But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. <sup>18</sup>Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? <sup>19</sup>Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go.” <sup>20</sup>Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

**12:17 “great plagues”** These plagues were apparently related to Sarai’s protection. In Genesis 20:18 it refers to “closed wombs” of Abimelech’s wives. The VERB “struck” (BDB 619, KB 668, *Piel* IMPERFECT) is the same root as “plagues” (BDB 619), which was a grammatical way of intensification.

▣ **“because of Sarai”** This is “by words of.” Rashi says she ordered the angel to protect her. Apparently she informs Pharaoh of the situation (cf. v. 18).

**12:18** The plague is obviously related to Sarai’s physical/sexual protection. The question is how Pharaoh knew the reason for the plague.

1. YHWH revealed it to him
2. his wise men (cf. 7:11,22; 8:7)?
3. Sarai herself

This might be another example, like Daniel 4 or the Magi of the NT, where God speaks to non-Jews to reveal His purposes.

**12:19-20** Abram’s departure from Egypt was not a request, but a command.

1. “take” – BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. “go” – BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. “Pharaoh commanded his men” – BDB 845, KB 1010, *Piel* IMPERFECT
4. “escorted him away” – BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Piel* IMPERFECT

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is this covenant so important? Who is included in it? Define its terms.
2. Did Abram immediately fulfill his part? How is God's grace seen in this chapter?
3. Was Terah dead when Abram left Haran?
4. How did God test Abram in this chapter? Did he pass?

# GENESIS 13

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Abram and Lot	Abram Inherits Canaan	Abraham and Lot	Abram and Lot Separate	Abram and Lot Separate
13:1	13:1-4		13:1-4	13:1-4
13:2-7		13:2-7		
	13:5-13		13:5-7	13:5-9
13:8-13		13:8-13	13:8-9	
			13:10-13	13:10-13
			Abram Moves to Hebron	
13:14-18	13:14-18	13:14-18	13:14-18	13:14-17
				13:18

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:1**

**<sup>1</sup>So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him.**

**13:1** Abram returns from Egypt to the Negev. The Negev means the dry southern portions of Canaan. He had migrated to this same region earlier (cf. 12:9) and will return to it again in 20:1. It is also where Isaac lived (cf. 28:62).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:2-7**

**<sup>2</sup>Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. <sup>3</sup>He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, <sup>4</sup>to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. <sup>5</sup>Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. <sup>6</sup>And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together. <sup>7</sup>And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land.**

**13:2** Abram was a wealthy man. The book of Genesis documents two sources of his wealth.

1. his possessions from Ur, 12:5
2. his accumulations from Egypt, 12:16

In the Ancient Near East there were several ways of accumulating and retaining wealth.

1. precious metals
2. jewels
3. clothing
4. food stuffs
5. livestock

**13:4 “Abram called on the name of the LORD”** This phrase implies a specific type of worship setting, probably involving an animal sacrifice (cf. Exod. 20:24). It is first used in 4:26, but recurs in 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25. See Special Topic at 12:8. Because of the parallelism of I Chr. 16:8; Ps. 105:1; 116:17; and Isa. 12:4, calling on the name also involved acts of “praising” or “thanksgiving” to YHWH.

The “name” (BDB 1027) represented the personal presence of Abram's covenant God. Its full significance will not be known until Exodus 3:13-16. As *Elohim* represented the “Creator,” YHWH represented the covenant-making, personal, present, promising God of Seth and Shem. See Special Topic: Names for Deity at 12:1.

Abram returned to his first altar in Canaan (cf. 12:8).

**13:6** The land in southern Canaan did not get enough annual rainfall to allow the native grasses to flourish. It took many acres to support one flock. Usually April through September was wet enough for grasses to grow, but in October through March the herds had to be moved to higher pastures.

**13:7 “the Canaanite and the Perizzite”** The term “Canaanite” is a collective term for the inhabitants of Palestine, as is “Amorites.” Some have seen a distinction in these names based on: (1) Perizzite can mean “villager,” while (2) Canaanite refers to walled-city dwellers. This is the only place where these two groups are listed as the inhabitants of Palestine alone. See Special Topic at 12:6. For “Canaanite” see note at 12:6.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:8-13**

<sup>8</sup>So Abram said to Lot, “Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. <sup>9</sup>Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if *to the left*, then I will go to the right; or if *to the right*, then I will go to the left.”  
<sup>10</sup>Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere—*this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar.* <sup>11</sup>So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup>Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom. <sup>13</sup>Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD.

**13:8-9 “Please let there be no strife”** There is a series of grammatical features that describe this dialogue.

1. please let there be no strife (BDB 937) – BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal* JUSSIVE, v. 8
2. please separate from me – BDB 825, KB 962, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE, v. 9
3. I will go to the right – BDB 412, KB 415, *Hiphil* COHORTATIVE
4. I will go the left – BDB 970, KB 1332, *Hiphil* COHORTATIVE

It is surprising that Abram (the older and wealthier) let Lot choose, since Canaan had been designated by YHWH as His special gift to Abram. YHWH used Lot’s greed to motivate him to choose the eastern side of Jordan.

Only after Lot left and Abram stayed in Canaan did YHWH reappear to him.

**13:8 “brothers”** Here this word (BDB 26) is used in the sense of a relative (cf. 14:14,16; 29:12,15).

**13:10 “Lot lifted up his eyes and saw”** Lot chose based on self-interest. The wickedness (cf. v. 13) of the place did not deter him.

▣ **“this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah”** Here is another editorial comment from a later event. Exactly who and when this original account was penned is unknown, but it seems to have been one of the priests who served as Moses’ scribe and biographer (i.e., recorded his death [Deuteronomy 34] and made comments about him, as in Num. 12:3).

▣ **“like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt”** Rashi (a rabbi of the Middle Ages) says the land had trees like Eden and vegetables like Egypt. The irony is that as Eden was a place of judgment, so too, the Jordan Valley!

▣ **“Zoar”** Zoar (BDB 858) is one city located in the Jordan Valley (cf. v. 11), just south of the Dead Sea. The account of its name is found in Gen. 19:20-22, which is a word play on “small” (BDB 859 I). It was an oasis (cf. Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 4.8.4).

There are several cities located in this area: (1) Sodom; (2) Gomorrah; (3) Admah; (4) Zeboiim; and (5) Zoar/Bela. They were collectively called “the cities of the plain.” All but Zoar were destroyed by God (cf. Deut. 29:23).



**13:13** The population of Sodom is characterized in several negative ways.

1. evil – BDB 948, cf. 2:9; 3:22; 6:5; 8:21; 37:33; 38:7
2. sinners – BDB 308, cf. Num. 16:38; 32:14
3. against the Lord
4. exceedingly wicked

However, the text does not specify how. The account of chapter 19 gives us a window into their evil. Numbers 1 and 2 are hendiadys, which are often combined in translations as “evil sinners.”

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:14-18**

**<sup>14</sup>The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; <sup>15</sup>for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. <sup>16</sup>I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. <sup>17</sup>Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.” <sup>18</sup>Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.**

**13:14 “The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him”** Perhaps this fulfilled the condition of 12:1. Abram moved by revelation (“lift up your eyes,” BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERATIVE; “look,” BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERATIVE); Lot by self-interest (cf. v. 10).

**13:15 “all the land. . . forever”** Two things must be remembered in this statement: (1) God’s covenant is always conditional on a human faith response (i.e., Deut. 11:31-32; 28:36,63-68; 30:19-20) and (2) the Hebrew term “forever” (*’olam*) must be interpreted in its context (see NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 1252-1253). It does not usually mean “forever” in the modern English sense of the term. See Special Topic: Forever following Special Topic: Covenant.

This is the heart of the issue about the Jews having a biblical claim in Palestine today. I am impressed by

1. *Israel in Prophecy* by William Hendricksen
2. *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis Over Israel and Palestine* by Colin Chapman

#### **SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT**

The OT term *berith* (BDB 136), covenant, is not easy to define. There is no matching VERB in Hebrew. All attempts to derive an etymological definition have proved unconvincing. However, the obvious centrality of the concept has forced scholars to examine the word usage to attempt to determine its functional meaning.

Covenant is the means by which the one true God deals with His human creation. The concept of covenant, treaty, or agreement is crucial in understanding the biblical revelation. The tension between God’s sovereignty and human free-will are clearly seen in the concept of covenant. Some covenants are based exclusively on God’s character and actions.

1. creation itself (cf. Genesis 1-2)
2. the call of Abram (cf. Genesis 12)

3. the covenant with Abram (cf. Genesis 15)
4. the preservation of and promise to Noah (cf. Genesis 6-9)

However, the very nature of covenant demands a response

1. by faith Adam must obey God and not eat of the tree in the midst of Eden
2. by faith Abraham must leave his family, follow God, and believe in future descendants
3. by faith Noah must build a huge boat, far from water, and gather the animals
4. by faith Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt and received specific guidelines for religious and social life with promises of blessings and cursings (cf. Deuteronomy 27-29)

This same tension involving God's relationship to humanity is addressed in the "new covenant." The tension can be clearly seen in comparing Ezekiel 18 with Ezek. 36:27-37. Is the covenant based on God's gracious actions or mandated human response? This is the burning issue of the Old Covenant and the New. The goals of both are the same: (1) the restoration of fellowship lost in Genesis 3 and (2) the establishment of a righteous people who reflect God's character.

The New Covenant of Jer. 31:31-34 solves the tension by removing human performance as the means of attaining acceptance. God's law becomes an internal desire instead of an external performance. The goal of a godly, righteous people remains the same, but the methodology changes. Fallen mankind proved themselves inadequate to be God's reflected image. The problem was not the covenant, but human sinfulness and weakness (cf. Romans 7; Galatians 3).

The same tension between OT unconditional and conditional covenants remains in the NT. Salvation is absolutely free in the finished work of Jesus Christ, but it requires repentance and faith (both initially and continually). It is both a legal pronouncement and a call to Christlikeness, an indicative statement of acceptance and an imperative to holiness! Believers are not saved by their performance, but unto obedience (cf. Eph. 2:8-10). Godly living becomes the evidence of salvation, not the means of salvation. This tension is clearly seen in the book of Hebrews.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: FOREVER ('OLAM)**

This is the very common (used over 400 times) term *'olam* (BDB 761, KB 798). It is used of duration of time in several senses, each of which must be linked to the nature of the thing to which it refers.

- A. Time past (examples only)
  1. "heroes of old," Gen 6:4
  2. "mountains and hills," Gen. 49:21
  3. "generations of old," Deut. 32:7
  4. "forefather," Josh 24:2
  5. "days of old," Isa. 51:9
- B. Continual for a lifetime (examples only)
  1. "believe in you forever" (i.e., Moses), Exod. 19:9
  2. "slave forever," Deut. 15:17; I Sam. 27:12
  3. "all your days," Deut. 23:6

4. Samuel “stay there forever,” I Sam. 1:22
  5. King “live forever,” I Kgs. 1:21; Neh. 2:3; Ps. 21:4
  6. “bless the Lord forever,” Ps. 115:18; 145:1-2
  7. “sing forever,” Ps. 89:1; 115:18; 145:1-2
  8. “pregnant forever” (metaphor), Jer. 20:17
  9. possibly Prov. 10:25
- C. Continual existence (but with obvious limitations)
1. humans live forever, Gen. 3:22
  2. the earth, Ps. 78:69; 104:5; 148:6; Eccl. 1:4 (cf. II Pet. 3:10)
  3. Aaronic priesthood, Exod. 29:9; 40:15 (cf. I Sam. 2:30)
  4. the Sabbath, Exod. 31:16-17
  5. the feast days, Exod. 12:14,17,24; Lev. 16:29,31,24; 23:14,21,41
  6. circumcision, Gen. 17:13 (cf. Rom. 2:28-29)
  7. the land of promise, Gen. 13:15; 17:18; 48:4; Exod. 32:13 (cf. Exiles)
  8. ruined cities, Isa. 25:2; 32:14; 34:10
- D. Conditional Covenants
1. Abraham, Gen. 17:7,8,13,19
  2. Israel, Deut. 5:29; 12:28
  3. David, II Sam. 7:13,16,25,29; Ps. 89:2,4
  4. Israel, Jdgs. 2:1 (cf. Galatians 3)
- E. Unconditional Covenants
1. Noah, Gen. 9:12,16
  2. New Covenant, Isa. 55:3; Jer. 32:40; 50:5 (i.e., Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-30)
- F. God Himself
1. His existence, Gen. 21:33; Deut. 32:40; Ps. 90:2; 93:2; Isa. 40:28; Dan. 12:7
  2. His name, Exod. 3:15; Ps. 135:13
  3. His reign, Exod. 15:18; Ps. 45:6; 66:7; Jer. 10:10; Micah 4:7
  4. His word, Ps. 119:89,160; Isa. 40:8; 59:21
  5. His lovingkindness, Ps. 25:6; 89:2; 103:17; 118:1-4,29; Jer. 33:1
- G. His Messiah
1. His name, Ps. 72:17,19
  2. Blessed forever, Ps. 45:2,17; 89:52
  3. reign, Ps. 89:36,37; Isa. 9:7
  4. priest, Ps. 110:4
  5. pre-existence, Micah 5:2
- H. New Age life
1. everlasting life, Dan. 12:2

2. everlasting contempt, Dan. 12:2
3. no more tears, Isa. 65:19 (Rev. 21:4)
4. no sun, Isa. 60:19-20 (Rev. 21:23)

Note how many different English words are used to translate this Hebrew word in the NIV

1. forever
2. old, of old
3. everlasting
4. eternal
5. lasting
6. always
7. for life
8. continue
9. regular
10. permanent
11. any time
12. ancient, ancient times
13. endless
14. forevermore
15. to the very end
16. a long time
17. long ago

**13:16 “I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth”** Here again is the metaphorical promise (cf. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 28:14; Exod. 32:13; Num. 23:10) of a son, a family, a tribe, and a great nation (YHWH also promises to bless Ishmael, cf. 16:10; 17:20). The promise is not to be through Lot; he is gone! Abram believes this promise (cf. Gen. 15:6) and Paul uses this as the basis for his justification by grace through faith in Rom. 4:3 and Gal. 3:6.

In Genesis Abraham receives many promises from YHWH.

1. land – 12:2,7; 13:14-15; 15:7,18; 17:8
2. seed/descendants – 12:2; 13:16; 15:5,18-21; 17:2,4-7,16,19; 22:17
3. covenant – 17:7,19,21
4. special blessing of all nations through him – 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14

However, these are not conditional promises. There is an emphasis on obedience and actions on his part, 12:1; 13:17; 17:1,23; 18:19; 22:16-18; 26:4-5 (see *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, p. 3). Abram does not initiate, but he must respond appropriately!

**13:17** YHWH commands Abram to check out his new gift.

1. “arise” or “go” – BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (idiomatic, see note below)

2. “walk about” – BDB 229, KB 246, *Hithpael* IMPERATIVE (possibly a legal requirement for ownership of land)

The UBS’s *Handbook on Genesis* makes a good point about “arise” when used in combination with another command.

“Arise does not mean that Abram was seated or lying down when he was commanded to walk. In Hebrew the term has a rhetorical function when it occurs as a command followed by another command, indicating that the command is important and that the person should begin immediately to do the action commanded. For other examples in Genesis see 19:15; 21:18; 28:2” (p. 304).

▣ **“I will give it to you”** See note at v. 15.

**13:18 “the oaks of Mamre”** Sacred tree(s) (BDB 18) are recurrent themes in early Israel (PLURAL in MT, but SINGULAR in the LXX and Peshitta).

1. great tree at Moreh – 12:6; Deut. 21:30
2. great tree at Mamre – 13:18; 14:13; 18:1 (cf. Josephus, *Antiq.* 1.10.4)
3. great tree at Shechem – 35:4; Jdgs. 9:6
4. great tree at Zaananim – Josh. 19:38; Jdgs. 4:11
5. great tree at Ophrah – Jdgs. 6:11,19
6. great tree at Tabor – I Sam. 10:3 (no mention of an altar)
7. BDB 18 is equated with BDB 781 in Gen. 18:1,4,8. BDB 781 is what the special tree(s) of Genesis 2-3 are called (cf. 2:9,16,17; 3:1,2,3,6,8,11,12,17,22,24)

▣ **“Hebron”** At this time it was known as Kiriath-arba (cf. 23:2; 35:27), which shows that this account was written down at a later period after the name was changed by the invading Israelites.

▣ **“there he built an altar to the LORD”** This new altar (often in the area of a pre-existing Canaanite worship site) is a recurrent theme of Abram’s sojourn in Canaan (cf. 12:7; 13:18; 22:9). These altars probably involved an animal sacrifice, which had become a characteristic of the worship of YHWH.

1. Abel – 3:21
2. Noah – 8:20
3. Abram – 13:18; 15:12-21
4. Isaac – 26:25
5. Jacob – 33:20; 35:7
6. Job – Job 1:5

Animal sacrifices are continued in the Exodus (cf. Exodus 12) and developed in the Mosaic covenant (Leviticus 1-7,16).

# GENESIS 14

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
War of the Kings	Lot's Captivity and Rescue	An Alliance of Four Eastern Kings	Abram Rescues Lot	The Campaign of the Four Kings
14:1-12	14:1-4 14:5-12	14:1-12	14:1-7 14:8-12	14:1-12
14:13-16	14:13-16	14:13-16	14:13-16	14:13-16
God's Promise to Abram			Melchizedek Blesses Abram	Melchizedek
14:17-24	14:17 Abram and Melchizedek 14:18-20	14:17-24	14:17-20	14:17-19 (19)
(19-20)	(19-20)	(19-20)		14:20
	14:21-24		14:21 14:22-24	14:21-24

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:1-12

<sup>1</sup>And it came about in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, <sup>2</sup>that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). <sup>3</sup>All these came as allies to the valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). <sup>4</sup>Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but the thirteenth year they rebelled. <sup>5</sup>In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim and the Zuzim in Ham and the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, <sup>6</sup>and the Horites in their Mount Seir, as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness. <sup>7</sup>Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and conquered all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, who lived in Hazazon-tamar. <sup>8</sup>And the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah and the king of Admah and the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) came out; and they arrayed for battle against them in the valley of Siddim, <sup>9</sup>against Chedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim and Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. <sup>10</sup>Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country. <sup>11</sup>Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed. <sup>12</sup>They also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom.

**14:1-12** The events recorded here are unknown to current history, as are the names of the kings. There has been much disagreement about these names. It is possible that a related set of cuneiform texts purchased by the British Museum called “the Chedorlaomer Texts” records the same event because of the similarity of three of the four kings’ names, but this, too, is uncertain.

So what do we know?

1. There is “archeological evidence of an advanced civilization (Middle Bronze I) in trans-Jordan, Negev, and Sinai at this time which collapsed suddenly” (ZPEB, vol 1, p. 785). This war fits current evidence.
2. Armies moved long distances during this period (i.e., second millennium B.C.) to gain spoil and control.

One example to show the current state of the confusion which surrounds this event involves “Arioch king of Ellasar,” which can refer to

1. Eri-aku, king of the city of Larsa (Akkadian), which is in central Babylon or Assyria
2. a satrap of Armenia (Ellasar is Armenian for Armenia)
3. Cappadocia (from Genesis Apocryphon of the Dead Sea Scrolls)
4. a city between Carchemish and Haran (from the Mari Texts)

The confusion is obvious. These names are not common to any written sources. The spelling of names changes from language to language. It is best to wait until more documented history is known from this period and locale. The kings must be contemporaneous and from the period of Abram (19<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C.). But let me hasten to mention that the names fit the country (region to which they are related, Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, p. 30).

1. Amraphel – Semite flavor

2. Arioeh – Hurrian flavor
3. Chedorlaomer – Elam flavor
4. Tidal – Hittite flavor

**14:2** The cities listed (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela/Zoar) are cities located in the southern Arabah, today in the region covered by the southern tip of the Dead Sea.

▣ **“Bera. . .Birsha”** The Jewish Study Bible says these two names are symbolic for “evil” (BDB 948) and “wickedness” (BDB 957, p. 34, also note Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, p. 130). This is unsubstantiated by BDB. It may be a rationale on its part for asserting that the account is not historical. The names of the kings are unknown from history.

**14:3 “the valley of Siddim”** This location is found only in this chapter, vv. 3, 8. The ancient translations used the immediate context (v. 10) to translate it as part of the Jordan Rift Valley, where fossil petroleum products were visible on the surface. This is probably an area now covered by the southern part of the Dead Sea.

**14:4** This verse tells us the reason for “the cities of the plain” to rebel (BDB 597, KB 632, *Qal* PERFECT) against their Mesopotamian overlord. In response Chedorlaomer recruited several other Fertile Crescent kings to join him in retaliation.

**14:5-7** Derek Kidner (*Genesis*, Tyndale OT Commentaries, p. 131) thinks vv. 5-7, possibly vv. 1-11, may be from a historical document (a royal record of military campaigns) describing the defeat of the “cities of the plain” and their local allies. I also think this is a possible option. It is “different” from the surrounding chapters.

**14:5 “Rephaim. . .Zuzim. . .Emin”**

**SPECIAL TOPIC: TERMS USED FOR TALL/POWERFUL WARRIORS OR PEOPLE GROUPS**

These large/tall/powerful people are called by several names.

1. *Nephilim* (BDB 658) – Gen. 6:4; Num. 13:33
2. *Rephaim* (either BDB 952 or BDB 952 II) – Gen. 14:5; Deut. 2:11,20; 3:11,13; Josh. 12:4; 13:12; II Sam. 21:16,18,20,22; I Chr. 20:4,6,8
3. *Zamzummin* (BDB 273), *Zuzim* (BDB 265) – Gen. 14:5; Deut. 2:20
4. *Emim* (BDB 34) – Gen. 14:5; Deut. 2:10-11
5. *Anakim* (sons of *Anak*, BDB 778 I) – Num. 13:33; Deut. 1:28; 2:10-11,21; 9:2; Josh. 11:21-22; 14:12,15

▣ **“Ashteroth”** This (BDB 800) is one name for the Canaan female goddess connected to *Ba’al*.



## **SPECIAL TOPIC: FERTILITY WORSHIP OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST**

### **I. Reasons For**

- A. Ancient humans began as a hunter-gatherers, but as nomadic life became settled, the need for crops and herds developed.
- B. Ancient Near Eastern inhabitants were vulnerable to the forces of nature. As civilizations developed around the major bodies of fresh water they became dependant on the regular order of the seasons.
- C. The forces of nature became gods who needed to be supplicated and controlled.

### **II. Where and Why**

- A. Fertility religions developed in
  1. Egypt (Nile)
  2. Mesopotamia (Tigris and Euphrates)
  3. Canaan (Jordan)
- B. There is a basic commonality among the fertility cults of the Ancient Near East.
- C. The changing and unpredictable seasons and weather conditions caused the development of myths using human/divine analogies as the basis of life in the spiritual realm and on earth.

### **III. Who and How**

- A. Who (the gods and goddesses)
  1. Egypt
    - a. Isis (female)
    - b. Osiris (male)
  2. Mesopotamia
    - a. Ishtar/Inanna (female)
    - b. Tammuz/Dumuzi (male)
  3. Canaan
    - a. Ba'al (male)
    - b. Asherah, Astarte, Anath (female)
- B. Each of these pairs were mythologized in similar ways
  1. one dies
  2. the other restores
  3. the pattern of dying and rising gods mimic the annual cycles of nature
- C. Imitation magic saw human sexual unions (i.e., marriage of the gods) as a way of insuring fertility of crops, herds, and people.

### **IV. The Israelites**

- A. YHWH's people were warned (i.e., Leviticus and Deuteronomy) to avoid the fertility cults (especially of Canaan).
- B. These cults were very popular because of the superstition of human beings and the added incentive of sexual activity.

C. Idolatry involves the blessing of life to be sought in cultic or ritual ways instead of a personal faith and trust in YHWH.

#### IV. Suggested Reading

- A. W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*
- B. J. H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*
- C. James G. Frazer
  - 1. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*
  - 2. *Folklore in the Old Testament*
  - 3. *The Worship of Nature*
- D. C. H. Gordon, *Before the Bible*
- E. S. N. Kramer, *Mythologies of the Ancient World*

**14:6 “Horites”** See Special Topic at 12:6.

▣ **“El-paran”** This is not the general name for Deity (i.e., *El*) prefixed. It is an abbreviation of “terebinth” (cf. LXX, i.e., a large tree).

**14:7 “En-mishpat (that is Kadesh)”** The term “En” (BDB 745) means “spring” and is part of the name of several locations in the OT. “Mishpat” (BDB 1048) means “judgment,” “justice,” or “decision,” which denotes the events of Numbers 13.

This is the only occurrence of this name in the Bible. The parenthesis identifies it with the oasis in the northern Sinai desert so famous during the Wilderness Wandering Period (cf. Num. 13:26; 20). Kadesh is also mentioned in Gen. 16:14, 20:1, and Num. 13:26; 20:1, later called “Kadesh Barnea” (cf. Num. 32:8). Apparently this is another example of an editor or scribe who added information (1) from a later period or (2) as further clarification to an existing text or oral tradition (cf. vv. 2,8,17).

▣ **“Amalekites”** This group may be descendants from Esau (cf. Gen. 36:15-16), who became a symbol of evil to Israel because of their raiding the defenseless rear part of the Israelite migration (cf. Deut. 17:8-16; 25:18-19).

▣ **“Amorites”** See Special Topic at 12:6.

▣ **“Hazazon-tamar”** From II Chr. 20:2 this is identified as En-gedi, a unique freshwater source on the western side of the Dead Sea.

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:13-16**

**<sup>13</sup>Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram. <sup>14</sup>When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. <sup>15</sup>He divided his forces against them by**

**night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup>He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people.**

**14:13 “Abram the Hebrew”** The term “Hebrew” (BDB 720) can derive from

1. Eber – a descendant of Shem (cf. 10:21) and Shelah (cf. 10:24). The name means “beyond” (cf. LXX) or “the region across” (BDB 719). If this term designates a people group (cf. 39:14), it is another example of an anachronism denoting a later editor or scribe updating the text.
2. Habiru – name for migrating Semites of the second millennium B.C.; Akkadian for Hebrew (ABD, vol. 3, p. 6); the name itself means “refugees.”

This term is often used to designate Israelites to foreigners. Chapter 14 is unique in the recorded events of Abram’s life.

1. use of “Hebrew” (BDB 720 I)
2. linked to the city of Jerusalem (Salem)
3. use of the title “God Most High” (cf. 14:18,19,20,22)

**14:14** It is surprising that a force of 318 (plus allies) could defeat a combined army of four Fertile Crescent kings (this is the faith miracle). This defeat is meant to reveal the presence and power of YHWH with Abraham (as vv. 17-24 and 15:1 clearly show). This is the reason this event is recorded! Also Abram’s use of the title “Melchizedek” recognizes YHWH’s activity beyond Abram’s covenant. Others (i.e., Job, Elihu) also knew and worshiped YHWH, but by a different name (i.e., *El Elyon*). Abram’s call was not an exclusive act, but a way to reveal YHWH to all the nations.

▣ **“trained men”** Even though this is a military context, this term (BDB 335) refers to domestic or pastoral training.

A military aspect may be found in the VERB “he led out” (BDB 937, KB 1227, *Hiphil IMPERFECT*), which may reflect an Akkadian root, “to muster troops,” which follows the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint.

▣ **“as far as Dan”** This is another case of a later name being used. Dan (the city) refers to the migration of the tribe of Dan from the Philistine area to the far north in Joshua 19:4-48 and Judges 18. Obviously a later editor or scribe is making updates!

**14:15** The UBS’s *Handbook on Genesis* makes a good comment here.

“14:15 shows ‘that Abram did not recover Lot in the night raid at Dan, but only later at Hobah’ (p. 319).

This city/region “Hobah” (BDB 295) is north of Damascus and is mentioned only here in the Bible. The invading kings and Abram with his allies traveled long distances.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 14:17-24**

**<sup>17</sup>Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). <sup>18</sup>And**

**Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. <sup>19</sup>He blessed him and said,**

**“Blessed be Abram of God Most High,**

**Possessor of heaven and earth;**

**<sup>20</sup>And blessed be God Most High,**

**Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” He gave him a tenth of all. <sup>21</sup>The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.” <sup>22</sup>Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup>that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ <sup>24</sup>I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share.”**

**14:17 “the king of Sodom”** Exactly how “the king of Sodom” is related to the king of Salem is uncertain. (Verse 17 picks up on the divisions of the spoils of war continued in vv. 21-24). It is surprising to me that he (i.e., Shemeber, v. 2) is even mentioned. Apparently (1) the king of Salem was a spiritual advisor to the king of Sodom or (2) this is an abridged context combining two separate events. Salem is not one of the Cities of the Plain that were attacked (cf. vv. 1-2).

From v. 23 Abram wanted YHWH to receive all the credit for his prosperity (cf. v. 20b) and he did not fully trust the king of Sodom.

▣ **“the valley of Shaveh (that is the King’s Valley)”** The term “Shaveh” (BDB 1001) means “to be smooth” (BDB 1000) and here may refer to a plain.

The “King’s Valley” is also mentioned in II Sam. 18:18 and appears to be a valley close to Salem. Its location is uncertain (though some think it is the Kidron Valley), as are so many people and places in this chapter.

**14:18 “Melchizedek”** The name means “king of righteousness” or “my king is righteous” (BDB 575, similar to Josh. 10:1; Zedek may relate to a Canaanite astral god, Zedek). The name (Melchizedek) appears only here and in Ps. 110:4 in the OT. The Psalm 110 passage caused the Dead Sea Scrolls community to expect two Messiahs.

1. a royal one from the tribe of Judah
2. a priestly one from the tribe of Levi

The NT book of Hebrews (i.e., chapter 7) uses this Canaanite priest/king as a type of a superior priesthood.

1. his genealogy is not given
2. Abram offers a tithe to him (v. 20, a sign of an acknowledgment to a superior)
3. he is leader of the city later to become Jerusalem
4. he is a priest (unusual at this period, the father acted as priest for the family, cf. 31:54; Job 1) to God Most High (*El Elyon*, אֱלֹהֵי עֵלְיוֹן, cf. vv. 19,20)

By means of rabbinical hermeneutics the author of Hebrews uses him as a type/symbol of a better priesthood than Aaron/Levi.

▣ **“Salem”** The special city that YHWH chose for His name to dwell goes by several names in the OT.

1. Salem – early Canaanite name
2. Jebus – Canaanite name of Joshua’s day
3. Jerusalem – of David’s day (see parallelism of Ps. 76:2)

▣ **“bread and wine”** This was for Abram and all the others as well. This was a way of referring to the necessities of life (cf. Ps. 104:15). They may have had a religious significance (i.e., covenant of peace meal), but this is uncertain from the text. It is not a foreshadowing of the Lord’s Supper. Be careful of types not revealed by inspired NT authors!

▣ **“wine”**

## **SPECIAL TOPIC: BIBLICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ALCOHOL AND ALCOHOLISM**

### **I. Biblical Terms**

#### **A. Old Testament**

1. *Yayin* – This is the general term for wine (BDB 406), which is used 141 times. The etymology is uncertain because it is not from a Hebrew root. It always means fermented fruit juice, usually grape. Some typical passages are Gen. 9:21; Exod. 29:40; Num. 15:5,10.
2. *Tirosh* – This is “new wine” (BDB 440). Because of climatic conditions of the Near East, fermentation started as soon as six hours after extracting the juice. This term refers to wine in the process of fermenting. For some typical passages see Deut. 12:17; 18:4; Isa. 62:8-9; Hos. 4:11.
3. *Asis* – This is obviously alcoholic beverages (“sweet wine” BDB 779, e.g. Joel 1:5; Isa. 49:26).
4. *Sekar* – This is the term “strong drink” (BDB 1016). The Hebrew root is used in the term “drunk” or “drunkard.” It had something added to it to make it more intoxicating. It is parallel to *yayin* (cf. Prov. 20:1; 31:6; Isa. 28:7).

#### **B. New Testament**

1. *Oinos* – the Greek equivalent of *yayin*
2. *Neos oinos* (new wine) – the Greek equivalent of *tirosh* (cf. Mark 2:22).
3. *Gleuchos vinos* (sweet wine, *asis*) – wine in the early stages of fermentation (cf. Acts 2:13).

### **II. Biblical Usage**

#### **A. Old Testament**

1. Wine is a gift of God (Gen. 27:28; Ps. 104:14-15; Eccl. 9:7; Hos. 2:8-9; Joel 2:19,24; Amos 9:13; Zech. 10:7).
2. Wine is a part of a sacrificial offering (Exod. 29:40; Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:7,10; 28:14; Deut. 14:26; Jdgs. 9:13).
3. Wine is used as medicine (II Sam. 16:2; Prov. 31:6-7).
4. Wine can be a real problem (Noah – Gen. 9:21; Lot – Gen. 19:33,35; Samson – Jdgs. 16:19; Nabal – I Sam. 25:36; Uriah – II Sam. 11:13; Ammon – II Sam. 13:28; Elah – I Kgs. 16:9; Benhadad – I Kgs. 20:12; Rulers – Amos 6:6; and Ladies – Amos 4).
5. Wine can be abused (Pro. 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4-5; Isa. 5:11,22; 19:14; 28:7-8; Hosea 4:11).

6. Wine was prohibited to certain groups (Priests on duty, Lev. 10:9; Ezek. 44:21; Nazarites, Numbers 6; and Rulers, Pro. 31:4-5; Isa. 56:11-12; Hosea 7:5).
7. Wine is used in an eschatological setting (Amos 9:13; Joel 3:18; Zech. 9:17).

#### B. Interbiblical

1. Wine in moderation is very helpful (Ecclesiasticus 31:27-30).
2. The rabbis say, "Wine is the greatest of all medicine, where wine is lacking, then drugs are needed." (Baba Bathra 58b).

#### C. New Testament

1. Jesus changed a large quantity of water into wine (John 2:1-11).
2. Jesus drank wine (Matt. 11:18-19; Luke 7:33-34; 22:17ff).
3. Peter accused of drunkenness on "new wine" at Pentecost (Acts 2:13).
4. Wine can be used as medicine (Mark 15:23; Luke 10:34; I Tim. 5:23).
5. Leaders are not to be abusers. This does not mean total abstainers (I Tim. 3:3,8; Titus 1:7; 2:3; I Pet. 4:3).
6. Wine used in eschatological settings (Matt. 22:1ff; Rev. 19:9).
7. Drunkenness is deplored (Matt. 24:49; Luke 11:45; 21:34; I Cor. 5:11-13; 6:10; Gal. 5:21; I Pet. 4:3; Rom. 13:13-14).

### III. Theological Insight

#### A. Dialectical tension

1. Wine is the gift of God.
2. Drunkenness is a major problem.
3. Believers in some cultures must limit their freedoms for the sake of the gospel (Matt. 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23; I Corinthians 8-10; Romans 14).

#### B. Tendency to go beyond given bounds

1. God is the source of all good things.
2. Fallen mankind has abused all of God's gifts by taking them beyond God-given bounds.

#### C. Abuse is in us, not in things. There is nothing evil in the physical creation (cf. Mark 7:18-23; Rom. 14:14,20; I Cor. 10:25-26; I Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:15).

### IV. First Century Jewish Culture and Fermentation

- A. Fermentation begins very soon, approximately six hours after the grape is crushed.
- B. Jewish tradition says that when a slight foam appeared on the surface (sign of fermentation), it is liable to the wine-tithe (*Ma aseroth* 1:7). It was called "new wine" or "sweet wine."
- C. The primary violent fermentation was complete after one week.
- D. The secondary fermentation took about 40 days. At this state it is considered "aged wine" and could be offered on the altar (*Edhuyyoth* 6:1).
- E. Wine that had rested on its lees (old wine) was considered good, but had to be strained well before use.

- F. Wine was considered to be properly aged usually after one year of fermentation. Three years was the longest period of time that wine could be safely stored. It was called “old wine” and had to be diluted with water.
- G. Only in the last 100 years with a sterile environment and chemical additives has fermentation been postponed. The ancient world could not stop the natural process of fermentation.

V. Closing Statements

- A. Be sure your experience, theology, and biblical interpretation do not depreciate Jesus and first century Jewish/Christian culture! They were obviously not total-abstainers.
- B. I am not advocating the social use of alcohol. However, many have overstated the Bible’s position on this subject and now claim superior righteousness based on a cultural and/or denominational bias.
- C. For me, Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8-10 have provided insight and guidelines based on love and respect for fellow believers and the spread of the gospel in our cultures, not personal freedom or judgmental criticism. If the Bible is the only source for faith and practice, then maybe we must all rethink this issue.
- D. If we push total abstinence as God’s will, what do we imply about Jesus, as well as those modern cultures that regularly use wine (e.g., Europe, Israel, Argentina)?

**14:19-20** Most English translations mark this as poetry.

**14:19 “blessed be Abram”** This is the same VERB (BDB 138, KB 159) found three times in Gen. 12:3. Its basic meaning is to “kneel” or “bless.”

▣ **“Most High”** Abram, Melchizedek, and Job all knew the God of creation by different names.

1. Abram – YHWH
2. Melchizedek – *El Elyon*
3. Job – *Elohim, El*

See Special Topic at 2:1.

▣ **“possessor of heaven and earth”** The VERB (BDB 888, KB 1111, *Qal* PARTICIPLE, cf. v. 22) means “to own” or “to make” (possibly from two similar consonantal roots). This theological language is common in Near Eastern religions (i.e., Canaanite Ugaritic poems); it was a way to acknowledge the high god (applied to YHWH in Ps. 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 146:6).

**14:20 “a tenth of all”** This is the first mention of a numerical concept that develops into the tithe in Leviticus (see Special Topic following). This gesture on Abram’s part was a way of thanking YHWH for the victory and acknowledging that He was the victor!

By giving this to Melchizedek he was recognizing him as one who truly knew and served the same God who called him from Ur (cf. v. 22).

## SPECIAL TOPIC: TITHES IN THE MOSAIC LEGISLATION

### A. Scripture References:

For Priests and Central Sanctuary	For Local Levites	For Local Poor
1. Lev. 27:30-32		
2. Deut. 12:6-7,11,17	Deut. 12:12	
3. Deut. 14:22-26	Deut. 14:27	Deut. 14:28-29
4.		Deut. 26:12-15
5. Num. 18:21-24	Num. 18:25-29 (Levites must tithe of their tithe to central shrine)	Num. 18:21-29
6.	Neh. 10:37,38	Neh. 12:44
7. Mal. 3:8,19		

### B. Examples of tithing predate Mosaic legislation

1. Genesis 14:20, Abraham to Melchizedek (Heb. 7:2-9)
2. Genesis 28:22, Jacob to YHWH

### C. The tithes of Israel were used to support the central sanctuary, but every third year the national tithes were directed exclusively to the local poor.

I personally believe “tithing” is an OT concept related to maintaining the central sanctuary. I do not think it is a NT principle. The best and the only discussion about believing Gentiles’ giving pattern is recorded in II Corinthians 8-9, which deals with the one-time gift of the Gentile churches to the Jerusalem church.

## SPECIAL TOPIC: TITHING

Luke 11:42 and Matt. 23:23 are the only NT references to tithing. I do not believe the NT teaches tithing because this entire setting is against “nit-picking” Jewish legalism and self-righteousness. I believe the NT guidelines for regular giving (if there are any) are found in II Corinthians 8 and 9, which go far beyond tithing! If a Jew, with only the information of the OT, was commanded to give ten to thirty percent (there are two, possibly three, required tithes in the OT), then Christians should give far beyond and not even take the time to discuss the tithe!

NT believers must be careful of turning Christianity into a new legal performance-oriented code (Christian Talmud). Their desire to be pleasing to God causes them to try to find guidelines for every area of life. However, theologically it is dangerous to pull old covenant rules which are not reaffirmed in the NT (cf. Acts 15) and make them dogmatic criteria, especially when they are claimed (by modern preachers) to be causes of calamity or promises of prosperity (cf. Malachi 3).

Here is a good quote from Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 292-293:

“The New Testament does not once introduce tithing into the grace of giving. Tithes are mentioned only three times in the New Testament: (1) in censuring the Pharisees for neglect of justice, mercy, and faith while giving meticulous care to the tithing of even garden produce (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42); (2) in the exposure of the proud Pharisee who ‘prayed to himself,’



boasting that he fasted twice each week and tithed all his possessions (Luke 18:12); and (3) in arguing for the superiority of Melchizedek, and hence of Christ, to Levi (Heb. 7:6-9).

It is clear that Jesus approved tithing as a part of the Temple system, just as in principle and practice he supported the general practices of the Temple and the synagogues. But there is no indication that he imposed any part of the Temple cultus on his followers. Tithes were chiefly produce, formerly eaten at the sanctuary by the one tithing and later eaten by the priests. Tithing as set forth in the Old Testament could be carried out only in a religious system built around a system of animal sacrifice.

Many Christians find the tithe to be a fair and workable plan for giving. So long as it is not made to be a coercive or legalistic system, it may prove to be a happy plan. However, one may not validly claim that tithing is taught in the New Testament. It is recognized as proper for Jewish observance (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42), but it is not imposed upon Christians. In fact, it is now impossible for Jews or Christians to tithe in the Old Testament sense. Tithing today only faintly resembles the ancient ritual practice belonging to the sacrificial system of the Jews.”

Paul Stagg has summed it up:

“While much may be said for adopting the tithe voluntarily as a standard for one’s giving without rigidly imposing it upon others as a Christian requirement, it is clear in adopting such a practice that one is not carrying on the Old Testament practice. At most one is doing something only remotely analogous to the tithing practice of the Old Testament, which was a tax to support the Temple and the priestly system, a social and religious system which no longer exists. Tithes were obligatory in Judaism as a tax until the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, but they are not thus binding upon Christians.

This is not to discredit tithing, but it is to clarify its relationship to the New Testament. It is to deny that the New Testament supports the coerciveness, legalism, profit motive, and the bargaining which so often characterize the tithing appeals today. As a voluntary system, tithing offers much; but it must be redeemed by grace if it is to be Christian. To plead that ‘it works’ is only to adopt the pragmatic tests of the world. Much ‘works’ that is not Christian. Tithing, if it is to be congenial to New Testament theology, must be rooted in the grace and love of God.”

**14:21** One wonders if the “tithes” of v. 20 are part of the spoils discussion of v. 21. There is confusion in the context.

1. vv. 17, 21-24 deal with the king of Sodom and the spoils
2. vv. 18-20 deal with the tithe of the spoils to the king of Salem

**14:22** Notice how Abram equates the names for Deity.

1. YHWH
2. *El Elyon*

thereby identifying them as one and the same.

**14:23** “I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours” This hyperbolic language is typical (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 120) of Ancient Near Eastern bartering language (cf. Genesis 23). It is an idiom for “taking nothing.” Clothing was one of the spoils of battle. Abram wanted to make it perfectly clear, he was not entering or had never been in a covenant relationship with the king of Sodom.

**14:24** This is a list of Abram’s neighbors who aided in the battle and who deserved the spoils due them.

# GENESIS 15

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Abram Promised A Son	God's Covenant with Abram	The Covenant With Abraham and Sarah	God's Covenant with Abram	The Divine Promise and Covenant
15:1-11	15:1-11	15:1-6	15:1	15:1
(1)				(1)
			15:2-3	15:2-6
			15:4-5	
			15:6	
		15:7-11	15:7	15:7-11
			15:8	
			15:9-11	
15:12-16	15:12-16	15:12-16	15:12-16	15:12-16
15:17-21	15:17-21	15:17-21	15:17-21	15:17-21
(18)	(18)			(18)

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## BACKGROUND

- A. Chapter 15 is a series of tests and conditions which God gave to Abraham from chapters 12 through 22 (cf. 12:1-3; 14:12-14; 15:1-18; 17:1-5; 22:16-18).

Chapter 15 explains YHWH's actions in chapter 14. YHWH was Abram's victory. Abram's hope is in YHWH's promise, first given in chapter 12, but repeated several times (cf. chapters 12, 15, 17, 18, 22).

- B. It is interesting to note that the covenant proclamation in chapters 12 and 17 have expressed conditions, while chapters 15 and 22 have no overt conditions. All of God's dealings with humans are based on His unchanging, merciful character and His initiating love, however, God has also purposed that humans made in His image must respond to His love by repentance, faith, obedience, and perseverance. These requirements are fundamental, not only in Genesis, but throughout the entire Bible.

- C. It is important that we see throughout God's dealing with Abram that His grace, not human merit, effort, or resources, is emphasized over and over again. This theme becomes the central motif of Genesis. However, the radical call of faith and fellowship which was required of Abram is emphasized also (cf. 22:16,18)! Paul uses this as a paradigm of God's dealing with sinful mankind (cf. Romans 4 and Galatians 3). This is a crucial text on how God receives sinful mankind. The very fact that He would/will is shockingly wonderful!

- D. These opening chapters of Genesis are crucial in understanding our world and our spiritual needs. Genesis 1-3 sets the stage for a proper understanding of the human situation.

1. made in God's image for fellowship (1:26-27)
2. rebelled against God's leadership (3:1-7)
3. the far-reaching consequences of human rebellion (3:8-20)
4. God's promise of redemption (3:15)

In reality everything from Genesis 3 through Revelation 20 is God repairing the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin. Heaven is described in Revelation 21-22 as a restored Garden of Eden. The opening chapters of Genesis address all humanity.

1. Adam
2. Noah
3. Abram (cf. 12:3; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8)

God chose one to choose all! God's choice involved promise (i.e., unconditional covenant) with response (i.e., a conditional covenant). Abram's life shows the effects of sin and grace. He struggles with obedience and faith. Through this conflict, all are called (Abram is a paradigm of faith/doubt/sin/trust, cf. Romans 4; Galatians 3).

- E. Verse 6 is crucial to NT theology. It seems to be a comment or conclusion of the compiler of Abram's story. Was this Moses' or a Patriarch's later conclusion (i.e., Jacob)? The real issue is not who, when, or how of the formation of Scripture, but is it God's truth or human speculation? Here is where the presuppositions of authority (i.e., inspiration) enter. Usually sinful people find God existentially and then search for more information about Him in Scripture. Scripture accounts

are for us who have never seen! It gives a foundation and source for faith seeking understanding. Abram's life is a paradigm for all believers (OT saints and NT saints). When dealing with historical narrative, one must continue to ask, "why record this?" (See Fee and Stuart, *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*).

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:1-11**

**<sup>1</sup>After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying,  
"Do not fear, Abram,  
I am a shield to you;  
Your reward shall be very great."**

**<sup>2</sup>Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" <sup>3</sup>And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." <sup>4</sup>Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup>And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." <sup>6</sup>Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. <sup>7</sup>And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." <sup>8</sup>He said, "O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?" <sup>9</sup>So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." <sup>10</sup>Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. <sup>11</sup>The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.**

**15:1** It is difficult to know when to translate a text as prose or poetry. The only textual marker is "beat" (i.e., accented phrases), but this is a later development. Verse 1 is translated as poetry in NASB, JPSOA, NJB, NIV, but as prose in NKJV, NRSV, TEV, and REB. This same ambiguity is seen in 14:19-20.

The phrase "after these things" is ambiguous and recurrent (cf. 22:1; 22:20; 39:7; 40:1; 48:1). The individual narratives are linked together in Genesis in an eastern historical framework, not a modern western, sequential time sequence. See article: Old Testament Historiography Compared with Contemporary Near Eastern Cultures on page xv.

This is the first of two (cf. v 4) occurrences in Genesis of this very common phrase (i.e., "the word of the LORD came to. . .," cf. v. 4), which is found throughout the Prophets. It emphasizes that YHWH addressed Abram, apparently in a very specific and audible way (BDB 55). In this particular account it was by means of a night vision. See note at 15:1c below.

Abram is depicted as a person who receives divine revelation. The introductory formula is common in the Latter Prophets, but rare before them. Abram is even called a "prophet" (BDB 611) in 20:7. Prophets wrote Scripture. It has always been a theory of mine that Moses is not the sole author of the early parts of Genesis, but a compiler/editor. The imagery in Genesis 1-2 is Mesopotamian, not Egyptian. No Egyptian loan words appear until the life of Joseph. I think Moses used oral or written traditions dating back to Abram's day (i.e., the Patriarchs). He was a compiler and editor for much of this early history. The human writers use their culture and vocabulary, but the message is from Deity (i.e., inspiration).

▣ **“the LORD”** YHWH is a form of the Hebrew VERB, “to be” (cf. Exod. 3:14). It seems to emphasize that God is the ever-living, only-living God. The rabbis assert that when God is addressed as YHWH, it speaks of His mercy and when He is addressed as *Elohim*, it speaks of His power as Creator. I like this theory much better than the “JEDP” theory of source criticism, which was so popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. See Special Topic: Names For Deity at 12:1.

▣ **“in a vision”** This implies that it was at night, which is also supported by v. 5. With the remaining content of chapter 15, particularly v. 12, it is uncertain whether this vision came in one night or if it was spread out over two nights (i.e., two visions, vv. 1-6,7-21). The term “vision” (BDB 303) found here is different from “appeared” (BDB 906) found in 12:7. The term here is a rare one, found only in three chapters of the Bible, Gen. 15:1; Num. 24:4, 16; and Ezek. 13:7.

The NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 354, has an interesting summary of the ways YHWH reveals Himself in Genesis.

1. by words (BDB 55) – 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 21:12-13; 22:1-2
2. by visions – 15:1-6 (BDB 303); 46:2-4 (BDB 909 I)
3. by dreams – 20:3-7 (BDB 538); 28:12-15 (BDB 321); 31:10-13 (BDB 321), 24 (BDB 538)
4. theophanies, (lit. “appeared,” BDB 906) – 12:7; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2,24; 35:1,9; 48:3
5. by the angel of YHWH (see Special Topic at 12:7) – 16:7-13; 21:17-19; 22:11-12,15-18; 31:11

The methods vary, but the initiating revelations of Deity confront humanity, not for the sake of the individuals themselves, but for YHWH’s redemptive plan to reach all peoples!

▣ **“do not fear, Abram”** This VERB (BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) is recurrent in Genesis (cf. 15:1; 21:7; 26:24; 46:3). YHWH knows sin has caused our hearts to fear (fear Him, fear life, fear ourselves). It is first used in Gen. 3:10 of Adam and Eve’s fear of God after they sinned. The rabbis say that this fear is connected with chapter 14, particularly (1) fear of the battle; (2) fear of reprisal by the nations whose kings he killed; or (3) fear of God because he had taken human life. However, from the context of chapters 12 through 15 it is possible that the fear is connected with Abram’s continued childlessness.

▣ **“I am a shield to you”** This term “shield” (BDB 171) is a military term functioning as a metaphor for a “protector” or “provider” (cf. Ps. 3:3; 28:7; 33:20; 84:9; and 91:4). The term “shield” is etymologically related to the term “delivered” (BDB 171, cf. 14:20). For a good definition of the term “shield” see Deut. 33:29. I prefer Luther’s translation over the New American Standard Bible because he implies that the “shield” and “reward” are God Himself—“I Am both your shield and reward” (cf. NKJV). There is no stated VERB in this phrase.

▣ **“Your reward shall be very great”** Abram had been tested with the desire for wealth and spoils in 13:8-13 and 14:21-24 and he rejected these materialistic opportunities. God had promised in chapter 12 both descendants and land. However, in this continuing affirmation of God’s promise, God Himself is Abram’s greatest possession (as He was for the later Levites, cf. Num. 18:20; Deut. 10:9).

**15:2 “O Lord GOD”** This is the first time that the combination of these divine names appears together in the Bible. It occurs in Genesis only here and v. 8. They are literally “*Adonai* YHWH.” We can see these names together in Deut. 10:17. The term *Adonai* (lit. “my Lord,” is used in Canaanite literature, but not

other Semitic languages) seems to be much like the term *Kurios* in the NT, which implies “master,” “husband,” “owner,” or “Lord.” See Special Topic: Names For Deity at 12:1.

There are several names for Deity which combine two names. However,

1. YHWH *Elohim* – Gen. 2:4
2. *Adonai* YHWH – Gen. 15:2

though often translated the same way in English, they are distinct in meaning and emphasis.

▣ **“what will You give me since I am childless”** The focal point of Abram’s concern was his continuing childlessness. His concern was based on God’s initial promise in 12:1-3. The ancients saw childlessness as a curse from God, yet God was affirming Abram as the recipient of a special favor. Abram was seeking the physical manifestation of that promised favor.

▣ The word “childless” (BDB 792) is a rare word. It is used only four times.

1. of Abram (not Sarai) – Gen. 15:2
2. as punishment for incest – Lev. 20:20,21
3. metaphorically of Jehoiakim not being succeeded on the throne by one of his sons – Jer. 22:30

▣ **“and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus”** There is a play on the rare Hebrew word for “heir” (אֲשֵׁר), which may mean “acquisition” or “possession” (BDB 606, NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 971) and the term “Damascus” (דַּמָּשְׂקִי, BDB 199). They sound similar in the Hebrew language. Some see this as being related to the Hurrian adoption customs found in the Nuzi Tablets from the second millennium B.C.

Some assume that “Eliezer” (BDB 451), which means “God is help,” is the servant mentioned in 24:2.

The term (BDB 606) translated “heir” is a rare term. The normal VERB for “heir” (BDB 439, KB 441) is found in vv. 4,5 (twice), 7,8. They both mean “take possession of.” This phrase is explained by v. 3.

**15:3 “Since You have given no offspring”** Abram, by this repetition, shows the level of anxiety that he felt. Abram is a good example of faith mixed with doubt. Abram believed God, but that did not mean that he did not have questions about some aspects of His promises. God does not despise a sincere questioner! God would bring him through a series of trials and tests until Abram knew that his greatest possession was God Himself (esp. chapter 22).

**15:4 “but one who shall come forth from your own body”** It must be noted that this is still twenty-five years in the future. It does assert specifically that the child will come from Abram, but it does not assert that he will come from Sarai. This is the cause of the complications found in chapter 16.

The translated phrase “from your own body” is literally “of your inward parts.” This word (BDB 588) is used in several senses.

1. lower viscera – II Sam. 20:10; II Chr. 21:15
2. stomach – Job 20:14; Ezek. 3:3; 7:19; Jonah 1:17; 2:1; II Sam. 7:12; 16:11
3. sex organs
  - a. male – Gen. 15:4
  - b. female – Isa. 49:1
4. the physical location of human emotions – Song of Songs 5:4,14; Isa. 16:11; 63:15; Jer. 4:19; 31:20; Lam. 2:11

**15:5 “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them”** God addressed Abram with two commands.

1. look – BDB 613, KB 661, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. count – BDB 707, KB 765, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

God’s blessing would be abundant and evident (cf. 12:2; 17:2).

God used several metaphors with which Abram would have been familiar to describe the abundance of his descendants.

1. dust (cf. Gen. 13:16; 28:14; Num. 23:10)
2. stars (cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4)
3. sand (cf. Gen. 22:17 and 32:12)

From the promise of 12:3 and the concept of “a kingdom of priests” (cf. Exod. 19:5-6) to the universal prophecies of Isaiah (cf. 42:6; 49:6; 51:4), Abraham’s family would be much bigger than anyone dreamed. It would include believing Gentiles (cf. Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23; Rom. 2:28-29; 4; Gal. 3:7-9,29).

**15:6 “Then he believed in the LORD”** This is not to imply that Abram did not believe back in chapter 12, for he did leave Ur and follow God. But, here the term “believe” (BDB 52, KB 63, *Hiphil* PERFECT, which denotes a life of trust, not just this one act) is from the root **אמן**, from which we get “amen.” The root means “to be strong” or “to lean upon.” Abraham put his complete trust in the promise of God that he would have descendants. It was an act of faith without sight (cf. 22:16,18; Heb. 11:1). Abram took God at His word, by faith, without demanding physical sight. This is extremely important because this becomes the basis of Paul’s argument of justification by grace through faith found in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. Paul also uses Hab. 2:4 in Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11 and the author of Hebrews in 10:38. It seems that the essence of the term is “Abraham leaned upon YHWH and not upon himself.” Throughout this section of Genesis is emphasized again and again that it is God’s initiating love, not human resources, which is required for their salvation. The term “believed” can be translated in English by three words: believe, trust, and faith (cf. Exod. 4:5,31; Deut. 1:32; II Chr. 20:20; Isa. 43:10, relates to Messiah in Isa. 28:16 and refers to unbelief in Num. 14:11; 20:12; Deut. 9:23; II Kgs. 17:14; Ps. 78:22). It seems that the essence of the OT term is found in “trust” or “trustworthiness,” not focused in ourselves, but in the faithfulness of God and His promises.

Notice Abram believes

1. in the Lord (personal relationship)
2. in His word (propositional revelation)

It has been helpful for me to characterize biblical faith as

1. faith in a person (YHWH/Christ)
2. trust in the truths about that person (the Bible)
3. living a life like that person (OT obedience/Christlikeness)

All three are crucial, not optional!

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: FAITH/BELIEVE**

- A. This is such an important term in the Bible (cf. Heb. 11:1,6). It is the subject of Jesus’ early preaching (cf. Mark 1:15). There are at least two new covenant requirements: repentance and faith (cf. 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21).



B. Its etymology

1. The term “faith” in the OT meant loyalty, fidelity, or trustworthiness and was a description of God’s nature, not ours.
2. It came from a Hebrew term (*emun, emunah*), which meant “to be sure or stable.” Saving faith is mental assent (set of truths), moral living (a lifestyle), and primarily a relational (welcoming of a person) and volitional commitment (a decision) to that person.

C. Its OT usage

It must be emphasized that Abraham’s faith was not in a future Messiah, but in God’s promise that he would have a child and descendants (cf. Gen. 12:2; 15:2-5; 17:4-8; 18:14). Abraham responded to this promise by trusting in God. He still had doubts and problems about this promise, which took thirteen years to be fulfilled. His imperfect faith, however, was accepted by God. God is willing to work with flawed human beings who respond to Him and His promises in faith, even if it is the size of a mustard seed (cf. Matt. 17:20).

D. Its NT usage

The term “believed” is from the Greek term (*pisteuō*) which can also be translated “believe,” “faith,” or “trust.” For example, the NOUN does not occur in the Gospel of John, but the VERB is used often. In John 2:23-25 there is uncertainty as to the genuineness of the crowd’s commitment to Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Other examples of this superficial use of the term “believe” are in John 8:31-59 and Acts 8:13, 18-24. True biblical faith is more than an initial response. It must be followed by a process of discipleship (cf. Matt. 13:20-22, 31-32).

E. Its use with PREPOSITIONS

1. *eis* means “into.” This unique construction emphasizes believers putting their trust/faith in Jesus
  - a. into His name (John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; I John 5:13)
  - b. into Him (John 2:11; 3:15,18; 4:39; 6:40; 7:5,31,39,48; 8:30; 9:36; 10:42; 11:45,48; 17:37,42; Matt. 18:6; Acts 10:43; Phil. 1:29; I Pet. 1:8)
  - c. into Me (John 6:35; 7:38; 11:25,26; 12:44,46; 14:1,12; 16:9; 17:20)
  - d. into the Son (John 3:36; 9:35; I John 5:10)
  - e. into Jesus (John 12:11; Acts 19:4; Gal. 2:16)
  - f. into Light (John 12:36)
  - g. into God (John 14:1)
2. *en* means “in” as in John 3:15; Mark 1:15; Acts 5:14
3. *epi* means “in” or “upon,” as in Matt. 27:42; Acts 9:42; 11:17; 16:31; 22:19; Rom. 4:5,24; 9:33; 10:11; I Tim. 1:16; I Pet. 2:6
4. the DATIVE CASE with no PREPOSITION, as in Gal. 3:6; Acts 18:8; 27:25; I John 3:23; 5:10
5. *hoti*, which means “believe that,” gives content as to what to believe
  - a. Jesus is the Holy One of God (John 6:69)
  - b. Jesus is the I Am (John 8:24)
  - c. Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Him (John 10:38)

- d. Jesus is the Messiah (John 11:27; 20:31)
- e. Jesus is the Son of God (John 11:27; 20:31)
- f. Jesus was sent by the Father (John 11:42; 17:8,21)
- g. Jesus is one with the Father (John 14:10-11)
- h. Jesus came from the Father (John 16:27,30)
- i. Jesus identified Himself in the covenant name of the Father, “I Am” (John 8:24; 13:19)
- j. We will live with Him (Rom. 6:8)
- k. Jesus died and rose again (I Thess. 4:14)

▣ **“and He reckoned it to him”** The term “reckoned” (BDB 362, KB 359, *Qal* IMPERFECT) can mean “counted” or “considered.” It is used quite often by the priests in connection with the sacrifices (cf. Lev. 7:18; 17:4; and Num. 18:27). As a person brought a sacrifice to the priest, the sacrifice was counted or reckoned on the person’s behalf. God counted unto Abram His own righteousness, thereby fully accepting him.

▣ **“as righteousness”** This term (BDB 842) originally meant a “measuring reed” and thereby it came to refer to a standard of measurement. God Himself is that standard of measurement, therefore, most of the Hebrew and Greek words for “sin” mean a deviation from the standard of God’s own righteousness. This term has developed in its meaning.

1. it meant God’s moral nature as can be seen clearly in the eighth century Prophets
2. it came to mean God’s help for the helpless (cf. Ps. 10:16-18 and 72:12). This concept is further developed in Jesus’ day by almsgiving (cf. Matt. 6:1)
3. the last major usage of this term “righteousness” applies to spiritual salvation. This is particularly noted in Isaiah 40-55 and Paul’s use in the NT. Paul speaks of our righteousness with God based solely on God’s initiating love and our faith response in Rom. 4:3 and Gal. 3:6.
4. we can see the continuing use of this term in James 2:14-16

Here the word is used, not in the sense of “sinlessness,” but that Abram’s trust in YHWH’s promises had opened the door for a trusting/faithful relationship to continue. This was not Abram’s first (or last) act of trusting YHWH. Abram’s reception of YHWH’s initiating promises allowed an intimate fellowship to develop and deepen.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS**

“Righteousness” is such a crucial topic that a Bible student must make a personal extensive study of the concept.

In the OT God’s character is described as “just” or “righteous.” The Mesopotamian term itself comes from a river reed which was used as a construction tool to judge the horizontal straightness of walls and fences. God chose the term to be used metaphorically of His own nature. He is the straight edge (ruler) by which all things are evaluated. This concept asserts God’s righteousness as well as His right to judge.

Man was created in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1,3; 9:6). Mankind was created for fellowship with God. All of creation is a stage or backdrop for God and mankind’s interaction. God wanted

His highest creation, mankind, to know Him, love Him, serve Him, and be like Him! Mankind's loyalty was tested (cf. Genesis 3) and the original couple failed the test. This resulted in a disruption of the relationship between God and humanity (cf. Genesis 3; Rom. 5:12-21).

God promised to repair and restore the fellowship (cf. Gen. 3:15). He does this through His own will and His own Son. Humans were incapable of restoring the breach (cf. Rom. 1:18-3:20).

After the Fall, God's first step toward restoration was the concept of covenant based on His invitation and mankind's repentant, faithful, obedient response. Because of the Fall, humans were incapable of appropriate action (cf. Rom. 3:21-31; Galatians 3). God Himself had to take the initiative to restore covenant-breaking humans. He did this by

1. declaring sinful mankind righteous through the work of Christ (forensic righteousness).
2. freely giving mankind righteousness through the work of Christ (imputed righteousness).
3. providing the indwelling Spirit who produces righteousness (ethical righteousness) in mankind.
4. restoring the fellowship of the Garden of Eden by Christ restoring the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27) in believers (relational righteousness).

However, God requires a covenantal response. God decrees (i.e., freely gives) and provides, but humans must respond and continue to respond in

1. repentance
2. faith
3. lifestyle obedience
4. perseverance

Righteousness, therefore, is a covenantal, reciprocal action between God and His highest creation. It is based on the character of God, the work of Christ, and the enabling of the Spirit, to which each individual must personally and continually respond appropriately. The concept is called "justification by faith." The concept is revealed in the Gospels, but not in these terms. It is primarily defined by Paul, who uses the Greek term "righteousness" in its various forms over 100 times.

Paul, being a trained rabbi, uses the term *dikaioῦν* in its Hebrew sense of the term *SDQ* used in the Septuagint, not from Greek literature. In Greek writings the term is connected to someone who conformed to the expectations of Deity and society. In the Hebrew sense it is always structured in covenantal terms. YHWH is a just, ethical, moral God. He wants His people to reflect His character. Redeemed mankind becomes a new creature. This newness results in a new lifestyle of godliness (Roman Catholic focus of justification). Since Israel was a theocracy, there was no clear delineation between the secular (society's norms) and the sacred (God's will). This distinction is expressed in the Hebrew and Greek terms being translated into English as "justice" (relating to society) and "righteousness" (relating to religion).

The gospel (good news) of Jesus is that fallen mankind has been restored to fellowship with God. Paul's paradox is that God, through Christ, acquits the guilty. This has been accomplished through the Father's love, mercy, and grace; the Son's life, death, and resurrection; and the Spirit's wooing and drawing to the gospel. Justification is a free act of God, but it must issue in godliness (Augustine's position, which reflects both the Reformation emphasis on the freeness of the gospel and Roman Catholic emphasis on a changed life of love and faithfulness). For Reformers the term "the righteousness of God" is an OBJECTIVE GENITIVE (i.e., the act of making sinful mankind acceptable to God [positional sanctification]), while for the

Catholic it is a SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE, which is the process of becoming more like God (experiential progressive sanctification). In reality it is surely both!!

In my view all of the Bible, from Genesis 4 - Revelation 20, is a record of God's restoring the fellowship of Eden. The Bible starts with God and mankind in fellowship in an earthly setting (cf. Genesis 1-2) and the Bible ends with the same setting (cf. Revelation 21-22). God's image and purpose will be restored!

To document the above discussions note the following selected NT passages illustrating the Greek word group.

1. God is righteous (often connected to God as Judge)
  - a. Romans 3:26
  - b. II Thessalonians 1:5-6
  - c. II Timothy 4:8
  - d. Revelation 16:5
2. Jesus is righteous
  - a. Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14 (title of Messiah)
  - b. Matthew 27:19
  - c. I John 2:1,29; 3:7
3. God's will for His creation is righteousness
  - a. Leviticus 19:2
  - b. Matthew 5:48 (cf. 5:17-20)
4. God's means of providing and producing righteousness
  - a. Romans 3:21-31
  - b. Romans 4
  - c. Romans 5:6-11
  - d. Galatians 3:6-14
  - e. Given by God
    - 1) Romans 3:24; 6:23
    - 2) I Corinthians 1:30
    - 3) Ephesians 2:8-9
  - f. Received by faith
    - 1) Romans 1:17; 3:22,26; 4:3,5,13; 9:30; 10:4,6,10
    - 2) I Corinthians 5:21
  - g. Through acts of the Son
    - 1) Romans 5:21-31
    - 2) II Corinthians 5:21
    - 2) Philippians 2:6-11
5. God's will is that His followers be righteous
  - a. Matthew 5:3-48; 7:24-27
  - b. Romans 2:13; 5:1-5; 6:1-23

- c. II Corinthians 6:14
  - d. I Timothy 6:11
  - e. II Timothy 2:22; 3:16
  - f. I John 3:7
  - g. I Peter 2:24
6. God will judge the world by righteousness
- a. Acts 17:31
  - b. II Timothy 4:8

Righteousness is a characteristic of God, freely given to sinful mankind through Christ. It is

- 1. a decree of God
- 2. a gift of God
- 3. an act of Christ

But it is also a process of becoming righteous that must be vigorously and steadfastly pursued; it will one day be consummated at the Second Coming. Fellowship with God is restored at salvation, but progresses throughout life to become a face-to-face encounter at death or the Parousia!

Here is a good quote taken from *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* from IVP

“Calvin, more so than Luther, emphasizes the relational aspect of the righteousness of God. Luther’s view of the righteousness of God seems to contain the aspect of acquittal. Calvin emphasizes the marvelous nature of the communication or imparting of God’s righteousness to us” (p. 834).

For me the believer’s relationship to God has three aspects.

- 1. the gospel is a person (the Eastern Church and Calvin’s emphases)
- 2. the gospel is truth (Augustine’s and Luther’s emphases)
- 3. the gospel is a changed life (Catholic emphasis)

They are all true and must be held together for a healthy, sound, biblical Christianity. If any one is over emphasized or depreciated, problems occur.

We must welcome Jesus!

We must believe the gospel!

We must pursue Christlikeness!

**15:7 “I Am the LORD”** This is YHWH, the special covenant name for Deity. See Special Topic at 12:1.

▣ **“who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans”** There is some discrepancy over the location of where God first spoke to Abram. It was either in Ur or in Haran. Compare Gen. 11:31-12:1 with Neh. 9:7 and Acts 7:2. Some even try to assert that God spoke with Terah, Abram’s father, in Ur and to Abram in Haran, but I think this is an inappropriate understanding. It is surely possible that a revelation came at both Ur and Haran. Also, at this point, I would like to mention how precisely the books of Genesis and Deuteronomy

fit into the culture of the second millennium B.C., particularly the Hittite/Suzeraine treaty formulas. These historical documents, along with Nuzi and Mari tablets, have shown us how culturally appropriate vv. 2, 17, and 16:2 were in their own day. The historicity of the Patriarchs is confirmed in light of recent archaeological finds.

As so often in these early chapters of Genesis, later names of cities and countries are used. The name Chaldean is not used of a people in Mesopotamia (i.e., southern Babylon) until the sixth century B.C. Israeli scribes were trained in Egypt, where scribes felt free to update the texts they copied (not so with Mesopotamian scribes).

**15:8 “how may I know that I shall possess it”** Abram, whose faith had been counted as righteousness in v. 6, now expresses his need for confirmation (cf. vv. 2-3). This is theologically significant. God accepted Abram, not because of his perfect faith, but because of God’s perfect love. Even amidst doubt God accepted him and, so too, us (cf. John 20:24-29). Abram is/was serving a larger theological purpose (i.e., redemptive paradigm).

**15:9** Abram is commanded (BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) to bring several animal sacrifices.

1. a three year old heifer
2. a three year old female goat
3. a three year old ram
4. a turtledove
5. a young pigeon

The exact reason for these specific animals is uncertain. They are mentioned later in the Mosaic legislation, which may mean that they had a cultural significance that we do not fully understand. In v. 10 they are cut in half and laid opposite each other, except for the birds. This was the cultural norm for “cutting” a covenant (see Special Topic at 13:14, cf. Jer. 34:18). Some have assumed that the animal’s death was a way of warning the participants of the covenant of what would happen to them if they broke the stipulations of the covenant. However, this is uncertain.

**15:11 “The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses”** There has been much discussion among commentators about why v. 11 is recorded. Some of the theories are:

1. they are symbolic of Abram’s doubts
2. they are symbolic of Israel’s enemies (cf. Ezek. 17:3,7,12)
3. it took several hours for God to manifest Himself and this is simply a sign of the historicity of the account (i.e., the presence of dead animals caused flesh-eating birds to appear)

For me, because I am so nervous about allegories and typologies which are not mentioned specifically in the NT, number 3 seems to be the best option. Note these offerings were not burnt. This was a covenant ceremony, not a sacrifice.

▣ **“and Abram drove them away”** It seems very strange that the Hebrew VERB “blew them away” (BDB 674, KB 728, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) should be used here. This metaphor was often used of God (cf. Ps. 147:18; Isa. 40:7), but how this is connected with Abram’s action is uncertain.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:12-16**

<sup>12</sup>Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror *and* great darkness fell upon him. <sup>13</sup>God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. <sup>14</sup>But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. <sup>15</sup>As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup>Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

**15:12 “Now when the sun was going down”** This implies that a new day was beginning (cf. Gen. 1:5). Exactly how long this vision lasted is uncertain, but it may cover two nights and one day (see note at v. 1c).

▣ **“a deep sleep fell upon Abram”** This is the same Hebrew phrase (BDB 922) that is used concerning the deep sleep that fell upon Adam when God took one of his ribs to create Eve (cf. Gen. 2:21). This VERB implies a divinely initiated unconsciousness in preparation for revelation (cf. Job 4:13; 33:15).



**NASB** “terror *and* great darkness”  
**NKJV** “horror *and* great darkness”  
**NRSV** “a deep and terrifying darkness”  
**TEV** “fear and terror”  
**NJB** “a deep and dark dread”

The term “terror” (BDB 33, KB 41) means fright, horror, terror, dread. It is often used in poetic passages of God’s terror.

1. to enemies – Exod. 15:16; 23:27
2. to Job – 9:34; 13:21
3. to Israel – Deut. 32:25; Ps. 88:16

The term “darkness” (חֹשֶׁךְ, BDB 365, KB 362 and its related root כּוּשַׁח) relates to

1. cosmic darkness – Gen. 1:2
2. one of the plagues of the Exodus – Exod. 10:21
3. death/underworld – Ps. 139:7-12
4. disaster – Job 15:22-30; 20:26; Isa. 8:22; 50:10
5. God’s hiddenness – Ps. 18:12
6. lack of revelation – Micah 3:6

Again, there have been several interpretations of this phrase.

1. that although God’s promises were wonderful it would be a long, hard road to fulfillment
2. that humans are always physically drained after God’s revelations of the future; this is true of Daniel and many of the other prophets
3. that God was approaching, which is always frightening (cf. Job 4:12-21)

**15:13 “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs”** The phrase “know for certain” is the result of the combination of the INFINITE ABSOLUTE and the IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 393, KB 390), “to know,” which is a grammatical way to show emphasis. YHWH

is answering Abram's question of v. 8. There is still a faith/doubt struggle in Abram! This does not offend God!

Notice that the land of Egypt is not mentioned specifically. The term "strangers" means "sojourners" (BDB 158) or someone who has limited rights because they are not official citizens of a nation. YHWH is predicting the Egyptian experience. Faith in God does not mean an easy life! God's promises are delayed and often misunderstood, but faith remains.

▣ **"they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years"** There seems to be a discrepancy between this verse, which is mentioned in Acts 7:6 in Stephen's speech, and Exod. 12:40, which mentions the number 430 and is quoted by Paul in Gal. 3:17. The Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch take this 430 year period as the Patriarch's sojourn both in Canaan and Egypt. It is possible that the number 400 is simply a round number. The rabbis say that it extends from the birth of Isaac until the Exodus. It must be taken into account that v. 16 mentions the fourth generation and, from our best computation, that is exactly how long this period lasted.

**15:14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve and afterwards they will come out with many possessions"** This is amply fulfilled in Exod. 3:22 and 12:35-56. These very possessions consisted of the gold, silver, bronze, and jewelry that was used to construct the tabernacle and its furniture (cf. Exodus 25-40).

This text cannot be used to assert that faith always produces wealth. Initially prosperity was a way to attract the nations to YHWH. However, the focus was never on the prosperity, but on the faith relationship. One of my favorite commentators, Gordon Fee, himself a charismatic, denounces the use of proof-texts such as this to preach a "health, wealth, prosperity" gospel. His booklet is penetrating (i.e., *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*).

**15:15 "you shall go to your father in peace"** The Hebrew term "peace" (BDB 1022) denotes a contention with the life and God (see Special Topic following). God promises Abraham that he will live to a ripe, old age and will die a gentle death. There is also the question of what it means to be "gathered to your fathers." It is obviously a reference to *Sheol* (cf. Deut. 32:50), but some wonder if it means that in *Sheol* families are together. This may be reading too much into this passage because Abram's parents were not YHWHists and, therefore, may be in a different part of *Hades* or *Sheol*. We are uncertain about the afterlife and the biblical terms of *Sheol*, *Hades*, *Gehenna*, and exactly how they relate to each other in an intermediate state.

## **SPECIAL TOPIC: WHERE ARE THE DEAD?**

### I. Old Testament

- A. All humans go to *Sheol* (etymology uncertain, BDB 1066), which is a way of referring to death or the grave, mostly in Wisdom Literature and Isaiah. In the OT it was a shadowy, conscious, but joyless existence (cf. Job 10:21-22; 38:17; Ps. 107:10,14).
- B. *Sheol* characterized
  1. associated with God's judgment (fire), Deut. 32:22
  2. associated with punishment even before Judgment Day, Ps. 18:4-5



3. associated with *Abaddon* (destruction), also open to God, Job 26:6; Ps. 139:8; Amos 9:2
4. associated with “the Pit” (grave), Ps.16:10; Isa. 14:15; Ezek. 31:15-17
5. wicked descend alive into *Sheol*, Num. 16:30,33; Ps. 55:15
6. personified often as an animal with a large mouth, Num. 16:30; Isa. 5:14; 14:9; Hab. 2:5
7. people there called *Repha'im*, Isa. 14:9-11

## II. New Testament

A. The Hebrew *Sheol* is translated by the Greek *Hades* (the unseen world)

B. *Hades* characterized

1. refers to death, Matt. 16:18
2. linked to death, Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14
3. often analogous to the place of permanent punishment (*Gehenna*), Matt. 11:23 (OT quote); Luke 10:15; 16:23-24
4. often analogous to the grave, Luke 16:23

C. Possibly divided (rabbis)

1. righteous part called paradise (really another name for heaven, cf. II Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7), Luke 23:43
2. wicked part called *Tartarus*, II Peter 2:4, where it is a holding place for evil angels (cf. Genesis 6; I Enoch)

D. *Gehenna*

1. Reflects the OT phrase, “the valley of the sons of Hinnom,” (south of Jerusalem). It was the place where the Phoenician fire god, *Molech* (BDB 574), was worshiped by child sacrifice (cf. II Kgs. 16:3; 21:6; II Chr. 28:3; 33:6), which was forbidden in Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5.
2. Jeremiah changed it from a place of pagan worship into a site of YHWH’s judgment (cf. Jer. 7:32; 19:6-7). It became the place of fiery, eternal judgment in I Enoch 90:26-27 and Sib. 1:103.
3. The Jews of Jesus’ day were so appalled by their ancestors’ participation in pagan worship by child sacrifice, that they turned this area into the garbage dump for Jerusalem. Many of Jesus’ metaphors for eternal judgment came from this landfill (fire, smoke, worms, stench, cf. Mark 9:44,46). The term *Gehenna* is used only by Jesus (except in James 3:6).
4. Jesus’ usage of *Gehenna*
  - a. fire, Matt. 5:22; 18:9; Mark 9:43
  - b. permanent, Mark 9:48 (Matt. 25:46)
  - c. place of destruction (both soul and body), Matt. 10:28
  - d. paralleled to *Sheol*, Matt. 5:29-30; 18:9
  - e. characterizes the wicked as “sons of hell,” Matt. 23:15
  - f. result of judicial sentence, Matt. 23:33; Luke 12:5
  - g. the concept of *Gehenna* is parallel to the second death (cf. Rev. 2:11; 20:6,14) or the lake of fire (cf. Matt. 13:42,50; Rev. 19:20; 20:10,14-15; 21:8). It is possible the lake of fire

becomes the permanent dwelling place of humans (from *Sheol*) and evil angels (from *Tartarus*, II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6 or the abyss, cf. Luke 8:31; Rev. 9:1-10; 20:1,3).

h. it was not designed for humans, but for Satan and his angels, Matt. 25:41

E. It is possible, because of the overlap of *Sheol*, *Hades*, and *Gehenna* that

1. originally all humans went to *Sheol/Hades*
2. their experience there (good/bad) is exacerbated after Judgment Day, but the place of the wicked remains the same (this is why the KJV translated *Hades* (grave) as *Gehenna* (hell).
3. the only NT text to mention torment before Judgment is the parable of Luke 16:19-31 (Lazarus and the Rich Man). *Sheol* is also described as a place of punishment now (cf. Deut. 32:22; Ps. 18:1-5). However, one cannot establish a doctrine on a parable.

### III. Intermediate state between death and resurrection

A. The NT does not teach the “immortality of the soul,” which is one of several ancient views of the afterlife.

1. human souls exist before their physical life
2. human souls are eternal before and after physical death
3. often the physical body is seen as a prison and death as release back to pre-existent state

B. The NT hints at a disembodied state between death and resurrection

1. Jesus speaks of a division between body and soul, Matt. 10:28
2. Abraham may have a body now, Mark 12:26-27; Luke 16:23
3. Moses and Elijah have a physical body at the transfiguration, Matthew 17
4. Paul asserts that at the Second Coming the souls with Christ will get their new bodies first, II Thess. 4:13-18
5. Paul asserts that believers get their new spiritual bodies on Resurrection Day, I Cor. 15:23,52
6. Paul asserts that believers do not go to *Hades*, but at death are with Jesus, II Cor. 5:6,8; Phil. 1:23. Jesus overcame death and took the righteous to heaven with Him, I Pet. 3:18-22.

### IV. Heaven

A. This term is used in three senses in the Bible.

1. the atmosphere above the earth, Gen. 1:1,8; Isa. 42:5; 45:18
2. the starry heavens, Gen. 1:14; Deut. 10:14; Ps. 148:4; Heb. 4:14; 7:26
3. the place of God’s throne, Deut. 10:14; I Kgs. 8:27; Ps. 148:4; Eph. 4:10; Heb. 9:24 (third heaven, II Cor. 12:2)

B. The Bible does not reveal much about the afterlife, probably because fallen humans have no way or capacity to understand (cf. I Cor. 2:9).

C. Heaven is both a place (cf. John 14:2-3) and a person (cf. II Cor. 5:6,8). Heaven may be a restored Garden of Eden (Genesis 1-2; Revelation 21-22). The earth will be cleansed and restored (cf. Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:21; II Pet. 3:10). The image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) is restored in Christ. Now the intimate fellowship of the Garden of Eden is possible again.

However, this may be metaphorical (heaven as a huge, cubed city of Rev. 21:9-27) and not literal. I Corinthians 15 describes the difference between the physical body and the spiritual body

as the seed to the mature plant. Again, I Cor. 2:9 (a quote from Isa. 64:6 and 65:17) is a great promise and hope! I know that when we see Him we will be like Him (cf. I John 3:2).

V. Helpful resources

- A. William Hendriksen, *The Bible On the Life Hereafter*
- B. Maurice Rawlings, *Beyond Death's Door*

**SPECIAL TOPIC: PEACE (*SHALOM*)**

The Hebrew term (BDB 1022, KB 1532) is common in Semitic cognates.

- A. Akkadian
  - 1. to be unharmed
  - 2. stay well
  - 3. to be in good condition
- B. Ugaritic (Canaanite)
  - 1. to be unharmed
  - 2. healthy
- C. Arabic
  - 1. to be healthy
  - 2. to be in a happy situation
- D. Aramaic
  - 1. to be complete
  - 2. to come to an end/completion
  - 3. conclude a peace
  - 4. stay unharmed
- E. Hebrew connotations
  - 1. completeness
  - 2. soundness
  - 3. welfare
  - 4. peace

Today the term *shalom* is a Hebrew greeting and farewell statement. It still denotes the absence of evil and the presence of good (i.e., contentment with life). It denotes a mental state of security and satisfaction.

**15:16 “for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete”** This shows that God was continuing to try to bring the Canaanite population of the Promised Land to Himself. Melchizedek was a Canaanite. Only after adequate opportunity and time does God judge them and remove them. This is not an act of favoritism toward the Jews, for when they take up the practices of the Canaanites, they are also removed from the land (i.e., the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles).

Amorite and Canaanite are both used as a way to refer to all the tribes of Canaan. In a sense this text is a foreshadow of the conflict that will occur when Israel conquers the land, but is itself conquered by Canaanite idolatry. This foreshadowing is similar to Gen. 9:20-27, esp. v. 25. It is Ham who sins, but his son Canaan who is cursed. Canaanite culture is the problem. Many, most, if not all, of the regulations in the Pentateuch are related to Canaanite culture and worship. Israel was to be distinct! Israel was to reveal YHWH!

How this got into the text of Genesis is that either

1. God is preparing them for future events
2. a later scribe added these comments to highlight his own day

Just a note, when I mention a later scribe or editor this is not meant to depreciate “inspiration.” I assume the Spirit guided all the writers, editors, scribes, and the compilers! The real author of Scripture is God. Exactly how, when, and who of the historical process is unknown (lost to history).

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 15:17-21**

**<sup>17</sup>It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, *there appeared* a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. <sup>18</sup>On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying,**

**“To your descendants I have given this land,**

**From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:**

**<sup>19</sup>the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite <sup>20</sup>and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim <sup>21</sup>and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.”**

**15:17 “*there appeared* a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between the pieces”** YHWH appeared to Abram in a form which he would have understood culturally. A smoking oven seems to be

1. a means of hiding YHWH’s presence (i.e., the *Shekinah* Cloud of Glory of the Exodus)
2. a symbol of deity which provided protection in the Akkadian curse tablets
3. a symbol of both judgment and protection (cf. Zech. 12:6)
4. in Mesopotamia this symbolism represented divine purification.

Inside the oven was fire. God is often associated with fire, not only in the biblical account, but also in Zoroastrianism. I personally believe that this oven is connected with the fact that most covenants are ratified by a covenant meal and this oven symbolized that meal. Also, it is theologically significant to notice that Abram does not pass between the pieces; only God does. This is another inference that the covenant is from God’s resources and not human effort, merit, and resources. This was a God-initiated, God-performed covenant (cf. II Sam. 7:8-16; Ps. 89:20-37).

#### **SPECIAL TOPIC: FIRE (BDB 77)**

Fire has both positive and negative connotations in Scripture.

##### **A. Positive**

1. warms (cf. Isa. 44:15; John 18:18)
2. lights (cf. Isa. 50:11; Matt. 25:1-13)
3. cooks (cf. Exod. 12:8; Isa. 44:15-16; John 21:9)

4. purifies (cf. Num. 31:22-23; Prov. 17:3; Isa. 1:25; 6:6-8; Jer. 6:29; Mal. 3:2-3)
5. holiness (cf. Gen. 15:17; Exod. 3:2; 19:18; Ezek. 1:27; Heb. 12:29)
6. God's leadership (cf. Exod. 12:21; Num. 14:14; I Kgs. 18:24)
7. God's empowering (cf. Acts 2:3)

B. Negative

1. burns (cf. Josh. 6:24; 8:8; 11:11; Matt. 22:7)
2. destroys (cf. Gen. 19:24; Lev. 10:1-2)
3. anger (cf. Num. 21:28; Isa. 10:16; Zech. 12:6)
4. punishment (cf. Gen. 38:24; Lev. 20:14; 21:9; Josh. 7:15)
5. false eschatological sign (cf. Rev. 13:13)

C. God's anger against sin is expressed in fire metaphors

1. His anger burns (cf. Hos. 8:5; Zeph. 3:8)
2. He pours out fire (cf. Nah. 1:6)
3. eternal fire (cf. Jer. 15:14; 17:4)
4. eschatological judgment (cf. Matt. 3:10; 13:40; John 15:6; II Thess. 1:7; II Pet. 3:7-10; Rev. 8:7; 13:13; 16:8)

D. Like so many metaphors in the Bible (i.e., leaven, lion) fire can be a blessing or a curse, depending on the context.

**15:18 “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram”** The term “to make” literally means “to cut” (BDB 503, KB 500, *Qal* PERFECT). This term cut is not etymologically related to the word in v. 10 (BDB 144, KB 167), but it does become a standard, biblical metaphor for “making a covenant.”

**SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT PROMISES TO PATRIARCHS**

This initial promise of a special covenant relationship was made to

1. Abraham, Gen. 12:1-3
  - a. land, Gen. 12:7; 13:4-15; 15:18-21
  - b. people, Gen. 13:16; 15:4-5; 17:2-6; 22:18
  - c. blessing to the world, Gen. 18:18; 22:18
2. Isaac, Gen. 26:2-4
  - a. land
  - b. people
  - c. blessing to the world
3. Jacob, Gen. 28:2-4,13; 35:9-12; 48:3-4
  - a. land
  - b. people

4. the nation of Israel (a land), Exod. 3:8,17; 6:8; 13:5; 33:1-3; Deut. 1:7-8,35; 4:31; 9:3; 11:25; 31:7; Josh. 1:6

▣ **“covenant”** “Covenant” (BDB 136) becomes a central motif of biblical literature. It speaks of both promises and obligations on the part of both God and humanity. There is a unique combination of conditional and unconditional aspects to covenants in the biblical material. Are the covenants conditional or unconditional? Yes! It seems that God’s unconditional love is dependent on mankind’s faith and repentant response (cf. 15:6; Romans 4; Mark 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21). This seems somewhat paradoxical, but it is God’s way of working with sinful mankind. See Special Topic: Covenant at 13:14.

▣ **“From the river of Egypt”** Usually, this refers to the Nile River, but in the context of other biblical promises of the boundaries of the Promised Land, it must mean the “wadi El-arish” (cf. Num. 34:5 and Josh. 15:4). These dimensions of the Promised Land were partially fulfilled in David’s day, but more completely in Solomon’s (cf. I Kgs. 4:21).

**15:19-21** We find the listing here of ten tribes which made up the Canaanite population. Sometimes the number of these tribes varies: (1) Joshua 24:11 has 7 tribes; (2) Exodus 3:17 has 5 tribes; and (3) Exodus 23:28 lists 3 tribes. The exact number is uncertain, but it is obvious that the term “Amorite,” which means “highlander,” or the term “Canaanite,” which means “lowlander,” becomes a corporate term for all of the tribes. See Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine at 12:6.

**15:20 “Hittite”** From Genesis 10:15 we see that these people came from Heth (BDB 366). They later formed a major empire in central Turkey.

▣ **“the Rephaim”** These seem to be very tall human beings (BDB 952, cf. Josh. 12:4; 17:15; I Chr. 20:4) like the *Anakim* (cf. Deut. 2:11 and 3:11) and possibly the *Nephilim* (cf. Genesis 6 and Num. 13:33). See Special Topic at 14:5.

**15:21 “the Jebusite”** These are the inhabitants of Jerusalem who will remain unconquered until David’s day (BDB 101, cf. Jdgs. 1:21; 19:11; II Sam. 5:6ff).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Explain and define in your terms the significant words used in Gen. 15:6. Relate this to Romans 4 and Galatians 3.
2. Why do so many people allegorize Gen. 15:11?
3. What is the significance of God appearing to Abraham as a smoking oven and a flaming torch (Gen. 15:17)?
4. Why are the tribes of Canaan listed differently (cf. 15:19-21)?

# GENESIS 16

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Sarai and Hagar 16:1-6	Hagar and Ishmael 16:1-3  16:4-6	The Birth of Ishmael 16:1-6	Hagar and Ishmael 16:1-4  16:5 16:6	The Birth of Ishmael 16:1-2 16:3-6
16:7-14	16:7-14	16:7-14	16:7-8a 16:8b 16:9-12	16:7-12
(11-12)	(11-12)	(11-12)	16:13-14	(11-12) 16:13-14
16:15-16	16:15-16	16:15-16	16:15-16	16:15-16

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.



## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:1-6

<sup>1</sup>Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. <sup>2</sup>So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. <sup>3</sup>After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. <sup>4</sup>He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. <sup>5</sup>And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me." <sup>6</sup>But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence.

**16:1 "she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar"** The name Hagar means "to flee" (BDB 212). This is characteristic of her (cf. vv. 6, 8). She was an Egyptian who was probably purchased for Sarai while they were in Egypt (cf. Gen. 12:10-20).

**16:2 "the LORD has prevented me from bearing children"** It is obvious that the couple had discussed YHWH's revelations and also the delay in their fulfillment. Apparently they began planning how to "help" Him fulfill His promise!

The form of the VERB "prevented" (BDB 783, KB 870, *Qal* PERFECT) denotes completed action. Sarai must have thought she was permanently barren.

In a sense Sarai is blaming YHWH for her continued barrenness (cf. 20:18). The delay was part of the plan of God to mature their trust in Him and to clearly reveal Himself to later generations. All believers struggle with the timing of divinely promised events.

▣ **"Please go in to my maid"** The VERB (BDB 97, KB 112) is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE used in the sense of a request (cf. 30:3). The VERB is often used as a euphemism of sexual intimacy (cf. Gen. 6:4; 16:2; 19:34; 30:3; 38:8,9; 39:14; Deut. 22:13; 25:5; II Sam. 11:4; 12:24; 16:21-22; 20:3; Pro. 6:29).

▣ **"I shall obtain children through her"** This is very much in line with the Nuzi Tablets which describe the Hurrian culture of the second millennium B.C. Hagar's child would legally become Sarai's child and Abram's heir.

▣ **"Abram listened"** This almost parallels the problem of Genesis 3 (esp. v. 17). Abram was tempted to do something he was probably inclined to do anyway. The VERB is literally "to hear" (BDB 1033, KB 1570) in the IMPERFECT TENSE, which implies repeated action. The monogamy ideal of original creation is lost, surprisingly in an attempt to "help" God!

**16:3 "After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan"** It is significant that at least ten years have elapsed since God spoke to Abraham in chapter 15. Abraham was continuing to trust, but was trying to think of ways that he could help God. This again is God showing Abraham specifically that it was His

resources, not Abraham's, that would ultimately bring forth the promise. This section is used as an allegory by Paul in Gal. 4:21-31.

▣ **“as his wife”** Hagar is more appropriately his concubine. Although the Hebrew term “wife” is used here, it is obvious that she is not a wife, but a concubine (i.e., female sexual partner with limited rights).

**16:4 “her mistress was despised in her sight”** The VERB (BDB 886, KB 1103, *Qal* IMPERFECT) can mean

1. be light
2. swift
3. to be insignificant (cf. I Sam. 2:30; Job 40:4)

The *Hiphil* stem denotes contempt (cf. II Sam. 19:44; Isa. 23:9; Ezek. 22:7). In Hebrew thought to have honor or weight is contrasted with “to be light.”

**16:5** The mystery of interpersonal relationships is obvious. Sarai initiated this plan and is now distressed by its outcome. As so often in the biblical accounts, the reader is not given all the background and dialog involved in the event. Abram may have been more initially involved. In interpreting historical narrative, readers must ask themselves “why record this?” Abram and Sarai must learn that human performance is not the key to a relationship with God; faith, obedience, and perseverance are!

It is quite possible that what we have recorded in this verse is legal idiom. Sarai is speaking in such a way as to claim her legal rights in the situation of a slave acting in a haughty manner (i.e., Code of Hammurabi and the Nuzi Tablets). Everything she did was culturally/legally acceptable, but Hagar's attitude was not. Abram, as the head of the home, was responsible.

▣ **“may the LORD judge between you and me”** The VERB (BDB 1047, KB 1622) is a *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense. Exactly what she wants YHWH to do is ambiguous. Apparently she is seeking divine sanction for her feelings of rejection or approval for her planned actions against Hagar. However, the phrase does show the growing tensions between Abram and Sarai.

**16:6** This seems to be somewhat cruel to us, but we must judge it in light of its own day and not ours. This fits exactly the Nuzi Tablets and the Code of Hammurabi in how to deal with concubines.

Again, in some ways this parallels the Gen. 3:11-13 account. Abram passes the responsibility from himself as family leader to Sarai. Humans tend to deflect responsibility and make excuses!

▣ **“Sarai treated her harshly”** The VERB (BDB 776 III, KB 853) in the *Piel* stem means to humble or mistreat (cf. 31:50; Exod. 22:21,22 [twice in the intensified form]; Job 30:11). Hagar's attitude and actions do not make Sarai's actions appropriate. Sinful humans are selfish, self-centered. Mature faith will solve this problem.

It is just possible that after Hagar conceived Sarai returned her to her service and removed her as a sexual partner from Abram.

▣ **“she fled from her presence”** A slave running away was a serious legal matter which had serious consequences. This is very similar to the event recorded in Gen. 21:8-21. The following verses show YHWH's care and love, even for the concubine Hagar and her child. YHWH's love is not limited to Abram's family (i.e., Melchizedek, Job).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:7-14**

<sup>7</sup>Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. <sup>8</sup>He said, “Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from and where are you going?” And she said, “I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.” <sup>9</sup>Then the angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority.” <sup>10</sup>Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, “I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count.”

<sup>11</sup>The angel of the LORD said to her further,  
“Behold, you are with child,  
And you will bear a son;  
And you shall call his name Ishmael,  
Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction.

<sup>12</sup>“He will be a wild donkey of a man,  
His hand *will be* against everyone,  
And everyone’s hand *will be* against him;  
And he will live to the east of all his brothers.”

<sup>13</sup>Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “You are a God who sees”; for she said, “Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?” <sup>14</sup>Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

**16:7 “the angel of the LORD”** This personage seems to be a personification of the personal presence of God (cf. Gen. 16:7-13; 18:1; 19:1; 20:17,19; 22:11-15; 31:11,13; 32:24,30; 48:15-16; Exod. 3:2,4; 13:21; 14:19; Jdgs. 6:12,12; Zech. 3:2,4). It is obvious from these passages that the angel of the Lord represents YHWH. There are some accounts where this same phrase, “the angel of the LORD,” does not mean the personification of God (cf. Gen. 24:7,40; Exod. 23:30; 32:34; I Chr. 21:15ff; Zech. 1:12,13), therefore, we cannot be dogmatic about the use of this phrase in every occurrence, but we must look at the specific context.

▣ **“by a spring of water on the way to Shur”** We do not know the exact geographical location spoken of here, but it is probably south of Beersheba on the way to Egypt. Hagar is going home.

**16:8** Verses like this (i.e., 3:9,11; 4:9,10), which record God or His representative asking questions, have become part of a theological movement called “Open Theism,” which takes these questions literally and make the theological assumption that God does not know

1. the future
2. historical actions of persons

I do not support Greek philosophy (i.e., the philosophically developed attributes of God), nor do I deny the historicity of the Genesis accounts, but I do assert that they are literary documents which use metaphorical language (as all human communication does). The issue is the purpose of the questions in the Bible. Do they reflect a lack of knowledge on God’s part or God working to develop understanding in human beings? There are too many other texts that assert God’s knowledge of persons and future events for me to feel comfortable with Open Theism as anything but a reworked A. N. North’s theology (i.e., Process Thought).

**16:9** The angel gives her two commands.

1. return – BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. submit – BDB 776 III, KB 853, *Hithpael* IMPERATIVE

This message implies that it is YHWH's will that Hagar's child grow up under Abram's influence (i.e., knowledge of YHWH).

▣ **“submit”** This is the same VERB translated “harshly” (BDB 776 III, KB 853) in v. 6 and the NOUN is used in v. 11, “affliction” (BDB 777). YHWH does not promise to change the situation with Sarai, but does promise to bless the male child (i.e., Ishmael).

**16:10-12** The response of the angel of the Lord to Hagar is very similar to God's response to Abram in 15:5. Some great promises are made concerning the child, as well as his physical and mental characteristics. Hagar is overwhelmed that YHWH would care for her.

**16:10 “I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count”** This promise is repeated to Abram about Ishmael in 17:20.

The VERB is intensified by the combination of the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and the IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 915, KB 1176, both *Hiphil*). Contact with, knowledge of, and trusting in YHWH's words brings blessing! In a sense Hagar responds to Deity in the same manner as Abram. She does not even question (or at least none are recorded) as Abram does. Both encounters involve the promised blessings of a child, yet the revelation of difficult times. Genesis 15:6 is a salvation point for Abram. Hagar surely responded in like manner! For me, whose biases see an eternal redemptive plan, God's acceptance of Hagar and Ishmael is powerful witness to His purpose of redemption beyond Israel (see Special Topic at 12:3). In a sense this is an example of “the nations” being welcome in the same manner as Abram—by faith which issues in obedience. There are several clues/hints of an OT Great Commission! God's heart beats for a lost world, a broken fellowship must be restored! The universal visions of Isaiah, the story of Jonah, and the NT ring with these truths.

**16:11-12** The NASB prints vv. 11-12 as poetry (cf. 12:1-3; 14:19-20; 15:1,18; 17:1-2,4-5). Verse 12 describes what kind of a man he will be.

**16:11 “you are with child”** This is not new information (cf. v. 4), but that the child will be a son is new.

▣ **“Ishmael”** The name means “*El* heard” or “may *El* hear” (BDB 1035, KB 447). In the previous phrase the angel says “YHWH has given heed,” which is literally “heard” (BDB 1033). Notice the child is not named by the father, but by God (cf. Matt. 1:21,25; Luke 1:31,35; 2:21).

**16:12 “a wild donkey of a man”** This root (BDB 825) means

1. Akkadian – mule
2. Assyrian – wild mule
3. Arabic – wild ass
4. Hebrew – wild ass or horse (the *Anchor Bible Commentary* on Genesis, p. 118)

But make note this was not a derogatory comment in the Ancient Near East. These animals were used for sacrifices in Mesopotamia. They were highly valued and admired. It denotes his isolationistic tendencies

(i.e., nomadic herdsman). Ishmael is going to love his freedom and will live a nomadic life. The next two poetic lines describe this nomadic existence (self reliant, trust no one, make no alliances).



- NASB** “he will live to the east of all his brothers”  
**NKJV** “and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren”  
**NRSV** “and he shall live at odds with all his kin”  
**TEV** “He will live apart from all his relatives”  
**NJB** “living his life in defiance of all his kinsmen”

This phrase, “to the east,” seems to have two possible etymologies: (1) to the east of (lit. “before the face of,” BDB 815) and (2) “in defiance of.” Both etymologies seem to be related in this context and describe exactly the Bedouin tribes of the Middle East.

**16:13-14** The phrase “a God (*El*) who sees” is related to the name for the well which is found in v. 14. In these early parts of Genesis God is called by many names that are commensurate to His actions. By looking up all of these names, we are overwhelmed by the love of God for fallen mankind (and here an Egyptian slave woman).

**16:13** “**I even remained alive here after seeing Him**” It was understood in the Ancient Near East that to see God was to die (cf. Gen. 32:30 and Exod. 33:20). Hagar is shocked that God (i.e., Angel of the Lord) would come to her and that she would see Him and still live.

It is difficult in the context to know if

1. she was amazed to see a physical manifestation of Deity (i.e., I saw Deity)
2. she was amazed God saw her and came to her with such encouragement and care (Deity saw me)

I think #2 fits the context best and the later name of the well in v. 14. *Anchor Bible Commentary* on Genesis says the name is pointed in the MT in an unusual manner to allow both possibilities (p. 110).

This is the only place in the OT where someone gives Deity a name. Usually Deity reveals Himself by giving a combination name (i.e., *El* plus, YHWH plus, *Elohim* plus). Also note that this unique naming was done by a persecuted Egyptian slave girl. YHWH seeks her out and confronts her. His love is amazing!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 16:15-16**

**<sup>15</sup>So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.  
<sup>16</sup>Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.**

**16:15-16** Moses continues to update the reader on the age of Abram so that we can follow his life in some kind of chronological sequence, which becomes significant in God’s promise of a special son with Sarai in his old age.

**16:15** The Bible records no question or hesitation on Hagar’s part about YHWH’s promise, as it does with Abram.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. What are the major theological truths presented in chapters 15 and 16?
2. List the references where God makes a covenant with Abraham. Are the promises conditional or unconditional? What does this imply for us?
3. Who is the angel of the Lord? Why?
4. What is so significant about God seeking out Hagar and her child?

# GENESIS 17

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Abraham and the Covenant of Circumcision	The Sign of the Covenant	The Everlasting Covenant	Circumcision, the Sign of the Covenant	The Covenant and Circumcision
17:1-8  (1-5)	17:1-8	17:1-8	17:1-6	17:1-3a  17:3b-8
17:9-14	17:9-14	17:9-14	17:9-14	17:9-14
17:15-22	17:15-22	17:15-22	17:15-16 17:17-18 17:19-22	17:15-22
17:23-27	17:23-27	17:23-27	17:23-27	17:23-27

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

### BACKGROUND

- A. Genesis 17 is a reaffirmation of the Covenant which was made in Genesis 15 and which was first announced in Genesis 12.

- B. It has been thirteen years since the promise of a son in Genesis 15. Genesis 17 sets the stage for God to fulfill His plan to Abram through Sarai.
- C. This chapter is a series of word plays based on the names of the individuals involved. Names were very important to the Hebrews (i.e., 16:11-12). At significant periods in their lives, they often changed their name to show the uniqueness of what was happening in their lives.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 17:1-8**

**<sup>1</sup>Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him,**

**“I am God Almighty;**

**Walk before Me, and be blameless.**

**<sup>2</sup>I will establish My covenant between Me and you,**

**And I will multiply you exceedingly.”**

**<sup>3</sup>Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying,**

**<sup>4</sup>As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you,**

**And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.**

**<sup>5</sup>No longer shall your name be called Abram,**

**But your name shall be Abraham;**

**For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.**

**<sup>6</sup>I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. <sup>7</sup>I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.**

**<sup>8</sup>I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”**

**17:1-5** NASB divides this into two poems, 1b-2; 4-5, but NKJV, NRSV, TEV, NJB, and JPSOA do not.

**17:1 “ninety-nine years old”** Genesis records Abram’s age several times to give a chronology of his faith pilgrimage.

1. 75 years old, 12:4 – YHWH’s first revelation to him
2. 86 years old, 16:16 – birth of Ishmael
3. 99 years old, 17:1 – YHWH’s third revelation to him
4. 100 years old (round number), 17:17 – age at chapter 17
5. 99 years old, 17:24 – when circumcised
6. 100 years old, 21:5 – birth of Isaac
7. no exact age, 24:1 – “advanced in age”
8. 175 years old, 25:7 – age at death

☐ **“the LORD”** “YHWH” is the covenant name for God used in Exodus 3:14. It is used only here in this chapter. It seems to have been used very early by the line of Seth (cf. 4:26; and often by the Patriarchs).



However, from Exod. 6:3 we are told that the Patriarchs called him *El Shaddai*, not YHWH. Maybe they called Him YHWH, but did not know the full significance of the name until the burning bush experience of Moses. See Special Topic at 12:1.

▣ **“the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him”** God appears to Abraham several times (i.e., 12:7; 18:1), but it has been thirteen years since the last recorded appearance. Obviously, YHWH was testing Abram’s walk of faith.

▣ **“I am God Almighty”** The title “God Almighty” is *El Shaddai*. The etymology of this term (BDB 994) is uncertain. The rabbis say that it means “self-sufficiency.” The LXX and the Vulgate follow this understanding by translating it “God (*El*) Almighty.” Apparently this was the patriarchal name for God (cf. Exod. 6:3). It is used six times in Genesis and thirty-one times in Job. Albright asserted that it is from an Akkadian root that can mean mountain or rock (cf. Ps. 18:1, 2). If the term implies, “God of the mountain” as the true meaning, then it must reflect Canaanite mythology (cf. Isa. 14:13; Ezek. 28:2) or Babylonian religion (i.e., ziggurats being raised on human-built mountains, cf. Genesis 10) on which to worship their gods. Whatever the original intent, as early as Exodus 19-20 the focus will change to the God of Mt. Sinai (cf. Jdgs. 5:5). See Special Topic at 12:1.

▣ **“Walk before Me”** This is the first of two commands by YHWH to Abram.

1. walk – BDB 229, KB 246, *Hithpael* IMPERATIVE
2. be blameless – BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

YHWH seeks a fellowship with Abram as He had with Adam, Enoch, and Noah. The phrase “walk before Me” denotes an intimacy; a personal relationship; a distinctive type of faith and life! This is an emphasis on a lifestyle faith relationship which is a balance to the legal pronouncement of justification by grace through faith seen in 15:6. In the NT Paul and James unite these twin emphases of the Christian life (cf. Romans 4 and James 2). Notice that lifestyle is the condition for the covenant (cf. v. 9). All of the OT covenants are unconditional on God’s part and conditional on human response. This same term (BDB 229, KB 246), walk, is used of Enoch’s (cf. Gen. 5:24), and Noah’s (cf. Gen. 6:9) lifestyle faith.

▣ **“blameless”** This ADJECTIVE (BDB 1071, NOUN 1070) denotes a “whole-heartedness,” “completeness,” “soundness,” “integrity,” and “innocence.” It was used of

1. Noah – Gen. 6:9
2. Abram – Gen. 17:1 (a command)
3. Abimelech – Gen. 20:4-6
4. Jacob – Gen. 25:27
5. Job – Job 1:1,8; 2:3
6. Isaac – Deut. 18:13
7. YHWH – Deut 32:4; II Sam. 22:31; Ps. 18:30
8. David – II Sam. 22:24; 26:33; Ps. 18:23,25,30,32

It also denotes a clean animal, a perfect representation of its breed, which was acceptable for sacrifice (i.e., Exod. 12:5; 29:1; Lev. 1:3,10; 3:1,6,9; 4:3,23,28,32).

## SPECIAL TOPIC: BLAMELESS, INNOCENT, GUILTLESS, WITHOUT REPROACH

### A. Opening Statements

1. This concept theologically describes mankind's original state (i.e., Genesis 1, the Garden of Eden).
2. Sin and rebellion have decimated this condition of perfect fellowship (i.e., Genesis 3).
3. Humans (male and female) long for the restoration of fellowship with God because they are made in His image and likeness (i.e., Gen. 1:26-27).
4. God has dealt with sinful mankind in several ways
  - a. godly leaders (i.e., Abraham, Moses, Isaiah)
  - b. sacrificial system (i.e., Leviticus 1-7)
  - c. godly examples (i.e., Noah, Job)
5. Ultimately God provided the Messiah
  - a. as full revelation of Himself
  - b. as the perfect sacrifice for sin
6. Christians are made blameless
  - a. legally through Christ's imputed righteousness
  - b. progressively through the work of the Spirit
  - c. the goal of Christianity is Christlikeness (cf. Rom. 8:28-29; Eph. 1:4), which in reality, is the restoration of the image of God lost in the fall of Adam and Eve
7. Heaven is a restoration of the perfect fellowship of the Garden of Eden. Heaven is the New Jerusalem coming down out of God's presence (cf. Rev. 21:2) to a purified earth (cf. II Pet. 3:10). The Bible begins and ends on the same themes.
  - a. intimate, personal fellowship with God
  - b. in a garden setting (Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22)
  - c. by prophetic statement, the presence and companionship of animals (cf. Isa. 11:6-9).

### B. Old Testament

1. There are so many different Hebrew words that carry the concept of perfection, blamelessness, innocence that it would be hard to name and show all the intricate relationships.
2. The main terms carrying the concept of perfection, guiltlessness, or innocence (according to Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, pp. 94-99) are
  - a. *shalom* (BDB 1022)
  - b. *thamam* (BDB 1070)
  - c. *calah* (BDB478)
3. The Septuagint (i.e., the Bible of the early church) translates many of these concepts into Koine Greek terms used in the NT.
4. The key concept is connected to the sacrificial system.
  - a. *amōmos* (cf. Exod. 29:1; Lev. 1:3,10; 3:1,6,9; Num. 6:14; Ps. 26:1,11)
  - b. *amiantos* and *aspilus* also have cultic connotations

### C. New Testament

1. the legal concept
  - a. Hebrew legal cultic connotation is translated by *amōmos* (cf. Eph. 5:27; Phil. 2:15; I Pet. 1:19)
  - b. Greek legal connotation (cf. I Cor. 1:8; Col. 1:22)

2. Christ is the sinless, blameless, innocent One (*amōmos*, cf. Heb. 9:14; I Pet. 1:19)
  3. Christ's followers must emulate Him (*amōmos*, cf. Eph. 1:4; 5:27; Phil. 2:15; Col. 1:22; II Pet. 3:14; Jude 24; Rev. 14:5)
  4. This concept is also used of church leaders
    - a. *anegklētos*, "without accusation" (cf. I Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6-7)
    - b. *anepileptos*, "above criticism" or "no handle for reproach" (cf. I Tim. 3:2; 5:7; 6:14; Titus 2:8)
  5. The concept of "undefiled" (*amiantos*) is used of
    - a. Christ Himself (cf. Heb. 7:26)
    - b. the Christian's inheritance (cf. I Pet. 1:4)
  6. The concept of "wholeness" or "soundness" (*holoklēria*, cf. Acts 3:16; I Thess. 5:23; James 1:4)
  7. The concept of "without fault," guiltless innocence is conveyed by *amemptos* (cf. Luke 1:6; Phil. 2:15; 3:6; I Thess. 2:10; 3:13; 5:23)
  8. The concept of "not subject to blame" is conveyed by *amōmētos* (cf. I Pet. 3:14)
  9. The concept of "spotless," "unblemished" is often used in passages that have one of the above terms also (cf. I Tim. 6:14; James 1:27; I Pet. 1:19; II Pet. 3:14)
- D. The number of words in Hebrew and Greek which convey this concept shows its importance. God has provided our need through Christ and now calls on us to be like Him.

Believers are positionally, forensically declared "right," "just," "blameless" by the work of Christ. Now believers are to possess their position. "Walk in the light as He is in the light" (cf. I John 1:7). Walk worthy of the calling (cf. Eph. 4:1,17; 5:2,15). Jesus has restored the image of God. Intimate fellowship is now possible, but remember God wants a people who reflect His character, as His Son did. We are called to nothing less than holiness (cf. Matt. 5:20,48; Eph. 1:4; I Pet. 1:13-16). God's holiness, not only legally, but existentially!

### 17:2 "I will establish" YHWH promises to

1. "establish" His covenant – BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* COHORTATIVE; this is a common VERB with many connotations. The same VERB is used of YHWH's promise of "giving" Abram's descendants land in 12:7; 13:15; 15:7,18 and of Abram's complaint that YHWH had not "given" him children in 15:3. Note how this term is translated in chapter 17.

#### NASB

#### NIV

- |                    |               |
|--------------------|---------------|
| a. establish, v. 2 | confirm, v. 2 |
| b. make, v. 5      | make, v. 5    |
| c. make, v. 6      | make, v. 6    |
| d. give, v. 8      | give, v. 8    |
| e. give, v. 16     | give, v. 16   |
| f. make, v. 20     | make, v. 20   |
2. "multiply" – BDB 915, KB 1176, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense (i.e., many descendants)
  3. the land is mentioned in v. 8

▣ "My covenant between Me and you" Covenant is the central theme of the OT. YHWH comes to Abram in initiating grace, but he must respond, not only in initial faith, but also in lifestyle faith. There are mutual rights and also responsibilities. OT covenants are not between equals, but form the cultural pattern for the Hittite/Suzerian treaties of 2000 B.C. This covenant is further qualified in v. 7.

▣ **“I will multiply you exceedingly”** This has been a common theme of YHWH’s promise to Abram in his old age with his barren wife (cf. Gen. 12:2; 15:2-5; 13:16; 17:6). It becomes the basis for his name change. Just a reminder, this was God’s original plan for all life forms (cf. Genesis 1 and note Isaiah 60).

**17:3 “Abram fell on his face”** This was a sign of respect and reverence for God (cf. 18:2), but note 17:17.

▣ **“God” *Elohim*** is the common name for God in the Ancient Near East, based on the root *El*. The rabbis say that it emphasizes God’s power and control of nature as Creator, while YHWH emphasizes His grace and redemption. This seems to be a much better theory than that of source criticism (JEDP). See Special Topic at 12:1.

**17:4 “And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations”** Notice that more nations than simply Israel are included in the lineage of Abraham (cf. 35:11; 48:4,19). This sets the stage for the NT understanding of Abraham being the father of all those who have faith (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 3:1ff).

**17:5 “Abram”** His name will be changed to “Abraham,” which means “the father of a multitude.” This is not scientific etymology, but a typical popular etymology so characteristic of these early chapters of Genesis. Many have said that “Abraham” is based on the promise in 12:2.

**17:7 “I will establish”** This VERB (BDB 877, KB 1086, *Hiphil* PERFECT) in the *Hiphil* stem is used with oaths to assure their fulfillment (cf. 6:18; 17:19; Exod. 6:4; Lev. 26:9; Ezek. 16:62). YHWH is committing Himself to the completion of His promises.

▣ **“an everlasting covenant”** The Hebrew term *’olam* (BDB 761) is from the root that means “to be hidden.” It does not necessarily mean “forever and ever” (i.e., vv. 8,13,19), but it must be interpreted in its context. See Special Topic at 13:14.

**17:8 “I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings”** This is one of YHWH’s initial promises (cf. 12:7; 13:15, 17; and 15:18) and later to Jacob in 48:4.

▣ **“I will be their God”** This becomes special covenant language (i.e., Exod. 6:7; 29:45; Lev. 26:12,45; Num. 15:41; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1,33; 32:28). YHWH uniquely, in a sense exclusively, chooses Abram and his descendants to represent Him to the nations (cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 29:12-13). YHWH loves the nations through him.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 17:9-14**

<sup>9</sup>God said further to Abraham, “Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup>This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. <sup>12</sup>And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a *servant* who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. <sup>13</sup>A *servant* who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

**17:9 “you shall keep My covenant”** This VERB (BDB 1036, KB 1581, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is repeated in 17:10. Remember that the covenant was conditional on Abraham’s faith response, both initially and throughout his life. This truth can be clearly seen in 26:5; Exod. 12:24; 13:10; 15:26; 19:5; 20:6; 23:17; Lev. 18:4,5,26,30; 19:19,37; 20:8,22; 22:31; 25:18; 26:3; Deut. 4:2,6,9,23,40; 5:1,29; 6:2,3,12,17,25; 7:9,12; 8:1,2,6,11; 10:13; 11:1,8,22, etc. Obedience is crucial, not optional!

**17:10 “circumcised”** Circumcision (BDB 557 II) was not an uncommon rite in the ancient Orient. All of the surrounding people circumcised their children at puberty except possibly the Assyrians, Babylonians, Hivites, or Horites of central Palestine and the Philistines (Aegean people) who invaded the southern coast of Palestine in the 1200’s B.C. (cf. Jer. 9:25-26). However, circumcision had a religious purpose for the Israelites. It was always an outer sign of an inner faith (cf. Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Rom. 2:28-29; Col. 2:11-13).

**17:12-14** Other races and peoples besides the Israelites were included in the covenant if they were obedient to God’s will (cf. Exod. 12:44; 20:10). This is the OT precedent for household faith as seen in the NT (cf. Acts 10:2; 11:14; 16:15,31-34; 18:8).

**17:12** The word “circumcision” (BDB 557 II) is mentioned several times in this chapter.

1. v. 10 – *Niphal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE
2. v. 11 – *Niphal* PERFECT
3. v. 12 – *Niphal* IMPERFECT
4. v. 13 – *Niphal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE (the combination of the IMPERFECT VERB and an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE intensifies the action, “you shall surely be circumcised”)
5. v. 24 – *Niphal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT
6. v. 25 – *Niphal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT
7. v. 26 – *Niphal* PERFECT
8. v. 27 – *Niphal* PERFECT

YHWH took a common cultural practice, changed the time of its initiation and used it as a visible sign of His unique people. This was not for hygiene, but religious purpose.

**17:14 “that person shall be cut off from his people”** This is the same VERB used in the phrase “to cut a covenant” (*Qal* stem, cf. 15:10). In the *Niphal* stem it denotes the death penalty (cf. Exod. 12:15,19; 30:33,38; 31:14; Lev. 7:20,21,25,27; 17:4,9,14; 18:29; 19:8; 20:17,18; 22:3; 23:29; Num. 9:13; 15:30,31; 19:13,20; see note at NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 431). Disobedience had serious consequences. It affected the application of the “eternal covenant” to an individual.

There are some scholars who prefer to see this VERB as representing a disfellowshipping or removal from the community instead of death. Scholarly discussion continues on this point.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 17:15-21**

**<sup>15</sup>Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup>I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.” <sup>17</sup>Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” <sup>18</sup>And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!” <sup>19</sup>But God said, “No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. <sup>20</sup>As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him**

**fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. <sup>21</sup>But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.”**

**17:15 “Sarai, but Sarah”** Both names mean the same thing, but one is the older form. Some think the root is “princess” (BDB 979 I, KB 1354 I, Sarah - KB 1354 II) from the VERB “to rule,” but it is also possibly from the root “to strive,” which may be better because of the root’s relationship to “Israel” (cf. 32:28, BDB 975 I), which is from the same root “contend” (KB 1354 I).

Sarah, a background overview.

1. She was Abraham’s wife
2. She was barren, Gen. 11:29-30
3. She was his half-sister, Gen. 20:12
4. She was very beautiful, Gen. 12:10-13; 20:1-7 (if you compare 12:4 with 17:17, her beauty lasted long past 65 years of age)
5. She was a jealous lady, Gen. 16; 21:8-21
6. She laughed, as Abraham did, at God’s promises, 18:1-10
7. She died at the age of 127 and was buried at Hebron in the cave of Machpelah, Gen. 23:2-30
8. She is used in allegory with Hagar, Gal. 4:21-31
9. She is lifted as an example to woman, I Pet. 3:1
10. She is used in the same analogy as Abraham, Gal. 3:29; I Pet. 3:1

**17:16 “I will give you a son by her”** It had been thirteen years since the promise. Ishmael was born through Hagar, but this was not the promised seed to establish the covenant. Abraham believed God in 15:6 (cf. Rom. 4:3), but it was not until many years later that the promise was fulfilled.

▣ **“I will bless her”** The Septuagint, Peshita, and the Vulgate all have the masculine which refers to Isaac, but the description is parallel to the promises given to Abram.

▣ **“she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her”** Again notice the emphasis on more than Israelites (cf. v. 6).

**17:17** YHWH is testing Abraham again. After all these years (i.e., 13) does he still believe (cf. 15:6) he will have a child (a son, an heir)? Abraham “laughs” (17:17); Sarah “laughs” (18:12,13,15). What did this represent?

1. joy at the promise’s fulfillment (cf. 21:6)
2. gesture of doubt (cf. 19:14)

Paul, in Rom. 4:19, focuses on Abraham’s faith, but was this a developed faith after testing or the initial faith which tried to help the fulfillment by taking Hagar? These were not perfect people. There are no “perfect” people! God does not demand perfect faith! The focus in Genesis is YHWH’s faithfulness, not Abram’s or Sarai’s!

Note the distinction between Abraham’s outward act, “fell on his face,” but inner reaction, “laughed”! Only God can see both.

**17:18** This may be another attempt to “help” God fulfill His promise (like Hagar) or it might be an expression of Abraham’s genuine love for Ishmael. Calvin asserts that this was a lack of faith on Abraham’s part and uses this verse in a negative sense.

▣ **“Ishmael”** Ishmael (BDB 1035) is the son of Hagar, Sarah’s handmaiden. His name seems to mean “May God hear” and may be a play on Hagar’s and Abraham’s prayers. Ishmael is the father of the Arab tribes (cf. 16:10-12).

**17:19 “you shall call his name Isaac”** All of the other Patriarch’s names are changed when they come into a relationship with YHWH except for Isaac. This is because his name was given by God from the very beginning. “Isaac” (BDB 850) is a wordplay on the word “laughter” (BDB 850). This is explained in 21:6. Sarah’s unbelief will be changed to “laughter” and joy!

▣ **“an everlasting covenant”** This is the same Hebrew term *’olam* (cf. vv. 6, 8). It means “into the hidden future,” not “forever and ever.” See Special Topic at 13:14.

**17:20** See Genesis 25:12-18, where the lineage of Ishmael is delineated.

**17:21** This is the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise begun in Genesis 12.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 17:22-27**

**<sup>22</sup>When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. <sup>23</sup>Then Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all *the servants* who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s household, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the very same day, as God had said to him. <sup>24</sup>Now Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>25</sup>And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>26</sup>In the very same day Abraham was circumcised, and Ishmael his son. <sup>27</sup>All the men of his household, who were born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.**

**17:22 “God went up”** God acted in the way commensurate with how the people of that day expected Him to act (cf. 11:5; 35:13). To modern western people this phrase implies an ascension, but it could be an idiom for “left suddenly.”

**17:23 “in the very same day, as God had said to him”** This reflects Abraham’s obedience (cf. 12:4; 22:3).

**17:25 “And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin”** Circumcision is still a puberty rite for the Arabs, who perform it at age thirteen. This possibly reflects this biblical account. It needs to be noted that the Israelites circumcised at eight days old, which is a sign of the covenant relationship, not a sign of personal faith (modern denominations use this as analogous to infant baptism). Faith must come and be lived out in order for the covenant to be valid to each individual.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. How is Genesis 17 related to Genesis 12 and 15?
2. Why are the names of the Patriarchs changed?
3. Is the Old Testament covenant conditional or unconditional?
4. Describe covenant and its responsibilities.
5. How is circumcision related or unrelated to the surrounding nations?



# GENESIS 18

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Birth of Isaac Promised	The Son of Promise	The Lord's Visit to Abraham and Sarah	A Son Is Promised to Abraham	The Apparition at Mamre
18:1-8	18:1-8	18:1-8	18:1-5a 18:5b 18:6-8	18:1-5 18:6-8
18:9-15	18:9-15	18:9-15	18:9a 18:9b 18:10a 18:10b-12 18:13-14 18:15a 18:15b	18:9-15
18:16-21	Abraham Intercedes for Sodom 18:16-21	Abraham's Intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah 18:16-21	Abraham Pleads for Sodom 18:16-19 18:20-21	Abram Intercedes for Sodom 18:16-21
18:22-33	18:22-33	18:22-33	18:22-25 18:26 18:27-28a 18:28b 18:28b 18:29b 18:30a 18:30b 18:31a 18:31 b 18:32a 18:32b-33	18:22-26 18:27-29 18:30-32 18:33

## **READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)**

### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## **CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS**

- A. This is a very anthropomorphic section (speaking of God in human terms). This type of literary form has always made Jewish commentators very nervous. However, to many of us in the Church, this is the pre-incarnate Christ who physically manifests the very presence of God (cf. "The Angel of the Lord" at 12:7).
- B. Genesis 18-19 bring into vivid reality both sides of God's nature: love and judgment. These characteristics are not only seen in God, but can be transferred (1) to His people who reflect His love and (2) to the people of Sodom who reflect the character of the Evil one and, therefore, experience God's wrath.
- C. It is uncertain at what point in chapter 18 that Abraham recognized the three visitors as being supernatural. Much of what is recorded is simply Oriental custom.
  1. he bowed himself to the earth (cf. Gen. 23:7; 33:6-7; 42:6; 43:26)
  2. he washed their feet (cf. Gen. 19:2; 24:32; 43:24)
  3. he offered a meal (cf. v. 5)
  4. he stood while they ate (cf. v. 8)
  5. he called them *Adonai*, but in the sense of "Sir" (cf. v. 3)

On the other side of the coin there seems to be some indication that he understood very early that they were of supernatural origin.

1. he hurried and ran (cf. vv. 2,6, and 7), which was an unusual act for the Patriarch in the heat of the day
2. the meal he prepared was very large in quantity (cf. v. 6)
3. he even prepared an animal from his flock, which was unusual (cf. v.7)

It is obvious from v. 9 on that he recognizes the Lord as being personified in one of these visitors.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:1-8

<sup>1</sup>Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup>When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, <sup>3</sup>and said, “My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by. <sup>4</sup>Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; <sup>5</sup>and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant.” And they said, “So do, as you have said.” <sup>6</sup>So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead *it* and make bread cakes.” <sup>7</sup>Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave *it* to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed *it* before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

**18:1 “Now the LORD appeared to him”** The VERB “appeared” (BDB 906, KB 1157, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) is used several times in Genesis (cf. 12:7 [twice]; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2,24; 35:1,9). It denotes a personal physical manifestation. Since YHWH is an eternal spirit, this physicalness is hard to explain.

It is interesting to me that the rabbis say that chapter 18 is directly connected to chapter 17 and the reason for the visit from the Lord was to see if Abraham had recovered from his circumcision. As a matter of fact, the rabbis understand all three of these visitors to be angels who simply represented the Lord. They assert that (1) one angel came to help Sarah conceive; (2) one came to heal Abraham; and (3) one came to destroy Sodom.

### SPECIAL TOPIC: GOD DESCRIBED AS A HUMAN (ANTHROPOMORPHIC LANGUAGE)

- I. This type of language is very common in the OT (some examples)
  - A. Physical body parts
    1. eyes - Gen. 1:4,31; 6:8; Exod. 33:17; Num. 14:14; Deut. 11:12; Zech. 4:10
    2. hands - Exod. 15:17; Num. 11:23; Deut. 2:15
    3. arm - Exod. 6:6; 15:16; Num. 11:23; Deut. 4:34; 5:15
    4. ears - Num. 11:18; I Sam. 8:21; II Kgs. 19:16; Ps. 5:1; 10:17; 18:6
    5. face - Exod. 32:30; 33:11; Num. 6:25; Deut. 34:10; Ps. 114:7
    6. finger - Exod. 8:19; 31:18; Deut. 9:10; Ps. 8:3
    7. voice - Gen. 3:8,10; Exod. 15:26; 19:19; Deut. 26:17; 27:10
    8. feet - Exod. 24:10; Ezek. 43:7
    9. human form - Exod. 24:9-11; Ps. 47; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26
    10. the angel of the Lord - Gen. 16:7-13; 22:11-15; 31:11,13; 48:15-16; Exod. 3:4,13-21; 14:19; Jdgs. 2:1; 6:22-23; 13:3-22
  - B. Physical actions
    1. speaking as the mechanism of creation - Gen. 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26
    2. walking (i.e., sound of) in Eden - Gen. 3:8; 18:33; Hab. 3:15
    3. closing the door of Noah’s ark - Gen. 7:16
    4. smelling sacrifices - Gen. 8:21; Lev. 26:31; Amos 5:21
    5. coming down - Gen. 11:5; 18:21; Exod. 3:8; 19:11,18,20

6. burying Moses - Deut. 34:6

C. Human emotions (some examples)

1. regret/repent - Gen. 6:6,7; Exod. 32:14; Jdgs. 2:18; I Sam. 15:29,35; Amos 7:3,6
2. anger - Exod. 4:14; 15:7; Num. 11:10; 12:9; 22:22; 25:3,4; 32:10,13,14; Deut. 6:5; 7:4; 29:20
3. jealousy - Exod. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; 32:16,21; Josh. 24:19
4. loath/abhor - Lev. 20:23; 26:30; Deut. 32:19

D. Family terms (some examples)

1. Father
  - a. of Israel - Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; 39:5
  - b. of the king - II Sam. 7:11-16; Ps. 2:7
  - c. metaphors of fatherly action - Deut. 1:31; 8:5; 32:1; Ps. 27:10; Pro. 3:12; Jer. 3:4,22; 31:20; Hosea 11:1-4; Mal. 3:17
2. Parent - Hosea 11:1-4
3. Mother - Ps. 27:10 (analogy to nursing mother); Isa. 49:15; 66:9-13
4. Young faithful lover - Hosea 1-3

II. Reasons for the use of this type of language

- A. It is a necessity for God to reveal Himself to human beings. The very pervasive concept of God as male is an anthropomorphism because God is spirit!
- B. God takes the most meaningful aspects of human life and uses them to reveal Himself to fallen humanity (father, mother, parent, lover)
- C. Though necessary, God does not want to be limited to any physical form (cf. Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5)
- D. The ultimate anthropomorphism is the incarnation of Jesus! God became physical, touchable (cf. I John 1:1-3). The message of God became the Word of God (cf. John 1:1-18).

▣ **“by the oaks of Mamre”** The same place is mentioned in 13:18 and 14:13. It is very important for us to recognize the significance of trees in semi-arid areas. They were almost seen as having a holy sense because they represented the presence of underground water. Also they provided shade which, in this area of the world, can mean a 60 degree difference in temperature. In reality it was probably not an oak, but a terebinth (cf. UBS, *Helps For Translators, Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, pp. 154-155). The rabbis say that it was not a single tree but an orchard, which may be true.

▣ **“he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day”** This is so realistic to the culture of that day, for the tent flap would have been open during the hot time of the day. The people would have been relaxing quietly at this time of day in order to avoid heat stroke.

**18:2 “behold, three men were standing opposite him”** We learn from 19:1 that two of the men were angels (cf. Heb. 13:2).

▣ **“bowed himself to the earth”** This can be seen as

1. an Oriental custom of greeting (i.e., 23:7; 33:6-7; 43:28)
2. an act of reverence (divine visitors, i.e., 19:1; or YHWH Himself, 24:26,48,52)
3. an act of fear (Abraham was a sojourner in a foreign land, See Textual Insights, C)

**18:3 “My lord”** These are the consonants for the word *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי, BDB 10). The pointing of the term tells us what the Masoretic scholars believed these names to represent (i.e., #3 below). The title is pointed in three different ways: (1) the first as “Sir” or “Mister”; (2) the second is the PLURAL of this form, usually kings or lords; and (3) the third way is to signify Deity (i.e., here), אֲדֹנָיִךְ. See Special Topic at 12:1.

☐ **“if now I have found favor in your sight”** This is a common Oriental greeting (cf. 30:27).

☐ Verses 3-5 are a series of polite but urgent requests.

1. entreaty to stay and rest a while (BDB 716, KB 778, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense), v. 3
2. entreaty to let water be brought (BDB 542, KB 534, *Hophal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) to wash (BDB 934, KB 1220, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) their feet, v. 4
3. entreaty to relax against the large tree in the honored place (“lean,” BDB 1043, KB 1612, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE), v. 4
4. entreaty to allow Abraham to prepare and bring food (BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* COHORTATIVE), v. 5
5. entreaty to refresh/sustain themselves (BDB 703, KB 761, *Qal* IMPERATIVE), v. 5

**18:4 “rest yourselves under the tree”** In this day the term “rest” meant to prepare to eat. Usually a fellowship time centered around meals. Meals were a way to seal friendships and agreements.

**18:5 “I will bring a piece of bread”** This was an understatement when one compares the size of the loaf which Sarah made in v. 6, which must have contained 33 quarts.

☐ **“since you have visited your servant”** This is a Hebrew idiomatic phrase that seems to imply that even at this point, Abraham seems to understand that this visit was not an accident, or to no purpose. From v. 9 I believe the purpose was to increase Sarah’s faith and also to help Abraham understand his place of intercession as a ministry, which will be significant for all the Patriarchs.

**18:6** Abraham rushes (VERB used three times in vv. 6, 7) to command his wife to prepare a meal for the guests. This would take some significant time.

1. quickly prepare, BDB 554, KB 553, *Piel* IMPERATIVE
2. knead it, BDB 534, KB 525, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. make bread cakes, BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

☐ **“three measures”** This is the term “se’ah” (BDB 684), which equaled about 1/3 ephah.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WEIGHTS AND VOLUMES (METROLOGY)**

The weights and measurements used in commerce were crucial in ancient agricultural economy. The Bible urges the Jews to be fair in their dealings with one another (cf. Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:13-16; Prov. 11:1; 16:11; 20:1). The real problem was not only honesty, but the non-standardized terms and systems used in Palestine. It seems that there were two sets of weights; a “light” and a “heavy” of each amount (see *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, p. 831). Also the decimal system (base of 10) of Egypt had been combined with the sexagesimal (base of 6) of Mesopotamia.

Many of the “sizes” and “amounts” used were based on human body parts, animal loads, and farmer’s containers, none of which were standardized. Therefore, the charts are only estimations and are tentative. The easiest way to show weights and measures is on a relational chart.

I. Volume terms used most often

A. Dry measures

1. Homer (BDB 330, possibly a “donkey-load,” BDB 331), e.g., Lev. 27:16; Hosea 3:2
2. Letekh (or lethech, BDB 547), cf. Hosea 3:2
3. Ephah (BDB 35), e.g., Exod. 16:36; Lev. 19:36; Ezek. 45:10-11,13,24
4. Se’ah (BDB 684), e.g., Gen. 18:6; I Sam. 25:18; I Kgs. 18:32
5. Omer (BDB 771 II, possibly “a sheaf” [a row of fallen grain], BDB 771 I), e.g., Exod. 16:16,22,36; Lev. 23:10-15
6. ’Issaron (BDB 798, “a tenth part”), e.g., Exod. 29:40; Lev. 14:21
7. Qav (or Kab, BDB 866), cf. II Kgs. 6:25

B. Liquid Measures

1. Kor (BDB 499), e.g., I Kgs. 5:2,25; Ezek. 45:14
2. Bath (BDB 330, equal to a homer), e.g., II Chr. 2:10; Ezek. 45:10-11,14
3. Hin (BDB 228), e.g., Exod. 29:40; Lev. 19:36; Ezek. 45:24
4. Log (BDB 528), cf. Lev. 14:10,12,15,21,24

C. Chart (taken from Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, p. 201 and *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 16, p. 379)

homer (dry) = kor (liquid)	1						
ephah (dry) = bath (liquid)	10	1					
se’ah (dry)	30	3	1				
hin (liquid)	60	6	2	1			
omer/issaron (dry)	100	10	-	-	1		
qav/kab (dry)	180	18	6	3	-	1	
log (liquid)	720	72	24	12	-	4	1

II. Weight terms used most often

A. The three most common weights are the talent, the shekel, and the gerah.

1. The largest weight in the OT is the talent. From Exod. 38:25-26 we learn that one talent equals 3,000 shekels (i.e., “round weight,” BDB 503).
2. The term shekel (BDB 1053, “weight”) is used so often that it is assumed, but not stated in the text. There are several values of shekel mentioned in the OT.
  - a. “commercial standard” (NASB of Gen. 23:16)
  - b. “the shekel of the sanctuary” (NASB of Exod. 30:13)
  - c. “by the king’s weight” (NASB of II Sam. 14:26), also called “royal weight” in the Elephantine papyri.
3. The gerah (BDB 176 II) is valued at 20 per shekel (cf. Exod. 30:13). These ratios vary from Mesopotamia to Egypt. Israel followed the evaluation most common in Canaan (Ugarit)
4. The mina (BDB 584) is valued at either 50 or 60 shekels. This term is found mostly in later OT books (i.e., Ezek. 45:12; Ezra 2:69; Neh. 7:70-71). Ezekiel used the 60 to 1 ratio, while Canaan used the 50 to 1 ratio.
5. The beka (BDB 132, “half a shekel,” cf. Gen. 24:22) is used only twice in the OT (cf. Gen. 24:22; Exod. 38:26) and is valued at one-half a shekel. Its name means “to divide.”

B. Chart

1. Based on Exodus

talent	1		
mina	60	1	
shekel	3,000	50	1
beka	6,000*	100	1

\*(gerah, also 6,000 from Exod. 30:13; Lev. 27:25; Num. 3:47; 18:16; Ezek. 45:12)

2. Based on Ezekiel

talent	1				
mina	60	1			
shekel	3,600	60	1		
beka	7,200	120	2	1	
gerah	72,000	1,200	20	10	1

**18:7-8** Verses 6-8 describe an expensive and elaborate meal. Abraham was offering these guests the very best he had! These were important visitors!

**18:8** “**he was standing by them under the tree as they ate**” Philo, Josephus, and the Targums of Jonathan translate this as “they seemed to eat,” but those of us who accept further NT revelation see that even Jesus ate (cf. Luke 24:41-43) after His glorification, which makes the eating of food by Deity not an impossibility. Jewish writers are very uncomfortable with these anthropomorphic statements.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:9-15**

**“Then they said to him, ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’ And he said, ‘There, in the tent.’<sup>10</sup>He said, ‘I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.<sup>11</sup>Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.<sup>12</sup>Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?’<sup>13</sup>And the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?’<sup>14</sup>Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.’<sup>15</sup>Sarah denied it however, saying, ‘I did not laugh’; for she was afraid. And He said, ‘No, but you did laugh.’”**

**18:9** “**Where is Sarah your wife**” They knew her name! To ask a man about his wife would have been a very unusual question in this culture. It shows the intimacy that these visitors felt toward Abraham.

**18:10** “**I will surely return to you**” This is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT of the same Hebrew word (BDB 996, KB 1427), which intensifies the force of the VERB, “I will surely return.”

☐ “**at this time next year; and behold Sarah your wife shall have a son**” This is exactly the word that God had given to Abraham in 17:15-21, but in this context it is also a word to Sarah.

The NASB’s “at this time next year,” is not a literal reading of the MT, which has “at the time of reviving” (BDB 311 I, 3, i.e., spring). This is repeated in v. 14, but with an added phrase, “at the appointed

time” (BDB 417). This is added to clarify that the time period will be nine months, not a full year (cf. II Kgs. 4:16-17).

**18:11** This is a comment from the narrator (i.e., author) or a later inspired editor. Inspiration is a faith issue. Believers are convinced that the true author of all canonical Scripture was the Holy Spirit. The exact procedures and timing of the final versions of Scripture are unknown.

**18:12 “Sarah laughed to herself, saying”** Abraham had laughed in 17:17. Sarah laughs because she thinks it is incredulous that she and Abraham, both being old, could possibly have a child. Her words here are used by the author of I Pet. 3:6 to show her reverence to Abraham. Apparently she had passed the time of menopause and their sexual life had been non-existent for some time. As we learn, by God’s empowering, not only is Sarah able to conceive, but Abraham is able to have many other children as well.

**18:13 “and the LORD said to Abraham ‘Why did Sarah laugh’”** One of the three guests is identified as YHWH Himself. The Lord addresses Abraham because in that day it would have been improper to address Sarah directly. The truth of God’s dealing with Sarah’s faith can be seen in Hebrews 11:11. We see somewhat of the humanity of Sarah in her denial of her laughter (cf. v. 15). Later on, God will name the promised child by a form of the word “laughter,” as we see in 21:3, 6, 7. Notice that it has been twenty-five years since God’s initial promise to Abraham in chapter 12.

▣ **“saying”** YHWH quotes Sarah’s very thoughts showing His omniscience and giving credence to His promise.

**18:14 “Is anything too difficult for the LORD”** YHWH’s omniscience is matched to His omnipotence (cf. Jer. 32:17,27; Matt. 19:26). YHWH is attempting to build and confirm Abraham and Sarah’s faith/trust in Himself! YHWH is true to His word. They must obey His word! He is the God who speaks and acts!

The term here translated “difficult” (BDB 810, KB 928) means “extraordinary,” “wonderful act of God.” Note its usage in Exod. 15:11; Ps. 77:14; 78:12; 88:10; 119:129; 139:6; and Isa. 9:5; 25:1; 29:14; Dan. 12:6.

It is interesting how the primary wives of the Patriarchs were all unable to have children without the help of the Lord. It was one way He showed His power, purpose, and eternal plan. It points toward the virgin birth of the Davidic Messiah. YHWH has an eternal redemptive plan, person, and lineage which He will develop and protect!

▣ **“at the appointed time”** See note at v. 10.

**18:15** Abraham and Sarah are not perfect people. There are no perfect people! They both show the signs of the Fall (i.e., Genesis 3). They both are mixtures of faith and doubt!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:16-21**

**<sup>16</sup>Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. <sup>17</sup>The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, <sup>18</sup>since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? <sup>19</sup>For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.” <sup>20</sup>And the LORD said, “The outcry of Sodom and**



**Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. <sup>21</sup>I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.”**

**18:16 “the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom”** Jerome tells us that there was a site not far from Hebron where one could see the area of the Dead Sea, possibly as far as the cities of the plain. Most modern archeologists assume that the cities of the plain were at the southern end of the Dead Sea.

**18:17-19** This seems to be a soliloquy on the part of YHWH or maybe He said it softly in order for Abraham to hear so he would realize his unique relationship to the Lord. This is the source of Abraham being called, “God’s friend” (cf. II Chr. 7:20; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23). This same kind of truth is revealed by Jesus to His disciples in John 15:15.

YHWH reveals His immediate future actions (i.e., judgment of the cities on the plain, cf. chapter 19) to encourage Abraham about His promise of a son through Sarah. Abraham’s line would be YHWH’s instrument of bringing the nations to Himself and restoring the intimate fellowship of Eden.

Abraham is shown to be a prophet (cf. 20:7). YHWH reveals Himself in unique and predictive ways to prophets (i.e., Amos 3:7), which shows He is in control of time and events and also who is His true spokesperson.

Verse 18 is an obvious reference to the initial promises beginning in 12:1-3.

**18:18 “since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation”** The VERB is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 224, KB 243) which denotes intensity or here, a sure promise.

▣ **“in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed”** There is some discussion whether to translate this in the PASSIVE or REFLEXIVE form (i.e., *Niphal* stem). It seems to be that it occurs in both forms in this section of Genesis. However, it also assures us of the universal nature of God’s love. Whether we will bless ourselves by calling on Abraham’s God, or whether Abraham’s God will bless us directly through Abraham (i.e., line of the Messiah and concept of justification by grace through faith, cf. 15:6) is not really the issue (cf. 12:13; 22:18; 28:14; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8).

Notice the universal implication of this verse and v. 25. Abraham knew YHWH was not a local, tribal, family god, but the God of all the earth. One wonders when this theological concept dawned on Abraham. At first (i.e., chapter 13) the full implications of the vision would not have been realized, but at some point they were (i.e., incipient monotheism).

**18:19 “For I have chosen him”** This is the Hebrew term “know” (BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* PERFECT), which is used in Gen. 4:1; 19:5,8; Num. 31:18 to show “intimate personal relationship.” It can also be understood in the sense of predestination, but probably better here, “cared for” (cf. Exod. 2:25; Deut. 2:7; 33:9; Hosea 13:5).

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: KNOW (using mostly Deuteronomy as a paradigm)**

The Hebrew word “know” (BDB 393) has several senses (semantic fields) in the *Qal*.

1. to understand good and evil - Gen. 3:22; Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:14-15; Jonah 4:11
2. to know by understanding - Deut. 9:2,3,6; 18:21
3. to know by experience - Deut. 3:19; 4:35; 8:2,3,5; 11:2; 20:20; 31:13; Josh. 23:14
4. to consider - Deut. 4:39; 11:2; 29:16

5. to know personally
  - a. a person - Gen. 29:5; Exod. 1:8; Deut. 22:2; 28:35,36; 33:9
  - b. a god - Deut. 11:28; 13:2,6,13; 28:64; 29:26; 32:17
  - c. YHWH - Deut. 4:35,39; 7:9; 29:6; Isa. 1:3; 56:10-11
  - d. sexual - Gen. 4:1,17,25; 24:16; 38:26
6. a learned skill or knowledge - Isa. 29:11,12; Amos 5:16
7. be wise - Deut. 29:4; Pro. 1:2; 4:1; Isa. 29:24
8. God's knowledge
  - a. of Moses - Deut. 34:10
  - b. of Israel - Deut. 31:21,27,29

▣ **“that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD”**

Notice the inference that Abraham will have a child and will pass on his faith to his seed (cf. Deut. 4:9; 6:7). Also notice the condition of obedience, which is certainly part of the covenant obligations (cf. 17:1), not only on the part of Abraham, but for all the generations of faith to follow. The Lord wants a people to reflect His character to the nations. The term “the way of the LORD” is interesting because it speaks of lifestyle faith (cf. Jdgs. 2:22; Ps. 119:1). It is the first title of the early church (cf. Acts 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14,22; John 14:6).

▣ **“by doing righteousness and justice”** These two words (BDB 842 and 1048) are often used together. They describe a life of love for God, neighbor, and the community, which is clearly stated in the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Notice the implied condition of lifestyle in line with the revealed character of God (cf. 17:1).

**18:20 “And the LORD said, ‘The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great’”** The term “outcry” (BDB 277) is a play on a very similar Hebrew word that means “outrage” (BDB 277). This same account of the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah is recorded in Genesis 19 and Jude verse 7.

Notice how Sodom's sin is characterized.

1. great – BDB 912 I, KB 1174, *Qal* PERFECT
2. exceedingly (BDB 547) grave – BDB 457, KB 455, *Qal* PERFECT

Their sins “shouted” at YHWH for judgment! It is possible that Lot and his family were the ones praying (cf. v. 23) or watcher angels, or even a metaphor for the sins themselves.

YHWH knows the depth of human sin (cf. 6:5-6,11-12,13b; 15:16,19-21).

**18:21 “I will go down”** This anthropomorphic phrase speaks of YHWH's personal presence for

1. judgment, here and Gen. 11:5,7
2. aid, Exod. 3:8

It must not be used to conflict with YHWH's knowledge of current and future events (i.e., “Open Theism”). This is eastern metaphorical language.

Also notice the way that YHWH is personally present with the two angels (“men”). He knows what is true because of (1) who He is and (2) what the angels encounter. There is a fluidity between the SINGULAR and PLURAL of these three “men” (cf. 18:1-2).

This is a significant phrase which shows that the just God, although He is all knowing, still examines personally before making judgment. It was used by the rabbis to say that this was to be a characteristic of the judges in Israel (cf. Gen. 11:5; Exod. 3:8).

▣ **“if not I will know”** This is another anthropomorphic phrase to describe God’s justice (cf. Exod. 2:25).

There are several COHORTATIVES relating to YHWH in this verse.

1. I will go down – BDB 432, KB 434, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
2. I will see – BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense
3. I will know – BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* COHORTATIVE

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 18:22-33**

**<sup>22</sup>Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup>Abraham came near and said, “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep *it away* and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? <sup>25</sup>Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are *treated alike*. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” <sup>26</sup>So the LORD said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.” <sup>27</sup>And Abraham replied, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am *but* dust and ashes. <sup>28</sup>Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?” And He said, “I will not destroy *it* if I find forty-five there.” <sup>29</sup>He spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose forty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do *it* on account of the forty.” <sup>30</sup>Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do *it* if I find thirty there.” <sup>31</sup>And he said, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy *it* on account of the twenty.” <sup>32</sup>Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy *it* on account of the ten.” <sup>33</sup>As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place.**

**18:22 “the men”** There were three guests who turned out to be physical representatives of the spiritual realm: (1) two angels mentioned here (cf. 19:1) and (2) YHWH who remained with Abraham.

▣ **“while Abraham was still standing before the LORD”** This is one of the few places that the Masorete scholars changed the Hebrew text because they thought it was inappropriate in its current state. Originally it was “that YHWH stood before Abraham.” The Septuagint reflects the MT.

**18:23 “Abraham came near and said”** This was usually used of prayer and sacrifice. The Targum of Jonathan translates this as “and Abraham prayed,” which may be accurate. The phrase (and context) does show a wonderful fellowship between Abraham and YHWH.

▣ **“Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked”** This shows Abraham’s understanding of the nature and character of YHWH (i.e., “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” v. 25). YHWH certainly had knowledge of the situation, but He wanted Abraham to understand his unique relationship with Him, and the necessity for intercessory prayer on the behalf of others, which he will certainly use with Abimelech as can be seen in 20:7, 17. I think Abraham must have been thinking about Lot and his family in Sodom at this point, but also of v. 18!

**18:26** This verse is an example of the corporate nature of the Hebrew culture.

1. negatively
  - a. Adam and Eve sinned and all creation suffered the consequences.

- b. Achan sinned (cf. Joshua 7) and the army of Israel lost a battle (some died).
- 2. positively
  - a. Righteous people affect the actions of God toward the whole city of Sodom (and the cities of the plain).
  - b. One righteous man could divert God's judgment on Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 5:1).
  - c. Adam's sin affected all creation. Jesus' life and death affect all creation (cf. Rom. 5:12-21).

This concept is the theological basis for the vicarious, substitutionary atonement of Isaiah 53. One innocent One's death can bring forgiveness (cf. Leviticus 1-7; John 1:29; II Cor. 5:21).

**18:27 “the Lord”** This is the term for *Adonai*, pointed in such a way as to speak of Deity. See Special Topic at 12:1.

▣ **“I am *but* dust and ashes”** This is obviously an allusion to Genesis 3 where humans come from dust and return to dust. Abraham knew the traditions about creation! However, it is also possible that this phrase was a Semitic idiom of the day (i.e., Job, a contemporary of Abraham uses the same phrase in 30:19; 42:6).

**18:32 “suppose ten are found there?”** The exact reason for Abraham stopping at the number 10 is uncertain. It may refer to either (1) Lot and his family or (2) the fact that Abraham did not want to restrict the judgment based solely on Lot and his family.

# GENESIS 19

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
The Doom of Sodom	Sodom's Depravity	The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah	The Sinfulness of Sodom	The Destruction of Sodom
19:1-11	19:1-3	19:1-11	19:1-2a 19:2b 19:3	19:1-3
	19:4-11		19:4-5 19:6-8 19:9-11	19:4-5 19:6-11
	Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed		Lot Leaves Sodom	
19:12-14	19:12-14	19:12-14	19:12-13 19:14	19:12-14
19:15-22	19:15-22	19:15-23	19:15-17  19:18-20 19:21-22a 19:22b	19:15-16  19:17-22
19:23-26	19:23-26	19:24-26	19:23-26	19:23-26
19:27-28	19:27-28	19:27-28	19:27-29	19:27-28
19:29	19:29	19:29		19:29
Lot is Debased	The Descendants of Lot		The Origin of the Moabites and Ammonites	The Origin of the Moabites and the Ammonites
19:30-38	19:30-35	19:30-38	19:30-33  19:34-38	19:30 19:31-38
	19:36-38			

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

#### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

##### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:1-11

<sup>1</sup>Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw *them*, he rose to meet them and bowed down *with his* face to the ground. <sup>2</sup>And he said, "Now behold, my lords, please turn aside into your servant's house, and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way." They said however, "No, but we shall spend the night in the square." <sup>3</sup>Yet he urged them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he prepared a feast for them, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. <sup>4</sup>Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; <sup>5</sup>and they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them." <sup>6</sup>But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, <sup>7</sup>and said, "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. <sup>8</sup>Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof." <sup>9</sup>But they said, "Stand aside." Furthermore, they said, "This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them." So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door. <sup>10</sup>But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. <sup>11</sup>They struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied *themselves trying to find the doorway*.

**19:1 "the two angels came to Sodom in the evening"** They had left Abraham and YHWH on the mount overlooking the Dead Sea in the evening and arrived some 40 miles distance in just a few minutes—they are angels!!! They are human in form, speech, and dress, as is evident from 18:2,22; 19:10,12,16. They always appear as males except possibly Zech. 5:9.

▣ **“as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom”** We can see something of the progression of Lot’s wickedness by the fact that

1. in 13:11 he is said to have moved to the plains of Sodom and Gomorrah
2. the nomadic shepherd has moved into the city. He has apparently become one of the elders of the city which is implied in the phrase “in the gate of”
3. in v. 3 he is obviously aware of the homosexual activities of the inhabitants, which he had probably observed several times
4. in v. 7 he goes so far as to call them “brothers”
5. later on he is reluctant to leave the city and his material possessions.

God help us—Lot seems to have tried to change them (v. 9) but, as so often happens, their evil influence affected him, his wife, and his daughters!

As Abraham had done, Lot also arose to greet them and bowed down. Whether these are common cultural gestures (which is probable) or a recognition of their origin is uncertain.

**19:2 “please turn aside into your servant’s house, and spend the night, and wash your feet”** Lot seems to be the only one to address these visitors and without realizing they were angels he wanted to protect them from the inhabitants of this city. This can be seen in his strong urging in v. 3. The response of the two angels is a Semitic idiom for a cultural way to say “yes,” but not without some urging.

Three IMPERATIVES (expressing Lot’s desire) describe Lot’s gesture of Oriental hospitality.

1. turn aside – BDB 693, KB 747, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. spend the night (lit. lodge) – BDB 533, KB 529, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. wash – BDB 934, KB 1220, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

Added to this he prepared a feast for them (cf. v. 3). Obviously these angels and the physical representatives of YHWH (possibly the Angel of the Lord) could and did eat food, as did the resurrected Jesus (cf. John 21).

▣ **“we shall spend the night in the square”** This must have been the normal procedure for visitors. But Lot knew the consequences. Possibly he had seen it happen before!

**19:3 “he urged them strongly”** This VERB (BDB 823, KB 954, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is used twice in this verse.

1. In v. 9 its literal meaning of push or press is used of the men of Sodom.
2. Here its metaphorical use of “to urge” is used (cf. Jdgs. 19:7; II Kgs. 2:17; 5:23). The ADVERB “strongly” (BDB 547) intensifies the request.

▣ **“baked unleavened bread”** The rabbis say this shows that this was the Passover, therefore, Isaac was born on the Passover (the next year). However, this seems to be reading too much into the phrase, “unleavened bread.” Earlier in the day Abraham had cooked bread that was not unleavened. Apparently Lot’s servants or family prepared the meal quickly (cf. Jdgs. 6:19).

**19:4 “the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter”** This implies that every single man in the town, both young and old, had become homosexuals, or at least, bisexuals. As God told Abraham to train up his children, 18:19, we see the negative aspect of that as the people of Sodom have trained their children in evil. Here is a good example of the sins of the fathers being passed on to their sons (cf. Deut. 5:9-10).

The last phrase translated “from every quarter” (cf. NASB and NKJV) is literally “to the last man” (BDB 892). The term is used for things in between (e.g., 47:21). The evil of Sodom that the angel (i.e., YHWH) had mentioned in 18:20-21 was true. There were not even ten righteous men (cf. 18:32).

## SPECIAL TOPIC: HOMOSEXUALITY

There is much modern cultural pressure to accept homosexuality as an appropriate alternate lifestyle. The Bible condemns it as a destructive lifestyle, out of the will of God for His creation.

1. it violates the command of Genesis. 1 to be fruitful and multiply
2. it characterizes pagan worship and culture (cf. Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; and Jude 7)
3. it reveals a self-centered independence from God (cf. I Cor. 6:9-10)

However, before I leave this topic let me assert God's love and forgiveness to all rebellious human beings. Christians have no right to act hatefully and arrogantly towards this particular sin, especially when it is obvious that all of us sin. Prayer, concern, testimony, and compassion do far more in this area than vehement condemnation. God's Word and His Spirit will do the condemning if we let them. All sexual sins, not just this one, are an abomination to God and lead to judgment. Sexuality is a gift from God for mankind's well-being, joy, and a stable society. But this powerful, God-given urge is often turned into rebellious, self-centered, pleasure-seeking, "more-for-me-at-any-cost" living (cf. Rom. 8:1-8; Gal. 6:7-8).

**19:5 "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them"** Their demands are

1. bring them out – BDB 422, KB 425, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
2. have relations with – BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* COHORTATIVE

Josephus, in his book *Antiquities of the Jews* 1:11:3, says that the angels were beautiful creatures and excited the lust of the men of Sodom. The Bible often speaks of the sin of homosexuality, which was apparently common in Canaan (cf. Lev. 18:22; 20:13). It was also common in the Roman Empire of Paul's day (cf. Rom. 1:26, 27; I Cor. 6:9; I Tim. 1:10).

The Hebrew phrase, "have relations with them," is literally "to know" (BDB 393, KB 390), which speaks of "intimate personal relationship." This homosexual gang-rape would probably have killed the visitors. It is obvious from v. 9 that this would have also happened to Lot's daughters and even to Lot himself. Some commentators see Lot offering his daughters to the mob as the experience which caused them to lose respect for their father.

**19:7 "do not act wickedly"** This VERB (BDB 949, KB 1269, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT, here used in a JUSSIVE sense) in this *Hiphil* stem can mean

1. do not hurt – e.g., 43:6; Exod. 5:22-23; Josh. 24:20; Isa. 11:9
2. do not do evil – e.g., I Sam. 12:25; Jer. 4:22; 13:23

It seems Lot is accusing the men of an immoral intent (cf. v. 9). He is acting as an ethical mirror to the intended sexual violence which encompassed two evils.

1. violation of hospitality
2. sexual perversion

**19:8 "Now behold, I have two daughters"** Lot expresses himself to the mob with three suggestions.

1. Let me bring them (his two daughters) out to you – BDB 422, KB 425, *Hiphil* COHORTATIVE
2. Do to them whatever you like – BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. Do nothing to these men – BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

These strangers had come under the "shelter of my roof" (literally, "shadow," BDB 853). This same term is used for "under the shadow of God's wing," which is a metaphor for protection and care (cf. Num. 14:9; Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:7). Lot was obliged to protect his guests at any cost!

This has been explained in various ways, but it remains an enigma concerning the motives of Lot.

1. it was his ultimate desire to protect his guests (Oriental hospitality)



2. he knew this mob did not desire women
3. he was hoping his potential sons-in-law, who could have been in the crowd, would stop the mob at this point. This account is very similar to Jdgs. 19:24.

**19:9 “stand back”** This VERB (BDB 620, KB 670, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) is usually translated “come near” (e.g., Lev. 21:21; II Kgs. 4:27); uniquely here it denotes “get out of our way” as they pushed forward.

▣ **“and already he is acting like a judge”** This is an emphatic construction (i.e., the IMPERFECT VERB and INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE of the same Hebrew root). The actions of these men deserve judgment (cf. v. 13). This is the information alluded to in 18:20-24. This may be the source of II Pet. 2:7-8, which calls Lot righteous.

▣ **“now we will treat you worse than them”** They proposed to molest (this is the same VERB as v. 7) Lot and his family as well as the strangers.

**19:11 “They struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness”** This Hebrew term (BDB 645, KB 697, *Hiphil* PERFECT) means more than just simple, temporary blindness (the VERB occurs only twice in the OT, cf. II Kgs. 6:18). Iben Ezra says that it means “blindness of eye and mind,” which seems to fit the latter part of this verse, which says they continued to grope around looking for the doorway as if confused (e.g., Exod. 3:20). The blindness here (BDB 703) is different from Lev. 22:22; Deut. 28:28 (BDB 734). This one denotes “blinded by a bright light.”

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:12-14**

<sup>12</sup>Then the two men said to Lot, “Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring *them* out of the place; <sup>13</sup>for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD that the LORD has sent us to destroy it.” <sup>14</sup>Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, “Up, get out of this place, for the LORD will destroy the city.” But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

**19:12 “Whom else have you here”** This is not so much for the angels’ information as it is for Lot to see he had no real ties to Sodom!

**19:13-14 “the LORD has sent us to destroy it. . .the LORD will destroy the city”** The presence of a destroying angel can be seen in the ten plagues of Egypt, but the ultimate authority is YHWH behind angels’ activities.

Three times in these two verses the Hebrew term “destroy” (BDB 1007, KB 1469) is used.

1. v. 13 – “destroy” – *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE
2. v. 14 – “destroy” – *Piel* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT (cf. v. 29)
3. v. 14 – “destroy” – *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE (cf. 18:28)

The term basically means “to ruin,” but is used in the sense of destroy (cf. 6:17; 9:15; 13:10; II Sam. 24:16). This is the same root used to describe the “Death” angel in Exod. 12:23 (note I Chr. 21:15; Isa. 54:16; Jer. 22:7).

**19:14 “went out and spoke to his sons-in-law”** Some assume that Lot’s daughters were already married (BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE, cf. the Septuagint and the Targums), but others believe they were only betrothed (cf. Josephus, the Vulgate, Rashi, and TEV). It seems to me from the context that Lot

only had two daughters and they were still unmarried, living at home, but it remains a possibility he had other married daughters who were completely caught up in the life of Sodom and would not leave.

Lot tried to motivate these young men to leave.

1. up (lit. arise) – BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. get out (lit. go) – BDB 422, KB 425, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

▣ **“to be jesting”** This VERB (BDB 850, KB 1019, *Piel* PARTICIPLE) has several connotations.

1. sexual activity – Gen. 26:8
2. mocking – Gen. 21:9
3. make sport of (related to #1) – Gen. 39:14,17
4. play (related to #1) – Exod. 32:6
5. entertain – Jdgs. 16:25

The same root is used of Abraham’s and Sarah’s laughing at YHWH’s promise of a child the following spring (cf. 17:17; 18:12).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:15-22**

**<sup>15</sup>When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.” <sup>16</sup>But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the LORD *was* upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city. <sup>17</sup>When they had brought them outside, one said, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away.” <sup>18</sup>But Lot said to them, “Oh no, my lords! <sup>19</sup>Now behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have magnified your lovingkindness, which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, for the disaster will overtake me and I will die; <sup>20</sup>now behold, this town is near *enough* to flee to, and it is small. Please, let me escape there (is it not small?) that my life may be saved.” <sup>21</sup>He said to him, “Behold, I grant you this request also, not to overthrow the town of which you have spoken. <sup>22</sup>Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.” Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar.**

**19:15** As dawn came the angels became emphatic.

1. up (lit. arise) – exact form of v. 14
2. take – BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

In vv. 16-22 the angels’ concern and protection is continued.

▣ **“or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city”** This is a common term for divine judgment (cf. 18:23,24; 19:15,17; Num. 16:26; I Sam. 12:25).

**19:16 “he hesitated”** This VERB (BDB 554, KB 552, *Hithpael* IMPERFECT) is used several times in the OT and means “to linger” or “delay.” Why Lot tarried is not stated. One can only speculate, but it does reveal a lack of trust in the angels’ message. The warnings of v. 17 imply a reluctance on Lot’s part to leave his life in Sodom or possibly his physical possessions (i.e., household goods, servants, valuables, livestock). Remember Lot chose the best grassland for himself (cf. 13:10).

▣ **“for the compassion of the LORD *was* upon him”** The Hebrew NOUN (BDB 328) is found only here and Isa. 63:9, which also denotes YHWH’s covenant love, compassion, mercy, and grace towards His people. His special care is related to His promises to the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The VERB

(although never appearing in Psalms) is used of YHWH's special covenant love (cf. II Chr. 36:15; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17 [twice], but note the contrast when they sin in II Chr. 36:17; Ezek. 5:11; 7:4,9; 8:18; 9:5,10)!

**19:17 “Escape for your life”** The VERB “escape” (מלט, BDB 572, KB 589, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE) is used five times in this context (cf. 19:17 [twice], 19,20,22). It is a sound play on the name “Lot” (לוט, BDB 532).

▣ **“Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley”** The angels give several emphatic statements to Lot.

1. escape for your life – BDB 572, KB 589, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE
2. do not look back – BDB 613, KB 661, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense (note the tragedy of v. 26, apparently it was hard for Lot and his family to let go of their lives in Sodom)
3. do not stay anywhere in the valley – BDB 763, KB 840, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
4. escape to the mountains – same form as #1

“Anywhere in the valley” literally means “five cities.” This referred to five major cities in the Jordan plain: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar, which is also called Bela (cf. Gen. 14:2).

**19:19** This verse shows something of Lot's personality. Exactly why he was afraid of the mountains is uncertain (unless it is just their distance away), but at least it reveals a lack of trust in YHWH's continuing protection and provision (lit. “favor in your eyes,” cf. 6:8; 32:5; 34:11).



NASB “lovingkindness”

NKJV “mercy”

NRSV “great kindness”

This is the Hebrew special covenant NOUN *hesed* (BDB 338).

### SPECIAL TOPIC: LOVINGKINDNESS (*HESED*)

This term has a wide semantic field. The BDB characterizes it this way (338-339):

- A. Used in connection to human beings
  1. kindness to fellow men (e.g., I Sam. 20:14; II Chr. 24:22)
  2. kindness toward the poor and needy (e.g., Micah 6:8)
  3. affection (cf. Jer. 2:2; Hos. 6:4)
  4. appearance (cf. Isa. 40:6)
- B. Used in connection to God
  1. covenant loyalty and love
    - a. “in redemption from enemies and troubles” (e.g., Jer. 31:3; Ezra 27:28; 9:9)
    - b. “in preservation of life from death” (e.g., Job 10:12; Ps. 86:13)
    - c. “in quickening of spiritual life” (e.g., Ps. 119:41,76,88,124,149,150)
    - d. “in redemption from sin” (cf. Ps. 25:7; 51:3)
    - e. “in keeping the covenants” (e.g., II Chr. 6:14; Neh. 1:5; 9:32)
  2. describes a divine attribute (e.g., Exod. 34:6; Micah 7:20)
  3. kindness of God
    - a. “abundant” (e.g., Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8)

- b. “great in extent” (e.g., Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; 7:9)
- c. “everlasting” (e.g., I Chr. 16:34,41; II Chr. 5:13; 7:3,6; 20:21; Ezra 3:11)
- 4. deeds of kindness (e.g., II Chr. 6:42; Ps. 89:2; Isa. 55:3; 63:7; Lam. 3:22)

**19:20 “please, let me escape”** This is a COHORTATIVE (BDB 572, KB 589, *Niphal* COHORTATIVE), which explains the “please, let” of NASB.

The next VERB (BDB 310, KB 309) “escape” (lit. “live”) is a *Qal* JUSSIVE.

**19:21 “Behold, I grant you this”** This is literally the Hebrew idiom “lift the face” (VERB, BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* PERFECT plus “face,” BDB 815). It comes from the judicial realm. If a judge “lifted the face” of an accused to see who he/she was, then his impartiality was jeopardized (cf. Lev. 19:15; Ps. 82:2; Pro. 18:5). The judge must be no respecter of persons.

Lot, afraid that he could not make it to the mountains, asked for Bela (Zoar, BDB 858, the root means “to be insignificant”), which means “small” (BDB 859 I), “to be spared.” The angels, surprisingly, approved his request (it seems in a sense all three angels represented YHWH’s personal presence). This city was large enough to have a king, as is recorded in 14:2. This may theologically be another way to show the power of intercession (i.e., Abraham in 18:22-33).

**19:22** Again the angel commands Lot.

1. hurry – BDB 554, KB 553, *Piel* IMPERATIVE (the opposite of v. 16a)
2. escape – BDB 572, KB 589, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE (cf. 19:17 [twice], 19,20), only here in Genesis through Deuteronomy

▣ **“I cannot do anything until”** The destroying angels are under orders to spare Lot and his family. This reflects either

1. the grace of YHWH
2. the power of intercessory prayer (i.e., 18:22ff)

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:23-26**

**<sup>23</sup>The sun had risen over the earth when Lot came to Zoar. <sup>24</sup>Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven, <sup>25</sup>and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. <sup>26</sup>But his wife, from behind him, looked *back*, and she became a pillar of salt.**

**19:24 “the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven”**

It seems rather unusual that the term “YHWH” is used twice here. Jewish commentators call the term the plural of majesty, while Christian commentators see something of the Trinity here. As a matter of fact, the Council of Sirmium commented on this verse as follows, “God the Son brought down the rain from God the Father.” We learn from 14:10 of the presence of tar pits in this region and apparently, somehow, through lightning or raining fire (cf. Ezek. 38:22; Luke 17:29; Rev. 14:10; 19:20; 20:10), God caused this entire region to ignite and explode (cf. Jude 7).

Again note the supernatural preservation of Zoar. This is similar to Goshen being protected from the ten plagues.

Fire is always associated with the cleansing judgment of YHWH. See Special Topic at 15:17.

**19:25 “He overthrew those cities”** This Hebrew term “overthrew” (BDB 245, KB 253, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means to turn upside down and thereby destroy. Sodom’s destruction is used throughout Scripture to denote divine judgment (cf. Deut. 29:23; Isa. 13:19; Jer. 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11). This destruction was the personal judgment of YHWH. He would do the same to the Canaanite cultures that Joshua would face in the conquest of Canaan.

**19:26** Readers are not sure exactly what happened here, but it is obvious that Lot’s wife’s heart was still in Sodom and she reaped a just recompense (cf. Luke 17:32). She became a memorial of disobedience! Not only was Lot’s wife affected by their time in Sodom, but also his daughters, which is evident from vv. 30-38.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:27-28**

**<sup>27</sup>Now Abraham arose early in the morning *and went* to the place where he had stood before the LORD; <sup>28</sup>and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the valley, and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land ascended like the smoke of a furnace.**

**19:27 “to the place he had stood before the LORD”** This is an idiom for being in the presence of Deity (cf. 18:22; Lev. 9:5; Deut. 10:8).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:29**

**<sup>29</sup>Thus it came about, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot lived.**

**19:29 “that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow”** Notice that Lot was spared because of the intercession of Abraham, the possessor of the covenant promise (cf. Exod. 2:24). This verse accentuates the preeminence of Abraham.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 19:30-38**

**<sup>30</sup>Lot went up from Zoar, and stayed in the mountains, and his two daughters with him; for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; and he stayed in a cave, he and his two daughters. <sup>31</sup>Then the firstborn said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of the earth. <sup>32</sup>Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him that we may preserve our family through our father.” <sup>33</sup>So they made their father drink wine that night, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. <sup>34</sup>On the following day, the firstborn said to the younger, “Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve our family through our father.” <sup>35</sup>So they made their father drink wine that night also, and the younger arose and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. <sup>36</sup>Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. <sup>37</sup>The firstborn bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. <sup>38</sup>As for the younger, she also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the sons of Ammon to this day.**

**19:30-38** These verses serve as an explanation of the origins of Moab and Ammon.

**19:30 “for he was afraid to stay in Zoar”** There are two possibilities concerning this verse: (1) he ignored the angel’s special promise in v. 21 or (2) he saw how evil the people of this city were also and was afraid that God’s judgment would surely fall on them too. He went to the very place he said in v. 19 that he feared!

**19:31** The daughters show the same lack of trust in YHWH’s provision as their father. They seem to have forgotten

1. God’s deliverance through Abraham in chapter 14
2. God’s deliverance through the angels in chapter 19

**19:32** The daughters designed a plan to preserve their family line.

1. come – BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (cf. v. 34)
2. let us make our father drink wine – BDB 1052, KB 1639, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense (cf. v. 34)
3. let us lie with him – BDB 1011, KB 1486, *Qal* COHORTATIVE (v. 34 IMPERATIVE)

Verse 34 repeats these incestuous acts.

**19:36** One wonders if they both became pregnant the first time or that this became a repeated event.

**19:37 “Moab”** The popular, but not technical meaning based on similar sounds was “from my father” (BDB 555), which shows the incestuous relationship. This child later became the father of the Moabites who caused such great problems for the Israelites, yet were relatives (cf. Deut. 2:9).

**19:38 “Ben-ammi. . .sons of Ammon”** Ben-ammi seems to mean “son of my people” (cf. the Septuagint, Jerome, and Augustine). The sons of Ammon (BDB 769) later caused tremendous problems for the nation of Israel, yet were relatives (cf. Deut. 2:19). The degradation of vv. 30-38 was seen either as (1) a mark of moral failure or (2) pride that they kept the pure racial line of the family. Both names are sarcastic!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. What are the major truths communicated in chapters 18 and 19?
2. Why does YHWH appear with angels? What is the purpose (or purposes) of His visit?
3. What does the term *Adon* mean and imply?
4. List the gradual degradation of Lot in these chapters.

# GENESIS 20

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Abraham's Treachery	Abraham and Abimelech	Abraham and Sarah in Gerar	Abraham and Abimelech	Abraham at Gerar
20:1-7	20:1-7	20:1-7	20:1-3 20:4-5 20:6-7	20:1-7
20:8-18	20:8-13  20:14-16 20:17-18	20:8-18	20:8-10 20:11-13 20:14-16 20:17-18	20:8-13  20:14-18

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

### BACKGROUND

- A. It is amazing in light of the promises of chapter 18 that Abraham could fall to such a self-seeking, fearful level as he had earlier in chapter 12. It is another specific literary device to show that the promise is completely of God and not of man.

Just think for a moment of all the problems related to the promise of a son and descendants to Abraham.

1. a barren wife
2. wife taken by Pharaoh (Genesis 12)

3. wife taken by Abimelech (Genesis 20)
  4. the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22)
- Abraham had to cling to the promises of YHWH amidst a life of uncontrollable circumstances. Abraham “believed” God (Gen. 15:6)!

- B. This chapter reveals to us that there were many righteous men in Canaan in Abraham’s day.
1. Melchizedek of the city of Salem
  2. Abimelech, the king of the Philistines
- This may explain why, in the prophecy to Abraham in Gen. 15:13-16, the sin of the Amorite (a collective term for the people of Canaan) was not yet complete. Abimelech is seen in this chapter as spiritually superior to Abraham!
- C. The necessity of Abraham’s intercessory prayer to YHWH on behalf of Abimelech shows the unique and privileged position of Abraham as YHWH’s chosen one.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:1-7

**<sup>1</sup>Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar. <sup>2</sup>Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. <sup>3</sup>But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married.” <sup>4</sup>Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a nation, even though blameless? <sup>5</sup>Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.” <sup>6</sup>Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup>Now therefore, restore the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”**

**20:1 “Abraham journeyed from there”** Abraham left his campsite at the oaks of Mamre (cf. 18:1) or Hebron (cf. 13:18). Abraham lived a nomadic life, as did Job (same time frame).

▣ **“the Negev”** This refers to “the south country” (BDB 616), which was a semi-arid desert, including the city of Beersheba to the south. This same area is mentioned in 13:1. The Patriarchs, Abraham, and Isaac spent most of their time in this general area.

▣ **“Kadesh”** This oasis was also known as Kadesh-barnea (cf. 14:7; 16:14), which is about 50 miles south of Beersheba. It is interesting that the term *Kadesh* (BDB 873 II, means “sacred”) is related to the Hebrew word for “holy,” which is *kadosh* (BDB 871).

▣ **“Shur”** The term (BDB 1004 III) means “wall,” possibly referring to the line of Egyptian fortresses (cf. I Sam. 15:7; 27:8). This is referred to in 16:7 as the place where the angel of the Lord spoke with Hagar. We do not know where it is located geographically, but it is obviously south of Beersheba on the road to Egypt (cf. 18:25).



▣ **“then he sojourned in Gerar”** There is obviously a two-stage migration recorded here, for Gerar is north of *Kadesh*. The first VERB in v. 1 “journeyed” (BDB 652, KB 704) literally means “to pull up tent pegs,” but this one, “sojourned” (BDB 157, KB 184), implies a long stay (cf. 12:10; 21:23-24; 26:3; 32:6; 35:27; 47:4). This was an area that would later be a stronghold of the Philistines (cf. 10:19). We learn from later history that it was near Gaza, one of the five major walled cities of the Philistines.

**20:2 “She is my sister”** This is the same thing that happened in 12:17-18 with the Pharaoh in Egypt. It will happen to Isaac and Rebekah in 26:1ff. The only explanation we have concerning this is in v. 13, where it seemed to be the normal operating procedures for Abraham and Sarah after they left Ur of the Chaldeans. It is quite possible that they were truly half-brother and sister (cf. v. 12), but it is also possible that Abraham simply adopted her in a ceremony that we learn from the Nuzi Tablets which describe Hurrian culture.

▣ **“So Abimelech the king of Gerar sent and took Sarah”** Does this mean that Sarah was still physically attractive? This is entirely possible, based on 12:14. Some say that God rejuvenated her body to allow her to conceive and that she became beautiful again. Other commentators have assumed that, because she was almost ninety years, this was only a cultural way of sealing the friendship covenant between Abraham and Abimelech.

**20:3 “God came to Abimelech in a dream”** Abimelech (BDB 4) is a title for the leader of a country, such as Pharaoh, Caesar, or Czar. It apparently means “father is king” or “the king is my father.” We see this general name for the kings of the Philistines found in the introduction to Psalm 34.

The fact that God appeared to him in a dream, as he did to Laban in 31:34, shows something of this man’s relationship to God. This can specifically be seen where he calls God *Adonai* (v. 4) and shows that he may have had some understanding of the covenant God (YHWH), as did Melchizedek (Genesis 14), another non-covenant person.

**20:4-6** We see here the discussion between God and Abimelech where Abimelech reminds God that he acted innocently, without knowing all of the facts. The metaphor in v. 5, “innocence of my hands”(CONSTRUCT BDB 667 and BDB 496), refers to a Hebrew idiom of open-handedness, i.e., “nothing to hide.” It is parallel with “in the integrity of my heart” (CONSTRUCT BDB 1070 and BDB 523, cf. I Kgs. 9:4; Ps. 7:8; 101:2). In v. 6 God said that He kept him from sinning (cf. I Sam. 25:39; Job 33:18; also note Ps. 19:13).

Apparently this refers to some kind of disease which fell upon Abimelech and his family (cf. vv. 17-18; 12:17). I think that it is important to see that God was actively involved in His world in the care of a non-covenant member. This can also be seen in His dealings with Hagar and Ishmael. This should be a great encouragement to all human beings (cf. Ezek. 18:23,32; John 3:16; Rom. 11:32; I Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; II Pet. 3:9; I John 2:1; 4:14).

**20:4 “Lord, will You slay a nation, even though blameless?”** This shows the same understanding of God’s justice that Abraham had in 18:23. Apparently the king saw his death as a prelude to the destruction of the entire tribe (a plague, cf. v. 17). He asserts (by the use of the term “blameless” or “righteous,” BDB 843) that he had committed no act of sexual consummation toward Sarah and that he was acting out of ignorance, not known sin. From this verse it is obvious that adultery was considered a serious violation of God’s standards even in this early stage of history (cf. Gen. 12:17-19; 26:7-11) because it affected inheritance rights.

## SPECIAL TOPIC: HUMAN SEXUALITY

### I. Introductory Remarks

- A. Christians have been unduly influenced by Greek asceticism, which makes both the human body and its normal activities evil.

The Bible affirms the goodness of physical creation (cf. Gen. 1:26-27), but acknowledges the results of human rebellion (cf. Genesis 3). One day this curse shall be removed (cf. Rom. 8:18-22).

- B. Maleness and femaleness are God's idea! Human sexuality is part of God's creation and plan for human beings made in His image.

Sex is not something we do. It is something we are. Every area of our thoughts and lives is affected by sexual orientation, as interpreted by our cultures.

### II. Biblical Insights (selected examples)

#### A. From Genesis

1. There was an original mutuality (cf. 1:26-27).
2. Sex was a mandate from God (i.e., 1:28).
3. All creation is affirmed as "very good" in Gen. 1:31, including human sexual activity.
4. Women are not opposites, but complements, to men (i.e., 2:18).
5. Eve and Adam's open-eyed rebellion has affected all of us and our world, including sexuality (cf. 3:7,16).

