

Genesis

Purpose

Though many dispute Moses as the author of the Torah, Scriptures affirm his authorship (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:9; Josh. 1:8; 2 Kg. 21:8). Likewise, Jesus Christ attributed authorship to Moses (Matt. 19:8; Mark 7:10; Luke 18:29-31; 20:37; 24:27; John 7:19).¹

Torah is the Hebrew name for the first five books of the Old Testament. The name means “teachings” or “instructions” and was considered the foundational teachings of the Jewish faith and, later, the Christian faith. The purpose of the Torah is to teach that people can experience God’s blessing by trusting Him and by obeying His will.

Genesis is in the Scriptures primarily to teach this lesson—people are able to enjoy a personal relationship with God and realize their own fulfillment as human beings only through trust in and obedience to God. Genesis reveals God as one who is sovereign over and transcends His creation, yet enters it to initiate a relationship with His people. Thus, Genesis’ primary focus is that God is faithful to His promises and powerful enough to bring them to fulfillment.²

Genesis’ purpose is communicated through three main events. First, God reveals Himself as the sole and sovereign creator of the universe in which He places His crowning achievement—humanity, made as His image—in order to represent Himself and be in a relationship with Him. This is, in the second event, ruined through humanity’s rebellion against His law, which casts creation and humanity into a fallen state, separated from their sovereign creator. However, God does not abandon His creation or representatives; through the Abrahamic Covenant—the third event—He initiates the foundation of redeeming both His creation and humanity. Thus it is the Abrahamic Covenant established in Genesis that becomes the seed from which the redemption of the Kingdom of God and His image grows through the rest of the Scriptures and finds its fulfillment in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Themes

Though the Kingdom of God is not specifically mentioned until the New Testament, the concept is certainly present in the Old Testament, and the New Testament is entirely dependent on these concepts. The concept of the Kingdom of God can be found in four motifs woven through Genesis: seed, land, God’s law, and the ruler.

“The book of Genesis is concerned principally in identifying both the people who submit to God’s commands and the land that sustains them. The rest of the Pentateuch focuses mainly on God’s law, while the Deuteronomistic history (especially Joshua-Kings) develops the theme of the nations’ ruler.”³

¹ Jesus Christ did not specifically say that Moses wrote Genesis, but in His day Jews regarded the Torah as a whole unit and recognized Moses as its author. Thus they would have understood what Jesus said about any of the five books of Moses as an affirmation of Moses’ authorship of them all. Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* is a rebuttal of the denial that Moses wrote the Torah. No one has discredited it, though liberal scholars have ignored it.

² See Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 1.

³ Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, pp. 45-46. The four motifs that follow are taken from the idea developed on pp. 46-54.

The Seed

God first establishes His creation through the concept of the “seed” through the notion of “after its own kind.” Just as the seed of plants grows according to its own kind (Gen. 1:11-12), so do the animals according to their own kind (Gen. 1:21, 24) and humans to their own kind (Gen. 1:28). However, God created humans to reflect *Himself* (Gen. 1:26-28) by creating them as His image. Through the divine mandate—to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28)—they were to duplicate His image, according to their own kind. As they eat the forbidden fruit (seed) they establish a) themselves as their own lawmakers separate from God and b) a rival kingdom (seed). But the gracious God intervenes by putting enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of humanity (Gen. 3:15). Thus, the two rival kingdoms have been established: Satan’s seed, to which humanity will always be drawn through its fallen nature; and God’s seed, which is implanted in humanity by being made in the image of God and through His redemption of its soul (Gen. 3:15, 21). This is seen through the seed of Abel, which reproduces Eve’s love for God, and the seed of Cain, which reproduces Eve’s enmity against God.

Genesis begins to develop the genealogies (seeds) of humanity until it comes to Abraham, whose offspring God will choose to bless, declaring, “I will make you into a great nation” (Gen. 12:2) and “I am going to make you a father of many nations and I will make you extremely fruitful” (Gen. 17:5). This promise will be fulfilled physically, through his biological descendants (Isaac, Ishmael, the Midianites, the Edomites, etc.), and spiritually, through those who reproduce his faith.

Psalms 8:4-6 anticipates many nations becoming part of the seed of Abraham. Jesus asserts His authority over all the nations as the seed of Abraham, and He commissions His disciples to bring all nations into His family by making them disciples in His name (Matt. 28:18-20). Even though Abraham’s offspring, Israel, had the first opportunity to represent God’s kingdom (Acts 3:25), it is after their rejection of Jesus as the rightful seed that God turns to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 18:6). Paul makes this point clear, in that the true seed of Abraham is his spiritual descendants who will become the kingdom of God (Gal. 3:15-29; Rom. 11). Finally, using language reminiscent of Gen. 15:5, Rev. 7:9 reveals “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, and people and language standing before the throne and in front of the lamb,” praising God. Thus, God has redeemed and restored His seed back to Himself.

The Land

By gathering the primeval waters God reveals the dry land, to which He brings life with the vegetation, animals, and humanity. He then places humanity in a garden that is seen as a unique temple-garden and where God’s presence dwells with humanity. Because of humanity’s sin, they are cast out of His land and presence. Thus, throughout the rest of Scriptures God’s land will be directly related to His presence. Through the sins of Adam, Cain, and the Tower of Babel, humanity is seen constantly as being scattered and without a land in which to belong.

God then comes to Abraham and promises him a land (Gen. 12:1) that is unlike all others—one flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8)—where Abraham’s offspring will be protected and sustained. This promise of land is fulfilled several times but never consummated. Joshua will lead the offspring of Abraham into this land, and there they will dwell with the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle, and later the temple, becomes God’s dwelling place that had been lost in the garden. Dwelling among His chosen people in His chosen land, God begins to establish His kingdom on

earth. Later, because of their sin and rebellion, the people will be exiled from this land. However, God promises them a day that they will be restored to the land. Though Israel will physically return to the land through Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, they will not truly inherit the land until the coming of Jesus Christ. Christ teaches that He is the temple of God, that we are to dwell in Him, and that He will then dwell in us (John 14-15). We are to then take Him to the ends of the earth, claiming the world in His name (Acts 1:8). Hebrews 11:39-40 and 13:14 make it clear that the believers' land is not an earthly one but a heavenly one. Ultimately, Christ is seen as returning to this world to usher His people into the heavenly land, which is a restoration of what was lost in the garden and with the tree of life restored (Rev. 21-22).

God's Law

God is portrayed as the supreme lawgiver through the fact that He is the sovereign creator of all things. When humanity chose to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they rejected God's law and set themselves up as their own lawmakers. Humanity is thus seen as being in rebellion to God's law through Cain, the flood generation, and the incident at the Tower of Babel.

It is through the Abrahamic Covenant that God begins to bring a select people back under His law. It is Moses as the Lawgiver who represents God to the people and reveals His standard to the people through the Mosaic Covenant. It is in the context of the people accepting God's law through Moses that God is for the first time called "King" (Deut. 33:3-5; Ex. 15:18; Num. 23:21). God, in return, calls the people "a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6). They are to mediate God's law to the world as His representatives. Because of the people's unwillingness to obey the law of God, however, He removed them from the land of His presence through the exile.

During this time of exile God reveals that He will make a new covenant with His people—one in which the law will be written on their hearts (Jer. 31:33-34; 2 Cor. 3:3). Christ is seen as the fulfillment of this law, as the new lawgiver, and whom His people are to obey (Rom. 6).

The Ruler

Just as God is seen as the lawgiver, He is also seen as the supreme ruler by the fact that He is the sole creator (Gen. 1-2). It is His rule that Adam and Eve reject when they choose to submit to the created, Satan and themselves, rather than to the Creator. It is through the Abrahamic Covenant that Abraham submits himself to the kingship of God (Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22) and becomes a nation under God.

When the people reject God as their ruler (1 Sam. 8:6-8) God gives them their own earthly king to rule on His behalf. It is through the Davidic Covenant that God establishes an eternal dynasty to be His rulers on earth (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17; Ps. 89) and who are even spoken of as sitting on "the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh" (1 Chron. 28:5). However, these rulers continually fail to represent God, and the prophets begin to look forward to an ideal king that will come one day—the Messiah.

Jesus Christ comes as this ruler (Mark 8:29; Luke 2:11; 9:20; John 1:19-34; 11:27) and begins to establish His kingdom on earth (Philippians 2), and He is now seated on the throne of God as ruler over all creation (Col. 2; Heb. 1:1-4). One day He will return and ultimately establish His kingdom on earth and bring all things under His rule (Rev. 20).

Structure

The structure of Genesis is based on the repeating Hebrew word *toledot*, which means “the account of” and occurs ten times in Genesis as the introduction to a new division in the book. Each *toledot* introduces a genealogy and then gives the account of the people that follow.

Introduction (1:1-2:3)

The account of Sky and Land (2:4-4:26)

The account of Adam (5:1-6:8)

The account of Noah (6:9-9:29)

The account of the Sons of Noah (10:1-11:9)

The account of Shem (11:10-26)

The account of Terah (11:27-25:11)

The account of Ishmael (25:12-18)

The account of Isaac (25:19-35:29)

The account of Esau (36:1-43)

The account of Jacob (37:1-50:26)

Outline

- I. The Primeval Events (1:1-11:26)
 - A. The Creation of the Sky and Land (1:1-2:3)
 - B. The Creation of Man and Woman (2:4-25)
 - C. The Temptation and Fall of Creation (3:1-24)
 - D. The Story of Cain and Abel (4:1-26)
 - E. From Adam to Noah (5:1-6:8)
 - F. Noah and the Flood (6:9-9:29)
 - G. The Tower of Babel (10:1-11:26)
- II. The Life of Abraham (11:27-25:18)
 - A. The Promise to Abram (11:27-13:2)
 - B. The Blessings of Victory (13:3-14:24)
 - C. The Cutting of the Covenant (15:1-21)
 - D. The Birth of Ishmael (16:1-16)
 - E. The Sign of the Covenant (17:1-27)
 - F. The Announcements of the Lord (18:1-33)
 - G. The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:1-38)
 - H. Abraham and Abimelech (20:1-18)
 - I. The Birth of Isaac (21:1-34)

- J. The Sacrifice of Isaac (22:1-24)
- K. The Death of Sarah (23:1-20)
- L. A Wife for Isaac (24:1-67)
- M. The Death of Abraham (25:1-18)
- III. The Life of Isaac and Jacob (25:19-37:1)
 - A. The Birthright of Esau (25:19-34)
 - B. Isaac, Rebekah, and Abimelech (26:1-33)
 - C. Jacob Takes Esau's Blessing (26:34-28:22)
 - D. Laban Outwits Jacob (29:1-30)
 - E. The Growth of Jacob's House (29:31-31:55)
 - F. Jacob and Esau Are Reconciled (32:1-33:17)
 - G. Dinah and the Shechemites (33:18-34:31)
 - H. Israel Fulfills his Vow (35:1-37:1)
- IV. The Life of Joseph (37:2-50:26)
 - A. Joseph Rejected by his Brothers (37:2-36)
 - B. Judah Sins Against Tamar (38:1-30)
 - C. Joseph's Rulership over Egypt (39:1-41:57)
 - D. Joseph's Brothers Come to Egypt (42:1-43:34)
 - E. The Family of Israel Reconciled (44:1-46:27)
 - F. Israel in Egypt (46:28-47:31)
 - G. Jacob's Blessing (48:1-49:28)
 - H. Jacob and Joseph's Death and Burial (49:29-50:26)

I. The Primeval Events (1:1-11:26)

Genesis 1-11 provides an introduction to the book of Genesis and the Torah as a whole.

“His theological perspective can be summarized in two points. First, the author intends to draw a line connecting the God of the Fathers and the God of the Sinai covenant with the God who created the world. Second, the author intends to show that the call of the patriarchs and the Sinai covenant have as their ultimate goal the reestablishment of God's original purpose in Creation.”⁴

“Gen 1-11 as we read it is a commentary, often highly critical, on ideas current in the ancient world about the natural and supernatural world. Both individual stories as well as the final completed work seem to be a polemic against many of the commonly received notions about the gods and man. But the clear polemical thrust of Gen 1—11 must not obscure the fact that at certain points biblical and extrabiblical thought are in clear agreement. Indeed Genesis and the ancient Near East probably have more in common with each other than either has with modern secular thought.”⁵

The structure of the primeval history of Genesis forms an alternating structure wherein the events of Genesis 1:1-6:8 parallel the events of 6:9-11:32.⁶

Creation story: first beginning; divine blessing (1:1-2:3)	Flood story: reversal of creation; new beginning; divine blessing (6:9-9:19)
Sin of Adam: nakedness; seeing/covering nakedness; curse (2:4-3:24)	Sin of Noah: nakedness, seeing/covering nakedness; curse (9:20-29)
No descendants of murdered younger, righteous son Abel (4:1-16)	Descendants of younger, righteous son Japheth (10:1-5)
Descendants of sinful son Cain (4:17-26)	Descendants of sinful son Ham (10:6-20)
Descendants of chosen son Seth: ten generations from Adam to Noah (5:1-32)	Descendants of chosen son Shem: ten generations from Noah to Terah (10:21-32)
Downfall: unlawful union (6:1-4)	Downfall: rebellious union (Tower of Babel) (11:1-19)
Brief introduction to Noah, through whom God saves humanity (6:5-8)	Brief introduction of Abraham, through whom God will bless humanity (11:27-32)

A. The Creation of the Sky and Land (1:1-2:3)

In verse 1 the phrase “in the beginning God created” or “when God created,” states quite clearly that God was the one who existed before anything else in the universe. This phrase also communicates the beginning of time and matter.

The word for “God” here is the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which is the generic term for god. The best understanding seems to be the “strong one” or the “mighty one.” The idea that it

⁴ John H. Sailhamer. “Genesis,” in *Genesis-Numbers*, vol. 2 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 19.

⁵ Gordon J. Wenham. *Genesis 1–15*, p. xlvii.

⁶ See Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 19.

communicates is that of an all-powerful and sovereign God who is king over the whole world. (See the *Meaning of the Name Elohim* excursus.)

The verb for “create” (*bara*) is used in Scriptures exclusively for the activity of God and describes His activity of creating something new, fresh, and perfect. Contrary to common belief, the verb does not describe something created *out of nothing* (see v. 27 where it refers to the creation of man). It often stresses forming anew, reforming, or renewing (Ps. 51:10; Isa. 43:15; 65:17).⁷

The phrase “heavens and earth” should be understood as “sky and land.” The Hebrew word used for “heaven” (*shamayim*) is the same word used for “sky” in verse 8. When *shamayim* is in the singular form, it refers to heaven, and when it is in the plural, it refers to the sky. In both verses it is in the plural form. The Hebrew word for “earth” (*eretz*) is the same word used for “land” in verse 10. The author assumes that heaven already exists with the opening phrase “In the beginning God.” Here he is more interested in giving an account of the material realm – not the spiritual. The phrase “sky and land” forms a merism, referring to the entire ordered universe (Jer. 33:25), including the sky and land and everything in them (Gen. 2:1; Deut. 3:24; Isa. 65:17; Jer. 23:24).⁸

There are two major ways that verse 1 can be understood in relation to the rest of the creation account:⁹

- Verse 1 describes *part* of what God did on day one (1:1-5). It is the creation of matter, which will then be formed in the next six days. He created a lump of “clay” that would later be fashioned into the world that we now know.
- Verse 1 is a topic statement that *summarizes* what God did during the six-day creation account (1:2-31). It is not an account of creation itself. This view does not deny that God created everything out of nothing (John 1:3); rather, it simply says that Genesis is not making that affirmation (it presupposes the existence of pre-existent matter).

1. How is the earth described in verses 2a?

In verse 2 the Hebrew word for “Spirit of God” (*ruach*) means “wind” or “breath.” This word “wind” is often used in the sense of a fluttering bird that hovers over her young in protection or incubation (Deut. 32:11) and is also portrayed as having wings (Hos. 4:19; Ps. 18). Yet the word *ruach* can also refer to the divine spirit that energizes and

⁷ See Allen P. Ross. *Creation and Blessing*, pp. 105-06.

⁸ Merism is two parts for the whole, referring to the entire ordered universe, including the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. Merism is like the phrase “flesh and bone;” here, the two parts, “flesh” and “bone,” are used together to refer to the whole body of a person. Thus the “heavens and the earth” is a phrase that refers to everything mentioned in the six-day creation account.

⁹ Both of these views are held by a large number of scholars and seem to both be grammatically possible. Which of these views one holds has a lot to do with how one sees the whole creation account in Genesis 1 (see *The Three Views of Creation* excursus).

empowers God's people (Gen. 41:38; Ex. 31:3; 35:31; Num. 24:2; 1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6; 19:20, 23; Ezk. 11:24; 2 Chr. 15:1; 24:20). Since the wind here is seen as belonging to God ("wind of God"), it is likely that both ideas of wind are in view here.

2. What is the contrast between verse 2a and 2b?

3. What are the repeating phrases in verses 1-31?^{10 11}

"Perhaps nowhere else in the ancient world is such a positive evaluation placed on created matter and earthly life as here. Indeed, the Bible asserts unequivocally the goodness of all that God made and thus stands in sharp contrast to those religions, which regard the material world as evil and detrimental to the 'spiritual' nature of humans. As Walther Zimmerli puts it, 'the whole thrust of the Old Testament proclamation guards against any flight in a beyond which is turned away from the world.'"¹²

The Hebrew word for "day" (*yom*) can mean a literal day or a period of time (e.g., "the *day* that Britain ruled the seas"). It is argued that *yom* should be seen as a literal, 24-hour day because when *yom* is used elsewhere in the Bible with a number it means a literal 24-hour day. However, those examples are found in the *historical* genre, whereas Genesis 1 is more *poetic*, so that rule does not necessarily apply here. Furthermore, evening and morning do not always refer to periods within a literal day (e.g., "the *morning and evening* of one's life").

In verse 3 light is created in response to the darkness in order to put the darkness in its proper place. Remember that there is no discussion of how the darkness came about, only that it was not good and that the light of God has overcome it (Jn. 1:5). Light symbolizes life and blessing of various sorts (Ps. 19:1-6; 27:1; 49:19; 97:11). Since the sun is created after the light, the chronology emphasizes that God is the ultimate source of light. This serves as a polemic against the pagan religions wherein their sun gods are the source of light and life.

¹⁰ Ten times in this chapter the decree of God in creation is expressed. The spoken decree of the Lord also introduces the Law, the words and commandments from the Lord that must be obeyed. The ten decrees of God in this chapter anticipate the ten words in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:2-17). God's spoken word is expressed in Ps. 33:6, 9.

¹¹ In the nomadic times of Israel, the day began with the sunset in the evening and ended with the sunset of the next evening. Later, when Israelite culture began to develop cities, the day began at midnight, but the evening and morning pattern remained with consideration to the Hebrew festivals [e.g., the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:32) and the Sabbath].

¹² Foster R. McCurley. *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, p. 15.

In verses 6-8, notice that God creates an expanse in order to separate the waters below from the waters above. It is the expanse, not the waters above, that God calls *sky*. The sky in the Bible was viewed as hard as a mirror (Job 37:18) and like a canopy (Isa. 40:22). The Hebrews considered the sky as a heavenly ocean since that is how it appeared and since water rained down from it. Not only did the sky form a physical canopy that held the rainwaters in check, but it was also seen as a metaphysical barrier that separated the spiritual realm from the physical realm.¹³

Verse 14 should be understood as “in the expanse of the sky” (NET, NIV) not “in the heavens” (NASB, KJV). The description is a pre-scientific view of the world and is a phenomenal (a philosophy known or derived through the senses rather than through the mind) description, describing what *appears* to be the case. The sun and the moon are not, scientifically, actually in the sky (below the clouds), but they appear that way from the viewpoint of a person standing on the earth. Even today we use similar phenomenological expressions, such as “the sun is rising” or “the stars in the sky.”¹⁴

In verses 14-17 the sun and moon are nameless objects designed by the one Creator God to serve humanity; the pagan idea of them being supreme gods is completely stripped away in the Genesis account of creation. The luminaries were given three functions: to separate the day from the night, to be signs for the seasons and days and years, and to serve as a light upon the earth.

In the ancient Near East the stars were seen as divine beings who controlled the natural realm (Num. 24:17; Deut. 4:19; 1 Kg. 22:19-22; Job 1; 38:7, 33; Ps. 82; Isa. 6; 24:21; 40:26; Dan. 7:10; Rev. 4; Enoch 14:22-23). In verse 14 this notion that the stars *bring about* the seasons of the year is replaced by the notion that they are merely “signs” or markers for the seasons.

In verse 20 “across the expanse of the sky” (NET) in the Hebrew says “in front of [literally, ‘on the face of’] the firmament of the sky.” Here the birds of the air are seen as moving through the “waters of the sky” in parallel to the fish in the “waters of the earth.”

In verse 21 the term “the great sea creatures” comes from the Hebrew word *tanninim*, which is used of the snake (Ex. 7:9) and the sea serpent (Isa. 27:1) in other places in the Bible. The primordial sea monster that is violently cut up in other places in the Bible is transformed into a frolicking sea creature, which is included among the other created beings (v. 21). God shows His sovereignty by stating that they are created beings and are dependent upon and ultimately serve God. Their arrival on the sixth day show their insignificance compared to the other parts of creation.

In verse 26 the personal phrase “let us” has replaced the impersonal “let there be,” showing a more divine intent with the creation of humanity. The formula “it was so” is

¹³ Throughout the ancient Near East and in the Bible, the sea is seen as a chaotic and evil entity that needs to be subdued. However, in Genesis 1 it is simply stated that God separated the waters under the firmament from the waters above the firmament. The sea is already subdued, and God is controlling it to bring His creation into existence.

¹⁴ See Allen Ross. *Creation and Blessing*, pp. 109-10, and Bruce Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 62.

replaced by a threefold blessing (vv. 26-28), showing that this is the climax of creation, where man is seen as the apex of creation.¹⁵

4. What does it mean to be created “as the image of God,” according to verses 26-30?¹⁶

In verse 17 the word “man” should be translated as “mankind.” Man is not portrayed as an individual until chapter 2. Here God creates mankind in the image of God as male and female (as seen in verse 27c). This verse demands equality between the female and the male, for both are created in the image of God.

“First, God's deliberation shows that he has decided to create man differently from any of the other creatures—in his image and likeness. God and man share a *likeness* that is not shared by other creatures. This apparently means that a relationship of close fellowship can exist between God and man that is unlike the relationship of God with the rest of his creation. Secondly, in Gen 1, man, the image bearer, is the object of God's blessing. According to the account of creation in Gen 1, the chief purpose of God in creating man is to bless him.”¹⁷

5. How does God deal with the four negative descriptors used in verse 2a?

On the first three days of creation, the passage tells us that God began to form the void into something that He could fill. On the last three days of creation, God fills that which He formed. The number of creative acts also increases with each triad, starting with a single creative act (days 1 and 4) to one creative act with two aspects (days 2 and 5) to two separate acts (days 3 and 6).¹⁸

¹⁵ See Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 64.

¹⁶ In the ancient Near East when a king would conquer a nation and then have to move on, he would erect an image of himself in that conquered nation as a reminder that it was he who was the sovereign ruler, even though he was not present. Similarly, idols were believed to possess the spirit of their god, as a representation of his rule, thus idols were made as the image of the gods (see I. Hart. “Genesis 1:1-2:3: As a Prologue to the Book of Genesis.” *TynBul*, p. 318.)

¹⁷ John H. Sailhamer. “Exegetical Notes: Genesis 1:1–2:4a.” *Trinity Journal*, p. 80.

¹⁸ See Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 58.

Formlessness		Emptiness	
Day	Item Created	Day	Item Created
1	Light from darkness	4	Lights for day and night
2	Sky divides waters above & below	5	Creatures of the water and air
3	Land and plants	6	Creatures of the dry land and man

6. How is the seventh day (2:1-3) unique from the previous six days?

In verse 2:2-3 there are 35 words in the Hebrew texts of these verses, which is a multiple of seven. The three middle clauses (2a, 2b, 3a) have seven words each (in the Hebrew) and the adjective “seventh” is in each one.

We can learn six things from this chapter of how God is different from all the other pagan gods of the time. (See the *Ancient Near Eastern Thought* excursus.)

- 1) God has no beginning—In the pagan accounts of creation, the gods are not eternal but are born into existence. The pagan myths also tell of their demise and deaths through heavenly wars or humanity forgetting them. However, the God of the Bible is portrayed as eternal, past and future, and His existence is not dependent upon the belief of humanity (Neh. 9:6; Job 41:11; Ps. 102:25; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 1:8)
- 2) God is separate from His creation—In the pagan accounts, the gods are either born out of the creation or are seen as literally an element within the creation. In the Hebrew Scriptures, God is seen not only as being in existence before the creation of matter but as one who is completely separate from it and unchanged by it.
- 3) He created all things, therefore He is sovereign over all things—God shows His superiority in the fact that He creates the entire world by Himself and needs the help of no others. In the pagan accounts, the gods are responsible for the creation of only one portion of the whole and so are limited in control over only that portion. However, Yahweh created the whole earth and so is sovereign over the whole and all that is in it.
- 4) God created out of order and goodness—When God creates, the world is under His sovereign control, and Scriptures constantly proclaim that what God created is good, orderly, and intentional. In the pagan accounts, either the gods are born out of chaos and contain chaos within themselves or the creation is seen as the result of some spiritual bloody and violent war.
- 5) God is a moral being—The fact that God continually proclaims His creation as good and that chaos and evil are nowhere to be seen shows that He Himself is a moral and good being. On the contrary, the pagan gods are no better morally than the humans over whom they rule. Often they are portrayed as even worse than humanity.

- 6) God created humans to represent Him—Man was created as God’s image on earth and in His likeness; thus man represents and rules on the behalf of God over all creation. Unlike the pagan nations, it is not just the king who is in God’s image, but all of humanity is God’s image; thus there is equality among mankind. Man’s dominion over the earth is not found in the “image”; rather, because he is created as the image of God, he has the authority to rule over the creation. Likewise, man, as the image of God, is also responsible to God.

The Hebrew poetry of the Scriptures adopts pagan imagery in order to communicate to the culture, but it does not adopt the pagan theology; this is what Scripture corrects. God’s creating and naming all the things and portions thereof in creation displays God’s sovereignty and authority over them, thus demonstrating His superiority to the other gods.

The silent treatment of the gods is a devastating dethronement of their authority and power over the creation. “On each day of creation another set of idols is smashed... On the first day the gods of light and darkness are dismissed; on the second day, the gods of sky and sea; on the third day, earth gods and gods of vegetation; on the fourth day, sun, moon, and star gods. The fifth and sixth days remove from the animal kingdom any associations with divinity, while at the same time all human beings, from the greatest to the least—not just Pharaohs, kings and heroes—are granted a divine likeness.”¹⁹

Genesis 1-2 also lays the foundation for the giving of the Law, God’s Word, to His people. If indeed God created all things, then how foolish it would be to have other gods before Him.

¹⁹ Conrad Hyers. *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science*, pp. 44-45.

Excursus: The Meaning of *'Elohim*

Grammatical Description

The origin of the word *'elohim* and its original meaning are not certain. The best understanding seems to be the “strong one” or the “mighty one.” The idea that it communicates is that of an all-powerful and sovereign God who is king over the whole world.

'Elohim is a plural noun; however, in the Hebrew plural nouns do not always indicate plurality. If a noun is intended to be understood as a plural, then the verbs and adjectives that surround it will also be plural. Yet when *'elohim* is used of the one true God, it takes singular verbs and adjectives with it. Scripture makes it clear that it views God as singular because of the singular modifiers that surround it.

The plurality of the noun does not refer to the trinity since grammatical evidence does not allow for this. There are many times that the Old Testament refers to the pagan gods as *'elohim* (Jdg. 11:24; 1 Kg. 11:33), yet one would never see these as references to those gods as trinitarian.

The uses of *'elohim* as a singular noun is called an honorific plural. It is not used as a plural in a numeric sense but rather as in a degree of respect. An example of this is Judges 19:26 and 27; “At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying;” “when her master got up in the morning.” The Hebrew word for “master” in these two cases is the masculine plural *adone*, which is surrounded by singular modifiers. Other examples are the word “enemy” in Judges 16:23 and “owner” in Isaiah 1:3.

The trinity is not introduced until the New Testament and even then it is not clearly revealed. One has to connect the dots to come to the understanding of the trinity. It is important when studying the Old Testament that a New Testament understanding of theology is not read back into the Old Testament Scriptures.

Uses of the Plural

Sometimes *'elohim* is used as a true numerical plural, translated as “gods,” and this plurality is determined by the plural modifiers that surround the word (Ex. 12:12). Other times that the true numerical plural of *'elohim* shows up is with reference to the angelic host.

In Genesis 3:5, “The serpent said to the woman, ‘surely you will not die, for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will open and you will be like divine beings (*'elohim*) who know good and evil.’” Here the plural modifier “who know” determines that *'elohim* is a numeric plural – thus it is several gods here.

Psalm 82 states that God is standing in the presence of god (El, the head Canaanite god) and denounces a group of *'elohim*. “God stands in the assembly of El; in the midst of the *'elohim* He renders judgment.” Some say that this refers to human judges, yet verse 7 says that they will die like mortals. The context points to the fact that they are angels that have been given jurisdiction over the nations and have rebelled against God’s authority.

Deuteronomy 32:8 tells how God divided mankind according to the number of the angels. “When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided up mankind, He set the boundaries of the peoples, according to the number of the heavenly assembly.”

This can be seen in Daniel 10:12-11:1 where the angel that comes to Daniel is delayed because he was battling the prince of Persia. This would be an angel that was given authority over the nation, who has rebelled against God and is now a demonic angel. Psalm 82 is reflecting this.

It is clear from these passages that the angels are considered as little *'elohim* who dwell in the courts of God and have a certain authority under His Godhood. Thus it is these angels to which God is referring in Genesis 1:26 when He says, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness." This is followed by Genesis 3:22; "And the Lord God said, 'Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.'" The "us" refers to the angels that surround God.

Genesis 3:5 defines who is the "us" in 1:26 and 3:22 when they are called the "divine beings" (*'elohim*).

Job 38:7 makes it clear that the angels were present during the creation of the world. And if they have certain authority over the nations (Deut. 32:8; Dan. 10:12-11:1), then it would be natural to see them in Genesis 1-2 since man was created as the image of God to have authority over the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28).