#### B. Physical love is affirmed in Scripture, even after the Fall.

1. Proverbs 5:15-23 affirms life-long monogamy and regular sexual activity.
2. Ecclesiastes 9:7-9, enjoy life in all its aspects while you can.
  - a. Gen. 1:2, Spirit of God brooded over the waters
  - b. Gen 17:1, *El Shaddai* may have feminine connotations (i.e., Arabic root)
  - c. Deut. 32:18, God as mother bird
  - d. Exod. 19:4, God as mother eagle
  - e. Isa. 49:14-15; 66:9-13, God compared to a nursing mother
3. God is an eternal spirit without a body, yet "He" uses human sexual metaphors to describe Himself.

### III. God-given boundaries for expressing human sexuality

#### A. Marriage

1. the norm in the OT and NT
2. used as an example of the "spirit filled life," Eph. 5:15-6:9
3. Song of Songs, an affirmation of sexual activity (assumed monogamy)
4. I Corinthians 7:3-5, sex is more than procreation
  - a. the body belongs to God, I Cor. 6:19-20
  - b. the body belongs to one's spouse, I Cor. 7:4

#### B. Human sexuality used to illustrate God and His love.

1. Galatians 3:28, summary of the new age, the gospel and its across-the-board availability and equality
2. Ephesians 5:21-31, the Christian home becomes an example of the relationship between Christ and His church (as Hosea 1-3 used Hosea's marriage as a way to explain God's love for Israel)

C. God Himself is described as both male and female.

1. male, so common
  - a. Father, Deut. 1:31; 32:5; Ps. 103:13; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4,19; 31:9; Hos. 11:1; Mal. 3:17
  - b. husband, Hos. 11:3-4
2. female
3. outline
  - a. command for “Spirit-filled life,” Eph. 5:18 (PRESENT PASSIVE IMPERATIVE [also note Col. 3:18-25])
  - b. followed by five PRESENT PARTICIPLES (Eph. 5:19-24)
    - (1) singing
    - (2) psalming
    - (3) making melody
    - (4) giving thanks always
    - (5) submit to one another
  - c. one example (the Christian home)
    - (1) husband and wife (Eph. 5:22-33)
    - (2) parents and children (Eph. 6:1-4)
    - (3) domestic slave owners and domestic slaves (Eph. 6:5-9)
4. Sexuality was given for more than procreation
  - a. pleasure
  - b. mutual self-giving
  - c. emotional well being
  - d. physical needs

B. Singleness

1. It is a spiritual gift and calling, Matt. 19:12; I Cor. 7:7-8,32,34
2. Voluntary, not compulsive and not more spiritual, I Tim. 4:1-5
3. Some notable examples:
  - a. Jeremiah
  - b. John the Baptist
  - c. Jesus
  - d. Paul
  - e. Barnabas
  - f. Philip’s four daughters (Acts 21:8-9)

IV. Mankind’s perversions of God-given human sexuality

A. Pre-marital (fornication) and extra-marital (adultery)

B. Some selected texts

1. I Cor. 6:15-20
2. Gal. 5:19-21
3. Heb. 13:4

- C. Sex (in both thought and act) can become a license to use people as things for personal gratification.
- D. Divorce
  - 1. always second best
  - 2. allowed in the OT, Deut. 24:1-4, but restricted by Jesus, Matt. 5:27-32; 19:3-12
- E. Homosexuality
  - 1. never the will of God
    - a. Lev. 20:13
    - b. Rom. 1:26-27
    - c. I Cor. 6:9-11
  - 2. It is serious because it is a lifestyle sin, but no worse than other lifestyle sexual sins (fornication or adultery or lust). It is not the “unpardonable sin” (which is unbelief).
  - 3. All fallen humans struggle with human sexuality. This powerful, persistent, pervasive desire, instinct, and appetite must be dealt with daily by all of us!
  - 4. Many believers were homosexual partners to pagan temples, but after salvation they were not slaves to it any more, I Cor. 6:9,11

V. Concluding remarks

- A. Sexuality is God’s plan for a completely populated earth.
- B. Sexuality is only for time, not eternity, Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34-36.
- C. Sexuality has been affected by the Fall. Every one of us is naturally a self-centered, selfish person.
- D. Sexuality is meant to help us as redeemed people become more self-controlled (the capstone of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:23). Sex is a good teacher to selfish humans.
- E. Christian parents bear a primary role in helping families, communities, and nations deal with this powerful and pervasive issue. It can be a drag or a ladder. We are models of divine grace. The best sex education is two parents who love each other selflessly!
- F. Sex can be wonderful or awful. It was meant to
  - 1. fill the earth
  - 2. bond two people
  - 3. form the family
  - 4. be enjoyed

**20:7** The VERBAL forms are striking in this message from God given to Abimelech in a dream.

- 1. “restore the man’s wife,” BDB 996, KB 1427, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE, interestingly this is the same VERB used so often in the OT for “repent.”
- 2. “he will pray for you,” BDB 813, KB 933, *Qal* IMPERFECT (possibly used in a JUSSIVE sense). Note God’s forgiveness depended on Abraham’s intercessory prayer (much like Job 42:8). This highlights the special status of Abraham!
- 3. “you will live,” BDB 310, KB 309, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
- 4. “if you do not restore her,” *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE (see #1)
- 5. “know,” BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
- 6. “you shall surely die,” the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 559, KB 562) denote intensity. Sin is associated with “death” (2:17; Exod. 10:17; Num. 18:22).

▣ **“he is a prophet”** This is the first use of this term in the Bible and the only occurrence in Genesis. The term “prophet” (BDB 611) refers to one who receives and gives God’s revelation (cf. Num. 12:6). However, in this context it seems to be connected with intercessory prayer (cf. vv. 7, 17). This is possible because of other biblical references (cf. I Sam. 7:5, 12:19, 23; Job 42:8; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 27:18). Some say that it refers to passing on the revelation of God to his children (cf. 18:19).

## **SPECIAL TOPIC: OT PROPHECY**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **A. Opening Statements**

1. The believing community does not agree on how to interpret prophecy. Other truths have been established as to an orthodox position throughout the centuries, but not this one.
2. There are several well defined stages of OT prophecy
  - a. premonarchial
    - (1) individuals called prophets
      - (a) Abraham - Gen. 20:7
      - (b) Moses - Num. 12:6-8; Deut. 18:15; 34:10
      - (c) Aaron - Exod. 7:1 (spokesman for Moses)
      - (d) Miriam - Exod. 15:20
      - (e) Medad and Eldad - Num. 11:24-30
      - (f) Deborah - Jdgs. 4:4
      - (g) unnamed - Jdgs. 6:7-10
      - (h) Samuel - I Sam. 3:20
    - (2) references to prophets as a group - Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22
    - (3) prophetic group or guild - I Sam. 10:5-13; 19:20; I Kgs. 20:35,41; 22:6,10-13; II Kgs. 2:3,7; 4:1,38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.
    - (4) Messiah called prophet - Deut. 18:15-18
  - b. non-writing monarchial (they address the king)
    - (1) Gad - I Sam. 22:5; II Sam. 24:11; I Chr. 29:29
    - (2) Nathan - II Sam. 7:2; 12:25; I Kgs. 1:22
    - (3) Ahijah - I Kgs. 11:29
    - (4) Jehu - I Kgs. 16:1,7,12
    - (5) unnamed - I Kgs. 18:4,13; 20:13,22
    - (6) Elijah - I Kgs. 18-II Kgs. 2
    - (7) Milcaiah - I Kgs. 22
    - (8) Elisha - II Kgs. 2:8,13
  - c. classical writing prophets (they address the nation as well as the king): Isaiah through Malachi (except Daniel)

#### **B. Biblical Terms**

1. *Ro’eh* = “seer,” I Sam. 9:9. This reference itself shows the transition to the term *Nabi*. *Ro’eh* is from the general term “to see.” This person understood God’s ways and plans and was consulted to ascertain God’s will in a matter.
2. *Hozeh* = “seer,” II Sam. 24:11. It is basically a synonym of *Ro’eh*. It is from a rarer term “to see.” The PARTICIPLE form is used most often to refer to prophets (i.e., “to behold”).

3. *Nabi* = “prophet,” cognate of Akkadian VERB *Nabu* = “to call” and Arabic *Naba’a* = “to announce.” This is the most common term in the Old Testament to designate a prophet. It is used over 300 times. The exact etymology is uncertain but “to call” at present seems the best option. Possibly the best understanding comes from YHWH’s description of Moses’ relationship to Pharaoh through Aaron (cf. Exod. 4:10-16; 7:1; Deut. 5:5. A prophet is someone who speaks for God to His people (Amos 3:8; Jer. 1:7,17; Ezek. 3:4.)
4. All three terms are used of the prophet’s office in I Chr. 29:29; Samuel - *Ro’eh*; Nathan - *Nabi*’ and Gad - *Hozeh*.
5. The phrase, *’ish ha - ’elohim*, “Man of God,” is also a broader designation for a speaker for God. It is used some 76 times in the OT in the sense of “prophet.”
6. The term “prophet” is Greek in origin. It comes from: (1) pro = “before” or “for” and (2) phemi = “to speak.”

## II. DEFINITION OF PROPHECY

- A. The term “prophecy” had a wider semantic field in Hebrew than in English. The history books of Joshua through Kings (except Ruth) are labeled by the Jews as “the former prophets.” Both Abraham (Gen. 20:7; Ps. 105:5) and Moses (Deut. 18:18) are designated as prophets (also Miriam, Exod. 15:20). Therefore, beware of an assumed English definition!
- B. “Propheticism may legitimately be defined as that understanding of history which accepts meaning only in terms of divine concern, divine purpose, divine participation,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 896.
- C. “The prophet is neither a philosopher nor a systematic theologian, but a covenant mediator who delivers the word of God to His people in order to shape their future by reforming their present, “Prophets and Prophecy,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol. 13 p. 1152.

## III. PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

- A. Prophecy is a way for God to speak to His people, providing guidance in their current setting and hope in His control of their lives and world events. Their message was basically corporate. It is meant to rebuke, encourage, engender faith and repentance, and inform God’s people about Himself and His plans. They hold God’s people to fidelity to God’s covenants. To this must be added that often it is used to clearly reveal God’s choice of a spokesman (Deut. 13:1-3; 18:20-22). This, taken ultimately, would refer to the Messiah.
- B. Often, the prophet took a historical or theological crisis of his day and projected this into an eschatological setting. This end time view of history is unique in Israel and its sense of divine election and covenant promises.
- C. The office of prophet seems to balance (Jer. 18:18) and usurp the office of High Priest as a way to know God’s will. The Urim and Thummim transcend into a verbal message from God’s spokesman. The office of prophet seems to also have passed away in Israel after Malachi. It does not reappear until 400 years later with John the Baptist. It is uncertain how the New Testament gift of “prophecy” relates to the Old Testament. New Testament prophets (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1; 14:29,32,37; 15:32; I Cor. 12:10,28-29; Eph. 4:11) are not revealers of new revelation or Scripture, but forth-tellers and foretellers of God’s will in covenant situations.
- D. Prophecy is not exclusively or primarily predictive in nature. Prediction is one way to confirm his office and his message, but it must be noted “less than 2% of OT prophecy is Messianic. Less than

5% specifically describes the New Covenant Age. Less than 1% concerns events yet to come.” (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, p. 166).

- E. Prophets represent God to the people, while Priests represent the people to God. This is a general statement. There are exceptions like Habakkuk, who addresses questions to God.
- F. One reason it is difficult to understand the prophets is because we do not know how their books were structured. They are not chronological. They seem to be thematic, but not always the way one would expect. Often there is no obvious historical setting, time frame or clear division between oracles. These books are difficult (1) to read through in one sitting; (2) to outline by topic; and (3) to ascertain the central truth or authorial intent in each oracle.

#### IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF PROPHECY

- A. In the Old Testament there seems to be a development of the concept of “prophet” and “prophecy.” In early Israel there developed a fellowship of prophets, led by a strong charismatic leader such as Elijah or Elisha. Sometimes the phrase, “the sons of the prophets,” was used to designate this group (II Kings 2). The prophets were characterized by forms of ecstasy (I Sam. 10:10-13; 19:18-24).
- B. However, this period passed rapidly into individual prophets. There were those prophets (both true and false) who identified with the King, and lived at the palace (Gad, Nathan). Also, there were those who were independent, sometimes totally unconnected with the status quo of Israeli society (Amos). They are both male and female (II Kgs. 22:14.)
- C. The prophet was often a revealer of the future, conditioned on man’s immediate response. Often the prophet’s task was an unfolding of God’s universal plan for His creation which is not affected by human response. This universal eschatological plan is unique among the prophets of the Ancient Near East. Prediction and Covenant fidelity are twin foci of the prophetic messages (cf. Fee and Stuart, p. 150). This implies that the prophets are primarily corporate in focus. They usually, but not exclusively, address the nation.
- D. Most prophetic material was orally presented. It was later combined by means of theme, chronology, or other patterns of Near Eastern literature which are lost to us. Because it was oral it is not as structured as written prose. This makes the books difficult to read straight through and difficult to understand without a specific historical setting.
- E. The prophets use several patterns to convey their messages.
  - 1. Court Scene - God takes His people to court, often it is a divorce case where YHWH rejects his wife (Israel) for her unfaithfulness (Hosea 4; Micah 6).
  - 2. Funeral dirge - the special meter of this type of message and its characteristic “woe” sets it apart as a special form (Isaiah 5; Habakkuk 2).
  - 3. Covenant Blessing Pronouncement - the conditional nature of the covenant is emphasized and the consequences, both positive and negative, are spelled out for the future (Deuteronomy 27-28).

#### V. HELPFUL GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING PROPHECY

- A. Find the intent of the original prophet (editor) by noting the historical setting and the literary context of each oracle. Usually it will involve Israel breaking the Mosaic Covenant in some way.
- B. Read and interpret the whole oracle, not just a part; outline it as to content. See how it relates to surrounding oracles. Try to outline the whole book.

- C. Assume a literal interpretation of the passage until something in the text itself points you to figurative usage; then put the figurative language into prose.
- D. Analyze symbolic action in light of historical setting and parallel passages. Be sure to remember this Ancient Near Eastern literature is not western or modern literature.
- E. Treat prediction with care.
  1. Are they exclusively for the author's day?
  2. Were they subsequently fulfilled in Israel's history?
  3. Are they yet future events?
  4. Do they have a contemporary fulfillment and yet a future fulfillment?
  5. Allow the authors of the Bible, not modern authors, to guide your answers.
- F. Special concerns
  1. Is the prediction qualified by conditional response?
  2. Is it certain to whom the prophecy is addressed (and why)?
  3. Is there a possibility both Biblically and/or historically for multiple fulfillment?
  4. The NT authors under inspiration were able to see the Messiah in many places in the OT that are not obvious to us. They seem to use typology or word play. Since we are not inspired we best leave this approach to them.

## VI. HELPFUL BOOKS

- A. *A Guide to Biblical Prophecy* by Carl E. Amending and W. Ward Basque
- B. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart
- C. *My Servants the Prophets* by Edward J. Young
- D. *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* by D. Brent Sandy
- E. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 4, pp. 1067-1078

▣ **“you and all who are yours”** Again we have the emphasis on corporality, which is so common in the OT (cf. 17:27; 19:12). We do not really see an individual element until Ezekiel 18 and Jeremiah 31:31-34, which will characterize the New Covenant.

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 20:8-18**

**<sup>8</sup>So Abimelech arose early in the morning and called all his servants and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were greatly frightened. <sup>9</sup>Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." <sup>10</sup>And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What have you encountered, that you have done this thing?" <sup>11</sup>Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. <sup>12</sup>Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife; <sup>13</sup>and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, "This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'" <sup>14</sup>Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male**



and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him. <sup>15</sup>Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; settle wherever you please." <sup>16</sup>To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, it is your vindication before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared." <sup>17</sup>Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore *children*. <sup>18</sup>For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

**20:8 “arose early in the morning”** This is a Hebrew idiom of the urgency and immediacy (cf. 21:14; 22:3) of responding to God’s expressed will.

▣ **“and the men were greatly frightened”** Not only is the faith of Abimelech seen in vv. 4-6, but the faith of his entire family is expressed in this verse. It makes Abraham’s statement in verse 11a ironical.

**20:9-10** Through a series of three questions Abimelech really shows the inappropriate activity of Abraham, as Pharaoh had done earlier in chapter 12.

**20:10 “encountered”** Some see this as a prophetic vision, but most scholars take this to mean “What have you encountered in the past that has caused you to act this way?”

**20:11-12** Abraham gives three explanations about why he acted as he had. All three of them seem rather inappropriate. The fear or death is also recorded in 12:12 and with Isaac in 26:7.

**20:13 “when God caused me to wander”** In English it almost seems that he is implying that it is God’s fault that he acted this way. It reminds us of how Adam blamed God (cf. Gen. 3:12). However, it is uncertain if we can understand this in this way. What is certain is that the name *Elohim*, which is used here, is followed by the PLURAL VERB (BDB 1073, KB 1766, *Hiphil* PERFECT PLURAL), which is highly unusual when referring to the monotheistic Israelite Deity. Some say that he is getting down on the polytheistic level of Abimelech (S. R. Driver). However, Abimelech seems to be knowledgeable of the one true God also. The rabbis say this PLURAL, though rare, is not uncommon when referring to God (cf 1:26; 11:7; 35:7; II Sam. 7:23). The Church often interprets these OT PLURALS as an incipient form of the doctrine of the Trinity.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE TRINITY**

Notice the activity of all three Persons of the Trinity in vv. 4-6. The term “trinity,” first coined by Tertullian, is not a biblical word, but the concept is pervasive.

- A. the Gospels
  - 1. Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19
  - 2. John 14:26
- B. Acts - Acts 2:32-33, 38-39
  - 1. Paul
  - 2. Romans 1:4-5; 5:1,5; 8:1-4,8-10
  - 3. I Corinthians 2:8-10; 12:4-6
  - 4. II Corinthians 1:21; 13:14

5. Galatians 4:4-6
6. Ephesians 1:3-14,17; 2:18; 3:14-17; 4:4-6
7. I Thessalonians 1:2-5
8. II Thessalonians 2:13
9. Titus 3:4-6

C. Peter - I Peter 1:2

D. Jude - vv. 20-21

It is hinted at in the OT

A. Use of PLURALS for God

1. Name *Elohim* is PLURAL, but when used of God always has a SINGULAR VERB
2. "Us" in Genesis 1:26-27; 3:22; 11:7
3. "One" in Deuteronomy 6:4 is PLURAL (as it is in Gen. 2:24; Ezek. 37:17)

B. The angel of the Lord as a physical representative of Deity

1. Genesis 16:7-13; 22:11-15; 31:11,13; 48:15-16
2. Exodus 3:2,4; 13:21; 14:19
3. Judges 2:1; 6:22-23; 13:3-22
4. Zechariah 3:1-2

C. God and Spirit are separate, Genesis 1:1-2; Psalm 104:30; Isa. 63:9-11; Ezek. 37:13-14

D. God (YHWH) and Messiah (*Adon*) are separate, Psalm 45:6-7; 110:1; Zechariah 2:8-11; 10:9-12

E. Messiah and Spirit are separate, Zechariah 12:10

F. All three mentioned in Isa. 48:16; 61:1

The Deity of Jesus and the personality of the Spirit caused problems for the strict, monotheistic, early believers:

1. Tertullian - subordinated the Son to the Father
2. Origen - subordinated the divine essence of the Son and the Spirit
3. Arius - denied Deity to the Son and Spirit
4. Monarchianism - believed in a successive manifestation of God

The trinity is a historically developed formulation informed by the biblical material

1. The full Deity of Jesus, was equal to the Father, affirmed in 325 A.D. by the Council of Nicea
2. The full personality and Deity of the Spirit equal to the Father and Son was affirmed by the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.)
3. The doctrine of the trinity is fully expressed in Augustine's work *De Trinitate*

There is truly mystery here. But the NT seems to affirm one divine essence with three eternal personal manifestations.

▣ **"this is the kindness which you will show me: everywhere we go"** This seems to show that Abraham and Sarah had made an agreement about this brother and sister ruse from the time that they left Ur of the Chaldeans.

**20:14** This exactly repeats what Pharaoh did for Abraham in 12:16.

It is these doublets that have caused modern western scholars to question a single author for the Pentateuch. The different names for Deity and these doublets caused them to theorize several authors/editors (see Dr. Utley's discussion of this in the introduction [Authorship] of his commentary on Genesis 1-11, available free online at [www.freebiblecommentary.org](http://www.freebiblecommentary.org)). Also note the good brief discussion in *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 118-120.

**20:16 “a thousand pieces of silver”** Most translations assume that the term “shekel” should appear here because it was the normal term for “weight of valuable metal” in the Ancient Near East (see Special Topic at 18:6). There are several other texts where it is assumed but not stated (cf. Gen. 37:28; Jdgs. 17:2,3,4,10).



**NASB, NKJV, “your vindication”**

**NRSV “exoneration”**

**TEV “that you are innocent”**

**NJB “you have been completely vindicated”**

It is uncertain whether or not there are two separate gifts given by Abimelech, one to Abraham (v. 14) and one to Sarah (v. 16), or simply one gift, the monetary value of which is recorded in this verse. I personally believe that there are two separate gifts. The phrase, “your vindication” is literally “for you a covering of the eyes” (CONSTRUCT BDB 492 & 744), which is a Hebrew idiom to show that Sarah was completely innocent and was compensated for the embarrassment.

**20:17 “God healed Abimelech”** We do not know the exact disease that came upon Abimelech and his family, but it caused the birth of children to be impossible. Apparently this was one way that God protected Abimelech from having relations with Sarah. Also, from vv. 17 and 18, we see that barrenness was considered a divine curse. This is one reason that Abraham had such a hard time believing God's words of grace when Sarah was barren.

**20:18 “the LORD closed fast all the wombs”** This is the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 783 & 870), which intensifies the action of the VERB.

This clause is the only place in chapter 20 where the covenant name for Deity, YHWH, is used. In context (v. 17) it is parallel with *Elohim*. The Samaritan Pentateuch and some LXX manuscripts have *Elohim*.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Abraham represent Sarah as his sister?
2. How do you explain this being done twice to Sarah and once to Rebekah?
3. Why is Sarah's protection so theologically significant?

# GENESIS 21

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Isaac Is Born	Isaac Is Born	Isaac and Ishmael	The Birth of Isaac	The Birth of Isaac
21:1-7	21:1-7	21:1-7	21:1-7	21:1-7  (6-7)
	Hagar and Ishmael Depart			The Dismissal of Hagar and Ishmael
21:8	21:8-14	21:8-14	21:8	21:8-14a
Sarah Turns Against Hagar			Hagar and Ishmael are Sent Away	
21:9-14			21:9-13  21:14-16	21:14b-16
21:15-19	21:15-21	21:15-19		
			21:17-21	21:17-19
21:20-21		21:20-21		21:20-21
Covenant With Abimelech	A Covenant With Abimelech	Abraham's Dispute with Abimelech	The Agreement Between Abraham and Abimelech	Abraham and Abimelech at Beersheba
21:22-26	21:22-34	21:22-24	21:22-23  21:24	21:22-24
		21:25-34	21:25-29	21:25-31
21:27-34			21:30-31  21:32-34	21:32-34

### **READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)**

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph

2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised. <sup>2</sup>So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup>Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. <sup>4</sup>Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup>Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup>Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." <sup>7</sup>And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

#### 21:1

NASB "Then the LORD took note of Sarah"

NKJV "and the LORD visited Sarah"

NRSV "the LORD dealt with Sarah"

TEV "the LORD blessed Sarah"

NJB "Yahweh treated Sarah as he had said"

YHWH is repeated twice for emphasis. This child was by His enabling! The VERB is literally "visited" (BDB 823, KB 955, *Qal* PERFECT). This is often used of God drawing near to someone either for blessing or judgment. In the positive sense one may note Gen. 15:24-25 and Exod. 13:19. However, it must be noted that this word is usually used in the sense of judgment.

▣ "as He had promised" This seems to specifically refer to Genesis 18:10-15. Sarah delivering (v. 2; Heb. 11:11) the special child of promise is implied in God's promises to Abraham in chapters 12, 15, and 17.

21:2 "at the appointed time" This refers specifically to 17:21 and 18:10, 14. I believe that it refers to the nine month gestation period.

21:3 "Isaac" His name was given in 17:19, 21. It comes from the word for "laughter" (BDB 850) and is connected to Abraham's laughter in 17:17 and Sarah's laughter in 18:15.

21:4 "Abraham circumcised his son Isaac" This was the sign of the covenant mandated by YHWH. It was done when the child was eight days old as God had commanded (cf. 17:9-14). From Gen. 17:25, the Arabs developed the practice of circumcising their children at age thirteen, in line with the circumcision of Ishmael. All of the people of the Ancient Near East circumcised their children, but at different ages and for different purposes. Only the Philistines and Hivites were uncircumcized (i.e., chapter 34).

**21:5** Again, Abraham's age (cf. 17:17) is given to show the grace of God in His promise, not human strength or effort.

**21:6** There is a word play on

1. Abraham and Sarah's expressed doubt about the Lord's revelation in 17:17 and 18:12 by laughing
2. the child is named "laughter"
3. laughter was the outward sign of the joy of Sarah finally having a child of her own and people congratulating her by laughing with her
4. laughter is used in a negative sense in v. 9 of Hagar's attitude toward Isaac

**21:7 "Sarah will nurse children"** The term "children" is PLURAL. Hebrew has so many unexpected PLURALS. It must have been a way to show (1) things that come in pairs (eyes, ears, hands) and (2) intensity (i.e., PLURAL OF MAJESTY).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:8-14**

**<sup>8</sup>The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. <sup>9</sup>Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. <sup>10</sup>Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." <sup>11</sup>The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. <sup>12</sup>But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. <sup>13</sup>And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant." <sup>14</sup>So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave *them* to Hagar, putting *them* on her shoulder, and gave *her* the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.**

**21:8 "The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast"** We understand from the literature of the day that there was a feast commonly held at the weaning of a child (i.e., old enough to assure it would survive). This weaning could have been at the age of two or three (cf. II Macc. 7:27).

**21:9 "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking"** The NKJV has "scoffing," while NRSV and TEV have "playing." The LXX adds "playing with her son." This Hebrew term means "laughter" (BDB 850), but in the *Piel* stem (KB 1019) can mean "to jest or make sport of" (cf. 19:14; Exod. 32:6; Jdgs. 16:23), but because of Gal. 4:29, and because of Hagar's mocking in 16:4, 5, it probably means "mocking" or "bringing reproach." The rabbis quote II Sam. 2:14 and Pro. 26:19 as examples of the negative use of this term.

**21:10 "drive out this maid and her son"** This VERB is another *Piel* (BDB 176, KB 204) and an IMPERATIVE (cf. Gal. 4:30). According to the Nuzi Tablets, this was an illegal act. However, from earlier legal documents called "Lipit-ishtar" either sharing the inheritance or giving them their freedom was a legal way to deal with the children of concubines.

**21:11** Abraham loved Ishmael (cf. 17:18), as does YHWH (cf. 17:20; 21:3,18,20). Abraham felt this demand by Sarah was inappropriate and perhaps even wrong (cf. Num. 11:10; I Sam. 1:8).

**21:12** God gives Abraham two commands.

1. “Do not be distressed,” BDB 949, KB 1269, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense. This VERB is used in v. 11 to describe Abraham’s reaction to Sarah’s request (command).
2. “Listen to her,” BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, “hear”).

▣ **“whatever Sarah tells you”** Implied in this is that God accepted Sarah’s assessment of the situation. This does not mean that Sarah’s attitude was appropriate. However, on the other hand, we do not fully know the situation. Maybe she, like Rebekah (later in chapter 27), was trying to protect the covenant promise.

**21:13 “because he is your descendant”** God will bless Ishmael because of his father, Abraham. His life is described in prophecy in 16:11-12. Ishmael’s relationship to Abraham was the source of his blessing as Lot’s was in 19:29.

**21:14 “skin of water”** This term (CONSTRUCT BDB 332 and BDB 565) occurs only in this chapter in the OT (cf. vv. 14,15,19). It refers to a sheepskin or sheep stomach, sewed in such a way as to become a water container.

▣ **“putting them on her shoulder”** Both the Septuagint and the Syriac translate this in such a way that it implies that they also put Ishmael on her back. It seems from the context that Ishmael must have been between 15 and 17 years old, much too heavy to be carried by his mother, therefore, this is probably an idiom for preparing for a journey.

▣ **“wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba”** See verse 31.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:15-19**

<sup>15</sup>When the water in the skin was used up, she left the boy under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup>Then she went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away, for she said, "Do not let me see the boy die." And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice and wept. <sup>17</sup>God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. <sup>18</sup>Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." <sup>19</sup>Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink.

**21:15**

NASB, TEV      “left”  
NKJV            “placed”  
NRSV            “cast”  
NJB              “abandoned”

The term (BDB 1020) denotes an abandoning (Exod. 1:22; Isa. 71:9; Jer. 38:6,9; Ezek. 16:5), which expects death.

**21:16 “a bowshot away”** This rare VERB (BDB 377, KB 373, *Polel* PARTICIPLE) is found only here in the OT.



▣ **“and lifted up her voice and wept”** There is some confusion in the text here because the Angel of the Lord said He heard the lad crying and only the mother’s voice is mentioned. However, we must remember that this is only a brief summary of the situation and all of the action is not included. The Angel of the Lord spoke to Hagar again as He had in 16:6ff which shows the love of God even for those peripherally connected with Abraham.

**21:17-18** God addresses Hagar.

1. “What is the matter with you?” (no VERB)
2. “Do not fear,” BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* IMPERFECT used as a JUSSIVE, cf. same root in 15:1; 26:24; 46:3
3. “Arise,” BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. “Lift up the lad,” BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
5. “Hold him by the hand,” BDB 304, KB 302, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE, this implies care for him, sustaining him.

**21:17** Also notice how *Elohim* and the Angel of the LORD are identified (i.e., they speak from heaven), yet are separate (cf. Exod. 3:2; 4). See Special Topic: The Angel of the Lord at 12:7.

▣ **“for God has heard”** This is a play on Ishmael’s name (cf. 16:11). The VERB “hear” (BDB 1033), “Ishmael” (BDB 1035), and “God hears” are obviously from the same root.

**21:18 “for I will make a great nation of him”** The VERB (BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means “to set” or “to place,” cf. 21:13; 46:3. This is not the same VERB (BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense) used in YHWH’s promise to Abram in 12:2 nor 18:18 (BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE).

**21:19** One wonders if v. 19 is a miracle of sight or the provision of a previously non-existent water source. This same term is used in Gen. 3:5 and II Kgs. 6:15-19.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:20-21**

<sup>20</sup>God was with the lad, and he grew; and he lived in the wilderness and became an archer. <sup>21</sup>He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

**21:20** The metaphor “God was with the lad” is also used of Jacob (Gen. 28:15) and Joseph (Gen. 39:2,3,21). It expresses YHWH’s personal care and presence (note 21:22). Ishmael shared in the blessing of Abraham!

**21:21 “and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt”** This was obviously meant to be done by the father, but in this case Hagar chose a wife for Ishmael from her own people.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:22-26**

<sup>22</sup>Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, “God is with you in all that you do; <sup>23</sup>now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned.” <sup>24</sup>Abraham said, “I swear it.” <sup>25</sup>But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the

**well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. <sup>26</sup>And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor did I hear of it until today."**

**21:22 “Abimelech and Phicol”** These same two names are mentioned in Gen. 26:26 in connection with Isaac and problems over this very same well at Beersheba. The names are general names for the king and the commander, these men lived quite a long time, or there has been confusion in the Hebrew text of Genesis (i.e., editors).

▣ **“God is with you in all that you do”** This is said not only of Abraham, but also of Isaac (cf. Gen. 26:28).

**21:25 “but Abraham complained to Abimelech”** The word here seems to be “chided” (BDB 406, KB 410, *Hiphil* PERFECT). The controversy over wells was common in this semi-arid desert region. Abimelech’s answer shows that he was not aware of the problem and still wanted a covenant with Abraham (“swear,” BDB 989, KB 1396, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE, v. 23).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 21:27-34**

<sup>27</sup>Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. <sup>28</sup>Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. <sup>29</sup>Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?" <sup>30</sup>He said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand so that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well." <sup>31</sup>Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath. <sup>32</sup>So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines. <sup>33</sup>Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. <sup>34</sup>And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.

**21:27 “the two of them made a covenant”** Apparently the animals of v. 27 were cut in half in order to make this covenant (see Special Topic: Covenant at 13:14).

**21:28 “seven ewe lambs”** It is obvious that this is a separate group from v. 27, apparently in connection with the well at Beersheba. The name “Beersheba” comes from two possible origins: (1) “the well of seven,” 21:28 or (2) “the well of an oath” in 26:33 (“seven” [BDB 987] and “swear” [BDB 989] are similar in Hebrew).

**21:32 “the Philistines”** Many commentators note that the Philistines had not yet entered the land in great numbers. Although this is quite true, the mercenary nature of these Aegean people shows that they could have been in this region in small numbers before the 12th century B.C., for that is when they settled here after a thwarted invasion of Egypt. It is also possible that this is an anachronism.

**21:33 “planted a tamarisk tree”** This symbolized two things.

1. The presence of underground water often associated with sacred sites (God provides water for Hagar, Ishmael, and also for Abraham).
2. Abraham, the nomad, planned to stay here for an extended period.

▣ **“he called on the name of the LORD”** The name is the covenant name of Deity, YHWH (BDB 42). This implies a worship setting (cf. 4:26; 12:8). It is similar to what Noah did in Gen. 8:20.

▣ **“the everlasting God”** This name for God is found only here. It is made up of the Hebrew words *El* (BDB 42) and *'olam* (BDB 761). The term *El* is combined with several other titles in the early parts of Genesis to show the nature of God: (1) *El Shaddai* (BDB 42 and 994), 17:1; 43:14 and Exodus 3; (2) *El Elyon* (BDB 42 and 751 II), 14:18-24; (3) *El Roi* (BDB 42 and 909), 16:13; (4) *El Bethel* (BDB 42 and 110), 31:13; 35:7. *El* was the general name for God in the Ancient Near East (see Special Topic at 12:1).

The name *'olam* (BDB 761) means “that which is hidden” and refers either to the past or the future. It is used in the sense of “everlasting,” but the meaning must be specifically ascertained from the context (see Special Topic at 13:14).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Is chapter 20 a negative comment about Abraham?
2. Did Abimelech also know Adonai?
3. Why did Abimelech take Sarah as his wife when she was so old and who even describes herself as “worn out” (cf 18:12)?
4. What does the term “prophet” mean and how does Abraham qualify for this title?
5. List the three reasons that Abraham gives in vv. 11-13 for his trying to trick Abimelech.
6. Why did Sarah demand that Hagar and Ishmael leave?

# GENESIS 22

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
The Offering of Isaac  22:1-8	Abraham's Faith Confirmed  22:1-2  22:3-8	The Testing of Abraham  22:1-8	God Commands Abraham to Offer Isaac  22:1  22:2  22:3-5  22:6-7a  22:7b  22:7c  22:8	Abraham's Sacrifice  22:1-2  22:3-5  22:6-8
22:9-14	22:9-14	22:9-14	22:9-11a  22:11b  0.925  22:13-14	22:9-10  22:11-14
22:15-19	22:15-19	22:15-19	22:15-19	22:15-18  22:19
22:20-24	22:20-24  The Family of Nahor	22:20-24  The Descendants of Abraham's Brother Nahor	22:20-24  The Descendants of Nahor	22:20-24  The Descendants of Nahor

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:1-8

<sup>1</sup>Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>2</sup>He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." <sup>3</sup>So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. <sup>4</sup>On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. <sup>5</sup>Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." <sup>6</sup>Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. <sup>7</sup>Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" <sup>8</sup>Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

**22:1 "God"** This is the Hebrew word *Elohim*. This is one of the common names for God which is found in the early parts of Genesis. We are uncertain of its etymology, but because of the play on words found in Gen. 31:29, it seems to be related to the phrase "be strong." Critical scholarship of the 18th and 19th centuries have used the terms *Elohim* and YHWH, found in different chapters of the book of Genesis, to postulate a documentary hypothesis of several sources. However, the rabbis say that the distinction between these names is found in the character of God which they represent. *Elohim* represents God's power and concern as Creator, while YHWH represents God's covenant mercies. I think the rabbinical explanation is much to be preferred.

▣ **"tested Abraham"** The term "test" (BDB 650, KB 702, *Piel* PERFECT) is used in the sense of "to try." It is used in the sense of bringing someone to the place whereby they recognize and act on their own stated priorities. It is obvious from Genesis 12 through 22 that God is presenting Abraham with a series of situations (the rabbis say ten) in order to focus his love and trust into God and God alone. These tests were not so much for God's sake, but for Abraham's sake and his understanding of the God who called him out of Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham is asked to give up family, home, friends, inheritance, tradition and even the future (his promised son) to follow God by faith. God tests all of His children in the area of their priority (cf. Matt. 4:1ff; Heb. 5:8; 12:5-13).

God tests (BDB 650) in order to know (BDB 393). Israel often tested God by their disobedience and God proved to be true to His word. Now God will give Israel and her people a chance to demonstrate their spoken allegiance and faith.

1. God tested His people corporately
  - a. Exod. 15:25; 16:4; 20:20
  - b. Deut. 8:2,16; 13:3
  - c. Jdgs. 2:22; 3:1,4
2. God tested individual Israelites
  - a. Abraham, Gen. 12:1,12
  - b. Hezekiah, II Chr. 32:31

The Psalm writers cry out for God to test them so as to remove any hidden flaws (cf. 26:2; 139:23). The NT people of God are equally tested, as was Jesus (Matthew 4; Luke 4; Heb. 5:8).

▣ **“and said”** This chapter is a series of dialogs. Notice the number of times “say/said” (BDB 55, KB 65) is used.

- |                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. v. 1, three | 6. v. 9, one   |
| 2. v. 2, two   | 7. v. 11, two  |
| 3. v. 3, one   | 8. v. 12, one  |
| 4. v. 5, one   | 9. v. 16, one  |
| 5. v. 7, five  | 10. v. 20, one |

▣ **“Abraham”** God changed his name from Abram, which means “exalted father,” to Abraham, which means “father of a multitude.” God is about to ask Abraham to do something that will jeopardize his new name! The Septuagint doubles God’s address to Abraham, but the Hebrew manuscript has only a single “Abraham” in v. 1, while the double is in v. 11.

▣ **“Here I am”** This is a Hebrew idiom of availability (cf. v. 11; Exod. 3:4; I Sam. 3:4; Isa. 6:8).

**22:2** Notice the series of commands given to Abraham concerning Isaac.

1. “Take now your son,” BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. “Go to the land of Moriah,” BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (it is interesting to note that this VERB in this form is found only here and Gen. 12:1, which links these two tests as promise and fulfillment [also note v. 18 and 12:3])
3. “Offer him there,” BDB 748, KB 828, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE

▣ **“Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac”** This seems to be a purposeful series of phrases referring specifically to Isaac, the special son of promise. Also notice that he is the “only” (BDB 402) son (cf. vv. 2,12,16). Ishmael was not the son of promise and he has been sent away! All of Abraham’s hope for descendants is in this boy, and YHWH directs him to sacrifice!

▣ **“to the land of Moriah”** This term (BDB 599) has been translated many ways.

1. the Vulgate and the Samaritan Pentateuch have “visions”
2. the Targums translate it as “worship”
3. the Septuagint has “high”
4. the Peshitta has “of the Amonites”
5. some scholars translate it as “shown of YHWH”
6. others “the chosen”
7. still others “the place of appearing”

It seems that “the place of appearing” might be the best possible translation based on the other use of this term in II Chr. 3:1, which mentions that the temple was built on Mt. Moriah, the place where God appeared to David. This can either refer to II Sam. 24:16 or more probably, I Chr. 21:18-30. The mention of Abraham offering Isaac in that context is either omitted because it was so well known or it was unknown to the author of I Chronicles. Also Moriah seems to relate to the city of Melchizedek, Salem (14:18), later called Jebus, which became Jerusalem.

▣ **“a burnt offering”** This is the Hebrew term “holocaust” which means “a completely burned sacrifice” (BDB 750). Not only did it involve ritually cutting his throat, but also ritually butchering him. What a shocking command from the Deity who promised him a son and caused him to send Ishmael away! Abraham must trust God without understanding, much like the Numbers 21 incident alluded to in John 3:14.

**22:3 “Abraham rose early in the morning”** Notice that there is no hesitation or questioning on Abraham’s part recorded, but what a bad night it must have been. Whether this is an omission or a sign of the development of Abraham’s faith is uncertain. Abraham is certainly not perfect, but the greatness of his trust in God can surely be seen in this account. This was the climactic test of trust.

**22:4 “on the third day”** The distance between Beersheba and Mt. Moriah is about a two and a half days walk, but with a donkey and the other supplies, it may have taken longer.

**22:5** Notice the commands to his servants and the description of his intent.

1. “stay here,” BDB 442, KB 444, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. “I and the lad will go yonder,” BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
3. “we will worship,” BDB 1005, KB 295, *Hishtaphel* COHORTATIVE
4. “we will return to you,” BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* COHORTATIVE

▣ **“we will worship and return to you”** Abraham’s faith in God is so certain that Heb. 11:17-19 assumes that Isaac will be raised from the dead if necessary in order to accompany Abraham back to their home. This is in line with God’s previous promise to Abraham in 21:12 that Abraham would have descendants through Isaac. Although Abraham did not understand the how or why, he certainly knew and understood the God who was able.

**22:6 “Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son”** There are many connections between what happens to Isaac and what later happens to Jesus. Personally, I am nervous about any allegory and typology which is not mentioned specifically in the NT because of how much it has been abused by commentators throughout the life of the church. There is obviously an allusion between Isaac and Jesus. What God would not allow Abraham to do to Isaac, He did Himself to His own Son. I think we can understand something of the intensity of the love of God when we empathize with the love and faith of Abraham.

▣ **“the fire and the knife”** Whether this fire refers to the coals of the previous night’s campfire or to the small bag of flint and kindling is uncertain. The knife is the term for a “butcher knife” (BDB 38), a very large knife which was used for cooking purposes (cf. Jdgs. 19:29; Pro. 30:14).

**22:7 “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering”** Isaac’s question must have cut Abraham to the heart, to which Abraham expresses his faith in God so beautifully in v. 8. The fact that Isaac was acquainted with sacrifices shows that the sacrificial system predates the Mosaic legislation. This can be seen (1) in Cain and Abel (Genesis 4); (2) in Noah (Genesis 9); and (3) in Job (Job 1:42).

**22:8 “and Abraham said, ‘God will provide for Himself the lamb’”** The phrase “God will provide” later becomes a name for God in v. 14 (“YHWH,” BDB 217 and “see,” BDB 906). We have seen how common it is for the acts of God to result in a new name to describe His character and actions. The Hebrew term

“will provide” is really “will see to it” (BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERFECT), but it came to be used in this specialized sense (the One who sees is the One who provides).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:9-14**

**“Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup>Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup>But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” <sup>12</sup>He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” <sup>13</sup>Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. <sup>14</sup>Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.”**

**22:9 “Abraham built the altar there, and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar”** We see something, not only of the great faith of Abraham, but of the great faith of Isaac. Isaac was apparently old enough to carry the wood up the hill and he was old enough to resist being tied up by his father. I am sure that this incident caused hours of religious discussion later between Abraham and Isaac.

The VERB “bind” (BDB 785, KB 873, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is found only here in the OT. The same root (BDB 785) means to bend or twist. Therefore, it is assumed to mean twist the legs of a sacrificial animal so as to tie them together.

**22:10 “Abraham stretched out his hand”** This apparently refers to the ritual act of slitting the throat of the sacrificial animal.

**22:11 “but the angel of the LORD”** It is obvious when we read vv. 11 and 12 together that this “angel of the LORD” is the personification of God Himself (cf. Gen. 16:7-13; 18:1; 19:1; 21:17, 19; 22:11-15; 31:11, 13; 32:24, 30; 48:15-16; Exod. 3:2, 4; 13:21; 14:19; Jdgs. 6:12, 14; and Zech. 3:1, 2). But, notice how in v. 12 the angel refers to “God.” It is difficult to affirm a strict monotheism with all the other spiritual entities mentioned in Genesis (i.e., “Spirit” in Gen. 1:2; “Let us” in Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; “the angel of the LORD above,” and also note “the LORD says to my Lord” in Ps. 110:1). How all these inter-relate is a mystery. Christians affirm, along with Jews, the monotheism expressed in Deut. 6:4. See Special Topic: The Trinity at 20:13.

**22:12** There are two negative commands.

1. “do not stretch our your hand against the lad,” BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Qal* IMPERFECT, but used in a JUSSIVE sense
2. “do nothing to him,” BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* JUSSIVE

The following PERFECTS show that YHWH is fully satisfied with Abraham’s trusting faith.

1. “for now I know,” BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* PERFECT
2. “since you have not withheld your son,” BDB 362, KB 359, *Qal* PERFECT

The repetitive phrases referring to Isaac are found in v. 2 and repeated in v. 12 (cf. v. 16).



Just a word about “now I know.” Does this call into question YHWH’s foreknowledge or is this a literary way of showing approval to Abraham’s faith? I understand it in the second sense. I am uncomfortable with Open Theism.



**NASB, NKJV,**  
**NRSV, NJB** “fear”  
**TEV** “honor”  
**Peshitta** “reveres”  
**REB** “a god-fearing man”

This term (BDB 431) occurs often in the OT. It can mean “fear” (cf. Gen. 3:10; 18:15; 20:8; 28:17; 32:8; 42:35; 43:18), but in certain contexts it transitions to “awe,” “respect,” or “honor” when describing a human’s attitude toward Deity. Note the following texts: Gen. 42:18; Exod. 1:17; 9:30; 18:21; Lev. 19:14,32; 25:17,36,43; Deut. 6:2,24; 10:12,20; 14:23; 17:19; 25:18; 28:58; 31:12-13; Ps. 33:8. This “fear” should issue in worship and obedience. It is a lifestyle relationship, not a set of isolated events, places, creeds, or rules. Obedience flows from respect and love, not fear of reprisal. Disobedience is primarily against love, as well as law! One’s relationship with God becomes the priority of life! The “Abraham believed God” (Gen. 15:56) has been demonstrated in life!

### 22:13

**NASB, RSV** “behind *him* a ram”  
**NKJV** “and there behind *him* was a ram”  
**NRSV, TEV** “a ram”

There are variations in the Hebrew manuscripts at this point. The MT has the ADVERB “behind” (אחֲרָי, BDB 29), but some Hebrew manuscripts and the Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, and Peshitta have “one” (אֶחָד, BDB 25), translated “a” ram.

▣ **“in place of his son”** God did not ask Abraham to sacrifice the ram, but Abraham on his own behalf and with thanksgiving, offered it to God on the very mountain that would one day be the site of Solomon’s temple. This may be the incipient form of sacrifice as the substitutionary act that is later developed, not only in the Mosaic legislation, but also supremely in the sacrifice of Christ (cf. Isaiah 53 and John 1:29; the book of Hebrews; I Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 5:11-14).

**22:14 “as it is to this day”** This may be the literary marker of a later editor. It could even be Moses, or Moses’ priestly scribe. I personally think that much of Genesis, up to Joseph’s day, comes from Patriarchal oral or written traditions.

▣ **“Abraham called the name of the place The LORD Will Provide”** This seems to be based on God’s act and Abraham’s answer to Isaac in v. 8.

▣ **“in the mount of the LORD it will be provided”** This seems to be a foreshadowing of the place God will cause His Name to dwell (cf. Deuteronomy, i.e., the temple on Mt. Moriah).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:15-19**

**<sup>15</sup>Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, <sup>16</sup>and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup>indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. <sup>18</sup>In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." <sup>19</sup>So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.**

**22:16 "By Myself I have sworn"** This is the only time in the book of Genesis where God swears by Himself in relationship to the covenant. This becomes a major theological point for Heb. 6:13-18. Notice that it is an unconditional promise based on God's love, but it is in response to Abraham's great act of faith (i.e., "because you obeyed My voice," v. 18). The unconditional/conditional nature of the covenants of the Bible seem to be related to God's unconditional love, but human's conditional response.

**22:17 "indeed I will greatly bless you"** There are two grammatical structures which denote emphasis in this verse.

1. The *Piel* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and the *Piel* IMPERFECT VERB of the same root, "bless" (BDB 138, KB 159), therefore, translated "I will greatly bless you."
2. The *Hiphil* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and the *Hiphil* IMPERFECT VERB of the same root, "multiply" or "make many" (BDB 915, KB 1176), therefore, translated "I will greatly multiply your seed."

This seems to go back to the beginning promise to Abraham in chapter 12 (as it was in the initial creation), the promise of a seed and of a land. The NT emphasizes the promise of the seed and de-emphasizes the promise of the land.

▣ **"I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore"** These are two of several metaphors used to describe the multitudinous nature of Abraham's descendants (cf. dust, Gen. 13:16; 28:14; Num. 23:10; stars, Gen. 15:5; 26:4; and sand, Gen. 32:12).

▣ **"and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies"** The gate symbolized the security of the ancient, walled cities. To secure someone's gate meant to capture their city. Therefore, this is a metaphor for the military victory of the descendants of Abraham against all those who would be against them. This same metaphor is used in the NT in Matthew 16 for "the gates of hell shall not overcome the church."

From the Prophets we know that even these promises are conditional on Israel's obedience, as they were on Abraham's obedience (cf. 15:6; 22:16,18). YHWH's promises have been abrogated by Israel's continual disobedience and idolatry. We must remember that the primary focus in Scripture is God's character and faithfulness. However, it must also be said that His desire is that His people reflect His character to an unbelieving world (i.e., the nations) so that they also can respond to Him!

**22:18 "in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed"** The grammatical and theological issue involved is how to translate the *Niphal* and *Hithpael* PERFECTS of the VERB "bless" (BDB 138, KB 159) that seem to be parallel in

1. Gen. 12:3, *Niphal* PERFECT
2. Gen. 18:18, *Niphal* PERFECT
3. Gen. 22:18, *Hithpael* PERFECT

4. Gen. 26:4, *Hithpael* PERFECT

5. Gen. 28:14, *Niphal* PERFECT

The *Niphal* stem is usually PASSIVE (this VERB appears only in Genesis texts translated as PASSIVES), but can function as REFLEXIVE or RECIPROCAL. The *Hithpael* stem is REFLEXIVE or RECIPROCAL (cf. Deut. 29:18; Ps. 72:17; Isa. 65:16 [twice]; Jer. 4:2).

The NT quotes of this crucial promise are PASSIVES. See Acts 3:25 and Gal. 3:8. The question relates to the missionary mandate of Israel to be a “kingdom of priests” for the nations (cf. Exod. 19:5-6). Although this is not stated unambiguously until the eighth century prophets, it is assumed and alluded to in these Genesis texts.

In one sense Israel was to provide the information about God (through their obedient lifestyle observance of the Mosaic law). Ultimately the nations had to respond and trust the trustworthiness of YHWH (as Abraham did, cf. Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23). They must recognize and respond to the revelation provided by YHWH to and through Israel. If Israel was disobedient, instead of the witness of abundance as well as a stable society, all the nations saw only the judgment side of YHWH. Israel has failed in her missionary mandate and it has passed to the church (i.e., “the Great Commission,” Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8)!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 22:20-24**

**<sup>20</sup>Now it came about after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, "Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: <sup>21</sup>Uz his firstborn and Buz his brother and Kemuel the father of Aram <sup>22</sup>and Chesed and Hazo and Pildash and Jidlaph and Bethuel." <sup>23</sup>Bethuel became the father of Rebekah; these eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. <sup>24</sup>His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah and Gaham and Tahash and Maacah.**

**22:20-24** This family genealogy seems to be somewhat unusual here, but in reality it is very significant in laying the groundwork for Isaac’s future bride, Rebekah, who will be mentioned in v. 23.

**22:23 “Bethuel”** This name means “man of God” (BDB 143 D).

▣ **“Rebekah”** It is possible that the Hebrew etymology of this name (BDB 918) means “to tie up an animal” and thereby came to mean “the place of tying” or when used of a woman “an ensnaring one.” The rabbis see this as meaning that Rebekah’s beauty was enticing and she “tied up” Isaac’s affection.

**22:24 “Reumah”** This word (BDB 910) has two possible meanings: (1) “to be raised,” which seems to be appropriate since she was raised from a slave to a concubine or (2) “pearl” or “coral,” which seems to be a closer correlation to the Hebrew term.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Does God really test His children? If so, why?
2. What is the meaning of the term “Moriah” and where is it located?
3. Why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice the son of promise?
4. Why are vv. 20-24 included in this passage?

# GENESIS 23

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Death and Burial of Sarah	Sarah's Death and Burial	Abraham's Purchase of a Family Burial Place	Sarah Dies and Abraham buys a Burial Ground	The Tomb of the Patriarchs
23:1-16	23:1-16	23:1-16	23:1-2 23:3-4 23:5-6 23:7-9 23:10-11 23:12-13 23:14-16	23:1-2 23:3-6 23:7-11 23:12-16
23:17-20	23:17-20	23:17-20	23:17-18 23:19-20	23:17-20

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:1-16**

<sup>1</sup>Now Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; *these were* the years of the life of Sarah. <sup>2</sup>Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. <sup>3</sup>Then Abraham rose from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of

Heth, saying, <sup>4</sup>"I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me a burial site among you that I may bury my dead out of my sight." <sup>5</sup>The sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, <sup>6</sup>"Hear us, my lord, you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead." <sup>7</sup>So Abraham rose and bowed to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. <sup>8</sup>And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your wish *for me* to bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and approach Ephron the son of Zohar for me, <sup>9</sup>that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he owns, which is at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site." <sup>10</sup>Now Ephron was sitting among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the sons of Heth; *even* of all who went in at the gate of his city, saying, <sup>11</sup>"No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead." <sup>12</sup>And Abraham bowed before the people of the land. <sup>13</sup>He spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If you will only please listen to me; I will give the price of the field, accept *it* from me that I may bury my dead there." <sup>14</sup>Then Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, <sup>15</sup>"My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you? So bury your dead." <sup>16</sup>Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, commercial standard.

**23:1** The rabbis say that when Abraham returned home and told Sarah what he had done, in response she issued seven loud cries and died. Her death is recorded in chapter 23. Whether this is true or not, we can certainly see where the rabbis got their interpretation!

**23:2** “Kiriath-arba” This name (BDB 900) is made up of

1. “Kiriath” means “city”
2. “Arba”
  - a. usually translated “city of four” (i.e., Anak and his three sons or four villages together)
  - b. the same root means ambush (BDB 70)
  - c. a person’s name, one of the Anakim, Josh. 14:15; 15:13; 21:11

See Special Topic: Giants at 14:5.

▣ “Abraham went in to mourn Sarah and weep for her” One wonders how long this mourning and negotiating with the locals lasted. The body of Sarah would deteriorate quickly in this climate (see the chapter on Death and Funeral Rites” in *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions*, vol. 1 by Roland deVaux, pp 56-61). Today in Israel (which still does not embalm) one must be buried within twenty four hours.

**23:3-13** What follows through the rest of the chapter is a record of the dialogue (using formalized and standard Oriental customs) between the local inhabitants near Hebron and Abraham. Note the formalities expressed in IMPERATIVES (note paragraphing of TEV).

1. “give me,” v. 3, BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* IMPERATIVE in the sense of a request
2. “burial site,” v. 3 (lit. possession for a burying place), BDB 868, KB 1064, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
3. “hear,” v. 6, BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (used by the sons of Heth to Abraham)
4. “bury your dead,” v. 6, BDB 868, KB 1064, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (this was not what Abraham wanted to do, i.e., bury Sarah on one of their lands)
5. “hear,” v. 8, same as #3, but Abraham speaks to them
6. “approach” (or entreat), v. 8, BDB 803, KB 910, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (as request)

7. “give,” v. 9, BDB 678, KB 733
  - a. *Qal* JUSSIVE
  - b. *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense  
(Ephron responds in v. 11 [three *Qal* PERFECTS], but this is not a literal offer of a gift of the land, rather part of the expected negotiations; it basically denotes a pending sale)
8. “hear,” v. 11, same as #3 and #5 (Ephron speaks to Abraham and offers the cave and the field)
9. “bury,” v. 11, same as #4
10. “listen” (lit. “hear”), v. 13, same as #3,5,8 (Abraham speaks to Ephron)
11. “hear,” v. 15, same as #3,5,10 (Ephron speaks to Abraham in such a way about the price of the field that all negotiation over the price is excluded, and this was apparently a high price)

Much of this dialogue seems formal or repetitious to us, but it was the expected protocol of Canaanite society in the second millennium B.C.

**23:3 “the sons of Heth”** The name Heth (תת, BDB 366) is an ancestor of the Hittites (תת, BDB 366, cf. Gen. 10:15; I Chr. 1:13). See Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine at 12:6.

**23:4 “a stranger and a sojourner”** These two terms have different connotations, but are probably here a hendiadys.

1. “a stranger” (BDB 158) implies an alien resident, cf. Gen. 15:13; Exod. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19; 23:8
  2. “a sojourner” (BDB 444) is an alien just passing through with no legal rights, Lev. 22:10; 25:40
- Possibly taken together, they imply someone who moved into an unsettled area, but did not own land. See article on “Resident Aliens” in *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions*, vol. 1, by Roland deVaux, pp. 74-76.

**23:6 “you are a mighty prince”** The term translated “mighty” is the term *elohim* (BDB 43), which can be used of

1. God
2. judges
3. angels
4. here denoting a powerful, local, family leader

The translation “mighty” comes from the root meaning of *el* (BDB 42, cf. I Chr. 12:22; Ps. 68:15; Jonah 3:3). Some commentators want to translate it “prince of God.”

The term translated “prince” (BDB 672) means “one lifted up” (from basic root, BDB 669). The NASB translates it as

1. “prince” in Gen. 17:20; 25:16; 34:2
2. “leader” in Exod. 16:22; Num. 1:16,44; 2:3; Josh. 22:32
3. “ruler” in Exod. 22:28; 34:31; 35:27; I Kgs. 11:34
4. “chief” in Josh 13:21

In this highly stylized negotiation this is a polite title of respect. The Hittites are not making a religious statement.

**23:9 “the cave of Machpelah”** This seems to be a cave (common burial place) located in the district of Machpelah, an outlying region from Hebron toward Mamre (cf. 13:18; 14:13; 18:1).

Several of Abraham’s family were buried here.

1. Sarah, 24:19
2. Abraham, 25:9

3. Isaac, 35:29
4. Rebekah and Leah, 49:31
5. Jacob, 50:13

**23:10 “at the gate”** This would have been the place where local leaders met for fellowship, commerce, and legal matters.

▣ **“the Hittite”** See Special Topic at v. 3.

**23:15 “shekels”** See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Weights and Volumes at 18:6

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 23:17-20**

**<sup>17</sup>So Ephron's field, which was in Machpelah, which faced Mamre, the field and cave which was in it, and all the trees which were in the field, that were within all the confines of its border, were deeded over <sup>18</sup>to Abraham for a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. <sup>19</sup>After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field at Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. <sup>20</sup>So the field and the cave that is in it, were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth.**

**23:17 “were deeded over”** The VERB (BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means to raise or stand up. It came to refer to legal transactions as being established. Abraham now officially owned land in Palestine/Canaan. He was no longer a sojourner and alien.



# GENESIS 24

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
A Bride for Isaac	A Bride for Isaac	Finding a Wife for Isaac	A Wife for Isaac	The Marriage of Isaac
24:1-9	24:1-9	24:1-9	24:1-4 24:5 24:6-9	24:1-9
24:10-14	24:10-14	24:10-14	24:10-14	24:10-14
Rebekah is Chosen				
24:15-21	24:15-21	24:15-21	24:15-17 24:18-21	24:15-21
24:22-27	24:22-28	24:22-27	24:22-23 24:24-25 24:26-27	24:22-27
24:28-41	24:29-31 24:32-41	24:28-33	24:28-31 24:32-33a 24:33b	24:28-32 24:33-49
24:42-44	24:42-44	24:34-41 24:42-44	24:34-41 24:42-49	
24:45-49	24:45-49	24:45-49		
24:50-52	24:50-51	24:50-51	24:50-53	24:50-53
24:53-61 (60)	24:52-60 (60)	24:52-61 (60)	24:54 24:55 24:56 24:57-58a 24:58b 24:59-61 (60)	24:54-61 (60)

Isaac Marries Rebekah	24:61-67			
24:62-67		24:62-67	24:62-65a	24:62-67
			24:65b	
			24:66-67	

**READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)**

*FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

**WORD AND PHRASE STUDY**

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:1-9**

<sup>1</sup>Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in every way. <sup>2</sup>Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Please place your hand under my thigh, <sup>3</sup>and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, <sup>4</sup>but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac." <sup>5</sup>The servant said to him, "Suppose the woman is not willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?" <sup>6</sup>Then Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there! <sup>7</sup>"The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. <sup>8</sup>But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this my oath; only do not take my son back there." <sup>9</sup>So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

**24:1** "Now Abraham was old, advanced in age" When one compares Gen. 25:20, which says that Isaac was forty years old at his marriage to Rebekah, with Gen. 21:5, which says that Abraham was 100 years old

at the birth of Isaac, then it seems that Abraham was 140 years old at the beginning of chapter 24. He lived to be 185 (cf. Gen. 25:7).

▣ **“and the LORD had blessed Abraham in every way”** See a complete listing of these blessings at v. 35.

**24:2 “Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he owned”** The ADJECTIVE “oldest” (BDB 278, from the NOUN “beard”) can mean a person of authority, not necessarily the oldest in age (cf. Gen. 50:7; Isa. 3:2). Many commentators assume that this faithful servant is Eliezer of Damascus, mentioned in Gen. 15:2. The fact that he was securing a wife for Isaac shows his unselfish nature in connection with the inheritance rights. As a matter of fact this is one of the most godly, beautiful, and faithful supporting actors mentioned in the Bible.

▣ **“please place your hand under my thigh”** The VERB “place” (BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) is an important cultural command related to the oath of v. 35 (“swear,” BDB 989, KB 1396, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense).

This particular cultural act is mentioned only here and in Gen. 47:29. There have been several theories as to its exact purpose.

1. Since the thigh represents the symbol of a man’s descendants (BDB 437,1,b, cf. Gen. 46:26; Exod. 1:5; Jdgs. 8:30), this may refer to the genital organs. If this is true it seems to refer to circumcision, which is the sign of YHWH’s covenant (cf. v. 3). This is the way that this verse is interpreted by the Targum of Jonathan and Rashi.
2. It is conceded that this refers to descendants and therefore, Jerome, Augustine, and Luther all say that it refers to the ultimate descendant of Abraham, the Messiah.
3. Some see it as referring to the lordship of Abraham to this particular administrator for this important task of finding a wife for Isaac (cf. Aben Ezra and Calvin).
4. It may reflect a cultural curse oath of sterility if violated.

**24:3 “I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth”** There has been much discussion among commentators whether Abraham was a true monotheist or simply a henotheist (someone who had only one god himself, but did not deny the existence of other gods). Because of phrases like this, I believe that Abraham was a monotheist. Most scholars assume that full-blown monotheism, in a philosophical sense, did not develop until the 8<sup>th</sup> century Prophets.

▣ **“you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites”** This is probably because of the prophecy of Gen. 15:13-16 or Gen. 9:25-27 (also note Exod. 34:15-16 and Deut. 7:3-6). Abraham had met several godly men who were Canaanites.

1. the Amorite mentioned in 14:13
2. Melchizedek, mentioned in 14:18
3. Abimelech, mentioned in chapter 20.

This shows that the ultimate degradation of the Amorite was not yet complete at this stage in history.

**24:4 “go to my country and my relatives”** This seems to refer to Ur of the Chaldees and the family of Nahor mentioned in 11:27-31.

**24:5 “suppose the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land”** Apparently, the servant was concerned with the specific stipulations that Abraham had put in his request. Abraham was concerned that

Isaac have a wife who (1) was willing, by faith, to leave her family, as he had to leave his family and (2) knew YHWH, their God.

▣ “**should I take your son back to the land from where you came**” Verse 5 is an emphatic question (*Hiphil* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and *Hiphil* IMPERFECT VERB of the same root, BDB 996, KB 1427) by the servant and v. 6 is an emphatic command (“see to it that you do not take,” a *Niphal* IMPERATIVE [BDB 1036, KB 1581] followed by a *Hiphil* IMPERFECT [BDB 996, KB 1427] of the same VERB used in v. 5) by Abraham that Isaac is not to return to the land of Abraham’s birth. There are two possible reasons: (1) they were still polytheistic or (2) God’s promises specifically related to Canaan (cf. v. 7; Heb. 11:15; Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18).

**24:7 “He will send His angel before you”** YHWH’s angel often speaks and acts to carry out YHWH’s will. He is mentioned several times in Genesis (cf. 16:7; 21:17; 22:11; also note Exod. 23:20,23). See special note at 12:7.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:10-14**

<sup>10</sup>Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master's in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. <sup>11</sup>He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. <sup>12</sup>He said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. <sup>13</sup>Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; <sup>14</sup>now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also' —*may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master.*"

**24:10 “Then the servant took ten camels”** There has been much discussion among historians concerning the date when camels were domesticated. It is true that they were not widely used for commercial purposes (i.e., caravans) until 1200 B.C., but they seem to have been domesticated much earlier for private use.

▣ “**Mesopotamia**” This is the Hebrew term “Aram-na-harain” (BDB 74 and 625, cf. Deut. 23:4), which seems to mean “Aram of the two rivers.” This phrase refers to northern central Mesopotamia.

▣ “**the city of Nahor**” Nahor (BDB 637, the meaning is uncertain) is the name of Terah, Abraham’s father’s father (cf. Gen. 11:22,23,24,25; I Chr. 1:26). It is also the name of one of Terah’s sons (Gen. 11:26,27,29). Apparently, Abraham is telling the servant to return to the city where his brother Nahor lives (Gen. 22:20-24). It may have been known by another name, possibly even Ur of the Chaldees, Abrahams’ original home or to the place where many of his family moved, Haran (cf. Gen. 11:31). The NIV Study Bible note mentions that a city by the name Nahor appears in clay tablets found at Mari (p. 41). In this sense “Haran” refers to a district, not just a city in north central Mesopotamia.

**24:12 “And he said, ‘O LORD, the God of my master Abraham’”** This is not a disparaging comment on the faith of the servant, but a recognition of the source of the covenant promise (cf. v. 26). His prayer contains two entreaties.

1. “grant” (lit. “cause to occur”), BDB 899, KB 1137, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE

2. “show,” BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

The term “lovingkindness” is the powerful covenant NOUN **רַחֵם** (cf. 19:19; 20:13; 21:23; 24:12,14,27,49; 32:10; 39:21; 40:14; 47:29). See Special Topic at 19:19. This servant was surely addressing in prayer the covenant God of Abraham.

**24:12,16** Several characteristics of Rebekah are highlighted.

1. willingness to help, v. 12
2. strength to help, v. 12
3. very beautiful, v. 16
4. a virgin, v. 16
5. hospitable, v. 25

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:15-21**

**<sup>15</sup>Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. <sup>16</sup>The girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. <sup>17</sup>Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar." <sup>18</sup>She said, "Drink, my lord"; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink. <sup>19</sup>Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw also for your camels until they have finished drinking." <sup>20</sup>So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. <sup>21</sup>Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence, to know whether the LORD had made his journey successful or not.**

**24:15 “Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah”** This family was mentioned in Gen. 22:20-24. Her father’s name, Bethuel, means “man of God” (BDB 143 I), which may show the spiritual nature of this family. It is also significant that the family line comes through Milcah, the true wife, and not a concubine of Nahor, Reumah.

**☐ “came out with a jar on her shoulder”** This is one point which shows the historicity of the account. Women in Egypt carried the water jars on their heads, but in Mesopotamia they carried it on their hip or shoulder.

**24:17 “please let me drink”** This is a *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE (BDB 167, KB 196). This matches his prayer of v. 14.

**24:18 “Drink”** This is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE (BDB 1059, KB 1667), which also answers his prayer for guidance to the right woman.

**24:19-20 “I will draw for your camels”** This was also part of the servant’s prayer of v. 14. YHWH gave specific guidance to Rebekah. This act on Rebekah’s part would have involved a considerable amount of time and energy for ten thirsty camels!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:22-27**

**<sup>22</sup>When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold, <sup>23</sup>and said, "Whose daughter are you?"**

Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father's house?" <sup>24</sup>She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." <sup>25</sup>Again she said to him, "We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in." <sup>26</sup>Then the man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. <sup>27</sup>He said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers."

**24:22** “the man took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold” This gold ring refers to a nose ring (cf. v. 47 and the Samaritan Pent.). I imagine that a nose ring of a half-shekel would cause one’s nose to droop (cf. Pro. 11:22; Isa. 3:21; Ezek. 16:12).

**24:27**

<b>NASB</b>	“lovingkindness”
<b>NKJV</b>	“mercy”
<b>NRSV</b>	“steadfast love”
<b>Peshitta</b>	“grace”

This is the Hebrew term *hesed* (BDB 338, see Special Topic at 19:19), which means “kindness” or “covenant fidelity.” It is mentioned quite often in connection with God’s activity toward His chosen people. It is used

1. to save one from their enemies
2. to save one from death
3. to turn one toward the Word of God (cf. Psalm 109:26; 119:41, 76, 88, 124, 149, 159)
4. to forgive sin (cf. Ps. 25:7; 51:3)
5. for covenant keeping (cf. Deut. 7:9, 12; I Kgs. 8:23; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Dan. 9:4)
6. often to describe the fulness and eternity of God’s love and care (cf. I Chr. 36:34,41; II Chr. 5:13; 7:3,6; 20:23; Ezra 3:11; Ps. 100:5; 103:17; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1,2,3,4,29; 136:lff; 138:8)



<b>NASB, NKJV,</b>	
<b>Peshitta</b>	“truth”
<b>NRSV</b>	“faithfulness”
<b>NJB</b>	“faithful love”

This is another significant term, “truth,” *אמת* (BDB 54) which appears in conjunction with the term “lovingkindness.” Its original etymology meant “to be firm” or “to be sure” and it came, therefore, to speak of “faithfulness.” The Greek equivalent of this is the term Paul uses to describe justification by grace through faith in Romans 4 and Galatians 3, quoting from Habakkuk 2:4 (remember the NT writers were Hebrew thinkers writing in Koine Greek, see Special Topic: Believe at 15:6). These terms often appear together (cf. Ps. 25:10; 40:11; 57:4; 61:8; 85:11; 89:15; 115:1; 135:2). This same term is used by the author of Genesis to describe Abraham’s faith in God (cf. 15:6).

▣ **“the LORD has guided me”** The VERB (BDB 634, KB 685, *Qal* PERFECT) describes God’s leadership and guidance for those who trust Him (cf. Ps. 5:8; 27:11; 139:24; Isa. 58:11).

☐ **“in the way”** This term (BDB 202) describes lifestyle faith in God (cf. Jdgs. 2:22; Ps. 119:1). This OT idiom became the earliest title for the Christian church (i.e., “The Way,” cf. Acts 9:2; 18:25, 26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; and possibly John 14:6).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:28-41**

**<sup>28</sup>Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. <sup>29</sup>Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran outside to the man at the spring. <sup>30</sup>When he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, "This is what the man said to me," he went to the man; and behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. <sup>31</sup>And he said, "Come in, blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside since I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels?" <sup>32</sup>So the man entered the house. Then Laban unloaded the camels, and he gave straw and feed to the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. <sup>33</sup>But when *food* was set before him to eat, he said, "I will not eat until I have told my business." And he said, "Speak on." <sup>34</sup>So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. <sup>35</sup>The LORD has greatly blessed my master, so that he has become rich; and He has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and servants and maids, and camels and donkeys. <sup>36</sup>Now Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master in her old age, and he has given him all that he has. <sup>37</sup>My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; <sup>38</sup>but you shall go to my father's house and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son.' <sup>39</sup>I said to my master, 'Suppose the woman does not follow me.' <sup>40</sup>He said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you to make your journey successful, and you will take a wife for my son from my relatives and from my father's house; <sup>41</sup>then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my relatives; and if they do not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'"**

**24:29 “Laban”** Rabbinical sources are negative toward Laban, therefore, they interpret v. 30 to say that he only went out to meet the servant when he saw the gold which he had given to his sister. However, v. 30 also mentions the family of Abraham, which is another potential reason for Laban’s interest. Laban is a difficult person to understand in Scripture because in v. 31 he uses the term “YHWH,” but in Gen. 31:53 he seems to be an idolater and polytheist and implies that there is another god of Nahor.

**24:32-33** Several expected cultural acts are done for the servant of Abraham by Laban/Laban’s servants.

1. unloaded the camels
2. gave the camels food
3. gave water for the servants who accompanied “the servant” to wash their feet
4. fed all of them

**24:34-41** This repeats the words of Abraham to his servant which are recorded earlier in this chapter.

**24:36 “Now Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my master in her old age”** Apparently this information was given to ease the family’s mind about the age of Isaac. Isaac was the son of Abraham, while Rebekah was the granddaughter of Nahor.

**24:41 “oath”** In the first part of this chapter Abraham asked the servant to take an oath (BDB 46). The form of the word used here in v. 41 also means “curse,” which shows the very emphatic nature of Abraham’s request.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:42-44**

<sup>42</sup>“So I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now You will make my journey on which I go successful; <sup>43</sup>behold, I am standing by the spring, and may it be that the maiden who comes out to draw, and to whom I say, 'Please let me drink a little water from your jar'; <sup>44</sup>and she will say to me, 'You drink, and I will draw for your camels also'; let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.'”

**24:43 “the maid”** It is interesting that Rebekah is called a virgin in v. 16, “bethulah” (BDB 143), while in v. 43 she is called a maiden, “alma” (BDB 761). The translators of the Septuagint translated the term “alma” as “virgin” in Isa. 7:14 and in this verse. It seems that the terms, culturally, meant the same thing, although “bethulah” specifically means “virgin” and “alma” means “a young woman of marriageable age” who was assumed to be a virgin.

**24:42-48** This is a repetition of the previous discussion in vv. 11-27.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:45-49**

<sup>45</sup>“Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew, and I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' <sup>46</sup>She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'; so I drank, and she watered the camels also. <sup>47</sup>Then I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him'; and I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her wrists. <sup>48</sup>And I bowed low and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had guided me in the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. <sup>49</sup>So now if you are going to deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, let me know, that I may turn to the right hand or the left.”

**24:49** The servant asks for a response from Laban. Will he act like Abraham in lovingkindness and truth? If he does not wish to proceed with the marriage bargaining the servant will leave (metaphor, “I may turn to the right hand or left”) and try elsewhere.

The verse has three IMPERATIVES.

1. “tell me,” BDB 616, KB 665, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
2. “let me know,” same VERB repeated
3. “that I may turn,” BDB 815, KB 937, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:50-51**

<sup>50</sup>Then Laban and Bethuel replied, "The matter comes from the LORD; so we cannot speak to you bad or good. <sup>51</sup>Here is Rebekah before you, take *her* and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken."



**24:50** “then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, ‘The matter comes from the LORD, so we cannot speak to you bad or good’” It is unusual that Laban, the brother, is listed before Bethuel, the father. We have learned from the Nuzi Tablets that a brother often took the lead in marriage negotiations. The last phrase of this verse has been greatly misunderstood by many commentators. It seems to be a Hebrew idiom for “YHWH has spoken, what then can we say?” (cf. v. 51c).

It is surprising that Bethuel is mentioned in v. 50, but not in vv. 53,55. Many assume he must have died during this time frame. Maybe Laban’s response in v. 50 is characterized as from himself and Bethuel without the father being present. It is possible that brothers negotiated the marriage of sisters.

**24:51** There are several commands in response to the servant’s recounting the reason he had come and his request for an immediate answer (v. 49).

1. “take *her*,” BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. “go,” BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. “let her be the wife,” BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal* JUSSIVE

Notice, Rebekah is not asked about her actions in v. 28, but she is asked in vv. 57-58, which seems to be a polite gesture since the dowry price is paid in v. 53. Remember the Bible only summarizes for us what was said and what happened, but we believe the Spirit guided these summaries.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:52-61**

<sup>52</sup>When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the LORD. <sup>53</sup>The servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. <sup>54</sup>Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master." <sup>55</sup>But her brother and her mother said, "Let the girl stay with us *a few* days, say ten; afterward she may go." <sup>56</sup>He said to them, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master." <sup>57</sup>And they said, "We will call the girl and consult her wishes." <sup>58</sup>Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." <sup>59</sup>Thus they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse with Abraham's servant and his men. <sup>60</sup>They blessed Rebekah and said to her,

"May you, our sister,  
Become thousands of ten thousands,  
And may your descendants possess  
The gate of those who hate them."

<sup>61</sup>Then Rebekah arose with her maids, and they mounted the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and departed.

**24:52** “he bowed himself to the ground before the LORD” This is the third time that this servant has prayed in public, expressing his faith and thanksgiving to the Lord. This is truly a wonderful biblical character.

**24:53** In the ancient world wealth was accumulated by having

1. weights of precious metals
2. jewels
3. expensive clothing
4. food stuffs

5. land
6. livestock

Notice the servant brings several of these items, which could be transported easily.

1. articles of silver
2. articles of gold
3. garments
4. precious things

Abraham was a wealthy man. To have a family member become part of his family (i.e., Isaac's wife) was a great honor.

**24:54** Knowing the importance that was placed on a meal to conclude an agreement or establish a friendship bond, this meal may have been more than just a celebration.

**24:55** “*a few days, say ten*” The Samaritan Pentateuch has “a month.”

**24:56** The servant wants to leave immediately. He wants to fulfill his assignment as soon as possible.

1. “send me away to my master,” v. 54, BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Piel* IMPERATIVE
2. “do not delay me,” v. 56, BDB 29, KB 34, *Piel* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
3. “send me away,” same as #1
4. “that I may go to my master,” BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* COHORTATIVE

**24:58** “Then they called Rebekah and said to her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ and she said, ‘I will go’” We learn from the Nuzi Tablets that the permission of the girl was required. “I will go” is a *Qal* COHORTATIVE (BDB 981, KB 1371).

**24:59** “her nurse” We learn from Gen. 35:8 that her name was “Deborah” and she lived a long time and served Rebekah. The term “nurse” (BDB 413, KB 416, *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE) is from the VERB “to suck” (BDB 413), this could be literal or a metaphor for a personal helper. From v. 61 we learn there were other servants.

**24:60** This farewell poem is very similar to the words of God which are recorded in Gen. 22:17. They request God on her behalf for many descendants and military victories.

**23:61** The camels were primarily used to carry the dowry and gifts for Rebekah, and on the way home to carry Rebekah, her servants, and their belongings.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 24:62-67**

<sup>62</sup>Now Isaac had come from going to Beer-lahai-roi; for he was living in the Negev. <sup>63</sup>Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, camels were coming. <sup>64</sup>Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. <sup>65</sup>She said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "He is my master." Then she took her veil and covered herself. <sup>66</sup>The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. <sup>67</sup>Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

**24:62 “Beer-lahai-roi”** This is a term which means “the well of the living One who sees me” (CONSTRUCT BDB 97 and BDB 91). This was the name given to the well shown to Hagar by the Angel of the Lord in Gen. 16:14.

**24:63**

**NASB, NKJV “meditate”**

**NRSV, TEV,**

**NJB, JPSOA “walk”**

This is a rare Hebrew word (BDB 1001 I or BDB 962) used only here in the Hebrew Scriptures. Some of the various theories concerning its meaning are:

1. following the Septuagint and the Vulgate, it means “to meditate.” There is a very similar term in Hebrew which means “to meditate” (BDB 967, cf. Ps. 105:2; 119:15, 23)
2. the word can mean “to walk around mumbling to oneself in a depressed state” as Hagar did in this same location (chapter 16)
3. the Targum of Onkelos translates this term “to pray.” This third option is followed by the Samaritan Pentateuch, Kimchi, Rashi and Luther.

**24:64 “dismounted”** This is literally “fell” (BDB 656, KB 709, *Qal* IMPERFECT) It was culturally appropriate and expected for women to dismount from their animal in the presence of men.

**24:65 “she took her veil and covered herself”** This was a sign (1) of respect for Isaac; (2) of betrothal to Isaac; or (3) that she was unmarried.

**24:67 “Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent”** This was important because Sarah had died three years earlier and Isaac was still grieving. The beauty and honor of Sarah’s tent was a wonderful way to welcome his bride-to-be.

▣ **“thus Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death”** This verse seems to show that Isaac was still grieving over the death of his mother and this may affect the way we interpret the word “meditate” in v. 63.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Abraham not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite?
2. How is the faith of this servant seen or not seen in this chapter?
3. What can one tell about the personality of Laban from vv. 29ff?
4. What is the significance of Rebekah being called a virgin in v. 16 and a maiden in v. 43?
5. How is the excitement of Isaac and Rebekah on seeing each other reflected in vv. 61-67?

# GENESIS 25

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Abraham's Death	Abraham and Keturah	The Death of Abraham	Other Descendants of Abraham	The Descendants of Keturah
25:1-6	25:1-6	25:1-6	25:1-4 25:5-6	25:1-4 25:5-6
25:7-11	Abraham's Death and Burial 25:7-11	25:7-11	The Death and Burial of Abraham 25:7-11	The Death of Abraham 25:7-11
Descendants of Ishmael	The Families of Ishmael and Isaac		The Descendants of Ishmael	The Descendants of Ishmael
25:12-18	25:12-18	25:12-18	25:12-18	25:12-16 25:17 25:18
25:19-26 (23)	25:19-26 (23)	The Rivalry of Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) 25:19-26 (23)	The Birth of Esau and Jacob 25:19-23 (23) 25:24-26	The Birth of Esau and Jacob 25:19a 25:19b-23 (23) 25:24-28
25:27-34	25:27-28 Easu Sells His Birthright 25:29-34	25:27-28 25:29-34	Easu Sells His Rights As the Firstborn Son 25:27-28 25:29-30 25:31 25:32 25:33a 25:33b-34	Easu Gives Up His Birthright 25:29-34

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 25:1-6

**<sup>1</sup>Now Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. <sup>2</sup>She bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah. <sup>3</sup>Jokshan became the father of Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim and Letushim and Leummim. <sup>4</sup>The sons of Midian were Ephah and Epher and Hanoch and Abida and Eldaah. All these *were* the sons of Keturah. <sup>5</sup>Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac; <sup>6</sup>but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the east.**

**25:1 “Now Abraham took another wife whose name was Keturah”** Jewish tradition says this was just another name for Hagar (cf. v. 12), but, the plural of the word “concubine” (BDB 811) found in v. 6 seems to militate against this. Luther assumes that Abraham did this just to fulfill Gen. 17:4. It is uncertain whether Abraham married Keturah before or after the death of Sarah. Chronology is more a feature of western historiography than eastern, biblical historiography. The name Keturah (BDB 882) means “perfumed one” or “wrapped in incense smoke!”

**25:2 “and she bore him”** This is a series of well established Arab tribes. The most noted is Midian (cf. Gen. 36:35; 37:28; Exod. 3:11; 18:1; Num. 25:17; 13:21; Jdgs. 6:1ff). An excellent graph of these Arabian tribes can be found in Leupold's commentary on Genesis, vol. 2, p. 690.

**25:4 “and the sons of Midian were”** Verse 4 lists the children of this most prominent tribe. We hear of this tribe later from Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, who was of the tribe of the Kenites or Midianites.

**25:6 “but the sons of his concubines”** I Chronicles 1:32 also calls Keturah a concubine.

▣ **“and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the east”** As Abraham had earlier sent Hagar's son, Ishmael, away (towards Egypt), he now sends the sons of Keturah away (to the east of Canaan). We know from the Nuzi Tablets, which describes Hurrian culture, that this was the legally acceptable way to show the father's choice of inheritance and to deal with the semi-legal sons of a concubine.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 25:7-11**

<sup>7</sup>These are all the years of Abraham's life that he lived, one hundred and seventy-five years. <sup>8</sup>Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with *life*; and he was gathered to his people. <sup>9</sup>Then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, <sup>10</sup>the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth; there Abraham was buried with Sarah his wife. <sup>11</sup>It came about after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac lived by Beer-lahai-roi.

**25:7 “And these are all the days of Abraham’s life”** The length of Abraham’s life is 175 years, which was viewed as the ideal age.

**25:8 “and Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with *life*”** This same phrase is used to describe Ishmael in 25:17, Isaac in 35:29, and Jacob in 49:33. This was a fulfillment of YHWH’s promise in 15:15. Death was not something to be feared, but to be expected at the end of a long life (cf. Job 42:17; I Chr. 23:1; 29:28; II Chr. 24:15).

▣ **“and he was gathered to his people”** Since Abraham was not literally buried with his ancestral family (cf. v. 9), this must refer to their view of the afterlife. This is a recurrent phrase in Genesis (cf. 25:8,17; 35:29; 49:29,33). Somehow there was a conscious existence after death that involved friends and family. The light of specific revelation is shining rather dimly in the OT concerning this area, however (note Ps. 16:9-11; Job 19:25-27; Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2-3). See *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 127-129. We learn from Heb. 11:13-16 that Abraham was looking for a city whose builder and maker is God.

See Special Topic: Where Are the Dead? at 15:15.

**25:9 “then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him”** It is significant that Isaac and Ishmael were somehow reunited at the burial of their father. Ishmael had been sent away in 21:14, but apparently the relationship had been reestablished at their father’s death. The same thing will also happen with Esau and Jacob at the death of Isaac (cf. Gen. 35:29.).

▣ **“the cave of Machpelah”** We learn that this was the burial place purchased by Abraham (cf. Gen. 23:17-18) for Sarah. It will also house other members of the Patriarch’s family.

**25:11 “Isaac lived by Beer-lahai-roi”** This site (BDB 91) is mentioned earlier in connection with the flight of Hagar (cf. Gen. 16:14; 24:62). Apparently it was just to the south of Beersheba on a major road to Egypt.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 25:12-18**

<sup>12</sup>Now these are *the records of* the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham; <sup>13</sup>and these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, and Kedar and Adbeel and Mibsam <sup>14</sup>and Mishma and Dumah and Massa, <sup>15</sup>Hadad and Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. <sup>16</sup>These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages, and by their camps; twelve princes according to their tribes. <sup>17</sup>These are the years of the life of Ishmael, one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people. <sup>18</sup>They settled from Havilah to Shur which is east of Egypt as one goes toward Assyria; he settled in defiance of all his relatives.

**25:12 “Now these are *the records of the generations of*”** This is a characteristic phrase of the book of Genesis, used numerous times to divide the book into the life history of several different men. Those who are peripherally connected with the covenant received much less space (i.e., Ishmael) than those who are uniquely called to carry on the promised seed of the coming Messiah (cf. Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10,27; 25:12,19; 36:1,9; 37:2).

**25:13 “Kedar”** This is the most predominate tribe of Ishmael (BDB 871, cf. Isa. 21:16-17; 42:11; Jer. 2:10; 49:29; Ps. 120:5). The tribes of Ishmael seem to have been located to the east and the south of the tribes of Keturah’s sons.

**25:15 “Tema”** This is an oasis in northeast Arabia which later became the focal point of the moon goddess, *Zin*. See Special Topic at 12:4. The term “Tema” means “desert” (BDB 1066).

**25:16 “the twelve princes”** This seems to be a fulfillment of Gen. 17:20. This Hebrew term is an honorific title of leadership, much like the modern term, Sheikh among Arab tribes. The number “twelve” seems to be the ideal number of children because: Nahor has twelve sons (cf. Gen. 22:20-24); Esau has twelve tribes (cf. Gen. 12:6-14); here, Ishmael has twelve princes; and later Jacob will have twelve sons. Possibly it is a number representing ideal organization.

#### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE NUMBER TWELVE**

Twelve has always been a symbolic number of organization

A. outside the Bible

1. twelve signs of the Zodiac
2. twelve months of the year

B. in the OT (BDB 1040 plus 797)

1. the sons of Jacob (the Jewish tribes)
2. reflected in
  - a. twelve pillars of the altar in Exod. 24:4
  - b. twelve jewels on the high priest’s breastplate (which stand for the tribes) in Exod. 28:21
  - c. twelve loaves of bread in the holy place of the tabernacle in Lev. 24:5
  - d. twelve spies sent into Canaan in Numbers 13 (one from each tribe)
  - e. twelve rods (tribal standards) at Korah’s rebellion in Num. 17:2
  - f. twelve stones of Joshua in Josh. 4:3,9,20
  - g. twelve administrative districts in Solomon’s administration in I Kgs. 4:7
  - h. twelve stones of Elijah’s altar to YHWH in I Kgs. 18:31

C. in the NT

1. twelve apostles chosen
2. twelve baskets of bread (one for each Apostle) in Matt. 14:20
3. twelve thrones on which NT disciples sit (referring to the 12 tribes of Israel) in Matt. 19:28
4. twelve legions of angels to rescue Jesus in Matt. 26:53
5. the symbolism of Revelation
  - a. 24 elders on 24 thrones in 4:4



- b. 144,000 (12x12x1000) in 7:4; 14:1,3
- c. twelve stars on the woman's crown in 12:1
- d. twelve gates, twelve angels reflecting the twelve tribes in 21:12
- e. twelve foundation stones of the new Jerusalem and on them the names of the twelve Apostles in 21:14
- f. twelve thousand stadia in 21:16 (size of new city, New Jerusalem)
- g. wall is 144 cubits in 21:7
- h. twelve gates of pearl in 21:21
- i. trees in new Jerusalem with twelve kinds of fruit (one for each month ) in 22:2

**25:17 “he breathed his last”** The term “breathed” (lit. “expire,” נָנַח, BDB 157, KB 184, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is not the term *ruach* (רוּחַ, BDB 924, cf. Gen. 6:17, “breath of life”), but a rarer term (cf. Gen. 6:17; 7:21; 25:8,17; 35:29) used mostly in Genesis, Numbers, and poetic texts. Its basic meaning is to be empty (i.e., empty a body of breath).

**25:18** This area would control the caravan routes from Egypt to Assyria/Babylon. It was suitable to nomadic, tent-dwelling people.

▣ **“he settled in defiance of all his relatives”** The phrase “in defiance” (BDB 815-819) has a wide semantical field. Its basic meaning is “face,” “presence,” or metaphorically “before.” It is used earlier in this verse to mean “over against” or “opposite” a geographical location, but here it denotes opposition to other people.

This is a fulfillment of Gen. 16:12, which describes the rather inhospitable, nomadic attitude of Ishmael and his descendants. This phrase is interpreted in many different ways. It is even possible that this refers to military raids against his neighboring relatives.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 25:19-26**

<sup>19</sup>Now these are *the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; <sup>20</sup>and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. <sup>21</sup>Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. <sup>22</sup>But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I *this way*?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. <sup>23</sup>The LORD said to her,*

"Two nations are in your womb;  
 And two peoples will be separated from your body;  
 And one people shall be stronger than the other;  
 And the older shall serve the younger."

<sup>24</sup>When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. <sup>25</sup>Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. <sup>26</sup>Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them.

**25:19 “now these are *the records of the generations of Isaac*”** This is the same characteristic phrase discussed in v. 12, but here it relates to the covenanter and is therefore, highly expanded.

▣ **“Abraham’s son: Abraham became the father of Isaac”** This is an unusual repetitive statement. Rashi says the doublet was used to dispel the rumor that Isaac was the child of Abimelech (by Sarah). The rabbis also state that Isaac looked just like Abraham in the face in order to dispel this rumor which was started by the event in Gen. 20:1-18.

**25:20 “Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah”** When one compares Gen. 25:20 with v. 26 it is obvious that Isaac was sixty years old at the birth of Jacob.

▣ **“Bethuel the Syrian of Paddan-aram”** The word “Syrian” is often translated “Armenian” (BDB 74). It seems to be the district surrounding the town of Haran. Paddan-aram (BDB 804 and BDB 74) means “the plains of Aram,” which denotes the same area as “Aram-naharaim” of 24:10.

**25:21 “and Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren”** There were two major theological purposes for the Patriarchs having barren (BDB 785) wives: (1) to show God’s provision and (2) to show that this was not of human effort, but by grace and not merit. The rabbis use this text to emphasize the power of intercessory prayer.

**25:22 “but the children struggled together within her”** This is a violent VERB (BDB 954, KB 1285, *Hithpolel* IMPERFECT). It is translated (NIDOTTE, vol. 3, 1191)

1. in *Qal* stem as crush, smash, abuse
2. in *Niphal* stem as crack, break
3. in *Hiphil* and *Piel* stems as crush in pieces
4. in *Polel* as oppress
5. in *Hithpolel* as crush each other

This was a prophetic foreshadowing relating to v. 23.

▣ **“and she said, ‘if it is so, why then am I *this way*’”** There has been much discussion over this idiomatic, ambiguous phrase (lit. “why this, I?”). The current theories are:

1. She was asking why she was made pregnant by God and then was having such complications; at this point she did not know that she was carrying twins.
2. Her pregnancy was causing her great pain and she wondered why she had ever asked for this.
3. She was literally worried for her life amidst this problem pregnancy.
4. She feared that this turmoil would continue after she gave birth. The troubled pregnancy was a sign of trouble to come (a foreshadowing).

▣ **“so she went to inquire of the LORD”** This has also caused much discussion among the commentators. They ask where she went and who she asked! It is obvious that the text does not record this. Some assert that there was a set place for patriarchal worship. There has been much speculation about who she consulted.

1. Luther says she talked to Shem
2. the rabbis say she talked to Melchizedek
3. others assert that she spoke to Abraham

4. still others believe it was Isaac
5. possibly, it was simply personal prayer at a family altar (possibly even a sacrifice)

It is possible that this text and 28:22 imply holy attendants at sacred places (i.e., priests, Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 2, p. 345).

**25:23 “And the LORD said to her”** This is an extremely significant poetic word from the Lord to Rebekah. God had already promised children to Isaac (cf. Gen. 17:19; 21:12). This prophecy specifically delineates which one of the children would carry the family line. This is quoted in Rom. 9:10-12. One wonders why Isaac did not seem to follow this word from the Lord, for obviously Rebekah shared it with him when he tried to make Esau the inheritor in chapters 26 and 27.

▣ **“and the older shall serve the younger”** Like the barren wives of the Patriarchs this phrase shows that the promised seed will not be done in the normal way that the Semites performed inheritance rights (cf. Rom. 9:10-12).

**25:25 “the first came forth red”** This term (*admoni*, BDB 10, “red”) is related to the term in Genesis which speaks of the “dust” (BDB 9) out of which God created man (cf. Gen. 2:7), the “Adamah,” which apparently also has the root idea of “red” (BDB 10). The wordplay continues in v. 30, where the red porridge (BDB 10) is linked to the name “Edom” (BDB 10), from which we get the nation which would come from Esau.

▣ **“like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau”** The term “hairy” (BDB 972) sounds very much like the term “Seir” (BDB 973), which is the earlier name for Edom. There is a double play on the words “red” and “hairy” and “Esau” and “Edom.”

This Hebrew description of a baby as red and hairy may not convey the right connotation to modern readers. This was not meant in any way to be negative. The term “hairy” (BDB 12) implied a beautiful, impressive garment (e.g., Josh. 7:21,24 or a prophet’s mantle (cf. I Kgs. 19:13,19; II Kgs. 2:8,13,14).

**25:26 “And afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau’s heel, so his name was called Jacob”** The name Jacob (BDB 784) is related to “heel” (BDB 784). From Hosea 12:3 and from Esau’s comment in Gen. 27:36 we recognize that the name Jacob evolved into “supplanter” or “usurper” (from a similar VERB and ADJECTIVE, BDB 784). It is not until his confrontation with God at the brook Jabbok years later that his name will be changed to “Israel” (cf. Gen. 32:28) and by implication his character.

▣ **“and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them”** It is to be noted that he had waited twenty years, in faith, for this promised child. God was testing Isaac in the same way He had tested Abraham.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 25:27-34**

<sup>27</sup>When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. <sup>28</sup>Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. <sup>29</sup>When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; <sup>30</sup>and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom. <sup>31</sup>But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." <sup>32</sup>Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" <sup>33</sup>And Jacob said, "First

**swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. <sup>34</sup>Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.**

**25:27 “When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents”** The focus of this passage is that they were very different in personality. Esau was content to be away from home; Jacob was content to be at home. Jacob is the one who fulfilled the normal expectations of a nomadic, patriarchal figure.

The term “peaceful” (NKJV “mild”; NRSV and TEV “quiet”) is actually “complete” (BDB 1020). Here, it seems to mean a complete, normal, or regular nomadic leader. The same ADJECTIVE is used to describe Job’s integrity (cf. 1:1,8; 2:3; 8:20; 9:20,21,22, also note Ps. 37:37; Pro. 29:10).

**25:28 “Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game”** Isaac was a quiet, peaceful individual and it may be that his son, Esau, was all that he was not. It is surprising that Esau was his favorite, when obviously he knew the divine word from Gen. 25:23.

▣ **“but Rebekah loved Jacob”** This favoritism is going to cause great problems in the family as it always does. But, it seems that Rebekah was trying to hold on to the divine promise of v. 23.

**25:29** One wonders if this event was premeditated and had been repeated. Was Jacob looking for an occasion like this? The use of the term “cooked” (lit. “boiled,” BDB 267, KB 268, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) may be a hint. The term regularly means to presume to have rights that are not legally theirs (NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 1094).

Apparently this meal was prepared some distance away from the main campsite. The meal is called

1. “stew,” v. 29, BDB 268, a boiled pot of beans, cf. II Kgs. 4:38
2. “red stuff,” v. 30, BDB 10
3. “lentil stew,” v. 34, BDB 727, cf. II Sam. 17:28; 23:11; Ezek. 4:9

**25:30 “Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished”** This is a strong term for “eat.” It literally means “to gulp down” (BDB 542, KB 533, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE). Surely, Esau was not at the point of starvation, but he was weary (BDB 746, cf. Deut. 25:18; Jdgs. 8:4-5). This is the first of several clues which show that Esau was not a bad man, but a secular-minded man (see *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 3476-348). The things of faith and the responsibilities of home life were simply not a concern to him.

**25:31,33** Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright. . .first swear to me”

1. “sell,” BDB 569, KB 581, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. “swear,” BDB 989, KB 1396, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE

It is obvious Jacob took advantage of Esau’s weakness. The question is, was it because of (1) the prophecy (cf. 25:23), (2) the well being of the family, or (3) self interest?

**25:32 “Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me”** This has been interpreted basically in three different ways: (1) an exaggeration; (2) that he really expected to die (BDB 559, KB 562, *Qal* INFINITIVE) at a young age; or (3) another example of his lack of concern for spiritual things. From the Nuzi Tablets of the same period we understand that the transfer of birthright was possible legally. We also see that it must have been a common occurrence because it is prohibited in Deut. 21:15-17. Later, Reuben will be replaced by Judah. Jacob may have been following in an inappropriate way the divine command of

v. 23. It is hard to read the mind of Jacob in these accounts for he often comes across as a sincere but manipulative person.

**25:34** This verse describing Esau's actions may be a way of describing his solitary and anti-social personality.

1. "he ate," BDB 37, KB 46, *Qal* IMPERFECT
2. "he drank," BDB 1059, KB 1667, *Qal* IMPERFECT
3. "he rose," BDB877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERFECT
4. "he went on his way," BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERFECT
5. "he despised his birthright," BDB 102, KB 117, *Qal* IMPERFECT

▣ **"Thus Esau despised his birthright"** The verb (BDB 102, KB 117, *Qal* IMPERFECT) denotes "to view as worthless" or even "view with contempt." The rabbis depict Esau as a very evil person. Hebrews 12:16 shows him as being spiritually immature. He took his spiritual and family life lightly.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. What does v. 8 say about the ancients' view of death?
2. Why were so many of the patriarchs' wives barren?
3. Why is v. 23 so significant?
4. What is the popular etymology contained in v. 25?
5. Can we know the psychological motives and characteristics of Esau and Jacob? How?
6. List the ways the book of Hebrews interprets this account in chapters 11 and 12.

# GENESIS 26

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Isaac Settles in Gerar 26:1-5 26:6-11	Isaac and Abimelech 26:1-5 26:6-11	Stories About Isaac 26:1-5 26:6-11	Isaac Lives at Gerar 26:1-5 26:6-9a 26:9b 26:10-11	Isaac at Gerar 26:1-6 26:7-11
26:12-17	26:12-16	26:12-16	26:12-15 26:16-18	26:12-14 The Wells Between Gerar and Beersheba 26:15-18
Quarrel Over the Wells 26:18-22	26:17-22	26:17-22	26:19-20 26:21-22	26:19-22
26:23-25 (24)	26:23-25	26:23-25	26:23-25	26:23-24 (24) 26:25
Covenant With Abimelech 26:26-33	26:26-33	26:26-33	The Agreement Between Isaac and Abimelech 26:26-27 26:28-31 26:32-33	The Alliance with Abimelech 26:26-30 26:31-33
26:34-35	26:34-35	26:34-35	Esau's Foreign Wives 26:34-35	The Hittite Wives of Esau 26:34-35

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## BACKGROUND

- A. This is the only chapter in Genesis where Isaac is the major character.
- B. Isaac comes across, in this chapter, as a very quiet, trusting and godly individual. He is not as dynamic a personality as Abraham and Jacob, but is a faithful follower of YHWH.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 26:1-5

**<sup>1</sup>Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup>The LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. <sup>3</sup>Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. <sup>4</sup>I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; <sup>5</sup>because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws."**

**26:1 "Now there was a famine in the land"** This is very similar to the occurrences in Genesis 12 and 20 that forced Abraham to leave the Promised Land.

▣ **"So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines"** The Philistines were a mercenary people from the islands of the Aegean. They attempted to invade Egypt, but were repulsed and so they settled in the southwestern coast of Palestine, somewhere around 1200 B.C. Because the name Abimelech is mentioned earlier in Gen. 21:22, this must have been the common name to denote all of the Philistine kings. This is similar to the use of Hadad in Syria and Pharaoh in Egypt.

It is surely possible that

1. there were earlier Philistine tradesmen in Canaan
2. that a Canaanite group merged with the Philistines and this name is an anachronism

3. Philistines are listed in Gen. 10:6-20 coming from Ham and the Canaanites, not Japheth (Islands of the Aegean). It is possible the name refers to several groups associated with Palestine/Canaan (NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 1049).

**26:2-3** YHWH's appearance to Isaac has several directives and promises.

1. "do not go down to Egypt," v. 2, BDB 432, KB 434, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
2. "stay in the land," v. 2, BDB 1014, KB 1496, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. "sojourn in this land," v. 3, BDB 157, KB 184, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. "I will be with you," v. 3, BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense
5. "I will bless you," v. 3, BDB 138, KB 159, *Piel* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense
6. "I will give all these lands," v. 3, BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

**26:2** "and the LORD appeared to him and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt'" This may have been because of Abraham's experience in Egypt or because Isaac needed to trust God for provision in the Promised Land.

**26:3** "I will be with you and bless you" This again is a reaffirmation, not only of God's presence (cf. 28:15; 31:3), but His blessings and a reaffirmation of the covenant.

▣ "and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham" This is a reference to God's special promises to Abraham which are found in Genesis 12,15,17 and 22.

The VERB "establish" (BDB 877, KB 1086, *Hiphil* PERFECT) is used several times in Genesis.

1. to establish or ratify a covenant, cf. 6:18; 9:9,11; 17:7,19,21
2. give effect to or confirm the covenant, 26:3 (note Lev. 26:9; Deut. 8:18)

**26:4** There seem to be three specific promises mentioned: (1) abundant descendants; (2) land (cf. 12:7; 15:18-19; 17:7-8; 26:1-5; 28:10-15; 35:12); and (3) all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Isaac and his descendants.

▣ "as the stars of heaven" This had been mentioned earlier to Abraham in Gen. 15:5 and 22:17. The other two metaphors used by God to describe their fruitfulness were the sand of the sea and the dust of the earth.

▣ "all these lands" This was part of the promise to Abraham (cf. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8).

▣ "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" This phrase is literally interpreted "shall bless themselves." There are two distinct VERBAL forms of this promise. The *Niphal* is found in Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 28:14. It is also quoted in the NT in Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8. Genesis 26:4 is in the *Hithpael*, which is found only here and in Gen. 22:16-18 and should properly be translated "shall bless themselves." In truth, there is little difference between "bless themselves" and "shall be blessed." As a matter of fact the Septuagint translation makes no distinction between these VERBAL forms at all. The obvious, tremendous blessing is that through Abraham and his children God was seeking to bless the entire world. God chose one man to choose a nation to choose a world. We must keep in mind that the Jews were chosen, not for a special blessing, but as an instrument for the redemptive blessing to come to all men. Israel was always meant to be a kingdom of priests (cf. Exod. 19:5-6). See Special Topic at 12:3.



**26:5 “because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws”** The two VERBS in this verse emphasize the human aspect of the covenant (cf. 12:1; 17:1,9-14; 22:16; 26:3-5).

1. “obeyed” (lit. “hear so as to do”), BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERFECT
2. “kept,” BDB 1036, KB 1581, *Qal* IMPERFECT

Both denote ongoing action.

There is a real (and purposeful) tension between God’s free grace given to one human/nation to call all humans/nations (cf. the unconditional action of God in Gen. 15:12-21) and the recurring mentioning of obedience (i.e., the conditional nature of God’s promises). Both are true! Human performance does not bring fallen humans into Divine acceptance. However, once we have had an encounter with Him, we cannot be unaffected, unchanged (cf. Eph. 1:4; 2:8-9,10). The goal of God is a righteous people to bring the nations to Himself. The danger is a free grace with no conditions and a merited grace with many conditions. The New Covenant of Jer. 31:31-34 and Ezek. 36:22-38 show us the way—a new heart, a new mind, a new spirit. God’s external code becomes an internal mandate.

The listing of “charge” (BDB 1038), “commandments” (BDB 846), “statutes” (BDB 349), and “laws” (BDB 435) is found only here in the early books of Genesis - Numbers, but appears often in Deuteronomy. See Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation following the next paragraph.

This seems to be an allusion to Gen. 15:6. In this account, Abraham’s belief that he would have a child was taken by God as an act of faith and was reckoned unto Abraham as righteousness. This significant OT passage is used as the theological underpinnings by the Apostle Paul for the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, explicated so beautifully in Romans 4 and Galatians 2-3. The word “laws” here is the first use of the term “Torah” (BDB 435), which is a Hebrew word meaning “teachings” or “guidelines.” This term came to be the title for the first five books of Moses.

Notice the repetition of the personal PRONOUN!

**SPECIAL TOPIC: TERMS FOR GOD’S REVELATION (using DEUTERONOMY and PSALMS)**

- I. “Statutes,” BDB 349, “an enactment, decree, or ordinance”
  - A. Masculine, קח - Deut. 4:1,5,6,8,14,40,45; 5:1; 6:1,24,25; 7:11; 11:32; 16:12; 17:19; 26:17; 27:10; Ps. 2:7; 50:16; 81:4; 99:7; 105:10,45; 148:6
  - B. Feminine, חקה - Deut. 6:2; 8:11; 10:13; 11:1; 28:15,45; 30:10,16; Ps. 89:31; 119:5, 8,12,16,23,26,33,48,54,64,68,71,80,83,112,124,135,145, 155, 171
- II. “Law” BDB 435, “instruction”
  - Deut. 1:5; 4:44; 17:11,18,19; 27:3,8,26; 28:58,61; 29:21,29; 30:10; 31:9; Ps. 1:2; 19:7; 78:10; 94:12; 105:45; 119:1,18,29,34,44,51,53,55,61,70,72, 77,85,92,97,109,113,126,136,142,150,153, 163,165,174
- III. “Testimonies” BDB 730, “divine laws”
  - A. PLURAL, עדות - Deut. 4:45; 6:17,20; Ps. 25:10; 78:56; 93:5; 99:7; 119:22,24,46, 59,79, 95,119,125,138,146,152,167,168
  - B. עדות or דת - Ps. 19:8; 78:5; 81:6; 119:2,14,31,36,88,99,111,129,144,157
- IV. “Precepts” BDB 824, “a charge”
  - Ps. 19:8; 103:18; 111:7; 119:4,15,27,40,45,56,63, 69,78,87,93, 94,100, 104, 110,128,134,141,159,168,173

V. "Commandments" BDB 846

- Deut. 4:2,40; 5:29; 6:1,2,17,25; 8:1,2,11; 10:13; 11:13; 15:5; 26:13,17; 30:11,16; Ps. 19:8; 119:6,10,19,21,32,35,47,48,60,66,73,86,96,98,115,127,131,143,151,166,176

VI. "Judgments/ordinances" BDB 1048, "rulings" or "justice"

- Deut. 1:17; 4:1, 5, 8, 14, 45; 7:12; 16:18; 30:16; 33:10,21; Ps. 10:5; 18:23; 19:10; 48:12; 89:30; 97:8; 105:5,7; 119:7,13,20, 30,39,43,52,62,75,84,102,106,120,132,137,149, 156,160,164; 147:19; 149:9

VII. "His ways" BDB 202, YHWH's guidelines for His people's lifestyle

- Deut. 8:6; 10:12; 11:22,28; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16; 32:4; Ps. 119:3,5,37,59

VIII. "His words"

A. BDB 202

- Deut. 4:10,13,36; 9:10; 10:4; Ps. 119:9,16,17,25,28,42,43,49, 57,65,74,81,89,101,105,107,114,130,139,147,160,161,169

B. BDB 57

1. "word" - Deut. 17:19; 18:19; 33:9; Ps. 119:11,67,103,162,170,172
2. "promise" - Ps. 119:38,41,50,58,76,82,116,133,140,148,154
3. "command" - Ps. 119:158

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 26:6-11**

**"So Isaac lived in Gerar. <sup>7</sup>When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say, "my wife," *thinking*, "the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful." <sup>8</sup>It came about, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah. <sup>9</sup>Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, 'She is my sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'I might die on account of her.'" <sup>10</sup>Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." <sup>11</sup>So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."**

**26:7 "She is my sister, for he was afraid to say, 'my wife'"** Some see this as a cultural element related to the Nuzi Tablets, where a man actually adopted his wife. If that is the case then Isaac is telling the truth. But, it seems that Isaac is simply following in the footsteps of his father (cf. Gen. 12:13; 20:2, 12). In Abraham's case this was a half-truth, but in Isaac's it is uncertain because in this verse (and v. 9) his action is attributed to his personal fear. It shows a lack of faith on Isaac's part because God had promised to be with him and protect him. Yet, in the midst of Isaac's unbelief, as with Abraham, God was faithful.

**26:8 "Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah"** This term "caressing" (BDB 850, KB 1019, *Piel* PARTICIPLE) is from the same root as the name for Isaac, which means "to laugh" or "to play" (BDB 850, cf. Gen. 17:17,19; 18:12; 21:6,9). Here it has a sexual connotation as it does in Gen. 39:17 and Exod. 32:6. Some translations use the term "fondling."

**26:10 “And Abimelech said”** Both the Abimelech of Abraham’s day and the Abimelech of Isaac’s day come across as much more morally and ethically sensitive than the Patriarchs. This may imply that at this stage of history the Canaanites had some degree of spirituality.

**26:11** YHWH’s protection is behind this decree!

The phrase “shall surely be put to death” reflects a *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a *Hophal* IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 559, KB 562), which was a grammatical way to show intensification.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 26:12-17**

**<sup>12</sup>Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the LORD blessed him, <sup>13</sup>and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; <sup>14</sup>for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. <sup>15</sup>Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth. <sup>16</sup>Then Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are too powerful for us." <sup>17</sup>And Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar, and settled there.**

**26:12-14** Note the blessings.

1. reaped a hundredfold, v. 12
2. became rich and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy, v. 13
3. had flocks and herds, v. 14
4. had a great household, v. 14

The second item in #2 is a *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and *Qal* IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 229, KB 246), which denotes intensity.

The third item in #2 is an ADJECTIVE and VERB of the same root (BDB 152, KB 178, *Qal* PERFECT).

**26:12 “the LORD blessed him”** This is a direct theological recognition that it was God and not Isaac’s husbandry that was the source of blessing.

**26:14 “the Philistines envied him”** This is the VERB (BDB 888, KB 1109, *Piel* IMPERFECT) “to be jealous.”

1. they stopped up Abraham’s wells, v. 15
2. they sent Isaac away, v. 16

Isaac’s prosperity was intended to help the Philistines come to YHWH, but instead it caused jealousy and resentment.

**26:15 “Philistines stopped up”** As Isaac grew, both in numbers and wealth, he became a source of fear for the Philistines. They show their distress and fear by stopping up Isaac’s wells. Knowing that Isaac was a herdsman, lack of water would force him to move away. This section of chapter 26 shows us the patience and faith of Isaac. Much of his personality type can be discerned by how he handles this tension over water rights.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 26:18-22**

**<sup>18</sup>Then Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the same names which his father had given them. <sup>19</sup>But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there**

a well of flowing water, <sup>20</sup>the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac, saying, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they contended with him. <sup>21</sup>Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over it too, so he named it Sitnah. <sup>22</sup>He moved away from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he named it Rehoboth, for he said, "At last the LORD has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land."

**26:18** "he gave them the same names which his father had given them" This is simply keeping the family tradition or it may have been a religious act relating to the covenant with his father.

**26:20-22** "Esek. . .Sitnah. . .Rehoboth" This is a series of three wells which were used to show what was happening in Isaac's relationship with his neighbors.

1. the first well means "contention" (BDB 796)
2. the second well means "enmity" (BDB 966 II)
3. the third well means "broad places" (BDB 932), which is a Hebrew idiom to represent rest and peace and happiness

**26:22** "At last the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" Isaac had the manpower to easily overcome the Philistines, but he chose to wait in faith, on God who had made him a promise. The name of the third well and "room" are the same (BDB 932).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 26:23-25**

<sup>23</sup>Then he went up from there to Beersheba. <sup>24</sup>The LORD appeared to him the same night and said,  
"I am the God of your father Abraham;  
Do not fear, for I am with you.  
I will bless you, and multiply your descendants,  
For the sake of My servant Abraham."

<sup>25</sup>So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

**26:23** "Then he went up from there to Beersheba" This is a site in the southern area of the Judean wilderness which was an important sojourning camp for Abraham (cf. Gen. 22:19).

**26:24** "The LORD appeared to him the same night and said" This is the second time YHWH appears to Isaac (cf. v. 2). Here it was in a dream at night (cf. 15:5,12; 21:12,14; 22:1-3; 26:24). Many of the revelations in Genesis are recorded in poetry, as is v. 24 (cf. 12:1-3; 15:1,18; 17:1-2,4-5; 35:10,11-12).

▣ "I am the God of your father Abraham" Notice how YHWH and *Elohim* are parallel (cf. Gen. 2:4). This is a more formal and complete revelation than v. 2. It is structured similarly to God's revelations to Abraham.

▣ "Do not fear, for I am with you" What a great promise (also note 15:1; 21:17; 46:3).

▣ "for the sake of My servant Abraham" This is a special honorific title used for Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and David. It may be the origin of the Pauline phrase, "a slave of Jesus Christ."

**26:25** The sites of YHWH's personal revelations became sacred places. Altars were built in these places and they became places of worship, prayer, and sacrifice (cf. 8:20; 12:7,8; 13:4,18; 22:9).

▣ **“dug a well”** Water is a precious commodity in these semi-arid lands. Isaac patiently waited for YHWH's help and direction. The several successful wells mentioned in this context show YHWH's presence and blessing.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 26:26-33**

**<sup>26</sup>Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with his adviser Ahuzzath and Phicol the commander of his army. <sup>27</sup>Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?" <sup>28</sup>They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, <sup>29</sup>that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.'" <sup>30</sup>Then he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. <sup>31</sup>In the morning they arose early and exchanged oaths; then Isaac sent them away and they departed from him in peace. <sup>32</sup>Now it came about on the same day, that Isaac's servants came in and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." <sup>33</sup>So he called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.**

**26:26 “Abimelech...Phicol”** Although these names are exactly the same as in Gen. 21:22, it has been about 75-80 years and obviously cannot refer to the same men. From the introduction to Psalm 34 it seems obvious that these are titles instead of proper names.

**26:27** Obviously Isaac still felt the pain and embarrassment of being expelled!

**26:28 “We see plainly that the LORD has been with you”** There are several grammatical features of this verse.

1. “plainly see,” this is a *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and *Qal* PERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 906, KB 1157), which denotes “it was plain that”
2. “let there now be an oath,” BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal* JUSSIVE; the word “oath” (BDB 46) is found only here and 24:41 (twice), even v. 31 is a different word (BDB 989). It can mean oath or curse (e.g., Num. 5:21,23,27; Deut. 29:12,14,19,20,21). It implies “may one be cursed if they do not keep the oath.”
3. “let us make a covenant,” BDB 503, KB 500, *Qal* COHORTATIVE

This is the theological purpose of the blessing of the Patriarchs. It was not to give them more physical things, but to show others their unique relationship to YHWH (cf. v. 29c).

**26:30 “he made them a feast”** The normal procedure for cutting or sealing a covenant was a fellowship meal.

**26:32-33 “they had dug a well . . . ‘we have found water’ . . . Shibah”** Obviously these wells had physical and spiritual significance. They mark the blessing of God in the life of Isaac. Verse 33 may be a rival etymology for the name Beersheba (i.e., “may it be given,” BDB 988) in Gen. 21:31, where the name is explained as “the well of oath” or “the well of seven.” Shibah may be a way of referring to the “oath.” The

Hebrew words “seven” and “swear” are quite similar. Quite often in the OT the etymologies are popular rather than technical and, therefore, may have two popular origins.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 26:34-35**

**<sup>34</sup>When Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; <sup>35</sup>and they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah.**

**26:34-35** These two verses really set the stage for chapter 27, particularly v. 46. The author is weaving elements into this account that will later have great theological significance (i.e., cause Isaac and Rebekah to send Jacob back to Haran to find a wife).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Is the Abimelech of Genesis 21 the same as the one in Genesis 26?
2. What is the origin of the Philistines?
3. Why did both Abraham and Isaac claim that their wives were their sisters?
4. What is the purpose of so many wells being alluded to in this chapter?
5. Explain the ancient rites of a covenant feast and how it impacts biblical revelation.

# GENESIS 27

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Jacob's Descendants	Isaac Blesses Jacob	Jacob Cheats Esau Out of His Blessing	Isaac Blesses Jacob	Jacob Obtains Isaac's Blessing by Fraud
27:1-4	27:1-4	27:1-4	27:1a 27:1b 27:2-4	27:1-4
27:5-17	27:5-17	27:5-17	27:5-10 27:11-12 27:13-17	27:5-10 27:11-17
27:18-29 (27-29)	27:18-29 (27-29)	27:18-29 (27-29)	27:18a 27:18b 27:19 27:20a 27:20b 27:21-24a 27:24b 27:25-29	27:18-29 (27b-29)
The Stolen Blessing	Easu's Lost Hope		Esau Begs for Isaac's Blessing	
27:30-38	27:30-38	27:30-38	27:30-31 27:32 27:33 27:34 27:35 27:36 27:37 27:38-40 (39-40)	27:30-40 (39-40a)
27:39-40 (39-40)	27:39-40 (39-40)	27:39-40 (39-40)		
	Jacob Escapes from Esau (27:41-28:5)			

27:41-45	27:41-46	27:41-45	27:41	27:41-45
			27:42-45	
		Jacob's Departure for Aram and His Dream at Bethel (27:46-28:22)	Isaac Sends Jacob to Laban (27:46-28:5)	Isaac Sends Jacob to Laban (27:46-28:5)
27:46		27:46-28:5		

### **READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)**

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

### **BACKGROUND**

- A. Quite often commentators have seen this chapter as very disparaging against Rebekah and Jacob. However, in light of Gen. 25:23, it is Isaac and Esau who are trying to manipulate God's revelation.
- B. Esau is not concerned with his own birthright, and has already sold it to Jacob (cf. Gen. 25:27-34). The NT author of the book of Hebrews reveals to us Esau's motives in Heb. 12:16-17. The birthright was directly connected to the patriarchal blessing (i.e., the idiom "so that my soul may bless you," vv. 4,19,25,31). Esau seemed to be unconcerned either about God's prediction to Rebekah or to his own forfeiture of the birthright in Genesis 25. Whether Isaac had forgotten this revelation to Rebekah, which she surely would have shared with him, or ignored it, is uncertain, but Jacob, is not, in reality, "the over-reacher" that he is often depicted as being. This does not mean that he is without manipulative tendencies, but it is unfair to blame him for all of the problems in this chapter.
- C. This chapter has an unusual number of commands related to Isaac's desire for a special meal before he gives the patriarchal blessing (supposedly to Esau).



## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 27:1-4

**<sup>1</sup>Now it came about, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." And he said to him, "Here I am." <sup>2</sup>Isaac said, "Behold now, I am old *and* I do not know the day of my death. <sup>3</sup>Now then, please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; <sup>4</sup>and prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die."**

**27:1 “when Isaac was old, and his eyes were too dim to see”** Eye problems must have been a significant disease in the Ancient Near East (cf. Jacob in Gen. 48:10; Eli in II Sam. 3:2 and later, Paul in II Corinthians 12).

▣ **“he called his older son Esau”** This shows (1) the favoritism of Isaac toward Esau (cf. Gen. 25:28), which will become obvious as the chapter develops or (2) the cultural expectation of the oldest (i.e., lit. “great,” BDB 152, i.e., in age, cf. 10:21; 29:16; 44:12) son’s special place in the family.

**27:2 “Isaac said, ‘Behold now, I am old and I do not know the day of my death’”** It is interesting to note that Isaac, about 137 years of age, is nervous about his death. We learn from Gen. 35:18 that he lived to be 180 years old. His concern may have issued from the fact that his brother, Ishmael, died at the age of 137, recorded in Gen. 25:17. If it is true that Luther’s calculations of Isaac’s age of 137 (cf. Gen. 47:9; 5:6; 41:46; 31:38; 25:26) is accurate, then Isaac was reacting to his physical disabilities and not to the revelation of God.

From the Nuzi Tablets from this same area and time we learn that “I am old” may be a legal idiom for the public transfer of inheritance rights to the control of a son.

**27:3,4** There is a series of IMPERATIVES related to Isaac’s requested meal before passing on the patriarchal blessing. Here are Isaac’s commands/requests.

1. “please take your gear” (“quiver,” BDB 1068, only here in the OT and “bow,” BDB 905), v. 3, BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. “go out to the field,” v. 3 BDB 422, KB 425, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. “hunt game for me,” v. 3, BDB 844, KB 1010, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. “prepare a savory dish,” v. 4, BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
5. “bring it to me,” v. 4, BDB 97, KB 112, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
6. “that I may eat,” v. 4, BDB 37, KB 46, *Qal* COHORTATIVE

**27:4 “so that my soul”** This is the term *nephesh* (BDB 659, KB 711, cf. v. 25), which refers to that which breathes or has life. It can be used of cattle (cf. Gen. 1:24; 2:19) or humans (cf. Gen. 2:7). Humans do not have a soul (Greek thought), they are a soul. Their physical body is the outer boundary of a body/soul/spirit unity.

▣ **“may bless you before I die”** Notice the purpose of the meal was to be the occasion of the passing on of the leadership of the family (i.e., patriarchal blessing). The Hebrew concept of the spoken word was such that once it was given it could not be revoked (cf. vv. 33-38; Isa. 55:11).

Isaac thought he was dying (cf. v. 2), but lived years longer. Isaac was the beneficiary of the covenant promises to Abraham. Yet still he was going blind and thought he would soon die. Physical illness is not a sign of God's displeasure, but the result of living in a fallen world (see the booklet by Gordon Fee, "The Disease of the Health, Wealth Gospel").

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 27:5-17**

**<sup>5</sup>Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring home, <sup>6</sup>Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, <sup>7</sup>'Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.' <sup>8</sup>Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you. <sup>9</sup>Go now to the flock and bring me two choice young goats from there, that I may prepare them as a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. <sup>10</sup>Then you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death." <sup>11</sup>Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. <sup>12</sup>Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be as a deceiver in his sight, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing." <sup>13</sup>But his mother said to him, "Your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me." <sup>14</sup>So he went and got them, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made savory food such as his father loved. <sup>15</sup>Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. <sup>16</sup>And she put the skins of the young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. <sup>17</sup>She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made, to her son Jacob.**

**27:5 "Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke"** There is obviously a problem of jealousy and manipulation in this family. We can see the conflicts and tension between Rebekah and Isaac and Jacob and Esau. It is interesting how often the Bible records marital and family problems among these heroes of the OT. Rebekah's listening at the tent flap can be interpreted either as her being nosy or as her trying to fulfill God's revelation to her in Gen. 25:23. In my understanding of this passage I am going to give Jacob and Rebekah the benefit of the doubt for it looks as if Isaac and Esau are trying to get around God's obvious prediction.

**27:7** The IMPERATIVES reflect vv. 3 and 4.

▣ **"and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death"** The very fact that God's name is mentioned (in the text by Rebekah, not Isaac, cf. v. 4) shows the significance of the patriarchal blessing. It was almost viewed as having an independent power and once given could not be recalled. It was very significant because of God's promises to Abraham and subsequent promises to Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve children.

**27:8-9** Rebekah decides to trick Isaac and block his intentions, so she orders Jacob to

1. listen/hear, v. 8, BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. go to the flock, v. 9, BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. bring/take two choice kids, v. 9, BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. that I may prepare them as a savory dish, v. 9, BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

**27:9 “such as he loves”** Rebekah knew how to cook Isaac’s favorite food. Apparently she did not do it often or he would not have requested it from Esau.

**27:11 “Esau my brother is a hairy man”** Note Genesis 25:25.

**27:12**

**NASB, NKJV** “deceiver”  
**NASB (margin)** “mock”  
**NRSV** “mocking”  
**TEV** “deceiving”  
**NJB** “cheating”  
**LXX** “ill-intentioned”

The Hebrew VERB (BDB 1073, KB 1770, *Pilpel* PARTICIPLE) in this stem (*Pilpel*) means “mock” or “deceive,” while in the *Hitpalpel* stem (cf. II Chr. 36:16) denotes “mocking” or “misuse” (NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 320). This term is found in the OT in only these two places. The NIV translated them as “tricking” and “scoffed.”

This root is not related to Jacob’s name in 25:26 (BDB 784).

**27:13-17** This shows the detailed planning of both Rebekah and Jacob in this manipulative act.

**27:13 “Your curse be on me”** There is no VERB in the MT. Rebekah knew there would be consequences! She commands Jacob to act on her behalf.

1. obey (lit. hear), BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, cf. vv. 5 (twice),6,8,13,34,43
2. go, BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, cf. vv. 5,9,13,14
3. get, BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, cf. vv. 9,13,14,15,35,36 (twice),45,46

**27:15-17** Notice the duplicitous actions.

1. took Esau’s best clothes (BDB 326) and put them on Jacob, v. 15
2. put goat skins on Jacob’s arms and neck, v. 16 (possibly from the two kids slain to provide the meal)
3. gave Jacob the prepared food to take to Isaac, v. 17

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 27:18-29**

<sup>18</sup>Then he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" <sup>19</sup>Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me." <sup>20</sup>Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have *it* so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the LORD your God caused *it* to happen to me." <sup>21</sup>Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." <sup>22</sup>So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." <sup>23</sup>He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. <sup>24</sup>And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" And he said, "I am." <sup>25</sup>So he said, "Bring *it* to me, and I will eat of my son's game, that I may bless you." And he brought *it* to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank. <sup>26</sup>Then his father Isaac said to him, "Please come close and kiss me, my son." <sup>27</sup>So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said,

"See, the smell of my son  
 Is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed;  
<sup>28</sup>Now may God give you of the dew of heaven,  
 And of the fatness of the earth,  
 And an abundance of grain and new wine;  
<sup>29</sup>May peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you;  
 Be master of your brothers,  
 And may your mother's sons bow down to you.  
 Cursed be those who curse you,  
 And blessed be those who bless you."

**27:18-24** This is the beginning of several lies.

1. Who are you?, v. 18, I am Easu, v. 19
2. How did you get the game and cook it so quickly?, v. 20, The Lord helped me, v. 20
3. Are you really Easu?, v. 24, I am, v. 24
4. Isaac's doubts can be seen in vv. 21,24,27

**27:19** Jacob requests Isaac to

1. get up, BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. sit, BDB 442, KB 444, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. eat, BDB 37, KB 46, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

**27:20** "Because the LORD your God caused *it* to happen to me" Most commentators call this blasphemy because Jacob lied, using God's name. But, I think that Jacob is referring to the fact that God's prediction of him, through his mother, as well as his purchasing of the birthright from Esau, are God's doings (i.e., the bigger picture)!

**27:22-23** Rebekah must have applied the kid's skin very carefully, especially on the hands (fingers). How she attached it is uncertain. It is possible that "hands" really refers to Jacob's arms.

**27:25** Apparently this special official blessing, which transferred family leadership, was like a covenant and, therefore, was accompanied with a meal. To eat with someone and then betray them was seen as a great crime against another.

**27:26-27** This was another test. Kissing was usually a gesture of greeting and farewell, but here it was a chance for Isaac to get close to Jacob and smell him and his clothes. Esau must have had a distinct odor related to his hunting activities.

**27:27-29** Isaac meant the patriarchal blessing for Esau, but it will be given to Jacob. Note that it includes agricultural blessings (cf. Deut. 33:28) as well as the primogenitor of the family. You will also recognize some aspects associated with Abraham's blessing (i.e., v. 29).

**27:28** "the dew of heaven" Rain comes only during certain seasons in Palestine (early rains, cf. Deut. 11:14; Joel 2:23; late rains, cf. Deut. 11:14; Joel 2:23). The remaining growing season is provided with water

by dew. Therefore, “dew” (BDB 378) becomes a metaphor for the grace and provision of God (cf. Deut. 33:13, 28).

Verses 28 and 29 have a string of IMPERFECTS used as JUSSIVES.

1. “may God give,” v. 28, BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
2. “may people serve you,” v. 29, BDB 712, KB 773, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
3. “may nations bow down to you,” v. 29, BDB 1005, KB 295, *Hishtaphel* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
4. “be master of your brothers,” v. 29, BDB 217, KB 241, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
5. “may your mother’s sons bow down to you,” v. 29, same as #3

**27:29** This is obviously Hebrew poetry with parallel symmetry. It expresses the truth found in Gen. 25:23, which is alluded to in the Abrahamic covenant in Gen. 12:1-3.

“Blessed” (BDB 138, KB 159) and “curse” (BDB 76, KB 91) represent the presence or absence of God’s bountiful provisions (cf. Num. 24:9; Deut. 27:15-28:19). In a sense it was an observable covenant promise.

☐ **“and may your mother’s sons bow down to you”** This almost seems to be a calculated putdown to Jacob.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 27:30-38**

<sup>30</sup>Now it came about, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had hardly gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. <sup>31</sup>Then he also made savory food, and brought it to his father; and he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." <sup>32</sup>Isaac his father said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." <sup>33</sup>Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was he then that hunted game and brought *it* to me, so that I ate of all of *it* before you came, and blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed." <sup>34</sup>When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, *even* me also, O my father!" <sup>35</sup>And he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing." <sup>36</sup>Then he said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" <sup>37</sup>But Isaac replied to Esau, "Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him. Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?" <sup>38</sup>Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, *even* me also, O my father." So Esau lifted his voice and wept.

**27:30 “Jacob had hardly gone out”** This phrase is a *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and *Qal* PERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 422, KB 425). This is an emphatic phrase denoting the short period of time between Jacob’s departure and Esau’s arrival.

**27:31 “and he said to his father”** It is interesting that Esau’s phraseology is exactly like that used by Jacob in v. 19. Possibly Jacob even copied his brother’s idiomatic speech in trying to trick his father. However, it may just be standard idiomatic expression.

**27:32** Suddenly Esau identifies himself as the “firstborn” (BDB 114). This had never interested him before (note 25:29-34).

**27:33 “Then Isaac trembled violently”** In the Hebrew the VERB and ACCUSATIVE COGNITIVE (BDB 353, KB 350, cf. Dan. 10:7) should be translated “trembled with a very great trembling.” It is my understanding of this text that Isaac finally realizes that he has been fighting against God in trying to bless his firstborn son, Esau, and not that he is only mad at Jacob. It is interesting to note that this is another way for God to show His sovereignty over the covenant in that firstborn children, who normally would receive the promise of the father, do not, in all of these opening chapters of Genesis. It is the second, or later, sons who receive the patriarchal blessing.

▣ **“Yes, and he shall be blessed”** This phrase can be understood either (1) as against the background of the power of the spoken word, which once given, could not be recalled or (2) as the fact that Isaac realized that he was fighting against God (see preceding note).

**27:34 “he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry”** Note the items of intensity.

1. COGNITIVE terms (BDB 858, KB 1042), “he cried out with a cry”
2. “great,” ADJECTIVE (BDB 152)
3. “bitter,” ADJECTIVE (BDB 600 I)

▣ **“Bless me, even me also, O my father!”** This is the first of two *Piel* IMPERATIVES (BDB 138, KB 159, cf. v. 38). Hebrews 12:17 shows us that Esau, although sorry that he had missed the material blessing, was sorry for the wrong reasons.

**27:35-36 “Your brother came deceitfully, and has taken away your blessing”** It is only a half truth that Jacob was a “supplanter,” “over-reacher” (BDB 784), and “deceiver” (BDB 941) because (1) Esau had sold his own birthright (cf. v. 36 and Gen. 25:27-34) and (2) Isaac ignored the revelation of God to Rebekah in Gen. 25:23. The name Jacob is defined as “overreacher” or “supplanter” (BDB 139) in Gen. 25:26.

**27:36 “these two times”** This obviously refers to Gen. 25:27-31 and 27:18-29.

▣ **“birthright. . . blessing”** There is a play on the Hebrew words that sound very much alike: “birthright” equals *bekhorah* (BDB 114), while “blessing” equals *berakhah* (BDB 139).

▣ **“Have you not reserved a blessing for me”** The patriarchal blessing was comprehensive. Everything as far as the family’s leadership and covenant promises (cf. v. 37) was pronounced on Jacob and could not be revoked because of the Hebrew concept of the power of the spoken word in YHWH’s name, even though Isaac was tricked into giving it!

**27:37** Esau was not made a poor person. He still was due one-third of all of Isaac’s property, but he would not be the one in charge of the family’s business nor speaker for the family.

**27:38 “lifted up his voice and wept”** This is an emotional Hebrew idiom for expressed sorrow (cf. Gen. 21:16).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 27:39-40**

**<sup>39</sup>Then Isaac his father answered and said to him,  
"Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling,  
And away from the dew of heaven from above.  
<sup>40</sup>By your sword you shall live,  
And your brother you shall serve;  
But it shall come about when you become restless,  
That you will break his yoke from your neck."**

**27:39-40** This is not so much a patriarchal blessing as it is a poetic prophecy, very similar to Genesis 49. There is a glimmer of independence in v. 40, lines 3 and 4.

**27:40** This may describe the history of the nation of Edom which will come from Esau (cf. Genesis 36). For much of their history they were under the domination (i.e., yoke, BDB 760, cf. Lev. 26:13; I Kgs. 12:4) of the Jews. The commentator, Leupold, interprets this as "they were always trying to get out from under Jewish domination." However, others interpret this to mean that they finally succeeded, being a reference to Herod's (who was from Edom) rule over Palestine during the days of Jesus (Luther).



**NASB, NKJV,  
NRSV, LXX "break"  
NASB (margin) "tear off"  
TEV "shake off"  
NJB "break away"**

The term (BDB 923, KB 1194) is a rare word. In the *Qal* stem (e.g., Jer. 2:31) it means to roam about freely, but in the *Hiphil* stem it means to tear oneself loose (only here and possibly Ps. 55:3).

**SPECIAL TOPIC: EDOM AND ISRAEL**

- A. Edom is the nation east of the Dead Sea, which came from Esau, Jacob's brother (cf. Gen. 25-29; 32-33). Edom means "red" while Esau means "hairy" (cf. Gen 25:25, 30).
- B. Israel was commanded to respect Edom (cf. Deut. 23:7)
- C. Israel and Edom had continuing problems.
  1. Num. 20:14-21
  2. Jdgs. 11:16-17
  3. I Sam. 14:47-48
  4. II Sam. 8:14
  5. I Kgs. 11:14-25
  6. II Kgs. 14:22; 16:5-6
  7. II Chr. 20:10-30; 21:8ff
  8. Amos 1:6, 9
- D. Other prophecies against Edom.
  1. Isa. 34:5ff; 63:1ff

2. Jer. 49:7-22
  3. Lam. 4:21-22
  4. Ezek. 25:12-17; 35:1-15; 36:2-6
  5. Amos 1:11-12
- E. Edom was condemned because of
1. her pride, vv. 3-4
    - a. in geographical security
    - b. in political alliances and military power
    - c. in commercial wealth
    - d. in traditional wisdom
  2. her violation of Judah, her kinsman, vv. 10-14
    - a. rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem (Lam. 2:15-17; 4:21)
    - b. refused to help (v. 15)
    - c. active support of enemy (v. 14)
    - d. took Judah's property (Jer. 13:19)
  3. her rejection and disdain of YHWH (v. 16)
- F. Edom may be a symbol (type) for all nations who rebelled against God and His people, vv. 15-21 (cf. Psalm 2).
- G. Possible historical fulfilment of this prophecy
1. destruction of Edom by Neo-Babylon about 5 years after the fall of Jerusalem, 580 B.C.
  2. displacement of Edom from Petra by Nabatean Arabs about 550-449 B.C. (cf. Mal. 1:2-5). Edom not mentioned in Nehemiah's list of surrounding enemies, but is replaced by Arab tribes. Edom moved to the Negev.
  3. defeat of Edom by Alexander's general, Antigonus in 312 B.C. (recorded in Diodorus Seculus)
  4. defeat of Edom in the Negev by Judah Maccabaeus around 175 B.C. (cf. I Maccabees 5:3,15; II Maccabees 10:15; Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 12:8:1; 13:9:1)
  5. Edom forced to accept Judaism by John Hyrcanus in 125 B.C. They are now called Idumeans.
  6. The Roman General, Titus, completely destroyed the Idumean influence in A.D. 70.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 27:41-45**

**<sup>41</sup>So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob." <sup>42</sup>Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, "Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you *by planning* to kill you. <sup>43</sup>Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! <sup>44</sup>Stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury subsides, <sup>45</sup>until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?"**



**27:41** The Septuagint translates this verse as a wish by Ishmael for Isaac to die (i.e., Isaac thought he was going to die; that is why he gave the patriarchal blessing, cf. v. 2), but this seems to be totally out of context. Esau seems to really love Isaac.

**27:43** Once Rebekah hears Esau's plans to take revenge on Jacob she commands Jacob to act.

1. "obey" (lit., "hear so as to act"), BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. "arise," BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. flee (lit. go), BDB 137, KB 156, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

She sends him back to her family in Haran. The trip had two purposes.

1. get him away from Esau and allow Esau's anger to calm (cf. vv. 44-45)
2. get a wife from her family (cf. v. 46), not from the Canaanites as Esau had done (cf. Gen. 26:34-35; 27:46)

**27:44-45** Here is a series of phrases by Rebekah which seem to imply that she will call Jacob home very quickly. In reality, Jacob will stay for over 20 years and probably will never see his mother again. Isn't it ironical that, although Jacob received both the birthright and the inheritance, he had to flee for his life and Esau enjoyed both of them for over 20 years. I feel sorry for Rebekah who had to stay with an old, crippled man whom she had deceived and an older son who felt betrayed.

**27:45 "Why should I be bereaved of both of you in one day"** This can be interpreted in two ways: (1) that Esau would kill Jacob and then the closest kin would act as a *go'el* and kill Esau (cf. Gen. 9:6) or (2) that Jacob, though a homebody, was also a very strong man, which was obvious from his description of his shepherding duties with Laban (cf. Gen. 31:38-42), and later his wrestling with the angel (cf. Gen. 32:22-32), and probably the two brothers would kill each other if they fought.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 27:46**

**<sup>46</sup>Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"**

**27:46** Again, we see the subtlety of Rebekah. She uses a supposed excuse for sending Jacob away, while not mentioning her weariness of life (BDB 880 I) to Esau. Apparently, her reason was valid because Isaac honors it (cf. 28:1-2). We have a reference in Gen. 26:34, 35 that Esau had married two of the Canaanite (Heth, BDB 366, cf. 23:3,10; see Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine at 12:6) women.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Who does this chapter seem to identify as having impure motives and techniques?
2. How is Genesis 25:23 related to this chapter?
3. What does the patriarchal blessing involve?
4. Why does Rebekah want her son to marry a relative?

# GENESIS 28

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Jacob is Sent Away	Jacob Escapes from Esau (27:41-28:5)	Jacob's Departure for Aram and His Dream at Bethel (27:46-28:22)	Isaac Sends Jacob to Laban (27:46-28:5)	Isaac Sends Jacob to Laban (27:46-28:5)
28:1-5	28:1-5 (3-4)			
	Esau Marries Mahalath		Esau Takes Another Wife	Another Marriage of Esau
28:6-9	28:6-9	28:6-9	28:6-9	28:6-9
Jacob's Dream	Jacob's Vow at Bethel		Jacob's Dream at Bethel	Jacob's Dream
28:10-17	28:10-17	28:10-17	28:10-15 28:16-17	28:10-19
28:18-22	28:18-22	28:18-22	28:18-22	28:20-22

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 28:1-5

**<sup>1</sup>So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. <sup>2</sup>Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. <sup>3</sup>May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. <sup>4</sup>May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham." <sup>5</sup>Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.**

**28:1 "So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him"** The interpretation of this chapter is based on Rebekah's overhearing the plot of Esau and her plan which is implemented in 27:46. It is significant that Isaac blesses Jacob freely here without being tricked. Possibly he recognized that he was fighting against God's choice in wanting Esau to receive the blessing. However, in context the "blessing" here is a mere greeting formula (e.g., 47:7,10 and Ruth 2:4).

▣ **"You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan"** This is exactly the statement made by Abraham to his servant for finding a wife for Isaac in Gen. 24:3-4. This must be related to the exclusive worship of YHWH. Although Bethuel's son, Laban, may not be a true YHWHist (i.e., *Teraphim*, cf. 31:19,34,35), apparently there was some theological understanding within that family.

**28:2** Isaac gives Jacob several commands.

1. "arise," BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. "go," BD 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. "take," BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

▣ **"to Paddan-aram"** This term (BDB 804 and 74) is later used for the Syrian empire (cf. 25:20) and yet here it seems to refer to the area around Haran (i.e., a city or a district).

▣ **"to the house of Bethuel your mother's father"** See also Gen. 22:20-24; 24:15.

**28:3 "May God Almighty bless you"** This is the title *El Shaddai* (BDB 42 and 994, see note at 17:1). This was a common patriarchal title for God (cf. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; and possibly 49:25). We learn from Exod. 6:2-3 that this was the name or title that the Patriarchs used for God. See Special Topic: Names for Deity at 12:1.

▣ **"a company of peoples"** This is the first use of the Hebrew term *Qahal* (BDB 874, cf. Deut. 5:22; 9:10; 10:4; 23:2-9; 31:30), which is translated by the Septuagint as *ekklesia*. The NT believers used this term to describe their own new fellowship of covenant believers. It was their way of saying that they felt they were one with the OT people of God.

**28:3-4** These verses have several IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense.

1. bless, v. 3, BDB 138, KB 159, *Piel* IMPERFECT
2. make fruitful, v. 3, BDB 826, KB 963, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT
3. make you multiply, v. 3, BDB 915, KB 1176, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT
4. give you the blessing of Abraham, v. 4, BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. 15:7,8

**28:4 “the blessing of Abraham”** This becomes a standard phrase for the Abrahamic promise (cf. v. 13; 12:7; 13:15,17; 15:7,8; 17:8; 26:3,4; Exod. 6:4).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 28:6-9**

**<sup>6</sup>Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he charged him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," <sup>7</sup>and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram. <sup>8</sup>So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; <sup>9</sup>and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.**

**28:6 “Now Esau”** We get another insight into the character of Esau from vv. 6-9. He still does not want the responsibility, but he desires the blessing. And, again, he seems to be a man who is rather secular-minded. He already had wives from the daughters of Canaan (cf. Gen. 26:35; 27:46), and now he will marry a daughter of Ishmael in order to please his father. This girl goes by the name “Mahalath” in v. 9, but is called “Basemath” in Gen. 36:3. Possibly he is still trying to get a blessing from Isaac.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 28:10-17**

**<sup>10</sup>Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. <sup>11</sup>He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. <sup>12</sup>He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup>And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. <sup>14</sup>Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. <sup>15</sup>Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." <sup>16</sup>Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." <sup>17</sup>He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."**

**28:10 “Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran”** Hosea 12:12 says that he was fleeing from his brother (cf. Gen. 27:41-45).

**28:11**

**NASB, NKJV,**

**NRSV, NJB,**

**LXX**

**“and he came to a certain place”**

**TEV** “to a holy place”  
**REB** “to a certain shrine”

This seems to be a rather unusual phrase (lit. “the place,” BDB 879) for a random place. It refers to somewhere in the hill country of Ephraim, close to the site of the city of Luz. This area had some special connections with Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:8; 13:3-4).

**28:12 “a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven”** The term for ladder (found only here in the OT) is from the root “to stack something up” (BDB 700, KB 757). The area is known for its flat stones. Instead of a ladder in the modern sense, it was probably a stair-step arrangement of these large stones. Jesus uses this staircase in John 1:51 to describe Himself.

▣ **“the angels of God were ascending and descending on it”** The order seems to be reversed here, but it may be in this unique order to show the significance that the covenant God of Abraham was already with Jacob, and His angels were already guiding his daily life.

**28:13**

**NASB, NKJV,**

**RSV, Pehsitta** “the LORD stood above it”

**NRSV, TEV,**

**JPSOA, NRSV** “the LORD standing beside him”

**NJB, NASB (margin)** “the LORD stood beside him”

**NIV** “above it stood the LORD”

**LXX** “the LORD stood upon it”

The VERB (BDB 662, KB 714, *Niphal* PARTICIPLE) means “stand.” The context or accompanying PREPOSITION must clarify the particulars. Here **לְ** can mean “by” or “on.” This is another covenant renewal statement, the first official one to Jacob. The phrase “I am the God of your father” is a patriarchal title (cf. 26:24; 28:13; 31:5,29,42,53; Exod. 3:6,15).

▣ **“the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants”** This was spoken first to Abram (Gen. 12:7; 13:15,17; 15:7,8; 17:8), then to Isaac (Gen. 26:3), and now to Jacob.

**28:14 “be like the dust of the earth”** YHWH promises a large number of descendants to the Patriarchs (cf. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 16:10; 17:2,4-5). In a sense this was the fulfillment of the promise of an heir, but much more—many heirs. Those of us who are Christians see this in Gal. 3:14 and Rom 2:28-29; 8:15-17! Genesis 3:15 is a reality.

▣ **“and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed”** This is the major truth that the purpose of the call of Abraham was the redemption of the whole world (see H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament*). This particular VERBAL form is *Niphal* in Hebrew and should be translated “shall be blessed.” This same form appears in 12:3; 18:18; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8. The *Hithpael* form appears in Gen. 26:4 and 22:16-18 and should be translated “shall bless themselves.” These are two ways of looking at the same blessing. God will show a blessing through His people that others will see and desire. However, it will be found only through a relationship with the patriarchal God (i.e., YHWH).

**28:15 “I am with you”** The “I Am” God (cf. v. 13) is personally present with Jacob. This is the greatest of God’s blessings (cf. Gen. 26:3).

☐ **“I will not leave you”** YHWH promises to never abandon his promises/people (e.g., Deut. 31:6,8; Josh. 1:5; Heb. 13:5).

☐ **“until I have done what I have promised you”** Note the surety of YHWH’s promises, see Deut. 7:9 and Isa. 55:11.

### 28:16

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, REB **“Surely the LORD is in this place”**

TEV **“the LORD is here”**

JPSOA **“Surely the LORD is present in this place”**

The ADVERB “surely,” “truly” (BDB 38, cf. Exod. 2:14; I Sam. 15:32; Isa. 40:7; 45:15; Jer. 3:23 [twice]; 4:10) denotes intensity.

☐ **“and I did not know it”** Apparently Jacob felt that he had violated holy ground, but he did not know it was holy because it did not look unusual or different. This, in my opinion, negates the theory of some ancient commentators that this was a Canaanite holy site.

**28:17 “He was afraid”** Jacob’s attitude toward this dream is described as “fear” (BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* IMPERFECT). He describes the place as “awesome” (BDB 431, KB 432, *Niphal* PARTICIPLE). Humans were/are fearful of seeing or being in the presence of a holy God or the spiritual realm (i.e., angels). Note God’s word to Moses at the burning bush in Exod. 3:5 or the nation of Israel before Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19.

☐ **“This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven”** Some commentators feel that this phrase “the gate of heaven” (BDB 1044 CONSTRUCT 1029) and the concept of a ladder reaching to heaven is reminiscent of several Babylon religious motifs (i.e., the Ziggurats). Although it is true that these motifs are found in Babylonian mythology, that does not mean that it is the source of Jacob’s thought.

This is a metaphor for the place where God and humans meet. Here the added concept of God’s angels going and coming denotes His active involvement in the daily affairs of humans, especially the covenant family.

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 28:18-22

**<sup>18</sup>So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. <sup>19</sup>He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. <sup>20</sup>Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, <sup>21</sup>and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. <sup>22</sup>This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”**

**28:18 “set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top”** This pillar, in Hebrew *massebah* (BDB 663), is a memorial (cf. 35:14) to the site where Jacob met God. It later became associated with the worship of the fertility gods and was condemned in the Mosaic legislation (e.g., Exod. 23:24; 34:13; Deut. 16:22).

**28:19 “He called the name of that place Bethel”** This is from the Hebrew word for house, *beth* (BDB 108), and the general name for God in the Ancient Near East, *El* (BDB 41). It was known by the Canaanites

as Luz, which means “almond tree” (BDB 531 II, cf. 35:6; 48:3), but from this point on the Jews called it Bethel (i.e., house of God).

**28:20-22 “IF”** This does seem like a lack of faith on Jacob’s part, but it may be that he was trying to put into specific language the promise of God. It may be much like the FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCES in Greek and that he is assuming that what God had said was true and he was putting it in terms that he can understand and hang on to. At this point I’m not ready to negate the faith of Jacob because of this ambiguous phrase.

Note the conditions.

1. if God will be with him
2. if God will keep/watch over (BDB 1036, KB 1581)
3. if God will give him food
4. if God will clothe him
5. if he returns to his father’s house in safety

Note Jacob’s promised actions.

1. he will establish the site of the dream and raised stone as God’s house
2. he will tithe (“surely give a tenth to Thee,” INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB of the same root [BDB 797, KB 894] denotes intensity)

Jacob does not ask for wealth, but sustenance and God’s presence and protection on his journey.

**28:22 “I will surely give a tenth to Thee”** The tithe, like circumcision and sacrifice, is much more ancient than the Mosaic legislation. We see this concept of the tithe in Gen. 14:20 and here and 28:22, long before Moses received the laws. It seems to be a symbol for that which is due to God as a sign that all that we have belongs to Him.

One wonders to whom Jacob would pay this tithe. There were no priests or structures at this isolated place where he encountered YHWH. Possibly burnt offerings!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Had Isaac changed his mind about Jacob being the true promised heir?
2. By what name did the Patriarchs know God?
3. What meaning does the ladder that reached to heaven have for Jacob, and later for Jesus?
4. What is a pillar and why is it condemned?
5. What does v. 22 say about tithing?



# GENESIS 29

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Jacob Meets Rachel	Jacob Meets Rachel	Jacob's Success in Haran (29:1-31:55)	Jacob Arrives at Laban's Home	Jacob Arrives at Laban's Home
29:1-3	29:1-3	29:1-3	29:1-3	29:1-8
29:4-8	29:4-8	29:4-8	29:4a 29:4b 29:5a 29:5b 29:6a 29:6b 29:7 29:8	
29:9-12	29:9-12	29:9-12	29:9-12a 29:12b-14	29:9-14a
29:13-14	29:13-14	29:13-14		Jacob's Two Marriages
	Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel		Jacob Serves Laban for Rachel and Leah	29:14b-19
29:15-20	29:15-20	29:15-20	29:15-17 29:18 29:19-20	
Laban's Treachery				29:20-30
29:21-30	29:21-30	29:21-30	29:21-25 29:26-27 29:28-30	
	The Children of Jacob (29:31-30:24)		The Children Born to Jacob (29:31-30:24)	Jacob's Children (29:31-30:24)
29:31-35	29:31-30:8	29:31-30:8	29:31-35	29:31-30:8

## READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 29:1-3**

**<sup>1</sup>Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east. <sup>2</sup>He looked, and saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large. <sup>3</sup>When all the flocks were gathered there, they would then roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.**

**29:1 “Then Jacob went on his journey”** This phrase is translated literally “lifted up his feet” (BDB 669 and 919). This is the only place that this unique idiom occurs in the OT. It seems to show something of the excitement and purpose that Jacob felt after his meeting with God at Bethel.

▣ **“and came to the land of the sons of the east”** In Judges 6:3 and 33 this seems to refer to an Arabian tribe (cf. Job 1:3; Isa. 11:14; Ezek. 25:4,10). However, here it seems to refer to the inhabitants of Haran (cf. Jer. 49:28). Possibly, it refers to the northern Arabian tribes between Bethel and Haran that Jacob might encounter.

**29:2 “He looked, and saw a well in the field”** The journey is completely omitted and in v. 2 Jacob finds himself close to Haran, but not certain of his exact location. Wells were the place to meet the local folk. The presence of God is obvious in this “by chance” encounter. Haran is the context for chapters 29-31.

▣ **“Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large”** This was common in this culture and was (1) to stop evaporation; (2) keep the water clean; or (3) for the purpose of security (unauthorized use).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 29:4-8**

**<sup>4</sup>Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran."  
<sup>5</sup>He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know *him*." <sup>6</sup>And he said to them, "Is it well with him?" And they said, "It is well, and here is Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep." <sup>7</sup>He said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them." <sup>8</sup>But they said, "We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered, and they roll the stone from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."**

**29:4 “brothers”** This is the use of the term (BDB 26) for a greeting without implying a family relationship. We use this same greeting among fellow Christians in the southern USA today.

In vv. 12 and 15 the same term is used of a relative, but again not literally a “brother.” This recognition of family is called “my bone and my flesh” in v. 14 (cf. Gen. 2:23).

**29:5 “Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor”** Here is a good example where the word “son” (BDB 119) in Hebrew can refer to “father” or “grandfather.” Bethuel is Laban’s father and Nahor is his grandfather (cf. Gen. 24:24,29).

**29:6 “Is it well with him. . .It is well”** This is the term *shalom* (BDB 1022). See Special Topic at 15:15.

▣ **“Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep”** There are no coincidences in the lives of God’s servants (cf. 24:15; Exod. 2:16, see *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life* by Hannah Whithall Smith). There is an unseen hand of God, as in Esther (note Gen. 37:15-17).

**29:7 “Behold, it was still high day”** Jacob was a shepherd and he knew that what was being done was against the best shepherding practices (this knowledge will impress Laban). This will allow him to show off his muscles (cf. v. 10) for Rachel! Apparently, it worked! I bet Rachel was shocked at being kissed by this stranger (cf. v. 11), but after he told her who he was there was great joy. The fact that Jacob weeps shows the cultural propensity of Oriental men to show their emotions much more than their western counterparts (cf. v. 13).

Jacob addresses the other shepherds in idiomatic IMPERATIVES functioning as rhetorical questions.

1. water, BDB 1052, KB 1639, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
2. go, BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. pasture, BDB 944, KB 1258, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 29:9-12**

**<sup>9</sup>While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. <sup>10</sup>When Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. <sup>11</sup>Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted his voice and wept. <sup>12</sup>Jacob told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.**

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 29:13-14**

<sup>13</sup>So when Laban heard the news of Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Then he related to Laban all these things. <sup>14</sup>Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him a month.

**29:13** “when Laban heard the news of Jacob his sister’s son, he ran to meet him” The rabbis say he ran because he thought that Jacob would have presents just as Eliezer had brought (Gen. 24:10). However, I’m not ready to impugn his motives at this point. It is true that Laban is going to out-manipulate Jacob, the manipulator, but this seems to be the plan of God for maturing Jacob.

**29:14** “a month” The term (BDB 294) is related to the term “moon” (BDB 294). The Hebrews used a lunar calendar marked by the phases of the moon (i.e., new moon, new month).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 29:15-20**

<sup>15</sup>Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" <sup>16</sup>Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup>And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face. <sup>18</sup>Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." <sup>19</sup>Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than to give her to another man; stay with me." <sup>20</sup>So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

**29:15** This is very subtle, but it seems that Laban had already caught on to the idea that Jacob had an eye for Rachel and he was in a round-about way asserting that since Jacob did not have the dowry he could work for him. Possibly he had also noted his shepherding skills.

**29:16** “Leah” The etymology of her name (BDB 521, KB 513) is somewhat in dispute: (1) Akkadian root, “cow”; (2) Arabic root, “wild cow”; or (3) “wearied” (from VERB, KB 512). From v. 17 it seems that she was not as attractive physically as was Rachel.

▣ **“Rachel”** Her name meant “a ewe” (BDB 932, KB 1216). Apparently, nomadic people were often named after animals.

**29:17**

NASB, RSV,

JPSOA, NIV,

LXX

“eyes were weak”

NKJV

“eyes were delicate”

NRSV

“eyes were lovely”

TEV, NJB

“lovely eyes”

REB

“dull eyes”

Peshitta

“attractive eyes”

The ADJECTIVE (BDB 940, KB 1230) means

1. Hebrew root—soft, tender, slender
2. Arabic root—weak, thin, poor

Most English translations take the Arabic in this context because of the root meaning of her name. But, this verse may be an attempt to compliment both girls.

▣ **“beautiful of form and face”** The ADJECTIVE (BDB 421) is used twice in two CONSTRUCTS.

1. BDB 421 and 1061 denote fair/beautiful in form
2. BDB 421 and 909 denote fair/beautiful in appearance

All of the primary Patriarchs’ wives were beautiful, attractive (but barren) women.

**29:18 “Now Jacob loved Rachel. . .and I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel”**

This was a very generous offer, far more than Laban would ever have asked. But he was thrilled and took full advantage of it. Something of the true love between these two can be seen in vv. 19-20,30.

**29:19 “stay with me”** This is a command (BDB 442, KB 444, *Qal* IMPERATIVE), but in context it is an idiomatic way of accepting Jacob’s offer to work seven years for Laban as a price for a bride.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 29:21-30**

<sup>21</sup>Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give *me* my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her."  
<sup>22</sup>Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast. <sup>23</sup>Now in the evening he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to him; and *Jacob* went in to her. <sup>24</sup>Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. <sup>25</sup>So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?" <sup>26</sup>But Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the firstborn. <sup>27</sup>Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years." <sup>28</sup>Jacob did so and completed her week, and he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. <sup>29</sup>Laban also gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid. <sup>30</sup>So *Jacob* went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years.

**29:21 “Then Jacob said to Laban, ‘Give *me* my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her”** Obviously, Laban was in no hurry even at the end of seven years, to give Jacob his daughter. This shows something of the tendency that will be seen throughout these verses concerning the manipulative techniques of Laban. He was looking out for his immediate family’s interests.

**29:23 “*Jacob* went in to her”** There has been much discussion about why Jacob, after all this time, did not know that this was Leah. Some of the theories are: (1) it was dark (i.e., v. 23, “in the evening”); (2) she was veiled (cf. 24:65); (3) he was drunk (the term “feast” [BDB 1059] in v. 22 is from the root “to drink” [BDB 1059], implying a wild party)! It seems to me that #3 fits the social context the best.

**29:24 “Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid”** We learn from the Nuzi Tablets, which describe the Hurrian culture of the same period (2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.), that this was a common practice. In case the daughter was barren, the servant could bear a child in her behalf (cf. vv. 28-29; 30:3). Verses 24 and 29 are a narrator’s parenthesis preparing us for chapter 30.

**29:25 “behold, it was Leah”** Although it was obvious from Laban’s character that this kind of behavior was to be expected, it is surprising that Leah did not say something or that Rachel did not say something. But,

we must judge this day in light of its own culture and not in ours, and because of the lack of specific textual information modern interpreters must not speculate.

**29:27 “complete the bridal week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years”** This bridal week was common to this culture (cf. Jdgs. 14:14,17). It is also reflected in the extra-canonical book of Tobit 11:18. The concept of the month being broken into weeks is uniquely biblical (cf. Gen. 2:1, 2). The fact that Laban could make the unbelievable request that Jacob serve him seven more years shows the exploitive attitude of this man. Jacob has met his match and now knows how it feels to be tricked (cf. 27:35).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 29:31-35**

<sup>31</sup>Now the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.  
<sup>32</sup>Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben, for she said, "Because the LORD has seen my affliction; surely now my husband will love me." <sup>33</sup>Then she conceived again and bore a son and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this *son* also." So she named him Simeon. <sup>34</sup>She conceived again and bore a son and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore he was named Levi.  
<sup>35</sup>And she conceived again and bore a son and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

**29:31 “unloved”** This is a Hebrew idiom which is, literally, “hated” (BDB 971, KB 1338, *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE, cf. v. 33), but because of its use in Deut. 21:15; Mal. 1:2-3; John 12:25 and Luke 14:26, we know that it is simply an idiom of comparison which should be translated “unloved,” not “hated.” It speaks of priority. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.

**29:32 “Leah conceived and bore him a son and named him Reuben”** Reuben (BDB 910, “behold a son” from the VERB “to see,” BDB 909) is the popular etymology for the term “seen” (BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* PERFECT, “to see”).

☐ To bear a son was a great honor. Leah was certain Jacob would be pleased and acknowledge her with more attention.

**29:33 “Then she conceived again and bore a son. . .Simeon”** The word “Simeon” (BDB 1035) is the popular etymology from the Hebrew word “heard” or “the Lord heard” (BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* PERFECT).

**29:34 “She conceived again and bore a son. . .Levi”** His name (BDB 532 I) is from the popular etymology for “joined” (BDB 530 I, KB 522, *Niphal* IMPERFECT). Leah longed for a deeper emotional relationship with Jacob.

**29:35 “she conceived again and bore a son. . .Judah”** This one is the son that God chose to fulfill His promise. His name means “praise” (BDB 397), which is a play on “I will praise YHWH” (BDB 392, KB 389, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT). His name becomes the name of a tribe, then a nation, and then all Jewish people. The three older sons will be rejected because of their improper acts. Again, it is interesting that God chose the woman who was less loved to bring forth the line of the Messiah. This reversal of expected events is common in Genesis and shows YHWH’s control and sovereignty.

# GENESIS 30

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
The Sons of Jacob	The Children of Jacob (29:31-30:24)	Jacob's Success in Haran (29:1-31:55)	The Children Born to Jacob (29:31-30:24)	Jacob's Children (29:31-30:24)
30:1-13			30:1 30:2 30:3-8	29:31-30:8
	30:9-13	30:9-13	30:9-13	30:9-13
30:14-21	30:14-21	30:14-21	30:14 30:15a 30:15b 30:16 30:17-21	30:14-21
30:22-24	30:22-24	20:22-24	30:22-24	30:22-24
Jacob Prospers	Jacob's Agreement with Laban		Jacob's Bargain with Laban	How Jacob Became Rich
30:25-36	30:25-36	30:25-36	30:25-26 30:27-28 30:29-30 30:31a 30:31b-33 30:34-36	30:25-31      30:32-36
30:37-43	30:37-43	30:37-43	30:37-39 30:40 30:41-43	30:37-43

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 30:1-8

<sup>1</sup>Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." <sup>2</sup>Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" <sup>3</sup>She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children." <sup>4</sup>So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. <sup>5</sup>Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. <sup>6</sup>Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan. <sup>7</sup>Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. <sup>8</sup>So Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed." And she named him Naphtali.

**30:1 "jealous of her sister"** This is literally "red in the face" (from Arabic root, BDB 888, KB 1109, *Piel* IMPERFECT). She apparently took her jealousy out on Jacob ("give me children," BDB 396, KB 393, *Qal* IMPERATIVE), who did not appreciate it one bit (cf. v. 2)! Barrenness seems to be common in the wives of the Patriarchs. Rachel's impatience can be seen in v. 1, whereas Rebekah had prayed for over twenty years. After four children by Leah, Rachel is jealous, angry, and impatient.

**30:3 "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her, that she may bear on my knees"** This is a cultural idiom which seems to refer to adoption (cf. Gen. 48:12). We know from the law codes Lipit-Ishtar, the code of Hammurabi, the Nuzi Tablets, the Mari Tablets, and Alalakh Tablets that this was a cultural possibility. We cannot judge the morality of this custom in light of our own day.

Rachel's frustration can be seen in a series of commands.

1. go in to her, BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (a strong request)
2. that she may bear, BDB 408, KB 411, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
3. that through her I too may have children (lit. I may be built), BDB 124, KB 139, *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

**30:5-6 "And Bilhah conceived and bore a son. . . Dan"** The name "Dan" is the Hebrew word "judged" (BDB 192). The daughter who will be born in v. 21 is the feminine form of this same word (Dinah, BDB 192).



**30:8**

**NASB, NRSV** “with mighty wrestlings”

**NKJV** “with great wrestlings”

**TEV** “a hard fight”

**NJB** “a fateful battle”

**LXX** “contended”

The problem is that the MT has “*elohim*,” which could mean Rachel wrestled with God, or translate it as descriptive “mighty/great/hard” and see it as denoting a metaphorical wrestling match with Leah. Possibly it relates to both the spiritual (God) and physical (her sister) struggle related to her barrenness (cf. Peshitta).

▣ **“Naphtali”** This term is related to the term “wrestled” (lit. “twisted,” BDB 836). She wrestled with her sister in rivalry and with God in prayer.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 30:9-13**

**<sup>9</sup>When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. <sup>10</sup>Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. <sup>11</sup>Then Leah said, "How fortunate!" So she named him Gad. <sup>12</sup>Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. <sup>13</sup>Then Leah said, "Happy am I! For women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.**

**30:9** There was real competition between these sisters/wives!

**30:10-11 “Leah’s maid Zilpah bore her a son. . .Gad”** The word Gad (BDB 151 III) comes from the Hebrew “fortunate” or “good fortune” (BDB 151 II).

The MT has “by good fortune,” but the Masoretic scholars’ marginal note has “good fortune has come”). It is possible that Gad (גַּד, BDB 151 III) comes from

1. a troop, גִּדָּי, BDB 151 I, NKJV (NIV footnote)
2. fortune, גַּד, BDB 151 II, LXX, NASB, NRSV, TEV, JPSOA, NJB, REB, Peshitta
3. happy, LXX

**30:12 “And Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. . .Asher”** This name is related to the Hebrew word “happy” (BDB 81).

**30:13 “Asher”** This name (BDB 81) comes from the VERB “happy” (BDB 80, KB 97 II, *Piel* PERFECT), meaning “consider happy” or “blessed.”

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 30:14-21**

**<sup>14</sup>Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." <sup>15</sup>But she said to her, "Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son's mandrakes also?" So Rachel said, "Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." <sup>16</sup>When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night. <sup>17</sup>God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. <sup>18</sup>Then Leah said, "God has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband." So she named him**

**Issachar. <sup>19</sup>Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. <sup>20</sup>Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. <sup>21</sup>Afterward she bore a daughter and named her Dinah.**

**30:14 "Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah"** Mandrakes (BDB 188) were an ancient aphrodisiac (cf. Song of Songs 7:13). Either their yellow fruit or their roots which looked like a man were the origin of this tradition. Rachel wanted these and hoped that she would conceive and bear a son (again the covenant family trying to help God). The tension between these two sisters becomes obvious in this account. What amazes me is how Jacob was so easily manipulated by the strife of these two women (cf. v. 15-16).

**30:16 "I have surely hired you"** This is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 968, KB 1330), which denotes intensity. Jacob was willingly sexually manipulated by his first two wives. Issachar's name (see below) reflects this sad event.

**30:18 "Issachar"** The name Issachar (יִשָּׂכָר, BDB 441) is related to the Hebrew word "wages" or "recompense" (שָׂכָר, BDB 969). Leah hired Jacob's love with Reuben's mandrakes!

**30:19-20 "Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. . .Zebulun"** The term Zebulun (BDB 259) is a play on the Hebrew words for "gift" or "dowry" (BDB 256) and the word "dwell" or "honor" (BDB 269). His wives are still fighting over his affection.

**30:21 "Afterwards she bore a daughter and named her Dinah"** This seems to be the only girl born to this family. The fact that only one was named shows that there was probably only one daughter, however, note 37:35. However, Dinah's place in the later narrative may be the reason for the naming of this one daughter.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 30:22-24**

**<sup>22</sup>Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. <sup>23</sup>So she conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." <sup>24</sup>She named him Joseph, saying, "May the LORD give me another son."**

**30:22-24 "Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb"** The name "Joseph" (BDB 415) is related to one of two Hebrew VERBS.

1. "take away her reproach" (BDB 62, KB 74, *Qal* PERFECT, cf. v. 23) or
2. "add" (BDB 414, KB 418, *Hiphil* JUSSIVE) asking God for another male child (cf. 35:17)

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 30:25-36**

**<sup>25</sup>Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country. <sup>26</sup>Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me depart; for you yourself know my service which I have rendered you." <sup>27</sup>But Laban said to him, "If now it pleases you, stay with me; I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account." <sup>28</sup>He continued, "Name me your wages, and I will give it." <sup>29</sup>But he said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you and how your cattle have fared with me. <sup>30</sup>For you had**

little before I came and it has increased to a multitude, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?" <sup>31</sup>So he said, "What shall I give you?" And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this *one* thing for me, I will again pasture *and* keep your flock: <sup>32</sup>let me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep and every black one among the lambs and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and *such* shall be my wages. <sup>33</sup>So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning my wages. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, *if found* with me, will be considered stolen." <sup>34</sup>Laban said, "Good, let it be according to your word." <sup>35</sup>So he removed on that day the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, every one with white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the care of his sons. <sup>36</sup>And he put *a distance* of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

**30:25-26 "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country"** Apparently the cultural norm of the day involved Laban sending Jacob away instead of Jacob just leaving. He had apparently tried to leave several times with always the same negative result. Laban wanted Jacob to stay because it profited him (cf. v. 27).

Verses 25 and 26 have some intense language.

1. "send me away," v. 25, BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Piel* IMPERATIVE
2. "that I may go to my own place," v. 25, BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
3. "give me my wives and my children," v. 26, BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. "let me depart," BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* COHORTATIVE

The VERB "served" (BDB 712, KB 773) is used twice (cf. v. 29), showing Jacob's attitude that he has fully paid Laban all he owes (and more, v. 30)!

**30:27 "I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account"** The word "divined" is from the root "hiss" or "whisper" (BDB 638 II). It is an attempt to know and control the future through physical means apart from trusting YHWH. It is condemned in Lev. 19:26; Num. 23:23-24; and Deut. 18:10.

It is hard to know why these early people in Genesis use things later condemned in the Mosaic legislation.

1. raised stones
2. divination, here and 44:5,15 (Joseph)
3. imitation magic (i.e., striped branches produce striped animals)
4. use of mandrakes for fertility
5. household idols (*teraphim*)
6. circumcision of pagans (as a weapon)

These early YHWHists were influenced by their cultures. They are surely moving toward a purer, more complete monotheism, but it was a long road!

**30:28 "Name me your wages, and I will give it"** Laban fully recognizes that his prosperity is based on Jacob and he wants to retain him at any cost.

The VERB "name" (BDB 666, KB 718, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) has a varied semantical field. It normally means "to pierce" or "bore." Here it denotes Jacob naming his compensation in order to remain with Laban. It is also used in this sense of "naming" in Isa. 62:6.

The second VERB “give” (BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* COHORTATIVE) signals the reader that Laban recognizes his need of Jacob’s presence and help (cf. v. 30). Laban must have been a demanding father-in-law (cf. 31:11-12). The text even implies Jacob was seen and treated as a hired servant (cf. 31:14-16).

**30:30 “the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned”** Jacob knew the source of Laban’s blessing was in him and his relationship to YHWH. But, as v. 30 continues, it shows that Jacob also recognized the needs of his own household.

**30:31 “So he said, ‘What shall I give you?’ And Jacob said, ‘You shall not give me anything’”** Jacob knew that the source of blessing was not Laban but God.

**30:32** Jacob is going to take the off-colored (BDB 378, KB 375, used five times in vv. 32-35) animals from the sheep and the goats. The off-colored animals from the sheep would be dark and the off-colored animals from the goats would be speckled or mottled. These unusually colored animals would normally be rare. This was for the obvious reason that Jacob by this time knew Laban and he did not want any questions about whose was whose in the future (cf. v. 33).

**30:35-36 “So he removed on that day the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, every one with white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the care of his sons”** There are two very interesting things in this verse and in v. 36. The word “he” at the beginning of v. 35 obviously refers to Laban. This is the first mention of his own sons. Apparently, Laban divided the flock and gave Jacob’s animals into the care of his (Laban) sons. From v. 36 we see that Laban sent Jacob’s animals a three days journey away so that they could not breed with his animals. This also forced Jacob to take care of Laban’s animals to assure their blessing. Although Laban had everything on his side, God was with Jacob. I personally do not believe that Jacob’s tricks mentioned in vv. 37ff were the source of the spotted and speckled animals multiplying faster, but the supernatural presence of God.

The NIV Study Bible’s footnotes assert that v. 35 was done secretly by Laban and his sons to reduce or eliminate all unusually colored animals. If so, then Jacob’s claim only referred to future births. When I read this I do not see v. 35 as necessarily having this connotation, but it would not surprise me knowing the manipulative nature of Laban.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 30:37-43**

**<sup>37</sup>Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white which *was* in the rods. <sup>38</sup>He set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, *even* in the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink; and they mated when they came to drink. <sup>39</sup>So the flocks mated by the rods, and the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. <sup>40</sup>Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban; and he put his own herds apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock. <sup>41</sup>Moreover, whenever the stronger of the flock were mating, Jacob would place the rods in the sight of the flock in the gutters, so that they might mate by the rods; <sup>42</sup>but when the flock was feeble, he did not put *them* in; so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's. <sup>43</sup>So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.**

**30:37-43** This again looks like the patriarchal family trying to help YHWH fulfill His promises! Whether this method worked (i.e., some chemical in the plant) or not is not the theological issue! Jacob, the trickster, is still at work. Are YHWH's promises dependant on Jacob's actions?

**30:43** Jacob's flocks and herds grew for several years (possibly six more after the mandated fourteen, cf. 31:41).

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTERS 29-30**

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did God allow a trickster like Laban to manipulate His chosen vessel, Jacob?
2. Did Jacob want to be a polygamist?
3. List the names of each of these sons and give their popular etymology.

# GENESIS 31

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Jacob Leaves Secretly for Canaan	Jacob Flees from Laban	Jacob's Success in Haran (29:1-31:55)	Jacob Flees from Laban	Jacob's Flight
31:1-16	31:1-16	31:1-9	31:1-3 31:4-9	31:1-13
		31:10-16	31:10-13 31:14-16	31:14-16
31:17-21	31:17-21	31:17-18	31:17-21	31:17-21
Laban Pursues Jacob	Laban Pursues Jacob	31:19-21	Laban Pursues Jacob	Laban Pursues Jacob
31:22-24	31:22-24	31:22-24	31:22-25	21:22-25
31:25-32	31:25-32	31:25-32	31:26-30 31:31-32	31:26-30 31:31-35
31:33-35	31:33-35	31:33-35	31:33-35	
31:36-42	31:36-42	31:36-42	31:36-42	31:36-42
The Covenant of Mizpah	Laban's Covenant with Jacob		The Agreement Between Jacob and Laban	A Treaty Between Jacob and Laban (31:43-32:3)
31:43-55	31:43-50	31:43-50	31:43-44 31:45-55	31:43-44 31:45-55
	31:51-55	31:51-54 31:55		

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

#### 1. First paragraph

2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 31:1-16

<sup>1</sup>Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth." <sup>2</sup>Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not *friendly* toward him as formerly. <sup>3</sup>Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you." <sup>4</sup>So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field, <sup>5</sup>and said to them, "I see your father's attitude, that it is not *friendly* toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me. <sup>6</sup>You know that I have served your father with all my strength. <sup>7</sup>Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me. <sup>8</sup>If he spoke thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth speckled; and if he spoke thus, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth striped. <sup>9</sup>Thus God has taken away your father's livestock and given *them* to me. <sup>10</sup>And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which were mating *were* striped, speckled, and mottled. <sup>11</sup>Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' <sup>12</sup>He said, 'Lift up now your eyes and see *that* all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. <sup>13</sup>I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.'" <sup>14</sup>Rachel and Leah said to him, "Do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father's house? <sup>15</sup>Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also entirely consumed our purchase price. <sup>16</sup>Surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you."

**31:1** “Now Jacob heard the words of Laban’s sons, saying” Exactly how old these sons were is uncertain, but they were old enough to tend the flocks by themselves (cf. 30:35). Several years must have passed since chapter 30. Apparently they were repeating what they had heard at home. They were also repeating it in public, which shows that they were not afraid of Jacob’s finding out. Their accusations, though understandable, were not factual (cf. 30:30). Before Jacob came, Laban was not a wealthy man. YHWH was with Jacob; Laban had been blessed by the association.

▣ **“wealth”** This is literally “glory” (BDB 459, cf. KJV). The Hebrew term “glory” means “heaviness” or “weight.” It can be used of “honor,” but here it seems to mean “physical abundance” (NKJV).

**31:2** “Jacob saw the attitude of Laban” Laban was a manipulator. Although he had treated Jacob harshly, he had always smiled at him, but now his countenance had changed.

**31:3** “Then the LORD said to Jacob” YHWH took this opportunity of Jacob’s recognition of a negative situation to reveal to him that it was time for him to go home (“return,” BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal*

IMPERATIVE). He reminded him of the Bethel experience with the phrase “I will be with you,” which had occurred 20 years earlier (cf. Gen. 28:10-22, esp. v. 15).

**31:4 “Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field”** Rachel is mentioned first because she was the favored wife. They are called out into the field for a private, secret meeting. Apparently Jacob had not discussed this with his wives before.

**31:5 “the God of my father”** This is one of several phrases in chapter 31 which shows the historical continuity of God’s covenant with several generations of Abraham’s family.

**31:6 “you know that I have served your father with all my strength”** The wives had been cognizant of Jacob’s long hours and difficult working schedule in connection with their father. He worked 14 years for them and 6 more years for his own flocks and herds.

**31: 7 “Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times”** The term “cheated” (BDB 1068, KB 1739, *Hiphil* PERFECT) comes from the Hebrew root which means “to mock,” “to deceive,” or “to trifle with.”

The term “changed” (BDB 322, KB 321) is also alluded to in v. 41. Although we are not told exactly how Laban changed his wages, it is obvious from the context that Jacob was supposed to get all of the off-colored animals, but when the off-colored animals produced more offspring, Laban began to take certain groups of them for his own. Every time he made a change, God blessed the remaining flock of Jacob, whether they were speckled or mottled or striped (cf. v. 8).

▣ **“ten times”** This seems to be a round number used as hyperbole, not exactly ten times (be careful of western literalism).

▣ **“God did not allow him to hurt me”** Jacob, realizing his position before God, based not only on the prophecy of 25:23, but of God’s specific vision to him in 28:10-22, has the theological understanding of what he is experiencing. Laban knew it too (cf. v. 29).

**31:8** This verse describes in detail how Laban tried to change their agreement. However, every time he changed it, God changed the breeding habits of the goats and sheep to benefit Jacob (cf. v. 9).

**31:9 “God has taken away”** This is a strong VERB (BDB 664, KB 717, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT), which in the *Hiphil* stem denotes “snatching away,” cf. vv. 9 and 16. It is used of delivering prey from wild animal attacks (cf. I Sam. 17:34-35; Ezek. 34:10; Amos 3:12). As Laban took away Jacob’s rightful wages, now God snatches away his flock and gives it to Jacob. The mechanism of the transfer is described in v. 12.

**31:10 “And it came about at the time that the flocks were mating”** This describes a subsequent vision that Jacob had concerning the animals which would belong to him. It was not Jacob’s manipulation of certain techniques (i.e., 30:37-43), but God’s grace, that caused Jacob’s portion of the flock to prosper (cf. v. 9, and esp. v. 12).

**31:11 “the angel of God”** Again, the angel of the Lord is a personification of Deity (cf. Gen. 16:7-13; 18:1; 19:1; 21:17, 19; 22:11-15; 31:11, 13; 32:24, 30; 48:15, 16; Exod. 3:2, 4; 13:21; 14:19; Jdgs. 6:12, 14; Zech. 3:1-2). He speaks for YHWH. See Special Topic at 12:7.



**31:13 “I am the God of Bethel”** This refers to God’s vision to Jacob which is recorded in Gen. 28:10-22. The God of Jacob’s father and grandfather (cf. v. 5) issues new orders.