This is also clearly seen in Isaiah 6:8, "I heard the voice of the sovereign Master say, 'Whom will I send? Who will go on our behalf?'" It is clear from the context that the "our" here refers to the seraphs mentioned in verse 2.

'Elohim as the One True God

In most cases, *'elohim* is used in reference to Israel's God and does not function as a true numerical plural; rather it is defined by the singular modifiers as an honorific plural.

"In the beginning *'elohim* created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

"So *'elohim* said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?'" (Gen. 3:13).

God is portrayed in Scripture as the true *'elohim* whom all the other little *'elohim* (angels) serve and answer to. True, some have rebelled against Him, but they still must answer to Him in judgment (Ps. 82).

Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "Listen, Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" The Hebrew does not point to the singularity of God but to His uniqueness among all the other gods.

An example of the same Hebrew construct in Deut. 6:4 is in Song of Songs 6:8-9. Here the groom declares that there may be sixty queens, but for him, he says of his lover, "she is one." The context makes it clear that he does not think she is the only woman but that she is unique and the only one to whom he will be loyal.

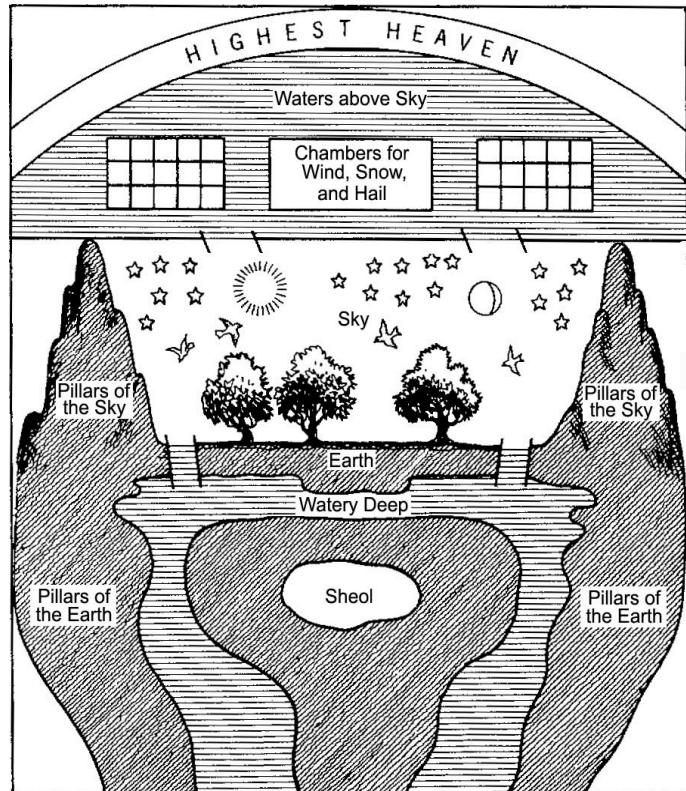
Deut. 6:4 declares that Israel's God is unique from all the others and that He is the only one humanity is to worship and be loyal to. This is supported by Deut. 7:9 and 10:17.

The use of *'elohim* for God is a title that is limited to Genesis 1-16. (In chapter 17, God introduces a new name to Israel, *El Shaddai*.) As *'elohim*, God reveals Himself as the "Strong One" who created the world and thus rules over all creation, everything being subject to Him. The creation must submit to Him as King and Judge.

Excursus: Ancient Near Eastern Thought

In the myths of the ancient Near Eastern people, before the world existed there was nothing but a watery, chaotic void. It is out of this void that the first god came into existence. (Sometimes the watery void is a god, yet it is still seen as having a beginning.) This god creates the first wave of gods and elements, usually earth and sky and sun and moon. These gods then create more gods and elements, and so forth until the creation as we now know it is complete. These gods are seen by the ancients as not only having a beginning but as being limited in authority and control over certain parts of the creation.

The ancient's conception of the world is one in which the gods are seen as a part of the creation and the world is seen as a closed system. The creation was seen as a world that was divided into two realms: below was the earth and the water, where humans lived and were limited too; above was the heavenly ocean that contained the rains and snow, above which the gods dwelled. These two realms were separated by the sky that served not only as a visual barrier between the two but also as a physical one for humans. The gods were seen as being involved in and a part of the creation while also dwelling above it. This upper realm was held up by the mountains, which was the only physical element that connected the two realms. Some of the myths tell of great heroes who were able to ascend these mountains and thus reach of the upper realm and become gods themselves.



In the ancient Near East, the gods were seen as an everyday part of the people's lives. They were seen as a part of creation, as well as being responsible for creation and what happened. For these people there was no understanding, explanation, or cause for the events in their life that was not tied to the actions and involvement of the gods.

“There is no such word as “religion” in the languages of the ancient Near East. Likewise, there is no dichotomy between sacred and secular, or even between natural and supernatural. The only suitable dichotomy is between the spiritual and the physical, though even that would be less meaningful distinction to them than it is to us. In the end, there is a distinction between the heavenly realm and the earthly one, but events in the two were often intertwined or parallel.”²⁰

The gods were not seen as just being tied to creation but also as being part of the creation. Each element had its own god that was responsible for that element's existence and activity within the

²⁰ John H. Walton. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, p. 87.

world. Thus a god could control only the element for which it was responsible. Likewise, each culture had its own gods for the different elements, so the god of the storm in Egypt was not able to control the storms in Babylon because he did not have authority there.

The people of the nations believed that the boundaries of their nations were limited by the power and sovereignty of their deities, which is what would lead to conflict among the gods when a nation began to expand its borders (2 Chr. 32:9-19). However, Yahweh sees no limitations to what He can rule over since He created and sustains all (1 Kgs. 20). What the gods controlled was given to them by Yahweh to govern, but they then claimed it as their own, misleading the people into believing that they are the originators and sovereign over the nations.

“The myths of the Ugarit [Canaanite], like other mythologies of the Near East, pictured the gods in human forms, having similar aims and aspirations, desires and passions. The amazing aspect about these gods and about Baal himself, is that they appear to have no standard of morality governing their actions. Goodness and godliness did not go hand and hand. They lived immoral lives, hated, warred, killed often for pleasure... They certainly were not models for man to emulate, either ethically or religiously.”²¹

“The Biblical concept of God is remarkably different. The God of Israel is not subject to nature; He is above it and controls it. He stands alone and there is no being on His level. He does not eat or drink or make love. Neither does He marry nor has He a wife or children. Biblical Hebrew possesses no term for goddess. Another unique feature, strikingly different to the rest of the ancient world is that God of the Bible prohibits the making of images. When the Bible employs human phrases to describe God, i.e. anthropomorphism, it aims to teach that God has a personal relation to history and to human society. The only image possible of Him is the mental one of a person with whom man can have personal relations.”²²

Throughout the Old Testament, Yahweh, as the sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe, continually attacks the so-called gods of the nations through word and deed. In the days of Moses He brings Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods to their knees through the ten plagues and delivers His people from their oppression. Later, as His people face the temptations of the Canaanite religion that surrounds them, He demonstrates time after time His superiority to Baal and the other Canaanite gods. This rivalry reaches its climax at Mount Carmel where Yahweh deals Baal a devastating blow. And when His people are scattered in exile due to their sin, He taunts the Babylonian gods and pronounces judgment upon the Babylonian empire.

“The story of the Hebrew Bible can be described as a struggle to destroy the heathen deities of the ancient world and to replace their worship by the belief in one God. The Bible as a whole can be regarded as a protest against paganism of every description.”²³

“We do not find in the Old Testament an ascending from idolatry to pure worship of God, but rather a people possessing a pure worship and spiritual theology constantly fighting through the medium of divinely raised spiritual leaders, religious seductions which nevertheless often claimed the mass people. Idolatry is a declension from the norm not an early stage gradually but with difficulties superseded.”²⁴

²¹ Leah Bronner. *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, p. 45.

²² Leah Bronner. *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, p. 136

²³ Leah Bronner. *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, p. 1.

²⁴ J. A. Motyer. *The New Bible Dictionary*, p. 551.

Excursus: The Three Views of Creation

Genesis 1:1-3 asks the questions, “What is the relationship of the elements in the verses?” and “How should one understand an earth that is without form, empty, and covered in darkness?” Are these words to be interpreted *neutrally*, simply describing the beginning state of creation in a chronological account, or are they to be interpreted *negatively*, relating God’s redeeming the creation from an evil and chaotic state? There are three common views to understanding how verses 1-3 relate to each other.

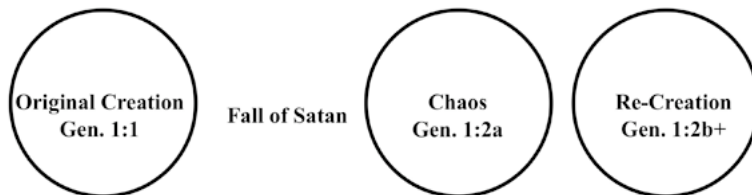
The basic elements of verses 1-3:

- Verse 1: Creation of sky and land, (water?)
- Verse 2a: Formless and empty (refer to judgment elsewhere in Scriptures)
Darkness (refers to sin elsewhere in Scriptures)
Watery deep (refers to evil and chaos [Satan] in the Ancient Near East)
- Verse 2b: Holy Spirit over life-giving waters (Hebrew word is different from one above)
- Verses 3+: Seven-day creation

Re-creation Theory

In this theory:

- Verse 1 refers to the creation of the physical universe
- Verse 2a describes the world after the war in heaven, which occurred between verses 1 and 2
- Verse 2b is the Holy Spirit’s renewal of the creation
- Verses 2b+ relate the recreation of the world



Verse 1 is seen as the creation of the earth, but between verses 1 and 2, an angelic rebellion in heaven takes place, ending with the fall of Satan. Verse 2 describes the earth after that fall, and its chaotic state is a result of God’s judgment. Verses 3 and on describe the re-creation of the earth after that judgment.

Verse 1 tells how God created the entire universe, and its final state looked much like it does now. Because the words *without form*, *empty*, *darkness*, and *watery deep* bear a negative connotation, referring to evil and Satan (since they do everywhere else in the Bible), then the angelic rebellion must have taken place between verses 1 and 2.

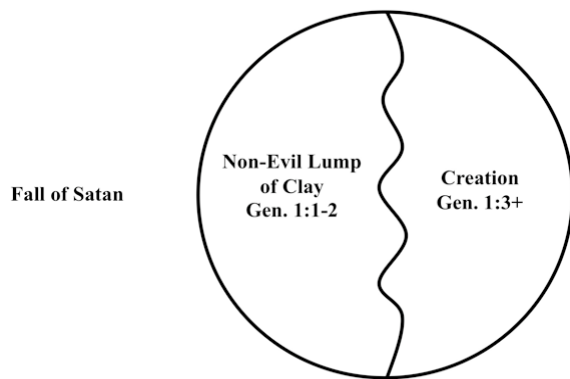
Verse 2 then describes what the earth looked like after the rebellion (much like a war-torn Britain after WWII), and God’s spirit moving over the waters reflects His victory over Satan. God begins to recreate in verses 3 and following.

The problem with this view is not only does the grammar not support it²⁵, but this view reads too much into the text; there is nothing between verses 1 and 2 that gives the least suggestion to the fall of Satan, nor anything in verse 2 that suggests a victory won by God. This view is not a viable option and is held by a very small minority.

Unformed Theory

In this theory:

- Verse 1 refers to the creation of the physical creation as a lump of clay
- Verse 2a is a description of that lump of clay without any negative connotation
- Verse 2b is the work of the Holy Spirit on the lump of clay
- Verses 3+ describes the forming of the lump of clay into the creation as we now know it



In the beginning there was nothing, and verse 1 is the first creative act, wherein God brings something out of nothing. The disjunctive clause in verse 2 is understood as a parenthetical comment on the nature of what the world was like after the initial act of creation. The initial act of creation begat a formless lump of clay containing all the elements of the universe that will later be formed. Verse 3 then picks up on the story to describe how God fashioned the lump of clay into the creation as we know it. This is the traditional view held by many people in the past.²⁶

The problem is that this view tries to ignore the negative connotation of the words “unformed,” “empty,” and “darkness.” Everywhere else in the Bible, these words bear a negative connotation. When “unformed” (*tohu*) and “empty” (*bohu*), literally “waste and void,” are used elsewhere in the Bible, they actually have the negative connotation of judgment (Isa. 34:11; 45:18; Jer. 4:23). In the Bible the Hebrew word “darkness” symbolizes that which opposes God, such as judgment (Ex. 10:21), death (Ps. 88:13), oppression (Isa. 9:1), the wicked (1 Sam. 2:9), and sin in general; in Isaiah 45:7 it parallels “evil.” Likewise, in the New Testament it is used to describe those who oppose God (Jn. 1:4; 1 Jn. 1:6) and who will one day be removed from all of creation (Rev. 21:

²⁵ This view ignores the syntactical function of the waw conjunction at the beginning of verse 2 (“and the earth”). The construction of the waw plus a noun does not denote sequence; rather it forms a disjunctive clause. This form causes a break in the sentence, making verse 2 circumstantial to verse 1 or 3. It cannot be understood as “And then the earth became;” rather it is “now the earth was.” See Bruce K. Waltke. “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3.” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, pp. 139-40 and Mark F. Rooker. “Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or Re-Creation.” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, p. 317.

²⁶ For a defense of this view, see Mark F. Rooker. “Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or Re-Creation?” *Bibliotheca Sacra*.

25). In addition the “darkness” in Genesis 1:2 and 3 is *not* called good; it is the light that is declared good. We cannot assume that the original audience would be able to read this without negative connotations coming to mind.

The negative connotation of darkness can be seen even in the literature of our own culture. It is commonly understood that vampires are evil, demon-like creatures of the dead that come out in the *night*, and any form of *light* harms or kills them.

There is also no mention of the state of the heavens or sky in verse 2. If verse 2 refers to creation as a lump of clay, then why is only the water portion of that clay mentioned in verse 2, with no mention to the origins of the sky portion or the water portion? Furthermore, if verse 1 is understood as an act of creation, then verse 1 would be day 1 of creation, verse 3 day 2, and so on—resulting in an 8-day creation account.

Pre-Chaos Theory

In this theory:

- Verse 1 is the title of the story
- Verse 2a is a description of the spiritual realm during the rebellion in heaven
- Verse 2b is a description of the spiritual realm after the rebellion in heaven
- Verses 3+ describe the creation of the physical realm



This view understands verse 1 to be the title of the story; *In the Beginning God Created the Sky and Land*. The fact that the sky and land are specifically mentioned as being created in verses 8 and 10 means that they cannot be created here as well. Verse 2 is background to the story describing the spiritual realm in which God dwells (since the material realm has not been created yet), and the story of creation begins in verse 3.²⁷

In verse 2 “the deep” is the Hebrew word *tehom*, which refers to the watery deep, the ocean. Here the “watery deep” carries the idea of the abyss, chaos, and darkness—what is not good for life. This is emphasized by the fact that darkness is over the face of the watery deep.