1. “arise,” BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. “leave” (lit. “go”), BDB 422, KB 425, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. “return,” BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

**31:14** Jacob’s wives are fully with him!

**31:15 “Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also entirely consumed our purchase price”** Here the two daughters of Laban accuse their father of not acting faithfully with them in light of the cultural expectations of that day (Hurrian culture). In the Hurrian documents the “Mohar” or “wife’s dowry” was saved, at least in part, for the daughter. However, Laban had taken Jacob’s wages and totally consumed them. Verse 15 shows us the daughters recognized this greediness and neglect by Laban their brother.

The phrase “entirely consumed” is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 37, KB 46), which denotes intensity.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 31:17-21**

**<sup>17</sup>Then Jacob arose and put his children and his wives upon camels; <sup>18</sup>and he drove away all his livestock and all his property which he had gathered, his acquired livestock which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. <sup>19</sup>When Laban had gone to shear his flock, then Rachel stole the household idols that were her father's. <sup>20</sup>And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing. <sup>21</sup>So he fled with all that he had; and he arose and crossed the *Euphrates* River, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.**

**31:17 “Jacob arose and put his children and his wives upon camels”** The flight was going to be in haste and his family was too young to make the trip except mounted on camels.

**31:18 “he drove away all his livestock”** The term “drove away” (BDB 624, KB 675) denotes the haste with which the livestock were driven. Apparently, they traveled in the evening and night-time hours to avoid the heat.

**31:19 “When Laban had gone to shear his flock”** The shearing season was a time of great festivity and family reunion (cf. Gen. 38:12; I Sam. 25:4 and II Sam. 13:23). Jacob’s absence is significant, which shows the deterioration of their relationship.

▣ **“then Rachel stole the household idols that were her father’s”** The Hebrew word for “household idols” is *teraphim* (BDB 1076). These household idols could be very large (cf. I Sam. 19:13), or very small so as to fit in Rachel’s camel saddle. We understand from the Nuzi Tablets that these household idols were a sign of inheritance rights so Rachel may have stolen them as a symbol of her understanding of Laban’s illegal acts in regard to her inheritance or to later assert the right of her son to inherit Jacob’s property. Some say that she stole them so that Laban could not divine their whereabouts (i.e., Rashi, cf. 30:27). These *teraphim* were used for divination (cf. Zech. 10:2). They often appear in association with “the ephod” (cf. Jdgs. 17:5; 18:14, 17 and Hos. 3:4). They are condemned as being idolatrous in I Sam. 15:23. Rachel is told to get rid of them in 35:20, so perhaps they had a religious significance for her.

### SPECIAL TOPIC: *TERAPHIM*

From differing parts of the OT a composite description is difficult:

1. small and portable household idols, Gen. 31:19,34,35
2. large idol shaped like a human, I Sam. 19:13,16
3. idols used in homes, but also in shrines, Jdgs. 17:5; 18:14,17,18
4. idols used for knowing the future or will of the gods/god
  - a. condemned and paralleled with divination, I Sam. 15:23
  - b. condemned and paralleled with mediums, spiritists, and idols, II Kgs. 23:24
  - c. condemned and paralleled with divination, shaking arrows, and inspecting a sheep's liver, Ezek. 21:21
  - d. condemned and paralleled with diviners and false prophets, Zech. 10:2

**31:20**

**NASB, TEV,**

**NRSV, NIV,**

**PESHITTA**

**“Jacob deceived”**

**NKJV**

**“stole away”**

**RSV, NJB**

**“outwitted”**

**REB**

**“hoodwinked”**

**JPSOA**

**“kept in the dark”**

**LXX**

**“hid the matter”**

As Rachel “stole” the family’s *teraphim*, so Jacob “stole the heart” (BDB 170, KB 198, *Qal* IMPERFECT) of Laban, which is obviously an idiom for deception.

▣ **“Laban the Syrian”** The term “Syrian” can be translated “Aramean” (BDB 74). The exact relationship between Laban being called an Aramean and Jacob being called the same in Deut. 25:5 is uncertain. From Genesis 10 there seems to be two different lines, but inter-marriage may have caused them to be identified together or by the geographical location (i.e., Haran) in which Abraham initially sojourned.

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 31:22-24**

**<sup>22</sup>When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, <sup>23</sup>then he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days' journey, and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. <sup>24</sup>God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night and said to him, "Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad."**

**31:22 “When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled”** We learn from Gen. 30:36 that the flocks of Laban and Jacob were kept a three days journey apart, so apparently a servant saw Jacob leave and immediately went to tell Laban (BDB 616, KB 665, *Hophal* IMPERFECT).

**31:23 “in the hill country of Gilead”** There has been some discussion about the possibility of this much distance being traveled in such a short time. However, we are talking about a ten day period of forced march. It is uncertain what the exact distance is, possibly between 250 and 350 miles because (1) we are

not certain of the location in Syria where Jacob's flock was located and (2) we are not sure of the eastern boundary of Gilead.

Laban came with a large contingent of armed men (cf. v. 29). His pursuit is characterized as "hotly pursued" (BDB 196, KB223, *Qal* PERFECT) in v. 37.

**31:24 "Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad"** This is a Hebrew idiom ("take heed that you do not say a word to Jacob either good or bad") which apparently means "leave him completely alone." Again, God's grace and protection are clearly seen in delivering the patriarchal family again and again.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 31:25-32**

**<sup>25</sup>Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen camped in the hill country of Gilead. <sup>26</sup>Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword? <sup>27</sup>Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre; <sup>28</sup>and did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Now you have done foolishly. <sup>29</sup>It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful not to speak either good or bad to Jacob.' <sup>30</sup>Now you have indeed gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house; but why did you steal my gods?" <sup>31</sup>Then Jacob replied to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. <sup>32</sup>The one with whom you find your gods shall not live; in the presence of our kinsmen point out what is yours among my belongings and take it for yourself." For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.**

**31:25 "Now Jacob had pitched his tent"** This is the first mention that Jacob had put up his tent, so apparently the forced march had not allowed them to stop earlier. Apparently, Jacob felt that they were far enough away to be safe.

**31:26-30** I interpret this as Laban, the manipulator, making unfair accusations about Jacob. Many of the things that Laban accuses him of are not true to fact. Laban seems to be making his case publicly for the sake of his relatives (and Jacob's) who were listening and would ultimately act as judges.

**31:27** Laban says he would have given Jacob a party. Jacob remembers the last party Laban held for him (i.e., the wedding night with Leah)! He wanted no more "parties" with his father-in-law.

**31:28 "Now you have done foolishly"** This term (BDB 698, KB 754, *Hiphil* PERFECT) is usually used in the Bible in connection with sin and guilt (cf. I Sam. 13:13 in connection with Saul, and II Sam. 24:10 in connection with David). Apparently Laban was accusing Jacob's flight of being sinful in nature.

**31:29 "It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night"** The phrase "in my power" (BDB 42) is related etymologically to the term *El* (BDB 42) or *Elohim* (BDB 43). This is the only verse that gives us the clue that the basic etymology of the word *El* may mean "to be strong." God warns Laban in a dream as He had earlier warned Pharaoh (through a plague, cf. 12:17, and some further revelation, but exactly how is not recorded) and Abimelech (cf. 20:3). YHWH is watching and protecting the covenant family from harm/attack.

**31:30 “you have indeed gone away because you longed greatly for your father’s house”** There are two intensified forms in this verse spoken by Laban.

1. “indeed gone away,” INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 229, KB 246, “go”)
2. “longed greatly,” INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PERFECT VERB from the same root (BDB 493, KB 490)

The term “longed greatly” (BDB 493) is from the Hebrew root “to be pale,” which was often used to describe the metal silver (BDB 494). It was a very strong term for “desire.” Laban accused Jacob of leaving because he was homesick, not because of the true reason which was Laban’s manipulation, fraud, trickery and finally, bad attitude.

▣ **“but why did you steal my gods”** Refer to 31:19. Apparently these household gods were superstitiously connected with inheritance and prosperity and Laban saw Jacob’s leaving as a loss of prosperity as well as with the loss of inheritance and possibly spiritual direction from these household gods (i.e., *teraphim*).

**31:31-32** Jacob answers Laban’s question from v. 27, but not his question from v. 30b. Jacob did not know about Rachel stealing the *teraphim* (v. 19).

**31:32** Apparently Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen these gods. Verse 32 reflects the Code of Hammurabi in connection with someone stealing, either from a temple, or someone’s household gods. The rabbis say that Rachel’s death, recorded in Gen. 35:16-18, while giving birth to Benjamin, is related to Jacob’s words recorded in this verse (cf. *Gen. Rab.* 74.4). This is obviously legal terminology (i.e., “in the presence of our kinsmen”). There are two IMPERATIVES.

1. point out (lit. “examine,” cf. 37:32; 38:25), BDB 647 I, KB 699, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
2. take (connotation, “take it back for yourself”), BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 31:33-35**

<sup>33</sup>So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maids, but he did not find *them*. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. <sup>34</sup>Now Rachel had taken the household idols and put them in the camel's saddle, and she sat on them. And Laban felt through all the tent but did not find *them*. <sup>35</sup>She said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is upon me." So he searched but did not find the household idols.

**31:33 “So Laban went into Jacob’s tent, and into Leah’s tent”** This shows the historicity in the account that the women usually stayed in separate tents.

**31:34 “the camel’s saddle”** This term (BDB 468), found only here, could refer to a pouch in the saddle or a bag attached to the saddle (TEV, REB).

▣ **“And Laban felt through all the tent”** This term “felt” means “to feel carefully with the hands” (BDB 344, KB 341, *Piel* IMPERFECT, cf. 44:12). It is usually used of blind people groping in the darkness (cf. Deut. 28:29; Job 5:14; 12:5).

**31:35 “for the manner of women is upon me”** This refers to her menstrual period (BDB 202 CONSTRUCT BDB 61). It is obvious from Lev. 15:19 that there were some cultural taboos connected with this. However,

it is uncertain how much we can project these Levitical legislations back into the culture of Laban and Jacob, but there was some compelling reason why he did not ask Rachel to get up.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 31:36-42**

**<sup>36</sup>Then Jacob became angry and contended with Laban; and Jacob said to Laban, "What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me? <sup>37</sup>Though you have felt through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set *it* here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. <sup>38</sup>These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks. <sup>39</sup>That which was torn *of beasts* I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself. You required it of my hand *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night. <sup>40</sup>Thus I was: by day the heat consumed me and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. <sup>41</sup>These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times. <sup>42</sup>If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so He rendered judgment last night."**

**31:36 "Jacob became angry"** This VERB (BDB 354, KB 351, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means "to burn" and denotes human anger (cf. 4:5,6; 30:2; 34:7; 39:19).

▣ **"contended with Laban"** The VERB (BDB 936, KB 1224, *Qal* IMPERFECT) has legal connotations (cf. v. 37). Jacob was attacked by Laban before the relatives, now Jacob retaliates with rhetorical questions.

1. "What is my transgression?" (v. 36)
2. "What is my sin?" (v. 36)
3. "What have you found?" (v. 37)

In a real sense the relatives constituted a court of nomadic law. They must render a decision in the dispute (v. 37).

**31:38-42** Jacob defends his shepherding techniques and diligence (before the kinsmen).

1. the lambs had not miscarried
2. he had not eaten of the rams
3. he took the loss of the sheep due to wild animals

All of this fits exactly into the culture of that day which is shown in the Law Code of Hammurabi, (paragraph 266).

**31:42 "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac"** This phrase "the fear of Isaac" is unique to this chapter and is used twice (cf. v. 53). It may refer to the Deity Isaac respects or awes. An American archeologist, Albright, says that the word "fear" is related to the use of "kinsmen" in the Cognate languages (Aramaic, Arabic, and Ugaritic) and should be translated the "kinsmen of Isaac," another way of expressing "the God of my fathers." However, this is uncertain.

▣ **"you would have sent me away empty-handed"** Jacob realized the greed of Laban and also the presence of the grace of God. This is seen in the last phrase of v. 42, where Jacob makes an allusion to the dream of Laban which is recorded in vv. 24 and 29. God has already passed judgment!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 31:43-55**

<sup>43</sup>Then Laban replied to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne?" <sup>44</sup>So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." <sup>45</sup>Then Jacob took a stone and set it up *as* a pillar. <sup>46</sup>Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. <sup>47</sup>Now Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. <sup>48</sup>Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." Therefore it was named Galeed, <sup>49</sup>and Mizpah, for he said, "May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. <sup>50</sup>If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, *although* no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me." <sup>51</sup>Laban said to Jacob, "Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. <sup>52</sup>This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. <sup>53</sup>The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. <sup>54</sup>Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain. <sup>55</sup>Early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

**31:43** Laban tries to answer Jacob's accusations.

**31:44** "So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me"

Although Laban offers to make a covenant, it is Jacob who sets up a pillar (v. 45, although Laban claims to have done it in v. 51), similar to what he did in Genesis 28, and gets the kinsmen to gather stones around it (v. 46). There they ate the covenantal meal. Meals are often associated with the forming of a covenant in the OT.

The grammatical features of this verse are

1. "come," BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. "let us make a covenant," BDB 503, KB 500, *Qal* COHORTATIVE, (lit. "to cut," see Special Topic at 13:14)
3. "let it be a witness," BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal* PERFECT, implicating a permanent witness of non-aggression (cf. v. 52)

**31:47** There are two names here. The first is Aramaic (BDB 1094 CONSTRUCT BDB 1113) and the second is Hebrew (BDB 165). They are parallel, referring to the heap of stones. Jacob named the place "Galeed" (BDB 165, "witness-pile"), which is related to where they were camped (i.e., "Gilead," BDB 166, "a circle of stones" or "a circle of mountains").

There has been much discussion over Aramaic vs. Hebrew as the language of the Patriarchs. It seems that Aramaic was spoken in Mesopotamia, the home of Abraham, but as he journeyed to Canaan he picked up a dialect of Aramaic which we know as Hebrew. This moves our linguistic understanding of these languages back in time.

**31:49** "Mizpah" The term "Mizpah" (BDB 859) in v. 49 is also a Hebrew term which speaks of a "watchtower" and is personified there to refer to God witnessing (BDB 859, KB 1044, *Qal* JUSSIVE, root related to Mizpah) between these two men. It is interesting to me that Laban really takes this opportunity

to blast Jacob in all the stipulations he puts on him in the presence of their relatives, which seems to be totally inappropriate. An example of this would be his not marrying other wives. It is Jacob who has shown a concern for Leah and Rachel, as seen in v. 31, and not Laban.

**31:53 “The God of Abraham and God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us”** The VERB here is PLURAL (BDB 1047, KB 1622, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense, PLURAL), which seems to imply that Laban is making a polytheistic statement. The Septuagint does not follow the MT here (it has the SINGULAR VERB). The book of Genesis seems to imply that Abraham became a YHWHist, but not Nahor. This seems to be an allusion to an agreement made in the names of several family gods. But, notice that Jacob only swears by the name of the God of his father, YHWH (“the fear of Isaac”).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Who is seen as the manipulator in this chapter?
2. List the ways that Laban had treated Jacob unfairly.
3. List the ways that Jacob had acted faithfully.
4. What was a *teraphim* (v. 19)? What was its purpose?
5. List Laban’s accusations in vv. 26-30 and show how they are true or false.
6. Why did Rachel steal Laban’s household gods?

# GENESIS 32

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Jacob's Fear of Esau	Esau Comes to Meet Jacob	Jacob's Reconciliation with Esau (32:1-33:20)	Jacob Prepares to Meet Esau	Jacob Prepares For His Meeting with Esau
32:1-2	32:1-8	32:1-2	32:1-2	
32:3-5		32:3-5	32:3-5	32:4-7
32:6-8		32:6-8	32:6-8	32:8-14a
32:9-12	32:9-12	32:9-12	32:9-12	
32:13-21	32:13-21	32:13-21	32:13-21	32:14b-22
	Wrestling with God		Jacob Wrestles at Peniel	Jacob Wrestles with God
32:22-23	32:22-32	32:22-32	32:22-24a	32:23-25a
Jacob Wrestles				32:25b-30
32:24-32			32:24b-26a	
			32:26b	
			32:27a	
			32:27b	
			32:28	
			32:29a	
			32:29b	
			32:30-32	
				32:31-32

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.



1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:1-2

<sup>1</sup>Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. <sup>2</sup>Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.

#### 32:1

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, TEV "met"

NJB, JPSOA "encountered"

This VERB (BDB 803, KB 910, *Qal* IMPERFECT) denotes a chance encounter (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 575, e.g., Exod. 23:4; Num. 35:19,21; Josh. 2:16; I Sam. 10:5; Amos 5:19).

One wonders if this brief and ambiguous verse is somehow linked to the wrestler of vv. 22-32. The wrestler is obviously an angel or spiritual being of some kind that had the power (from YHWH) to bless Jacob and change his name. The problem lies in

1. this ambiguous opening verse
2. the wrestler's inability to defeat Jacob in a protracted physical contest

▣ **"the angels of God"** He had seen the angels as he left Canaan (cf. 28:12), now on his return, they appeared again (cf. II Kgs. 6:16-17; Ps. 34:7). They represented YHWH's presence and protection. It would have reminded him of his conditions and God's promises of chapter 28. This chapter is a mixture of fear and trust. Jacob contends with these two options!

▣ **"met"** This VERB (BDB 803, KB 910, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means to "meet" or "encounter." The Anchor Bible Commentary (p. 254) links these angels to vv. 24-32. This does allow one to see the chapter as beginning and ending with a divine encounter.

**32:2 "God's camp"** The term "camp" (BDB 334) implies a place of encampment or rest on a journey. It can denote an armed military camp (cf. Josh. 6:11,14; I Sam. 4:3,6,7; 17:53; II Kgs. 7:16) or army (cf. Exod. 14:24). This is one of several Hebrew military terms translated "hosts."

▣ **"Mahanaim"** This word literally means "two camps" or "two hosts" (BDB 334, dual form). These two camps can refer to

1. Laban and Jacob
2. the angels and Jacob
3. Esau and Jacob
4. Jacob's divided family groups

In light of the immediate context, #2 fits best. In light of the larger context, #4 fits Jacob's character of trying to trust in his own resourcefulness.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:3-5**

<sup>3</sup>Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. <sup>4</sup>He also commanded them saying, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: 'Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; <sup>5</sup>I have oxen and donkeys *and* flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.'"

**32:3 “messengers”** In both Hebrew (BDB 521) and Greek the term “messengers” (same root as the name Malachi) means “angels.” The rabbis say he sent the angels before him to meet Esau. The same Hebrew root is translated “angels” in v. 1 and “messengers” in vv. 3 and 6.

**32:4 “lord Esau”** Here “lord” is used as a title of courtesy (*Adon*) in Jacob’s message to Esau.

▣ **“your servant”** He calls Esau “brother” in v. 3, but when the messengers address him they are to call Jacob, not “brother,” but “slave” or “servant” (BDB 713). Jacob is afraid that Esau still holds a grudge (cf. vv. 7.11).

**32:5** Apparently this message has a dual purpose.

1. Jacob has become prosperous
2. he wants to give Esau some of his wealth as a gift (cf. vv. 13-21)

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:6-8**

<sup>6</sup>The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." <sup>7</sup>Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; <sup>8</sup>for he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape."

**32:6 “four hundred men are with him”** Esau did not answer Jacob’s message and he had 400 men with him. This really scared Jacob (cf. v. 7).

**32:7** Note Jacob’s mental response to the news.

1. “greatly afraid”
  - a. afraid, BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. 3:10; 18:15; 43:18
  - b. greatly, ADVERB, BDB 547
2. “distressed,” BDB 864 I, KB 1058, *Qal* IMPERFECT, which basically means “to be cramped,” cf. Job 20:22; Isa. 49:19, but it is used metaphorically for a “cramped spirit” (i.e., depressed), cf. Jdgs. 2:15; 10:9; II Sam. 13:2

**32:7-8** Jacob plans for the worst possible situation. Again in the context of v. 1, this seems to denote a lack of faith. He does pray in vv. 9-12, but in a sense he is still trying to control his own destiny.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:9-12**

<sup>9</sup>Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,' <sup>10</sup>I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff

*only* I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. <sup>11</sup>Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children. <sup>12</sup>For You said, 'I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.'"

**32:9** Notice the different ways to refer to Deity.

1. "O God (אלה, BDB 43) of my father Abraham"
2. "O God (same as above) of my father Isaac"
3. "O LORD" (יהוה, BDB 217)

See Special Topic: Names for Deity at 12:1. These all refer to the God of Abraham (cf. 12:1; 28:3-4) and to His promises to Jacob in 28:13-17.

▣ **"who didst say to me"** This refers to 31:13,29 and ultimately back to 28:15.

1. "return," BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, cf. 31:13
2. "I will prosper you," BDB 405, KB 408, *Hiphil* COHORTATIVE, cf. vv. 10,13; 28:14

**32:10** **"I am unworthy"** This is an important admission for Jacob (BDB 881, KB 1092, *Qal* PERFECT, which denotes insignificance, cf. II Sam. 7:19; I Chr. 17:17). The emphasis is on the covenant God's grace, protection, and provision!

▣

NASB	"lovingkindness"
NKJV	"mercies"
NRSV, REB	"steadfast love"
TEV	"kindness"
NJB	"faithful love"
LXX	"justice" or "righteousness"
Peshitta	"favors"

The word used here is *hesed* (BDB 338 I), which denotes covenant loyalty. See Special Topic at 19:19.

▣

NASB, NRSV,	
TEV	"faithfulness"
NRSV, LXX,	
Peshitta	"truth"
NJB	"constancy"
REB	"true"

This is the Hebrew word *emeth* (BDB 54), which denotes loyalty. *Hesed* and *emeth* are often found together in the OT to describe God. See Special Topic at 15:6.

**32:11** **"deliver me"** This term (BDB 664, KB 717, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE) in the *Hiphil* stem means "to snatch away" and metaphorically "deliver."

▣ **"lest he come and attack me"** The term "attack" (BDB 645, KB 697, *Hiphil* PERFECT) in the *Hiphil* stem means to strike a whole company with a fatal blow (cf. 34:30). Jacob was afraid Esau would kill all the heirs of his family.

**32:12** Jacob is reminding God of His covenant promises of 28:14 and 22:17. This was a recurrent covenant promise to the Patriarchs. It was a corollary to giving them a son.

▣ **“prosper you”** This is literally “I will do you good.” This phrase is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 405, KB 408), which denotes intensity.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:13-21**

<sup>13</sup>So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: <sup>14</sup>two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, <sup>15</sup>thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. <sup>16</sup>He delivered *them* into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on before me, and put a space between droves." <sup>17</sup>He commanded the one in front, saying, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these *animals* in front of you belong?' <sup>18</sup>then you shall say, 'These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.'" <sup>19</sup>Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, "After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; <sup>20</sup>and you shall say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.'" For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me." <sup>21</sup>So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp.

**32:20**

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, REB,

PESHITTA

“I will appease him”

TEV

“I will win him over”

NJB

“I conciliate him”

JPSOA, LXX

“I propitiate him”

The VERB (BDB 497, KB 493, *Piel* COHORTATIVE) is the VERB used for a blood cleansing sacrifice (cf. Leviticus 4 and 16). Its basic meaning is “to cover” or “make atonement.”

▣

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, LXX

“accept me”

TEV

“forgive me”

NJB

“be inclined towards me”

JPSOA

“show me favor”

REB

“receive me kindly”

The VERB (BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means “to lift.” This is a Hebrew idiom “to lift the face” (cf. Job 42:8,9; Ps. 82:2; Pro. 18:5; Lam. 4:16). In a legal setting it referred to a judge lifting the face of the accused, which jeopardized his impartiality.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:22-32**

<sup>22</sup>Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup>He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had. <sup>24</sup>Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. <sup>25</sup>When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket

of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. <sup>26</sup>Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." <sup>27</sup>So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." <sup>28</sup>He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." <sup>29</sup>Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. <sup>30</sup>So Jacob named the place Peniel, for *he said*, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." <sup>31</sup>Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Peniel, and he was limping on his thigh. <sup>32</sup>Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip.

**32:22 “crossed the ford”** The Hebrew root for “crossed” (BDB 716, KB 778, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is the same root as “ford” (BDB 721, cf. Josh. 2:7; Jdgs. 3:28; Isa. 16:2). It denotes wading across at a shallow point.

▣ **“the Jabbok”** This root means “flowing” (BDB 132). It had cut a very deep gorge.

**32:24 “a man wrestled”** Here “wrestled” (BDB 7, KB 9, *Niphal* IMPERFECT), “Jabbok” (BDB 132), as well as “Jacob” (BDB 784), all sound similar when pronounced. Here the person is called a “man” (BDB 35, *ish*, cf. v. 6), but the context implies it was a physical manifestation of Deity (cf. vv. 28,30; 18:1-2). However, v. 26 implies some kind of angelic creature.

This is the kind of text that western literalism cannot understand. This has both physical and symbolic aspects. This contest was for Jacob’s benefit. It surely does not describe the “wrestling” characteristics of God!!

YHWH appears to Jacob several times (cf. 28:10-22; 32:22-31; 35:9-13; 46:24) and each time it is the character and promises of God that are emphasized. The key element is not Jacob (or his acts), but God and His covenant promises!

**32:25 “when he saw that he had not prevailed against him”** The *Jewish Study Bible*, p. 67, mentions an interesting Jewish tradition (Gen. Rab. 77.3) that asserts it was Esau’s patron angel and that this encounter serves as a warning to all who would oppose the covenant people. This does attempt to explain why an angelic creature cannot defeat a mere human. However, can Esau’s angel change Jacob’s name to Israel?! This was somehow a “God thing.”

▣ **“the socket of his thigh”** The rabbis say this refers to the vein of the thigh and this part of the animal carcass is not allowed to be eaten in Judaism (cf. v. 32).

**32:26 “the dawn is breaking”** This time of day was known as a special period of God’s activity (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 85). It was often mentioned in ancient folklore.

In light of the Hebraic fear of seeing God (cf. 16:13; 32:30; Exod. 33:20), possibly the dawn would have revealed the divine identity of Jacob’s opponent.

▣ **“bless me”** It was not Jacob’s wrestling ability that was rewarded, but his tenacious dependent attitude upon God.

**32:27 “What is your name”** This is not lack of information on the angelic/divine wrestler’s part, but a reminder to Jacob of his character of trickery and manipulation.

**32:28 “Israel”** This name change seems to be the key to the interpretation of the entire account. Israel means “may *El* preserve” (BDB 975) or if JUSSIVE, “let *El* contend” (cf. Hosea 12:3-4). It was not Jacob’s strength, but God’s purpose. One’s name was very important to the Hebrews and denoted a person’s character.

Another option for the name “Israel” (יִשְׂרָאֵל, BDB 975) is from יִשְׂרָן (“Jeshurun,” BDB 449, cf. Deut. 32:15; 33:5,26; Isa. 44:2), which means “upright one.”

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: ISRAEL (the name)**

- I. The Name’s meaning is uncertain (BDB 975).
  - A. *El* Persisteth
  - B. Let *El* Persist (JUSSIVE)
  - C. *El* Preserves
  - D. Let *El* Contend
  - E. *El* Strives
  - F. He who strives with God (Gen. 32:28)
- II. Usages in the OT
  - A. Jacob’s name (supplanter, heel grabber, BDB 784, cf. Gen. 25:26) is changed after wrestling with the spiritual personage at the river Jabbok (cf. Gen. 32:22-32; Exod. 32:13). Often the meanings of Hebrew names are sound plays, not etymologies (cf. 32:28). Israel becomes his name (e.g., Gen. 35:10; 32:13).
  - B. It came to be used as a collective name for all of his twelve sons (e.g., Gen. 32:32; 49:16; Exod. 1:7; 4:22; 28:11; Deut. 3:18; 10:6).
  - C. It came to designate the nation formed by the twelve tribes before the exodus (cf. Gen. 47:27; Exod. 4:22; 5:2) and after (cf. Deut. 1:1; 18:6; 33:10).
  - D. After the united monarchy of Saul, David, and Solomon the tribes split under Rehoboam (cf. I Kings 12).
    1. the distinction starts even before the official split (e.g., II Sam. 3:10; 5:5; 20:1; 24:9; I Kgs. 1:35; 4:20)
    2. designates the northern tribes until the fall of Samaria to Assyria in 7:22 B.C. (cf. II Kings 17).
  - E. Used of Judah in a few places (e.g., Isaiah 1; Micah 1:15-16).
  - F. After the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles it became again the collective name for all of Jacob’s descendants (e.g., Isa. 17:7,9; Jer. 2:4; 50:17,19).
  - G. Used of laity in contradistinction from priests (cf. I Chr. 9:2; Ezra 10:25; Neh. 11:3).

▣ **“with me”** The wrestler seems to differentiate himself from God, although in v. 30 Jacob realizes he has somehow been with Deity.

**32:29 “Please tell me your name”** In the Ancient Near East the name of a spiritual being was closely guarded because of the possible use of that name in curses, oaths, and rituals. This is surely not the issue in biblical texts (cf. Jdgs. 13:17-18). In biblical texts YHWH reveals His name to His people (cf. Exod. 3:13-15). However, its meaning is not always comprehended (compare Exod. 6:3 with Gen. 4:26). As Judges 13:18 states, the name is too “wonderful” for humans to comprehend.

**32:30 “Peniel”** Peniel means “the face of God” (BDB 819). The spelling “Penuel” may be the alternative spelling of an older name for the location.

This name surely implies Jacob thought his opponent was YHWH, who could have easily defeated a mere mortal, but allows a contracted context to denote His willingness to work with and on the side of Jacob. He was not an antagonist, but a present help and one who blesses.

This really is a strange ancient account with many unknown aspects, much like Exod. 4:24-26. It would be very unwise to use these ambiguous texts for doctrine or application. They remain a mystery and their interpretation mere modern conjecture!

**32:31 “he was limping”** Whether this was permanent (later Jewish tradition) or temporary is not certain.

**32:32 “to this day”** This phrase is textual evidence of a later editor. The ban on eating this part of an animal is rabbinical, not biblical.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Who was the wrestler?
  - a. a man (cf. v. 24)
  - b. an angel (cf. v. 26, Hosea 12:3-4)
  - c. God in human form (cf. v. 30)
  - d. Jesus (Martin Luther, following Justin)
2. What part do the angels of v. 1 play in the rest of the chapter?
3. Why were these encounters (i.e., with the angel and Esau) so important to Jacob?
4. Why the name change?

# GENESIS 33

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Jacob Meets Esau	Jacob and Esau Meet	Jacob's Reconciliation with Esau (32:1-33:20)	Jacob Meets Esau	Meeting with Esau
33:1-3	33:1-3	33:1-3	33:1-5a	33:1-7
33:4-11	33:4-11	33:4-11	33:5b-7 33:8a 33:8b 33:9 33:20-11	33:8-11  Jacob Parts Company with Esau
33:12-14	33:12-14	33:12-14	33:12 33:13-14	33:12-17
33:15-17	33:15-17	33:15-17	33:15a	
Jacob Settles in Shechem	Jacob Comes to Canaan		33:15b-17	Jacob Arrives at Shechem
33:18-20	33:18-20	33:18-20	33:18-20	33:18-20

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.



## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This chapter includes mostly dialogue (note TEV translation). The term “say” (BDB 55, KB 65) is used ten times.  
This dialogue format has several commands/requests.
1. “let what you have be your own,” v. 9, BDB 224, KB 243, *Qal* JUSSIVE
  2. “please take my gifts,” v. 11 BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
  3. “let us take our journey,” v. 12, BDB 652, KB 704, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
  - 4-5. “go” (twice), v. 12, BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
  6. “please let my lord pass on before me,” v. 14, BDB 716, KB 778, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
  7. “I will proceed at my leisure,” v. 14, BDB 624, KB 675, *Hithpael* COHORTATIVE
  8. “please let me leave with you some of my people,” v. 15, BDb 426, KB 427, *Hiphil* COHORTATIVE
  9. “let me find favor in the sight of my lord,” v. 15, BDB 592, KB 619, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense
- B. Jacob has faced his fears.
1. Laban
  2. the angelic wrestler
  3. Esau
- C. Jacob is back in the Promised Land (Canaan). The divine promises of Bethel have been fulfilled. The covenant promises to Abraham and his seed continue (i.e., the eternal redemptive plan is on track).

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 33:1-3

**<sup>1</sup>Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. <sup>2</sup>He put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. <sup>3</sup>But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.**

**33:2** Notice the distinction in the family. The lesser wives and children go first, his favorites go last (i.e., Rachel and Joseph). Things have changed in Jacob’s heart, however, and he goes before them all (cf. v. 3). If they are to be killed, he will be killed first. He still strategizes, but he trusts in YHWH’s presence and promised protection.

**33:3 “bowed down”** This VERB (BDB 1005, KB 295, *Hishtaphel* IMPERFECT) is repeated four times.

1. Jacob bows before Esau, v. 3
2. the maids and their children bow before Esau, v. 6
3. Leah and her children bow before Esau, v. 7
4. Rachel and her child bow before Esau, v. 7

▣ “seven times” This was a gesture of submission (i.e., El Amarna Letters, 14th century B.C.).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 32:4-11**

**<sup>4</sup>Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. <sup>5</sup>He lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children, and said, "Who are these with you?" So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." <sup>6</sup>Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down. <sup>7</sup>Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down. <sup>8</sup>And he said, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" And he said, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." <sup>9</sup>But Esau said, "I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own." <sup>10</sup>Jacob said, "No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably. <sup>11</sup>Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have plenty." Thus he urged him and he took it.**

**33:4** “Esau ran . . . embraced . . . fell on his neck . . . kissed . . . wept” These are all signs of warm greetings.

1. “ran,” BDB 930, KB 1207, *Qal* IMPERFECT
2. “embraced,” BDB 287, KB 287, *Piel* IMPERFECT
3. “fell on his neck,” BDB 656, KB 709, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. 45:14; 46:29
4. “kissed,” BDB 676, KB 730, *Qal* imperfect (this is missing in the LXX and marked in the MT as an addition), cf. 45:15; 48:10; 50:1
5. “they wept,” BDB 13, KB 129, *Qal* IMPERFECT (the LXX and TEV, REB have “they both wept,” but possibly, “he wept,” cf. NJB, AB, p. 258)

**33:5** Esau asks about the groups of women and their children who were all accompanying Jacob. It must have been unusual for a man to have two wives and two concubines and children with each or Esau would not have asked. Esau’s reaction to this is not recorded.

**33:8** Esau asks about all the presents (i.e., animals) that Jacob has sent before his family (cf. 32:13-21).

**33:9** “my brother” The NASB Study Bible (p. 51) makes a good point in mentioning that Esau calls Jacob “my brother,” but Jacob calls Esau “my lord.” Jacob is either (1) being tactful or (2) fearful.

Gifts were common at special occasions. To refuse a gift in this culture implied a strained relationship (i.e., James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 41). Esau’s refusal would have supported Jacob’s worst fears! Esau did not need these gifts, but accepted them as a sign of accepting his brother.

**33:10** Jacob urges Esau to accept his gifts because Esau’s acceptance of him (cf. v. 14) would parallel God’s graciousness (“as one sees the face of God”) toward him. This may be a veiled allusion to 25:23.

**33:11** Jacob acknowledges the source of his physical wealth as the covenant God (i.e., “graciously,” BDB 335, KB 334, *Qal* PERFECT, cf. v. 5; 43:29).

▣ “gift” This (BDB 139) is literally “blessing.” It is the very term used to describe what Jacob cheated Esau of in chapter 27. It is not by accident that Jacob wants to bless his brother by giving a gift (lit. blessing). In a sense he was trying to make up for his earlier manipulations.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 33:12-14**

<sup>12</sup>Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you." <sup>13</sup>But he said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. <sup>14</sup>Please let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir."

**33:13** One wonders if this was another way for Jacob to make Esau feel superior, as well as an excuse for not traveling with him back to Seir immediately. His children were not "weak" and the flocks had already traveled a long way. Is Jacob still a manipulative liar?

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 33:15-17**

<sup>15</sup>Esau said, "Please let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord." <sup>16</sup>So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. <sup>17</sup>Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth.

**33:15 "people"** This is the term *goi* (BDB 766 I), which usually has a negative connotation referring to Gentiles, but here it is used of Esau's men and in Exod. 33:13 it refers to the people of God. Context, context, context determines word meaning, not lexicons! Words have meaning only in sentences; sentences have meaning only in paragraphs/strophe or stanzas; and these have meaning only in larger literary units. Be careful of "set" or "technical" definitions!

**33:17 "Succoth"** This term (BDB 697) means "booths." Jacob built a shelter for himself, but this is called a "house" (BDB 108), but note v. 19. He also built "booths" (BDB 697, i.e., a shelter made from branches) for his animals.

It is uncertain if there was a village in this area before Jacob camped there (cf. Josh. 13:27). It will later become the name of a city (cf. Jdgs. 8:5).

This is not the same as the Succoth located in the Egyptian delta (cf. Exod. 12:7; Num. 33:5). This is a city in northern Canaan on the east side of the Jordan.

One more point, Jacob does not seem to follow Esau to Mt. Seir, but travels to Succoth, which is not on the way to Seir/Edom. He even builds a house! It is uncertain if the text is telling us that (1) this was purposeful or (2) simply omits Jacob's visit to Seir. I prefer option #2. I want to believe Jacob has truly changed, that he is no longer the trickster, manipulator, liar.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 33:18-20**

<sup>18</sup>Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city. <sup>19</sup>He bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. <sup>20</sup>Then he erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

**33:18 "Shechem"** The name can refer to

1. a person's name, vv. 18,19; 34:2; Num. 26:31; Josh. 17:2; 24:32; Jdgs. 9:28
2. a topological region between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerazim. The same root (BDB 1014 I) means "shoulder" or "shoulder-blade."
3. a city, Josh. 20:7; 21:21; 24:1; Jdgs. 8:31

It is first mentioned in Gen. 12:6 in connection with Abram and now with Jacob (cf. 37:14).

There is no apparent connection between v. 17 and v. 18. How long Jacob stayed at Succoth is not recorded. They seem to be two separate events and times recorded with no clear connection. From building a house to buying land may imply temporary to permanent residence. The only problem is that v. 18 seems to imply soon after Jacob arrived from Paddan-aram (area around Haran) he bought the land.

He was told to return to Bethel, but he stopped short and remained. Why is not stated in the text!

**33:19 “And he bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent”** The act of buying a field implied residency or at least shows legal residency.

▣ **“Hamor”** This name means “ass” (BDB 331 II). In the ancient world donkeys were considered sacred animals. We know this, not only from the Mari Tablets, but also from the fact that (1) the wealthy rode donkeys (cf. Jdgs. 5:10) and (2) Israel’s kings rode on a special donkey for their royal mount (i.e., I Kgs. 1:33).

▣ **“for one hundred pieces of money”** This is a rare Hebrew term, קֶשֶׁטָה, *qesitah* (BDB 903). It is an unknown weight of metal (cf. Josh. 24:32; Job 42:11), possibly (1) the price of a lamb (LXX) or (2) a weight (mina) of metal in the shape (or imprint) of a lamb.

**33:20 “he erected there an altar”** This designated a place, time, and manner of worshiping. It allowed prayer and sacrifice to be offered to YHWH (cf. 8:20; 12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25). This is a fulfillment of YHWH’s promise of 28:15!

▣ **“El-Elohe-Israel”** This CONSTRUCT is made up of

1. *El*, BDB 42, cf. Exod. 34:6; see Special Topic at 12:1
2. *Elohe*, BDB 43, cf. Deut. 32:15,17; Ps. 18:32
3. Israel, see Special Topic at 32:28

The Septuagint translates it as “the God of Israel.” The Jewish Study Bible, using the JPSOA translation in its textual footnote, has “*El*, God of Israel” (p. 69).

# GENESIS 34

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
The Treachery of Jacob's Sons	The Dinah Incident	Shechem's Violation of Dinah	The Rape of Dinah	The Rape of Dinah
34:1-7	34:1-7	34:1-4 34:5-7	34:1-4 34:5-10	34:1-5 A Matrimonial Alliance with the Shechemites 34:6-12
34:8-12	34:8-12	34:8-12	34:11-12	
34:13-17	34:13-17	34:13-17	34:13-17	34:13-19
34:18-24	34:18-24	34:18-24	34:18-24	34:20-24 The Treacherous Revenge of Simeon and Levi
34:25-31	34:25-31	34:25-31	34:25-29 34:30 34:31	34:25-29 34:30-31

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Jacob must face his fears and temptations.
  - 1. Laban
  - 2. Esau
  - 3. Canaanite intermarriage
  - 4. Canaanite aggression
  
- B. Jacob is still a fearful person.
  - 1. lies to Esau and will not follow to Seir
  - 2. does not travel to Bethel (as told by God)
  - 3. is tempted to intermarry with the people of the land for self interest
  - 4. is fearful of Canaanite's retaliation
  
- C. God's name does not appear in this chapter (might be purposeful)!
  
- D. It is surely possible that this chapter is included
  - 1. as a foil to chapter 17
  - 2. as a way of showing why Judah is the line of the Messiah and not the older three sons. Chapter 34 will remove Simeon and Levi as possible options (cf. Gen. 49:5-7)  
Remember "historical narrative" must be interpreted in large contextual pieces. (See article on Old Testament Narrative at page xvii.)

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:1-7

**<sup>1</sup>Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. <sup>2</sup>When Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her by force. <sup>3</sup>He was deeply attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. <sup>4</sup>So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this young girl for a wife." <sup>5</sup>Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; but his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob kept silent until they came in. <sup>6</sup>Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. <sup>7</sup>Now the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard *it*; and the men were grieved, and they were very angry because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.**

**34:1 "Dinah the daughter of Leah"** A lengthy amount of time occurs between Genesis 33 and 34. The children are now grown. Dinah is the only daughter mentioned in Jacob's lineage (cf. 30:21). Surely there were others (cf. 37:35), but Dinah is mentioned because of her central role in this chapter. Her name is the feminine form of the word "judgment" or "vindication" (BDB 192), which is the name of one of Jacob's sons (cf. 30:6) and later one of the tribes, Dan.



NASB, NRSV,  
TEV, NJB "visit"

**NKJV, LXX,**

**Peshitta** “see”

The VERB “to see” (BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) can be understood in several ways (obviously she went alone away from her home/camp).

1. to observe, learn about them and their lives
2. to visit her friends, Jacob had remained there several years
3. a play on v. 2, “Shechem saw her” (same VERB)

**34:2 “Shechem”** This is the prince of the local tribe. Hamor is the current chief or tribal leader. The prince was named after this main city. For the meaning of the name, see 33:18.

It is possible grammatically to take “prince” (BDB 672 I), which means “the one lifted up,” as referring to Hamor (see *A Handbook on Genesis* by Reyburn and Fry, USB, p. 786).

▣ **“the Hivite”** The Septuagint translates this as Horite (cf. Gen. 34:2; Josh. 9:7). It is obvious that they are a non-circumcised, non-Semitic group of people which should probably be identified with the Hurrians. The only two uncircumcised groups of people which surrounded Israel in ancient times were the Philistines, who were Aegean mercenaries, and these Hurrian sojourners. All of the Canaanite tribes practiced circumcision. See Special Topic at 12:6.

▣ **“he took her and lay with her”** This is a hendiadys (two VERBS expressing one action). This is shocking to moderns, but a prince in the Ancient Near East had rights. Finding a wife in this period and locality was very different from modern dating methods (i.e., Exod. 22:16-17; Deut. 21:10-14; 22:28-29). Patriarchal culture was all about men’s rights and little about women’s freedoms or feelings.

There are several VERBS which denote sexual activity.

1. lie with, BDB 1011, KB 1486, cf. Gen. 19:32; 26:10; 30:15; 39:7; Lev. 18:22
2. approach, BDB 897, KB 1132, cf. Gen. 20:4; Lev. 18:6,14,19; 20:16
3. go in to, BDB 97, KB 112, cf. Gen. 19:31; 29:21,23,30; 30:3,4,16; 38:8,9,16; 39:14
4. know, BDB 393, KB 390, cf. Gen. 4:1,17,25; 19:5,8; 24:16; 38:26; Num. 31:17,18,35; Jdgs. 19:22,25; 21:12

▣

**NASB, NRSV,**

**JPSOA** “by force”

**NKJV, REB** “violated her”

**TEV** “raped”

**NJB** “forced her to sleep with him”

**LXX** “humbled her”

**Peshitta** “defiled her”

This VERB (BDB 776, KB 853, *Piel* IMPERFECT) in the *Piel* stem means “to humble” in the sense of violent sexual attack (i.e., rape, cf. Deut. 21:14; 22:24,29; Jdgs. 19:24; 20:5; II Sam. 13:12,14,22,32; Ezek. 22:10,11).

**34:3 “And he was deeply attracted to Dinah”** Although this young man was well thought of among his own people (cf. v. 19), he still perpetrated a violent act against Dinah. It apparently was a violation of a sojourner and her family.

Shechem’s feeling toward Dinah are repeated in three ways.

1. “he was deeply attracted to Dinah” (lit. “his soul cleaved to her”), BDB 179, KB 209, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. I Kgs. 11:2

2. “he loved the maiden,” BDB 12, KB 17, *Qal* IMPERFECT; “maiden” (BDB 655) denotes a young, but marriageable, youth
3. “spoke tenderly to her” (lit. “spoke to the heart of the girl”), BDB 180, KB 210, *Piel* IMPERFECT, cf. 50:21; Jdgs. 19:3; Ruth 2:13
4. “the soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter,” v. 8, BDB 365 I, KB 362, *Qal* PERFECT, cf. Deut. 21:11
5. “he was delighted with Jacob’s daughter,” v. 19, BDB 342, KB 339, *Qal* PERFECT

▣ **“the girl”** Dinah is described by several different terms in this chapter.

1. daughter, v. 1, BDB 123 I (several times)
2. the girl, v. 3, BDB 655, cf. v. 12 (Shechem described by the same root [BDB 654] in v. 19)
3. the young girl, v. 4, BDB 409, cf. Joel 4:3; Zech. 8:5 (used only for young females these three times, from root to “bear,” “beget”)
4. sister, v. 13, BDB 27, cf. vv. 14,27,31

**34:4 “So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, ‘Get me this young girl for a wife’”** This fits the cultural pattern of parents’ arranging the marriage of their children. But notice the son initiates the request (BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE). The problem was Shechem’s impulsive initial sexual aggression (cf. v. 7).

#### 34:5

NASB, NKJV,  
NRSV, LXX,  
JPSOA

“defiled”

TEV

“disgraced”

NJB, REB

“dishonored”

This VERB (BDB 379, KB 375, *Piel* PERFECT) denotes that which is viewed as unclean according to God’s law (cf. Lev. 18:24-30). Here it denotes sexual uncleanness (cf. Ezek. 18:6,11,15; 22:11; 23:17; 33:26). Dinah was raped by an uncircumcized Canaanite.

▣ **“Jacob kept silent”** His motive is not stated. It could have been

1. the temptation to use the situation to his advantage (cf. vv. 6,30)
2. to wait for his sons and servants to arm themselves
3. that the brothers had “a say” in the situation

**34:7** Dinah’s brothers were very angry.

1. “The men were grieved,” BDB 780, KB 864, *Hithpael* IMPERFECT, cf. Gen. 6:6
2. “They were very angry,” BDB 354, KB 351, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. Gen. 4:5,6; 31:36; 39:19
3. “He had done a disgraceful thing,” BDB 615, i.e., a senseless disregard for the moral standards of Jacob and his religious tradition, cf. Deut. 22:21; Jdgs. 19:23; 20:6; II Sam. 13:12 (the NOUN means “fool”)

▣ **“in Israel”** This is using the term in a later sense. In this clause it refers to the laws of the nation of Israel. This is a textual marker of a later editor, compiler, or scribe (cf. Deut. 22:21; Josh. 7:15; Jdgs. 19:23; 20:10).

Some commentators try to make this PREPOSITION (BDB 88-91) mean “to,” but it means “in.”



**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:8-12**

**<sup>8</sup>But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage. <sup>9</sup>Intermarry with us; give your daughters to us and take our daughters for yourselves. <sup>10</sup>Thus you shall live with us, and the land shall be *open* before you; live and trade in it and acquire property in it." <sup>11</sup>Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, "If I find favor in your sight, then I will give whatever you say to me. <sup>12</sup>Ask me ever so much bridal payment and gift, and I will give according as you say to me; but give me the girl in marriage."**

**34:8 “with them”** This refers to all of Dinah’s brothers and half-brothers. Shechem’s father tries to calm down the anger and sense of violation.

Verse 11 shows that Jacob himself is addressed also.

**34:9 “and intermarry with us”** This was not the family tradition of Abraham (cf. Gen. 24:3) or Isaac (cf. Gen. 28:1,8). Jacob is now tested.

**34:10 “the land shall be *open* before you”** This is a Hebrew idiom for free access and travel within the land (cf. Gen. 13:9; 20:15).

Notice the number of promises made to Jacob and his family if they will agree to this marriage.

1. “you shall live with us,” v. 10
2. “the land shall be *open* before you,” v. 10
3. “live and trade in it, v. 10 (“trade” probably means “travel freely within” in this context, cf. 42:34; NJB, but the same root can mean “traders,” cf. 23:16; I Kgs. 10:28-29)
4. “acquire property in it,” v. 10
5. “I will give whatever you say to me,” v. 11
6. “ask me ever so much bridal payment and gift,” v. 12

In a sense, become one with us! Jacob should have journeyed to Bethel. He stayed near Shechem (the city) too long. Now violence and pain will be the cost of his delinquent obedience.

**34:12 “bridal payment and gift”** This refers to a dowry or a Hebrew *mohar* (BDB 555). This was not so much a purchasing of the bride, but a compensation for the loss of a helper (cf. Exod. 22:16-17; I Sam. 18:25). This dowry was usually kept for the wife in case of the death of the husband or a later need (cf. Gen. 31:15 where Laban’s daughters are complaining that he had used the dowry money for himself).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:13-17**

**<sup>13</sup>But Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor with deceit, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. <sup>14</sup>They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcized, for that would be a disgrace to us. <sup>15</sup>Only on this *condition* will we consent to you: if you will become like us, in that every male of you be circumcised, <sup>16</sup>then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you and become one people. <sup>17</sup>But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go."**

**34:13**

NASB	“with deceit”
NKJV	“spoke deceitfully”
NRSV, Peshitta	“answered. . .deceitfully”
TEV	“in a deceitful way”
NJB	“a crafty answer”

**LXX**  
**JPSOA**

**“craftily”**  
**“speaking with guile”**

The NOUN “deceit” (BDB 941) means treachery. It is used by Esau of Jacob’s trick in Gen. 27:35. The same root is used to describe Laban’s trickery of Jacob with Leah in Gen. 29:25. This characteristic of Jacob remains in his family.

**34:14-17 “one who is uncircumcized”** Circumcision was a sign of the covenant of YHWH (cf. Gen. 17:9-14). Here, Dinah’s brothers are using it in the physical rather than its intended spiritual sense. They had ulterior motives. The violent attack of Shechem is now used as an excuse for a violent attack on the whole tribe! This kind of revenge is exactly what the Hebrew “Eye for an eye” (cf. Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20) law was meant to stop.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:18-24**

**<sup>18</sup>Now their words seemed reasonable to Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son. <sup>19</sup>The young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now he was more respected than all the household of his father. <sup>20</sup>So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, <sup>21</sup>“These men are friendly with us; therefore let them live in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters in marriage, and give our daughters to them. <sup>22</sup>Only on this *condition* will the men consent to us to live with us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised. <sup>23</sup>Will not their livestock and their property and all their animals be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will live with us.” <sup>24</sup>All who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and to his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.**

**34:19** This verse lists the three things that Shechem did to win the approval of Jacob’s family: (1) he did not delay; (2) he was delighted in Jacob’s daughter; and (3) he put his reputation on the line.

**34:20 “came to the gate of their city”** The gate was the site of the domestic, social, and legislative life of a community. He will appeal to these men (i.e., those old enough to fight) on the basis of the profit motive (cf. v. 23).

**34:21** All four VERBS in this verse are *Qal* IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense (i.e., “let us. . .”).

**34:23** The Shechemites saw this gesture (i.e., circumcision) as a way to increase their tribe’s power and wealth. The covenant people were not growing, but a Canaanite tribe is!

**34:24** Wow! This was a major concession. Circumcision for an adult is a painful and dangerous (i.e., infection) procedure. All of this just to allow the prince to marry a foreigner who he desired (i.e., royal line no longer pure). It is hard for modern westerners to comprehend eastern tribal loyalty and respect for tribal leaders.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 34:25-31**

**<sup>25</sup>Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male. <sup>26</sup>They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went forth. <sup>27</sup>Jacob's sons came upon the slain and looted the city, because they**

had defiled their sister. <sup>28</sup>They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field; <sup>29</sup>and they captured and looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, even all that *was* in the houses. <sup>30</sup>Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household." <sup>31</sup>But they said, "Should he treat our sister as a harlot?"

**34:25 “Now it came about on the third day. . .Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers”** Grown men would have been extremely sore on the third day after circumcision. The second and third sons of Leah knew this fact and took advantage of it by totally slaughtering the male population, and took the women and children and all of the possessions for their own. Later, in Gen. 49:5-7, this will be the basis of the prophecy against these two tribes assuming leadership in Jacob’s family. This is even asserted as the reason why Levi will not inherit with the other tribes, but will be dispersed throughout the tribes.

**34:26 “took Dinah from Shechem’s house”** This was a patriarchal culture. The reader is never informed of Dinah’s feelings or choices. One wonders

1. if she stayed at Shechem’s house voluntarily or was forced
2. if she ever returned home and told her story or was she accompanied by family members in v. 1
3. if she was conscious of the covenant consequences of her potential marriage to a Canaanite

**34:27**

**NASB** “Jacob’s sons”  
**LXX, Peshitta** “but the sons of Jacob”  
**TEV, NJB,**  
**REB** “Jacob’s other sons”

The NASB follows the MT, but the ancient versions translate it so as to involve all of Jacob’s sons in the plunder, but not the slaughter. There would have been too much booty for just two sons to have rounded up and used.

**34:28-29** Ancient warfare is shocking to moderns in its violence and the taking of spoils. Women and children were seen as property to be possessed and incorporated into a new society (this was how Dinah was perceived also).

**34:30-31** Jacob seems to be reacting more in fear of the circumstances than in trust toward God. God promised to protect him and be with him, but he seems to be expressing doubt of his ability based on numbers, not the promise (cf. 28:15).

As Rebekah and Jacob had been used by God to force Isaac to do the prophesied thing (cf. Gen. 25:23), so now too, Jacob’s sons are forcing Jacob to do the right thing (i.e., not intermarry with Canaanites and journey to Bethel). The tendency appears again in Jdgs. 8:33-35.

God works in surprising ways to accomplish His purposes in the family of Abraham!!!

**34:30**

**NASB, NRSV,**

**JPSOA, “odious”**

**NKJV “obnoxious”**

**NJB, REB “bad odour”**

**LXX “evil”**

**Peshitta “hurt my reputation”**

This *Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT (BDB 92, KB 107) means to cause to stink (cf. Exod. 16:24; Ps. 38:5). It is used metaphorically of being rejected by people in Exod. 5:21; I Sam. 27:12; and here.

▣ **“the Canaanites and Perizzites”** See Special Topic at 12:6.

# GENESIS 35

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Jacob Moves to Bethel	Jacob's Return to Bethel	Jacob's Journey from Shechem to Mamre	God Blesses Jacob at Bethel	Jacob at Bethel
35:1-4	35:1-4	35:1-4	35:1 35:2-4	35:1 35:2-5
35:5-8	35:5-7	35:5-8	35:5-8	35:6-8
Jacob Is Named Israel				35:6-8
35:9-15 (10) (11-12)	35:9-15	35:9-15	35:9-15	35:9-10 35:11-13 35:14-15
	Death of Rachel		The Death of Rachel	The Birth of Benjamin and Death of Rachel
35:16-21	35:16-20	35:16-21	35:16-18 35:19-21	35:16-20 Reuben's Incest
35:22a	35:21-22	35:22a	The Sons of Jacob 35:22a	35:21-22a
The Sons of Israel				The Twelve Sons of Jacob
35:22b-26	Jacob's Twelve Sons 35:23-26	35:22b-26	35:22b-26	35:22b-26
	Death of Isaac		The Death of Isaac	The Death of Isaac
35:27	35:27-29	35:27-29	35:27-29	35:27-29
35:28-29				

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph

2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. God commands Jacob
  1. arise, BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
  2. go, BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
  3. live (lit. dwell), BDB 442, KB 444, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
  4. make an altar, BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE and later in v. 11
  5. be fruitful, BDB 826, KB 963, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
  6. multiply, BDB 915, KB 1176, *Qal* IMPERATIVE; both of these commands reflect God's command
    - a. to the animals, Gen. 1:28
    - b. by implication to Adam and Eve
    - c. to Noah, Gen. 9:1,7
    - d. to Abraham in different terms
    - e. and now to Jacob
  
- B. Jacob commands his family to prepare
  1. put away the foreign gods, BDB 693, KB 747, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
  2. purify yourselves, BDB 372, KB 369, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
  3. change your garments, BDB 322, KB 321, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
  4. let us arise, BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* COHORTATIVE , cf. v. 1
  5. let us go, BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense, cf. v. 1
  
- C. When Jacob was finally obedient and came to Bethel YHWH presumably addressed him again, vv. 9-15

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:1-4

**<sup>1</sup>Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." <sup>2</sup>So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments; <sup>3</sup>and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." <sup>4</sup>So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.**

**35:1** "Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel'" Jacob's initial encounter with YHWH was at this place, cf. Gen. 28:18-22; 35:14. YHWH calls Himself "the God of Bethel" and tells Jacob to return to Canaan in Gen. 31:13.

The “go up” VERB (BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) can be understood in two ways.

1. Bethel was to the south, but was higher topologically than Shechem.
2. The VERB is often used of going to the temple (i.e., a holy site). Bethel may have represented an intimacy with God.

▣ **“make an altar”** The term “altar” (BDB 258) means a place of slaughter. The Patriarchs made many altars.

1. Noah on the Mount of Ararat, Gen. 8:20
2. Abraham
  - a. at Shechem, Gen. 12:7
  - b. at Bethel, Gen. 12:8
  - c. at Hebron, Gen. 13:18
  - d. at Moriah, Gen. 22:9
3. Isaac at Beersheba, Gen. 26:25
4. Jacob
  - a. at Shechem, Gen. 33:20
  - b. at Bethel, Gen. 35:7

Obviously, sacrifice predates the Mosaic covenant.

**35:2 “the foreign gods which are among you”** The term “gods” (little “g” PLURAL) is exactly the same as the term *Elohim* (capital “God”) in v. 1. Context must determine the translation of this term. See Special Topic at 12:1.

This verse is interesting in that it shows the spiritual preparation necessary for renewing the covenant promises. The foreign gods may refer to (1) the *teraphim* of Gen. 31:19,30; (2) other gods brought from Haran by members of his household; or (3) gods taken from Shechem made of precious metal (economic value), crafted artfully (ascetic value). This is similar to the covenant renewal of Josh. 24:14,23 (cf. I Sam. 7:3).

It is interesting that the spiritual preparation (the VERB “purify” [BDB 372, KB 369] is a *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE; this was not an option; this is the only use of this VERB in Genesis, but it becomes common in Leviticus), and was symbolized by bathing and a change of garments (cf. Exod. 19:10; Num. 8:7,21; 19:19). Therefore, this outward, physical symbol was meant to reflect an inner spiritual preparation of all of Jacob’s extended family. The stain of the slaughter of Shechem was heavy on them.

**35:3 “let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God”** Jacob is returning to the scene of his initial personal encounter with God (cf. Gen. 28:18-22). At this point in his relationship with YHWH one wonders if he is a monotheist (one and only one God) or a henotheist (only one God for me and my family).

**35:4 “the foreign gods”** This could refer to “the household gods” (*teraphim*, cf. 31:19,30,34; Jdgs. 17:5; I Sam. 19:13; Hosea 3:4, see Special Topic at 31:19), which denoted ancestral worship. It is surely possible that Jacob’s extended family (i.e., servants, cf. v. 6b) were polytheists and had brought symbols or representations of the gods with them.

▣ **“the rings which they had in their ears”** Apparently these were some type of magical charms which were related to idolatry (cf. Hos. 2:13).



NASB, NKJV,

NRSV “hid”

TEV, NJB,

JPSOA, REB “bury”

The VERB (BDB 380, KB 377, *Qal* IMPERFECT) can mean “hide,” “conceal,” or “bury” (cf. Job 40:13). Who was he hiding them from? This was a gesture of a clean break with the past religious practices of his new extended family from Haran.



“under the oak” “Oak” is a translation from the Septuagint (cf. Peshitta; see note in UBS, *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, p. 154-155). The Hebrew has *terebinth* (BDB 18). Trees seem to have had a very important place in the OT, often associated with holy sites (cf. Gen. 12:6; 13:18; 14:13; 18:1; Deut. 11:30; Josh. 24:26; Jdgs. 9:6,37).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:5-8**

**<sup>5</sup>As they journeyed, there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. <sup>6</sup>So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. <sup>7</sup>He built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother. <sup>8</sup>Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; it was named Allon-bacuth.**

**35:5 “there was great a terror upon the cities which were around them”** The basic root for the term “terror” is *חת* (BDB 369, K 363, cf. 9:2; Job 41:25); also *חתת* in Job 6:21. The basic two-consonant root can also mean “shattered” (cf. I Sam. 2:4) or “dismayed” (cf. Jer. 10:2; 46:5). The form in this verse is *חתת* and it occurs only here.

Although the word is not used in Conquest texts it appears to denote something of the “holy war” imagery (lit. “a terror of God,” cf. Exod. 15:16; 23:27; Josh. 10:10). In the ANE military campaigns were carried out in the name of the national deity. From the immediate context it could refer to the slaughter of Shechem (cf. Genesis 34). God was with Jacob in a special and recognizable way!

It is possible that *elohim* is used in a descriptive sense of “great terror,” as in 23:6 (cf. NASB, REB).

**35:6 “Luz”** We know from Gen. 28:19 that Jacob encountered YHWH just outside of this Canaanite city and he named the place “Bethel.” Throughout this period the Canaanites would call the city “Luz” (BDB 531 II, meaning “almond tree”) and the Jews would call it by the name of the place where Jacob first encountered YHWH, “Bethel,” which means “house of God” (BDB 110).

**35:7** See note at 26:25.



NASB, NRSV “El-bethel”

NKJV, NJB,

JPSOA “El-Bethel”

TEV

“God of Bethel”

The Patriarchs named places where Deity appeared to them. This place near Luz was where YHWH initially contacted Jacob. He remembers it well! So he names it again as “the *El* of the house of *El*” (Bethel)



because of the angels (cf. Job 1:6; Ps. 8:5 or a reference to the angelic council, cf. Gen. 1:26; I Kgs. 22:19) ascending and descending and YHWH standing above/beside the ladder.

▣ **“God had revealed Himself”** The name for “God” is *Elohim*, which is PLURAL. Usually when the name is used of the One God the VERB is SINGULAR, but here it is PLURAL (BDB 162, KB 191, *Niphal* PERFECT PLURAL). This may be (ABD, vol. 1, p. 270) because in Gen. 28:12 *Elohim* is used in connection with the angels of God. These occurrences of *Elohim* and a PLURAL VERB are rare.

It is also possible that the PERFECT TENSE and the PLURAL VERB denote a complete revelation.

**35:8 “Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died”** This detail denotes an eyewitness/contemporary source! Deborah had been a very faithful servant since Gen. 24:59. She would have been quite elderly. Notice that she is buried under (BDB 1065) an oak; again, another sacred site. The name of the place was called “the oak of weeping” (BDB 47 and 113).

▣ **“below. . .under”** These terms (BDB 1065) need to be explained because of their ambiguity in English.

1. below Bethel, denotes a lower height than the altar itself
2. under, means under the canopy of the branches, not under the trunk

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:9-15**

<sup>9</sup>Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him.

<sup>10</sup>God said to him,

"Your name is Jacob;

You shall no longer be called Jacob,

But Israel shall be your name."

Thus He called him Israel.

<sup>11</sup>God also said to him,

"I am God Almighty;

Be fruitful and multiply;

A nation and a company of nations shall come from you,

And kings shall come forth from you.

<sup>12</sup>The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac,

I will give it to you,

And I will give the land to your descendants after you."

<sup>13</sup>Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him. <sup>14</sup>Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. <sup>15</sup>So Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.

**35:9-12** This covenant renewal and commitment is very much like Gen 28:13-15. The time of this encounter is not specified. It looks like a flashback to 32:33-32 or YHWH reaffirming Jacob’s name change to Israel.

**35:10 “Jacob. . .Israel”** The NASB translates v. 10 and vv. 11-12 as poetry. This fits the repetition of the lines of v. 10 and matches the poetry of the theophanies of Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1; and 17:1-5.

It is surprising that we are uncertain as to the meaning (etymology) of the name “Israel.” See Special Topic at 32:28.

**35:11 “I am God Almighty”** This is the Hebrew compound *El Shaddai* (BDB 42 and 994). We learn from Exod. 6:2-3 that it was the common name in Genesis for God (cf. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3). It seems to be made up of the term *El* (BDB 42), which is the general name for God in the ANE, probably from the root for “being strong” or “powerful,” and the term *Shaddai* (שׁדַּי, BDB 994), which may be connected with a woman’s breast (BDB 994, cf. Gen. 49:25). Another possible translation is “the All Sufficient One” or the rabbi’s “self-sufficient,” although in Num. 24:4,16, it is translated by NASB as “the Almighty.” It is used often in non-Israelite sources such as Job and Balaam (cf. Num. 24:4,16). This title is often connected with God’s blessing (cf. Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 48:3-4). See Special Topic at 12:1.

In Deut. 32:17 a similar root (שׁדַּי, BDB 993) is translated “demon” (an Assyrian loan word).

▣ **“Be fruitful and multiply”** See notes at 17:1 and 28:3. This has been God’s mandate since Genesis 1 (for animals, for humankind, and now for His special covenant family).

▣ **“A nation and a company of nations”** Obviously this refers to Jacob’s descendants (cf. 48:4), but also to a much wider group (i.e., “those made in the image and likeness of God,” Gen. 1:26-27).

1. God’s promise of Gen. 3:15
2. the implications of God’s call to Abram in Gen. 12:3
3. God’s titles for Israel and her purpose in Exod. 19:5-6
4. Isaiah’s universal implications of the “nations” being included
5. Jesus’ capstone words to the church in Matt. 28:19-20 and repeated in Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8
6. the sermons in Acts and the letters of Paul
7. the clear statements of Galatians 3 and the book of Hebrews about the purpose of the OT

This phrase is a purposeful understatement with tremendous theological significance!

▣ **“kings shall come forth from you”** This phrase can be seen in two ways.

1. a literary parallel to “a company of nations”
2. a way of referring to the covenant with Abraham (cf. 17:6,16)

Jacob is the source of “tribes,” but Abraham of “kings.”

**35:12** This is a reaffirmation of the initial promises to Abraham (cf. 13:15; 26:3; 28:13). YHWH’s promises were to a family, a line of descendants! Some were stronger and more spiritual than others. This was not a promise to “favorites,” but a promise to fulfill an eternal redemptive purpose of the God of creation in Whose image all humans are created (cf. Gen. 1:26-27)! It is a promise to fallen humanity (cf. Gen. 3:15) to redeem them! God chose one to choose all!

**35:13 “Then God went up from him”** The VERB “went up” (BDB 748, KB 828) has a wide semantical field (“go up,” “ascend,” “climb,” “blossomed,” “sacrifice,” “return,” “accompanied,” and others. Here it is a spacial description of God leaving a person (cf. 17:22). The ancients believed God and heaven were “up” and judgment “down.” The smoke of a sacrifice went up to God (cf. 8:20; 22:2,13). God spoke from the mountain/from heaven (cf. Exodus 19-20). The angels of God ascended and descended in 28:12.

Now that moderns know of the vastness of physical creation, many commentators believe that a better way of referring to the place of Deity is inter-dimensional instead of spacial. Heaven is primarily a person, the place is irrelevant.

▣ **“in the place where He had spoken with him”** This exact phrase is repeated in v. 14. This is the kind of repetition that looks like a common scribal error (dittography).

**35:14 “Jacob set up a pillar”** This is what he originally did back at Bethel (cf. Gen. 28:18, 19, 22). Also notice that in v. 20 of this chapter he will raise a pillar over Rachel’s grave. These pillars marked the place of significant events.

▣ **“he poured. . .he poured”** There are two different VERB used.

1. the first, BDB 650, KB 703, *Hiphil* imperfect, refers to a drink offering (BDB 651)
2. the second, BDB 427, KB 428, *Qal* imperfect, refers to olive oil (BDB 1032, cf. 28:18) used for special holy anointings, Exod. 29:7; Lev. 8:12

**35:15** Jacob’s naming of this site of revelation is recorded three times. Some see this as different authors (J.E.D.P.), but I think it is similar to the recording of Paul’s conversion three times in Acts. It was a tremendous theological event. YHWH revealed Himself to Jacob/Israel!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:16-21**

**<sup>16</sup>Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and she suffered severe labor. <sup>17</sup>When she was in severe labor the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for now you have *another* son." <sup>18</sup>It came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. <sup>19</sup>So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). <sup>20</sup>Jacob set up a pillar over her grave; that is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day. <sup>21</sup>Then Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.**

**35:16 “Ephrath”** This is another way of designating Bethlehem in Judah (cf. Mic. 5:2). There were other Bethlehem’s, but Ephrath was a way of signifying the one located near Jerusalem, which will later be the city of David, the site of the birth of the Messiah.

▣ **“she suffered severe labor”** This VERB (BDB 904, KB 1151) in the *Piel* stem is found only here in the OT.

The chosen family suffered and was diseased (cf. 27:1) just as other people affected by the fall. God intervenes to assure their survival, but not their comfort and ease (see Gordon Fee, *The Disease of the Health, Wealth Gospel*).

**35:17 “do not fear”** The VERB (BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) is somewhat surprising. One would think she would be contemplating her own death, but in context the healthy birth of a male son is priority (cf. I Sam. 4:20). This seems to fulfill the request she expressed to God in 30:24.

**35:18 “her soul was departing”** “Soul” is the Hebrew word *nephish* (BDB 659). We must be careful that we do not mix Greek philosophy with Hebrew Scripture. The OT does not say not we have a soul, but that we are a soul (cf. Gen. 2:7). The word “soul” comes from the Akkadian word *napishtu*, which signifies the place of breathing or the throat (cf. Ps. 69:2). Humanity’s uniqueness is not in the fact that they have a *nephish*, for in the early parts of Genesis the animals also had a *nephish* (cf. Gen. 1:21, 24; 2:19; Lev. 11:46; 24:18). This is simply a Hebrew idiom that one’s physical life on earth ceased when breath departed.

▣ **“she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin”** His name given by Rebekah meant “son of my sorrow” (BDB 122), however Jacob changed it to “son of my right hand” (BDB 122). This was the place of skill, honor, and help. We learn from the Mari Tablets that this term could also mean “son of the south” (i.e., place of his birth, Canaan).

**35:19 “(that is Bethlehem)”** There was probably a later editorial insertion (place names 35:6,27; 36:1 and the phrase “to this day” in 35:20). Although I personally hold to the Mosaic authorship for the bulk of the Pentateuch, I also believe there are several editorial hands, as well as oral and written traditions from the Patriarchs, which were utilized by Moses. The possible editors would include: Joshua, Samuel, the author of Kings, Ezra, Jeremiah, and/or priests.

**35:21 “the tower of Eder”** The name is “Migdal-eder.” Migdal (BDB 153) means watch tower and is used in combination with several locations (i.e., Josh. 15:37; 19:38). This one is near Bethlehem (cf. Micah 4:8). Eder (BDB 727) means flock or herd. This raised pile of stones would have served as a vantage point to keep watch over the flocks.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:22a**

**<sup>22</sup>It came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine, and Israel heard of it.**

**35:22 “Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine”** This unseemly act is somehow associated with expectation of inheritance rights (i.e., I Sam. 16:20-22; I Kgs. 2:13-25). Reuben was trying to force his father’s hand in naming him the head of the clan. As it turned out, he was condemned and rejected because of this incident (cf. Gen. 49:3-4; I Chr. 5:1). As God had worked His unique will through the barren wives of the Patriarchs, in Genesis He shows His unique will by allowing the fourth son of Leah to be the line of the Messiah (i.e., Judah).

☐ **“Israel heard of it”** The Septuagint adds, “the thing appeared grievous before him” (cf. TEV, NAB). This does not appear in the MT. We are unsure if the translation of the LXX added it or it was part of an earlier Hebrew manuscript.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:22b-26**

**<sup>22b</sup>Now there were twelve sons of Jacob—<sup>23</sup>the sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, then Simeon and Levi and Judah and Issachar and Zebulun; <sup>24</sup>the sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin; <sup>25</sup>and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali; <sup>26</sup>and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.**

☐ **“Now there were twelve sons of Jacob”** The popular etymology associated with these names also enables some fluidity that can be discerned in the prophecies of Genesis 49.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:27**

**<sup>27</sup>Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre of Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned.**

**35:27 “Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre”** This was the site of another special oak tree (cf. Gen. 13:18; 14:13; and 18:1). The time element is uncertain. Did Jacob wait all this time after returning to Canaan to visit his father?! This is probably another historical flashback.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 35:28-29**

**<sup>28</sup>Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. <sup>29</sup>Isaac breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.**

**35:29 “Isaac breathed his last and died”** Isaac must have lived in a very decrepit condition for a long time (cf. 27:1). Jacob was gone over twenty years and his father had expected to die shortly after he left. This shows that although the Patriarch had the blessings of God, he still experienced physical discomfort and diseases for a long period of their lives.

▣ **“his sons Esau and Jacob buried him”** As Ishmael and Isaac had come back together to bury Abraham so these two sons, Esau and Jacob, were together for the burial of their father. This was apparently a very important cultural event.

▣ **“gathered to his people”** The VERB (BDB 62, KB 74, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) means “to gather” or “to remove.” It is an idiom for being united after death with one’s family (i.e., 25:8,17; 35:29; 49:29,33; Num. 20:24,26; 27:13; 31:2; Deut. 32:50). The OT’s revelations about the afterlife are brief and ambiguous (except for rare glimpses in Job and Psalms of a resurrection). See Special Topic at 25:8.

It could denote

1. an idiom for a peaceful death
2. an idiom for being buried in a family tomb
3. an idiom for being reunited with dead loved ones (i.e., an affirmation of personal existence after death). See *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 127-129.
4. an idiom for waiting with dead loved ones until God raises the dead (cf. Job 14:14-15; 19:25-27; Ps. 16:10; 49:15; 86:13; Ezekiel 37; Dan. 12:2-3; Hosea 13:14). The fullest NT text would be I Corinthians 15.

**35:29 “an old man of ripe age”** This is an idiom for a long life. Death was viewed as the natural end of all human life. Long life was viewed as a blessing. Death was a friend to the aged believer (and still is)!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Jacob only travel as far as Shechem and not go all the way to Bethel?
2. Who are the Hivites?
3. Was adultery always an odious crime or did that begin with the Mosaic legislation?
4. Why were Reuben, Simeon, and Levi rejected from being the patriarchal leader of the family?
5. What foreign gods is Jacob referring to in 35:2?
6. What do the ear-rings symbolize in 35:4?
7. Why were trees considered sacred sites to these nomadic desert dwellers?
8. Why did Jacob raise a pillar at special places and times in his life? Why is this later condemned?
9. Do we have a soul or are we a soul? Why?

# GENESIS 36

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Esau Moves	The Family of Esau	Edomite Lists	The Descendants of Esau	Esau's Wives and Children in Canaan
36:1	36:1-8	36:1-5	36:1-5	36:1-5
36:2-5				Esau's Migration
36:6-8		36:6-8	36:6-8	36:6-8
Descendants of Esau				Esau's Descendants in Seir
36:9-14	36:9-14	36:9-14	36:9-13a	36:9
				36:10
				36:11-12
			36:13b	36:13
			36:14	36:14
	The Chiefs of Edom			The Chieftains of Edom
36:15-19	36:15-16	36:15-19	36:15-16	36:15-16
	36:17		36:17	36:17
	36:18-19		36:18-19	36:18
				36:19
	The Sons of Seir		The Descendants of Seir	The Descendants of Seir the Horite
36:20-30	36:20-30	36:20-30	36:20-21	36:20-28
			36:22	
			36:23	
			36:24-26	
			36:27	
			36:28	
			36:29-30	36:29-30
	The Kings of Edom		The Kings of Edom	The Kings of Edom
36:31-39	36:31-39	36:31-39	36:31-39	36:31-39
	The Chiefs of Esau			The Chieftains of Edom
36:40-43	36:40-43	36:40-43	36:40-43	36:40-37:1

### **READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)**

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY** — Israel's relationship with the descendants of Esau (i.e., Edom)

- A. Israel was required to have a special friendship toward Edom because they were related.
  1. Numbers 20:14
  2. Deuteronomy 23:7, 8
- B. There are numerous problems between Israel and Edom through the years.
  1. Numbers 20:14-21
  2. Judges 11:16-17
  3. I Samuel 14:47-48
  4. II Samuel 8:14
  5. I Kings 11:14-25
  6. II Kings 14:22; 16:5, 6
  7. II Chronicles 20:10-30; 21:8-15
  8. Amos 1:6, 9
- C. There are numerous prophecies against Edom.
  1. Isaiah 34:5ff ; 63:1ff
  2. Jeremiah 49:7-22; Lamentations 4:21, 22
  3. Ezekiel 26:12ff; 35:1ff; 36:2-6
  4. Amos 1:11, 12
  5. Obadiah
- D. Chapter 36 is the genealogy of Esau, which seems to reflect the prophecy of Gen. 27:39-40. It is obvious from the recurrent phrase (“these are *the records of* the generations of. . .”) found in 36:1 that Moses used these OT characters as a way of dividing his account (i.e., Genesis) of the beginnings of the Hebrew people (cf. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10,27; 25:12, 9; 36:1,9; 37:2). Those who are part of the Messianic line receive the most space and attention.



- E. A brief outline of this chapter could be
1. vv. 2-8 are Esau's children in Canaan
  2. vv. 9-14 are Esau's grandchildren in Seir
  3. vv. 16-19 and 40-43 are the chieftains of the nation of Edom
  4. vv. 20-30 list the native rulers in this area
  5. vv. 31-39 are the later kings of Edom (a similar list occurs in I Chr. 1:35-54)

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 36:1

<sup>1</sup>Now these are *the records of the generations of Esau (that is, Edom)*.

**36:1** “these are *the records of the generations of*” This recurrent phrase (possibly a colophon) marks the divisions of the book of Genesis (cf. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). There is no VERB in this phrase.

▣ “**Esau (that is, Edom)**” This emphasis on the origin of the Edomites relating back to Jacob's brother, Esau, is a repeated theme throughout this chapter (cf. 8, 9, 19, 43. Esau's connection to Edom is spelled out specifically in Gen. 25:25, 30).

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 36:2-5

<sup>2</sup>Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite; <sup>3</sup>also Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, the sister of Nebaioth. <sup>4</sup>Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel, <sup>5</sup>and Oholibamah bore Jeush and Jalam and Korah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

**36:2** “**Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan**” The names of Esau's Canaanite wives are recorded in three different places: Gen. 26:34, 35; 28:9; and 36:2ff. However, the problem arises when these three accounts differ on the names of the wives. This discrepancy has been explained in different ways: (1) that there were not three wives, but four and (2) that these women had more than one name. It seems obvious from the text that Esau had at least two wives from Canaan and one daughter of Ishmael.

▣ “**Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite**” In Gen. 26:34 the daughter of Elon the Hittite is called Basemath (BDB 142). It seems unusual that this same name is used for Ishmael's daughter in Gen. 36:3. Rashi says that this may have been a common name for women because it is possibly related to the term for fragrance or incense (BDB 141). The Jewish tradition that is so biased against Esau affirms that her name relates to incense which she burned to idols, therefore, making her an idolater.

The term “Hittite” (BDB 366) is used of three distinct groups in the OT.

1. The original inhabitants of central Asia Minor called Hattians (i.e., they spoke Hattic) in the third millennium B.C. They were not Semitic or Judo-European.
2. Judo-European invaders in the second millennium B.C. (i.e., they spoke Nesite) who founded a large powerful empire.
3. Descendants from Heth (Gen. 10:15; 23:3,5,7,10,16,20; 25:10; 27:46; 49:32). They are listed as one of the ten groups who inhabited Canaan.

This titling of three distinct groups by the same name causes great confusion.

▣ **“Oholibamah”** This name means “tent of high place” (BDB 14), however, all of these names are very debatable as to their original etymological connection. The same root can mean “tree,” “aloe,” “shine,” or “be clean.” From Gen. 26:34-35 this same girl is apparently called Judith (if Esau had only three wives). Rashi says that Esau changed her name to Judith (BDB 397 II), which he says means “Jewish” (ADJECTIVE, BDB 397 I). This shows that she had left her idol worship and, thereby, would impress his father (i.e., Isaac). It is unusual that this same name occurs in v. 41 of this same chapter to denote a man. It is still in the FEMININE form, which shows that there has been some disruption of the Hebrew text in this chapter. The divergence of genealogies is common in the Bible because of (1) the difficulty of recording long series of names without spelling errors and (2) the difficulty of transcribing names from one language to another. Notice how many names change in I Chr. 1:35-54.

▣ **“the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite”** The Masoretic Text simply has “the daughter of,” however, the Samaritan Pent., the Septuagint, and the Syriac translations have “son.” It is obvious from the context and v. 24 that we are talking about a granddaughter.

Zibeon is called a Hivite. If it is true that this girl is related to one of the girls recorded in chapter 26, she is also called a Hittite. There has been much confusion in the translation of the OT between the exact relationship of Hittite (BDB 366), Hivite (BDB 295), and Horite (BDB 360 II, cf. v. 20; 14:6). Usually the term “Horites” (cf. v. 20) is used for non-Semitic Hurians (ZPBE, vol. 3, pp. 228-229), but apparently the term may refer to a group of Semites who were miners or cave dwellers (BDB 359, KB 339, “hole”). The evidence for this is that all of their names are Semitic, not Hurian.

**36:3 “Basemath”** This girl is called “Mahalath,” which means “pardon” (BDB 142) in Gen. 28:9. It is interesting that in the Samaritan Pentateuch her name is changed from Basemath (Gen. 36:3,4,10) to Mahalath. This shows that, very early, scholars recognized the problems with these names (i.e., a person has two names, a nickname, a change of names). It is to be remembered that Esau married one of Ishmael’s daughters in order to please his father and mother.

▣ **“the sister of Nebaioth”** It is assumed that Ishmael was dead at this time and that her brother acted in his place in giving her away and that is the reason why his name is included in the text. It is also possible, because this happens so often (i.e., brother acts as family representative in marriage issues, Laban, Simeon/Levi, even Abram claiming to be Sarai’s brother), that this may reflect ANE culture. Some have assumed because of the predominance of women’s names in this genealogy that there was a tendency toward matriarchy present in these Arabian tribes, but at this point historical documentation is uncertain.

**36:4-5** This is a list of some of the major tribes of Esau which will later be developed in the chieftain lists occurring later in this chapter. This chapter can be divided based on the content of these genealogies.

1. vv. 2-8 are Esau’s children in Canaan
2. vv. 9-14 are Esau’s grandchildren in Seir
3. vv. 16-19 and 40-43 are the chieftains of the nation of Edom
4. vv. 20-30 list the native rulers in this area
5. vv. 31-39 are the later kings of Edom.

A very similar list occurs in I Chr. 1:35-54.

**36:5 “Korah”** I have simply chosen one of the names which is used two different times in order to show the problem of really understanding the detailed relationship of these genealogies. It is asserted by some that there are two different “Korah’s” listed; one here in v. 5 and one in v. 16. However, Rashi says that they are related by the fact that the same person took his father’s wife. This shows the Jewish bias against Esau. The rabbinical interpretation of this chapter is very negative and assumes horrendous incest and family

problems in the lineage of Esau. This may be true, but it is not spelled out in the text and this negative understanding can be attained only by a biased presupposition.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 36:6-8**

**<sup>6</sup>Then Esau took his wives and his sons and his daughters and all his household, and his livestock and all his cattle and all his goods which he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to *another* land away from his brother Jacob. <sup>7</sup>For their property had become too great for them to live together, and the land where they sojourned could not sustain them because of their livestock. <sup>8</sup>So Esau lived in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom.**

**36:6 “Esau took his wives and his sons. . .and went to *another* land away from his brother Jacob”** The reason for this separation is mentioned in chapter 36 as the need for more pasture land (cf. v. 7). However, theologically, it seems to be related to the fact that Jacob was the true heir (i.e., Isaac’s blessing) of the land of Palestine and when he returned he inherited his father Isaac’s flocks as well as his own.

**36:8 “So Esau lived in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom”** It is quite possible that during the years of Jacob’s absence Esau moved his flocks from Seir back to Canaan at different times of the year and this account simply states that he stayed in Seir (cf. 32:3). However, this is uncertain. Mt. Seir became the traditional name for the nation of Edom.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 36:9-14**

**<sup>9</sup>These then are *the records of the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir. <sup>10</sup>These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Esau's wife Adah, Reuel the son of Esau's wife Basemath. <sup>11</sup>The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho and Gatam and Kenaz. <sup>12</sup>Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These are the sons of Esau's wife Adah. <sup>13</sup>These are the sons of Reuel: Nahath and Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were the sons of Esau's wife Basemath. <sup>14</sup>These were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon: she bore to Esau, Jeush and Jalam and Korah.***

**36:10 “These are the names of Esau’s sons”** It is obvious from the repeated listing of Esau’s sons that this chapter is divided into several distinct types of genealogical documents (see note at 36:4-5).

**36:11 “the sons of Eliphaz”** There has been much discussion as to whether this is the same Eliphaz as in the book of Job. There seems to be some credibility to this because the land of Uz is mentioned in v. 28. Edom was famous for her wise men, particularly from the city of Teman. These two evidences point toward Edom as the homeland of Job. Whether Eliphaz is the same as his “friend” is uncertain.

**36:12 “Timna was a concubine of Esau’s son Eliphaz . .she bore Amalek to Eliphaz”** She is singled out as a concubine obviously because she is the mother of the fierce enemy of the Israelites known as the “Amalekites” (cf. Exodus 17; Deut. 25:17,19; I Samuel 15). It was meant to be a derogatory statement because this is the only child of a concubine mentioned in this genealogical list.

**36:14 “the sons of Esau’s wife Oholibamah”** There has been much discussion as to why the sons of this one wife are mentioned along with the grandchildren. Some say that this is to relegate the children to the level of the grandchildren, i.e. a rather disparaging comment on this woman’s sons. It possibly relates to inheritance rights.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 36:15-19**

<sup>15</sup>These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz, the firstborn of Esau, are chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Kenaz, <sup>16</sup>chief Korah, chief Gatam, chief Amalek. These are the chiefs descended from Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Adah. <sup>17</sup>These are the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: chief Nahath, chief Zerah, chief Shammah, chief Mizzah. These are the chiefs descended from Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Esau's wife Basemath. <sup>18</sup>These are the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah: chief Jeush, chief Jalam, chief Korah. These are the chiefs descended from Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. <sup>19</sup>These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their chiefs.

**36:15-19** This is a list of the tribal leaders who came from Esau. The term “chief” (BDB 49 II) is the Hebrew word for “thousand” (BDB 48 II), which is used for

1. a family or clan unit, Josh. 22:14; Jdgs. 6:15; I Sam. 23:23; Zech. 9:7
2. a military unit, Exod. 18:21,25; Deut. 1:15
3. a literal thousand, Gen. 20:16; Exod. 32:28
4. symbolism, Gen. 24:60; Exod. 20:6 (Deut. 7:9; 34:7; Jer. 32:18)
5. Ugaritic (a cognate Semitic language), the same consonants as *alluph*, which means “chieftain” (cf. Gen. 36:15). This would mean that for Num. 1:39 there were 60 chieftains and 2700 men from Dan. The problem comes when there are obviously too many chieftains for the number of men in some tribes.

Many of the number problems of the OT can be explained by our inability to be certain of the translation of some of these Hebrew words. Many of Esau’s sons are mentioned in this list of chieftains, which shows how his family took over the leadership of this geographical area.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 36:20-30**

<sup>20</sup>These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan and Shobal and Zibeon and Anah, <sup>21</sup>and Dishon and Ezer and Dishan. These are the chiefs descended from the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom. <sup>22</sup>The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. <sup>23</sup>These are the sons of Shobal: Alvan and Manahath and Ebal, Shepho and Onam. <sup>24</sup>These are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah — he is the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness when he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon. <sup>25</sup>These are the children of Anah: Dishon, and Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. <sup>26</sup>These are the sons of Dishon: Hemdan and Eshban and Ithran and Cheran. <sup>27</sup>These are the sons of Ezer: Bilhan and Zaavan and Akan. <sup>28</sup>These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. <sup>29</sup>These are the chiefs descended from the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah, <sup>30</sup>chief Dishon, chief Ezer, chief Dishan. These are the chiefs descended from the Horites, according to their *various* chiefs in the land of Seir.

**36:20** “These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land” From Deut. 2:12 we learn that the sons of Esau disposed the inhabitants of Edom as the sons of Jacob disposed the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. However, we also see that there was some intermarriage between these two groups. It is uncertain if the intermarriage was an initial result of amalgamation of the tribes or if it was a result of defeating these people and taking their women as booty.

**36:24** “These are the sons of Zibeon. . .who found the hot springs in the wilderness when he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon” The Hebrew word translated “hot springs” (BDB 411) is difficult to define. I want to use this as an example of some of the difficulties we encounter in trying to understand parts of the OT, particularly those parts which are described by terms which are rarely used.

1. this term is used only here in the Hebrew Bible
2. in the Septuagint it is merely transliterated, not translated
3. in the Vulgate it is translated as “hot springs” (cf. REB), which we know are present in this geographical area
4. some translations believe that it refers to the term “vipers,” which also are present in this area
5. the Peshita changes the consonants “ymm” (ימם) to “mym” (ימם) which means “water” (cf. NKJV)
6. the rabbis say that a very similar term for “mules” (cf. KJV, ASV, NEB) is referred to here because it is a symbolic or idiomatic way of saying that this tribe came to no end in itself, i.e. mules cannot reproduce
7. the Samaritan Pentateuch changes the word to *Emim*, which is used in Deut. 2:10 for the giants.

This kind of wide divergence in translation shows the problem of trying to understand the meaning of these rare Hebrew terms. Be careful not to get caught up in these kinds of details that do not affect the main truth(s) of the literary unit! They are interesting, but not crucial.

**36:25** Notice one of the names of Esau’s wives, Oholibamah, is used here again in connection with the daughter of Adah (cf. v. 2). This has caused great problems for commentators. The Pulpit Commentary says that this was a different person, but was the cousin of Esau’s wife’s father. Names are common within families, regions, areas, and periods of time. Often several people go by the same name. The only way to differentiate them is by their fathers.

**36:26 “Dishon”** The Hebrew text has “Dishan,” but because of I Chr. 1:41 most translations have changed the term.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 36:31-39**

<sup>31</sup>Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the sons of Israel. <sup>32</sup>Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah. <sup>33</sup>Then Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah became king in his place. <sup>34</sup>Then Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites became king in his place. <sup>35</sup>Then Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the field of Moab, became king in his place; and the name of his city was Avith. <sup>36</sup>Then Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah became king in his place. <sup>37</sup>Then Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth on the *Euphrates* River became king in his place. <sup>38</sup>Then Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor became king in his place. <sup>39</sup>Then Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar became king in his place; and the name of his city was Pau; and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, daughter of Mezahab.

**36:31 “Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the sons of Israel”** This verse has caused a tremendous amount of stir among commentators of the OT. Because of the mention of the kings of Israel it seems to have been written in a later period when Israel had kings. This seems to imply that Genesis, if not written later, at least was edited at a later time. Those who hold to the documentary hypothesis (four different later authors, J.E.D.P.) use this as solid evidence that Moses is not the original author of the Pentateuch. Those who assert Mosaic authorship say that this was a prophecy about the days when a king would appear. One must admit that Israel is prophesied to have a king in Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:7,17; Deut. 17:14-20. For me it is obvious that someone has edited the writings of Moses—whether it was Jeremiah, Ezra, or one of the prophetic schools is uncertain, but brief editorial comments like this one do not seriously affect Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. See Introduction, Authorship of Genesis 1-11.

**36:32 “Bela the son of Beor”** The consonants of this name, Bela (BDB 118), are similar to the name for Balaam, who is also called the son of Beor (BDB 129). These are the only two occurrences of the father’s name (cf. Num. 22-24). To identify these as the same person is improbable, but in these genealogical lists, nothing is certain.

**36:37 “the Euphrates River”** This Hebrew term for “the river” (BDB 625) is used in most instances to refer to the Euphrates (i.e., 31:21). However, in context it must refer to a local river because there is no historical documentation for a king from the line of Esau ever reigning in the land of Mesopotamia.

**36:39** Because of the mention of several women in v. 39, Albright (noted American archaeologist) asserts that there was a matriarchal succession for kings in Edom. Since it is obvious that none of these kings are sons of the previous kings and because the wives are mentioned, this is a possibility although there is no historical evidence.

▣ **“Hadar”** The Masoretic Text has “Hadar” (BDB 214). However, in I Chr. 1:50 it is spelled “Hadad.” Hadad (BDB 212, cf. I Kgs. 11:14,17,21,25) became a general title for the kings of Syria, but in this account it is obviously not a reference to Syria.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 36:40-43**

<sup>40</sup>Now these are the names of the chiefs descended from Esau, according to their families *and* their localities, by their names: chief Timna, chief Alvah, chief Jetheth, <sup>41</sup>chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon, <sup>42</sup>chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar, <sup>43</sup>chief Magdiel, chief Iram. These are the chiefs of Edom (that is, Esau, the father of the Edomites), according to their habitations in the land of their possession.

**36:40 “these are the names of the chiefs descended from Esau”** This seems to be very similar to the chieftains mentioned earlier, however, this particular group is designated by their locality.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is an entire chapter given to the descendants of Esau?
2. Why is there such confusion in the listing of his wives?
3. Why are there seemingly five different lists recorded in this chapter?
4. Briefly outline the relationship between the descendants of Esau and the descendants of Israel.
5. Explain the relationship between the terms Hittite, Hivite, and Horite.

# GENESIS 37

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Joseph's Dream	Joseph Dreams of Greatness	Joseph is Sold Into Slavery	Joseph and His Brothers	
37:1-2a	37:1-4	37:1-2a	37:1-2a	Joseph and His Brothers
37:2b-4		37:2b-4	37:2b 37:3-4	37:2 37:3-4
37:5-8	37:5-8	37:5-8	37:5-7 37:8	37:5-11
37:9-11	37:9-11	37:9-11	37:9 37:10-11	
37:12-14	Joseph Sold by His Brothers 37:12-17	37:12-14a  37:14b-24	Joseph is Sold and Taken to Egypt 37:12-13a 37:13b 37:14a 37:14b-15	Joseph Sold by His Brothers 37:12-14
37:15-17			37:16 37:17	37:15-17
The Plot Against Joseph				
37:18-24	37:18-22  37:23-28		37:18-20 37:21-24	37:18-20 37:21-25a
37:25-28		37:25-28	37:25-28	37:25b-27 37:28-30
37:29-36	37:29-36	37:29-30 37:31-32 37:33-35 37:36	37:29-30 37:31-32 37:33-35 37:36	37:31-35 37:36

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This begins the story of Jacob and his family (emphasizing Joseph) going into Egypt, which will dominate the remainder of the book of Genesis, chapters 37-50, with only two brief parentheses.
  1. concerning Judah and Tamar (cf. Genesis 38)
  2. concerning Jacob's blessing of the tribes (cf. Genesis 49)
- B. This migration into Egypt and its consequences were prophesied in Gen. 15:13-16.
- C. The story of Joseph is different from the other historical narratives of Genesis.
  1. YHWH does not appear directly to Joseph (nor do angels)
  2. the story is lengthy, with a plot-line through several chapters
  3. YHWH works in secret, hidden, theological ways (i.e., "the man," of 32:15-17)
  4. the geography changes from Ur, Haran, Canaan to Egypt

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 37:1-2a**

**<sup>1</sup>Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan. <sup>2</sup>These are the records of the generations of Jacob.**

**37:1** Because of the phrase found in v. 2a, which seems to be the author of Genesis's way of dividing his book, most commentators believe that v. 1 should go with chapter 36. Verse 1 really forms a twin to the geographical settlement of Jacob versus Esau.

▣ **"in the land where his father had sojourned"** This was part of the Abrahamic promise (Genesis 12, 15, 17; 28:4). The nomadic lifestyle and a promised destination were acts of faith.



**37:2 “These are *the records of the generations of Jacob*”** This is a recurring phrase which marks the divisions in the book by Moses (cf. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; and 37:2). It is uncertain if this phrase (or colophon) points forward or backward.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 37:2b-4**

**<sup>2b</sup>Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was *still* a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father. <sup>3</sup>Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. <sup>4</sup>His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.**

▣ **“Joseph, when seventeen years of age”** The age of Joseph at the time of his being sold by his brothers into slavery is significant when we later compare his age at the time that he stands before Pharaoh in Genesis 41:46 (30 years old). His final age is given in 50:26 (110 years old).

▣ **“while he was *still* a youth”** This term (BDB 654 II) can be used in the sense of “trainee” or “apprentice” (cf. Exod. 33:11, where it is used of Joshua’s relationship to Moses). It is also possible that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah were apprentices as well. Although they were in the field and acted as shepherds, they did not have sole responsibility for the flocks.

▣ **“Bilhah”** This is Rachel’s maid. Some see Joseph as being identified with her sons because she probably continued to raise him after Rachel’s death. From Gen. 30:5-7 we find that the other two sons of Bilhah are Dan and Naphtali.

▣ **“the sons of Zilpah”** This is Leah’s maid and her sons are listed in Gen. 30:9-13. They are Gad and Asher.

▣ **“And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father”** The exact nature of this report and who it referred to is uncertain (same word used of the ten spies’ report in Num. 14:37), but the naivety of Joseph is foreshadowed here. There is a series of acts which cause his brothers to hate him.

1. the bad report of v. 2
2. the special coat of v. 3-4, given to him by Jacob
3. his ostentatious dreams recorded in vv. 5-10

**37:3 “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons”** Jacob’s name was changed to “Israel” after he wrestled with the angel at the brook Jabbok (cf. Gen. 32:22-32). The name has several possible etymologies. I think the one that fits the context of Genesis 32 is, “may *El* preserve.” See Special Topic at 32:28.

Jacob should have learned the problems associated with favoritism from his own childhood, but he was apparently oblivious to this. His favoritism sets the stage for the rejection of Joseph by his brothers.

▣ **“because he was the son of his old age”** This is a somewhat unusual phrase because Benjamin was the youngest son of Rachel. It may mean after he had many other sons. Western literalism is a great danger in interpreting ancient Semitic texts. The rabbis and the Targums see this discrepancy and translate it as “a son having wisdom of advanced age.” The following context will show that this is certainly not the case.



NASB	“a varicolored tunic”
NKJV	“a tunic of <i>many</i> colors”
NRSV, REB	“a long robe with sleeves”
TEV	“a long robe with full sleeves”
NJB	“a decorated tunic”
LXX	“a coat of many colors”
Peshitta	“a rich robe with long sleeves”
JPSOA	“an ornamental tunic”

The etymology of this Hebrew term (BDB 509 CONSTRUCT 821) is uncertain. Usually a tunic was a short-sleeved work garment which extended to the knees of men and women. It seems that this special tunic was either full-length, from the palms to the ankles (BDB 821), or multi-colored (LXX). Either way, it was obviously not a work garment. The only other reference to this tunic is in II Sam. 13:8, where Tamar wore the same type of garment, which is described as being appropriate for the virgin daughters of the king, therefore, implying royalty. It is possible that Joseph felt that his father knew he was to be the son of Promise because Reuben had been disqualified due to his sexual impropriety with Jacob’s concubine and Simeon and Levi for the slaughter of Shechem (Genesis 34, cf. Gen. 35:22).

From *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (p. 68):

“Egyptian paintings of this period depict well-dressed Canaanites as wearing long-sleeved, embroidered garments with a fringed scarf wrapped diagonally from waist to knee.”

**37:4 “His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers”** This sets the stage for the brothers’ rejection of Joseph.

**“hated”** This VERB (BDB 971, KB 1338, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) is used in vv. 4,5,8; also note Exod. 18:21; 20:5; 23:5; Lev. 19:17; 26:17; Deut. 5:9; 7:10,15; 12:31; 16:22; 19:11; 30:7; 32:41.



NASB	“on friendly terms”
NKJV, NRSV, LXX	“peaceably”
TEV	“in a friendly manner”
NJB	“a civil word”
REB	“harsh words”
JPSOA	“a friendly word”

This is the Hebrew NOUN *shalom* (BDB 1022). His brothers could not even use the culturally typical greeting. They did not want him to have ease, health, and prosperity!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 37:5-8**

<sup>5</sup>Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. <sup>6</sup>He said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had; <sup>7</sup>for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf." <sup>8</sup>Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

**37:5 “Then Joseph had a dream”** It needs to be emphasized that, up to this point in Genesis, God has communicated His will through dreams and visions (cf. 20:3; 28:12; 31:11,24). The people of the ANE recognized dreams as a valid source of revelation from the gods. Joseph’s dreams were of such a nature as to rub salt in the wounds of his brothers’ hurt feelings (cf. vv. 19-20).

**37:7-8 “your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf”** This was exactly the implication of Joseph’s coat. It is fulfilled in Gen. 42:6; 43:26; and 44:14.

Verse 8 has two grammatical features (INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB from the same root) which denote intensity.

1. to reign, BDB 573, KB 590
2. to rule, BDB 605, KB 647

This same grammatical feature is also used in v. 10

3. actually to come (and bow down), BDB 97, KB 112

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 37:9-11**

**<sup>9</sup>Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." <sup>10</sup>He related *it* to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?" <sup>11</sup>His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying *in mind*.**

**37:9** This dream is symbolic of Joseph’s coming leadership as YHWH’s provider and savior of his family. The fact that his mother (i.e., the moon) is already dead does not affect the literary thrust of the dream.

1. a prophetic foreshadowing to show God is in control of history
2. an aspect of Joseph’s naivete
3. a way of setting the brothers against him and implementing God’s plan of Egyptian asylum/slavery/exodus

The context could support any one of these interpretations. Joseph is not the key feature in this account. The key figure is YHWH and His eternal, redemptive plan to use Joseph for His purposes. Joseph is a moral person, but somewhat naive. Israel is saved by YHWH’s actions, not Joseph’s strengths.

**37:10 “and his father rebuked him”** This is a very strong Hebrew term (BDB 172, KB 199, *Qal* IMPERFECT) which originally meant “to cry out” (cf. Jer. 29:27). It is often used of God rebuking the nations (i.e., Isa. 17:13). It is even the term used for YHWH rebuking Satan in Zech. 3:2.

▣ **“Shall I and your mother”** We need to remember that Rachel is dead by this time (cf. Gen. 35:19). Some assume that he still thought of her or that this refers to Leah, Rachel’s older sister, or to Bilhah who raised him.

**37:11 “His brothers were jealous of him”** The VERB (BDB 888, KB 1109, *Piel* IMPERFECT) is parallel to “hated” (cf. vv. 4,5,8).

This fragment of v. 11 is combined with v. 28 and 39:21 and 45:4 in a combination quote in Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7:9.

▣ **“but his father kept the saying *in mind*”** This reminds of us of how Mary kept the sayings concerning Jesus in her heart (cf. Luke 2:19,51). Jacob realized that God had revealed Himself many times in dreams

to confirm the one who was to receive the patriarchal blessing. Not only did Jacob want to believe this, but so far, the historical events seem to infer that Joseph was to be the promised head of the covenant family. However, we learn from later chapters that God never appeared directly to Joseph as He did to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and that Judah will be the line of the Messiah, not Joseph.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 37:12-14**

**<sup>12</sup>Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem. <sup>13</sup>Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing *the flock* in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." And he said to him, "I will go." <sup>14</sup>Then he said to him, "Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.**

**37:13 “Israel said to Joseph”** Exactly why Joseph’s father sent him to check on his brothers is uncertain. Some have asserted (1) that he was trying to reunite the brothers or (2) that since Joseph had accurately informed him earlier (cf. v. 2), that he would do so again concerning the activity of the brothers and the welfare of the flock.

Starting here and through the rest of the chapter is a series of recorded dialogues between Jacob and Joseph.

1. “come,” BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. “send,” BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense
3. “I will go,” there is no VERB, but the common OT expression, “here *I am*,” which NASB translates as “I will go”
4. “go,” BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
5. “see,” BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
6. “bring word back,” BDB 996, KB 1427, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE

**37:14 “and bring word back to me”** Joseph had done this before in v. 2.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 37:15-17**

**<sup>15</sup>A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, "What are you looking for?" <sup>16</sup>He said, "I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing *the flock*." <sup>17</sup>Then the man said, "They have moved from here; for I heard *them* say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.**

**37:15-17 “A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field”** This unnamed man reveals the presence of God in this entire event (although His name does not appear). It is recorded exactly for that purpose! Because of other places in Genesis where angels are called “men” (i.e., chapter 18), this may have been an angel.

**37:17 “Dothan”** The name means “two wells” (BDB 206). Dothan is located on the major trade route which runs from Syria to Egypt. Notice on the map that Hebron, Shechem, and Dothan are the major cities which are located on this trading route. Later in biblical history, God will manifest His presence again at this place (cf. II Kings 6).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 37:18-24**

<sup>18</sup>When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. <sup>19</sup>They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! <sup>20</sup>Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!" <sup>21</sup>But Reuben heard *this* and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." <sup>22</sup>Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him" — that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. <sup>23</sup>So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; <sup>24</sup>and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

**37:18 “they saw him from a distance”** This possibly refers to the ostentatious coat given to him by his father, which he probably always wore.

▣ **“they plotted against him to put him to death”** The rare VERB (BDB 647, KB 699, *Hithpael* IMPERFECT) is parallel to hate in Ps. 105:25. This VERB in the *Piel* stem is used by YHWH of the Midianites in Num. 25:18. The *Qal* PARTICIPLE is translated “swindler” in Malachi 1:14.

The murderous sin of Cain against Abel (Genesis 4) is confirmed again in fallen humanity. Self interest is the deciding factor!

**37:20 “we will say”** See v. 32. They premeditatively planned how to kill him, how to deal with his corpse, and how to cover their actions with their father.

▣ **“Then let us see what will become of his dreams”** This may be an allusion to their own personal desire for inheritance, which they were afraid Joseph might usurp.

**37:21-22 “Reuben”** We cannot be certain about the exact motivation of Reuben, but from what is recorded at the end of v. 22, it seems to show that he felt a responsibility as the eldest son to protect his younger brother. It may have been that he hoped this would help to reinstate him with Jacob, in light of Gen. 35:22. I think that he really wanted to save Joseph, which can be seen by his reaction in vv. 29 and 30. This event clearly shows he has lost his influence and leadership among the brothers.

Notice Reuben’s words.

1. “Let us not take his life,” v. 21, BDB 645, KB 697, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense
2. “Shed no blood,” v. 22, BDB 1049, KB 1629, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
3. “Throw him into this pit,” v. 22, BDB 1020, KB 1527, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
4. “But do not lay hands on him,” v. 22, BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

Notice that Reuben’s ulterior motive is stated.

1. that he might rescue him, BDB 664, KB 717, *Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT
2. to restore him to his father, BDB 996, KB 1427, *Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT

**37:24 “they took him and threw him into a pit”** We can understand something of the trauma this teenage boy experienced from what is recorded in Gen. 42:21, which describes his plea for help.

▣ **“without any water in it”** This is obviously a dry cistern (not a well, but a water collector), which was so common in this area of Palestine. The rabbis say that they were full of snakes and scorpions, but this is only an assumption.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 37:25-28**

**<sup>25</sup>Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring *them* down to Egypt. <sup>26</sup>Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? <sup>27</sup>Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our *own* flesh." And his brothers listened to *him*. <sup>28</sup>Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled *him* up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.**

**37:25 “Then they sat down to eat a meal”** This shows the callous disregard of these brothers.

▣ **“a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead”** There is a fluctuation between the terminology used to describe these merchants (this is seen by source critics as evidence of multiple sources).

1. in v. 25 they are called Ishmaelites
2. in v. 28 they are called Midian traders
3. in v. 28, again, Ishmaelites
4. in v. 36 they are called Medanites

These are different names to refer to the same group as Jdgs. 8:24 shows. Also, the Midianites and the Medanites were both sons of Abraham through Keturah (cf. Gen. 25:2), but the mention of Medanites may be a scribal problem (Medanites, מִדְּיָנִי; Midianites, מִדְּיָנִי). This caravan may have been made up of several different family groups or just different names to refer to the same people.

▣ **“their camels were bearing. . .on their way to bring *them* down to Egypt”** These spices and aromatic balms were characteristic imports of Egypt because they were used (1) for embalming; (2) for incense; and (3) for medicine. Gilead (from which they came) was famous for its balms.

**37:26 “Judah said to his brothers”** We do not know the true motives of Judah, as we do not know the true motives of Reuben, but it seems that he was trying to save his brother from being killed (“he is our brother,” v. 27), although the motives stated are (1) to gain profit and (2) not to have innocent blood (i.e., murder) on their hands.

If Judah is trying to rescue his half-brother from death, then this is a positive way to characterize the son who would become the family line of Jesus. If Judah was acting according to the stated reasons then it shows that God’s purposes were not based on the merit or worth of an individual (cf. Genesis 38), but YHWH’s eternal redemptive plan for all humans (cf. Gen. 3:15; 12:3; Exod. 19:5; see the Special Topic: Bob’s Evangelical Biases at 12:3).

**37:28 “sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver”** Notice that the term “shekels” is in italics, which means it is not in the Hebrew text, but it is assumed (cf. 20:16; Jdgs. 17:2-4,10). It refers to a weight of money. We learn from Lev. 27:5 that younger slaves were sold for twenty shekels, while older slaves were sold for thirty shekels (cf. Exod. 21:32). We also know that slave trading was a cultural reality of Egypt during all of her history.

Some commentators interpret the “they” as Midianite traders pulling Joseph out of the pit and selling him to the Ishmaelites of v. 25. They assert that this was done without Jacob’s sons knowing it and, therefore, this explains vv. 29-30 (Reuben’s reaction to Joseph not being in the pit). However, this scenario does not explain v. 27! Often modern critics’ techniques say more about them and their literary presuppositions than it does about ancient Hebrew historical narrative.

▣ **“brought Joseph into Egypt”** It is ironical that the route that they were following took Joseph within a few miles of his father’s tent! However, it was God’s will that Joseph go to Egypt.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 37:29-26**

<sup>29</sup>Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments. <sup>30</sup>He returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is not *there*; as for me, where am I to go?" <sup>31</sup>So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; <sup>32</sup>and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this; please examine *it* to see whether it is your son's tunic or not." <sup>33</sup>Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" <sup>34</sup>So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. <sup>35</sup>Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him. <sup>36</sup>Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard.

**37:29 “Reuben returned to the pit. . .tore his garments”** This was the traditional sign of mourning (cf. 44:13). Additional signs of mourning can be seen in v. 34 when Jacob finds out about the loss of Joseph. Reuben must not have been present as they spoke about their plan or when the brothers sold Joseph.

**SPECIAL TOPIC: GRIEVING RITES**

The Israelites expressed sorrow for the death of a loved one and for personal repentance, as well as corporate crimes, in several ways:

1. tear outer robe, Gen. 37:29,34; 44:13; Jdgs. 11:35; II Sam. 1:11; 3:31; I Kgs. 21:27; Job 1:20
2. put on sackcloth, Gen. 37:34; II Sam. 3:31; I Kgs. 21:27; Jer. 48:37
3. take off shoes, II Sam. 15:30; Isa. 20:3
4. put hands on head, II Sam. 13:9; Jer. 2:37
5. put dust on head, Josh. 7:6; I Sam. 4:12; Neh. 9:1
6. sit on the ground, Lam. 2:10; Ezek. 26:16 (lie on the ground, II Sam. 12:16); Isa. 47:1
7. beat the breast, I Sam. 25:1; II Sam. 11:26; Nah. 2:7
8. cut the body, Deut. 14:1; Jer. 16:6; 48:37
9. fast, II Sam. 1:16,22; I Kgs. 21:27
10. chant a lament, II Sam. 1:17; 3:31; II Chr. 35:25
11. baldness (hair pulled out or shaved), Jer. 48:37
12. cut beards short, Jer. 48:37
13. cover head or face, II Sam. 15:30; 19:4

**37:30 “where am I to go”** What does Reuben mean by this question?

1. where can I find him
2. I cannot go home without him
3. a literary expression for a sense of hopelessness

**37:35 “Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him”** Isn’t it ironical that the very ones who sold Joseph are now trying to comfort his father over his loss. There has been some speculation about

the term “his daughters.” Does it refer to Dinah and others who were born later or does it refer to his daughters-in-law?

▣ **“Sheol”** This is a term (BDB 982) used for “the grave” or “the afterlife.” It seems to have two possible Hebrew etymologies: (1) “to go down” and (2) “to ask,” which would involve *Sheol* either asking for more human beings or for men asking questions about *Sheol*. It seems to me that *Sheol* in the OT and *Hades* in the NT are synonymous. From rabbinical literature, and some evidence in the NT, it seems to have been separated into two parts, the righteous and the wicked. See Special Topic: Where Are the Dead? at 15:15.

**37:36 “Potiphar”** This is a Hebrew name which seems to mean “he to whom (implied Re, the sun god) gave” (BDB 806). The longer form of this same name is found in the priest of On in Gen. 41:45.

▣ **“Pharaoh’s officer”** The term “officer” is literally “eunuch” (BDB 710, cf. Esther 1:10; 2:3), but because he is married, the term here means “a courier” or “an official” (cf. I Kgs. 22:9; II Kgs. 8:6; 24:12) instead of a castrate.

▣ **“the captain of the bodyguard”** There are two possibilities regarding this term because it literally means “the chief slaughterer” (BDB 978 CONSTRUCT 371). Some think it means “the chief cook” (i.e., butcher) and base this on Gen. 43:6; I Sam. 9:23-24. Others believe that it means “the captain of the bodyguard” based on Gen. 40:3 and II Kgs. 25:8. It is surely possible that those close to the king (like his cooks) became his bodyguards.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. What seems to be the source of the tension between Joseph and his brothers?
2. Describe the special tunic that Jacob had made for Joseph. What did it symbolize?
3. Why did the biblical author include vv. 15-17?
4. List the signs of mourning found here in vv. 29 and 34 and other parts of the OT.
5. Describe your view of *Sheol* and how it relates to the NT term, *Hades*.



# GENESIS 38

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Judah and Tamar	Judah and Tamar	Judah and Tamar	Judah and Tamar	The Story of Judah and Tamar
38:1-5	38:1-11	38:1-11	38:1-5	38:1-5
38:6-11			38:6-11	38:6-11
38:12-19	38:12-23	38:12-19	38:12-14	38:12-14
			38:15-16a	38:15-19
			38:16b	
			38:17a	
			38:17b	
			38:18a	
			38:18b-19	
38:20-23		38:20-23	38:20-21a	38:20-23
			38:21b	
			38:22	
			38:23	
38:24-26	38:24-26	38:24-26	38:24a	38:24-26
			38:24b	
			38:25	
			38:26	
38:27-30	38:27-30	38:27-30	38:27-30	38:27-30

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph

3. Third paragraph

4. Etc.

## BACKGROUND STUDY

- A. Chapter 38 is an obvious break in the context of the story of Joseph. Some have asserted that it is included because it delineates the lineage of the tribe of Judah, which is the line of the Messiah quoted in Matt. 1:3 and Luke 3:33. It is obvious that this chapter flies in the face of Jewish exclusivism and racial pride. The inclusion of a Canaanite woman, like Tamar, is another example of the mixed genealogy of the Messiah (cf. Rahab and Ruth).
- B. Some have asserted that the reason for the inclusion of chapter 38 is to show the contrast between the moral degeneration of the brothers of Joseph and his exemplary actions, which are recorded in Genesis 39.
- C. Genesis is a recurrent account of human designs running one way, but God's designs running another. This reversal of situations from disgrace to honor is characteristic of Genesis and the OT. Theologically it asserts YHWH's sovereignty and universal redemptive plan (i.e., Gen. 3:15; 12:3c; Exod. 19:5c). YHWH has been working for the restoration of fellowship with His wayward creation since Genesis 3 (esp. v. 15, which is a promise to all humans made in God's image, cf. 1:26-27). Things are not just happening!

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 38:1-5

**<sup>1</sup>And it came about at that time, that Judah departed from his brothers and visited a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. <sup>2</sup>Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; and he took her and went in to her. <sup>3</sup>So she conceived and bore a son and he named him Er. <sup>4</sup>Then she conceived again and bore a son and named him Onan. <sup>5</sup>She bore still another son and named him Shelah; and it was at Chezib that she bore him.**

**38:1 “And it came about at that time”** The Hebrew phrase here is very ambiguous and the exact temporal connection between chapters 37 and 38 is uncertain. It could be either immediately after chapter 37 or after a period of some time. Notice the different temporal connections.

1. now Jacob lived in the land, 37:1
2. and it came about at that time, 38:1
3. now after a considerable time, 38:12
4. now it was about three months later, 38:24
5. and it came about at that time, 38:27
6. then it came about after these things, 40:1
7. now it happened at the end of two full years, 41:1

It is obvious that the author is conscious of time, but this is not necessarily western sequential history.

**▣ “that Judah departed from his brothers”** There has been much speculation about why Judah departed. Some say it was because of the moral degeneration of his brothers or possibly their treatment of Joseph.

▣ **“and visited”** This VERB is literally “turned aside,” BDB 639, KB 692, *Qal* IMPERFECT). It implies a lengthy departure from his brothers. This same general geographical region will later be included in the tribal allocation of Judah (cf. Joshua 15:35). The cave of Abdullah will later be connected with the exploits of David in connection with Saul (cf. I Sam. 22:1). Apparently it was in the hill country of Judah, close to the coastal plain.

**38:2 “Shua”** This name (like Hirah, v. 1, BDB 301) is found only here in the OT. The same root consonants (BDB 447) mean “independent” or “noble.” It has the same three internal consonants as “salvation” (BDB 447), but there seems to be no theological connection.

▣ **“Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite”** The girl’s name is never mentioned (she is named “Bath-shua” in I Chr. 2:3, but this is not a name but a characterization—“daughter of Shua”), but it is obvious that Judah must have fallen in love with her at first sight. This particular marriage to a Canaanite is not condemned specifically in the immediate context. Judah was apparently a faithful husband to this one wife (cf. v. 12).

▣ **“Chezib”** The rabbis use this place name (BDB 469) in a derogatory sense (it is similar to the root “lie,” “falsehood,” “deceptive thing,” BDB 469) to refer to the children who were born of this woman. However, the rabbinical bias against the surrounding nations is obvious in all of their literature. It is just a place name. It probably is the same as Achzib (BDB 469) in Joshua 15:44.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 38:6-11**

**Now Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. <sup>7</sup>But Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD took his life. <sup>8</sup>Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." <sup>9</sup>Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground in order not to give offspring to his brother. <sup>10</sup>But what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD; so He took his life also. <sup>11</sup>Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"; for he thought, "I am afraid that he too may die like his brothers." So Tamar went and lived in her father's house.**

**38:6 “Now Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn”** Judah did not allow his father to choose his bride, but in the cultural tradition he choose the wife for his son. It is obvious that because of his background of faith in YHWH that he would have chosen an upstanding woman. Her name is Tamar, which means “palm tree” (BDB 1071 II). There are several other women in the Bible who have the same name.

**38:7 “Er. . . was evil in the sight of the LORD”** This negative evaluation occurs often in the OT (cf. 32:13; Deut. 4:25; 31:29; Jdgs. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1; I Sam. 15:19; I Kgs. 11:6; 14:22; 15:26,34; 16:19,25,30; 21:20,25; 22:52; II Kgs. 3:2; 8:18,27; 13:2,11; 14:24; 15:9,18,24,28; 17:2,17; 21:2,6,15,16,20; 23:32,37; 24:9,19). The results of the fall are pervasive and destructive. Because of the seeming parallels between the actions of Er and Onan which are mentioned in vv. 8-10, the rabbis assert that they were both guilty of the same sin (i.e., “wasted his seed on the ground”), but this is not clear from the context. They assert that Er did not want his wife to have children because it would have made her appear old before her time.

It is obvious that they acted in an inappropriate way, violating known guidelines. It is also obvious that the Lord uses temporal judgment (cf. Job 22:15-16; Isa. 55:23; Pro. 10:27).

**38:8 “Then Judah said to Onan, ‘Go in to your brother’s wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her’”** This is the later cultural concept of Levirate marriage (cf. Deut. 25:5ff.). We have only two examples of this in the Scriptures, here and in the book of Ruth. Inheritance rights were a significant issue.

Judah gives his second born son three commands.

1. go in to your brother’s wife, BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. perform your duty as a brother-in-law, BDB 386, KB 383, *Piel* IMPERATIVE
3. raise up offspring for your brother, BDB 877, KB 1086, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE

For a good brief discussion of “Levirate (from the Latin for “brother”) Marriage” see NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 902-905 and ABD, vol. 4, pp. 296-297.

**38:9 “Onan knew that the offspring would not be his”** Apparently Onan was more concerned about a larger inheritance for himself than he was with his brother’s family. This is the only birth control mentioned in the OT. Because his brother was the firstborn the larger part of the inheritance would go to his heir. This chapter clearly reveals the wickedness in these first two sons of Judah.

▣ **“so when he went in to his brother’s wife”** The Hebrew VERB TENSE implies that he went in to her only once (two PERFECT TENSE VERBS).

**38:11 “Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law. . .until my son Shelah grows up”** Judah had only three sons and two of them had apparently died by contact with Tamar. Judah was afraid that his last son would die and he would have no posterity. This account may be recorded to show how all of the Patriarchs tried to manipulate the promises of God in connection with the promised Messiah who would come through their seed. Or, it may simply be a fear connected with a possible curse on Tamar. The sin relates to the fact that he lied to his daughter-in-law when he had no intention of giving his last son to her, which was the legal requirement. The fact that Tamar returned to her father’s house (i.e., Judah’s command, BDB 442, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) seems to be a cultural norm (cf. Lev. 22:13 and Ruth 1:8).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 38:12-19**

<sup>12</sup>Now after a considerable time Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and when the time of mourning was ended, Judah went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. <sup>13</sup>It was told to Tamar, "Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." <sup>14</sup>So she removed her widow's garments and covered *herself* with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife. <sup>15</sup>When Judah saw her, he thought she *was* a harlot, for she had covered her face. <sup>16</sup>So he turned aside to her by the road, and said, "Here now, let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" <sup>17</sup>He said, therefore, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." She said, moreover, "Will you give a pledge until you send *it*?" <sup>18</sup>He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" And she said, "Your seal and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand." So he gave *them* to her and went in to her, and she conceived by him. <sup>19</sup>Then she arose and departed, and removed her veil and put on her widow's garments.

**38:12 “the wife of Judah, died”** We are still not given her name. Judah had been monogamous and cared very much for this Canaanite lady.

▣ **“and when the time of mourning was ended, Judah went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah”** Shearing time was a time of festivity (cf. I Sam. 25:4, 36). It was in the later tribal allocation of Judah (cf. Josh. 15:57). This geographical location is famous because of its connection with Samson.

**38:13 “It was told to Tamar”** It is my opinion that Tamar acted out of more godly reasons than is obvious in the text (cf. v. 26). Like Rebekah and Jacob (cf. 25:23), one could doubt their methods of action, but behind their actions is an element of faith and trust. As Abraham and all of the Patriarchs tried to help God to fulfill His promises, I believe that Tamar felt a unique responsibility as the wife of the eldest son of Judah to raise up an offspring. She was willing to humiliate herself and face the possibility of death in order to have the chance to bear a son to Judah.

**38:14 “she removed her widow’s garments”** Exactly what this involved is not certain, but she still felt connected to the family of Judah. She was still waiting for Judah to fulfill his word (cf. v. 11). It must have been a protracted period of time and she began to question Judah’s promise (cf. v. 14).

▣ **“and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim”** There are two veils or “shawls” (BDB 858, KB 1041) mentioned in the OT. They were not common before the Islamic period. Rebekah wore one when she met Isaac (cf. 24:65) and here Tamar wears a veil. Moses also wore a veil to cover his face when he came down from Mt. Sinai (“veil,” BDB 691, cf. Exod. 34:33,34,35).

We learn from the Syrian documents that a veil was a sign of a cultic prostitute who was married. We also learned that it became an emblem for the veiled goddess, Ishtar. Apparently this was a particular way to identify a cult prostitute. Although the word used by Judah in v. 15 is simply the common Hebrew term (“one who commits fornication,” BDB 275, KB 275, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE), the term used by his friend Hirah, the Adullamite in vv. 21-22, is the term for a temple prostitute (BDB 873 I, cf. Deut. 23:17-18; Hosea 4:14).

**38:16 “So he turned aside to her by the road, and said”** There are several elements here which bother the modern reader: (1) there seems to be an obvious double standard between the appropriateness of Judah’s action and the inappropriateness of Tamar’s action; (2) it also has concerned commentators that Judah knew the exact questions to ask and the procedures involved in paying the price of a harlot. We must be careful not to judge the ancient world by our motives, but also be careful to recognize the moral degeneration even within the tribe of Judah.

**38:17 “I will send you a kid from the flock”** From Samson’s exploits recorded in Jdgs. 15:1, this may have been the common price for a sexual encounter. However, there is some ancient evidence that a goat was a symbol of the love goddess and this may be the background for this custom.

**38:18 “What pledge shall I give you? And she said, ‘Your seal and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand’”** Tamar had thought out her plan in great detail. The seal and the staff were characteristic items of a wealthy person in the ANE and were unique to each individual. The seal could refer to a signet ring (BDB 368, KB 364, cf. 41:42), or to a cylindrical seal which was worn around the neck. Everyone who was anyone in ancient Babylon had one of these cylinder seals, which was used in place of their signature (cf. Strabo-XVI, 1, 20).

The “cord” (BDB 836, KB 990) is translated in the Targums as “cloak,” but apparently it refers to the implement used to hang either the ring or the seal around one’s neck.

The staff (BDB 641, KB 573) was more like a walking stick with a uniquely-carved headpiece. One would have felt unclothed without this walking staff in Judah’s day. He was ready to part with these very

personal, very significant items to purchase the price of this harlot! Tamar wanted them as conclusive proof that Judah was the father of her offspring!

**38:19** Tamar immediately went home which shows that prostitution was not her purpose or lifestyle!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 38:20-23**

**<sup>20</sup>When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. <sup>21</sup>He asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the temple prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?" But they said, "There has been no temple prostitute here." <sup>22</sup>So he returned to Judah, and said, "I did not find her; and furthermore, the men of the place said, "There has been no temple prostitute here." <sup>23</sup>Then Judah said, "Let her keep them, otherwise we will become a laughingstock. After all, I sent this young goat, but you did not find her."**

**38:20** “When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite” Hirah asked a few questions (cf. v. 21), but not many! This seems to imply that, even in this day, association with a prostitute was not looked upon favorably.

**38:23** Judah is worried about his reputation, not any inappropriate act on his part. There seems to be no sense of prostitution being a moral or spiritual (even a cult prostitute, vv. 21,22) problem for this period and this culture.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 38:24-26**

**<sup>24</sup>Now it was about three months later that Judah was informed, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is also with child by harlotry." Then Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!" <sup>25</sup>It was while she was being brought out that she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "I am with child by the man to whom these things belong." And she said, "Please examine and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?" <sup>26</sup>Judah recognized *them*, and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not have relations with her again.**

**38:24** “Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is also with child by harlotry” The PLURAL form is used here, which seems to imply that Tamar must have engaged in repeated sexual activities. What are the chances of one isolated encounter resulting in pregnancy? Her character was impugned by the very nature of her offense.

▣ “Then Judah said, ‘Bring her out and let her be burned’” Judah, as the head of the clan, was still legally responsible for his daughter-in-law’s punishment. The idea of burning her seems to be a common punishment for an unfaithful wife (cf. the Code of Hammurabi, but in a slightly different sense). In the Mosaic legislation it was only the daughters of priests who were burned; other offenders were stoned (cf. Deut. 22:20-24; Lev. 21:9).

Judah gives a strong command.

1. bring her out, BDB 422, KB 425, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE (i.e., out of her home into a public forum)
2. let her be burned, BDB 976, KB 1358, *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense (this was a community act)

**38:25** “It was while she was being brought out” Some say that she waited until the last possible minute hoping that Judah would reconsider his judgment. Others assert that she waited until the most dramatic,

public moment to embarrass Judah. As is the case in all the OT, and, for that matter, the NT, one's psychological motives cannot be ascertained.

▣ **“Please examine and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these”** Tamar asked Judah “to examine” the items (BDB 647, KB 699, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE, v. 25) and he does in v. 26 (BDB 647, KB 699, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT). The same VERB is used here that is used in 37:32,33 and 42:7,8 (twice).

Judah immediately recognizes his own possessions and realizes the appropriate, though somewhat questionable, acts of Tamar in the legal, religious setting of his own day. The term “righteousness” (BDB 842, see Special Topic at 15:6) here does not refer to the fact that she is without guilt in the manner in which she acted, but she acted in ways more acceptable than Judah. This is a non-theological use of “righteousness” (cf. 30:33). She risked a lot in order to bear this family heir(s)! Apparently she and Judah had no more sexual contact. It was not an act of lust, but, in my opinion, an act of religious faith (see note at v. 13). In my opinion Tamar is the real heroine of this entire account (as Rebekah was earlier).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 38:27-30**

<sup>27</sup>**It came about at the time she was giving birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb.** <sup>28</sup>**Moreover, it took place while she was giving birth, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet *thread* on his hand, saying, "This one came out first."** <sup>29</sup>**But it came about as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out. Then she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez.** <sup>30</sup>**Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand; and he was named Zerah.**

**38:27 “there were twins in her womb”** It amazes me how often the women of these Patriarchs in Genesis are barren and then how often they have twins. God is acting in recurrent ways! The genealogies belong to Him!

**38:28 “a scarlet *thread* on his hand”** The exact reason for this thread is uncertain. It may have been something very common such as the only convenient thing on hand or it may have been a cultural practice of that day. Many have asserted that it was a sign or symbol of redemption which will be followed throughout the entire OT (i.e., Josh. 2:18,21). I am personally nervous about these allegorical types of interpretations. It is surely an eyewitness detail.

**38:29 “Perez”** This name (BDB 829 II) means “breach” or “bursting forth” (BDB 829 I).

**38:30 “Zerah”** This name (BDB 280 II) means “to rise” or “come forth” (BDB 280) from the VERB form. The AB footnote, p. 297, says the meaning comes from “shining” (BDB 280, found only in Isa. 60:3) and is the same consonantal root and denotes a brightly-colored thread (also note, Jewish Study Bible, p. 78).

The identification of the firstborn was significant because of the inheritance rights. However, in the special line (i.e., Messianic line) of patriarchal lineage, God's choice, not man's, is evident! God has a universal, redemptive plan that is being worked out in the family of Abraham (cf. 3:15; 12:3c; Exod. 19:5c; Isaiah, Micah, Jonah).

In a literary sense this chapter functions like the book of Ruth, giving genealogical material for the line of Judah, later family of Jesse, father of David. There were Gentiles, even Canaanites in the line of King David (cf. Ruth)!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is it significant that Judah left his brothers and moved to the Canaanite area to the south?
2. Is Judah's marriage to this Canaanite woman condemned in the Scriptures?
3. Why was Judah afraid to give Tamar his third son?
4. How can we understand Tamar's acts? What could be their possible purpose?
5. Is there any significance to the scarlet thread mentioned in verse 28?



# GENESIS 39

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Joseph's Success in Egypt	Joseph a Slave in Egypt	Joseph's Success, Temptation and Imprisonment	Joseph and Potiphar's Wife	Joseph's Early Days in Egypt
39:1-6a	39:1-6	39:1-6a	39:1-6a	39:1-6a
				The Attempt to Seduce Joseph
39:6b-18		39:6b-18	39:6b-10	39:6b-10
	39:7-18		39:11-15	39:11-15
Joseph Imprisoned			39:16-18	39:16-20a
39:19-23	39:19-20	39:19-23	39:19-23	Joseph in Gaol
				39:20b-23
	39:21-23			

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 39:1-6a

<sup>1</sup>Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. <sup>2</sup>The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. <sup>3</sup>Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and *how* the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. <sup>4</sup>So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. <sup>5</sup>It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD 's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. <sup>6</sup>So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him *there* he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

**39:1 “Potiphar”** This name, in Egyptian, seems to mean “he who the sun god gives” (BDB 806). He is mentioned in Gen. 37:36. A similar feminine name (i.e., Potiphera, BDB 806) is seen later in Gen. 41:45,50; 46:20.

▣ **“an Egyptian officer”** Many commentators have assumed that the Pharaoh who put Joseph in charge of Egypt was of the Hyksos or shepherd kings rulers (1720-1550 B.C., see History Channel Video: The Exodus Decoded). These Semitic invaders controlled Egypt for several hundred years. They assert that the reason this officer is identified as an Egyptian (cf. v. 2) was in contradistinction to a Semitic Hyksos ruler.

▣ **“officer”** Literally this means a “eunuch” (see note at 37:36). However, because of 40:2 we understand that Potiphar was married. It is true that some physically castrated men were married, but it is not the norm. This term came to be used as simply the title for a court official and that seems to be the way it is used in this passage.

▣ **“Pharaoh”** This is the title for all the Egyptian kings (BDB 829, lit. “great house”). The Egyptian kings were believed to be the sons of the sun god, Re. The “great house” is a reference to the royal palace or temple complex which represented the earthly abode of the Egyptian gods.

▣ **“the bodyguard”** Literally this means “slaughterer” or “butcher” (see note at 37:36). Some have asserted that it is very similar to the term executioner. However, its usage, in both the Bible and in extra-Biblical material, seems to involve a military position connected to the royal guard. This would have meant that Potiphar was a very important, influential, and wealthy man.

▣ **“Ishmaelites”** There has been much question about the identification of these nomadic traders. In Gen. 37:36 they are either called Midianites or Medanites (see note at 37:36). These groups both are identified in Gen. 37:28 and Jdgs. 8:22,24. They have some connection with Ishmael and his descendants.

**39:2 “the LORD was with Joseph”** It is theologically significant that this is one of the rare occurrences of the term YHWH in this section of Genesis. As a matter of fact it is the only occurrence in the account concerning Joseph. Also note it is speaking of events outside of Canaan. YHWH is not limited to the Promised Land (cf. Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7).

The phrase “the LORD was with Joseph” occurs repeatedly (cf. 39:3,21,23) in this chapter and the blessings which accrue to him because of this become the main plot of the story. God, not Joseph, is the central character!

▣ **“he became a successful man”** Joseph was a “successful” (BDB 852 II, KB 1026, *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE) man and those around him also were successful and prosperous. This was exactly what Jacob’s presence did for Laban. Potiphar took note of the special blessing of Joseph’s presence (cf. v. 3).

The VERB in the *Hiphil* and *Qal* stems denotes a successful accomplishment of a task (not physical blessings exclusively).

1. Gen. 24:21,40 (*Hiphil*)
2. Jdgs. 18:5 (*Qal*)
3. II Chr. 26:5 (*Hiphil*)
4. Neh. 1:11; 2:20 (*Hiphil*)
5. Isa. 53:10; 55:11 (*Qal*)
6. Dan. 8:12,24; 11:36 (*Qal*)

Be careful of English definitions and connotations guiding biblical word studies!

▣ **“he was in the house of his master the Egyptian”** This is in contradistinction to the fact that he was not a field hand or that he lived in the master’s house instead of the servant’s quarters. Joseph became a trusted member of Potiphar’s home.

**39:3 “his master saw that the LORD was with him”** Potiphar did not put him in charge simply because of his administrative abilities, but because of his unique connection with the blessings of God. Potiphar did this strictly for personal gain (cf. vv. 3,45) and not in any religious sense.

**39:4** Joseph’s service is described in two ways.

1. “personal servant,” BDB 1058, KB 1661, *Piel* IMPERFECT, used of higher ranking minister, cf. II Sam. 13:17,18; I Kgs. 10:5; II Kgs. 4:43; 6:17
2. “overseer,” BDB 823, KB 955, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT, cf. II Kgs. 25:23

Today we might call him “an administrative assistant” or “executive secretary.” In Egyptian literature of this period “a household steward.”

**39:5 “the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house on account of Joseph”** This seems to be a truth throughout the OT period. There is a connection between physical blessing and one’s relationship to the covenant people (cf. Gen. 12:3; 30:27).

**39:6 “So he left everything he owned in Joseph’s charge. . .he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate”** Some historians have mentioned that there was a strict dietary separation between the Egyptians and all other foreigners based on religious guidelines, as there is today between the Jews and all other foreigners. Whether this was the basis of this exception is uncertain, but this cultural distinction is apparent in Egyptian society (cf. Gen. 43:32).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 39:6b-18**

<sup>6b</sup>Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. <sup>7</sup>It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." <sup>8</sup>But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me *here*, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. <sup>9</sup>There is no one greater in this house than I, and

he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" <sup>10</sup>As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to *lie* beside her or be with her. <sup>11</sup>Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. <sup>12</sup>She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. <sup>13</sup>When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, <sup>14</sup>she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. <sup>15</sup>When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside." <sup>16</sup>So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. <sup>17</sup>Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; <sup>18</sup>and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside."

▣ **“Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance”** This very same phrase (“handsome,” BDB 421, “form,” BDB 1061, “appearance,” BDB 909) is used to describe his mother Rachel (cf. Gen. 29:17). There are several handsome men mentioned in the OT connected with the line of the Messiah. This phrase is also used in connection with David and his son Absalom. Even Saul is described as a tall, handsome man. Remember beauty/handsomeness is variable from culture to culture and age to age. Joseph’s physical appearance will be the source of his problem with Potiphar’s wife.

**39:7 “It came about after these events that his master’s wife looked with desire at Joseph”** We know from the social interaction that was possible for Egyptian women in their society that there came to be a cultural proverb connected with the licentiousness of Egyptian females. Potiphar’s wife was very clever in her approach to Joseph. Her plan seems to have developed over time and she seems to make a multi-staged advance (cf. v. 10). This must have been a tremendous pressure on this young Hebrew lad as this manipulative lady approached him day after day with her sexual offers. There is an obvious contrast between the actions of Judah in chapter 38 and Joseph in this chapter!

**39:8-9** Joseph seems to make a very logical and appropriate answer to her advances in this verse. The first is connected to the kindness of Potiphar toward him and, in an implied way, that her unique position should not be violated. Also, Joseph sees God in connection with his sexual life as he sees Him in connection with all areas of his life. It is significant that sexual promiscuity, in his opinion, is not only a sin against Potiphar and also against Potiphar’s wife, but certainly against *Elohim*. Notice that he uses the general name for God (i.e., *Elohim*) because this lady was obviously not a religiously informed person and she would not have recognized the covenant name for God, YHWH (see Special Topic at 12:1).

**39:10 “she spoke to Joseph day after day”** This is the repeated burden of continual sexual pressure or possibly a sexual command from his owner’s wife. Joseph was a slave! He did not have the right to control his own actions!

**39:11** From the connotation of the text, she planned for the other servants to be absent when Joseph came in for his regular household duties. The rabbis say that this was on an Egyptian feast day and she claimed to be sick in order to stay home and seduce Joseph.

**39:12 “And he left his garment and fled and went outside”** Some accuse Joseph of being dumb because he left his garment (BDB 93, exactly what kind is uncertain, UBS *A Handbook on Genesis*, p. 895, asserts that servants in Egypt in this day wore no top, only a small shirt), but what was he supposed to do?! This was an appropriate, spiritual answer to lustful temptation (cf. II Tim. 2:22; II Pet. 1:4).

**39:13-18** These verses contain Potiphar's wife's accusations to her other Egyptian servants and then her husband.

**39:14** “she called to the men of her household and said to them” They must have been close by, but not in the house. There are several elements in her statement which are interesting.

1. she blamed her husband for bringing this Hebrew slave into the house (cf. v. 19)
2. she made a racial slur because he was a Hebrew

It is obvious from Egyptian records that they felt themselves to be superior to other foreign peoples.

▣ **“Hebrew”** The term for “Hebrew” has one of two possible origins: (1) it comes from Eber, the ancestor from which Abraham's family developed (cf. Gen. 11:16, used of Abraham in 14:13 and his descendants in 39:5) or (2) it comes from the general name for the nomadic people who came from beyond the river called the Habiri (immigrant) in the Tel El Armarna letters.

▣ **“to make sport of us”** The Hebrew term “make sport of us” (BDB 850, KB 1019, *Piel* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) in this verse seems to be a cultural idiom for “try to sexually harass us” (cf. 26:8). The implication is that Joseph had done this repeatedly to her and to other members of Potiphar's house.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 39:19-23**

**<sup>19</sup>Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned. <sup>20</sup>So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. <sup>21</sup>But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. <sup>22</sup>The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*. <sup>23</sup>The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.**

**39:20** “So Joseph's master took him and put him in jail” The normal punishment for this kind of crime was death (The IVP *Bible Background Commentary*, p. 71). It seems that Potiphar might have had some doubts concerning the veracity of his wife's statement. I am sure that at this point in Joseph's life, even with great faith in God, he must have wondered what was happening (cf. Gen. 40:15)!

▣ **“the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was placed there in the jail”** This is a very unusual term for jail. It seems to be from the root “to be circular” (from Song of Songs 7:2) or “enclosed” (BDB 690, found only in 39:20-23 and 40:3,5) and some commentators assert that it was a round-shaped prison, while others believe it was a special building on the grounds of the captain of the guard (i.e., Potiphar). If this is true we can see how Joseph was apparently transferred from the master's house to the master's prison which was not too far distant.

God's “unseen hand” is at work to start the next step of His plan. Joseph has been radically changed by his faith in YHWH since chapter 37. Knowing God should affect our character and actions!

**39:21-23** The presence of God was still with Joseph in a very unique and, apparently, visible way. This does not mean that there were not some very difficult experiences of body and mind which he went through, but God's care was obviously with him.

**39:23** This phrasing is similar to v. 6. Joseph took care of everything. He was a divinely gifted administrator and later we will learn, dream interpreter.

# GENESIS 40

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Joseph Interprets a Dream	The Prisoners' Dreams	Joseph, the Interpreter of Dreams	Joseph Interprets the Prisoners' Dreams	Joseph Interprets the Dreams of Pharaoh's Officials
40:1-8	40:1-8	40:1-8	40:1-4 40:5-7 40:8a 40:8b	40:1-4 40:5-8
40:9-15	40:9-15	40:9-15	40:9-11 40:12-15	40:9-15
40:16-19	40:16-19	40:16-19	40:16-17 40:18-19	40:16-19
40:20-23	40:20-23	40:20-23	40:20-23	40:20-23

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 40:1-8

<sup>1</sup>Then it came about after these things, the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. <sup>2</sup>Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. <sup>3</sup>So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the *same* place where Joseph was imprisoned. <sup>4</sup>The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time. <sup>5</sup>Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his *own* dream *and* each dream with its *own* interpretation. <sup>6</sup>When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected. <sup>7</sup>He asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" <sup>8</sup>Then they said to him, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *it* to me, please."

**40:1 “the cupbearer”** This word comes from the VERB “to drink” (BDB 1052). It is often translated “butler.” The Aramaic translation of this word is “chief cupbearer.” There are two other references to this office in the Bible: (1) in Neh. 1:11 (BDB 1052 I) and (2) the term “Rabshakeh” (BDB 913 II, cf. II Kgs. 18:17,19,26,27,28,39; 19:4,8; Isa. 36:2,4,11,12,13,22; 37:4,8). Apparently this was a very high court official and a very trusted person. He not only tasted and brought the king’s food, but also gave personal counsel. He would have always been on guard for any plot to hurt or kill the king. He was a culinary bodyguard!

▣ **“the baker of the king of Egypt”** The baker (BDB 66, KB 78, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) was also a very important official and confidant in the ancient Oriental courts. This was particularly true in Egypt where we know of 38 kinds of cakes which were regularly baked as well as 57 kinds of breads. Some of the bread was dyed different colors and made of different kinds of grain and in different physical shapes to resemble some of the animals and characteristic objects of Egypt.

▣ **“offended their lord, the king of Egypt”** How they offended is not stated. It could have involved (1) the quality of their food and/or drink or (2) their advice, or lack of it. The VERB “offended” (BDB 306, KB 305, *Qal* PERFECT) has a wide semantical field (“to miss a goal,” “sin,” “go wrong”). It is the same word used by Joseph in 39:9, but translated “sin” (cf. 20:6; 42:22). In 20:9 it is translated “wronged” and in 43:9; 44:32, “bear the blame.” Context, context, context determines word meaning within the basic parameters of the meaning of the basic root. Rashi (Jewish commentator of the Middle Ages) says that the offenses referred to were: (1) they found a fly in the king’s wine and (2) they found a pebble in the king’s bread. However, this is merely speculative interpretation or oral tradition.

**40:2 “Pharaoh was furious”** This VERB (BDB 893, KB 1124, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is often used of

1. God’s anger, Lev. 10:6; Num. 16:22; Deut. 1:34; 9:19
2. man’s anger
  - a. Moses, Exod. 16:20; Lev. 10:16; Num. 31:14
  - b. the commanders of the Philistines, I Sam. 29:4
  - c. Naaman, II Kgs. 5:11
  - d. a man of God, II Kgs. 13:19
  - e. Ahasuerus, Esther 1:12
  - f. king’s guards, Esther 2:21

It denotes an intense wrath that issues in action. It is a different word from 39:19, “his anger burned” (BDB 354, KB 351).

**40:3 “So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard”** This title, “captain of the bodyguard,” refers to Potiphar (cf. 37:36; 39:1). Potiphar’s chief jailor (BDB 978) put Joseph in charge of the prison. It is obvious that these two prisoners would be politically touchy because it was quite possible that they might be restored and they could be powerful enemies at court.

▣ **“imprisoned”** The term “imprisoned” is literally “bound” (BDB 63, KB 75). Joseph was probably bound in fetters (cf. Ps. 105:18) for a period of time and although God was with him, this was a hard, cruel life. We are not certain how long he remained in jail—some commentators say as long as 10 years (i.e., “some time” of v. 4).

**40:4 “the captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them”** This man would want these high officials treated well and Joseph seemed to be the perfect person for the job.

One wonders if the person called “the captain of the bodyguard” refers to

1. Potiphar, 37:36; 39:1
2. the chief jailor, 39:21-23

It may be that it was a special prison under Potiphar’s control, but he delegated responsibility to “a chief jailor” who delegated it to Joseph.

**40:5** This verse sets the literary stage for Joseph’s second giftedness to become obvious (i.e., dream interpretation). YHWH often reveals Himself (or the Angel of the Lord) to His people in visions, but to non-Abrahamic peoples, He often used dreams (cf. 20:3; 31:24; 41:1; Daniel 2).

**40:6-7 “When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected”** It is obvious here that Joseph was not bound at this time of his imprisonment and also that he really did care about these men and was concerned about their physical, as well as emotional (“dejected,” BDB 277 II, KB 277, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE), condition.

**40:8** Again, Joseph reveals his basic view of life (i.e., that God is in control of all things, including dreams (cf. 41:16,25,28; Dan. 2:27-28,45). We know from his own life that dreams were a very important way of God speaking to him as a young child (cf. Genesis 37), even though it caused him rejection by his family.

The VERB “tell” (lit. “recount,” BDB 707, KB 765, *Piel* IMPERATIVE) also opens the next verse (“told,” *Piel* IMPERFECT, cf. 37:10).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 40:9-15**

<sup>9</sup>So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream, behold, *there was a vine in front of me;* <sup>10</sup>and on the vine *were three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, and its clusters produced ripe grapes.* <sup>11</sup>Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's hand." <sup>12</sup>Then Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days; <sup>13</sup>within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer. <sup>14</sup>Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house. <sup>15</sup>For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon."



**40:9 “there was a vine in front of me”** Many commentators have asserted that this was an historical dream because fermented wine was not used in Egypt. However, it seems that the ancient historian, Heroditus, has been somewhat misunderstood in this connection. It is true that fermented wine was not a common drink in Egypt, but it was used among the priestly and royal classes. So, it would have been a unique symbol for a kingly drink (see *Manners and Customs of the Bible* by James M. Freeman, p. 45).

**40:11 “squeezed”** This VERB (BDB 965, KB 1315, *Qal* IMPERFECT) surprisingly is found only here in the OT.

**40:13** The cupbearer will be restored to royal confidence and service.

The word translated “your former custom” is literally “judgment” (BDB 1048), but used in a rare non-theological sense. Usually it is translated “judgment” or “justice.”

**40:14-15** For Joseph’s service and kindness, he asks a favor from the cupbearer. He explains the injustice of his situation and asks Pharaoh for a remedy. Joseph should not be held as Pharaoh’s prisoner since he was a captured slave.

**40:15** Something of Joseph’s thoughts about his betrayal by his brothers is expressed in “kidnapped” (lit. “to be stolen away”). This is intensified in the text by the use of the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and the PERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 170, KB 198).

▣ **“from the land of the Hebrews”** This could be

1. a later editor/scribe adding this comment
2. used in the sense of the land where the Patriarchs lived (if this is true, then Hebrew has been redefined and used in a very limited sense)

▣ **“dungeon”** This word (BDB 92) is the same word used for the dry cistern (cf. 37:24) his brothers threw him into in Canaan. He has just traded one pit for another!

The term is used for a prison in Exod. 12:29; Jer. 37:16, and here.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 40:16-19**

**<sup>16</sup>When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, "I also saw in my dream, and behold, there were three baskets of white bread on my head; <sup>17</sup>and in the top basket there were some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head." <sup>18</sup>Then Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; <sup>19</sup>within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you."**

**40:16 “I also saw in my dream, and behold, there were three baskets of white bread on my head”** The Hebrew term for “white bread” (BDB 301 I) is a very rare term which comes from an Aramaic and Arabic root which means “white” (NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 54). It could refer to a white wicker basket where birds could eat the bread from both the top and the sides (cf. v. 17).

It is interesting to note that in Canaan women carried heavy loads on their heads, but in Egypt only the men carried heavy loads on their heads, while the women carried them on their shoulders. This shows the unique historicity of this account.

**40:17 “all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh”** This is quite accurate historically as we have learned from certain Egyptian documents that there were 38 kinds of cakes and 57 kinds of bread known in Egypt (see note at v. 1).

**40:19 “Pharaoh will lift up your head from you”** It is obvious from vv. 13-19 that there is a radical reinterpretation of this phrase “lift up your head” (BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERFECT). In v. 13 it simply means to “lift up one’s head so as to do them good” (cf. Num. 6:26). It is an idiom for “release” (cf. II Kgs. 25:27). In v. 19 it means to “lift up one’s head so as to cut it off” (BDB 671, 3,b).

It is also obvious that v. 19 does not refer to hanging because it is difficult to hang one whose head has been cut off! This hanging apparently meant to hang or to impale one publicly after he was already dead (cf. Josh. 8:29; I Sam. 31:9-10; II Sam. 4:12). This seems to be the general intent of this public impaling as can be ascertained from Deut. 21:23. The fact that the man’s body would be eaten by birds would be especially horrendous to an Egyptian who place so much emphasis on embalming after death to preserve the body.

One wonders if there is a connection between

1. “prison” (lit. “round”) of 39:20-23; 40:3,5
2. “dungeon” (lit. “pit”) of 40:15
3. “lift up”

Could the prison have been a large round hole in the earth?

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 40:20-23**

<sup>20</sup>Thus it came about on the third day, *which was Pharaoh's birthday*, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. <sup>21</sup>He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand; <sup>22</sup>but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. <sup>23</sup>Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

**40:20-23** This is the fulfillment of Joseph’s interpretation and the failure of the chief cupbearer to remember (BDB 269, KB 269, *Qal* PERFECT). Again, nobody but YHWH can help Joseph. God is his only resource!

Again, the VERB “lift up” is used in opposite ways (with some ambiguity, cf. v. 20).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CHAPTERS 39-40

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Potiphar promote Joseph?
2. How is Joseph contrasted in this chapter with Judah in the previous chapter?
3. Did Joseph recognize that he was in prison for a purpose?
4. Does God always speak through dreams or just through certain dreams? Is the ability to interpret dreams a common spiritual gift or a limited, OT experience?

# GENESIS 41

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Pharaoh's Dream	Pharaoh's Dream	Joseph's Elevation	Joseph Interprets the King's Dream	Pharaoh's Dream
41:1-8	41:1-9	41:1-8	41:1-8	41:1-4 41:5-7 41:8-13
41:9-13	41:9-13	41:9-13	41:9-13	
Joseph Interprets				
41:14-24	41:14-24	41:14-21	41:14-15 41:16 41:17-24	41:14-16 41:17-24
41:25-36	41:25-36	41:25-36	41:25-32 41:33-36	41:25-32 41:33-36
	Joseph's Rise to Power		Joseph is Made Governor Over Egypt	Joseph's Promotion
41:37	41:37-45	41:37-45	41:37-46a	41:37-43
Joseph Is Made a Ruler of Egypt				
41:38-45				41:44-45
41:46-49	41:46-49	41:46-49	41:46b-49	41:46-49
The Sons of Joseph				Joseph's Sons
41:50-52	41:50-52	41:50-52	41:50-52	41:50-52
41:53-57	41:53-57	41:53-57	41:53-57	41:53-57

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

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1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 41:1-8

<sup>1</sup>Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. <sup>2</sup>And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. <sup>3</sup>Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the *other* cows on the bank of the Nile. <sup>4</sup>The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. <sup>5</sup>He fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. <sup>6</sup>Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. <sup>7</sup>The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, *it was* a dream. <sup>8</sup>Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

**41:1 “at the end of two full years”** This, of course, relates to chapter 40, where Joseph interprets two person’s dreams, both hoping to be released from prison, and yet, this was not successful. The date is from the restoration of one servant and the execution of the other. Throughout the account of Joseph it is interesting that the author/editor gives us several dates: (1) he was seventeen years old when he was sold into slavery (cf. Gen. 37:2); (2) he became second in command of the nation of Egypt when he was thirty years old (cf. Gen. 41:46). With these figures it is possible to see that he had remained in jail approximately thirteen years. This is conditioned on how much time he stayed in Potiphar’s service before the incident with his wife.

▣ **“Pharaoh”** Pharaoh is a collective title for all of the kings of Egypt as Hadad was for Syria, Caesar later becomes for Rome, and Czar was for Russia. The etymology of the term is uncertain, but most Egyptologists assume it is from the phrase “the great house” (BDB 829, i.e., the house of the gods). There has been much speculation about when Joseph could have arisen as second in command over all of Egypt. Many assume that it had to be during the Hyksos period known as “the Shepherd Kings,” who were apparently Semitic, not Egyptian (see AB, p. 316). They ruled from 1730 to 1570 B.C. However, it is interesting that in v. 1, the term for “river,” which obviously refers to the Nile, is found in a form that only occurs during the 18th Dynasty or 1546-1085 B.C. From Egyptian documents we also learn that throughout the history of Egypt, there were Semites in places of responsibility in many other Egyptian dynasties than the two mentioned above.

▣ **“a dream”** There is extensive literature, both in Egypt and Mesopotamia, concerning dreams and their interpretation. It is interesting that the two Hebrew persons involved in interpreting dreams each worked for pagan kings; Daniel in Mesopotamia and Joseph in Egypt.

The NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 154, makes an interesting comment about the three kinds of dreams.

1. natural sleep, Ps. 126:1; Isa. 29:7-8; Eccl. 5:7
2. false revelation, Jer. 23:25,27,32; 27:9-10; 29:8; Zech. 10:2
3. true revelation, Gen. 20:3; 28:12; Num. 12:6; I Kgs. 3:5; Dan. 2:28; Matt. 1:20

Visions can often occur at night, but seem to be different from dreams. The exact nature of the difference is not stated. YHWH communicates to a person's subconscious using symbols and metaphors with they are familiar.

▣ **“the Nile”** This (BDB 384) is the first in a series of uniquely Egyptian terms. Not only are they uniquely Egyptian terms, but the entire context is culturally Egyptian. This river and its annual flood was the source of Egypt's life and fertility. It was considered a god (cf. Exod. 1:22) to be appeased.

**41:2 “seven cows”** We learn from Plutarch, the Roman historian, and Clement of Alexandria, an early church father, that “cow” (BDB 831) symbolized the bounty of the earth in Egypt. As the cow was the main herd animal in Egypt, the sheep was in Palestine. The cow was an obvious choice in an Egyptian dream concerning agricultural bounty (i.e., “sleek,” BDB 421 [lit. “beautiful”] and “fat,” BDB 135).

▣ **“they grazed in the marsh grass”** This is another Egyptian loan word. We know from Egyptian sources that the cattle immersed themselves in the water along the Nile for several reasons: (1) to keep cool; (2) to keep the insects off; and (3) to eat the lush growth of marsh grass (BDB 28).

**41:3-4** These cows are in direct contrast with the healthy cows of v. 2.

1. ugly (lit. “bad of sight”), BDB 948 I CONSTRUCT BDB 909
2. gaunt (lit. “thin of flesh”), BDB 201 CONSTRUCT BDB 142

They eat up (BDB 37, KB 46, *Qal* IMPERFECT) the healthy cows (v. 4).

**41:5** The second dream is repetitious except the cows are replaced by contrasting ears of grain (BDB 987 II).

**41:6 “the east wind”** This desert wind (BDB 870), so notorious for its blighting of the agricultural produce of the land, is called the “Sirocco” (Aramaic) in Palestine, where it blows from the southeast. It is called the “Khamsin” in Egypt and it comes more from the south, southeast. It is referred to in Ezek. 17:10 and Hosea 13:15. All the food for the cattle (and thereby humans) would die.

**41:8 “his spirit was troubled”** The term translated “spirit” is *ruah* (BDB 924), which denotes the life force of animals and humans on this planet. It can be translated “wind,” “breath,” and “spirit.”

The VERB “troubled” (BDB 821, KB 952, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) is a rare word. It is used in the *Niphal* stem in Ps. 77:6; Dan. 2:1,3, and the *Qal* is used of God's Spirit “stirring” in Jdgs. 13:25. Its basic meaning is “to thrust” or “to impel.”

▣ **“the magicians of Egypt”** This seems to be another Egyptian loan word that comes from the root “to engrave” (BDB 355) and is always used of occultic knowledge (cf. Exod. 7:11,22; 8:3,14,15; 9:11). Why an Egyptian term would be used for Babylonian soothsaying priests (cf. Dan. 1:20; 2:2,10,27; 4:7,9) is uncertain. Therefore, these men were the readers, practitioners, and writers of the ancient books concerning divination, interpretations, etc. They are referred to not only in Egypt, but also in Babylon (cf. Is. 44:25; Jer. 50:35; 51:57) and in Persia (cf. Esther 1:13 and 6:13). The terms used in Daniel are different terms, but refer to the same type of people.

For an extensive discussion of the practices of divination and dream interpretation see A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, pp. 184-307.

☐ **“and all its wise men”** This refers to the court counselors (BDB 481 CONSTRUCT BDB 314, cf. Exod. 7:11; Isa. 19:11,12), not necessarily the priestly class of soothsayers referred to by the former term.

☐ **“there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh”** Pharaoh apparently had more honest wise men than Nebuchadnezzar, who did not trust his magi enough to give them the content of his dreams lest they make up an interpretation (cf. Daniel 2)!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 41:9-13**

<sup>9</sup>Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, "I would make mention today of my *own* offenses. <sup>10</sup>Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, *both* me and the chief baker. <sup>11</sup>We had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream. <sup>12</sup>Now a Hebrew youth *was* with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related *them* to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his *own* dream. <sup>13</sup>And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him."

**41:9-12 “my own offenses”** This paragraph refers to the events recorded in Genesis 40. It almost seems he is talking to a new Pharaoh.

**41:12 “a Hebrew youth”** See note at 40:15.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 41:14-24**

<sup>14</sup>Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. <sup>15</sup>Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." <sup>16</sup>Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." <sup>17</sup>So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, "In my dream, behold, I was standing on the bank of the Nile; <sup>18</sup>and behold, seven cows, fat and sleek came up out of the Nile, and they grazed in the marsh grass. <sup>19</sup>Lo, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such as I had never seen for ugliness in all the land of Egypt; <sup>20</sup>and the lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows. <sup>21</sup>Yet when they had devoured them, it could not be detected that they had devoured them, for they were just as ugly as before. Then I awoke. <sup>22</sup>I saw also in my dream, and behold, seven ears, full and good, came up on a single stalk; <sup>23</sup>and lo, seven ears, withered, thin, *and* scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them; <sup>24</sup>and the thin ears swallowed the seven good ears. Then I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me."

**41:14 “they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon”** Again we have an Egyptian loan word (see note at 40:15) in the term “dungeon,” which seems to mean “incarcerated within an Egyptian fortress.” Apparently Joseph was kept with the political prisoners.

☐ **“shaved himself and changed his clothes”** Here again is the Egyptian custom of not only shaving one’s beard, but of shaving one’s entire body, and cleaning one’s self completely before approaching Pharaoh.

**41:16 “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer”** This answer is much like Dan. 2:27-30. Joseph knew the source of his dreams was not in his ability to use divination or to read ancient documents, but in the power of God (cf. 40:8). Joseph has a theocentric worldview (cf. vv. 25,28,32).

The term translated “favorable” is the term *shalom* (BDB 1022), which denotes “peace,” “well being,” or “favor.” See Special Topic at 15:15. In the context of chapter 41, the *shalom* may refer to Pharaoh’s spirit (“his spirit was troubled”) in 41:8.

**41:17-24** This is a slightly different form from the account of Pharaoh’s dream found earlier in chapter 41. It fits the situation exactly. No one would retell the story exactly the same without embellishing some points and omitting other points. To me it is a sign of the historicity of the account.

**41:18** The term “sleek” is a Hebrew CONSTRUCT “beautiful” (BDB 421) and “form” (BDB 1061). This CONSTRUCT is used of

1. cows, here
2. women, Gen. 29:17; Deut. 21:11; I Sam. 25:3; Esther 2:7
3. man, Gen. 39:6
4. tree, Jer. 11:16

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 41:25-36**

<sup>25</sup>Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one *and the same*; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do. <sup>26</sup>The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one *and the same*. <sup>27</sup>The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind will be seven years of famine. <sup>28</sup>It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do. <sup>29</sup>Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; <sup>30</sup>and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will ravage the land. <sup>31</sup>So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it *will be* very severe. <sup>32</sup>Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, *it means* that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about. <sup>33</sup>Now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. <sup>34</sup>Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth *of the produce* of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. <sup>35</sup>Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard it. <sup>36</sup>Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine."

**41:25** Joseph is addressing an Egyptian who would not recognize YHWH so he used the more general name for Deity, *Elohim*. See Special Topic at 12:1.

This God is ready and willing to inform Pharaoh, a pagan king, about His future plans (cf. vv. 25,28,32). The “nations” have always been the focus of God’s eternal, redemptive plan (cf. 3:15; 12:3; Exod. 19:5-6; Isaiah; Jonah; Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8)!

**41:26-32** Joseph began to explain the dream to Pharaoh. Note in v. 24 none of his magicians could do it.

**41:26 “seven years”** In literature of the ANE seven year cycles were common (cf. ANET, p. 31).



<b>41:27</b>	
<b>NASB</b>	“thin ears”
<b>NKJV</b>	“empty heads”
<b>NRSV, JPSOA</b>	“empty ears”
<b>TEV</b>	“thin heads of grain”
<b>NJB</b>	“shriveled ears of grain”
<b>LXX</b>	“thin and blasted ears”

The Hebrew words for

1. thin, הדקות
2. empty, הרקות

The letters d (ד) and r (ר) are often confused. The UBS Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (1979, p. 62) gives “thin” a B rating (some doubt).

**41:32 “the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about”** Joseph is asserting his God’s power and foreknowledge related to events in Egypt. The Egyptian magicians (cf. Exodus 7-8), and by implication the Egyptian gods, were not able to know it or stop it.

YHWH later used the plagues of the Exodus to also depreciate the Egyptian pantheon. YHWH wants Egyptians to know Him!

**41:33-36** In these verses Joseph gives his wise understanding of what should be done to prepare for the abundance and then severe famine.

Notice the VERBALS.

1. “let Pharaoh look for a man, discerning and wise,” v. 33, BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* JUSSIVE
2. “set him over the land of Egypt,” v. 33, BDB 1011, KB 1483, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
3. “let Pharaoh take action,” v. 34, BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
4. “appoint overseers,” v. 34, BDB 823, KB 955, *Hiphil* JUSSIVE
5. “let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land,” v. 34, BDB 332, KB 331, *Piel* PERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense (NASB)
6. “let them gather all the food,” v. 35, BDB 867, KB 1062, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
7. “store up the grain,” v. 35, BDB 840, KB 999, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
8. “let them guard it,” v. 35, BDB 1036, KB 1581, *Qal* PERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense (NASB)
9. “let the food become as a reserve,” v. 36, BDB 224, KB 242, *Qal* PERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense (there are three *Qal* PERFECTS functioning as JUSSIVES in this context)
10. also note the phrase “it will be very severe” of v. 31

**41:33** It should be noted that YHWH’s revealed forecast of seven years of abundance and then seven years of famine (which no one can affect, yet here it is not a judgment from God, but a weather cycle in a fallen world) can only be dealt with by purposeful, planned human action. This interconnect of God’s sovereignty/knowledge and human activity is characteristic of the Bible. Both are crucial (cf. Exodus 3, God’s knowledge/action in vv. 7-9, but Moses’ need to respond in vv. 10-12).

#### **SPECIAL TOPIC: ELECTION/PREDESTINATION AND THE NEED FOR A THEOLOGICAL BALANCE**

Election is a wonderful doctrine. However, it is not a call to favoritism, but a call to be a channel, a tool or means of others’ redemption! In the Old Testament the term was used primarily for service; in the New Testament it is used primarily for salvation which issues in service. The Bible never reconciles the seeming contradiction between God’s sovereignty and mankind’s free will, but affirms them both! A good example

of the biblical tension would be Romans 9 on God's sovereign choice and Romans 10 on mankind's necessary response (cf. 10:11,13).

The key to this theological tension may be found in Ephesians 1:4. Jesus is God's elect man and all are potentially elect in Him (Karl Barth). Jesus is God's "yes" to fallen mankind's need (Karl Barth). Ephesians 1:4 also helps clarify the issue by asserting that the goal of predestination is not heaven, but holiness (Christlikeness). We are often attracted to the benefits of the gospel and ignore the responsibilities! God's call (election) is for time as well as eternity!

Doctrines come in relation to other truths, not as single, unrelated truths. A good analogy would be a constellation versus a single star. God presents truth in eastern, not western, genres. We must not remove the tension caused by dialectical (paradoxical) pairs of doctrinal truths:

1. Predestination vs. human free will
2. Security of the believers vs. the need for perseverance
3. Original sin vs. volitional sin
4. Sinlessness (perfectionism) vs. sinning less
5. Initial instantaneous justification and sanctification vs. progressive sanctification
6. Christian freedom vs. Christian responsibility
7. God's transcendence vs. God's immanence
8. God as ultimately unknowable vs. God as knowable in Scripture
9. The Kingdom of God as present vs. future consummation
10. Repentance as a gift of God vs. repentance as a necessary human covenantal response
11. Jesus as divine vs. Jesus as human
12. Jesus is equal to the Father vs. Jesus as subservient to the Father

The theological concept of "covenant" unites the sovereignty of God (who always takes the initiative and sets the agenda) with a mandatory initial and continuing repentant, faith response from humans. Be careful of proof-texting one side of the paradox and depreciating the other! Be careful of asserting only your favorite doctrine or system of theology!

**41:34 "and let him exact a fifth *of the produce* of the land of Egypt"** Notice that the phrase "of the produce" is in italics, which means it is not in the Hebrew text. Therefore, the VERB "exact a fifth" (BDB 332, KB 331, *Piel* PERFECT) can refer to a taxation of 20%, which we learn was common in the Egyptian literature, or it might refer to a dividing of the land of Egypt into five administrative districts (AB, p. 313).

Some commentators think the VERB is coming from the PASSIVE PARTICIPLE  $\Psi\text{C}\text{T}$  (BDB 332), which means "armed" or "equipped" (cf. Josh. 1:14; 4:12; Jdgs. 7:11, AB, p. 313). This is followed by the JPSOA, "organize the land of Egypt."

**41:36 "so that the land may not perish during the famine"** The term "land" (BDB 75) is functioning as a metaphor for the people and government of Egypt.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 41:37-45**

<sup>37</sup>Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. <sup>38</sup>Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" <sup>39</sup>So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. <sup>40</sup>You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne

I will be greater than you." <sup>41</sup>Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." <sup>42</sup>Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck. <sup>43</sup>He had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. <sup>44</sup>Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." <sup>45</sup>Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, as his wife. And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt.

**41:38 “a divine spirit”** This is translated from the Hebrew words *ruach Elohim* (BDB 924, and BDB 43). Notice that Pharaoh uses the same name for God as Joseph has used. This seems to be a common characterization for one who was able to interpret dreams (cf. Dan. 4:8, 9, 18; 5:11, 14) by non-Hebrews.

**41:40**

**NASB** “do homage”  
**NKJV** “shall be ruled”  
**NRSV** “shall order themselves”  
**TEV** “will obey your orders”  
**NJB** “respect your order”  
**LXX** “be obedient to your word”  
**JPSOA** “be directed”  
**REB** “will respect your every word”

The etymology of this term is uncertain, but it seems to be related to a Hebrew root which means “kiss upon the mouth” (BDB 676, KB 30, *Qal* IMPERFECT). It may mean (1) “to be obedient” (KB) or (2) “to kiss the ground as a gesture of homage” (cf. Ps. 2:12). Egyptians shall honor Joseph’s word (lit. mouth) as they do Pharaoh’s (cf. vv. 42,43,44). He was made Pharaoh’s “Grand Vizier.”

**41:42 “his signet ring”** This is from the same root as the VERB “to sink down” (BDB 371), which may refer to the official ring sinking down in clay or wax to officially document something (cf. Esther 3:10,12; 8:8,10).

▣ **“clothed him in garments of fine linen”** This is another Egyptian loan (BDB 1058 III) word that refers to the fine white linen worn by the elite classes of Egyptian society.

▣ **“put the gold necklace around his neck”** This was a symbol of authority throughout Egyptian history, particularly in the 12th dynasty (cf. Dan. 5:7, 16, 29). All of these details are true of Egypt’s culture of the period. These are eyewitness details!

**41:43 “second in charge”** This was a way of referring to Joseph as second in command of Egypt (i.e., Grand Vizier). The term “second” (BDB 1041) often refers to political or administrative offices (cf. I Sam. 23:17; II Kgs. 23:4; 25:18; I Chr. 5:12; 15:18; II Chr. 28:7; 31:12; Neh. 11:17; Esther 10:3; Jer. 52:24).

▣ **“Bow the knee”** The meaning of this Egyptian term (“Abrek,” cf. JPSOA) has been greatly debated. It sounds like the Hebrew root “to kneel.” There are several other possible translations found in Brown, Driver and Briggs (BDB 7). However, the Vulgate, Aquilla’s Hebrew translation, Origen of Alexandria, and the Jewish commentator, Kimchi, all say that it means “to bow the knee,” which comes from an ancient Hebrew root (BDB 7). This seems to be the best possibility contextually.

**41:44 “no one shall raise his hand or foot”** This is an idiom for “no work or effort shall start or continue without Joseph’s permission.” It denotes a total and complete authority.

**41:45 “Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah”** This is an official title (BDB 861) related to Pharaoh himself (cf. Gen. 45:8). Pharaoh’s naming him may have been a cultural sign of his authority over Joseph. There have been several proposed etymologies. The most popular one has been “the god speaks and he lives,” which seems to refer to Pharaoh as the son of the sun god, Re, or possibly Joseph’s God speaks and saves Egypt. Another possibility is “he who knows things,” which would refer to Joseph as a dream interpreter.

▣ **“and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of”** This is another Egyptian name which means “belongs to Neith” (BDB 62, cf. 41:45,50; 46:20), who is the love goddess of the Egyptians.

▣ **“Potiphara priest of On”** This is another Egyptian name which is a lengthening of the name Potiphar, found in Gen. 37:3. It means “he to whom (Re) gave” (BDB 806). Pharaoh is making Joseph a part of the elite classes of Egypt’s society by this marriage to the daughter of an important priest (BDB 463).

▣ **“On”** “On” (BDB 58) is the city of the sun god. It is called Heliopolis in Greek and Beth Shemesh in Hebrew (cf. Jer. 43:13). It was located about seven miles north of Cairo, on the border of the Land of Goshen.

▣

**NASB, NKJV** “and Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt”  
**NRSV** “Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt”  
**TEV** “traveled all over the land”  
**NJB, LXX** “and Joseph began to journey all over Egypt”  
**REB** “Joseph’s authority extended over the whole of Egypt”  
**JPSOA** “Thus Joseph emerged in charge of the land of Egypt”

This phrase is literally translated in the NASB and NKJV. However, its meaning is disputed.

1. vv. 45 and 46 are parallel, therefore, “traveled over the whole land” (TEV, NJB, LXX, NIV)
2. in Esther 1:17 this very common VERB “go” or “come” (BDB 422, KB 425, *Qal* IMPERFECT), also a *Qal* IMPERFECT, is used in the sense of something spreading (i.e., the message about Vasti’s defiance). So here Joseph’s fame and authority spread throughout the land (NRSV, REB).
3. Because the phrase “over the land” following the VERB is used in vv. 33, 41, and 43 in connection with Joseph’s authority as Vizier, then the VERB here must refer to that also (JPSOA).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 41:46-49**

**<sup>46</sup>Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. <sup>47</sup>During the seven years of plenty the land brought forth abundantly. <sup>48</sup>So he gathered all the food of *these* seven years which occurred in the land of Egypt and placed the food in the cities; he placed in every city the food from its own surrounding fields. <sup>49</sup>Thus Joseph stored up grain in great abundance like the sand of the sea, until he stopped measuring *it*, for it was beyond measure.**

**41:46 “thirty years old”** This is literally “son of thirty years,” which is an idiom (cf. Lev. 27:5; II Kgs. 8:26; Jer. 52:1).

**41:47-49** Joseph's dream interpretation was completely accurate. The abundance is accentuated in several ways.

1. seven years of plenty, v. 47
2. the land brought forth abundantly, v. 47
3. stored grain in great abundance, v. 47
4. like the sand of the sea, v. 49
5. until he stopped measuring it for it was beyond measure, v. 49

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 41:50-52**

<sup>50</sup>Now before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore to him. <sup>51</sup>Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," *he said*, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." <sup>52</sup>He named the second Ephraim, "For," *he said*, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

**41:51 "Manasseh"** This name (BDB 586) is related to the Hebrew VERB "to forget" (BDB 674, KB 728, *Piel* PARTICIPLE) by sound similarity. This is specifically related to the pain involved in the actions of his brothers. Later events in Genesis show that Joseph had not completely gotten over his brother's hateful betrayal.

**41:52 "Ephraim"** This name (BDB 68) is related to a term "fruitfulness" or "double fruit" (BDB 826, cf. 49:22) by popular wordplay. It is interesting to note that in modern Israel, Jewishness is determined by the Jewish mother. In reality, these two boys are not really Jewish! They will later become the half-tribes who will inherit Joseph's double portion and will make up part of the twelve tribes (i.e., thirteen) of Israel. Levi will not be counted as a tribe for inheritance purposes (cf. Joshua).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 41:53-57**

<sup>53</sup>When the seven years of plenty which had been in the land of Egypt came to an end, <sup>54</sup>and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said, then there was famine in all the lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. <sup>55</sup>So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, you shall do." <sup>56</sup>When the famine was *spread* over all the face of the earth, then Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians; and the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. <sup>57</sup>*The people of all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth.*

**41:53-57** This explains historically how Pharaoh came to own all the land of Egypt (cf. 47:20-26). The Egyptians sold their land to the king to buy grain to feed themselves and their families.

It must be noted that famine would have shown the failure of Egyptian religion (i.e., sun god, fertility gods, and the Nile itself) to be able to deliver Egypt, but YHWH could!

**41:56**

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, TEV,

VULGATE

"all the storehouses"

NJB, LXX,

REB

"all the granaries"

JPSOA

"all that was within"

The Hebrew text is literally translated by JPSOA. It can refer to

1. all the places where Joseph stored the grain
2. all the places where the Egyptians could buy grain throughout the land

**41:57** This verse describes the terrible drought and famine over the whole Near East and Mediterranean area. Many nations came to Egypt to buy food. Joseph saved

1. Egypt
2. many other surrounding people groups
3. especially the chosen family of Jacob!

God's providence functions on several levels!

Note the hyperbole in the phrase "all the earth." This is parallel to the phrase used in Genesis 6-7 about the extent of the flood (cf. 7:19, ארץ, 'eres, BDB 75).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. List all of the Egyptian loan words in this chapter and the uniquely Egyptian customs.
2. Describe magicians and their function in the Ancient Near East
3. List all of the ways that Joseph's new position is described in vv. 41-44.
4. What is the meaning of the names of Joseph's sons and what is their significance (v. 50-52)?

# GENESIS 42

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Joseph's Brothers Sent to Egypt	Joseph's Brothers Go To Egypt	Joseph's Brothers Journey to Egypt During the Famine	Joseph's Brothers Go to Egypt to Buy Grain	The First Meeting Between Joseph and His Brothers
42:1-5	42:1-5	42:1-5	42:1-4 42:5-7a	42:1-4 42:5-7
42:6-7	42:6-17	42:6-17	42:7b 42:8-9 42:10-11 42:12 42:13 42:14-17	42:8-17
42:18-25	42:18-24	42:18-25	42:18-20a 42:20b-21 42:22-24	42:18-24
	The Brothers Return to Canaan 42:25-28		Joseph's Brothers Return to Canaan 42:25-28	Jacob's Sons Return to Canaan 42:25-28
42:26-28		42:26-28		
Simeon is Held Hostage				
42:29-34	42:29-34	42:29-34	42:29-34	42:29-34
42:35-38	42:35-38	42:35-38	42:35-36 42:37 42:38	42:35-36 42:37-38

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 42:1-5

<sup>1</sup>Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you staring at one another?" <sup>2</sup>He said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy *some* for us from that place, so that we may live and not die." <sup>3</sup>Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. <sup>4</sup>But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "I am afraid that harm may befall him." <sup>5</sup>So the sons of Israel came to buy *grain* among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan *also*.

**42:1** "Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt" The VERB "see" is used twice in v. 1.

1. "Jacob saw," BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERFECT
2. "Why are you staring at one another," *Hithpael* IMPERFECT

This same word is used of Pharaoh's dream (cf. 41:19,22,28) and by Joseph for Pharaoh to look for a discerning and wise man (cf. 41:33). This common VERB is used in this chapter several times (i.e., vv. 1 [twice], 7,9,12,21,27,35). Rashi says that he had a divine vision, but he probably saw that others in Canaan were purchasing grain from Pharaoh (cf. 47:14).

**42:2** Jacob commands his sons to go to Egypt to sustain (i.e., "live and not die") the family.

1. go down there, BDB 432, KB 434, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. buy *some* for us, BDB 991, KB 1404, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. so that we may live, BDB 310, KB 309, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense. The famine was pervasive and severe!

**42:3-4** Jacob still did not trust the brothers. They had somehow been a part of Joseph's death and he would not trust something similar to happen to Rachel's only remaining child, Benjamin.

**42:4** "that harm may befall him" The term "harm" (BDB 62) is rare (cf. 44:29; Exod. 21:22,23) and implies a life-threatening accident. Jacob is fearful for the life of the only child of his beloved, deceased Rachel (i.e., Benjamin, Joseph's younger full brother). One wonders if Jacob thought he would be the leader of the family.

This VERB (BDB 896, II KB 1131m *Qal* PERFECT) is used in a negative sense here and in Lev. 10:19; Deut. 31:29; Job 4:14; Isa. 51:19; Jer. 13:22; 44:23, and is usually translated "befall."

**42:5** "So the sons of Israel came to buy *grain* among those who were coming" Some wonder why Jacob sent all of his sons (earlier he had divided his family for safety, cf. 32:22-32). It was possibly because (1) each individual could only buy so much grain or (2) that there was safety in numbers.



▣ **“for the famine was in the land of Canaan *also*”** From history we know that famine periodically swept through this part of the world. It was caused by (1) lack of rain at the appropriate time; (2) too much rain or cold; (3) insects; or (4) blight, mildew. Canaan was dependant on regular natural cycles, but Egypt was dependant on the Nile (i.e., flooding).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 42:6-7**

**“Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with *their* faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup>When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food.”**

**42:6 “And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down to him with *their* faces to the ground”** Not only does this verse seem to fulfill Joseph’s dream of Gen. 37:6-9, but also 43:28; and 44:14.