The summary of creation in verses 1-2 ends with the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters. The Hebrew word for “Spirit of God” is *ruach* and means “wind” or “breath.” This word “wind” is often used in the sense of a fluttering bird that hovers over her young in protection or incubation (Deut. 32:11) and is portrayed as also having wings (Hos. 4:19; Ps. 18). Yet the word *ruach* can also refer to the divine spirit that energizes and empowers God’s people (Gen. 41:38; Ex. 31:3; 35:31; Num. 24:2; 1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6; 19:20, 23; Ezk. 11:24; 2 Chr. 15:1; 24:20). Since the wind here is seen as belonging to God (“wind of God”) it is likely that both ideas of wind are in view here. Whether this is a reference to the third member of the trinity is not clear.

²⁷ For a defense of this view, see Bruce K. Waltke. “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3.” *Bibliotheca Sacra*.

The word “water” in the phrase “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water” is a deliberate change from the specific term for the watery deep to the general word for water. The arena is now the life-giving water and not the chaotic abyss. The sense is that it is no longer the darkness but the Spirit/wind of God that is over the surface of the water, and this is what subdues the chaotic waters, maintains control, and brings life from them. This would recall the image of God enthroned over the subjected celestial waters in ancient Near Eastern texts.

This seems to be the best view, given the context (the majority of Old Testament scholars hold this view). This view provides the reader with background information rather than God just deciding to create, as seen in view 2. Thus the focus of verse 1 and 2 is on the majesty of the victorious God who cannot be thwarted because He is the creator who first defeated the sea. Likewise, His creating in chapters 1 and 2 becomes an act of redemption. This is supported by the fact that the darkness and the watery deep are not declared as good. It is not until the presence of light that God begins declaring things good. These things should be seen as being in contrast to the Spirit of God in verse 2. Notice also that just like the darkness being done away with at the end of time (Rev. 21:25), so also will the sea be done away with (Rev. 21:1). These two views fit better within the greater context of the Bible than the previous views do. Likewise, it would have communicated a lot more to the original audience about God’s sovereignty over the evil in the world and His ability not only to subdue it but also to create a world that is void of its effect. It is not until humanity brings evil into the world through their disobedience do evil and chaos present a problem to His creation.

B. The Creation of Man and Woman (2:4-25)

Verse 2:4 begins the first *toledot* of Genesis (2:4-4:26). *Toledot* comes from the root word *yld*, meaning “to bear children” (i.e., “generation”). This first “account” or “generation” of the heavens and earth consists of what the creation has generated.

The next three acts in this *toledot* (chapters 2, 3, and 4) open with the events of the story (2:4-22a; 3:1-13; 4:1-22) and concludes with a poem (2:22b-23; 3:14-19; 4:23-24), followed by a short epilogue (2:24-25; 3:20-24; 4:25-26).

The fact that there are two creation accounts (chapters 1 and 2) with such differences between Genesis 1 and 2 shows that the Hebrews had no problem with letting these two differing accounts stand side by side in the Torah.

In verse 4 the narrator introduces a second name for God: *Yahweh*²⁸. The term *Elohim* refers to Him as the sovereign creator, while *Yahweh* refers to Him as one who enters covenant relationships with humanity, which will begin with Adam. Here both names are used together (*Elohim Yahweh*) to show that the creator of the universe rules history through chosen humanity.²⁹

In verse 7 God’s involvement is seen in the Hebrew word *yasar*, which is normally used of a potter forming clay into a pot. Here it is used of God forming the clay of the earth into a man with His own hands. Likewise, the Hebrew word *banah* in verse 18 means “to build or construct” and is used of God creating the woman. God is intimately involved with intent, design, and His own hands in the creation of humanity.

In verse 8 the word “garden” means “to be enclosed, fenced off, protected.” The garden denotes an enclosed, protected area with flourishing trees and plants. It serves as a temple-garden where God and man can have fellowship. The Holy of Holies in the tabernacle/temple will have the trees of the garden, and life is also protected by cherubim (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 26:1; 2 Chr. 3:7) so that sin and death are excluded (Gen. 3:23; Rev. 21:8). This garden paradise finds its fulfillment in Rev. 20-21.

The garden being located in the “east” is significant because the sun, which represents light and life, rises in the east, as opposed to the west, which represents death.³⁰

1. How is garden described in verses 9-14?

²⁸ Even though the narrator uses the name *Yahweh* here, this name is not officially given by God Himself until Ex. 3:14. The insertion of the name *Yahweh* is the narrator’s way of connecting the God of Moses, the Exodus, and the Mosaic Covenant to the God of creation and the covenants that God will make with humanity throughout Genesis. The narrator establishes the sovereignty and consistency of God by inserting *Yahweh* with God’s other names in the book of Genesis.

²⁹ See. Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 83.

³⁰ An example of this Ancient Near Eastern thinking can be found in Egypt where all the gods of life are on the east bank of the Nile and the gods of death are on the west bank of the Nile.

In verse 15 the word for “placed” has overtones of “rest,” meaning man was to find rest in the garden in the same way that God rested on the seventh day. Thus the garden was intended for man to share in an eternal rest with God, but sin destroyed that potential. God later established the Sabbath for man to share a rest with God in the midst of sin.

2. What was the purpose of man, according to verse 15?

3. Why did God forbid eating from the tree of knowledge in verses 16-17?

There is nothing evil about the tree itself, however; it belongs exclusively to God and confronts humanity with the law of God. The title “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” is synonymous with wisdom. The sin is in the act of violating God’s command and choosing to obtain the wisdom through one’s own initiative outside the will of God rather than obtaining wisdom from God in a dependent relationship with Him. The test was whether they would achieve this wisdom under God’s teaching or by their own means.³¹

In verse 17 the Hebrew literally says, “...dying you will die.” This construction emphasizes the certainty of the death if they disobey. Though the death mentioned here includes physical death, the emphasis is on their spiritual death, which is a separation from God relationally. The basic idea seems to be more of separation rather than annihilation.

4. What is the significance of verse 18?

In verse 18 the word “helper” is not a demeaning term, for it is also used of God as man’s helper in Psalm 10:14; 54:4 (Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:7; 1 Sam. 7:12). Being alone is a negative concept in the Scriptures; a healthy life is found in the community (Ecc. 4:9-12; Jer. 16:1-

³¹ The tree represents the wisdom to discern the effects of good and evil. Only God knows everything and transcends time and space, therefore only He can truly know good and evil. Thus the tree of knowledge represents what belongs only to God; to desire it is to desire what belongs only to God. Humans, by contrast, must be dependent upon a revelation from God as to what is good or evil (Prv. 30:1-6). (See Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 86.)

9), so the word “companion” better communicates the idea the author intended. Likewise, the word “suitable” means “equal and adequate.”

In verse 20, by giving a name to every creature, Adam was asserting his dominion. The Scriptures are explicit in affirming that to name someone or something is a token of lordship (Num. 32:38; 2 Kg. 23:34; 24:17; 2 Chr. 36:4; Dan. 1:6-7). “In Semitic thought, naming implied the ability to learn the inner secrets or essence of an object, just as man has such powers in science today. Man’s power to so ‘name’ the animals was notably set in the context of his own relational needs.”³²

5. How are man and woman portrayed as equals?

6. How is Adam portrayed as having headship over Eve?

In verse 24 the phrase “they will become one flesh” finds its meaning in the praise of Adam in the preceding verse. Just as woman came from the same bone and flesh as Adam, so in their union they become like one person again. This suggests a union, not just of body but also of mind and spirit. The husband’s obligations to his wife take precedence over other priorities.

In verse 25 “The naked condition of Adam and Eve does not just describe their unclothed physical appearance. It also refers to the physical and psychological oneness and transparency that existed in their relationship. Physically they were naked; they shared their bodies with each other openly. Psychologically they were not ashamed; they hid nothing from each other.”³³ They had no reason to be ashamed in each other’s presence or in God’s presence because there was no sin creating a wall between them.

The Adamic Covenant is the first covenant that God makes with humanity. Even though it is not explicitly stated in these chapters, it is understood. By placing Adam and Eve in the garden He bestows upon them the right to dwell with Him and makes them king and queen of His creation as His representatives (Gen. 1:26-31; 2:16-17; Ps. 8). The only requirement that He places upon them is to not eat from the tree of knowledge. This covenant is conditional in that if they violate the command of God, then the blessings of the covenant would be lost. By making this covenant with Adam and Eve and entering into such an intimate relationship with them, God binds Himself to them in a way unlike any of the other gods. In so doing, He gives humanity great worth, elevating them to a

³² James M. Houston. *I Believe in the Creator*, p. 81.

³³ Thomas Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 45.

position of authority and prominence that would ultimately be fulfilled in Christ.³⁴ However, in their disobedience they broke the covenant and lost their position and unity with God (Hosea 6:7). From the fall onward, every other covenant that follows will be a portion of the foundation for the New Covenant in Christ that will restore to humanity what was lost in the Adamic Covenant.

³⁴ See John F. Walvoord. "The New Covenant," *Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 187-88.

C. The Temptation and Fall of Creation (3:1-24)

The previous and current acts of Genesis forms a chiasmic parallel, where the events of 2:4-3:5 parallel the events of 3:14-24, yet are antithetical to the top half of the structure. These two parallels pivot on the event of 3:6-13, which is the emphasis of the story.

- A** Creation of man: his good relationship with the earth and his home in the garden, where he has freely growing food and access to the tree of life (2:4-17)
- B** Creation of woman: her good relationship with man (2:18-25)
 - C** Conversation of serpent with woman: his tempting of her (3:1-5)
 - X** The sin and God's uncovering of it (3:6-13)
 - C'** Punishment of serpent: its spoiled relationship with woman (3:14-15)
 - B'** Punishment of woman: her spoiled relationship with man (3:16)
 - A'** Punishment of man: his spoiled relationship with the earth and expulsion from his home in the garden; he now has to toil to secure food and will no longer have access to the tree of life (3:17-24)

The next two acts (chapter 3 and 4) display humanity's worsening state. Adam and Eve giving into the serpent's temptation is followed by Cain's sin even after God's warning.

1. How does one know that the serpent in chapter 3 is evil?³⁵

In verse 1 the word "shrewd" (NET) or "crafty (NIV, NASB) in the Hebrew means "wise," not wicked. In a negative sense, it is understood as "cunning" (Job 5:12; 15:5), and in a positive sense, as "prudent" (Prov. 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 22:3; 27:12). There is a word play between the words "naked" (2:25) and "shrewd" (3:1). Adam and Eve are seen as vulnerable and open to the serpent's attack. At the beginning they are naked and he is shrewd; afterward, they will be covered and he will be cursed.

2. Why did God allow the serpent into the garden?

³⁵ Some have suggested that the serpent was literally Satan, but this does not seem likely in light of 3:1 and 14 where he is called a beast of the field and is judged as a snake. Most likely, the tempter was Satan who possessed and controlled a literal snake just as he did with demoniacs in Jesus' day.

3. What tactics did the serpent use in verses 1-5?

“It is interesting that three times the Word of the Lord is quoted, but never appropriately: once it is questioned in a misleading way, once it is paraphrased with major changes, and once it is flatly denied.”³⁶

“What Satan said about Eve’s being as God was a half-truth. Ironically she was already as God having been made in His image (1:26). She did become like God in that she obtained a greater knowledge of good and evil by eating of the tree. However, she became less like God because she was no longer innocent of sin. Her relationship with God suffered. Though she remained like God she could no longer be with Him. The consequent separation from God is the essence of death (2:17).”³⁷

“Sin consists of an illicit reach of unbelief, an assertion of human autonomy to know morality apart for God. The creature must live by faith in God’s word, not by a professed self sufficiency of knowledge (Deut. 8:3; Ps. 19:7-9; Ezk. 28:6, 15-17).”³⁸

It is important to understand that Adam and Eve’s sin was not a sin against their neighbor but against God. It was not a social sin, which means that the core problem of sin cannot be fixed by social reform and humanitarian efforts. Even if we could make people better in this way, people and societies only seem “better” when compared to others; compared to God’s righteousness they are still wretched sinners. The only solution to sin is one that comes from God, since He is the offended, and not through humanitarian efforts.

4. What were the immediate effects of their sin, according to verses 6-13?

Verse 8 states that God was “walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” This is literally the “wind” or “spirit” of the day and refers to the same spirit/wind of God in Gen. 1:2. This suggests that this was a common occurrence and that Adam and Eve had face-to-face communion with God. This is very different from the pagan creation views of man as flawed, distant slaves of the gods.

³⁶ Allen P. Ross. *Creation and Blessing*, p. 132.

³⁷ Thomas Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 49.

³⁸ Bruce Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 87.

5. Why did God, if He knows all things, ask where Adam and Eve were in verse 9?

6. What was God's judgment for the serpent, according to verses 14-15?

In verse 15 the Hebrew word translated “offspring” is a collective singular. This does not refer to a specific offspring, rather to humanity as a whole and to all the offspring of the serpent (see Gen. 16:10; 22:17; 24:60 for other examples of singular verbs used in the collective sense).³⁹

It has been understood that man's offspring will “crush” the serpent's head and the serpent will “strike” or “bruise” the man's heel. However, the Hebrew uses the same word for both of these translations, which is “attack” or “bruise” in both cases (see the NET, NASB, RSV). Both of these are fatal blows. For a man to attack a serpent's head is fatal, and for a venomous serpent to attack a man's heel, pre-hospitals and antibiotics, is fatal as well. Death will continually be dealt out and spread by both the man and the serpent because of sin. The immediate seed of the woman is Cain, and then all humanity. By the New Testament period, the seed is all those who reject the Lord and oppose His kingdom (Jn. 8:44).

7. What was God's judgment for woman, according to verse 16?

In verse 16 the sentence “your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (NIV, NASB, RSV) should be translated “You will want to control your husband, but he will dominate you.” She will no longer be satisfied with the man as the head of the family but will seek to dominate the relationship. The word “desire” here should be understood as a prompting to do evil. In return, instead of being the head of the family in a

³⁹ This is not a prophecy of hope for Jesus; rather, God is giving the consequences for their sin. There will be an ongoing struggle between humanity and the serpent. Hope and restoration do not fit the context of this section and do not come until Genesis 3:20. Notice that the man's attack against the serpent is mentioned first; if this were a prophecy of Jesus, most likely the man's attack would be the conclusion rather than the serpent's attack.

sacrificial, loving sense, the husband will return with a tendency to dominate her. “The woman at her worst would be a nemesis to the man, and the man at his worst would dominate the woman.”⁴⁰ Not only has sin marred man’s relationship with God, it has created a rift between the two who should become as one (Gen. 2:24).

8. What was God’s judgment for man, according to verses 17-19?⁴¹

In verse 20 Adam names his wife *Eve*, which means “the mother of all living.” The naming of his wife and her naming of her children (4:1) shows an acceptance of the consequences, a renewed faith in God, and a hope for the future.

9. What did God do for Adam and Eve’s sin in verse 21?

“Man’s dignity rests in God who assigns an inestimable worth to every person. Man’s origin is not an accident, but a profoundly intelligent act by One who has eternal value; by One who stamps His own image on each person. God creates men and moves heaven and earth to redeem them when they fall. Our origin is in creation and our destiny is for redemption. Between these points every human heartbeat has value.”⁴²

10. What was the final judgment for humanity, according to verses 22-24?

“God’s response to human grasping is exile from paradise, which is at the same time a merciful act that prevents His deluded creatures from obtaining eternal life in sin and thus joining the ranks of the devils, condemned forever. By placing the cherubim, celestial guardians, at the gate of Eden, the author makes clear that the way back to paradise is not

⁴⁰ Allen P. Ross. *Creation and Blessing*, p. 147.

⁴¹ The ecology of the earth is partly dependent upon the morality of humanity (Gen. 4:12; 6:7; Lev. 26; Deut. 11:13-17; 28; Joel 1-2).

⁴² R. C. Sproul. *In Search of Dignity*, p. 94.

through the heavens or the ‘sons of God’ but by the dust of the earth and the reproduction of offspring as an inheritance.”⁴³

Adam and Eve did not die immediately in the sense that Satan said that they would, but they did experience death in the following three ways, which will be developed more fully throughout scripture: First is physical death, which is the separation of the body and soul (material and immaterial parts of the person). Second is spiritual death, which is the separation of humanity from God. Third is eternal death, which is permanent separation of humanity from God.

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God to represent Him as regents over the creation, yet in their giving in to the tempter, they surrender that authority and power to him. No longer will man have dominion and power over the creation; rather, Satan becomes the new ruler over this world because man submitted to him (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Matt. 12:24; 16:21-31; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 6:12). As the result, the creation suffered a curse and began to deteriorate. Having been thrice blessed by God (1:22, 28; 2:3), the creation now experienced a triple curse (3:14, 17; 4:11). Because there is no longer a good ruler exercising dominion over the earth, creation will now exist in chaos. The Adamic Covenant has been broken because humanity has failed to obey.

Though mankind’s image as God was corrupted and marred by sin, and though he lost his dominion over the earth, he did not lose completely the image as God. Certain biblical texts suggest that all persons still exist in the image as God, while other texts treat the image as something that needs to be restored through salvation. Gen. 9:6 and James 3:9 show that the image is still present even in man’s fallen state.⁴⁴

⁴³ Stephen F. Noll. *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness: Thinking Biblically about Angels, Satan and Principalities*, p. 55.

⁴⁴ New Testament texts seem to treat the image of God as something that is exemplified in Christ (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) and that needs to be restored in people (Rom. 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The need for renewal implies that the image was not lost but defaced or damaged in some way through the fall.

D. The Story of Cain and Abel (4:1-26)

The major theme of Genesis 4 is the spread of sin from the family to society. This is not how sin spread literally but how it is developed in the narrative to show its effects. Through Cain's rebellion and then his establishment of a city, which leads to the development of the nations, we can see that sin was not exclusive to just one family line or a few people.

The narrative of Cain and Abel in verses 1-16 is divided into two sections where the Lord dialogues with Cain, verses 3-7 and 9-16. These are separated by the report of the murder in verse 8.

In verse 1 Eve gives credit to God for the birth of her children, but she also claims that she has created man as well. This is a signal to the reader that there will be conflict.⁴⁵

1. Compare and contrast Cain and Abel in verses 1-5.

Cain shows through both his lack of desire to give God his best and his jealousy of his brother that he does not serve God out of love but because he feels obligated. His view of God is the same view of which Satan convinced Eve when he got her to doubt God. The fact that the person is mentioned before the offering in Genesis 4:3-4 suggests that the offering is not as important as the attitude of the person. The prophesied conflict between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman is already apparent in creation.

2. Why did God approach Cain in verses 6-7 and how did Cain respond?

In verse 7 the statement "sin is crouching at the door" is an allusion to the seed of the woman and the serpent (3:15) in conflict. The participle "crouching" is a cognate to an Akkadian term used of a type of demon—"sin is the demon at your door." God's words, "It desires to have you, but you must master it," in comparison to the oracle of God to the woman in 3:16, clearly shows that the Lord was warning Cain by reminding him of the fatal outcome of the earlier conflict.

Cain's self-focus and his refusal to heed God's warning before his murder of Abel shows that he viewed himself as a higher authority over his life than God. Cain decided that it was he who knew better and would thus take matters into his own hands.

⁴⁵ It is not likely that Cain and Abel are the first children of Adam and Eve by the fact that Cain goes to Nod and marries a woman and starts a city (Gen. 4:17). The narrator is not interested in giving a detailed account of history but an account of humanity's condition and its relationship to God.

3. How did God respond to Cain's murder of his brother in verses 9-10?

4. What was the judgment of Cain and what is its significance in verses 11-12?

“Cain is not being condemned to a Bedouin-like existence; the terminology is too extreme to describe such a life-style. Rather it seems likely that the curse on Cain reflects the expulsion from the family that was the fate in tribal societies of those who murdered close relatives... ‘To be driven away from the land’ (cf. v. 14) is to have all relationships, particularly with the family, broken. Moreover, it is to have one's relationship with the LORD broken...”⁴⁶

5. Did Cain repent of his sin when confronted by God in verses 13-14?

6. How did God respond to Cain's complaint in verses 13-14?

7. What is the significance of Cain settling in Nod and what does this say about him?

⁴⁶ Gordon Wenham. *Genesis 1-15*, p. 108.

8. How does this story end compared to how it began?

9. What is the significance of Cain's actions in verse 17?

10. What were the three major sins that Lamech committed in verses 19-22?

Polygamy is “the symptom of an unbalanced view of marriage, which regards it as an institution in which the wife’s ultimate *raison d’etre* [reason for being] is the production of children. Where God had created the woman first and foremost for partnership, society made her in effect a means to an end, even if a noble end, and wrote its view into its marriage contracts.”⁴⁷

11. What sets Seth's line apart from that of Cain's?

The biblical ideal for populating the earth is a slow and balanced growth of families, as seen in Seth's line (Gen. 5). The warrior society founded by Cain's son destabilizes the ideal for familial structure and represents a threat to the society, especially for the daughters. The “nation” is where mankind amasses in such numbers that the idea of family and community are lost. Ironically, although there are so many people around, they become isolated by their technology and the need to accomplish more. This was not the intention for mankind when God said, “be fruitful and multiply.” Cain's lineage is symbolic of human culture with great civilization and not God.

⁴⁷ Derek Kidner. *Genesis*, p. 39.

Genesis 6:1-8 is the transition from the godly line of Seth to the wicked humanity that now exists and that will lead to the flood. The union of the sons of God and the daughters of men shows that while humanity was following the divine decree to multiply and fill the earth, so evil was also abounding. The central theme of this passage is the wickedness of mankind. Whereas demonic influence was alluded to with Cain, here it is directly involved in the sin of humanity as Satan was with Adam and Eve in the garden. Through the intermarriage of angels and humans, man attempts to become divine outside the will of God. Once again we see mankind trying to obtain divinity through its own means rather than in obedience to God through a relationship with God (see *The Sons of God* excursus).

5. What was the judgment for the sin of the ungodly union of verse 6:2?

6. Upon what event does the wording of verse 2 reflect?

7. How is the phrase in verse 2 contrasted with verse 5?

8. How does the narrator describe humanity in verse 5?

In verse 6 the phrase “the Lord regretted” (NET) or “The LORD was grieved/sorry” (NIV, NASB) does not refer to the fact that God feels like He made a mistake; instead, what His creation has become causes Him great emotional pain. The word “pain” (NIV) or “grieved” (NASB, ESV) that follows this carries the idea of offense of anger that results from His feelings of regret and alludes to the judgment oracles in Gen 3:16-19.

9. What was the judgment for humanity's sin, according to verse 7?

10. How is verse 8 contrasted with the previous verse?

“It is not that Noah’s works of righteousness gains him salvation, for none is cited. Rather, his upright character is noted to condemn his generation, which merits death.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Kenneth A. Matthews. *Genesis 1-11:26*, p. 371.

Excursus: The Sons of God

One of the reasons Genesis 6 gives for God’s judging the world is that the “sons of God” were taking the “daughters of mankind” as their wives (Gen. 6:1-4). The problem with these titles is that it is not obvious to readers today to whom the narrator was referring. There are three major ways to understand these titles.

View One: The Line of Seth and Cain

In this view, the “sons of God” refer to the godly line of Seth, and the “daughters of mankind” refer to the ungodly line of Cain. In Genesis 4 there is a contrast made between Cain as an ungodly son, who begets an ungodly line, and Seth as a godly son, who came at a time when people began to call upon the Lord. Those who take this view see that contrast being continued into Genesis 6 and believe that one of the reasons for the flood was the mixing of the godly and ungodly lines in marriage.

Unfortunately, nowhere in Genesis is there any hint that the “sons of God” are to be seen as Seth’s line and the “daughters of mankind” as Cain’s line. In fact, the Hebrew word “mankind” is not talking about a specific group within mankind but about mankind as a whole. It would also be unnatural to restrict the title “daughters of men” to just Cain’s line and ungodly women; it is better to instead see it as a designation for “womankind.” It also does not seem natural to see godly men having sexual relations with ungodly women, for would that not make those men ungodly?

There is nothing in the text that states that Seth’s line was godly—only a few in his line are said to be godly. In fact, the text makes the opposite point: that all of humanity was evil and that Noah was the only righteous one that Yahweh found on the whole earth (6:5-8).

View Two: The Polygamy of Kings

In this view, the “sons of God” refer to tyrant kings who seize the “daughters of men” in its basic meaning. The sin here is the polygamy of the kings in order to gain power.

There is no hint in the text to any idea of kings or political alliances. In fact, there is no concept of nations until Genesis 10, after the flood. The mention of kings does not appear until the story of Abraham. The sin of polygamy and marriage for political alliances was a common thing after the flood, even with David, a man after God’s own heart. However, the text makes it clear that the evil of Genesis 6 was so exceptionally great that it deserved the earth being wiped out. This view, in fact, only came about as a *reaction* to the third view.

View Three: Fallen Angels

In this view, the “sons of God” refer to fallen angels and the “daughters of men” to the female descendants of mankind.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ This third view is how the Jews of the ancient Near East understood this passage. In fact, they wrote a lot on it in the Jewish Apocrypha, which presents this as the major event that disrupted the world order, both spiritually and physically. 1 Enoch 6-12 tells the whole story of the angels taking women as wives and of the flood that followed.

The phrase “sons of God” is used in the Scriptures to refer always to angels—*bene elim* (1 Sam. 2:12; 25:17, 25; Ps. 29:1; 89:6; 103:20) and *bene elohim* (Deut. 14:1; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Hos. 1:10; 11:1). This is true of extra-biblical material as well (1 Enoch 6-7).

There is the distinction between “sons” and “daughters” in each category. The phrasing is not the “daughters of God” and the “sons of men.” The distinction here imposes a *contrast* between the types of groups: those who are “of God” and “of men.” This seems to be the focus—those who belong in the category of the divine (*elohim*) and those who belong among humans (mankind). This contrast is lost with the first two views.

In verse 2 the taking of wives refers to the mutual consent of both groups in the unholy union. This was not a kidnapping and raping of women; rather, humanity was a willing participant. Verses 1-4 present the angelic cause for the flood whereas verses 5-6 present the human cause.

Those who disagree with this view often quote Matthew 22:29-30 as a rebuttal to the fact that angels, in Genesis 6, were able to have sex. The first problem is that this is not even the point of Matthew 22:29-30 (resurrection is the point). Second, in mentioning the angels, Jesus never said that angels were sexless; he said only that they are not given in marriage. We all know that one does not have to be married in order to have sex. Additionally, Jesus said that *holy* angels were not given in marriage in *heaven*; He never mentioned what *fallen* angels are capable of doing on *earth* outside the will of Yahweh.

There are places where the Scriptures describe angels who are able to take on human form and interact with mankind (Gen. 19:1-5; Heb. 13:2). Beyond this we do not know enough about angels to say of what they are and are not physically capable.

The Imprisoned Angels

This understanding of Genesis 6 is supported by 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6-7. These passages describe the punishment of a certain group of angels due to a sexual sin during the time of Noah and the flood. 2 Peter 2:4-5 puts the event in the time of Noah and the flood, and 2 Peter 2:6 and Jude 7 show that it preceded Sodom and Gomorrah. In the context here, Peter is talking about the immoral lifestyle of the false prophets (2 Peter 2:2, 13-14, 18). His point is that these false prophets will be judged for their misdeeds just as the demonic angels and Sodom and Gomorrah were. The implication is that these two were judged for their sexual perversions. Jude 7 says explicitly that the sin of the angels was a sexual perversion just like those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Their sin is also said to be sexual in 2 Peter and Jude, where it is compared to the sexual perversion of an unholy union as in Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Peter 2:1-3, 12-15, 18; Jude 7). The time sequence connects it to the time of the flood.

The event in 2 Peter and Jude cannot be referring to the original fall of the angels because then all the demonic angels would be imprisoned according to 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. Jude 6 also states that the angels did not keep their own domain (*archen*, a place of assigned authority and

The language of Jude, in fact, parallels 1 Enoch (10:4-6, 12; 13:2; 14:5; 12:4; 15:3) and even quotes it. There is little doubt that Jude and Enoch share a common understanding of the angels of Genesis 6. Jude, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, apparently endorses Enoch’s interpretation of the identity of the sons of God in Genesis 6. It was also held by the early Church fathers (Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian). It was not until the third century with Augustine (354-430 AD) that the first view was proposed. Most Old Testament scholars today take this view (see G. J. Wenham. *Genesis*. Word Biblical Commentary, p. 1:135).

activity), but abandoned their proper abode (*idion oiketerion*, “peculiar place of residence”). The implication is that they took on a state that they were not supposed to. This also cannot mean that they were on earth and not in heaven because this is true of all demons—yet they have not experienced the same fate as these particular demons have. These are the angels that await the great judgment of the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 20:10).

The Nephilim

Though it is not entirely clear, the context of Genesis 6 seems to indicate that the *nephilim* and the “mighty heroes of old” are the offspring of the unholy union. The meaning of the Hebrew word *nephilim* is uncertain, though the context suggests an understanding of great and mighty warriors who were famous throughout the world. The Greek equivalent in the LXX *gigantes* does not refer to monstrous size; rather, it means “fallen ones” and refers to the unusual offspring of an unholy union. This word was also used of the Titans, who were the offspring of male gods and human women.⁵¹

The difficulty is with Genesis 6:6, which states that the *nephilim* were on the earth *after* this event as well. If all humankind (except for Noah and his family) died in the flood, it is difficult to understand how the post-flood *nephilim* could be related to the pre-flood *nephilim* or how the Anakites of Canaan could be their descendants (Num. 13:33). This is a problem no matter which view one holds. A possible understanding is that in Numbers 13:33 it is not the author who connects the Anakites to the *nephilim* but a misconception circulated by the people of Israel. Just because the people *believed* the Anakites to be *nephilim* does not mean they were actual *nephilim*. We should not trust the opinions of those who are not divinely inspired.

⁵¹ See C. Fred Dickason. *Angels: Elect and Evil*, pp. 244-45 and Merrill F. Unger. *Biblical Demonology*, pp. 45-52.

F. Noah and the Flood (6:9-9:29)

This section is the third *toledot* of Genesis and includes the account of both Noah and his family.