**42:7 “he recognized them”** The VERB “regard, “recognize” (BDB 647, KB 699) is used twice in v. 7 (*Hiphil* IMPERFECT, *Hithpael* IMPERFECT) and twice in v. 8 (*Hiphil* IMPERFECT, *Hiphil* PERFECT). They were still bearded and dressed in the traditional garb of the nomadic tribes. On the other hand Joseph was clean shaven, finely dressed, in a place of authority, and he spoke Egyptian. All of these things disguised him well from his brothers.

▣ **“he recognized. . .he disguised”** Both of these VERBS come from the same root, נָכַר.

1. recognized, BDB 647, KB 699, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT, cf. 27:23; 37:33; 38:25,26; 42:7,8 (twice); Deut. 33:9
2. disguised (lit. “treat as a stranger”), BDB 649, KB 699, *Hithpael* IMPERFECT, cf. I Kgs. 14:5,6

It is uncertain if there are two separate Hebrew roots or two usages.

▣

NASB, NRSV,

TEV, NJB “harshly”

NKJV “roughly”

LXX “hard words”

AB “sternly”

The adjective (BDB 904) means “hard,” or “severe.” It is used in I Sam. 25:3 to describe Nabal’s personality. Here it describes the tone of Joseph’s voice (cf. I Sam. 20:10), as well as the content of his accusations (i.e., they were spies).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 42:8-17**

**<sup>8</sup>But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. <sup>9</sup>Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, "You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land." <sup>10</sup>Then they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. <sup>11</sup>We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies." <sup>12</sup>Yet he said to them, "No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!" <sup>13</sup>But they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers *in all*, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive." <sup>14</sup>Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies; <sup>15</sup>by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! <sup>16</sup>Send one of you that he may get your**

**brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." <sup>17</sup>So he put them all together in prison for three days.**

**42:9 “Joseph remembered the dreams”** This refers to chapter 37. Joseph had named his first son Manasseh (“making to forget”), but the memories of his brothers’ betrayal came flooding back.

▣ **“You are spies”** The rabbis say that Jacob told his sons to enter the city by different gates and that Joseph observed this and used it to accuse them of being spies (BDB 920, KB 1183, *Piel* PARTICIPLE, cf. Josh. 2:1; 6:22-23; I Sam. 26:4). He did this in order to test their motives and character.

▣

**NASB “the undefended parts of the land”**

**NKJV, NRSV,**

**JPSOA “the nakedness of the land”**

**TEV “where the country is weak”**

**NJB “the country’s weak points”**

**LXX “the marks (i.e., scrutinize the tracks) of the land”**

**REB “the weak points of our defences”**

This term (BDB 788) is literally “naked” (cf. 9:22-23) or “bare.” The sense here (determined by the context) is the area of Egypt without forts or military guards. It is a false accusation to test Jacob’s children.

**42:11 “we are honest men”** “Honest” (BDB 467 II, cf. 42:11,19,31,34) is used in the sense of irony of what they had earlier done to Joseph. They appeared as upright, forthright men, but they had acted in evil ways (cf. Genesis 34,37).

**42:13 “the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive”** The last phrase is obviously referring to Joseph. It is ironical that they are speaking this to his face without knowing who he was.

**42:15 “by the life of Pharaoh”** Many commentators have criticized Joseph for taking this oath twice. It fits his disguise! He is obviously not using it in a theological sense. However, it is a reference to the Egyptian tradition that Pharaoh was the son of the sun god, Re. This very oath has been found on Egyptian monuments.

**42:16** Joseph makes several commands and demands.

1. send one of you, BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. that he may get your brother, BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
3. while you remain in prison, BDB 63, KB 75, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE
4. that your words be tested, BDB 103, KB 119, *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

**42:17 “So he put them all in the prison for three days”** Apparently Joseph wanted them to experience some of the agony that he had gone through at their expense.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 42:18-25**

**<sup>18</sup>Now Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God: <sup>19</sup>if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for *the rest of you*, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, <sup>20</sup>and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die." And they did so. <sup>21</sup>Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us." <sup>22</sup>Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood." <sup>23</sup>They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. <sup>24</sup>He turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. <sup>25</sup>Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. And thus it was done for them.**

**42:18-20** Joseph's commands and demands continue.

1. do this, v. 18, BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. live, v. 18, BDB 310, KB 309, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. let one of your brothers be confined, v. 19, BDB 63, KB 75, *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
4. go, v. 19, BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
5. carry grain, v. 19, BDB 97, KB 112, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
6. bring your brother to me, v. 20, BDB 97, KB 112, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
7. so your words may be verified, v. 20, BDB 52, KB 63, *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

**42:18 "for I fear God"** This phrase could relate to Joseph's oaths in Pharaoh's name (cf. vv. 15,16) or to his fear of the divine in general related to his charges against these ten men. Joseph is asserting, in a roundabout way, his integrity and spirituality (cf. 20:11). He did fear/revere *Elohim*.

**42:21 "They said to each other, 'we are truly guilty concerning our brother'"** They felt that God was punishing them because of their sin against Joseph. This is obvious from vv. 21,22,28 and 44:16. There is a sense that we reap what we sow (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Pro. 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; I Cor. 3:8; II Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:6-7; II Tim. 4:14; I Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12). However, there is also another biblical truth that God does not deal with us according to our sins (cf. Ps. 103:10). We do not receive temporal punishment for all of our sins, or we would all be dead and yet there are occasions when God does do this.

**42:22 "Reuben answered them saying, 'Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen'"** This is probably the first time that Joseph had ever heard that Reuben had tried to defend him (cf. Gen. 37:22-24). Now these brothers believed that Joseph's innocent blood was crying out for vengeance as Abel's blood did against his brother in Genesis 4.

**42:23 "They did not know, however, that Joseph understood for there was an interpreter between them"** They were speaking Hebrew; Joseph apparently only spoke Egyptian through an interpreter. Again, this was part of the disguise until he was able to ascertain whether his brothers had overcome the biases which caused them to sin against him over twenty years earlier.

This Hebrew VERB translated “there was an interpreter” (BDB 539, KB 529, *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE) usually denotes scorn or mockery. In the *Hiphil* stem it denotes

1. derision, Job 16:20; Ps. 119:51
2. interpreter, here an envoy, II Chr. 32:31

All of the uses of this VERB in the OT occur in a negative context (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 799).

**42:24 “wept”** Joseph was apparently a sensitive man (cf. 43:30; 45:14,15).

▣ **“he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes”** Obviously Reuben, the firstborn, was the leader of the group and had apparently tried to help Joseph, so the obvious choice was Simeon. He was the second born and many commentators believe that fierce anger seen in his destruction of the men of Shechem (cf. Genesis 34) may have involved him in the original plot to hurt Joseph.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 42:26-28**

**<sup>26</sup>So they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed from there. <sup>27</sup>As one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. <sup>28</sup>Then he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack." And their hearts sank, and they *turned* trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"**

**42:25-29** The nine brothers were afraid that this would jeopardize Simeon’s release. The level of their concern is expressed in

1. their hearts sank, v. 28 (lit. “their hearts went out from them”), BDB 422, KB 425, *Qal* IMPERFECT
2. they turned trembling to one another, v. 28, BDB 353, KB 350, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. 27:33; I Sam. 16:4; 21:1; I Kgs. 1:49

**42:27 “sack”** There are two different Hebrew terms translated “sack” in this verse.

1. “sack” (BDB 974), which is a common term for “sackcloth” (used here)
2. “sack” (BDB 607), which is found only in this account about Joseph and his brothers. It refers to a sack carrying grain.

The answer for the use of the two terms may be that one refers to a money pouch (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 843) and the other a sack for grain (cf. James W. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 49).

**42:28 “What is this that God has done to us”** They still were feeling the divine judgment for their actions against Joseph.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 42:29-34**

**<sup>29</sup>When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, <sup>30</sup>"The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with us, and took us for spies of the country. <sup>31</sup>But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies. <sup>32</sup>We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no longer alive, and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.' <sup>33</sup>The man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me and take *grain* for the famine of your households, and go. <sup>34</sup>But bring your youngest brother to me that I may know that you are not spies, but honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'"**

**42:29-34** The nine brothers relate to their father, Jacob, all that happened in Egypt.

**42:34** “**you may trade in the land**” This VERB (BDB 695, KB 749, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is translated “trade” (cf. Gen. 23:16), but its use in Gen. 34:10 implies a meaning of “travel about freely.” It is possible that it refers specifically to returning to Egypt for more grain when necessary (cf. 43:2).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 42:35-38**

<sup>35</sup>Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. <sup>36</sup>Their father Jacob said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me." <sup>37</sup>Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him *back* to you; put him in my care, and I will return him to you." <sup>38</sup>But Jacob said, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow."

**42:35-38** The family discusses the situation and what to do. They decide to do nothing for the moment.

**42:35** The difference between v. 27 and v. 35 is “one” of them in v. 29 and “they” in v. 35. This is not a doublet, but an intensification of the problem that had frightened them earlier (cf. v. 28).

**42:36** “**You have bereaved me of my children; Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me**” Notice that Jacob takes the occurrences as a personal affront. There seems to be an implied accusation that the brothers were somehow involved in the loss of Joseph.

**42:37** “**Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying**” This is really a dumb offer! Why would Jacob, because of the loss of his sons, kill his grandsons?! It was an attempt by Reuben to assure his father, but it did quite the opposite. Jacob would wait until (1) Judah’s offer in 43:8-9 and (2) the reality of no food to finally allow Benjamin to go with them.

**42:38** “**Sheol**” This is the OT term used for the place of the dead. The doctrine of the afterlife is somewhat veiled in the OT, but it is obvious that they believed in an afterlife where families were together.

It is true that it was a shadowy, joyless state, but a conscious state nonetheless. The term *Sheol* is translated by the term *Hades* in the NT. Apparently all human beings went to this holding place of the dead. For that reason the rabbis speculate that there is a righteous part and a wicked part of *Hades*. See Special Topic at 25:8.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Joseph hide his identity?
2. Why did Joseph speak harshly to his brothers and accuse them of spying?
3. From this chapter what makes us think Jacob suspected something about Joseph's death?

# GENESIS 43

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
The Return to Egypt	The Return to Egypt with Benjamin	The Second Journey to Egypt	Joseph's Brothers Return to Egypt with Benjamin	Jacob's Sons Leave Again with Benjamin
43:1-10	43:1-7	43:1-10	43:1-2 43:3-5 43:6 43:7	43:1-10
	43:8-14		43:8-10	
43:11-15		43:11-15	43:11-14	43:11-14 The Meeting with Joseph
Joseph Sees Benjamin	43:15-25		43:15-17	43:15-17
43:16-25		43:16-25		
			43:18-22 43:23 43:24-27	43:18-23 43:24-25
43:26-34	42:26-34	43:26-34	43:28 43:29-34	43:26-34

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 43:1-10

<sup>1</sup>Now the famine was severe in the land. <sup>2</sup>So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, "Go back, buy us a little food." <sup>3</sup>Judah spoke to him, however, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' <sup>4</sup>If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. <sup>5</sup>But if you do not send *him*, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You will not see my face unless your brother is with you.'" <sup>6</sup>Then Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had *another* brother?" <sup>7</sup>But they said, "The man questioned particularly about us and our relatives, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you *another* brother?' So we answered his questions. Could we possibly know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'" <sup>8</sup>Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the lad with me and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. <sup>9</sup>I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him *back* to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever. <sup>10</sup>For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice."

**43:2** The text does not say how long the first installment of grain lasted, but Simeon is in prison the whole time and Jacob has not acted!

Finally when the grain ran out Jacob took action.

1. go back, BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. buy us a little food, BDB 991, KB 1404, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

**43:3 “Judah spoke to him”** At this point in the narrative Judah will become the significant son. The leadership of Reuben has been diminished.

▣ **“solemnly warned”** This is an intensified grammatical structure (i.e., the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PERFECT VERB of the same root, cf. v. 7 [twice] and v. 20). The VERB (BDB 996, KB 1427, *Hiphil* PERFECT) means to bear witness (cf. Exod. 19:21; Deut. 32:46) or warn (cf. Exod. 21:29; I Kgs. 2:42; Neh. 13:15,21).

▣ **“see my face”** This is an idiom for an audience with Joseph (cf. II Sam. 14:24). He supervised the sale of grain. If they could not see him, they could not buy grain (cf. v. 5).

**43:4-5** Judah continued to address his father, Jacob/Israel.

1. we will go down, BDB 432, KB 434, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
2. we will buy you food, BDB 991, KB 1404, *Qal* COHORTATIVE

Judah's (and the brothers) actions are dependant on Jacob's decision about sending Benjamin.

**43:6** Jacob criticizes them for sharing too much information about the family.

Jacob uses a strong VERB (BDB 949, KB 1269, *Hiphil* PERFECT). Its basic meaning in the *Hiphil* stem is “to do harm” (cf. Gen. 19:9; 31:7; Exod. 5:22-23; Num. 11:11; 20:15; Josh. 24:20).

**43:7** The brothers defend themselves emphatically.

1. The man questioned particularly about us and our relatives, BDB 981, KB 1371, *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and the *Qal* PERFECT VERB of the same root



2. How could we possibly know. . ., BDB 393, KB 390, *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and the *Qal* IMPERFECT VERB of the same root
3. That he would say, “bring your brother down,” BDB 432, KB 434, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE

**43:8-10** Judah (fourth and last son of Leah, cf. 29:35) becomes the spokesman again for the nine older brothers (cf. 44:14-34; 46:25-34).

1. Send the lad with me, BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. We will arise, BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
3. We will go, BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
4. That we may live, BDB 310, KB 309, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense
5. And we may not die, BDB 559, KB 562, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense (cf. 42:2)

When the bread was eaten it was time to make a decision. Judah’s pragmatism is to the point (cf. v. 10). If they do not go for bread, all of them will die, including Benjamin and Jacob. The rationale is overwhelming. They had to go to Egypt for more food and the condition for more food was the presence of Benjamin. Judah again tries to assure his father in v. 9, which seems to imply a belief in an afterlife.

**43:9** “I myself will be surety for him” The word “surety” (BDB 786 II, KB 876, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. 44:32) links this chapter with chapter 38 (cf. v. 17). Judah is becoming more and more a central figure (cf. 49:8-12).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 43:11-15**

**<sup>11</sup>Then their father Israel said to them, "If *it must be* so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. <sup>12</sup>Take double *the* money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake. <sup>13</sup>Take your brother also, and arise, return to the man; <sup>14</sup>and may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, so that he will release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." <sup>15</sup>So the men took this present, and they took double *the* money in their hand, and Benjamin; then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.**

**43:11-14** Jacob/Israel realizes the necessity and directs his older male children.

1. do this, v. 11, BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. take some of. . ., v. 11, BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. carry down to the man, v. 11, BDB 432, KB 434, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
4. take double the money, v. 12, BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
5. take back in your hand the money that was returned, v. 12, BDB 996, KB 1427, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE (this is the third and fourth usage of this VERB in this context)
6. take your brother, v. 13, BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
7. arise, v. 13, BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
8. return to the man, v. 13, BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
9. may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, v. 14, BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
10. that he may release your other brother, v. 14, BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Piel* PERFECT

**43:11**

NASB	“the best produce of the land”
NKJV	“the best fruits of the land”
NRSV	“the choice fruits of the land”
TEV	“the best products of the land”
NJB	“of the country’s best products”
REB	“some of the produce for which our country is famous”

The word (BDB 275 II) is used only here in the OT. Other related roots may bring the connotation in this context of “acceptable Egyptian food.” NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 119 says it is related to “strength,” but that does not fit this context.

A list of items is given that were regularly part of caravans (cf. 37:25). Joseph knew the products well since he had to travel with one of these caravans (as a slave) to Egypt.

**43:12**

NASB, TEV, NJB, LXX, JPSOA	“mistake”
NKJV, NRSV	“oversight”

The term (BDB 993) is found only here. The root means “go astray” or “err.” In Job 12:16 it is translated “misled.” NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 44, says the root indicates an “intentional commission of wrongful acts” (cf. Lev. 4:13; I Sam. 26:21; Ps. 119:21,118; Ezek. 45:20).

**43:14** “and may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man” Jacob sends them off in the name of the covenant God. This name, *El Shaddai*, was used first by Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3). The term *El* is the general name for God in the Ancient Near East and seems to come from the root, “to be strong.” The term *Shaddai* may be from the term for a woman’s breast and implies “the all-sufficient One.” It seems from Exod. 6:3 that this term *El Shaddai* was the common patriarchal name for God.

**43:15** The bringing of a gift was a very common cultural practice of appropriate manners. The items listed would be unique to Canaan and would be sought after in Egypt, but they were not enough to keep one’s family and cattle alive. The giving of a “present” (BDB 585) is similar to Jacob’s gifts to Esau in Genesis 32.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 43:16-25**

**<sup>16</sup>When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, "Bring the men into the house, and slay *an animal* and make ready; for the men are to dine with me at noon." <sup>17</sup>So the man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. <sup>18</sup>Now the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house; and they said, "*It is* because of the money that was returned in our sacks the first time that we are being brought in, that he may seek occasion against us and fall upon us, and take us for slaves with our donkeys." <sup>19</sup>So they came near to Joseph's house steward, and spoke to him at the entrance of the house, <sup>20</sup>and said, "Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food, <sup>21</sup>and it came about when we came to the lodging place, that we opened our sacks, and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full. So we have brought it back in our hand. <sup>22</sup>We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food; we do not know who put our money in our sacks." <sup>23</sup>He said, "Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." Then he brought**

**Simeon out to them. <sup>24</sup>Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys fodder. <sup>25</sup>So they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon; for they had heard that they were to eat a meal there.**

**43:16** When Joseph saw Benjamin he prepared for a special noon meal.

1. bring the men into the house, BDB 97, KB 112, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
2. slay *an animal*, BDB 370, KB 368, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. make ready, BDB 465, KB 464, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE

Egyptians mostly ate fish and fowl with vegetables and lots of bread. The slaughter of a larger animal was done at the home and only for special occasions (cf. James W. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 50).

**43:18 “he may seek occasion against us”** This is an unusual and rare metaphor. The VERB (BDB 164 II, KB 193, *Hithpoel* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) means “to roll” or “to roll away.” Here it implies “rolling over somebody so as to hurt them.” The only other usage in this stem is II Sam. 20:12, where it denotes rolling in one's own blood.

▣ **“and fall upon us”** This VERB (BDB 656, KB 709, *Hithpael* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT), in the *Qal* stem is used for being attacked (cf. Josh. 11:7; Job 1:15) or falling into the hands (power) of an enemy (cf. Jdgs. 15:18). The use of this VERB in this stem is unique to this text.

These brothers did not understand why they were being brought to Joseph's home and were very frightened. They thought it was related to their first visit and the money in their sacks (cf. vv. 20-22).

**43:19 “So they came near to Joseph's house steward”** This man seems to be very well informed. This is true not only of the details of Joseph's plan, but of the theology that informed Joseph's faith. It is my assumption that Joseph had shared with the members of his own household and Egyptian associates about his personal faith in the covenant God of Abraham. It is interesting that the sons of Jacob in v. 18 are so overwhelmed in the presence of the splendor of Egypt that they would have the nomadic fears of someone wanting to steal their animals. This is really a case of “country folks who had come to the big city.”

**43:20 “we indeed came down the first time”** This phrase is intensified by the use of an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a PERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 432, KB 434, both *Qal* stems).

**43:23 “Be at ease”** There is no VERB, just a PREPOSITION and the NOUN *shalom*. It is an implied IMPERATIVE.

▣ **“do not be afraid”** This VERB (BDB 431, KB 432) is a *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 43:26-34**

**<sup>26</sup>When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which was in their hand and bowed to the ground before him. <sup>27</sup>Then he asked them about their welfare, and said, "Is your old father well, of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" <sup>28</sup>They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." They bowed down in homage. <sup>29</sup>As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "May God be gracious to you, my son." <sup>30</sup>Joseph hurried *out* for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a *place* to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. <sup>31</sup>Then he washed his face and came out; and he controlled himself and said, "Serve the meal." <sup>32</sup>So they served**

him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians. <sup>33</sup>Now they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment. <sup>34</sup>He took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

**43:27,29** Joseph asks a series of questions about their family. They must have remembered their father's deep feelings about revealing this information (cf. v. 6).

1. Is your father well (no VERB, for *shalom* see 29:6)
2. Is he still alive (no VERB)
3. Is this your youngest brother (no VERB)

**43:29** “**May God be gracious to you, my son**” Joseph singles out Benjamin for a special greeting (“be gracious,” BDB 335, KB 334, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense).

Notice Joseph expresses his theological worldview.

**43:30** “**Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brothers**” This is translated literally “his compassions were warmed” (BDB 485, KB 481, *Niphal* PERFECT, cf. I Kgs. 3:26). The word “compassion” (BDB 933) literally means “feelings for those of the same womb” (i.e., brotherly affection).

**43:31** “**Serve the meal**” This is literally “set on bread” (BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* IMPERATIVE). It is interesting from vv. 31-33 that the Egyptians sat in chairs around a table for their meals, while the Canaanite Hebrews reclined on their left elbow. There were cultural tensions between the Egyptians and Canaanites (here Hebrews), cf. v. 32. This fits the historical situation exactly and shows the historicity of this account (cf. James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 52).

**43:32** “**So they served him by himself**” It seems that not only was Benjamin singled out for a special seat but also for extra food (cf. v. 34). Apparently Joseph is trying to make the other brothers jealous to see their reaction. He was trying to see if the same character traits which exploded in his own situation twenty years earlier were still present or if they had been mediated through the years.

▣ “**the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians**” This may well be the explanation of Gen. 39:6 of why Potiphar was concerned about his own food preparation. Some quote Heroditus, 2:41, as a historical corroboration of this view. It seems that the Egyptians held in contempt all those who ate cattle for they viewed cattle as being sacred, much like the modern Hindus. This may clarify Gen. 46:34 and Exod. 8:26.

**43:33** Apparently, the Egyptian servants seated the brothers in birth order. How did they know this? Joseph is continuing to reveal his identity.

**43:34** “**but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as theirs**” It seems quite possible that the number “five” is a significant number in Egypt for throughout this account the number “five” appears regularly (cf. 43:34; 45:6,11,22; 47:2,24). One wonders what the brothers must have thought when Joseph served them from his own table and gave Benjamin so much more?!

The term “portion” (BDB 673) denotes a piece of meat (cf. II Sam. 11:8; Esther 2:18; Jer. 40:5). It was not beef!

▣ **“they feasted and drank freely”** The two VERBS (“drink,” BDB 1059, KB 1667 and “drunk,” BDB 1016, KB 1500) sound very much alike (cf. Gen. 9:21). What a party they had!

# GENESIS 44

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
The Brothers Are Brought Back	Joseph's Cup	Joseph Puts His Brothers To a Final Test	The Missing Cup	Joseph's Cup in Benjamin's Sack
44:1-5	44:1-5	44:1-5	44:1-5	44:1-2 44:3-5
44:6-13	44:6-13	44:6-13	44:6-9 44:10-13	44:6-13
44:14-17	44:14-17	44:14-17	44:14-15 44:16 44:17	44:14-17
44:18-34	Judah Intercedes for Benjamin 44:18-34	44:18-34	Judah Pleads for Benjamin 44:18-23 44:24-29 44:30-34	Judah Intervenes 44:18-34

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 44:1-5

<sup>1</sup>Then he commanded his house steward, saying, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack. <sup>2</sup>Put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph had told *him*. <sup>3</sup>As soon as it was light, the men were sent away, they with their donkeys. <sup>4</sup>They had *just* gone out of the city, *and* were not far off, when Joseph said to his house steward, "Up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? <sup>5</sup>Is not this the one from which my lord drinks and which he indeed uses for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.'"

**44:1** This is the second time Joseph has done this (cf. 42:25).

1. fill, BDB 569, KB 583, *Piel* IMPERATIVE
2. put, BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

**44:2** The placing of Joseph's silver cup (cf. v. 5) in Benjamin's sack is new. Joseph is still testing his brothers to see if their jealousy and aggression against his full brother (Rachel's children) is finished.

It should be noted that the term translated "cup" (BDB 149) is really a larger vessel, possibly a bowl or even a pitcher (cf. Jer. 35:5). The normal word for "cup" is found in BDB 468 I (cf. 40:11,13,21; II Sam. 12:3; Ps. 16:5; 23:5; Pro. 23:31).

**44:4 "the city"** Which city depends on who the Pharaoh is. Later in Genesis it seems that Joseph talks to his father in the land of Goshen and Pharaoh in the capital in the same day. This implies a capital in the delta region. The Hyksos had their capitals there. The next Pharaoh to move the capital to this region was Seti I. He was the Pharaoh of the brutal treatment of the Israelite people before the exodus, probably during Rameses II's reign.

See OT Survey, Introduction to Exodus at [www.freebiblecommentary.org](http://www.freebiblecommentary.org).

▣ Joseph commands his servants to a follow-up action.

1. up, BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. follow, BDB 922, KB 1191, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. when you overtake them, BDB 673, KB 727, *Hiphil* PERFECT used in an IMPERATIVE sense with a temporal element. This is a hunting term for pursuing game. It was used of Laban chasing after Jacob (cf. 31:25).
4. accuse them (with a question) of theft!

▣ **"Why have you repaid evil for good"** The LXX (followed by the NRSV, TEV) adds after this sentence, "Why have you stolen my silver cup?" The Peshitta does not have this addition.

**44:5 "Is this not the one which my lord drinks and which he indeed uses for divination"** Throughout these three chapters Joseph has been developing a plot which would test his brothers' character. However, it is somewhat surprising to see him mention divination (BDB 638, KB 690 in an intensified grammatical construction of the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB of the same root, cf. v. 15). This may be just another element of his Egyptian disguise, for most of the leaders of Egypt during this period would have been diviners or used them. The term originally meant "to whisper" or "to hiss" (cf. Lev. 19:26 and Deut. 18:10, where it is later condemned). In the Septuagint it is translated "augury" which means to know the will of God by observing a flight of birds.

The Jerusalem Bible mentions in a footnote (p. 67) that the divination was done by

1. the way water fell into the cup (hydromancy)
2. the sound of the water falling into the cup
3. the pattern of oil drops poured into the cup (lecanomancy)

which were all used in the ANE. S. R. Driver adds another one

4. pieces of gold, silver, or precious stones were dropped into the cup and their distribution or arrangement was noted (cf. UBS, *Handbook on Genesis*, p. 989).

Much of our information about divination techniques comes from old Babylonian omen texts (also note later techniques in Ezek. 21:21). There is not much information about divination methods in this period of Egyptian history (see James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, pp. 52-54).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 44:6-13**

**<sup>6</sup>So he overtook them and spoke these words to them. <sup>7</sup>They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. <sup>8</sup>Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks we have brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? <sup>9</sup>With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." <sup>10</sup>So he said, "Now let it also be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and *the rest of you shall be innocent.*" <sup>11</sup>Then they hurried, each man lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. <sup>12</sup>He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. <sup>13</sup>Then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city.**

**44:6-13** These verses are a dialogue between Joseph's steward (also note 43:16-25) and the ten brothers.

**44:9** This response is very much like Jacob's when he was overtaken by Laban (cf. 31:32). It is an honest response and yet they will regret making these kinds of statements when the cup will be found in Benjamin's bag.

**44:10 "Now let it be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and *the rest of you shall be innocent*"** This again seems to be the general plot of seeing if they will abandon Benjamin or if they will stick together as a family. It would have been quite easy to leave Benjamin behind (cf. v. 17) and to scurry away to safety (as they did with Simeon's imprisonment).

The term translated "innocent" (BDB 667) is usually translated "blameless." The term is used in several ways.

1. in a judicial sense, Exod. 23:7
2. referring to an oath, Gen. 24:41; Josh. 2:17,20
3. referring to a person, Job 4:7; 9:23; 17:8; 22:19,30; 27:17; Ps. 10:8; 15:5; Pro. 1:11

This statement by the steward foreshadows Joseph's statement in v. 17.

**44:12 "beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest"** This knowledge of the brothers' birth order had previously surprised them (cf. 43:33). Now the steward is also familiar with this information.

This steward was a very close and trusted servant of Joseph. One only wonders how much of Joseph's life and faith he was familiar with.

**44:13 "Then they tore their clothes"** No words could express their shock! This is one of several signs of mourning in Jewish culture. See Special Topic: Grieving Rites at 37:29.



**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 44:14-17**

**<sup>14</sup>When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there, and they fell to the ground before him. <sup>15</sup>Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?" <sup>16</sup>So Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found." <sup>17</sup>But he said, "Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."**

**44:15** This is a false statement. It is made to inject tension into the situation. Joseph did not divine their theft; he engineered it!

**44:16** Judah is the group's spokesman. He asked Joseph several rhetorical questions.

1. What can we say to my lord?
2. What can we speak?
3. How can we justify (BDB 842, KB 1003, *Hithpael* IMPERFECT) ourselves?
4. v. 18 is also a question
5. v. 19 is also a question
6. v. 34 is also a question

☐ **“God has found out the iniquity of your servants”** Here again the theological aspects of the betrayal and selling of Joseph seems to have caused these guilt (BDB 730, cf. 4:13; 15:16; 19:15) feelings to have remained in his brothers all these years (cf. 42:21-22,28). However, the brothers seem to have truly changed for they are united in Benjamin's defense and Judah even uses a substitutionary option (cf. vv. 18-34, esp. vv. 32-33). This prayer is on the same level as the intercessory prayers of Abraham, Moses, and Paul.

**SPECIAL TOPIC: INTERCESSORY PRAYER**

I. Introduction

A. Prayer is significant because of Jesus' example.

1. personal prayer, Mark 1:35; Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:29; 22:29-46
2. cleansing of the Temple, Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46
3. Model Prayer, Matt. 6:5-13; Luke 11:2-4

B. Prayer is our putting into tangible action our belief in a personal, caring God who is present, willing, and able to act on our behalf and others', through our prayers.

C. God has personally limited Himself to act on the prayers of His children in many areas (cf. James 4:2).

D. The major purpose of prayer is our fellowship and time with the Triune God.

E. The scope of prayer is anything or anyone that concerns believers. We may pray once, believing, or over and over again as the thought or concern returns.

F. Prayer can involve several elements.

1. praise and adoration of the Triune God
2. thanksgiving to God for His presence, fellowship, and provisions
3. confession of our sinfulness, both past and present

4. petition of our sensed needs or desires
5. intercession where we hold the needs of others before the Father

G. Intercessory prayer is a mystery. God loves those for whom we pray much more than we do, yet our prayers often effect a change, response, or need, not only in ourselves, but in them.

## II. Biblical Material

### A. Old Testament

1. Some examples of intercessory prayer.
  - a. Abraham pleading for Sodom, Gen. 18:22ff
  - b. Moses' prayers for Israel
    - (1) Exodus 5:22-23
    - (2) Exodus 32:31ff
    - (3) Deuteronomy 5:5
    - (4) Deuteronomy 9:18,25ff
  - c. Samuel prays for Israel
    - (1) I Samuel 7:5-6,8-9
    - (2) I Samuel 12:16-23
    - (3) I Samuel 15:11
  - d. David for his child, II Samuel 12:16-18
2. God is looking for intercessors, Isaiah 59:16.
3. Known, unconfessed sin or an unrepentant attitude affects our prayers.
  - a. Psalm 66:1
  - b. Proverbs 28:9
  - c. Isaiah 59:1-2; 64:7

### B. New Testament

1. The Son and Spirit's intercessory ministry
  - a. Jesus
    - (1) Romans 8:34
    - (2) Hebrews 7:25
    - (3) I John 2:1
  - b. Holy Spirit, Romans 8:26-27
2. Paul's intercessory ministry
  - a. Prays for the Jews
    - (1) Romans 9:1ff
    - (2) Romans 10:1
  - b. Prays for the churches
    - (1) Romans 1:9
    - (2) Ephesians 1:16
    - (3) Philippians 1:3-4,9
    - (4) Colossians 1:3,9
    - (5) I Thessalonians 1:2-3
    - (6) II Thessalonians 1:11

- (7) II Timothy 1:3
- (8) Philemon, v. 4
- c. Paul asked the churches to pray for him
  - (1) Romans 15:30
  - (2) II Corinthians 1:11
  - (3) Ephesians 6:19
  - (4) Colossians 4:3
  - (5) I Thessalonians 5:25
  - (6) II Thessalonians 3:1
- 3. The church's intercessory ministry
  - a. Pray for one another
    - (1) Ephesians 6:18
    - (2) I Timothy 2:1
    - (3) James 5:16
  - b. Prayer requested for special groups
    - (1) our enemies, Matt. 5:44
    - (2) Christian workers, Hebrews 13:18
    - (3) rulers, I Timothy 2:2
    - (4) the sick, James 5:13-16
    - (5) backsliders, I John 5:16

### III. Hindrances to prayer

- A. Our relationship to Christ and the Spirit
  - 1. Abide in Him, John 15:7
  - 2. In His name, John 14:13,14; 15:16; 16:23-24
  - 3. In the Spirit, Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20
  - 4. According to God's will, Matthew 6:10; I John 3:22; 5:14-15
- B. Motives
  - 1. Not wavering, Matthew 21:22; James 1:6-7
  - 2. Humility and repentance, Luke 18:9-14
  - 3. Asking amiss, James 4:3
  - 4. Selfishness, James 4:2-3
- C. Other aspects
  - 1. Perseverance
    - a. Luke 18:1-8
    - b. Colossians 4:2
  - 2. Kept on asking
    - c. Matthew 7:7-8
    - b. Luke 11:5-13
    - c. James 1:5
  - 3. Discord at home, I Peter 3:7

4. Free from know sin
  - a. Psalm 66:18
  - b. Proverbs 28:9
  - c. Isaiah 59:1-2
  - d. Isaiah 64:7

#### IV. Theological Conclusion

- A. What a privilege. What an opportunity. What a duty and responsibility
- B. Jesus is our example. The Spirit is our guide. The Father is eagerly waiting.
- C. It could change you, your family, your friends, and the world.

**44:17 “Far be it from me to do this”** This is an idiomatic expression of not doing something that would violate a religious obligation or fairness (cf. Gen. 18:25; Josh. 22:29; 24:16; I Sam. 2:30; 20:2,9; 22:15,29; II Sam. 20:20; 23:17).

▣ **“go up in peace to your father”** This command (BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) is obviously given to intensify the situation. The brothers could not return home without Benjamin because they were afraid Jacob would die (cf. vv. 30-31). There seems to be no hope of peace!

#### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 44:18-34

**<sup>18</sup>Then Judah approached him, and said, "Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh. <sup>19</sup>My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' <sup>20</sup>We said to my lord, 'We have an old father and a little child of his old age. Now his brother is dead, so he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.' <sup>21</sup>Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me that I may set my eyes on him.' <sup>22</sup>But we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' <sup>23</sup>You said to your servants, however, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' <sup>24</sup>Thus it came about when we went up to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. <sup>25</sup>Our father said, 'Go back, buy us a little food.' <sup>26</sup>But we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' <sup>27</sup>Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; <sup>28</sup>and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn in pieces," and I have not seen him since. <sup>29</sup>If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.' <sup>30</sup>Now, therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, <sup>31</sup>when he sees that the lad is not *with us*, he will die. Thus your servants will bring the gray hair of your servant our father down to Sheol in sorrow. <sup>32</sup>For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him *back* to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.' <sup>33</sup>Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. <sup>34</sup>For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me—for fear that I see the evil that would overtake my father?"**

**44:18-34** Judah retells what has happened in the discussion about the brother's two trips to Egypt to buy food and the tensions at home about the second trip with Benjamin.

**44:18 “in my lord’s ears”** This is an idiom for “may I speak clearly with you” (cf. 20:8; 23:10,13,16; 50:4; Deut. 5:1; 31:11,28,30).

▣ **“do not be angry”** Judah requests (BDB 354, KB 351, *Qal* JUSSIVE) Joseph not to become more angry (cf. 30:2; 39:19), but to let him explain their family situation in connection with this youngest brother.

**44:28 “Surely he is torn in pieces”** This is an intensified grammatical structure (INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PERFECT VERB of the same root, BDB 382, 380), which is also found in 37:33.

**44:30 “Now, therefore, when I come to your servant, my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad’s life”** This shows something of Jacob’s dotting on Benjamin. This concept of the life being bound up (BDB 905, KB 1153, *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE) is also used to describe the tremendous love and friendship between David and Jonathan in I Sam. 18:1. Jacob had been melancholy since the loss of Joseph and had taken comfort by focusing on the only other son of his favorite dead wife, Rachel.

**44:33** This verse has two JUSSIVES. Judah is pleading for Benjamin’s release and return.

1. let your servant (i.e., Judah) remain (lit. “sit”), BDB 442, KB 444, *Qal* JUSSIVE
2. let the lad go up with his brothers, BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* JUSSIVE

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Joseph act in such cruel ways toward his brothers?
2. Why does Joseph seem to do such strange things in this chapter in relation to his brothers?
3. Why did Joseph want Benjamin to come to Egypt?
4. List the theological implications of premeditated sin controlling one’s destiny.

# GENESIS 45

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Joseph Deals Kindly With His Brothers	Joseph Revealed to His Brothers	Joseph Makes Himself Known to His Brothers	Joseph Tells His Brothers Who He Is	Joseph Makes Himself Known
45:1-3	45:1-15	45:1-3	45:1-8	45:1-2 45:3-8
45:4-15		45:4-15	45:9-11 45:12-13 45:14-15	45:9-13 45:14-15 Pharaoh's Invitation
45:16-20	45:16-20	45:16-20	45:16-20	45:16-20 The Return to Canaan
45:21-23	45:21-24	45:21-24	45:21-24	45:21-24
45:24-28	45:25-28	45:25-28	45:25-26 45:27-28	45:25-28

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## BACKGROUND STUDY

- A. In chapters 42-44 Joseph tested his brothers to see if their attitude of manipulation, particularly toward the sons of Rachel, had changed. This was primarily shown through their actions related to Benjamin.
- B. Chapters 45 and 46 deal with the closing section of Joseph's rise to supremacy and the fulfillment of God's plan for the physical deliverance of Jacob and the covenant family during the seven years of famine.
- C. Chapter 45, vv. 5-9, is strikingly relevant as we see God's hand so evident in the life of Joseph in what would seem to be tragic circumstances. If we could only learn this truth in our lives, what a difference it would make. Nothing just happens to God's children (See Hannah Whithall Smith's *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*).

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 45:1-3

**<sup>1</sup>Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. <sup>2</sup>He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard *it*, and the household of Pharaoh heard *of it*. <sup>3</sup>Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.**

**45:1 "Then Joseph could not control himself"** This is a VERB (BDB 407, KB 410, negated *Qal* PERFECT and a *Hithpael* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT, BDB 67, KB 80), which is used of Joseph in 43:31, where he was able to get control of his emotions. Here he wept so loudly (cf. v. 2) that everyone heard him weeping!

▣ **"everyone go out from me"** The command (BDB 422, KB 425, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE), possibly spoken in Egyptian, is directed to all of Joseph's servants (even his special steward). He is left with only his eleven brothers.

▣ **"when Joseph made himself known to his brothers"** What a moment this must have been! Joseph was emotional and they became emotional (cf. v. 3).

**45:2 "He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard *it* and the household of Pharaoh heard *of it*"** Joseph had sent all his Egyptian servants out of the room. This was either (1) so as not to embarrass his brothers or (2) so as not to show such great emotion in this personal matter before the Egyptians. However, the Oriental practice of loud wailing was heard by the servants who were close enough to respond if Joseph had called them. Apparently, Joseph was a very loved man in Egypt and his servants were personally concerned about him or were concerned about his expertise and governmental administration being lost, therefore, they reported to Pharaoh what they had heard.

**45:3 "I am Joseph"** This is an exclamation with no VERB. It is supposition that he spoke in Hebrew, but because it seems obvious to assume that his brothers did not speak Egyptian and that there was no translator present, maybe Joseph shocked them by speaking to them in their native tongue and making such a dramatic statement (cf. v. 4).

▣ **“Is my father still alive”** Some commentators have doubted the veracity of this verse because in 43:27 Joseph asked the same question. However, it seems possible that the term (BDB 311, cf. I Sam. 25:6) can mean more than simply physical life. Apparently he was asking about his father’s well-being, which we learn from later verses, had not been the same since the supposed death of Joseph (cf. v. 27).

▣ **“they were dismayed”** This is a strong VERB (BDB 96, KB 111, *Niphal* PERFECT, cf. Jdgs. 20:41; I Sam. 28:21; II Sam. 4:1; Job 21:6; 23:15; Ps. 6:3; 30:8; 48:6; 83:17; 90:7; 104:29; Isa. 13:8; 21:3; Ezek. 7:27).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 45:4-15**

**<sup>4</sup>Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup>Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup>For the famine *has been* in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. <sup>7</sup>God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. <sup>8</sup>Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. <sup>9</sup>Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, "Thus says your son Joseph, "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. <sup>10</sup>You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. <sup>11</sup>There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine *to come*, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished." <sup>12</sup>Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin *see*, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. <sup>13</sup>Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here." <sup>14</sup>Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. <sup>15</sup>He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.**

**45:5** **“Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here”** The term “grieved” (BDB 780, KB 864, *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) in the *Niphal* stem is used in I Sam. 20:3,34; II Sam. 19:2 and Neh. 8:10,11. The basic meaning is “hurt,” “pain,” or “grieve.”

The term “angry” is the term “burn” (BDB 354, KB 351, *Qal* JUSSIVE, cf. Gen. 31:36; 39:19; Exod. 32:11).

Joseph is about to make one of the most astonishing faith statements found anywhere in the Bible. This verse is the theological purpose of the Joseph account! In the midst of abuse and treachery he was able to see the hand of God (*Elohim*) by faith. Verses 5-9 form one of the strongest affirmations of the goodness and presence of God even amidst the struggles and problems of life.

Just an added comment on this powerful, wonderful text. My question has always been, “Does God act in these ways only toward the covenant family?” It is obvious that God does whatever is necessary to support the family of Abraham (cf. Romans 9-11), but what about ordinary believers? Is His love for eternity (i.e., redemption) or for time and eternity? Is He with us in the same way? This world is an evil, rebellious place (see *The Goodness of God* by Wenham). Believers suffer; believers are persecuted; believers are killed! From the NT it seems true that God is with us and for us even amidst circumstances that are unexplainable (see *The Christian’s Secrets of a Happy Life*, by Hannah Whithall Smith). It is a faith presupposition and a Scriptural revelation that believers are precious to God! Life is a mystery, but the unseen (yet not unknown) hand of God is with us moment by moment. Our peace must rest in Him, His Word, His Son, not in circumstances (cf. I Cor. 10:13; 13:8-13). We are the family of Abraham (cf. Rom. 2:28-29)!



**45:6** “For the famine *has been* in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing or harvesting” This goes back to the revelation through Pharaoh’s dream that there would be seven severe years of famine.

**45:7** Joseph’s statement in v. 7, referring to the remnant (BDB 984) being preserved, relates to his activity, not to the later theological use of the term “remnant” which refers to the believing, faithful portion of the Hebrew people.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: THE REMNANT, THREE SENSES**

The OT concept of “a faithful remnant” is a recurrent theme of the Prophets (mostly in the eighth century prophets and Jeremiah). It is used in three senses:

1. those who survived the Exile (e.g., Isa. 10:20-23; 17:4-6; 37:31-32; Jer. 42:15,19; 44:12,14,28; Amos 1:8)
2. those who remain faithful to YHWH (e.g., Isa. 4:1-5; 11:11,16; 28:5; Joel 2:32; Amos 5:14-15; Micah 2:12-13; 4:6-7; 5:7-9; 7:18-20)
3. those who are a part of the eschatological renewal and recreation (e.g., Amos 9:11-15)

In the context of exiles God chooses only some (those with a faithful zeal) of the remnant (survivors of the Exile) to return to Judah. As we have seen before in this chapter, themes from Israel’s past recur (v. 6). God is reducing the numbers so that He can show His power, provision, and care (e.g., Gideon, Judges 6-7).



**NASB, NKJV,**

**NJB** “by a great deliverance”

**NRSV** “many survivors”

**TEV** “descendants survive”

**LXX** “a great remnant (posterity)”

**JPSOA** “an extraordinary deliverance”

This is literally “escape” (BDB 812, cf. Jer. 25:35) and the ADJECTIVE “great” (BDB 152). Joseph’s aid to his family, by being raised to leadership in Egypt, is described as a great deliverance engineered by YHWH (cf. vv. 5,8; 50:20).

**45:8 “and He has made me”** The theological problem related to the doctrine of predestination is not that God knows and effects human actions (as well as physical events), but to what extent is He responsible (duplicitous) for human sin? Theologians (Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. pp. 423-425; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. pp. 424-426) have offered several theories which show God’s involvement in, but not initiation of, sinful acts (cf. James 1:14; I John 2:16).

1. He can prevent an act (cf. Gen. 20:16)
2. He can permit an act (cf. Ps. 81:12-13; Rom. 1:24,26,28)
3. He can direct an act (cf. Gen. 37:21-22; 45:5,7,8; 50:20)
4. He can limit an act (cf. I Cor. 10:13)

## SPECIAL TOPIC: PREDESTINATION (CALVINISM) VERSUS HUMAN FREE WILL (ARMINIANISM)

I. Romans 8:29 - Paul uses “foreknew” (*proginōskō*, “to know before”) twice, here and 11:2. In 11:2 it refers to God’s covenant love for Israel before time began. Remember that the term “know” in Hebrew related to intimate, personal relationship, not to facts about someone (cf. Gen. 4:1; Jer. 1:5). Here it was included in a chain of eternal events (cf. Rom. 8:29-30). This term was linked with predestination. However, it must be stated that God’s foreknowledge is not the basis of election because if that were so, then election would be based on fallen humanity’s future response, which would be human performance. This term is also found in Acts 26:5; I Pet. 1:2,20 and II Pet. 3:17.

A. “foreknew” (*proginōskō*, “to know before”)

The terms “foreknow” and “predestine” are both compounds with the PREPOSITION “before” and therefore, should be translated “to know before,” “to set bounds before,” or “mark off before.” The definitive passages on predestination in the NT are Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:13-14; and Romans 9. These texts obviously stress that God is sovereign. He is in total control of all things. There is a preset divine plan being worked out in time. However, this plan is not arbitrary or selective. It is based, not only on God’s sovereignty and foreknowledge, but on His unchanging character of love, mercy, and undeserved grace.

We must be careful of our western (American) individualism or our evangelical zeal coloring this wonderful truth. We must also guard against being polarized into the historical, theological conflicts between Augustine versus Pelegius or Calvinism versus Arminianism.

B. “predestined” (*proorizō*, “to set the bounds before”)

Predestination is not a doctrine meant to limit God’s love, grace, and mercy nor to exclude some from the gospel. It is meant to strengthen believers by molding their world-view. God is for all mankind (cf. I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9). God is in control of all things. Who or what can separate us from Him (cf. Rom. 8:31-39)? God views all history as present; humans are time bound. Our perspective and mental abilities are limited. There is no contradiction between God’s sovereignty and mankind’s free will. It is a covenantal structure. This is another example of truth given in dialectical tension. Biblical doctrines are presented from different perspectives. They often appear paradoxical. The truth is a balance between the seemingly opposite pairs. We must not remove the tension by picking one of the truths. We must not isolate any biblical truth into a compartment by itself.

It is also important to add that the goal of election is not only heaven when we die, but Christlikeness now (cf. Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4; 2:10). We were chosen to be “holy and blameless.” God chooses to change us so that others may see the change and respond by faith to God in Christ. Predestination is not a personal privilege, but a covenantal responsibility. This is the major truth of the passage. This is the goal of Christianity. Holiness is God’s will for every believer. God’s election is to Christlikeness (cf. Eph. 1:4), not a special standing. The image of God, which was given to man in creation (cf. Gen. 1:26; 5:1,3; 9:6), is to be restored.

C. “conformed to the image of His Son”—God’s ultimate goal is the restoration of the image lost in the Fall. Believers are foreordained to Christlikeness (cf. Eph. 1:4).

II. Romans 9

A. Romans 9 is one of the strongest NT passages on God’s sovereignty (the other being Eph. 1:3-14), while chapter 10 states humans’ free will clearly and repeatedly (cf. “everyone” v. 4; “whosoever” vv. 11,13; “all” v. 12 [twice]). Paul never tries to reconcile this theological tension.

They are both true! Most Bible doctrines are presented in paradoxical or dialectical pairs. Most systems of theology are logical half-truths. Augustinianism and Calvinism versus semi-Pelegianism and Arminianism have elements of truth and error. Biblical tension between doctrines is preferable to a proof-texted, dogmatic, rational, theological system that forces the Bible onto a preconceived interpretive grid.

- B. This same truth (found in Rom. 9:23) is stated in Rom. 8:29-30 and Eph. 1:4,11. This chapter is the strongest expression of God's sovereignty in the NT. There can be no dispute that God is in total charge of creation and redemption. This great truth should never be softened or diminished. However, it must be balanced with God's choice of covenant as a means of relating to human creation, made in His image. It is surely true that some OT covenants, like Genesis 15, are unconditional and do not relate at all to human response, but other covenants are conditioned on human response (e.g., Eden, Noah, Moses, David). God has a plan of redemption for His creation; no human can affect this plan. God has chosen to allow individuals to participate in His plans. This opportunity for participation is a theological tension between sovereignty (Romans 9) and human free will (Romans 10).

It is not appropriate to select one biblical emphasis and ignore another. There is tension between doctrines because eastern people present truth in dialectical or tension-filled pairs. Doctrines must be held in relationship to other doctrines. Truth is a mosaic of truths.

### III. Ephesians 1

- A. Election is a wonderful doctrine. However, it is not a call to favoritism, but a call to be a channel, a tool, or means of others' redemption! In the OT the term was used primarily for service; in the NT it is used primarily for salvation which issues in service. The Bible never reconciles the seeming contradiction between God's sovereignty and mankind's free will, but affirms them both! A good example of the biblical tension would be Romans 9 on God's sovereign choice and Romans 10 on mankind's necessary response (cf. 10:11,13).

The key to this theological tension may be found in 1:4. Jesus is God's elect man and all are potentially elect in Him (Karl Barth). Jesus is God's "yes" to fallen mankind's need (Karl Barth). Ephesians 1:4 also helps clarify the issue by asserting that the goal of predestination is not heaven only, but holiness (Christlikeness). We are often attracted to the benefits of the gospel and ignore the responsibilities! God's call (election) is for time as well as eternity!

Doctrines come in relation to other truths, not as single, unrelated truths. A good analogy would be a constellation versus a single star. God presents truth in eastern, not western, genres. We must not remove the tension caused by dialectical (paradoxical) pairs of doctrinal truths (God as transcendent versus God as immanent; security vs. perseverance; Jesus as equal with the Father vs. Jesus as subservient to the Father; Christian freedom vs. Christian responsibility to a covenant partner, etc).

The theological concept of "covenant" unites the sovereignty of God (who always takes the initiative and sets the agenda) with a mandatory initial and continuing repentant faith response from man. Be careful of proof-texting one side of the paradox and depreciating the other! Be careful of asserting only your favorite doctrine or system of theology.

- B. "He chose us" in Eph. 1:4 is an AORIST MIDDLE INDICATIVE which emphasizes the SUBJECT. This focuses on the Father's choice before time. God's choice must not be understood in the Islamic sense of determinism, nor in the ultra-Calvinistic sense as some versus others, but in the covenantal sense. God promised to redeem fallen mankind (cf. Gen. 3:15). God called and chose Abraham to choose all humans (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:5-6). God Himself elected all persons who would

exercise faith in Christ. God always takes the initiative in salvation (cf. John 6:44,65). This text and Romans 9 are the biblical basis for the doctrine of predestination emphasized by Augustine and Calvin.

God chose believers not only to salvation (justification), but also to sanctification (cf. Col 1:12). This could relate to (1) our position in Christ (cf. II Cor. 5:21) or (2) God's desire to reproduce His character in His children (cf. 2:10; Rom. 8:28-29; Gal. 4:19). God's will for His children is both heaven one day and Christlikeness now!

"In Him" is a key concept of Eph. 1:4. The Father's blessings, grace, and salvation flow through Christ (cf. John 14:6). Notice the repetition of this grammatical form (LOCATIVE of SPHERE) in v. 3, "in Christ"; v. 4, "in Him"; v. 7, "in Him"; v. 9, "in Him"; v. 10, "in Christ," "in Him"; v. 12, "in Christ" and v. 13, "in Him" (twice). Jesus is God's "yes" to fallen mankind (Karl Barth). Jesus is the elect man and all are potentially elect in Him. All of God the Father's blessings flow through Christ.

The phrase "before the foundation of the world" is also used in Matt. 25:34; John 17:24; I Pet. 1:19-20 and Rev. 13:8. It shows the Triune God's redemptive activity even before Gen. 1:1. Humans are limited by their sense of time; everything to us is past, present, and future, but not to God.

The goal of predestination is holiness, not privilege. God's call is not to a selected few of Adam's children, but to all! It is a call to be what God intended mankind to be, like Himself (cf. I Thess. 5:23; II Thess. 2:13); in His image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). To turn predestination into a theological tenet instead of a holy life is a tragedy. Often our theologies speak louder than the biblical text.

The term "blameless" (*amōmos*) or "free from blemish" is used of (1) Jesus (cf. Heb. 9:14; I Pet. 1:19); (2) Zachariah and Elizabeth (cf. Luke 1:6); (3) Paul (cf. Phil. 3:6); and (4) all true Christians (cf. Phil. 2:15; I Thess. 3:13; 5:23). God's unalterable will for every Christian is not only heaven later, but Christlikeness now (cf. Rom. 8:29-30; Gal. 4:19; I Pet. 1:2). Believers are to reflect God's characteristics to a lost world for the purpose of evangelism.

Grammatically the phrase "in love" in this verse could go with either v. 4 or v. 5. However, when this phrase is used in other places in Ephesians it always refers to human love for God (cf. 3:17; 4:2,15,16).

- C. In Eph. 1:5 the phrase "He predestined us" is an AORIST ACTIVE PARTICIPLE. This Greek term is a compound of "before" and "mark off." It refers to God's predetermined redemptive plan (cf. Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:28; 17:31; Rom. 8:29-30). Predestination is one of several truths related to mankind's salvation. It is part of a theological pattern or series of related truths. It was never meant to be emphasized in isolation! Biblical truth has been given in a series of tension-filled, paradoxical pairs. Denominationalism has tended to remove the biblical tension by emphasizing only one of the dialectical truths (predestination versus human free will; security of the believer versus perseverance of the saints; original sin versus volitional sin; sinlessness versus sinning less; instantaneously declared sanctification versus progressive sanctification; faith versus works; Christian freedom versus Christian responsibility; transcendence versus immanence).

God's choice is not based on foreknowledge of human performance, but on His gracious character (cf. vv. 9 & 11). He wishes that all (not just some special ones like the Gnostics or modern-day ultra-Calvinists) would be saved (cf. Ezek. 18:21-23,32; John 3:16-17; I Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; II Pet. 3:9). God's grace (God's character) is the theological key to this passage (cf. vv. 6a, 7c, 9b), as God's mercy is the key to the other passage on predestination, Romans 9-11.

Fallen mankind's only hope is the grace and mercy of God (cf. Isa. 53:6 and several other OT texts quoted in Rom. 3:9-18). It is crucial in interpreting these first theological chapters to realize that Paul emphasizes those things which are totally unrelated to human performance: predestination (chap. 1), grace (chap. 2), and God's eternal plan of redemption (mystery, 2:11-3:13). This was to counterbalance the emphasis of the false teachers on human merit and pride.

▣ **“a father to Pharaoh and a lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt”** This seems to be a threefold description of Joseph's job assignment in Egypt.

1. he had a unique relationship with Pharaoh. This has become an archaeologically documented title as far back as 3000 B.C. It seems to refer to the position of Grand Vizier.
2. “lord of all his household” seems to be a reference to the management of Pharaoh's personal property (cf. Gen. 41:40; 47:20-26).
3. “ruler over all the land of Egypt” seems to express his relationship in governmental administration (cf. Gen. 41:41, 48-49, 55-56; 42:6-7).

Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, p. 49, shows how the term “father” came to be used as a title for one of Pharaoh's chief advisors. Fathers were the principal teachers of children after they had reached a certain age of maturity, before this it was the mother's task. In the spiritual realm, priests took the term “father” to describe themselves (Hebrew wisdom teachers in Proverbs also took this title, as did priests in Jdgs. 17:10; 18:19).

**45:9** Joseph addresses his brothers with several commands.

1. hurry, BDB 554, KB 553, *Piel* IMPERATIVE, cf. v. 13
2. go up, BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. come down, BDB 432, KB 434, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. do not delay, BDB 763, KB 840, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

**45:10 “You shall live in the land of Goshen”** It is uncertain from the following verses whether this refers to a prophetic announcement (cf. 46:31) on behalf of Joseph or simply logic as to where shepherds lived. The land of Goshen (BDB 177) is located on the upper eastern side of the Nile, close to the land of Canaan. It is later called the land of Rameses (cf. Gen. 47:6,11). It was the livestock-producing area of Egypt (cf. Gen. 46:32-34).

▣ **“and you shall be near me”** This verse is often used as an evidence for the Pharaohs whom Joseph served being part of the “Shepherd Kings,” or Hyksos, who conquered Egypt by means of the compound bow and horse drawn chariot. They ruled Egypt from 1720 to 1580 B.C. We know that they were Semitic in origin and, therefore, it may have been easier for another Semite, such as Joseph, to rise in their ranks. Throughout Egyptian history, Semitic people have held important places in government. The capital of the Hyksos empire was located in Tanis or Zoan (cf. Ps. 78:12, 43). This is very close to the land of Goshen. However, the later native Egyptian Pharaohs had their capital 400 miles south in the city of Thebes. The dating of Joseph's administration in Egypt is still uncertain and this cannot be used as conclusive evidence.

**45:12 “Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you”** The exact meaning of each of these phrases is somewhat uncertain (probably he is not using an interpreter), but the overall thrust is easy to ascertain. Benjamin was uniquely related to Joseph because they were both sons of Rachel. The phrase “my mouth” seems to be used as an idiom for authority (cf. v. 21 and the interpretation of Rashi).

▣ **“Benjamin”** Rachel originally named him “son of my sorrow” because she died while giving him birth (cf. Gen. 35:18). However, Jacob changed his name to “the son of my right hand.” Because of Jacob’s unique love for Rachel, both Joseph and Benjamin were very special to him.

**45:13 “all my splendor”** This is the Hebrew word *kabod* (BDB 458). Its basic meaning (BDB 458 II) is “heavy” (cf. 41:31, NASB, “severe”; Exod. 4:10, “heavy of tongue”).

It came to be used of that which is valuable. Note the following usages.

1. riches, Gen. 31:1; Isa. 10:3; 61:6
2. splendor/success, Gen. 45:13
3. beauty, Isa. 35:2
4. severe famine, Gen. 12:10; 41:13; 43:1; 47:4,13
5. honor, Num. 24:11
6. much, Gen. 50:10,11 (i.e., mourning)

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: GLORY**

The biblical concept of “glory” is difficult to define. Believers’ glory is that they understand the gospel and glory in God, not in themselves (cf. 1:29-31; Jer. 9:23-24).

In the OT the most common Hebrew word for “glory” (*kbd*) was originally a commercial term relating to scales (“to be heavy”). That which was heavy was valuable or had intrinsic worth. Often the concept of brightness was added to the word to express God’s majesty (cf. Exod. 19:16-18; 24:17; Isa. 60:1-2). He alone is worthy and honorable. He is too brilliant for fallen mankind to behold (cf. Exod 33:17-23; Isa. 6:5). YHWH can only be truly known through Christ (cf. Jer. 1:14; Matt. 17:2; Heb. 1:3; James 2:1).

The term “glory” is somewhat ambiguous: (1) it may be parallel to “the righteousness of God”; (2) it may refer to the “holiness” or “perfection” of God; or (3) it could refer to the image of God in which mankind was created (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6), but which was later marred through rebellion (cf. Gen. 3:1-22). It is first used of YHWH’s presence with His people during the wilderness wandering period in Exod. 16:7,10; Lev. 9:23; and Num. 14:10.

**45:14 “Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck”** The excesses of Jewish interpretation, even in a helpful commentator like Rashi, can be seen in this verse. They say that Joseph wept because of the destruction of the tabernacle at Shiloh, which was in Joseph’s later land allotment (cf. Joshua). Benjamin wept because of the destruction of the temple, for Jerusalem which is really located in the tribal allocation of Benjamin. This shows the tendency of Jewish exegesis to completely remove the historical setting of the verse and apply it to any major event in the life of Israel.

### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 45:16-20**

**<sup>16</sup>Now when the news was heard in Pharaoh's house that Joseph's brothers had come, it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. <sup>17</sup>Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go to the land of Canaan, <sup>18</sup>and take your father and your households and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will eat the fat of the land.' <sup>19</sup>Now you are ordered, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come. <sup>20</sup>Do not concern yourselves with your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"**

**45:16** The brothers have recovered from (1) the shock of Joseph’s revelation of himself to them; (2) the fear of God for what they did to Joseph; and (3) the fear of Joseph himself.

**45:17-20** This is Pharaoh's message to Joseph for his family.

1. say to your brothers, v. 17, BDB 55, KB 65, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. do this, v. 17, BDB 793 I, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. load your beasts, v. 17, BDB 381, KB 378, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (this VERB is found only here in the OT)
4. go to the land of Canaan, v. 17, BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
5. come (not in NASB), v. 17, BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
6. take your father and your household, v. 18, BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
7. come to me, v. 18, BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
8. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, v. 18, BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
9. you shall eat the fat of the land, v. 18, BDB 37, KB 46, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
10. do this, v. 19, BDB 793 I, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
11. take wagons, v. 19, same VERB as #6
12. bring your father (lit. carry), v. 19, BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* PERFECT used in an IMPERATIVE sense
13. come, v. 19, same VERB as #5 and #7, but a *Qal* PERFECT used in an IMPERATIVE sense
14. do not concern yourselves with your goods (lit. "let not your eye with regret upon your vessels," v. 20, BDB 299, KB 298, *Qal* JUSSIVE; same idiom used in Deut. 7:16; 13:8; 19:13,31; 25:12

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 45:20-23**

**<sup>21</sup>Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. <sup>22</sup>To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred *pieces of silver* and five changes of garments. <sup>23</sup>To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance for his father on the journey.**

**45:21 "wagons"** This is an Egyptian loan word meaning "two-wheeled cart pulled by cattle" (BDB 722, cf. I Sam. 6:7) and does not refer to the war-chariots (BDB 939, cf. 41:43) of Egypt. Carts were common in Egypt because of the very flat terrain. They were rare, or possibly unknown, in the land of Palestine because it has rough, hilly terrain. One reason for the Philistine's ability to control the coastal shephelah was because of their use of iron chariots. However, Israel's early victories occurred in the hill country where the chariots were unusable. These carts must have been a very unusual sight in the land of Canaan.

**45:22 "changes of garments"** This possibly refers to ornamental clothing (i.e., Exod. 3:22; 12:35), which was one of the sources of wealth in the ancient world. It could have been to properly attire his brothers in their new cultural setting (Egypt's elite class, cf. 41:14). However, it may denote new clothes, not special expensive ones (i.e., Ruth 3:3).

▣ **but to Benjamin he gave three hundred *pieces of silver* and five changes of garments** Joseph, of all people, should have been aware of the problem that favoritism causes, yet the cultural setting is such that he lavished attention on his full-blooded brother (cf. 43:34).

**45:23** Remember how Jacob had sent gifts to "the man" of Egypt in 32:11, so now Joseph returns the cultural expectation.

1. ten donkeys loaded with the best things (BDB 375 CONSTRUCT BDB 595)
2. ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread

Wow! What Jacob must have thought when he saw all this coming down the road!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 45:24-28**

<sup>24</sup>So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the journey." <sup>25</sup>Then they went up from Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. <sup>26</sup>They told him, saying, "Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." But he was stunned, for he did not believe them. <sup>27</sup>When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. <sup>28</sup>Then Israel said, "It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

**45:24 “he said to them, ‘Do not quarrel on the journey’”** The VERB (BDB 919, KB 1182, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense, used only here in Genesis and only twice more in the Pentateuch) can be interpreted as relating to

1. assessing blame for their actions toward Joseph in Genesis 37 (Rashi)
2. fear (cf. Exod. 15:14; Deut. 2:25) of returning with the whole family and Joseph taking revenge
3. continuing thoughts about Benjamin getting more food (43:34) and now more clothes and silver pieces (45:22)

He was reminding them in a subtle way that God Himself had directed the circumstances, not that their acts were not sinful (cf. 42:21,28; 44:16), but that God had a larger purpose (cf. vv. 5,7,8; 50:20; Acts 7:9). God uses even evil for His purposes (cf. Acts 2:23).

**45:26 “but he was stunned”** This word originally meant “to grow numb by means of being cold” (BDB 806, KB 916, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. Ps. 38:2; 77:2; Hab. 1:4). It is obvious that these brothers had to confess to their father what they had done years earlier, although this is not specifically mentioned in the text. It is interesting to note that Joseph’s dreams finally come to reality. YHWH knows and controls history! Predictive dreams and prophecies are strong evidence of the uniqueness of the Bible and the character of God.

▣ **“for he did not believe them”** The VERB (BDB 52, KB 63) is a *Hiphil* PERFECT. Jacob had also not believed them about Joseph’s death (cf. 37:31-35). Jacob’s sons lied to him often and he sensed it!

**45:27 “the spirit of the father revived”** This seems to imply that since Joseph’s supposed death, Jacob was depressed and that he was not the man he had once been. Sometimes the death of a favored child can devastate parents almost to the point of never being able to recover.

**45:28** It is interesting that in v. 27 the Patriarch is called “Jacob,” which speaks of his old life, while in v. 28 he is called by his new name “Israel.” This is possibly because of (1) his renewed attitude of faith toward God and God’s promised covenant which is linked to Joseph or (2) because Jacob is about to make a decision which will affect the entire covenantal people.

The name “Israel” has always been difficult to interpret. Some theories based on Gen. 32:28-29 are:

1. “let *El* persist”
2. “may *El* preserve”
3. “ruling with *El*”
4. “prince of God”

See Special Topic at 32:28. I do not think that the different names refer to different sources (i.e., J.E.D.P.)! Whatever the correct etymology, this name became the special title of the people of God. After 922 B.C. it refers only to the northern ten tribes. After the return from exile in 538 B.C. it again becomes the title of the entire people of God.



Jacob responds in four ways.

1. it is enough, no VERB (BDB 912 I)
2. my son Joseph is still alive, no VERB
3. I will go, BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
4. and see him, BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

# GENESIS 46

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Jacob Moves to Egypt	Jacob's Journey to Egypt	Jacob's Migration to Egypt	Jacob and His Family Go To Egypt	Jacob Leaves for Egypt
46:1-4	46:1-7	46:1-4	46:1-4	46:1-5
46:5-7		46:5-7	46:5-7	46:6-7
Those Who Came to Egypt				Jacob's Family
46:8-27	46:8-15	46:8-27	46:8-15	46:8a
	46:16-18		46:16-18	46:8b-15
	46:19-22		46:19-22	46:16-18
	46:23-25		46:23-25	46:19-22
	46:26-27		46:26-27	46:23-25
	Jacob Settles in Goshen (46:28-47:12)	Jacob and His Sons Settle in Egypt (46:28-47:12)	Jacob and His Family in Egypt (46:28-47:12)	Joseph Welcomes Them
46:28-34	46:28-34	46:28-34	46:28-30	46:26-27
			46:31-34	46:28-30
				46:31-34

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Jacob wants confirmation from YHWH that a move to Egypt is His will. This is possibly because
1. he remembered the family tradition about the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt, spoken to Abraham in Gen. 15:13-16
  2. he was afraid because Isaac had been forbidden to go to Egypt
  3. he was reluctant to leave the Promised Land itself
- B. The footnotes of the NKJV (Nelson, 1982) list the name variations between this text and Numbers 26 and I Chronicles 4 and 7.

### HERE

1. Jemuel, v. 10, Exod. 6:15
2. Ohad, v. 10 (not in any other list)
3. Jachin, v. 10
4. Zohar, v. 10
5. Puvvah, v. 13, Num. 26:33
6. Iob/Job, v. 13
7. Ziphion, v. 16
8. Ezbon, v. 16
9. Arodi, v. 16
10. Huppim, v. 21
11. Hushim, v. 23
12. Jahzeel, v. 24
13. Shillem, v. 24

### NUMBERS/I CHRONICLES

- Nemuel, Num. 26:12; I Chr. 4:24
- Jarib, I Chr 4:24
- Zerah, I Chr. 4:24
- Puah, I Chr. 7:1
- Jashub, Num. 26:24; I Chr. 7:1
- Zephon, Num. 26:15, LXX
- Ozni, Num. 26:16
- Arod, Num. 26:17
- Hupham, Num. 26:39
- Shuham, Num. 26:42
- Jahziel, I Chr. 7:13
- Shallum, I Chr. 7:13

- C. There is an interesting summary of the different ways that YHWH revealed Himself in Genesis found in NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 354.
1. verbal, 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 21:12-13; 22:1-2
  2. visions, 15:1-6; 46:24
  3. dreams, 20:3-7; 28:12-15; 31:10-13,24; 37:5,9
  4. appearances/theophanies, 12:7; 16:7-14; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2,24; 35:1,9; 48:3
  5. the Angel of the Lord, 16:7-13; 18:2,16,17-33; 21:17-19; 22:11-12,15-18; 31:11,13; 48:15-16
- What is impressive for me is that God is trying to communicate in every way possible to this special family through whom He will reveal Himself to the whole world. God is communicating! God is revealing Himself!

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 46:1-4

<sup>1</sup>So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. <sup>2</sup>God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." <sup>3</sup>He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. <sup>4</sup>I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes."

**46:1** "So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba" Apparently, from Gen. 37:14, he had lived in Hebron all this time and now he was going to stop at this southern city about 25 miles south of

Hebron, the site of a special well. Genesis 21:22-31 and 26:33 are two different etymologies for the term “Beersheba” (BDB 92). This place had unique patriarchal associations with Abraham (cf. Gen. 27:33) and Isaac (cf. Gen. 26:24-25; 28:13).

Jacob took everything he had accumulated (cf. vv. 5-7). His move to Egypt was a permanent relocation for him.

▣ **“and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac”** It is interesting that sacrifices are usually offered after God appears to the patriarchs in a vision, but here Jacob wants confirmation from God concerning his move to Egypt. This is possibly because

1. he remembered the family tradition about the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt, spoken to Abraham in Gen. 15:13-16
2. he was afraid because Isaac had been forbidden to go to Egypt
3. he was reluctant to leave the Promised Land itself

The phrase “the God of his father Isaac” is not showing lack of personal belief in God on Jacob’s part, but is an emphasis on the ancient, covenantal God who called Abraham out of Ur and gave him descendants in the Promised Land of Canaan.

**46:2 “God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night”** Though Joseph is a significant person in the latter chapters of Genesis, God never speaks to him directly in a vision as He does to the Patriarch Jacob. Therefore, it is more proper to divide these latter chapters of Genesis into a larger section which deals with the life of Jacob. This is the last patriarchal night vision by God.

▣ **“Jacob, Jacob”** This was a sign of affection (cf. 22:11).

▣ **“Here I am”** This is a common idiomatic response to God’s addressing someone (cf. 22:1,7,11,18; 27:1,18; 31:11; 37:13; 46:2).

**46:3 “I am God, the God of your father”** This is the covenantal title (cf. 26:24; 28:13; 43:23). It literally says “the *El*, the *Elohim* of your father.” *El* (BDB 42) is the general name for God in the ANE, which comes from the root “to be strong” and the PLURAL form (*Elohim*, BDB 43) of it, which is used so often in the early parts of Genesis to describe God as creator. See Special Topic: Names For Deity at 12:1.

▣ **“do not be afraid to go down to Egypt”** Some see the fear (BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) as being related to

1. the family tradition relating to Abraham’s vision in Gen. 15:13-16
2. Isaac being forbidden to go to Egypt (26:2)
3. a fear of leaving the Promised Land.

There are several messages from God that contain this word, 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; 46:3.

▣ **“for I will make you a great nation there”** This is new information not previously shared with Abraham or Isaac. It shows the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham in 12:2; 17:4,6,20; and 18:18 in which He described the descendants of Abraham as being like the stars of heaven, the sand of the sea, and the dust of the earth.

God’s presence with Jacob’s family will cause them to multiply rapidly (cf. Exodus 1), as His presence with Jacob in Haran caused Jacob’s spotted and colored animals to increase in numbers rapidly. Numerical growth was one sign of God’s blessing. This rapid increase is what precipitates the problem with Egypt’s later government (i.e., Seti I; Rameses II).

**46:4 “I will go down with you into Egypt”** God’s personal presence is His greatest promise. It shows the initiating redemptive character of God (cf. Gen. 26:3, 24; 28:15; 31:3; Ps. 23:4; 139:7-12). This grammatical structure (clause) is emphatic in Hebrew (as is the next)! It also shows YHWH is not limited to Canaan. He is a universal God (i.e., Deut. 32:8).

▣ **“I will also surely bring you up again”** God has promised the land of Canaan to the Patriarchs, but Jacob is permanently relocating to Egypt. This is the divine promise that the Israelites will return to Canaan (cf. 15:16; 28:15).

▣ **“and Joseph will close your eyes”** This apparently is a Hebrew idiom describing the presence of loved ones at the time of death (cf. Gen. 50:1), often associated with this act of closing the eyelids with one’s hand at death.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 46:5-7**

**<sup>5</sup>Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob and their little ones and their wives in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. <sup>6</sup>They took their livestock and their property, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and came to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him: <sup>7</sup>his sons and his grandsons with him, his daughters and his granddaughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt.**

**46:7 “his daughters and his granddaughters”** Scholars have wondered if this means that there were more daughters than Dinah, or if this refers to his daughters-in-law.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 46:8-27**

**<sup>8</sup>Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, Jacob and his sons, who went to Egypt: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn. <sup>9</sup>The sons of Reuben: Hanoch and Pallu and Hezron and Carmi. <sup>10</sup>The sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. <sup>11</sup>The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. <sup>12</sup>The sons of Judah: Er and Onan and Shelah and Perez and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan). And the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. <sup>13</sup>The sons of Issachar: Tola and Puvvah and Iob and Shimron. <sup>14</sup>The sons of Zebulun: Sered and Elon and Jahleel. <sup>15</sup>These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, with his daughter Dinah; all his sons and his daughters *numbered* thirty-three. <sup>16</sup>The sons of Gad: Ziphion and Haggi, Shuni and Ezbon, Eri and Arodi and Areli. <sup>17</sup>The sons of Asher: Imnah and Ishvah and Ishvi and Beriah and their sister Serah. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. <sup>18</sup>These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah; and she bore to Jacob these sixteen persons. <sup>19</sup>The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. <sup>20</sup>Now to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. <sup>21</sup>The sons of Benjamin: Bela and Becher and Ashbel, Gera and Naaman, Ehi and Rosh, Muppim and Huppim and Ard. <sup>22</sup>These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob; *there were* fourteen persons in all. <sup>23</sup>The sons of Dan: Hushim. <sup>24</sup>The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel and Guni and Jezer and Shillem. <sup>25</sup>These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel, and she bore these to Jacob; *there were* seven persons in all. <sup>26</sup>All the persons belonging to Jacob, who came to Egypt, his direct descendants, not including the wives of Jacob's sons, *were* sixty-six persons in all, <sup>27</sup>and the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, *were* seventy.**

**46:10-24** These verses are very similar to the list in Numbers 26 and I Chronicles 4-7. These other two lists have variant spellings and, in some cases, variant names. See Contextual Insights, B. I believe that it can be explained by oral tradition or that people during this period of time often had two different names.

**46:10 “Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman”** There has been much discussion about why this person would have been included. It is obviously not normative. Rashi says that it refers to Dinah’s child, sired by Shechem (cf. Gen. R. 80).

**46:12** Verses 10-27 are supposed to be a list of all the people who came with Jacob to Egypt, but the naming of two of Judah’s children who were already dead (i.e., Er and Onan, cf. Gen. 38:7,10) shows that this list was added from another time. Not that it is inaccurate, but just not part of this context.

**46:13 “Job”** Many commentators have assumed that this should be spelled “Job” (יוב), but in I Chr. 7:1 and Num. 26:24 his name is Jashub (יִשׁוּב).

**46:15 “all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three”** Verses 15, 18, 22, and 25 all list the sum total of the different divisions of Jacob’s family.

1. In v. 15 we have the sons and daughter of Leah
2. In v. 18 we have the sons of Leah’s maiden, Zilpah
3. In v. 22 we have the sons of Rachel
4. In v. 25 we have the sons of Rachel’s maiden, Bilhah

The combined total of these groups appears in v. 26 as “sixty-six persons” and in v. 27 as “seventy.”

There has been much discussion as to how these two numbers relate to the list. Some say the number “seventy,” plus the daughter, Dinah, of v. 15, equals “seventy-one” minus Er and Onan of v. 12, as well as subtracting Joseph and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (v. 27). Others have asserted that the “sixty-six” of v. 26, plus Jacob, Joseph and his two sons, equals “seventy.” It is interesting that in Acts 7:14 Stephen mentions seventy-five persons. However, this number comes from the Septuagint, which apparently lists five of Joseph’s grandchildren. See Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 378-379; *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 521-522.

**46:17 “and their sister Serah”** Inclusion of this daughter shows that the list is meant to be inclusive. It may be that more sons were born into this family than daughters.

**46:20** Joseph has two sons by an Egyptian woman. These two sons will be adopted by Jacob as his own, thus bringing the total number of sons to thirteen.

It seems that Joseph was given the double inheritance usually reserved for the firstborn, but he was not given the head position in the family. This was reserved for Judah, Leah’s fourth son. These unusual decisions signal God’s leadership in the covenant family!

Ephraim will become the largest, most powerful tribe in northern Canaan, while Judah will become the largest and most powerful tribe in the south.

The LXX has an extended list of descendants connected to this verse. Some scholars think it was purposely omitted by the MT because of Deut. 32:8 (UBS, *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, p. 70).

**46:21 “The sons of Benjamin”** Benjamin’s sons seem to be listed here, but when one compares this with I Chr. 7:6, there are only three sons mentioned. Some commentators have asserted that the others listed here are grandsons (cf. Num. 26:38-40; I Chr. 7:6ff; 8:1ff).

**46:26 “his direct descendants”** This list is somewhat confusing because

1. it lists the names of sons who died earlier
2. some of the names are plural and seem to be names of later tribal clans
3. Benjamin, in v. 21, is said to have ten sons instead of the more traditional three

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 46:28-34**

<sup>28</sup>Now he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out *the way* before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. <sup>29</sup>Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time. <sup>30</sup>Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive." <sup>31</sup>Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who *were* in the land of Canaan, have come to me; <sup>32</sup>and the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.' <sup>33</sup>When Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' <sup>34</sup>you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' that you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians."

**46:28 “he sent Judah before him to Joseph”** There is some confusion in the MT. The Revised Standard Version, following the Septuagint, says “to appear before him in Goshen.” This could imply

1. that Judah was to show Joseph the way to their father in the land of Goshen
2. that he was to appear before Joseph in the land of Goshen

It does establish Judah’s leadership of the family.

**46:29 “his chariot”** There were at least three kinds of these two-wheeled, animal-drawn “chariots.”

1. a cart pulled by oxen, cf. 45:21
2. a war chariot with some metal for armor. Some held one person, but others were a bit larger and held two; most were pulled by horses (for speed), cf. Exod. 14:7
3. a ceremonial chariot seen in much Egyptian wall art, decorated and pulled by horses. It was a status symbol (as were the white donkeys in Palestine), cf. 46:29

**46:34 “for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians”** Some have seen this as

1. the urban Egyptians being antagonistic against semi-nomadic herdsmen
2. the Egyptian reaction to the Hyksos, or “Shepherd Kings” who ruled them during the 17<sup>th</sup> dynasty and who were basically Semitic, not Egyptian. Josephus mentions this in his *Antiquities of the Jews* 11.7.5 (Hengstenberg asserts that the Israeli national consciousness was protected by Egyptian exclusiveness and their abhorrence of herdsmen).
3. the Egyptians’ worship of the bull, therefore, anyone who ate beef would be abhorrent to them (cf. 43:32; Exod. 8:26, much like Hindus today)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Joseph dismiss his Egyptian servants in Gen. 45:1?
2. Explain the significant theological principle uttered by Joseph in Gen. 45:5-9.
3. Explain the meaning of the terms “Jacob” and “Israel” and how these are used in the Scriptures.
4. Why does God appear to Jacob in visions, but not to Joseph?
5. Why does the list in Numbers 26 and I Chronicles 4-6 differ from the list of descendants mentioned in Gen. 46:8-27?
6. What are the problems connected with the number “seventy” found in Gen. 46:27?
7. How did God use the Egyptian’s hatred of shepherds in the life of the sojourning Israelites?



# GENESIS 47

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Jacob's Family Settles in Goshen	Jacob Settles in Goshen (46:38-47:12)	Jacob and His Sons Settle in Egypt (46:28-47:12)	Jacob and His Family in Egypt (46:28-47:12)	Pharaoh Grants an Audience
47:1-6	47:1-6	47:1-6	47:1-3a 47:3b-6	47:1-5a,6b  47:5b,6a-11
47:7-12	47:7-12	47:7-12	47:7-8 47:9-12	47:12
47:13-19	Joseph Deals with the Famine 47:13-19	47:13-19	The Famine 47:13-15 47:16-17	Joseph's Agrarian Policy 47:13-14 47:15-17
Result of the Famine 47:20-26	47:20-26	47:20-26	47:18-19 47:20-24 47:25-26	47:18-19 47:20-22 47:23-26
47:27-28 47:29-31	Joseph's Vow to Jacob 47:27-31	Jacob's Adoption and Blessings of Ephraim and Manasseh (47:27-48:22) 47:27-28 47:29-31	Jacob's Last Request 47:27-30a 47:30b 47:31	Jacob's Last Wishes 47:27-31

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 47:1-6

**<sup>1</sup>Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, and said, "My father and my brothers and their flocks and their herds and all that they have, have come out of the land of Canaan; and behold, they are in the land of Goshen." <sup>2</sup>He took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. <sup>3</sup>Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" So they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers." <sup>4</sup>They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, therefore, please let your servants live in the land of Goshen." <sup>5</sup>Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. <sup>6</sup>The land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land, let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know any capable men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock."**

**47:1 "Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh"** This seems to have been a set appointment for Pharaoh to meet Joseph's family (cf. Gen. 46:33). It is alluded to in Acts 7:13.

▣ **"they are in the land of Goshen"** Chapters 46 and 47 are uniquely bound together because Joseph has rehearsed his family on what to say and how to say it that they might receive royal permission to live in the land of Goshen. This land was known as being a fertile pasture land. It is also called "the best of the land," vv. 6 and 11 (cf. 45:18).

**47:2 "He took five men from among his brothers"** There has always been speculation about why he chose only five. The rabbis say that he took the weakest and ugliest so that Pharaoh would not draft his brothers into military service, but this seems dubious. The Anchor Bible Commentary asserts the exact opposite, "he took the outstanding ones" (p. 350). There is a real possibility that the number "five" had special significance to the Egyptians because it is used so often in these chapters (cf. 41:34; 43:34; 45:22).

**47:3 "Your servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers"** It is very important to note that they are claiming to be the sons of a shepherd (cf. 13:7,8; 26:20; 46:32,34), therefore, all they knew was how to shepherd. Sons were expected to follow in the avocation of their father. Shepherds (of cattle) were looked down upon with some contempt in Egypt (cf. 43:32; 46:34; Exod. 8:26). This implies that (1) through the racial arrogance of the Egyptians and (2) the cultural aversion to shepherds, the children of Jacob would be left pretty much alone. This was very significant because it is obvious from Genesis 38 that they were

becoming amalgamated into the Canaanite culture. Therefore, the sojourn in Egypt was really a chance for them to collect themselves as a distinct national religious entity.

**47:4 “They said to Pharaoh”** There are four aspects of their response which are meant to alleviate any fears that Pharaoh may have had concerning them: (1) they were shepherds; (2) they were sojourners; (3) they were forced to come to Egypt; and (4) they asked permission to settle in the land, apparently for a limited period.

**47:5-6** There is some problem in the MT which is obvious when one compares the ancient versions. Pharaoh should be addressing the five brothers, not Joseph.

**47:6 “if you know any capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock”** Pharaoh also had livestock in the region of Goshen. This may have been just another way of showing his care for them because of Joseph. Or, it may have been his desiring the physical prosperity that was connected with the God of these people (cf. 30:27; 39:5).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 47:7-12**

**<sup>7</sup>Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. <sup>8</sup>Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you lived?" <sup>9</sup>So Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning." <sup>10</sup>And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence. <sup>11</sup>So 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 ordered. <sup>12</sup>Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to their little ones.**

**47:7 “and Jacob blessed Pharaoh”** There has been much discussion about Jacob blessing Pharaoh twice (cf. v.10). Some say it is simply the normal Oriental opening and departing greetings (cf. 31:55; Ruth 2:4, NJB). However, it seems unusual that it is mentioned twice here. The superior always blesses the inferior (cf. Heb. 7:7). Martin Luther says that Jacob preached the gospel to Pharaoh and that he and his court were converted. He uses Ps. 105:22 as evidence for this conversion. Because of the divine blessing on the family of Abraham and those connected to them, this blessing to such a supportive Pharaoh seems appropriate (cf. NRSV, TEV, NIV). The Jewish Study Bible lists the verses where Gentiles are blessed by their contact with the covenant family (cf. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; 30:27-30; 39:5,23, p. 93).

**47:9 “The years of my sojourning”** Jacob was certainly caught up in depression in the last years of his life. His melancholy spirit (brought on by the news of Joseph’s death) is revealed in this verse.

**47:11 “gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had ordered”** It is obvious here that “the land of Rameses” (cf. Exod. 1:11; 12:37; Num. 33:3) and the land of Goshen are the same area. The mentioning of Rameses is either (1) a later addition by a scribe or (2) there was a city there by this name before the Hebrews rebuilt one there in honor of Rameses II. Rameses II seems to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus experience and seems to confirm the date as being 1290 B.C. This is not only true because of the location of the Egyptian capital during the Hyksos period being relatively close to the land of Goshen, but also for the archaeological evidence of the invasion of Palestine around 1250 B.C.

**47:12**  
**NASB** “according to their little ones”  
**NKJV** “according to the number in *their* families”  
**NRSV** “according to the number of their dependents”  
**TEV** “including the very youngest”  
**NJB** “down to the least of them”  
**JPSOA** “down to the little ones”  
**LXX** “for each person”  
**Peshitta** “according to their families”

The “little ones” (BDB 381, KB 378, cf. Num. 14:3,31; 31:17) may refer to every member of the household who were allocated a certain amount of food (cf. 45:11). The rabbis say that children waste a lot of bread and this is an idiom to show that Joseph provided abundantly for them. It is possible that the term “little ones” is an intimate family metaphor for all the members of the covenant family (cf. v. 24).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 47:13-19**

<sup>13</sup>Now there was no food in all the land, because the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. <sup>14</sup>Joseph gathered all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan for the grain which they bought, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. <sup>15</sup>When the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us food, for why should we die in your presence? For *our* money is gone." <sup>16</sup>Then Joseph said, "Give up your livestock, and I will give you *food* for your livestock, since *your* money is gone." <sup>17</sup>So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses and the flocks and the herds and the donkeys; and he fed them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year. <sup>18</sup>When that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent, and the cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left for my lord except our bodies and our lands. <sup>19</sup>Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we and our land will be slaves to Pharaoh. So give us seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate."

**47:13-26** Many commentators have asserted that Joseph acted cruelly toward the people of Egypt. However, Joseph acted on the common theological assertion that Pharaoh, as the representative of the sun god Re, owned the land of Egypt, and brought it into reality.

**47:13 “languished”** This VERB (BDB 529, KB 520, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is found only here in the OT. Its basic meaning is “to faint.” The land of Canaan is unproductive. It is affected by the curse of Gen. 3:17-19 (cf. Rom. 8:20-22), part of which is the irregular cycles of nature. In this situation, YHWH is using (using not causing) this for His purposes. This control of the weather is also reflected in the “cursing and blessing” section of Deuteronomy (cf. 28-29). The famine was severe (cf. 12:10; 41:31; 43:1; 47:4,13).

**47:16 “Give up your livestock”** They had already sold everything (“give,” BDB 396, KB 393, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, cf. vv. 15,16) they had in order to buy food. Now, their livestock was in jeopardy. Really, the taking of the livestock, which they could not feed and which were going to die anyway, is an aspect of governmental mercy, not exploitation.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 47:20-26**

<sup>20</sup>So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every Egyptian sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. Thus the land became Pharaoh's. <sup>21</sup>As for the people, he removed them to the cities from one end of Egypt's border to the other. <sup>22</sup>Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh gave them. Therefore, they did not sell their land. <sup>23</sup>Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have today bought you and your land for Pharaoh; now, *here* is seed for you, and you may sow the land. <sup>24</sup>At the harvest you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own for seed of the field and for your food and for those of your households and as food for your little ones." <sup>25</sup>So they said, "You have saved our lives! Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's slaves." <sup>26</sup>Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt *valid* to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's.

**47:20 "So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh"** In the sixth year of famine, after the cattle had all been sold, they sold their land and themselves to Pharaoh (BDB 888, KB 1111, cf. vv. 19,20,22,23). Actually, they became serfs (cf. vv. 23-24). We know, not only from the Code of Hammurabi, but also from the archaeological discoveries at Ugarit and the Nuzi Tablets, that serfdom was a common, cultural plight of the people of the ANE. Joseph's title mentioned in 41:40 and 45:8 means that he was the administrator of Pharaoh's personal affairs. Verses 20-26 show how he personally benefitted Pharaoh in his bureaucratic control of Egypt. This entire experience has been "somewhat" documented from Egyptian historical records.

**47:21 "he removed them to the cities from one end of Egypt's border to the other"** Many commentators have asserted that this was to facilitate the distribution of food because they could not work the land anyway. However, the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch state "he made slaves of them" ("to the cities," BDB 746, לַעֲרִימָ, "to slaves," BDB 713, לַעֲבָדֵימָ). This translation is followed by the Revised Standard Version and seems to fit the context of both vv. 19 and 25, as well as the giving of seed in v. 23. Rashi says that he made them move to the city in order to prove to them that they did not own their own land. The Peshitta and Targum Ongelos have "he removed them from town to town," which is exactly opposite from the MT.