Genesis 6:9-9:19 forms a chiasmic parallel with God remembering Noah (8:1a) as the emphasis in the story.⁵²

A Transitional introduction (6:9a)

B Noah and his world at the time of the flood (6:9b-12)

C Provision for the flood with a divine monologue establishing God's covenant to preserve Noah, preceded by reflections on Noah and human behavior (6:12-22)

D Embarkation (7:1-5)

E Beginning of the flood with Noah and the animals (7:6-16)

F The triumphant flood (7:17-24)

X God remembers Noah (8:1a)

F' The waning Flood (8:1b-5)

E' Ending of the flood with Noah and the birds (8:6-14)

D' Disembarkation (8:15-19)

C' Provision for the post-flood world with a divine monologue to preserve the earth, with reflections on human behavior (8:20-22)

B' Noah and the world conditions after the flood (9:1-17)

A' Transitional introduction (9:18-19)

Likewise there is also an alternating parallel formed by chapters 6-9.

A Genealogical introduction (6:9-10)

B Setting (6:11)

C Narrative (6:12-8:21)

D Poem (8:22)

E Epilogue (9:1-17)

A Genealogical introduction (9:18-19)

B Setting (9:20)

C Narrative (9:20-24)

D Poem (9:25-27)

E Epilogue (9:28-29)

⁵² Structure taken from Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 125.

Due to so many scientific questions that are left unanswered in this account, it is clear that the narrator is more interested in the moral aspects of the flood than in its physical details.

Verse 9 is the first time in which the words *righteousness* and *blameless* are used in the Bible. “Righteousness” means that one is right before God and in His eyes. The righteous are characterized by their lack of selfishness and by their willingness to disadvantage themselves for the advantage of others. “Blameless” means “whole, complete,” signifying a wholehearted commitment to and wholeness of relationship with God. It does not mean that one is perfect but that he seeks to not sin against God, and that when he does sin, he deals with his sin quickly. The phrase “walked with God” links Noah to Enoch (Gen. 5:24). Just as Enoch was saved from death, so Noah is saved from the judgment of God. These three descriptions presented together emphasize how unique Noah is in the dark, bleak world that surrounds him.

1. What is the relationship between humanity and the animals in verses 11-13?

2. What is the significance of God having Noah build an ark in verses 14-16?⁵³

3. What is the contrast between verses 16 and 17?⁵⁴

4. What was Noah commanded to bring onto the ark in verses 6:19-7:4?

⁵³ In the pagan accounts of the flood, the boat is steered by the hero of the story who overcomes the flood through his own ingenuity. Likewise, that boat is unstable, being four times longer and heavier than the ark of God.

⁵⁴ In the pagan accounts of the flood, the gods are seen as keeping their decision to flood the earth a secret from humanity so all will be killed, and their reason for destroying the world is humanity has gotten too loud or annoying. However, the God of the Bible shares His plans with Noah so that he and all who repent may be saved, and His reason for destroying the world is that His moral law has been violated.

5. What was Noah's response to the command of the God in verses 6:22 and 7:5?

In verse 11 the word “great deep” is the same Hebrew word used in Gen. 1:2 to describe the watery deep that covered the earth before the Spirit of God hovered over it and changed it. The “floodgates of the heavens” (NIV, ESV) should be translated “floodgates of the sky” (NASB) since it is the plural form of *shamayim*, which denotes the sky as in Gen. 1:8. This pre-scientific view of the sky refers to the celestial waters above the sky, which we now know as the rain clouds. Due to the sin of humanity, God is unleashing the chaotic waters of the earth and the previously separated waters (Ps. 104:6-9) to return the earth to its formless and empty state. However, the Lord does not allow it to remain in this state and so subdues the sea once again, re-establishing its boundaries in order to reveal His “new” creation and start over with Noah as the “new Adam” (8:11).⁵⁵

6. How is the flood described in verses 7:17-24?

In 8:1, “God remembered” does not mean that God had previously forgotten Noah and his family; rather, the Hebrew term means to act upon a previous commitment to a covenant promise (Gen. 9:14-15; 19:29; 30:22; Ex. 2:24; 6:5; 32:13; 1 Sam. 1:19; Judg. 16:28; Ps. 8:4; 9:12; 74:1-3; 98:3; 105:8; 106:45; 111:5; Jer. 15:15). God’s remembering always implies His movement toward the object. By God’s acting upon his promises to Noah He shows Himself trustworthy in His word.

7. What is the significance of verse 8:1b?

In verse 6 (previously 7:17) the number 40 is conventional for a long period of time and represents the introduction to a new age. At the end of the 40 days, God is ready to reveal His “new” and redeemed creation.

⁵⁵ Here the flood both punishes humanity and purges the world of its sin and wickedness. In the Babylonian account the flood got out of control and frightens the gods who “coward like dogs” and cannot stop it.

In verses 6-11 the sending out of the raven *before* the dove shows the accuracy of the Biblical account. Ravens are stronger birds than doves and can fly longer—even through storms—and feed off of carrion.⁵⁶ The dove needs trees and ground because it cannot fly as long. In the Babylonian account the order of the two birds is reversed.

The number of days within the flood account reveals concentric parallelism.

7 days of waiting for the flood (7:4)

7 days of waiting for the flood (7:10)

40 days of flooding (7:17a)

150 days of water triumphing (7:24)

150 days of water waning (8:12)⁵⁷

40 days of waiting (8:6)

7 days of waiting (8:10)

7 days of waiting (8:12)

8. When did Noah leave the ark, according to verses 13-20, and what did he do first?

Notice that the pattern of the receding flood waters are parallel to the creation account in relation to the forming and filling of the earth. Now that the world is a watery mass, God must “re-create” His creation, redeeming it to its original state. The rain stopping and the water drying up are symbolic of the vertical and horizontal separations of the water (Gen. 1:6-10). The dove finding the olive branch is like the creation of vegetation (1:11-12), and the clearing of the storm clouds is the revealing of the sky and the sun, moon, and stars (Gen. 1:6-8, 14-17). The opening of the ark reveals the animals and humanity upon the earth (Gen. 1:20-26). Thus God is seen as redeeming His creation for a new Adam found in Noah.⁵⁸

9. What is the contrast in verses 21-22?

⁵⁶ See Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 141.

⁵⁷ The 150 days of the water covering the earth are viewed from two different perspectives.

⁵⁸ In the Babylonian account the gods are horrified at the destructive force that they had unleashed and lost control of.

There is a chiastic parallelism in the covenant that God makes with Noah.

A God's resolve to never again destroy the earth or humanity (8:20-22)

B Command to be fruitful (9:1)

C Legislation with regard to blood (9:2-6)

B' Command to be fruitful (9:7)

A' God's covenant and sign to never again destroy all flesh (9:8-17)

10. What is the significance of God's commands in verses 9:1-2?⁵⁹

Noah is portrayed as the second Adam in that he is blessed as God's image bearer (Gen. 9:6) and is given the same commandments that were given to Adam (Gen. 9:1). This passage alludes to the covenant in the Garden of Eden with the words "be fruitful," "multiply," and "fill the earth." "Noah is depicted as Adam *redivivus* (revived). He is the sole survivor and successor to Adam; both 'walk' with God; both are the recipients of the promissory blessing; both are caretakers of the lower creatures; both father three sons; both are workers of the soil; both sin through the fruit of a tree; and both father a wicked son who is under a curse."⁶⁰

11. What are the requirements for humanity, according to verses 3-6?

In verse 12 God states that He is making a covenant for all humanity. The Noachic Covenant is the second covenant that God has made with humanity. The blessing of God is that He will never again destroy the earth, but there are no requirements for humanity in order to keep the covenant alive (the ones listed above pertain to His moral will not the covenant itself). God states in verse 12 that the covenant is unconditional for "all successive generations." The sign of this covenant is the rainbow. "This covenant does not depend on human obedience to the laws given to Noah; rather, men's and women's compliance with the laws allow them to live and enjoy this covenant."⁶¹

⁵⁹ In the Babylonian account of the flood, overpopulation precedes the flood and fearing the same thing after the flood the gods inflict sterility upon women and a high mortality rate. Contrary to this the God of the Bible is one who blesses humanity in every way.

⁶⁰ Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, p. 351, 359.

⁶¹ Allen P. Ross. *Creation and Blessing*, p. 206.

In verse 13 the word for “rainbow” is simply “bow” in the Hebrew and refers to a battle bow used in hunting or battles. God hangs His battle bow in the sky pointed away from the earth as a sign of His peace with humanity.

The main purpose of Gen. 19:18-29 is to portray the characteristics of the three main branches of the human race in relation to the blessing and cursing of Noah. The most significant element in this section is the blessing and cursing motif that will occur repeatedly throughout Genesis. The narrator reveals the spiritual degradation of the Canaanites by exposing the character of the father (Ham).

12. Why is Noah called a “man of the soil” in verse 20?

13. Why did Noah get drunk and naked in verse 21?

14. What was Ham’s sin in verses 22-23?

15. Why did Noah curse Canaan and his descendents for the sin of Ham?

“The theme of this *toledot*, the annihilation of the seed of the Serpent’s kingdom and the earth they have corrupted and the preservation of the seed of the woman through the renewed earth, foreshadows the future destruction of this present, evil world by fire and the preservation of the faithful by the specified salvation in Christ to inherit a regenerated earth that will never pass away (Matt. 24:30-31, 37-39; Luke 17:26-32; 2 Thess. 1:5-9; 2 Peter 3:6-7). The elect covenant family going through a sea of death and coming forth from their burial chamber (Isa. 26:19-21) is a pledge that the redeemed will be brought through the cataclysm of the final judgment.”⁶²

⁶² Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, pp. 151-52.

G. The Tower of Babel (10:1-11:26)

Chapter 11 happens chronologically *before* the events of chapter 10. In chapter 10 the narrator reveals the scattered and separated nations as a foreshadow of what is to come. In chapter 11 the narrator explains how the world became scattered and confused nations.

The genealogy of Genesis 10 contains no ages and it includes not only the names of individuals but also nations and locations. “Evidently 70 nations descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Seventy became a traditional round number for a large group of descendants. Jacob’s family also comprised 70 people (46:27), which may indicate that Moses viewed Israel as a microcosm of humanity as he presented it here.”⁶³ Once again the genealogy here is a selective account in that it is only interested in presenting Israel’s neighbors.

1. Why is Nimrod elaborated on in verses 8-12?

2. What do the descendants of Ham have in common, considering Israel’s history?



⁶³ Thomas Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 92.

Genesis 11:1-9 appears to be a testimony to the divine commission to fill the earth (9:1), but the account tells how the nations were dispersed after the tower of Babel. This section ends with the people scattered across the earth, divided from one another and from God. It is the climax of the primeval events and transition into the patriarchal narratives. It is also the explanation for the development of the nations in chapter 10, since this event precedes chapter 10 chronologically.

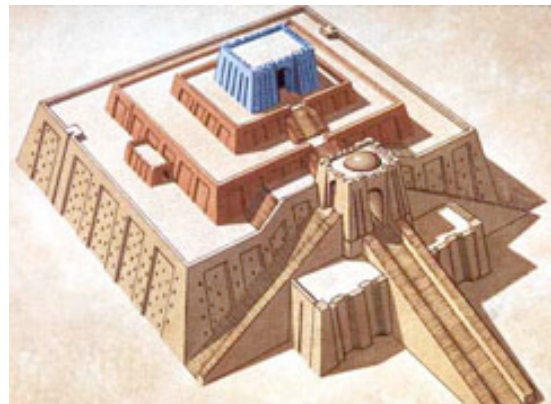
There is a chiasmic parallel in these verses, which reveals the theme of reversal around the pivot, “the LORD came down.” The plot moves the story from the unified construction of a city to God’s destruction of their unified rebellion.

- A All the earth one language
- B People settle together there
- C Said to each other
- D Come let us make bricks
- E A city and tower
- X And the LORD came down
- E’ The city and tower
- D’ Come now... let us confuse
- C’ Not understanding each other
- B’ People disperse from there
- A’ Language of the whole earth

3. What is significant about the people’s statement in verse 11:3 (Gen. 1:26)?

4. What did the people seek to accomplish, according to verse 4?

In the Ancient Near East people built ziggurats as temples that link heaven with earth. They believed that this would not only get them closer to the gods but also give them the ability to ascend to the heavens and possibly become gods themselves.



5. What command was humanity violating in verse 4?

6. What is the irony in verse 5?

7. What were the sin of the people and the judgment of God in verses 5-8?

In verse 6, Genesis implies that humans had never before built anything for their own glory, that this was evidence of their disobedience rather than worship, and it was the work of a united race, not of a nation.

In verse 9 the narrator explains that “Babel” means “confusion.” The irony here is that the Babylonian word for “Babel” means “gate of the gods.” The word they chose to portray their intended achievement now identifies their utter failure.

Unlike the previous judgments, there is no gracious provision from God in the midst of the judgment. From here on, the nations will develop in utter futility and confusion until God will make a great nation through a man who himself would be scattered. Abraham thus becomes the hope in the midst of the judgment.

The genealogy of Genesis 11:10-26 forms the fifth *toledot* and stresses the movement from death (Genesis 5) and confusion and scattering (Gen 10; 11:1-9) to life through the realization of the promises of God in Abraham.

II. The Life of Abraham (11:27-25:18)

This division begins the sixth *toledot*. Although it says it is “the account of Terah,” it is really the narrative of Abraham’s life and faith in God.

Genesis 11:27-22:24 forms a concentric parallel emphasizing the covenant with Isaac and Ishmael.

A Genealogy of Terah (11:27-32)

B Promise of a son and start of Abraham’s spiritual journey (12:1-9)

C Abraham lies about Sarah; God protects her in a foreign palace (12:10-20)

D Lot settles in Sodom (13:1-18)

E Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot militarily (14:1-24)

F Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Ishmael (15:1-16:16)

F’ Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Isaac (17:1-18:15)

E’ Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot in prayer (18:16-33)

D’ Lot flees doomed Sodom and settles in Moab (19:1-38)

C’ Abraham lies about Sarah; God protects her in foreign palace (20:1-18)

B’ Birth of son and climax of Abraham’s spiritual journey (21:1-22:19)

A’ Genealogy of Nahor (22:20-24)

The most important theme in the story of the patriarchs is the God of blessing making a covenant with Abraham and his descendents. This covenant builds on the one with Noah in 9:1-17, but where it focused on universal benefits for all, this covenant focuses on the blessings on the family of Abraham, who will then bless the rest of the world.

A second theme is the motifs of death and burial. Death is seen as slowing the fulfillment of the promises, thus reminding the reader of the presence of the curse. Thus the concern is for descendents in order to see the fulfillment of the promises.

A third theme is that of good and evil in conflict. Where God is good in providing blessings of fertility and life there are struggles and obstacles to overcome. Evil threatens to overcome the promises in the form of deception and conflict between people. Thus the story of Genesis is the triumph of good over evil through the development of the covenantal promises.

The following dates (all B.C.) are close approximations based on correlating dates between the Bible and other ancient Near Eastern sources (this study takes the 1446 Exodus view).

	1446 Exodus	1260 Exodus
Abraham	2166-1991	2000-1825
Isaac	2066-1886	1900-1720
Jacob	2006-1859	1840-1639
Joseph	1915-1805	1749-1639
Moses	1526-1406	1340-1220
Exodus	1446	1260

A. The Promise to Abram (11:27-13:2)

Genesis 11:27-32 forms a chiasmic parallel emphasizing the bareness of Sari.

A Terah and his family (11:17)

B The family lives in Ur; Haran dies (11:28)

C Abram takes Sarai; Nahor takes Milcah (son of Haran). (11:29)

X Sarai is barren, she has no children. (11:30)

C' Terah takes Abram, Sarai, and Lot (son of Haran) (11:31a)

B' The family leaves Ur and settles in Harran. (11:31b)

A' Summary of Terah's life; he dies. (11:32)

The covenant with Abraham becomes God's provision to humanity after the Tower of Babel incident. After God confused the language of humanity so that they could not ascend to godhood, He will now choose one who has been scattered and make him into a nation to guide all the other nations (gentiles) to him.

“The primeval history thus explains the significance of the patriarchal story: though apparently of little consequence in the world of their day, the patriarchs are in fact men through whom the world will be redeemed. The God who revealed himself to them was no mere tribal deity but the creator of the whole universe.”⁶⁴

“Ur is well known as an important center in the land of Sumer; it reached its zenith under the kings of the third dynasty of Ur, who around 2060-1950 B.C. [Abram was born c. 2166 B.C.] revived for the last time the ancient cultural traditions of the Sumerians.”⁶⁵

In verse 27 the name Terah may be related to the Hebrew word *yerah* meaning “moon,” which would connect him to the Mesopotamian moon god Sin, who was the principal deity of Ur. The name Abram means “exalted father,” most likely referring to his father.

In verse 29 the name Sarai means “princess” (or “lady”) and is based on the Akkadian goddess Sharratu, who was the wife of the moon god Sin. Sarai was the daughter of Terah by a different woman. The law did not prohibit the marrying of one's half-sister. Milcah means “queen,” which comes from the Akkadian title *Malkatu* for the goddess Ishtar, the daughter of the moon god.

These names, understood in the light of Joshua 24:2 and 14, make it clear that before God came to him, Abram and his family were worshiping the pagan gods of their ancestors.

In verse 30, after mentioning the pagan deities of the Terah's family, the narrator makes the contrasting point that, despite these gods, Sarai is barren. In contrast to what the gods were unable or unwilling to provide, God will make promises to Abram. Sarai's barrenness is, in the ancient world, a metaphor for hopelessness, for there is no human power to create a future. It is Sarai's barrenness that will test Abram's faith and drive the

⁶⁴Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, pp. li-lii.

⁶⁵*The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, p. 28.

whole story.⁶⁶ The mention of Lot in close connection to Abram probably means that Abram viewed Lot as his heir (11:27-32; 12:4-5; 13:1-2).



“These verses [12:1-9] are of fundamental importance for the theology of Genesis, for they serve to bind together the primeval history and the later patriarchal history and look beyond it to the subsequent history of the nation.”⁶⁷

1. What was the command that God gave to Abram in verse 12:1

2. In verses 1-3, what four things did God promise to do if Abram obeyed?

⁶⁶ The theme of God’s overcoming barrenness (Isa. 54:1) recurs with Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), Rachel (Gen. 29:31), and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:2), and foreshadows the virgin birth (Luke 1:26-38).

⁶⁷Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 274.

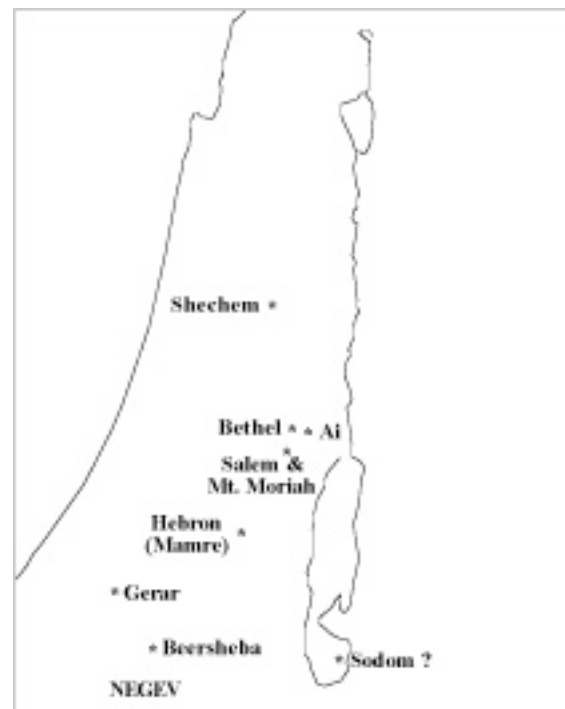
3. **Why did God choose to bless Abram, and why did Abram follow?**

4. **When did God speak to Abram and when did he obey (compare 11:27-32 with 12:4-5)?**

5. **What obstacles did Abram immediately face in verses 4-6?**

In verse 6 Moreh means “teacher,” and Shechem was a city that laid in the heart of Canaan. It is the land of Canaan that God will give to Abram and all his descendents as a blessing and with which He will make him into a great nation. By Abram building a separate altar, he dedicates the land to God and marks it for its redemption. The land is now legally his, but he does not obtain it yet.

6. **How did Abram respond to the famine in verse 10?**



7. **What were Abram’s actions in verses 11-16?**

“The thrice repeated story [involving Abraham in 12:10-20 and 20:1-18, and Isaac in 26:6-12] has been the subject of much discussion by commentators through the ages, but only with the discoveries at Nuzi has it become clear that Abraham and Isaac were not involved in any trickery, but were endeavoring to protect their respective wives from molestation by invoking the Hurrian custom or law of wife-sistership. According to the Nuzi tablets a woman having the status of wife-sister rather than that of just an ordinary wife, enjoyed superior privileges and was better protected. The status was a purely legal one, a wife-sister being quite distinct from the physical relationship usually understood by the word 'sister.' In order to create the status of wife-sistership two documents were prepared—one for marriage and the other for sistership... If such a marriage was violated, the punishment was much more severe than in the case of a straightforward ordinary marriage. It would appear that the actions of Abraham and Isaac reflect this custom.”⁶⁸

8. How did God respond in verses 17-20?

As Abram’s faith matures, God increasingly commits Himself to him. He begins with a promise to bless him (Gen. 12:2) and continues by making a covenant to make him the greatest nation on earth, through whom all will be blessed (Gen. 22).

“The call of God to Abraham is the sneak preview for the rest of the Bible. It is a story of God bringing salvation to all tribes and nations through this holy nation, administered at first by the Mosaic Covenant and then by the Lord Jesus Christ through the New Covenant. The elements of Abraham’s call are reaffirmed to Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:5-21; 17:4-8; 18:18-19; 22:17-18), to Isaac (Gen. 26:24), to Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15; 35:11-12; 46:3), to Judah (Gen. 49:8-12), to Moses (Ex. 3:6-8; Deut. 34:4), and to the ten tribes of Israel (Deut. 33). They are reaffirmed by Joseph (Gen. 50:24), by Peter to the Jews (Acts 3:25), and by Paul to the Gentiles (Gal. 3:8).”⁶⁹

⁶⁸Stuart A. West. “The Nuzi Tablets.” *Bible and Spade* 10:3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1981), p. 67. See also Ephraim A. Speiser. *Genesis*, pp. 91-92.

⁶⁹ Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 209.

B. The Blessings of Victory (13:3-14:24)

The events of chapter 13 form a chiasmic parallel emphasizing Lot's choice of Sodom.

A Abram at his Bethel altar with contentious Lot (13:3-7)

B Abram's speech: his offer of the land (13:8-9)

X Lot's choice of Sodom (13:10-13)

B' God's speech: His offer of the land (13:14-17)

A' Abram at his Hebron altar alone (13:18)

1. What was the problem in verses 3-9 and how did Abram solve it?

“Lot would have been the most likely candidate for the role of Abram's heir since he was a part of Abram's household, a blood relative (nephew), and since Sarai was barren. Abram probably regarded Lot at this time as the heir through whom God would fulfill His promises.”⁷⁰

In verse 7 the Canaanites are the physical descendants of Canaan (Gen. 10:15-18), whereas the Perizzites are a social class of Canaan's descendants driven from the cities and live in the open country (Deut. 3:5; 1 Sam. 6:18; Est. 9:19).

2. What land did Lot choose and why?

3. Why did God come again to bless Abram in verses 14-18?

In verse 16 the allusion to “dust” suggests physical seed. The “stars,” given later (Gen. 15:5), is an allusion to the heavenly or spiritual seed, in addition to physical seed.

In verse 17 the walking of the land symbolizes Abram's legal right to own the land. Ancient kings would assert their right to rule their territory by walking its borders.

In verse 1, Shinar is the region of Babylonia. The kings of Shinar, Elam, and Ellasar are all regions located in Mesopotamia (land of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; see map from

⁷⁰ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 123.

section II:A), whereas Tidal is a Hittite royal name from Anatolia region (modern-day Turkey). In verse 2, the kings mentioned are from the peninsula of land that juts into the eastern side of the Dead Sea. The kings of the north probably wanted to keep the trade routes between Mesopotamia and Egypt open and under their control.

In verse 13 the name *Hebrew* is difficult to determine its meaning. Most likely it is an ethnic term associated with Eber, the last descendant of Shem before the earth is divided (Gen. 10:21-25). This term is always used in opposition to other ethnic groups, especially Egyptians and Philistines. The Scriptures also ascribe this term only to Abraham and his descendants. This shows that they are the legitimate descendants of Shem through Eber.⁷¹

4. What did Abram do when he found out that Lot has been taken?

So far in Abram's journey of faith Yahweh has shown himself to be a God whose power transcends regions. First, in the land of Mesopotamia, the high god Marduke was the patron deity and ruled the land. Yet it was Yahweh who spoke to Abram and promised to protect and provide for him. Second, in the land of Egypt, where Ra was the high god, Yahweh protected Abram and blessed him, despite his lack of faith, showing Himself to be superior to the Egyptian gods and Pharaoh himself. And now in the land of Canaan, where Baal is high god and against those of Mesopotamia, Yahweh shows that He is able to defeat the people of another god in the land of another god. Unlike the pagan gods, Yahweh is not limited in power or by geography.

5. What did Abram do after his victory against the 4 allied kings in verses 17-21?

In verse 18 the name Melchizedek means "king of righteousness" and the city name Salem means "peace." Salem is occupied by the Jebusites, and by the time of Joshua's conquest it will be called Jerusalem (Josh. 10:1). Melchizedek is both king and priest, a combination not found in later Judaism. He is an enigma in his origins and identity, yet in this mystery, he is still merely a man who worships the same God as Abram. We know that he is not the pre-incarnate Christ because the author of Hebrews compares the resurrected Christ to Melchizedek (Heb. 7), and it would not make sense to compare someone to himself in order to prove his superiority. Neither is he an angel for Christ is shown to be superior to the angels in the book of Hebrews (Heb. 1-2) and then is shown to be similar to Melchizedek.

⁷¹ See Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 231.

Bread and wine were the royal food and drink of the day. Many writers have commented on their typical significance. Many ancient Near Easterners used them in making covenants.⁷²

In verse 19 the phrase “creator of sky and land” is a metonymy for God as the source of all life, joy and preservation in the midst of the everyday trials of life. This speaks of God as not just creator but one who is intimately involved in the present reality as humanities helper (Ps. 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 146:6).

6. Why did Abram accept nothing from the king of Sodom in verses 21-24?

In this section we see Abram’s faith in God as the sole provider for him both in land and in victory in the face of opposition. Yet Abram does not sit back and expect God to hand everything to him; rather, he participates with God in the obtaining of the promises and victories of life, just as God intended with Adam and Eve as His image bearers.

⁷²See Donald J. Wiseman, “Abraham in History and Tradition. Part II: Abraham the Prince,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:535 (July-September 1977), p. 236.

C. The Cutting of the Covenant (15:1-21)

Gen. 15 uses an alternating parallel to tie the request of Abram with the response of God.

A God makes a promise to Abram, referring to Himself as “Yahweh” (15:1)

B Abram questions God, addressing Him as “sovereign Yahweh” (15:2-3)

C God reassures him by a symbolic act of the display of the stars as reference to the seed (15:4-6)

A’ God makes a promise to Abram, referring to Himself as “Yahweh” (15:7)

B’ Abram questions God, addressing Him as “sovereign Yahweh” (15:8)

C’ God reassures him by a symbolic act of the display of the torch and smoking pot (15:9-21)

In verse 1: “‘The word of the LORD came.’ This is a phrase typically introducing revelation to a prophet, e.g., 1 Sam 15:10; Hos 1:1; but in Genesis it is found only here and in v 4 of this chapter. Abraham is actually called a prophet in 20:7. It prepares the way for the prophecy of the Egyptian bondage in vv 13-16.”⁷³

In verse 1, the Hebrew word “shield” (*magen*) is a metaphor, referencing God as a shield who protects his warrior. This is pun with the Hebrew word “delivered” (*miggen*) in Gen. 14:20, connecting God to a specific event and showing that he approved of Abram’s actions.

1. Why was Abram distressed in verses 1-2 and what does this say about how he understood the promises of God to be fulfilled?

“...under Hurrian law a man’s heir would be either his natural-born son—a direct heir—or, in the absence of any natural-born son, an indirect heir, who was an outsider adopted for the purpose. In the latter case, the adopted heir was required to attend to the physical needs of his 'parents' during their lifetime.”⁷⁴

2. How did the God respond to Abram’s distress in verses 4-5?

⁷³Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 327.

⁷⁴Stuart A. West. “The Nuzi Tablets.” *Bible and Spade* 10:3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1981), pp. 68-69. See also Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 116, 121-22.

In verse 6 the word for “believe” has the idea of considering something dependable and acting on it. The fact that Abram believed is an expression of faith and so God declared him as righteous. The word for “righteousness” means evidence of steadfast commitment or loyalty. It does not mean Abram is righteous, rather that God credits righteousness to Abram’s name in the records of heaven because of his faith and does not credit his sins against him.

In verses 9-11 the act of cutting animals half was a common way of two parties making a covenant with each other. Both parties would contribute animals of their own and then cut them in half, laying them on both sides of the path. By both of them walking between them together, they were saying, “May this happen to me if I do not honor the covenant.” Covenants were only valued upon the shedding of blood.

3. Do verses 7-11 indicate a lack of faith in Abram?

In verse 11 the “birds of prey” are seen as unclean (Lev. 11:13-19; Deut. 14:12-18) and represent foreign nations (Ezek. 17:3, 7; Zech. 5:9), most likely Egypt. Abram’s driving them away symbolically defends his inheritance from foreign enemies. Genesis 22:16-18 and 26:5 state that Abraham’s faithful obedience to the covenant is what guaranteed the blessings for his descendents. Exodus 2:24 and Deuteronomy 9:5 state that the exodus is grounded in the promises to the patriarchs.

4. What is the significance of what God tells Abram in verses 12-16?

In verse 16 the name Amorite is sometimes used as a term to refer to all the earlier inhabitants of Palestine (Gen. 48:22; Deut. 1:44; Jos. 2:10). Here it is used as a synecdoche for the ten nations listed in 15:19-21.

5. What does the statement in verse 16 mean and what does this say about God?⁷⁵

⁷⁵ The ugaritic texts (an ancient Syrian port city on the cost of the Mediterranean Sea ca. 1400 BC) documents the sins of the Amorites. It makes mention of the gods that they worshipped degrading themselves in violent acts and sexual deviant behavior.