**47:22** Religious property and personnel were not affected (cf. v. 26).

**47:24 "At the harvest you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh"** From the Code of Hammurabi, the texts from Ugaritic and Nuzi archaeological discoveries, we find that this was not terribly exploitive. From Mesopotamian and other historical documents we know that from forty to sixty percent was not uncommon. Joseph was treating these people with great fairness. They knew that, as v. 25 obviously reflects.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 47:27-28**

<sup>27</sup>Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous. <sup>28</sup>Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years.

**47:27** This sets the stage for the next Egyptian administration which would fear the Israelites.

**47:28 "the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years"** This is one of several verses throughout Genesis used to date certain major events. It is interesting that Jacob thought he was going to die long before he actually did, just as his father, Isaac, had in Gen. 27:2. This shows that although these

were great men of God, they still had physical problems associated with old age as well as psychological doubts. To know God does not exempt one from the problems of aging.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 47:29-31**

**<sup>29</sup>When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, <sup>30</sup>but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said."  
<sup>31</sup>He said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed *in worship* at the head of the bed.**

**47:29 “When the time for Israel to die drew near”** Death is in the hand of God, not chance, not fate, not the evil one. There is no “grim reaper,” only an angel of God.

Death is not an enemy, but a reunion for those who have a relationship with YHWH. In the Bible it is not death that is a tragedy, but an early death or a violent death. After the fall of Genesis 3 (cf. Genesis 5) death is the natural end of physical life. When one is aged, death is a blessing!

▣ **“place now your hand under my thigh”** This seems to be an idiomatic oath formula among the ancient Hebrews (cf. 24:2). There are two possible orientations to this gesture: (1) the thigh is the largest muscle in the body, therefore, connected to the idea of strength or (2) the thigh is close to the genitals, referring to the “seed” of promise. The point of this maneuver seems to be an emphasis on the descendants of Jacob as a true object of oath taking. Apparently this was caught up in the covenant promises of God for seed, going back to Canaan, (cf. Gen. 12:1-3).



NASB	“kindness and faithfulness”
NKJV	“kindly and truly”
NRSV	“loyally and truly”
NJB	“faithful love”
LXX	“mercy and truth”
Peshitta	“graciously and truly”
REB	“loyally and faithfully”
JPSOA	“steadfast loyalty”

These are the special covenant terms *hesed* (BDB 388, חֶסֶד, cf. 20:13; 21:23) and *emeth* (BDB 54, אֱמֶת). See Special Topic: Lovingkindness at 19:19.

**SPECIAL TOPIC: FAITH (*PISTIS* [NOUN], *PISTEUŌ*, [VERB], *PISTOS* [ADJECTIVE])**

- A. This is such an important term in the Bible (cf. Heb. 11:1,6). It is the subject of Jesus’ early preaching (cf. Mark 1:15). There are at least two new covenant requirements: repentance and faith (cf. 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21).
- B. Its etymology
  1. The term “faith” in the OT meant loyalty, fidelity, or trustworthiness and was a description of God’s nature, not ours.
  2. It came from a Hebrew term (*emun*, *emunah*, BDB 53), which meant “to be sure or stable.” Saving faith is mental assent (set of truths), moral living (a lifestyle), and primarily a relational (welcoming of a person) and volitional commitment (a decision) to that person.

C. Its OT usage

It must be emphasized that Abraham's faith was not in a future Messiah, but in God's promise that he would have a child and descendants (cf. Gen. 12:2; 15:2-5; 17:4-8; 18:14). Abraham responded to this promise by trusting in God. He still had doubts and problems about this promise, which took thirteen years to be fulfilled. His imperfect faith, however, was accepted by God. God is willing to work with flawed human beings who respond to Him and His promises in faith, even if it is the size of a mustard seed (cf. Matt. 17:20).

D. Its NT usage

The term "believed" is from the Greek term (*pisteuō*), which can also be translated "believe," "faith," or "trust." For example, the NOUN does not occur in the Gospel of John, but the VERB is used often. In John 2:23-25 there is uncertainty as to the genuineness of the crowd's commitment to Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Other examples of this superficial use of the term "believe" are in John 8:31-59 and Acts 8:13, 18-24. True biblical faith is more than an initial response. It must be followed by a process of discipleship (cf. Matt. 13:20-22,31-32).

E. Its use with PREPOSITIONS

1. *eis* means "into." This unique construction emphasizes believers putting their trust/faith in Jesus
  - a. into His name (John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; I John 5:13)
  - b. into Him (John 2:11; 3:15,18; 4:39; 6:40; 7:5,31,39,48; 8:30; 9:36; 10:42; 11:45,48; 17:37,42; Matt. 18:6; Acts 10:43; Phil. 1:29; I Pet. 1:8)
  - c. into Me (John 6:35; 7:38; 11:25,26; 12:44,46; 14:1,12; 16:9; 17:20)
  - d. into the Son (John 3:36; 9:35; I John 5:10)
  - e. into Jesus (John 12:11; Acts 19:4; Gal. 2:16)
  - f. into Light (John 12:36)
  - g. into God (John 14:1)
2. *en* means "in" as in John 3:15; Mark 1:15; Acts 5:14
3. *epi* means "in" or upon, as in Matt. 27:42; Acts 9:42; 11:17; 16:31; 22:19; Rom. 4:5,24; 9:33; 10:11; I Tim. 1:16; I Pet. 2:6
4. the DATIVE CASE with no PREPOSITION as in Gal. 3:6; Acts 18:8; 27:25; I John 3:23; 5:10
5. *hoti*, which means "believe that," gives content as to what to believe
  - a. Jesus is the Holy One of God (John 6:69)
  - b. Jesus is the I Am (John 8:24)
  - c. Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Him (John 10:38)
  - d. Jesus is the Messiah (John 11:27; 20:31)
  - e. Jesus is the Son of God (John 11:27; 20:31)
  - f. Jesus was sent by the Father (John 11:42; 17:8,21)
  - g. Jesus is one with the Father (John 14:10-11)
  - h. Jesus came from the Father (John 16:27,30)
  - i. Jesus identified Himself in the covenant name of the Father, "I Am" (John 8:24; 13:19)
  - j. We will live with Him (Rom. 6:8)
  - k. Jesus died and rose again (I Thess. 4:14)

**47:30 “you shall carry me out of Egypt”** This is a foreshadowing of the Exodus. Jacob may have known of it from the family traditions going back to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:12-16). It also seems to be implied in Gen. 48:21. Jacob knew that the destiny of the Hebrews did not relate to a long stay in Egypt.

**47:31 “Swear to me”** Jacob was very emphatic (BDB 989, KB 1396, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE) that he did not want to remain in Egypt and he asked his son, not only to swear by putting his hand under his thigh, but to swear verbally as well.



**NASB, JPSOA** “at the head of his bed”

**NKJV, NRSV** “on the head of the bed”

**LXX** “leaning on the top of his staff”

**Peshitta** “upon the head of his staff”

**REB** “by the head of his bed”

The Hebrew word for “bed” is *mittah* (BDB 641) and “staff” is *matteh* (BDB 641). Notice it is not a consonant issue, but a vowel issue. There has been much discussion about this translation in the Masoretic Text. The Septuagint (cf. Heb. 11:21, which follows the LXX) changes this metaphor to “the head of the staff.” This seems quite possible because the staff was a symbol of authority in ancient Egypt, therefore, this would mean that Jacob bowed his forehead and touched Joseph’s staff. This may have symbolized

1. Jacob fulfilling Joseph’s dream of Gen. 37:6-9
2. Jacob’s reverence for Joseph as fulfilling God’s plan for saving his family
3. a gesture of Jacob’s acknowledging Joseph’s prestige (cf. 48:2; I Kgs. 1:47)



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why would Joseph want his family to settle in Goshen?
2. Why did Joseph take only five of his brothers with him to meet Pharaoh?
3. Why is Jacob so melancholy in v. 9?
4. Why does Jacob bless Pharaoh twice?
5. Why does the name Rameses in v. 11 support a later date for the Exodus?
6. Did Joseph treat the people of Egypt harshly during these years of famine?
7. Why did Jacob want Joseph to swear in two different ways that he would take him out of the land of Egypt?

# GENESIS 48

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Israel's Last Days	Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons	Jacob's Adoption and Blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (47:27-48:22)	Jacob Blesses Ephraim and Manasseh	Jacob Adopts Joseph's Two Sons and Blesses Them
48:1-7	48:1-7	48:1-7	48:1-4 48:5-7	48:1-6 48:7
48:8-16	48:8-16	48:8-16	48:8 48:9a 48:9b-12 48:13-16	48:8-12 48:13-16
(15-16)	(15-16)	(15-16)	(15-16)	(15-16)
48:17-22	48:17-22	48:17-22	48:17-18 48:19	48:17-19
(20)		(20)	48:20 (20) 48:21-22	48:20 (20) 48:21-22

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xxiv)

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 48:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Now it came about after these things that Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is sick." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him. <sup>2</sup>When it was told to Jacob, "Behold, your son Joseph has come to you," Israel collected his strength and sat up in the bed. <sup>3</sup>Then Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, <sup>4</sup>and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.' <sup>5</sup>Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. <sup>6</sup>But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance. <sup>7</sup>Now as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan on the journey, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."

**48:1 "Joseph was told"** The rabbis say that Ephraim studied regularly with his grandfather Jacob and he is the one who told Joseph, but this is typical of rabbinical comments that are based on a supposition, not contextual or textual information. It is always fair to ask those who claim to speak for God, "Show me where you got this from Scripture."

▣ **"So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him"** These boys were half-Egyptian, but apparently this is setting the stage for the patriarchal blessing (i.e., adoption) which would include them as full heirs.

**48:3 "Jacob said to Joseph, 'God Almighty'"** This is the traditional patriarchal name for God (cf. Exod. 6:3). It is *El Shaddai*; *El* from the general name for God from the root "to be strong" and *Shaddai* from the root for a "woman's breast," which seems to mean "the all-sufficient One." See full note in the Special Topic at 12:1.

▣ **"appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me"** Luz is the Canaanite name for Bethel (cf. Gen. 28:17, 19; 35:9-15). Apparently, as YHWH had blessed Jacob, Jacob was now going to bless Joseph's sons. It is interesting to note that, as godly a man as Joseph was, YHWH never appeared to him as He did to the Patriarchs (see note at 46:2), which shows that even this literary unit concerning Joseph is really in the larger section on the life of Jacob.

**48:4 "I will make you fruitful and numerous"** There are three specific blessings here which are related to the Abrahamic blessing of Genesis 12:1-3: (1) I will make you fruitful and numerous; (2) I will make you a company of peoples; and (3) I will give the land to your descendants.

It is interesting that Jacob leaves out the clause from 35:11 (line 5), "and kings shall come forth from you," because apparently that aspect was for Judah (cf. 49:10). Prosperity and abundance would characterize the family, but kings would come from Judah (i.e., Messiah, Isa. 9:6-7; Micah 5:2).

▣ **"for an everlasting possession"** This is the Hebrew term *'olam*. It must be interpreted in light of the context. When one remembers the exilic period it is obvious that this term does not mean to perpetuity. See Special Topic at 13:14.

**48:5 “are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are”** It is interesting that in v. 1 Manasseh is mentioned before Ephraim, but from v. 5 and v. 14 Ephraim will appear before Manasseh. This seems to be planned by Jacob (cf. vv. 13-14). Ephraim and Manasseh are going to replace Simeon and Reuben as the firstborn, pre-imminent heirs of Jacob (cf. I Chr. 5:1). The younger Ephraim will be the stronger of the two. This does not affect Judah’s leadership of the family (cf. I Chr. 5:2)! This is as much a discipline of Reuben (cf. 35:22; 49:4; I Chr. 5:1) and Simeon (cf. 34:25; 49:5-7) as it was an inclusion for Joseph’s sons. Not only is there reversal in expectation between Manasseh and Ephraim (as there was with Esau and Jacob), but this same reversal of expectation will occur between Joseph and Judah (cf. 49:8-12). Joseph was the obvious choice for family leadership, but the choice was YHWH’s, not the culture (i.e., remember David and his brothers).

**48:6 “But your offspring that have been born after them”** This implies that Joseph may have more children, but if he did we have no record of them in the Bible.

**48:7** This is a historical summary about Joseph’s mother. Rachel’s death was painful and shocking to Jacob. He saw these two grandsons of Rachel’s first son, Joseph, as somehow coming from Rachel herself. They would be considered full “sons” (in an inheritance sense) of Rachel. She would be happy for this even in the afterlife!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 48:8-16**

**<sup>8</sup>When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" <sup>9</sup>Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." So he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." <sup>10</sup>Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age *that* he could not see. Then Joseph brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. <sup>11</sup>Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face, and behold, God has let me see your children as well." <sup>12</sup>Then Joseph took them from his knees, and bowed with his face to the ground. <sup>13</sup>Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them close to him. <sup>14</sup>But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the firstborn.**

**<sup>15</sup>He blessed Joseph, and said,**

**"The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,  
The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,**

**<sup>16</sup>The angel who has redeemed me from all evil,**

**Bless the lads;**

**And may my name live on in them,**

**And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;**

**And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."**

**48:8 “When Israel saw Joseph’s sons”** We learn from v. 10 that his eyesight was very bad, but not completely gone. Jacob (remembering his trickery of his father) wants to be sure who he is blessing!

**48:9 “Joseph said to his father, ‘They are my sons, whom God has given me here’”** The rabbis say that Joseph had to show his marriage license to Jacob to convince his father that his wife had become a convert. However, to me it seems that this verse is emphasizing the fact that in all areas, Joseph saw the hand of God in his life.

▣ **“Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them”** The two VERBS are

1. bring/take, BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. bless, BDB 138, KB 159, *Piel* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

The term “bless” has a fuller and more theological sense here. It involves the metaphorical adoption of these two grandsons into full inheritance rights as Jacob’s own sons. There are now thirteen tribes.

**48:10 “he kissed them and embraced them”** This was a special bonding as well as a legal (cf. v. 12) experience.

**48:12**

**NASB, NRSV** “took them from his knees”

**NKJV** “brought them from beside his knees”

**TEV, REB** “took them from Jacob’s lap”

**LXX** “brought them out *from between* his knees”

**Peshitta** “removed them from before his knees”

This was an adoption rite, which is alluded to in v. 5. Passing the children under the loins seems to have been the manner for this ancient adoption process (i.e., as women gave birth through their knees, 30:3; Job 3:17, JB footnote, p. 73).

**48:14 “But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim”** This is the aspect of crossing his hands so that his right hand—the hand of pre-imminence—would bless the younger son who would have the pre-imminence over his brother (as Jacob and Esau). The reversal of the culturally expected option (cf. v. 18) shows God’s control and sovereignty (cf. v. 19). This is the first biblical account of blessing in association with the laying on of hands. From this point forward it will become a regular practice.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: LAYING ON OF HANDS IN THE BIBLE**

This gesture of personal involvement is used in several different ways in the Bible.

1. oath taking (i.e. hand under thigh [Gen. 24:2,9; 47:29])
2. passing on the family leadership (cf. Gen. 48:14,17,18)
3. identifying with the death of a sacrificial animal as a substitute
  - a. priests (cf. Exod. 29:10,15,19; Lev. 16:21; Num. 8:12)
  - b. laypersons (cf. Lev. 1:4; 3:2,8; 4:4,15,24; II Chr. 29:23)
4. setting persons aside to serve God in a special task or ministry (cf. Num. 8:10; 27:18,23; Deut. 34:9; Acts 6:6; 13:3; I Tim. 4:14; 5:22; II Tim. 1:6)
5. participating in the judicial stoning of a sinner (cf. Lev. 24:14)
6. the hand on one’s mouth denotes silence or acquiescence (cf. Jdgs. 18:19; Job 21:5; 29:9; 40:4; Mic. 7:16)
7. the hand on one’s own head means sorrow/grief (II Sam. 13:19)
8. receiving a blessing for health, happiness, and godliness (cf. Matt. 19:13,15; Mark 10:16)
9. relating to physical healing (cf. Matt. 9:18; Mark 5:23; 6:5; 7:32; 8:23; 16:18; Luke 4:40; 13:13; Acts 9:17; 28:8)
10. receiving the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 8:17-19; 9:17; 19:6)

There is a surprising lack of uniformity in the passages that have been historically used to support the ecclesiastical installation of leaders (i.e., ordination).

1. In Acts 6:6 it is the Apostles who lay hands on the seven for local ministry.
2. In Acts 13:3 it is the prophets and teachers who lay hands on Barnabas and Paul for missionary service.
3. In I Timothy 4:14 it is the local elders who were involved in Timothy's initial call and installation.
4. In II Timothy 1:6 it is Paul who lays hands on Timothy.

This diversity and ambiguity illustrate the lack of organization in the first century church. The early church was much more dynamic and regularly used the spiritual gifts of believers (cf. I Cor. 14). The NT is simply not written to advocate or delineate a governmental model or ordination procedure.

**48:15-16** Verses 15-16 are a supplement to the family blessing recorded in Genesis 49. In Jacob's final blessing to the whole family he does not mention Joseph's two sons by name (cf. 49:22-26). This blessing is in poetic form (as is v. 20). Notice the threefold designation of God. God is seen as (1) the patriarchal God; (2) the Shepherd; and (3) the Angel. It is obvious that the angel of v. 16 must be the Angel of the Lord who is a physical manifestation (cf. Gen. 16:7-13; 18:2,16,17-21,22-23; 22:11-15; 31:11,13; 48:15-16. See Special Topic at 12:7).

**48:15 "He blessed Joseph"** Obviously these two boys (v. 16) were receiving the patriarchal blessing of Joseph (v. 15). From Genesis 49 it seems that Joseph was receiving the double inheritance rights (cf. 49:22-26) of the firstborn, while Judah was to receive the Messianic line (cf. 49:8-12).

▣ **"walked"** This VERB (BDB 229, KB 246) is often a metaphor for lifestyle faith (cf. 5:22,24; 6:9; 24:40; Eph. 4:1,17; 5:2,15). God demands it (cf. 17:1). God wants a people who reflect His character to a lost and needy world (i.e., the nations). The Patriarchs, with all their imperfections, lived before YHWH in an obedient, repentant, faithful way!

To put it another way, eternal life has observable characteristics. We are saved, not just to be with God when we die, but to be with God now! The goal of biblical faith is Christlikeness now (i.e., Rom. 8:28-29; Eph. 1:4; 2:10; 4:13)! The Bible's covenants have requirements.

1. faith (initial and daily)
2. repentance (initial and daily)
3. obedience (lifestyle)
4. perseverance through life

These are summarized in Deut. 8:6; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16!

**48:16 "who has redeemed me from all evil"** This is the term *Go'el* (BDB 145 I, KB 169, *Qal* PARTICIPLE, cf. Exod. 6:6; 15:13), which is used for the kinsmen redeemer (Ruth 4:6) or blood avenger (cf. Deut. 19:6; Josh. 20:3). It refers to that near kin who avenged or bought one back either from slavery, financial ruin, or as a prisoner of war. This term also occurs in Ruth 4:6; Num. 5:8; I Kgs. 16:11; Job 19:25.

## SPECIAL TOPIC: RANSOM/REDEEM

### I. OLD TESTAMENT

A. There are primarily two Hebrew legal terms which convey this concept.

1. *Ga'al*, which basically means “to free” by means of a price paid. A form of the term *go'el* adds to the concept, a personal intermediary, usually a family member (i.e., kinsman redeemer). This cultural aspect of the right to buy back objects, animals, land (cf. Leviticus 25,27), or relatives (cf. Ruth 4:15; Isa. 29:22) is transferred theologically to YHWH's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (cf. Exod. 6:6; 15:13; Ps. 74:2; 77:15; Jer. 31:11). He becomes “the redeemer” (cf. Job 19:25; Ps. 19:14; 78:35; Pro. 23:1; Isa. 41:14; 43:14; 44:6,24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7,26; 54:5,8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16; Jer. 50:34).
2. *Padah*, which basically means “to deliver” or “to rescue”
  - a. the redemption of the firstborn, Exod. 13:13,14 and Num. 18:15-17
  - b. Physical redemption is contrasted with spiritual redemption, Ps. 49:7,8,15
  - c. YHWH will redeem Israel from their sin and rebellion, Ps. 130:7-8

B. The theological concept involves three related items.

1. There is a need, a bondage, a forfeiting, an imprisonment.
  - a. physical
  - b. social
  - c. spiritual (cf. Ps. 130:8)
2. A price must be paid for freedom, release, and restoration.
  - a. of the nation, Israel (cf. Deut. 7:8)
  - b. of the individual (cf. Job 19:25-27; 33:28)
3. Someone must act as intermediary and benefactor. In *ga'al* this one is usually a family member or near kin (i.e., *go'el*).
4. YHWH often describes Himself in familial terms.
  - a. father
  - b. husband
  - c. near kin

Redemption was secured through YHWH's personal agency; a price was paid, and redemption was achieved!

### II. NEW TESTAMENT

A. There are several terms used to convey the theological concept.

1. *Agorazō* (cf. I Cor. 6:20; 7:23; II Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:34). This is a commercial term which reflects a price paid for something. We are blood-bought people who do not control our own lives. We belong to Christ.
2. *Exagorazō* (cf. Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). This is also a commercial term. It reflects Jesus' substitutionary death on our behalf. Jesus bore the “curse” of a performance-based law (i.e., Mosaic Law), which sinful humans could not accomplish. He bore the curse (cf. Deut. 21:23) for us all! In Jesus, God's justice and love merge into full forgiveness, acceptance, and access!

3. *Luō*, “to set free”
    - a. *Lutron*, “a price paid” (cf. Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). These are powerful words from Jesus’ own mouth concerning the purpose of His coming, to be the Savior of the world by paying a sin-debt He did not owe (cf. John 1:29).
    - b. *Lutroō*, “to release”
      - (1) to redeem Israel, Luke 24:21
      - (2) to give Himself to redeem and purify a people, Titus 2:14
      - (3) to be a sinless substitute, I Pet. 1:18-19
    - c. *Lutrōsis*, “redemption, deliverance, or liberation”
      - (1) Zacharias’ prophecy about Jesus, Luke 1:68
      - (2) Anna’s praise to God for Jesus, Luke 2:38
      - (3) Jesus’ better, once offered sacrifice, Heb. 9:12
  4. *Apolytrōsis*
    - a. redemption at the Second Coming (cf. Acts 3:19-21)
      - (1) Luke 21:28
      - (2) Romans 8:23
      - (3) Ephesians 1:14; 4:30
      - (4) Hebrews 9:15
    - b. redemption in Christ’s death
      - (1) Romans 3:24
      - (2) I Corinthians 1:30
      - (3) Ephesians 1:7
      - (4) Colossians 1:14
  5. *Antilytron* (cf. I Tim. 2:6). This is a crucial text (as is Titus 2:14), which links release to Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross. He is the one and only acceptable sacrifice; the one who dies for “all” (cf. John 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; I Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; II Pet. 3:9; I John 2:2; 4:14).
- B. The theological concept in the NT implies:
1. mankind is enslaved to sin (cf. John 8:34; Rom. 3:10-18; 6:23).
  2. mankind’s bondage to sin has been revealed by the OT Mosaic Law (cf. Galatians 3) and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5-7). Human performance has become a death sentence (cf. Col. 2:14).
- C. Jesus, the sinless lamb of God, has come and died in our place (cf. John 1:29; II Cor. 5:21). We have been purchased from sin so that we might serve God (cf. Romans 6).
- D. By implication both YHWH and Jesus are “near kin” who act on our behalf. This continues the familial metaphors (i.e., father, husband, son, brother, near kin).
- E. Redemption was not a price paid to Satan (i.e., medieval theology), but the reconciliation of God’s word and God’s justice with God’s love and full provision in Christ. At the cross peace was restored, human rebellion was forgiven, the image of God in mankind is now fully functional again in intimate fellowship!
- F. There is still a future aspect of redemption (cf. Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30), which involves our resurrection bodies and physical intimacy with the Triune God.



☐ **“And may my name may live on in them”** This may refer to the ancient view that a man lived on in his children (i.e., II Sam. 18:18; NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 677), or more likely, that the covenant faith of Jacob (cf. v. 16, line 3) would be passed on to these two boys.

The last three VERBS of v. 16 are IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense (i.e., “let. . .”)

1. bless, BDB 138, KB 159, *Piel* IMPERFECT
2. be called, BDB 894, KB 1128, *Niphal* IMPERFECT
3. grow, BDB 185, KB 213, *Qal* IMPERFECT

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 48:17-22**

**<sup>17</sup>When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. <sup>18</sup>Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head." <sup>19</sup>But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."**

**<sup>20</sup>He blessed them that day, saying,**

**"By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying,**

**'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!'"**

**Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. <sup>21</sup>Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. <sup>22</sup>I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."**

**48:17 “it displeased him”** This VERB in the *Qal* stem (BDB 949, KB 1269, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is a strong VERB denoting Joseph’s feeling about this reversal. The VERB can describe

1. distress, Gen. 21:11,12
2. displeasure, Num. 11:10; Josh. 24:15; I Sam. 8:6; 18:8; II Sam. 11:25; Neh. 2:10
3. grief, Deut. 15:10; I Sam. 1:8; Neh. 2:3
4. hostility, Deut. 15:9; 28:54,56
5. evil, Gen. 38:10; II Sam. 11:27
6. went ill with, Ps. 106:32; II Sam. 20:6

Obviously #2 fits this context best, but it is a strong word. Joseph’s feelings about what Jacob did were not a minor issue! He interrupted the blessing in an attempt to move Jacob’s hand. Even Joseph did not always know the Lord’s will. Jacob, not Joseph, is the Patriarch of the covenant family.

**48:19** The VERB “I know” (BDB 393, KB 390, two *Qal* PERFECTS) is repeated twice for emphasis. Jacob knew what he was doing (apparently by divine leadership). The reversal of expectations would continue.

**48:20 “Israel”** The “he” of line 1 refers to Jacob/Israel, but Israel in the second line could refer to the nation (a collective, cf. TEV).

☐ **“May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh”** This is going to be a blessing proverb which was used by the people of God.

**48:21 “Behold I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers”** The “I” is emphatic. Jacob is the Patriarch. This is another allusion to the fact that the whole family will be delivered from Egypt and that they will return to the Promised Land (cf. Gen. 15:12-16).

**48:22 “I give you one portion more than your brothers”** This term “portion” (BDB 1014 I) is literally “shoulder” in Hebrew. It is the name of the city of Shechem. Some think it refers to this geographical location because of the remainder of v. 22, which refers to the slaughter of the Shechemites, but this seems unusual because in the book of Genesis this is such a negative act. Others say that the word “shoulder” means that they were a stature higher, i.e. inherited more—the double inheritance of the firstborn. Some say that it refers to Shechem being the territory which Ephraim will inherit and others say it refers to Shechem being the site where Joseph will be buried (cf. Josh. 24:32). Manasseh will inherit on both sides of the Jordan (the only tribe to do so). Ephraim will be the largest of the tribes in number and land allocation (Judah second). Ephraim will dominate the northern part of Canaan, as Judah does the south. The leader Joshua is from Ephraim, as is Samuel!

▣ **“which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow”** This seems to be a historical event, but we do not have a record of it. The rabbis speculate that after the slaughter of the Shechemites that the other Canaanite kings came against Jacob and that he defeated them in battle. There is no record of this.

The term Amorite is a collective term to describe all of the Canaanite tribes (cf. Gen. 15:16). See Special Topic: Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine at 12:6.

# GENESIS 49

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
Israel's Prophecy Concerning His Sons	Jacob's Last Words to His Sons	Jacob's Blessing on His Twelve Sons	The Last Words of Jacob	Jacob's Testament
49:1-7	49:1-27	49:1-27	49:1-27	49:1-27
(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)
(3-4)	(3-4)	(3-4)	(3-4)	(3-4)
(5-7)	(5-7)	(5-7)	(5-7)	(5-7)
49:8-13				
(8-12)	(8-12)	(8-12)	(8-12)	(8-12)
(13)	(13)	(13)	(13)	(13)
49:16-15				
(14-15)	(14-15)	(14-15)	(14-15)	(14-15)
49:16-18				
(16-18)	(16-18)	(16-18)	(16-17)	(16-17)
			(18)	(18)
49:19	(19)	(19)	(19)	(19)
(19)				
49:20				
(20)	(20)	(20)	(20)	(20)
49:21				
(21)	(21)	(21)	(21)	(21)
49:22-27				
(22-26)	(22-26)	(22-26)	(22-26)	(22-26)
(27)	(27)	(27)	(27)	(27)
49:28-33	49:28	49:28	49:28	49:28
	Jacob's Death And Burial (49:29-50:14)	The Death of Jacob and the Final Days of Joseph (49:29-50:26)	The Death and Burial of Jacob (49:29-50:14)	Jacob's Last Moments and Death
	49:29-33	49:29-33	49:29-33	49:29-32
				49:33

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This is a difficult poem to interpret. The MT and the ancient versions disagree. The Hebrew text is very difficult because of
  1. rare words
  2. poetic parallels
  3. numerous idioms
- B. It is helpful to compare this deathbed characterization of the tribes that issue from Jacob's sons and who carry on the sons' idiosyncrasies through time, with Moses' deathbed characterization of the tribes in Deuteronomy 33.
- C. Although there are many difficult issues, for me verse 10 is crucial. Interpreters must always be careful of what their pet doctrines or systematic theologies or denominational traditions want a text to say or affirm. When all is said and done
  1. context
  2. parallel passages
  3. common sensemust guide each of us in these crucial, critical, but ambiguous texts!
- D. The list of sons is presented in relationship to their mother
  1. Leah (listed in birth order)
  2. Zilpah (Leah's maid)
  3. Bilhah (Rachel's maid)
  4. Rachel (the two are listed in birth order)

### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:1-2**

**<sup>1</sup>Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come.**

**<sup>2</sup>Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob;  
And listen to Israel your father."**

**49:1-2** There is a series of commands in these opening verses.

1. assemble, v. 1, BDB 62, KB 74, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE
2. hear, v. 1, BDB 616, KB 665, *Hiphil* COHORTATIVE
3. gather together, v. 2, BDB 867, KB 1062, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE
4. hear. . .listen, v. 2, both BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERATIVES

**49:1 “Then Jacob summoned his sons and said”** This is the final blessing which is so characteristic of the patriarchal leaders. Culturally it carried great weight. Isaac did the same thing in Genesis 27; Moses in Deuteronomy 33; Joshua in Joshua 24; and Samuel in I Samuel 12. This list is going to mention the sons of Leah first and the sons of Rachel last.

There is much ambiguity in this blessing. It is in a poetic form and is based on word plays (cf. Gen. 29:30-30:24). This patriarchal blessing is for each of his twelve sons.

The implication of this entire chapter is that God is not only in control of the destinies of nations but also of individuals (lit. “what will befall you in the days to come”)!



**NASB “in the days to come”**

**TEV “in the future”**

In the MT the phrase (BDB 31 CONSTRUCT 398) is used of the end-time (cf. Num. 24:14; Isa. 2:2; Ezek. 38:16), but that time frame does not fit this context. This text addresses the thirteen tribes (Joseph becomes Ephraim and Manasseh) out of Jacob. Therefore, it must relate to the conquest (Joshua) and settlement (Judges, cf. Deut. 31:29) of Canaan. If v. 10 does address a Davidic ruler from Judea, then a period as far as an early monarchial period (I Samuel) is possible.

**49:2 “Jacob. . .Israel”** They are obviously parallel. It says more about modern commentators and their presuppositions that they suppose these names to represent two separate authors (as they also do to *Elohim* and *YHWH*). Ancient Hebrew had its own literary forms, idioms, and patterns!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:3-4**

**<sup>3</sup>Reuben, you are my firstborn;**

**My might and the beginning of my strength,**

**Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.**

**<sup>4</sup>Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence,**

**Because you went up to your father's bed;**

**Then you defiled *it*—he went up to my couch.**

**49:3 “Reuben”** Verse 3 is written in such glowing terms (no VERBS) of the potential of Jacob’s firstborn son, but v. 4 is the drastic consequence of potential being flaunted. Reuben did a shameful deed of going in to his father’s concubine, Bilhah (cf. Gen. 35:22). It shows an excess of passion. While some see it as an attempt to inherit Jacob’s possession early, it seems to apply more to sexual passion than to greed.

**49:4**

**NASB, NJB**

**“uncontrolled”**

**NKJV, NRSV**

**“unstable”**

**LXX**

**“insolvent,” “wanton”**

**Peshitta**

**“went astray”**

This term (BDB 808) can mean

1. reckless (Arabic, cf. Jdgs. 9:4; Jer. 23:32)
2. arrogant (Akkadian)
3. unstable
4. wanton (cf. Zeph. 3:4)

BDB characterizes the term as “boiling water” spilling over a container. It is a total rejection of expected norms of behavior. It characterizes personal desires over any normal restraints.



<b>NASB</b>	<b>“you shall not have preeminence”</b>
<b>NKJV, Peshitta</b>	<b>“you shall not excel”</b>
<b>NRSV, JPSOA</b>	<b>“you shall no longer excel”</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>“you will not be the most important”</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>“you will not be foremost”</b>
<b>LXX</b>	<b>“burst not forth with violence”</b>

The VERB (BDB 451, KB 451, *Hiphil* JUSSIVE) in the *Hiphil* stem means

1. leave over, leave, Exod. 10:15; Ruth 2:14,18; II Kgs. 4:43; II Chr. 31:10
2. leave a remnant, Ezek. 6:8
3. save over, Ps. 79:11 (only)
4. excel, Gen. 49:4 (only)
5. have more than enough, Exod. 36:7; II Kgs. 4:43; II Chr. 31:10
6. make abundant, Deut. 28:11; 30:9

The NOUN is used in v. 3 twice! This shows Reuben’s potential, but because of lines 2 and 3, all this potential was lost. Sin has consequences and leaves lasting scars!

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:5-7**

**<sup>5</sup>Simeon and Levi are brothers;  
Their swords are implements of violence.  
<sup>6</sup>Let my soul not enter into their council;  
Let not my glory be united with their assembly;  
Because in their anger they slew men,  
And in their self-will they lamed oxen.  
<sup>7</sup>Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;  
And their wrath, for it is cruel.  
I will disperse them in Jacob,  
And scatter them in Israel.**

**49:5 “Simeon and Levi are brothers”** These two hot-blooded brothers were apparently the planners of the slaughter of the men of Shechem (cf. Gen. 34: 25-30). This text even includes the fact that they, in their anger (BDB 60 and BDB 720), lamed the oxen of that city, which is something we do not learn from Genesis 34 or it may be an idiom to denote the leading men of that city.



There are no VERBS in v. 5 in the original text.



<b>NASB, NRSV</b>	<b>“their swords”</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>“habitation”</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>“plans”</b>
<b>LXX</b>	<b>“choice of action”</b>
<b>REB, JB</b>	<b>“counsels”</b>
<b>Peshitta</b>	<b>“nature”</b>

The Hebrew (BDB 468) is uncertain, but the word (found only here) means “tools.” Some assume that they came into Shechem carrying only farming tools and no one suspected that they were there for harm until they began to use the tools against the populace.

The UBS Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project gives two options which both use the same consonants, מִכְרֵתֵיהֶם

1. their swords (educated guess from similarity with the Greek word, NRSV)
2. their destructions

It chooses the second option, but gives it a “C” rating (considerable doubt).

There is a third option from an Ethiopian root meaning “to advise” (cf. James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*, p. 57, cf. JB, REV).



<b>NASB</b>	<b>“implements”</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>“instruments”</b>
<b>NRSV, TEV</b>	<b>“weapons”</b>

This word (BDB 479) basically means “a utensil,” “a vessel.” It can refer to

1. household property
2. money
3. baggage
4. ornaments
5. hunting weapons
6. war weapons
7. musical instruments
8. yoke
9. shepherd’s bag
10. cooking pot

Obviously this word has a wide semantic field. It is parallel to “swords” (or whatever BDB 468 means). In the MT this word (BDB 479) is first then BDB 468. The JPSOA has “their weapons are tools of lawlessness.” The confusion of this verse can be seen in the wide variety of the ancient versions.

However, it is obvious that it refers to these two brothers slaughtering the Shechemites (cf. Genesis 34).

The UBS Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project lists two ways to understand the Hebrew phrase.

1. כְּלֵי חַמָּס = weapons of violence
2. כָּלוּ חַמָּס = they decided upon

It combines the two options “weapons of violence,” but gives it a “B” (some doubt) rating.

#### 49:6

<b>NASB</b>	<b>“my soul. . .my glory”</b>
<b>NKJV</b>	<b>“my soul. . .my honor”</b>
<b>NRSV, Peshitta</b>	<b>“I. . .I”</b>
<b>NJB, REV</b>	<b>“my soul. . .my heart”</b>

**JPSOA**

**“my person. . .my being”**

**LXX**

**“my soul. . .my inward parts”**

The first term (BDB 659) is *nephesh*, which means “a person’s or animal’s life-force” (i.e., that which breathes). It is used several times in chapter 46 (46:15,18,22,25,26 [twice], 27 [twice]), but translated numerous ways.

The second term (BDB 458) “*kabod*,” means “abundance,” “honor,” or “glory” (see Special Topic at 45:13). This form of this root appears only here, 31:1, and 45:13. In the context of Genesis 34 “abundance” or “honor” fits best. These same two words appear together in Ps. 7:6. However, in this context it refers to Jacob himself and is parallel to *nephesh*. Both of these terms occur in parallel JUSSIVE clauses.

These first two lines of poetry in v. 6 are an idiomatic way of Jacob not wanting to be associated with the plans or actions of his two older sons which issued in the premeditated slaughter of all the males of the Canaanite city of Shechem.

▣ **“because of their anger they slew men”** Jacob did not want to be identified with the rash, violent acts of these two sons.

▣ **“and in their self-will they lamed oxen”** This is parallel to line 3. It apparently refers to the slaughter at Shechem in an idiomatic way. These two brothers treated all the men of Shechem as if they were animals. It may even be an illusion to the slowness of their movements (three days after being circumcised).

**49:7 “curse”** This (BDB 76, KB 91) is a PASSIVE PARTICIPLE used as an exclamation (cf. 3:14,17; 4:11; 9:25; 27:29; Num. 24:9; Deut. 27:15-26; Jdgs. 21:18; I Sam. 14:24,28). It has a specialized usage in Gen. 12:3 and 27:29 related to the Abrahamic covenant, but that cannot be the meaning here because these sons are part of the covenant! The curse must be related to their rejection as leaders of the family (primo geniture). It is their “anger” (BDB 60) that is cursed, not the sons themselves. However, note that it is YHWH Himself (“I will divide/disperse them in Jacob,” BDB 323, KB 322, *Piel* IMPERFECT, FIRST PERSON SINGULAR).

Notice the clear synthetic parallelism between lines 1 and 2 and lines 3 and 4 in v. 7. This is a good example of how so much of Hebrew poetry is structured (see article on Hebrew Poetry).

▣ **“I will disperse them in Jacob”** We know from history that the tribe of Simeon, in receiving the tribal allocation close to the Philistines (cf. Josh. 19:1-9), was very quickly decimated and assimilated into the tribe of Judah. The tribe of Levi takes the place of the firstborn children (cf. Exodus 13) and becomes priests who are spread throughout the land, particularly the forty-eight Levitical cities. One reason to believe in the ancientness of this blessing is because there is no seeming blessing on the dispersion of Levi as there is in Moses’ blessing of the tribes in Deuteronomy 33.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:8-12**

**<sup>8</sup>Judah, your brothers shall praise you;**

**Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;**

**Your father's sons shall bow down to you.**

**<sup>9</sup>Judah is a lion's whelp;**

**From the prey, my son, you have gone up.**

**He couches, he lies down as a lion,**

**And as a lion, who dares rouse him up?**

**<sup>10</sup>The scepter shall not depart from Judah,**



Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
 Until Shiloh comes,  
 And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples.

<sup>11</sup>He ties *his* foal to the vine,  
 And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;  
 He washes his garments in wine,  
 And his robes in the blood of grapes.

<sup>12</sup>His eyes are dull from wine,  
 And his teeth white from milk.

**49:8-12 “Judah”** The term Judah (BDB 397) means “praise” (BDB 393, cf. 29:35). Apparently he is described as a very strong military tribe (cf. vv. 8-9) as well as the royal ruler (cf. vv. 10-12) of the sons of Jacob. This metaphor is continued in Judah as a lion’s whelp (BDB 158 CONSTRUCT BDB 71). This does not mean a lion’s cub, but a young lion just coming into a full possession of his strength (cf. Num. 24:9).

**49:8 “enemies”** This term (BDB 33, KB 38, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) is common in the OT, but over forty times it is used specifically of enemies of the King (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 366). In this royal blessing it is just another clue regarding the supremacy of Judah.

▣ **“Your father’s sons shall bow down to you”** The VERB (BDB 1005, KB 295, *Hishtaphel* [*OT Parsing Guide*] or *Hithpael* [Owen, *Analytical Key*] IMPERFECT denotes an act of homage) is the same one used in Joseph’s dream in 37:7 and 9. The brothers (including Judah) did not appreciate the thought of bowing down to one of their brothers, but here Jacob asserts they will bow to Judah in Canaan as they bowed to Joseph in Egypt. Judah will be the tribe of royalty!

**49:10 “the scepter. . .the ruler’s staff”** These (BDB 986 and BDB 349, KB 347, *Poel* PARTICIPLE) are in a parallel relationship implying that the king of the united tribes will come from Judah.

The phrase “ruler’s staff from between his feet” is to be understood in light of the ancient pictures of an ANE ruler holding the sign of his office (usually a staff or spear) between his legs as he sits on his throne. It should be noted that the term denotes a military leader’s symbol of authority (cf. Num. 21:18).

▣

NASB, NKJV	“Until Shiloh comes”
NRSV	“Until tribute comes to him”
TEV	“Nations will bring him tribute”
NJB	“until tribute be brought him”
LXX	“until there came the things stored up for him”
Peshitta	“until the coming of the One to whom the scepter belongs”
JPSOA	“so that tribute shall come to him”
REB	“until he receives what is his due”

Young’s Lit.

Translation “till his SEED come”

There has been much discussion on how to understand this phrase.

1. it could be a proper name (Sanh 98b)
2. it could be a place name, but this would be unusual because no major event occurs at this small city in the northern kingdom, either in Judah’s or David’s life, or the Messiah’s

3. some have asserted that it is a shorthand way of writing the phrase “until what is his comes”; this is the way the Septuagint and Targum Onkelos translates this verse
4. some have said that this is quoted in Ezek. 21:26-27 in the sense of “until the rightful Davidic/Judean king comes,” which would refer to the Messiah; this is the way the verse is translated in the Revised Standard Version
5. some Targums translate this verse “until the Messiah comes to whom the kingdom belongs”
6. there is a remote possibility that the word Shiloh comes from the Babylonian root which means “prince”

The UBS *Hebrew Text Project* lists the options.

1. יבא שילה, he comes to Shiloh or Shiloh comes
2. יבא שלה, he comes to whom it belongs (change of vowels)
3. יבא שי לה, tribute will be brought to him.

It gives option #1 an “A” rating (high probability) and links Shiloh to a son of Judah (spelled “Shelah,” cf. 38:5,11,14,26; 46:12; Num. 26:20; I Chr. 2:3; 4:21).

This verse refers to a Davidic Messiah, but its exact meaning is uncertain. Both the ancient synagogue and church thought it was Messianic. Judah is going to rule the twelve tribes, but the Messiah (his descendant) is going to rule all of the kingdoms of the earth (cf. Rev. 11:15).

The idea of a king of Israel who would impact all humanity is foreshadowed in Genesis.

1. prophecy to Abraham, Gen. 17:6,16
2. prophecy to Jacob, Gen. 35:11
3. acknowledgment of a coming king, Gen. 36:31
4. prophecy to Judah, Gen. 49:8-12
5. Balaam’s prophecy about Israel, Num. 24:7
6. Moses’ guidelines for a king, Deut. 17:14-20
7. specific promises to David, II Samuel 7



**NASB, NKJV,**

**NRSV “the obedience of the peoples”**

**TEV “bow in obedience before him”**

**NJB “the peoples render him obedience”**

**JPSOA “the homage of peoples be his”**

**LXX “he is the expectation of nations”**

**Peshitta “to whom the Gentiles shall look forward”**

The MT has “shall be the obedience of the peoples” (BDB 429 CONSTRUCT 766), which has no VERB. The LXX and Peshitta make the universal Messianic implication (i.e., “nations,” BDB 766 is PLURAL [cf. 27:29] and is regularly translated the “nations” referring to non-Abrahamic people [Gentiles]) explicit in Ps. 2:8; Dan. 7:13-14!

**49:11 “He ties *his* foal to the vine,**

**And his donkey’s colt to a choice vine”** Verses 11 and 12 form an idiom that refers to prosperity. There are so many choice vines that one does not mind tying an animal to it who may either eat it or pull it apart by trying to get away.

▣ **“He washes his garments in wine,**

**And his robes in the blood of grapes”** This is a parallel Hebrew structure that speaks of the abundance of grapes. However, it could refer to Judah as God’s agent of judgment (cf. Isa. 63:1-6; Rev. 19:13,15).

**49:12 “His eyes are dull from wine,**

**And his teeth white from milk”** This is another metaphor for prosperity which speaks of the abundance of wine (TEV, “bloodshot [BDB 314] eye”) and the abundance of milk (i.e., healthy herds).

See Special Topic: Alcoholism at 14:18.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:13**

<sup>13</sup>**“Zebulun will dwell at the seashore;  
And he *shall be* a haven for ships,  
And his flank *shall be* toward Sidon.”**

**49:13-14 “Zebulun. . . Issachar”** As Simeon and Levi are linked together, so are Zebulun and Issachar. Zebulun is going to be a very commercially-oriented tribe, while Issachar is going to be a very strong, but apparently unambitious, tribe.

**49:13**

**NASB** “shall dwell at the seashore”  
**NKJV** “shall dwell by the haven of the sea”  
**NRSV** “shall settle at the shore of the sea”  
**TEV** “will live by the sea”  
**NJB** “will live by the seashore”  
**LXX** “dwell on the coast”

This phrase is literally translated “at the seashore” (BDB 342 CONSTRUCT 410). This tribe never dwelt exactly on the sea (cf. Josh. 19:10-16) because Asher is between them and the ocean. However, they were involved in trade with Tyre and Sidon (cf. v. 13c; Deut. 33:19c and d).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:14-15**

<sup>14</sup>**“Issachar is a strong donkey,  
Lying down between the sheepfolds.  
<sup>15</sup>When he saw that a resting place was good  
And that the land was pleasant,  
He bowed his shoulder to bear *burdens*,  
And became a slave at forced labor.**

**49:14 “Issachar is a strong donkey,**

**Lying down between the sheepfolds”** These two lines of poetry have been interpreted in two ways.

1. some take it from a root that means “a day laborer” (TEV)
2. others think it means they are lazy because they lay down between hills, saddlebags (TEV), or sheepfolds (NRSV, NJB) and are turned into slaves (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 994, #4)

The exact allusion is uncertain, but the point is that they refuse to take advantage of their situation. The LXX translates it as positive.

▣

**NASB, NRSV,**  
**NJB, JPSOA** “sheepfolds”  
**NKJV** “two burdens”  
**TEV (NASB margin)** “saddlebags”

**LXX** “between the inheritances”  
**Peshitta** “by the highways”  
**REB** “in the cattle pens”

The Hebrew word **הַמִּשְׁפָּתִים** can mean

1. BDB 1046
  - a. fire places
  - b. ash heaps (i.e., villages)
  - c. sheepfold (cf. Jdgs. 5:16)
2. KB 652
  - a. the two (Hebrew dual) bags for a donkey (Arabic and Albright)
  - b. a kettle on the hearth
  - c. divided sheepfolds (cf. Ps. 68:13)

Yes, moderns would like to know exactly what this means, but even with the ambiguity, the context does paint a picture. We must rely on the larger picture until more lexical or historical information becomes available. This is not a crucial issue!

**49:15** There are two opposite ways to understand this verse.

1. Issachar was lazy and became a slave.
2. Issachar recognized the fertility of their inheritance and worked hard to make it prosperous.

It all has to do with “lying down.” Does this refer to laziness or rest after strenuous effort?

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:16-18**

**<sup>16</sup>“Dan shall judge his people,  
As one of the tribes of Israel.**

**<sup>17</sup>Dan shall be a serpent in the way,  
A horned snake in the path,  
That bites the horse's heels,  
So that his rider falls backward.**

**<sup>18</sup>For Your salvation I wait, O Lord. ”**

**49:16 “Dan”** This is a play on the name Dan (BDB 192), which means “judge” (BDB 192), as Dinah (BDB 192) is the feminine form and means “judges.” If this is true the phrase refers to Dan as small, but deadly.

**49:17 “Dan shall be a serpent in the way”** One of my favorite OT commentators, Leupold, takes vv. 17 and 27 in a positive sense (note v. 18). However, from the context it may be negative. We have some biblical examples of those who were from the tribe of Dan (cf. Judges 18). Because Judges 18 is the first occurrence of idolatry among the tribes in the Bible and because Dan left their land allocation given by Joshua, many have assumed that Dan is stigmatized by these acts. Dan is not included in the list of tribes in Rev. 7:5-8. Many of the early church fathers, Irenaeus, Ambrose, Augustine, and Theodore, assume that the antiChrist would come from the tribe of Dan.

**49:18 “For Your salvation I wait, O LORD”** The exact purpose of this outburst of prayer into this context has been disputed. Is it from Jacob or Dan? Is it a thanksgiving for God’s (only use of YHWH in Genesis 49) care which was brought to mind by the mention of the “serpent,” v. 17, referring to Genesis 3? Possibly it is a prayer that the tribe of Dan would recognize their waywardness and return to trust in YHWH’s protection and deliverance (i.e., original tribal allocations in Philistine controlled area).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:19**

**<sup>19</sup>"As for Gad, raiders shall raid him,  
But he will raid *at* their heels."**

**49:19 "As for Gad, raiders shall raid him,**

**But he shall raid *at* their heels"** There is an obvious play on the root of the name (BDB 151), found four times in this one verse. Gad will be in a tribal allocation that can be easily invaded by surrounding nations (i.e., east of the Jordan), but he will go after them and retrieve the spoils (i.e., fortunate, prosperous).

The Hebrew text has "heel" (BDB 784, I,a), but BDB mentions that the term may be מַרְבֵּץ (מ from the first letter of the next line of poetry, v. 20). If so, then the line should not read "heel," but "will attack their rear" (BDB 784, I,c).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:20**

**<sup>20</sup>"As for Asher, his food shall be rich,  
And he will yield royal dainties."**

**49:20 "Asher"** The basic meaning of Asher seems to be "happy one" (BDB 81). This may be alluding to the control of trade routes through their land allotment by Joshua, which makes them very wealthy. Also, the fertility of their soil means that they will provide food items for the royal table (cf. Deut. 33:24-25).

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:21**

**<sup>21</sup>"Naphtali is a doe let loose,  
He gives beautiful words."**

**49:21**

<b>NASB, NKJV</b>	<b>"a doe let loose"</b>
<b>NKJV, JPSOA</b>	<b>"a deer let loose"</b>
<b>TEV</b>	<b>"a deer that runs free"</b>
<b>NJB</b>	<b>"a swift hind"</b>
<b>LXX</b>	<b>"a spreading stem"</b>
<b>Peshitta</b>	<b>"a swift messenger"</b>
<b>REB</b>	<b>"a spreading terebinth"</b>

The VERB (BDB 1018, KB 1511, *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE) can mean

1. send forth
  - a. people
  - b. things
  - c. message
2. hurl
3. stretch out (i.e., spreading, cf. LXX, REB)
4. send away (cf. Gen. 3:23)
5. let loose (cf. Ps. 50:19)



NASB	“He gives beautiful words”
NKJV, Peshitta	“He gives goodly words”
NRSV, TEV,	
NJB, JPSOA	“that bears lovely fawns”
LXX	“bestowing beauty on its fruit”
REB	“putting forth lovely boughs”

The word translated “beauty” or “lovely” (BDB 1051 I, רַפֵּר, cf. Ps. 16:6), the same three consonants, can also be translated “horn,” רַפֵּר (cf. Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible).

The UBS *Handbook on Genesis* makes a helpful statement, “The change from ‘hinds’ to ‘terebinth’ and ‘fawns’ to ‘words’ involves a change in the Hebrew vowel points” (p. 1094).

Since animal metaphors, not plant metaphors, are common in Genesis 49 and since there is a parallel between the lines of the poem, v.21, “beautiful fawns” or “fawns of beauty” seems best.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:22-26**

<sup>22</sup>Joseph is a fruitful bough,  
A fruitful bough by a spring;  
Its branches run over a wall.  
<sup>23</sup>The archers bitterly attacked him,  
And shot *at him* and harassed him;  
<sup>24</sup>But his bow remained firm,  
And his arms were agile,  
From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob  
(From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),  
<sup>25</sup>From the God of your father who helps you,  
And by the Almighty who blesses you  
*With* blessings of heaven above,  
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,  
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.  
<sup>26</sup>The blessings of your father  
Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors  
Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills;  
May they be on the head of Joseph,  
And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

**49:22-26 “Joseph”** As Judah was singled out among the sons of Leah to receive the leadership of the family (i.e., line of the Messiah), so Joseph is singled out among the sons of Rachel to receive the double inheritance (i.e., Ephraim and Manasseh). This is a very poetic and yet emphatic statement about the priority of Joseph.

**49:22** There is a word play and a metaphor in this verse.

1. the *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE, BDB 826, KB 963, is repeated twice
2. in line 1 “bough” is literally “son,” but in line 3 “bough” is “daughter”

These are agricultural metaphors for a vigorous growing and fruitful plant (cf. Deut. 33:13-16).

Some commentators are doubtful of a switch from animal metaphors (cf. vv. 9,14,17,21,27, and the parallel in Deut. 33:17) and change the imagery to a wild donkey on a hillside (cf. JPSOA, TEV). Poetry in an ancient language using rare words is a slippery thing!

Verse 22 has many questions with the Hebrew text!

**49:23-25** These verses relate metaphorically to

1. Joseph's experience with his brothers and Potiphar and prison life
2. The tribes of Joseph's sons (i.e., Ephraim and Manasseh) and their conquest of their tribal allocations in Canaan (Joshua)

Notice the different titles for God.

1. the Mighty One of Jacob, v. 24, BDB 7 CONSTRUCT 784, cf. Ps. 132:2,5; Isa. 49:26 (the Mighty One of Israel, Isa. 1:26)
2. the Shepherd, v. 24, BDB 944, KB 1258, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE, cf. Ps. 23:1; 80:1 (similar pastoral idiom, Ps. 78:52)
3. the Stone (or Rock) of Israel, v. 24, BDB 6 CONSTRUCT 975, cf. Isa. 30:29; possibly linked to the Messianic title "Cornerstone" in Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16 (see Special Topic to follow)
4. the God of your fathers, v. 25, cf. Gen. 26:3,24; 28:13; 32:9 (i.e., Abraham, Isaac; note the SINGULAR is an emphasis on Jacob's God)
5. the Almighty (lit. *Shaddai*, cf. JPSOA), v. 25, BDB 994, cf. 17:1; see Special Topic: Names for Deity at 12:1

## **SPECIAL TOPIC: CORNERSTONE**

### **I. OT Usages**

- A. The concept of a stone as a hard durable item which made a good foundation was used to describe YHWH (cf. Ps. 18:1).
- B. It then developed into a Messianic title (cf. Gen. 49:24; Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16).
- C. It came to represent a judgment from YHWH by the Messiah (cf. Isa. 8:14; Dan. 2:34-35,44-45).
- D. This developed into a building metaphor.
  1. a foundation stone, the first placed, which was secure and set the angles for the rest of the building, called "the cornerstone"
  2. it could also refer to the final stone put in place, which holds the walls together (cf. Zech. 4:7; Eph. 2:20,21), called "the capstone" from the Hebrew *rush* (i.e., head)
  3. it could refer to the "key stone," which is in the center of the doorway arch and holds the weight of the entire wall

### **II. NT Usages**

- A. Jesus quoted Psalm 118 several times in reference to Himself (cf. Matt. 21:41-46; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17)
- B. Paul uses Psalm 118 in connection with YHWH's rejection of faithless, rebellious Israel (cf. Rom. 9:33)
- C. Paul uses the concept of a "capstone" in Eph. 2:20-22 in reference to Christ
- D. Peter uses this concept of Jesus in I Pet. 2:1-10. Jesus is the cornerstone and believers are the living stones (i.e., believers as temples, cf. I Cor. 6:19), built on Him (i.e., Jesus is the new Temple, cf. Mark 14:58; Matt. 12:6; John 2:19-20). The Jews rejected the very foundation of their hope when they rejected Jesus as Messiah.

### III. Theological Statements

- A. YHWH allowed David/Solomon to build a temple. He told them that if they kept the covenant He would bless them and be with them (cf. II Samuel 7), but if they did not the temple would be in ruins (cf. I Kgs. 9:1-9)!
- B. Rabbinical Judaism focused on form and ritual and neglected the personal aspect of faith (this is not a blanket statement; there were godly rabbis). God seeks a daily, personal, godly relationship with those created in His image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). Luke 20:17-18 contains frightening words of judgment.
- C. Jesus used the concept of a temple to represent His physical body (cf. John 2:19-22). This continues and expands the concept of personal faith in Jesus as the Messiah is key to a relationship with YHWH.
- D. Salvation is meant to restore the image of God in human beings so that fellowship with God is possible. The goal of Christianity is Christlikeness now. Believers are to become living stones (i.e., little temples built on/patterned after Christ).
- E. Jesus is the foundation of our faith and the capstone of our faith (i.e., the Alpha and Omega). Yet also the stone of stumbling and the rock of offense. To miss Him is to miss everything. There can be no middle ground here!

**49:25-26 “blessings”** Notice how many times this term is used.

1. who blesses you, v. 25, BDB 138, KB 159, *Piel* IMPERFECT, cf. 28:3; 48:3
2. with blessings of heaven above, v. 25, BDB 139, cf. 27:28; Deut. 33:13
3. blessings of the deep, v. 25, BDB 139, cf. Deut. 33:13
4. blessings of the breast and of the womb, v. 25, BDB 139
5. the blessings of your father, v. 26, BDB 139
6. have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors, v. 26 (difficult Hebrew phrase and does not include “blessings” again)

The blessing was to assure the Patriarchs of God’s presence with them (cf. Gen. 12:2; 22:17; 24:1; 26:12; 30:30) and blessing others through them (cf. Gen. 12:2-3; 22:18; 30:27; 39:5). This was God’s original purpose for creation (cf. 1:22,28)! This is not the world God intended it to be (cf. Genesis 3). Joseph’s godliness allowed God to show His original purpose of him and his family.

**49:25 “With the blessings of heaven above,  
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath**

**Blessings of the breasts and of the womb”** This is a threefold emphasis on abundance of crops, herds, and human population. This is what YHWH wanted to do to all humanity in Eden.

“Heaven” and “deep” are used as metaphors for the widest, greatest possible blessings. Both would relate to moisture for abundant crops and grasses (cf. Deut. 33:13).

**49:26** There is a parallelism between line 2 and line 3, but both have difficulties in Hebrew.

1. blessing of everlasting mountains (הרי עד, BDB 249) or ancestors (הורי עד, BDB 223 also assumes it refers in parallel to everlasting mountains, as does the LXX and the parallel in Deut. 33:15; MT has “ancestors,” but this form is found only here)
2. blessings of the eternal hills

In the context of the parallelism both lines probably relate to mountains and hills, which was an idiom for strength and permanence.



▣ **“the head of one distinguished among his brothers”** “Distinguished” (BDB 634) is from the root for “Nazarite,” which means “to set apart” (cf. TEV) or “consecrated to.” It can possibly denote a prince or official (cf. Nahum 3:17). It may refer to Joseph’s position of leadership in Egypt.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:27**

**<sup>27</sup>“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;  
In the morning he devours the prey,  
And in the evening he divides the spoil.”**

**49:27 “Benjamin”** He is described as a ravenous wolf (BDB 382, KB 380, *Qal* IMPERFECT). Some say that he ate all of the five portions that were set before him (cf. Gen. 43:34). His father knew his eating habits! Verse 27 is negative, note Judges 19-21.

Leupold interprets vv. 17 and 27 positively. Hebrew poetry is very ambiguous because of the genre of Hebrew poetry and the use of rare words used to make the beat (accented syllables) fit.

▣ **“prey”** The root ַי (BDB 723 I) usually denotes perpetuity (i.e., Gen. 49:26; and mostly in Psalm and Isaiah), but in some few texts (cf. here; Isa. 33:23; Zeph. 3:8) it denotes booty taken in battle using the metaphor of “prey.”

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 49:28-33**

**<sup>28</sup>All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him. <sup>29</sup>Then he charged them and said to them, “I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, <sup>30</sup>in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site. <sup>31</sup>There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah—<sup>32</sup>the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth.” <sup>33</sup>When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.**

**49:29 “gathered to my people”** This is an idiom for death and burial (cf. 25:8,17; 35:29; 49:33; Num. 27:13; 20:26; 31:2; Deut. 32:50; Jdgs. 2:10; II Kgs. 22:20). Whether this implies a family reunion in Sheol is uncertain. It may be a way of referring to family tombs or caves. But because of the worship of *teraphim* (cf. 31:19,34,35, see Special Topic at 31:19) it may have had a greater implication (cf. Matt. 22:31-32).

See *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 127-129, for a brief discussion on the phrase implying an afterlife.

▣ **“in the cave”** This refers to the burial site of the Patriarchs which was bought from Ephron the Hittite, alluded to in Gen. 23:1-19. There is a sense in which the covenant families are united in the afterlife.

Jacob is asserting in a veiled way that his family would not stay in Egypt, but at some point would return to Canaan (cf. 15:12-21). Joseph makes the same kind of prophetic request in 50:24-25. Egypt was a temporary shelter that would turn into an exploitation.

**49:31 “Rebekah. . .Leah”** This is the first account of the burial of these two. The rabbis say that Joseph may have been angry because his mother was buried by the side of the road, but this seems to be a prophetic allusion to the time when the northern tribes go into captivity and Rachel will weep for her children as she sees them go by for she is buried beside the road that they would take as they go into exile (cf. Jer. 31:15).

**49:33 “drew his feet into the bed”** If Jacob was sitting up the whole time this simply means he laid down; otherwise it seems to refer to the fetal position. Then he will breathe his last (an idiom for death).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why does Jacob adopt Ephraim and Manasseh?
2. What is the significance of the threefold titles of God found in Gen. 48:15-16?
3. How are the blessings of chapter 49 related to the names of these sons found in Gen. 29:30-30:24?
4. What two sons seem to receive the greatest blessing and what aspect of the blessing do we remember them for?

# GENESIS 50

## PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATION

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows MT)
The Death of Israel	Jacob's Death and Burial (49:29-50:14)	The Death of Jacob and the Final Days of Joseph (49:29-50:26)	The Death and Burial of Jacob (49:29-50:14)	Jacob's Funeral
50:1-3	50:1-3	50:1-3	50:1-3	50:1-3a 50:3b-6
50:4-6	50:4-11	50:4-6	50:4-5 50:6	
50:7-11		50:7-14	50:7-9	50:7-9
Burial at Machpelah			50:10-11	50:10-11
50:12-14	50:12-14		50:12-14	50:12-13 50:14
	Joseph Reassures His Brothers		Joseph Reassures His Brothers	From the Death of Jacob to the Death of Joseph
50:15-21	50:15-21	50:15-21	50:15-17 50:18 50:19-21	50:15-17 50:18-21
Death of Joseph	Death of Joseph		The Death of Joseph	
50:22-26	50:22-26	50:22-23 50:24-26	50:22-26	50:22-25 50:26

### READING CYCLE THREE (see p. xvi)

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph

3. Third paragraph

4. Etc.

## WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

### NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 50:1-3

**<sup>1</sup>Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him and kissed him. <sup>2</sup>Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. <sup>3</sup>Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.**

**50:1** This verse shows three signs of grieving associated with death.

1. fell on his father's face, BDB 656, KB 709, *Qal* IMPERFECT, similar to 33:4
2. wept over him, BDB 113, KB 129, *Qal* IMPERFECT
3. kissed him, BDB 676, KB 730, *Qal* IMPERFECT

**50:2 “physicians”** This is a *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE of the VERB “to heal” (BDB 950, KB 1272, cf. II Chr. 16:12). There was a group of professional embalmers, but Joseph possibly used physicians in order to side step the religious overtones of Egyptian embalming (NASB Study Bible, p. 73). Jacob was preserved so that he could later be buried in the family burial cave in Canaan (cf. 49:29-32).

▣ **“embalm”** This VERB (BDB 334, KB 333, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) means “spice,” “make spice” (cf. Song of Songs 2:13), or “embalm.” This was a uniquely Egyptian procedure, found only here in the OT. It had religious connections to Osiris (beginning about 2700 B.C.) and the Egyptians' belief in an afterlife.

It involved

1. the removal of the internal organs and their separate preservation in jars
2. in a later period the brain was also removed and placed in a separate jar
3. the body was wrapped with resinated linen cloth

The only written accounts of how to embalm come from Herodotus, *History* 2:85-90 and Diodorus Siculus, *History* 1.91. For a fuller discussion see ABD, vol. 2, pp. 490-495, and James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, pp. 56-58.

This discussion is not meant in any way to address modern embalming practices. They have no religious overtones as did the Egyptian rituals. Many have assumed that the curse statement in Gen. 3:19 still applies. I personally think the physical remains of life (i.e., human bodies) are not that significant!

### SPECIAL TOPIC: CREMATION

#### I. OLD TESTAMENT

- A. Cremation (burning) was one of the four ways to inflict capital punishment in Leviticus (cf. 20:14; 21:9, examples, Gen. 28:24 and Josh. 7:15,25).
- B. People friendly with Saul reclaimed his body and those of his three sons from the Philistines and burned them before burying their bones in the land of Benjamin (cf. I Sam. 31:12-13, omitted in the parallel of I Chr. 10:12)

There is some dispute among scholars about the reading “burned” vs. “anointed.” This text is the only seemingly positive cremation in the OT (cf. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 5, p. 1074). It may also refer to burning spices (cf. II Chr. 16:14; 21:19; Jer. 34:5).

- C. Later, a Judean prophet predicts the burning of the priests at Bethel on its sacrificial altar (cf. I Kgs. 13:2).
- D. The issue of cremation has sometimes been falsely linked to the OT use of fire as a metaphor for judgment (cf. Isa. 30:33). Cremation metaphors (i.e. “pyre”) are used to accentuate eschatological condemnation.
- E. Burial was practiced by all of the countries of the Ancient Near East (cf. Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, p. 57). Cremation was seen as a humiliation (cf. Amos 2:1).

## II. GREECE AND ROME

- A. Both of these civilizations practiced cremation.
  - 1. Greece, regularly (Sophocles, *Electra*, 1136-1139)
  - 2. Rome, as a viable, but not common, option (Cicero, *Deleg* 2,22,56)
- B. The cultures of the Mediterranean had a different attitude toward cremation than the cultures of the Ancient Near East. Tacitus mentions that the Jews bury, not burn (*His.* 5.5).

## III. RABBINICAL JUDAISM

- A. Most early rabbis assert that burying is commanded by Deut. 21:23.
- B. Cremation is forbidden in the Talmud (*Sanh.* 7:2,24b) and *Mishna* (*’Abodiah Zarah* 1.3).
- C. Modern Judaism allows those cremated to be placed in Jewish cemeteries (cf. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 5, p. 1074).

## IV. NEW TESTAMENT

There is no discussion or mention of this subject in the NT. The physical body is viewed as a temporary shelter (cf. II Cor. 5). Something of the old body will be reunited with the believer at the Second Coming, but there are no details or explanations (cf. I Thess. 4:13-18). This is simply not an issue of “faith and practice” for Christians. Like the Jews of the OT, believers of the NT assert a bodily resurrection. There is a physicalness to eschatology, but the how or why is not specified! The condition or location of the physical remains does not affect a believer’s reunion with Jesus. Faith in Christ is the key, not physical remains!

## SPECIAL TOPIC: BURIAL PRACTICES

- I. Mesopotamia
  - A. Proper burial was very important to a happy afterlife.
  - B. An example of a Mesopotamian curse is, “May the earth not receive your corpses.”
- II. Old Testament
  - A. Proper burial was very important (cf. Eccl. 6:3).
  - B. It was done very quickly (cf. Sarah in Genesis 23 and Rachel in Gen. 35:19 and notice Deut. 21:23).

- C. Improper burial was a sign of rejection and sin.
  - 1. Deuteronomy 28:26
  - 2. Isaiah 14:2
  - 3. Jeremiah 8:2; 22:19
- D. Burial was done if possible in family vaults in the home area.
- E. There was not embalming, like Egypt. Mankind came from dust and must return to dust (ex. Gen. 3:19; Ps. 103:14; 104:29).
- F. In rabbinical Judaism it was difficult to balance a proper respect and handling of the body with the concept of ceremonial defilement connected to dead bodies.

### III. New Testament

- A. Burial followed death quickly, usually within twenty-four hours. The Jews often watched the grave for three days, believing that the soul could return to the body within that time frame (cf. John 11:39).
- B. Burial involved the cleaning and wrapping of the body with spices (cf. John 11:44; 19:39-40).
- C. There were no distinctive Jewish or Christian burial procedures or items placed in the grave in first century Palestine.

**50:3 “forty days”** The number 40 (BDB 917) can be literal or figurative. The Hebrews mourned for 30 days (cf. Num. 20:29; Deut. 34:8) for national leaders. It was a sign of respect.

▣ **“seventy days”** Jacob received a royal burial. Pharaoh himself was mourned for seventy-two days (the Greek historian, Diodorus [1.72]). The Egyptians mourned for Jacob out of respect for Joseph.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC: SYMBOLIC NUMBERS IN SCRIPTURE**

- A. Certain numbers functioned both as numerals and symbols:
  - 1. One – God (e.g., Deut. 6:4; Eph. 4:4-6)
  - 2. Six – human imperfection (one less than 7, e.g., Rev. 13:18)
  - 3. Seven – divine perfection (the seven days of creation). Notice the symbolic usages in Revelation.
    - a. seven candlesticks, 1:13,20; 2:1
    - b. seven stars, 1:16,20; 2:1
    - c. seven churches, 1:20
    - d. seven spirits of God, 3:1; 4:5; 5:6
    - e. seven lamps, 4:5
    - f. seven seals, 5:1,5
    - g. seven horns and seven eyes, 5:6
    - h. seven angels, 8:2,6; 15:1,6,7,8; 16:1; 17:1
    - i. seven trumpets, 8:2,6
    - j. seven thunders, 10:3,4
    - k. seven thousand, 11:13

- l. seven heads, 13:1; 17:3,7,9
- m. seven plagues, 15:1,6,8; 21:9
- n. seven bowls, 15:7
- o. seven kings, 17:10
- p. seven vials, 21:9
- 4. Ten – completeness
  - a. use in Gospels:
    - (1) Matt. 20:24; 25:1,28
    - (2) Mark 10:41
    - (3) Luke 14:31; 15:8; 17:12,17; 19:13,16,17,24,25
  - b. use in Revelation:
    - (1) 2:10, ten days of tribulation
    - (2) 12:3; 17:3,7,12,16, ten horns
    - (3) 13:1, ten crowns
  - c. multiples of 10 in Revelation:
    - (1) 144,000 + 12x12x1000, cf. 7:4; 14:1,3
    - (2) 1,000 = 10x10x10, cf. 20:2,3,6
- 5. Twelve – human organization
  - a. twelve sons of Jacob (i.e., twelve tribes of Israel, Gen. 35:22; 49:28)
  - b. twelve pillars, Exod. 24:4
  - c. twelve stones on breastplate of High Priest, Exod. 28:21; 39:14
  - d. twelve loaves, for table in Holy Place (symbolic of God's provision for the twelve tribes), Lev. 24:5; Exod. 25:30
  - e. twelve spies, Deut. 1:23; Josh. 3:22; 4:2,3,4,8,9,20
  - f. twelve apostles, Matt. 10:1
  - g. use in Revelation:
    - (1) twelve thousand sealed, 7:5-8
    - (2) twelve stars, 12:1
    - (3) twelve gates, twelve angels, twelve tribes, 21:12
    - (4) twelve foundation stones, names of the twelve apostles, 21:14
    - (5) New Jerusalem was twelve thousand stadia squared, 21:16
    - (6) twelve gates made of twelve pearls, 21:12
    - (7) tree of life with twelve kinds of fruit, 22:2
- 6. Forty – number for time:
  - a. sometimes literal (exodus and wilderness wanderings, e.g., Exod. 16:35); Deut. 2:7; 8:2
  - b. can be literal or symbolic
    - (1) flood, Gen. 7:4,17; 8:6
    - (2) Moses on Mt. Sinai, Exod. 24:18; 34:28; Deut. 9:9,11,18,25
    - (3) divisions of Moses life:
      - (a) forty years in Egypt
      - (b) forty years in the desert

- (c) forty years leading Israel
- (4) Jesus fasted forty days, Matt. 4:2; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2
- c. Note (by means of a concordance) the number of times this number appears in time designation in the Bible!
- 7. Seventy – round number for people:
  - a. Israel, Exod. 1:5
  - b. seventy elders, Exod. 24:1,9
  - c. eschatological, Dan. 9:2,24
  - d. mission team, Luke 10:1,17
  - e. forgiveness (70x7), Matt. 18:22
- B. Good references
  - 1. John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology*
  - 2. D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 50:4-6**

**<sup>4</sup>When the days of mourning for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your sight, please speak to Pharaoh, saying, <sup>5</sup>'My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am about to die; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father; then I will return.'" <sup>6</sup>Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear."**

**50:4 “favor in your sight”** This is an idiom of approval (cf. 18:3; 47:29; Exod. 33:13). This idiom is always used of an inferior asking a superior (i.e., Ruth 2:13). Here Joseph is showing respect for Pharaoh.

**50:5-6** In v. 5 Joseph shares his oath (BDB 989, KB 1396, two *Hiphil* PERFECTS, vv. 5,6) to his father, Jacob (#1,2) and a promise to return (#3).

- 1. go up, BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense
- 2. bury me, BDB 868, KB 1064, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
- 3. I will return, BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* COHORTATIVE

In v. 6 Pharaoh responds to his request related to his oath.

- 1. go up, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
- 2. bury, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

**50:5 “dug”** The rabbinical Midrash (Peshitta and REV) replaces this term with “bought” (cf. Gen. 23:17-20; 47:27-31; 49:29-32). The two Hebrew roots are the same

- 1. dig, BDB 500 I, cf. 26:25; Num. 21:18
- 2. buy, BDB 500 II, cf. Deut. 2:6

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 50:7-14**

**<sup>7</sup>So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, <sup>8</sup>and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father's household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds**



in the land of Goshen. <sup>9</sup>There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company. <sup>10</sup>When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed seven days mourning for his father. <sup>11</sup>Now when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians." Therefore it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan. <sup>12</sup>Thus his sons did for him as he had charged them; <sup>13</sup>for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. <sup>14</sup>After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

**50:7-8** Verses 7-8 show how large a funeral procession went to Canaan.

1. Joseph
2. the servants of Pharaoh
3. the elders of his household
4. the elders of the land of Egypt
5. household of Joseph
6. Joseph's brothers
7. Jacob's household
8. a military escort, v. 9

Verse 9 implies a military escort. It may also have been Pharaoh's way to assure the return of his best administrator/advisor.

**50:8** "They left only their little ones and their flocks" This was to assure their return!

▣ "in the land of Goshen" See notes at 45:10; 46:28.

**50:10** "Atad" Literally this is "thorns" (BDB 31). The rabbis say it was a protective hedge. This site is unknown. Jerome says it was located near Jericho. It was the site of a ritual mourning, not necessarily the site of the burial!

▣ The intensity of their grief is described by

1. they lamented there
2. with a very great
3. and mournful
4. lamentation
5. observed seven days
6. note v. 11

▣ "beyond the Jordan" This phrase, "in the region of" (BDB 81 CONSTRUCT BDB 719 I, cf. v. 11), does not determine the east or west bank. It depends on the location of the speaker.

**50:11** This is a play on the word "Abel" (BDB 5 II), which means "meadow" (lit. "grow green grass"), and "Abel" (BDB 5 I), which means "mourning" (AB lists a third option, "watercourse," p. 376).

**50:12-14** This is a summary statement describing their promise to Jacob.

**50:13 “the cave”** This cave is the one referred to in 23:16-20.

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 50:15-21**

**<sup>15</sup>When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" <sup>16</sup>So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, <sup>17</sup>Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. <sup>18</sup>Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." <sup>19</sup>But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? <sup>20</sup>As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. <sup>21</sup>So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.**

**50:15** The intensity of the brothers' concern is expressed in

1. the VERB “bear a grudge” (BDB 966, KB 1316), which was used earlier of Esau (27:41) and alluded to in 49:23. It is also used by Job 16:9; 30:21. It is a very strong VERB.
2. the phrase “and pay us back in full,” which is a *Hiphil* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a *Hiphil* IMPERFECT of the same root (BDB 996, KB 1427).

**50:16-17** This introduces an unknown quote from Jacob which the brothers were quoting to assure Joseph's favor.

**50:17** This verse sets the stage for Joseph's faith statement in vv. 19-20. The brothers' fear and desire for forgiveness can be seen in

1. please forgive, BDB 609, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. I beg you (NASB expansion)
3. the transgression and sin of your brothers (cf. 37:18-28)
4. (we) did wrong
5. please forgive the transgression
6. v. 18

The only reasons for their request were

1. Jacob's words, vv. 16-17
2. they are servants of the God of Jacob, v. 17

**50:19**

**NASB, NKJV,**

**NRSV**

**“for am I in God's place”**

**TEV**

**“I can't put myself in the place of God”**

**NJB**

**“is it for me to put myself in God's place”**

**LXX**

**“for I am God's”**

**Peshitta**

**“for I am a servant of God”**

**JPSOA**

**“Am I a substitute for God”**

This was Joseph's way of saying that he saw himself as part of God's method for preserving Abraham's family (cf. 45:5-15; Ps. 105:16-24)! He explains this in v. 20. He did not see himself as acting as judge, only God can do this! The question in Hebrew expects a “no” answer. This same expression is found in 30:2.

**50:20 “you meant evil against me”** Joseph did not cover over the brothers’ sin, but saw the “unseen hand” of God in his life and circumstances! Oh that we could, by faith, recognize the “unseen hand” in our lives!

For a good article on God using the sin of humans to accomplish His purposes, see Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, second ed., pp. 425-426.

▣ **“God meant it for good”** This is a good example of the meaning of Romans 8:28-29.

**50:21** Joseph tells them what he will do for the family.

1. do not be afraid, BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense, as in v. 19
2. I will provide for you, BDB 465, KB 463, *Pilpel* IMPERFECT, cf. 45:11; 47:12
3. I will provide for your little ones, BDB 465, KB 463, *Pilpel* IMPERFECT, cf. 45:11; 47:12
4. he comforted them, BDB 636, KB 688, *Piel* IMPERFECT
5. spoke kindly to them (lit. “speak to the heart,” cf. 34:3; Jdgs. 19:3; Ruth 2:13)

**NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 50:22-26**

**<sup>22</sup>Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. <sup>23</sup>Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. <sup>24</sup>Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." <sup>25</sup>Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." <sup>26</sup>So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.**

**50:22 “one hundred and ten years”** This was the ideal age in Egyptian literature of the period.

**50:23 “Machir”** Also see Joshua 17:1 and Judges 5:14. The name may be related to the similar root for “merchandise” or “value” (BDB 569).

▣ **“born on Joseph’s knee”** Obviously this was not to be taken literally. It is a cultural ANE idiom used for adoption (cf. 30:3; 48:12) or receiving someone into the family.

**50:24 “God will surely take care of you”** Joseph trusted in God’s promised care for Abraham’s family (cf. Gen. 15:16)! Joseph was God’s instrument, but as he passed from this life, God would raise up others (i.e., Moses, Aaron, Joshua, etc.).

Joseph’s words are intensified by the *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and *Qal* IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 823, KB 955, lit, “visit,” used in a specialized sense of God’s personal presence and care, cf. Exod. 3:16; 4:31; Ruth 1:6; Zeph. 2:7). This form is found in both vv. 24,25!

**50:25 “carry my bones”** He knew they would return to the promised land and he wanted to be buried there just as his father had been (cf. Exod. 13:19; Josh. 24:32).

**50:26 “coffin”** This word (BDB 75) can refer to

1. ark (of the covenant, i.e., Exod. 25:22; 26:33; 30:6; Num. 10:33; Deut. 10:8; 31:9; Josh 3:3), a religious sacred box
2. coffin, only here (Israelites did not use coffins)
3. chest, for money (i.e., II Kgs. 12:10; II Chr. 24:8,10,11)

The other word translated in English “ark” (BDB 1061) refers to

1. Noah’s ark (i.e., Gen. 6:14)
2. Moses’ papyrus crib (i.e., Exod. 2:3)

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

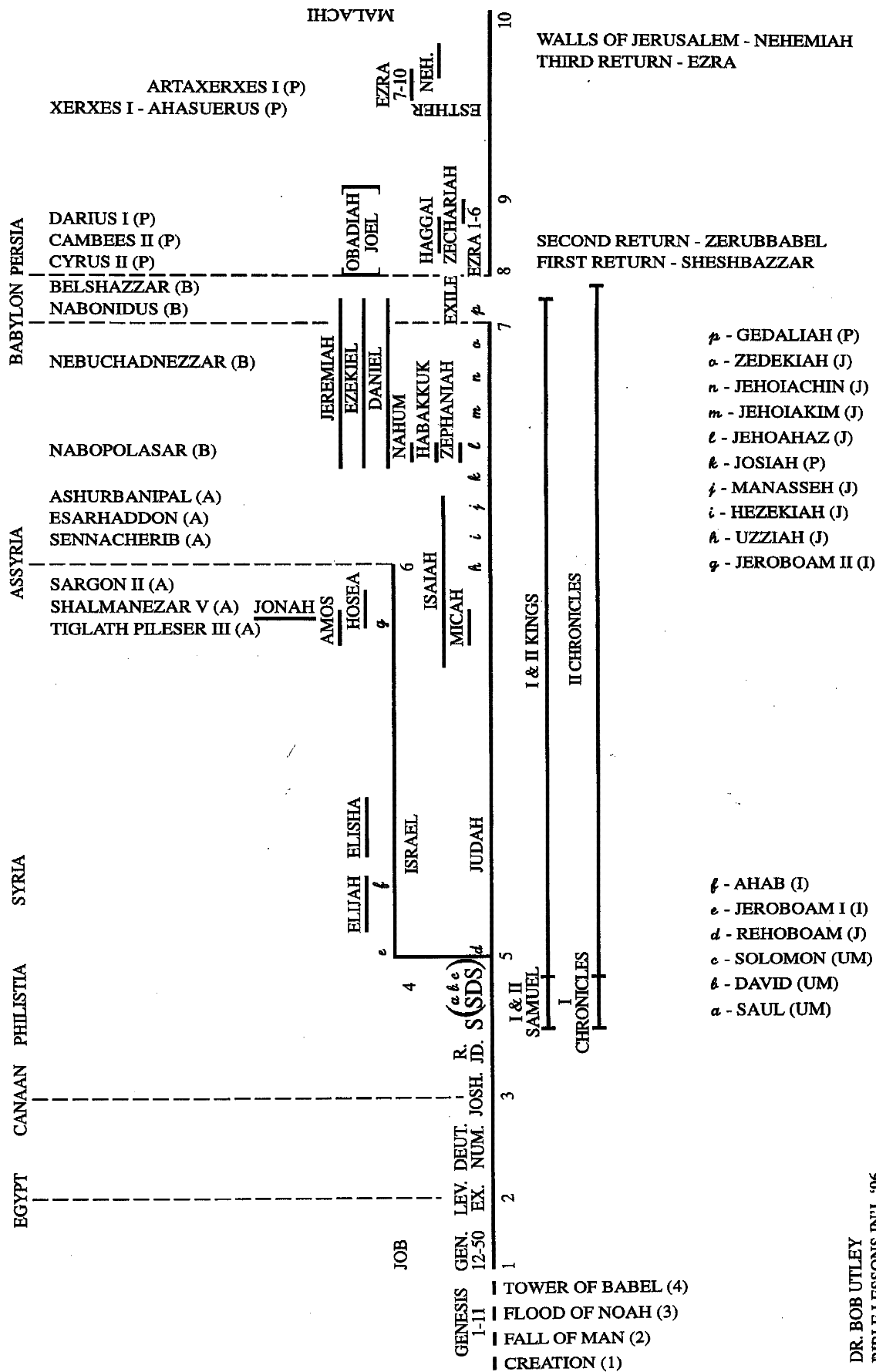
This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why was Jacob given an Egyptian royal funeral?
2. Why did Joseph’s brothers distrust him?
3. Why are vv. 19-20, when compared to 45:5-15, so significant?

# **APPENDIX ONE**

## **CHART OF THE WHOLE OLD TESTAMENT (on next page)**



## Undateable Events (Genesis 1-11)

1. Creation (Gen. 1-2)
2. Fall of Man (Gen. 3)
3. Flood of Noah Day (Gen. 6-9)
4. Tower of Babel (Gen. 10-11)

## Dateable Events

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Patriarchal Period (Gen. 12-50 and Job) | 2000 B.C.         |
| 2. Exodus from Egypt (Exodus)              | 1445 or 1290 B.C. |
| 3. Conquest of Canaan (Joshua)             | 1440 or 1250 B.C. |
| 4. United Monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon)  | 1000 B.C.         |
| 5. Divided Monarchy (Rehoboam-Jeroboam I)  | 922 B.C.          |
| 6. Fall of Samaria (Israel) to Assyria     | 722 B.C.          |
| 7. Fall of Jerusalem (Judah) to Babylon    | 586 B.C.          |
| 8. Decree of Cyrus (Persia) to Return      | 538 B.C.          |
| 9. Temple Rebuilt                          | 516 B.C.          |
| 10. Close of OT Period (Malachi)           | 430 B.C.          |

## List of Kings

- |                    |                                  |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| A. United Monarchy | D. Assyria                       |
| 1. Saul (a)        | 1. Tiglath Pileser III (745-727) |
| 2. David (b)       | 2. Shalmanesar V (727-722)       |
| 3. Solomon (c)     | 3. Sargon II (722-705)           |
| B. Israel          | 4. Sennacherib (705-681)         |
| 1. Jeroboam I (e)  | 5. Esarhaddon (681-669)          |
| 2. Ahab (f)        | 6. Ashurbanipal (669-663)        |
| 3. Jeroboam II (g) | E. Babylon                       |
| C. Judah           | 1. Nabopolassar (626-605)        |
| 1. Rehoboam (d)    | 2. Nebuchadnezzar (605-562)      |
| 2. Uzziah (h)      | 3. Nabonidus (556-539)           |
| 3. Hezekiah (i)    | 4. Belshazzar                    |
| 4. Manasseh (j)    | F. Persia                        |
| 5. Josiah (k)      | 1. Cyrus II (550-530)            |
| 6. Jehoahaz (l)    | 2. Cambes II (530-522)           |
| 7. Jehoiakim (m)   | 3. Darius I (522-486)            |
| 8. Jehoiachin (n)  | 4. Xerxes I (486-465)            |
| 9. Zedekiah (o)    | 5. Artaxerxes I (465-424)        |
| 10. Gedaliah (p)   |                                  |

## **APPENDIX TWO**

### **DOCTRINAL STATEMENT**

I do not particularly care for statements of faith or creeds. I prefer to affirm the Bible itself. However, I realize that a statement of faith will provide those who are unfamiliar with me a way to evaluate my doctrinal perspective. In our day of so much theological error and deception, the following brief summary of my theology is offered.

1. The Bible, both the Old and New Testament, is the inspired, infallible, authoritative, eternal Word of God. It is the self-revelation of God recorded by men under supernatural leadership. It is our only source of clear truth about God and His purposes. It is also the only source of faith and practice for His church.

2. There is only one eternal, creator, redeemer God. He is the creator of all things, visible and invisible. He has revealed Himself as loving and caring although He is also fair and just. He has revealed Himself in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Spirit; truly separate and yet the same in essence.

3. God is actively in control of His world. There is both an eternal plan for His creation that is unalterable and an individually focused one that allows human free will. Nothing happens without God's knowledge and permission, yet He allows individual choices both among angels and humans. Jesus is the Father's Elect Man and all are potentially elect in Him. God's foreknowledge of events does not reduce humans to a determined pre-written script. All of us are responsible for our thoughts and deeds.

4. Mankind, though created in God's image and free from sin, chose to rebel against God. Although tempted by a supernatural agent, Adam and Eve were responsible for their willful self-centeredness. Their rebellion has affected humanity and creation. We are all in need of God's mercy and grace both for our corporate condition in Adam and our individual volitional rebellion.

5. God has provided a means of forgiveness and restoration for fallen humanity. Jesus Christ, God's unique son, became a man, lived a sinless life, and by means of his substitutionary death, paid the penalty for mankind's sin. He is the only way to restoration and fellowship with God. There is no other means of salvation except through faith in His finished work.

6. Each of us must personally receive God's offer of forgiveness and restoration in Jesus. This is accomplished by means of volitional trust in God's promises through Jesus and a willful turning from known sin.

7. All of us are fully forgiven and restored based upon our trust in Christ and repentance from sin. However, the evidence for this new relationship is seen in a changed, and changing, life. The goal of God for humanity is not only heaven someday, but Christlikeness now. Those who are truly redeemed, though occasionally sinning, will continue in faith and repentance throughout their lives.

8. The Holy Spirit is "the other Jesus." He is present in the world to lead the lost to Christ and develop Christlikeness in the saved. The gifts of the Spirit are given at salvation. They are the life and ministry of Jesus divided among His body, the Church. The gifts which are basically the attitudes and motives of Jesus need to be motivated by the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit is active in our day as He was in the biblical times.

9. The Father has made the resurrected Jesus Christ the Judge of all things. He will return to earth to judge all mankind. Those who have trusted Jesus and whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will receive their eternal glorified bodies at His return. They will be with Him forever. However, those who have refused to respond to God's truth will be separated eternally from the joys of fellowship with the Triune God. They will be condemned along with the Devil and his angels.

This is surely not complete or thorough but I hope it will give you the theological flavor of my heart. I like the statement:

“In essentials—unity, In peripherals—freedom, In all things—love.”