In verse 17 “the smoking firepot and flaming torch” are two separate things. The term “flaming torch” refers to a portable, handheld wooden torch whose end is lit with fire (Jdg. 7:16, 20; 15:4, 5; Isa. 62:1; Ezek. 1:13; Nah. 2:4; Zech. 12:6; Job 41:19; Dan. 10:6). The “smoking firepot” refers to a portable earthenware pot used to bake dough or roast meat by putting charcoal inside it or putting the pot near a fire (Ex. 7:28; Lev. 2:4; 7:9; 11:35; 26:26). As both parties walk between the cut animals, each one would have carried either the torch or the firepot as a sign of their participation in the covenant. Both parties would then be obligated to each other in the fulfillment of their duties. This would make the covenant conditional, so that if one violated the terms of agreement, the other was freed from the covenantal bond.⁷⁶

Some have argued that because Abram did not walk between the two animals that the covenant made in Genesis 15 is unconditional; however, this is a misunderstanding of the culture and the context. Abram, upon seeing two objects passing between the cut up animals, would have interpreted them to represent two people, not one. God put Abram to sleep most likely because Abram would not have survived a physical walk with God between the animals. The fact that neither God nor Abram physically walk between the animals shows that the two separate objects represented the two parties in the covenant. The conditional nature of the covenant is also later emphasized in Gen. 17:1-2, 9, which makes it clear that Abram has a responsibility in maintaining the covenant. God wants to have a relationship with Abram; however, Abram is responsible as well.

This makes the promises of Gen. 12:1-4 an official covenant – the third covenant that God will make with humanity. This is also by far the most important and foundational covenants, for it is upon this covenant that God will build all others that will lead the coming and fulfillment of the messiah.

6. What land was Abram promised in verse 18?

⁷⁶ See Gordon Johnston, “God’s Covenant with Abraham in Gen. 15 in Light of A.N.E. Oath-Taking Rituals,” p. 8.

D. The Birth of Ishmael (16:1-16)

The first scene (16:1-6) and the second scene (16:7-14) are tied together with the use of the verb “fled” and the titles “mistress” and “maidservant.” The first scene (6:1-6) is an alternating parallel.

A Sarai proposes (16:1-2a)

B Abram agrees (16:2b)

C Sarai’s actions (16:3)

D Hagar’s reaction (16:4)

A’ Sarai proposes (16:5)

B’ Abram agrees (16:6a)

C’ Sarai’s actions (16:6b)

D’ Hagar’s reaction (16:6c)

The second scene (16:7-14) follows a concentric parallel emphasizing the angel’s prophecies.

A Angel finds Hagar by the spring (16:7)

B Dialogue between Angel and Hagar (16:8-9)

C Angel’s first prophecy (16:10)

C’ Angel’s second prophecy (16:11-12)

B’ Hagar’s worshiping response (16:13)

A’ Hagar names the well (16:14)

1. What was Sarai’s idea in verses 1-2 and why did she come up with it?

In verse 2 the word “maidservant” refers to a personal female servant owned by a rich woman, not a slave girl answerable to the male. The practice of surrogate motherhood for an infertile wife through her maidservant was an acceptable practice during this time period as evidenced by Gen. 30:3-12 and the Code of Hammurabi.⁷⁷

Though using a maidservant was the custom of the ancient Near East it was never God’s desire (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-5). “A thousand volumes written against polygamy would

⁷⁷ The Code of Hammurabi is an ancient law code created ca. 1790 by the Babylonian king Hammurabi. Though Abraham lived about 200 to 300 years before the Code of Hammurabi, it is not the *first* recorded law code in history but the most detailed one found in archeology. The Code of Ur-Nammu (ca. 2100-2050 BC), though not complete, shows that there were similarities between many of the law codes of the ancient world. These law codes give us an idea of what Abram and Sarai would have seen as acceptable or not.

not lead to a clearer fuller conviction of the evils of that practice than the story under review.”⁷⁸

2. Why did Hagar despise Sarai in verse 5?

3. How did Abram and Sarai deal with Hagar in verse 6?

4. Were the actions of Abram and Sarai in verses 1-6 those of faith?

5. How did God deal with Hagar and what was His prophecy in verses 7-12?

In verse 11 the name Ishmael means “God hears.” This shows that Hagar felt that God was compassionate and treated her justly.

In verse 13 Hagar names God *El-Roi*, which is a pun that can mean either “the God who sees me” or “the God that I see.” The first fits her context and the second fits her explanation. This is the only instance in all the Scriptures where a human gives God a name.

⁷⁸George Bush. *Notes on Genesis*, 1:259.

E. The Sign of the Covenant (17:1-27)

Genesis 17 follows an alternating parallel.

A Abraham the father of nations and king's name is changed (17:1-8)

B Law of circumcision is set forth (17:9-14)

A' Sarah the mother of nations and king's name is changed (17:15-22)

B' Law of circumcision is carried out (17:23-27)

In verse 1 the Hebrew name *El Shaddai* used of God has been commonly translated as "almighty God," yet this is too vague of an understanding. Though the origin and meaning of the name is uncertain, it is clear from its context that it carries the idea of God as the source of fertility and life (Gen. 17:1-8; 29:31; 30:22-24; 35:11, 16-18; 43:14). See *The Meaning of the Name El Shaddai* excursus.

1. What were the requirements of the covenant for God and Abram in verses 1-9?

2. How did Abram respond to what God said to him?

In verse 5 God changes Abram's name, "exalted father," to Abraham, "the father of a multitude."

"The choice of the word *be fruitful* in verse 6 and *multiply* in verse 2 seems intended to recall the blessing of all humankind in 1:29: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land,' and its reiteration in 9:1: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land.' Thus the covenant with Abraham was the means through which God's original blessing would again be channeled to all humankind."⁷⁹

3. What was the sign of the covenant and its requirement, according to verses 9-14?

⁷⁹John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 157.

In verse 12 the requirement of circumcision being on the eighth shows that God is truly the creator and sustainer of the human body. Before birth the baby's nutrients and antibodies comes from his mother's blood, including her blood-clotting ability, which is made possible by the protein prothrombin. Prothrombin is dependent on vitamin K for its production. At birth the baby is unable to produce vitamin K. After birth prothrombin decreases so that by the third day it is only 30 percent of normal, this would result in hemorrhaging if cut. Gradually the body begins to produce vitamin K and by the eighth day production is at 110 percent and then levels off to 100 percent for the remainder of ones life. Therefore the eighth day was the safest of all days for circumcision to be performed. Today vitamin K is routinely administered to newborns shortly after their delivery, which eliminates the clotting problem. However, before the days of vitamin K injections, a 1953 pediatrics textbook recommended that the best day to circumcise a newborn was the eighth day of life.⁸⁰

In verse 15 God changes Sarai's name, "my princess," to Sarah, "royal princess from whom kings would come." Abraham's name emphasized the multitude of the seed where Sarah's name emphasized the royal nature of the line.

4. In light of Abraham's previous demonstrations of faith, how should the reader interpret his laughter in verse 17?

In verse 19 the name Isaac, meaning "he laughs," could be a shortened form of "may God laugh," signifying divine approval. The irony is that it will be God laughing when He fulfills His promise despite the impossibilities of the physical realm.

5. How did Abraham respond to God's command of circumcision in verses 23-27?

Circumcision was not a new rite in the ancient Near East. The priests in Egypt practiced it, but in Mesopotamia it was not customary. Later the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites practiced it, but the Philistines did not. It also had hygienic value since cancer of the penis was much higher in uncircumcised males.⁸¹ Circumcision was a rite of passage for adults in these cultures.⁸² Normally it was practiced on young adults (Gen. 34), whereas circumcising infants was something new here.

⁸⁰See L. Holt, Jr. and R. McIntosh, *Holt Pediatrics*, pp. 125-26.

⁸¹Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September 1990):276.

⁸²Derek Kidner. *Genesis*, p. 174.

However, we do not fully understand the nature and meaning of circumcision and exactly why God made it the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. It is clear that this ritual marks the male as set apart. At the very heart of the promises of God to Abraham is the promise of the seed that will be a great nation and ultimately bless the whole world. Thus, the organ responsible for the procreation of the seed must be consecrated to God (Deut 30:6; Jer. 4:4). It is possible, where God does not require child sacrifice, that this is a substitutionary sacrifice of the body to God. Spiritually it would have been a frequent reminder to every circumcised male of God's promises involving seed and a symbol that they had repudiated "the flesh" in favor of trust in God and His spiritual promises.

Another possibility is that it could have been protection from evil spiritual beings and forces of the spiritual realm. It is interesting that at this time in history the cultures that do not perform circumcision also require human sacrifices. The Egyptians, for example, did not sacrifice humans and they also circumcised their adult males. Today, the Occult, especially in Africa, does not allow for children or adults who have been circumcised to be sacrificed at the altar. The demonic spirits that the shamans follow remedially forbade the offering of a human who has been circumcised, calling them defiled. Though it is not clear why the demons will not accept this sacrifice, it is possible that God, knowing this, has His people circumcised at birth to protect them from being taken and sacrificed by the Canaanites among whom they would be living.

Excursus: The Meaning of El Shaddai

Grammatical Description

El is the generic name for god; it is used of Yahweh as well as the other pagan gods of the culture. It is the equivalent to the English lower case *god*. El and Shaddai thus form a compound name for God.

Shaddai is often translated as “God Almighty;” however, this does not seem to be the best translation of the name. The focus does not seem to be so much on power and might (although that is implied) but more on sovereignty and kingship.

The most likely proposal is that the name Shaddai means “God, the one of the mountain.” The closest association of Shaddai is to the Akkadian word *Shadu*, which means “mountain.”

In the Hebrew the word for “mountain” is *har*, but Hebrew does have the word *shad*, which means “breast.” One can see the connection between mountain and breast, which is also a play on words for fertility and blessings (Ex. 49:25; see *Uses of El Shaddai* below).

Occurrences of El Shaddai

The use of the name El Shaddai is the name that is associated with the patriarchal period and seems to fade away after that.

The first occurrence of El Shaddai is in Genesis 17:1 when God is giving Abraham the sign of His covenant with him. “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘I am the *Sovereign God*.’”

In Exodus 6:3 God tells Moses that the patriarchs knew Him by only the name El Shaddai. “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as the *Sovereign God*, but by my name ‘Yahweh’ I was not known to them.”

The divine name El Shaddai occurs 48 times in the Bible. Out of the 48 occurrences it appears 42 times in the patriarchal period: 9 times in the Pentateuch, 2 times in Ruth and 31 times in Job. It occurs only 6 times outside of this period: 4 times in the prophets and 2 times in the Psalms.

Uses of El Shaddai

Mountains in the ancient cultures were seen as the dwelling places of the gods and represented their thrones and their sovereignty and kingship upon sitting on them. In Hebrew literature Mount Zion was seen as the mountain from which El Shaddai rules.

“Certainly the Lord has chosen Zion; He decided to make it his home.” (Psalm 132:13)

“Sing praises to the Lord, who rules in Zion! Tell the nations what He has done!” (Psalm 9:11)

“May the Lord bless you from Zion, that you might see Jerusalem prosper all the days of your life, and that you might see your grandchildren. May Israel experience peace!” (Psalm 128:5-6)

When God reveals Himself as El Shaddai in Genesis, it is in connection with blessings of fertility and multiple descendants.

In Genesis 17 when God reveals Himself as El Shaddai, He exhorts Abram to go the extra mile in obedience and then He will confirm His covenant with Abram of multiple descendants. “Then I will confirm my covenant between me and you, and I will give you a multitude of descendants” (17:2). God goes on and elaborates on how He will bless Abram with fertility and multiple descendants, saying, “...because I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you extremely fruitful” (17:5).

In Jacob’s farewell address in Genesis 49:25 Jacob makes a connection between the title of El Shaddai and the promises of blessings of the breast and womb, which is a word play between *Shaddai* and *shad* (breast). “...because of the *Sovereign God*, who will bless you with blessings from the sky above, blessings from the deep that lies below, and blessings of the breasts and womb.”

Throughout the rest of the Bible, the title El Shaddai is used in the context of the sovereign God of blessing, and it will bring with it all of the concepts of the God of the covenant of multiple descendants as developed in Genesis.

G. The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:1-38)

In verse 1, the city gate was where city authorities and judges sat. During the day the officials would sit in chambers off the passageway that went through the city wall in order to control the trade going in and out and to hear the cases of people coming into the city. The fact that Lot as gone from living *near* Sodom (Gen. 13:12) to dwelling *in* it (Gen. 14:12) to now being one of the city officials (Gen. 19:1) shows his progressive compromise over time.

1. What were Lot's actions in verses 1-5?



In verse 5, the locals' desire to have sex with the two visitors is not just a sin of homosexuality but, even worse, the desire to humiliate and subjugate another. This mentality of homosexual gang rape is not much different from prison rape today. The goal of such action is to dominate and humiliate the new person in the most degrading way possible in order to demonstrate absolute authority over the person. If it was merely about fulfilling a homosexual sexual desire, the whole city would not have come and forced themselves into the house.

2. What is the significance of Lot offering his daughters to the men in verse 8?

3. Why was Lot's wife punished so harshly for looking back in verse 26?

4. What is the significance of verses 27-29?

5. What is the significance of the daughters' actions in verses 30-35?

The Moabites (verses 37-38) were a nation that dwelled south of the Dead Sea, and the Ammonites dwelled east of the Jordan River. These two nations were later rejected by God because of their mistreatment of Israel (Deut. 23:3-6).

This story stands in stark contrast to that of Abraham's faith. Whereas Abraham invites God and the angels into his home without fear of the neighbors due to his choice of dwelling, Lot cannot offer security to his guests. Abraham, through faith, will become a great nation, whereas, through their lack of faith, Lot has lost his family and his daughters will beget ungodly nations.

“The impact of the unit focuses more directly on a characterization of the father. The one who offered his daughters for the sexual gratification of his wicked neighbors now becomes the object of his daughters' incestuous relationship... To be seduced by one's own daughters into an incestuous relationship with pregnancy following is bad enough. Not to know that the seduction had occurred is worse. To fall prey to the whole plot a second time is worse than ever.”⁸³

“In tragic irony, a drunk Lot carried out the very act which he himself had suggested to the men of Sodom (19:8)—he lay with his own daughters.”

“The account is remarkably similar to the story of the last days of Noah after his rescue from the Flood (9:20-27). There, as here, the patriarch became drunk with wine and uncovered himself in the presence of his children. In both narratives, the act had grave consequences. Thus at the close of the two great narratives of divine judgment, the Flood and the destruction of Sodom, those who were saved from God's wrath subsequently fell into a form of sin reminiscent of those who died in the judgment. This is a common theme in the prophetic literature (e.g., Isa 56-66; Mal 1).”⁸⁴

⁸³George W. Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, p. 147.

⁸⁴John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 174.

H. Abraham and Abimelech (20:1-18)

Genesis 20 follows a chiasmic parallel emphasizing the fear of Abimelech.

A Abimelech takes Sarah into his harem (20:1-2)

B God rebukes Abimelech (20:3-7)

X Abimelech and his officials become afraid (20:8)

B' Abimelech rebukes Abraham (20:9-13)

A' Abimelech blesses Abraham, and Abraham prays for Abimelech (20:14-18)

“The focus of the narrative of chapters 20 and 21 is on the relationship between Abraham and the nations. Abraham’s role is that of a prophetic intercessor, as in the promise ‘all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’ (12:3). He prayed for the Philistines (20:7), and God healed them (v. 17). In the narrative Abimelech plays the role of a ‘righteous Gentile’ with whom Abraham could live in peace and blessing. There is, then, an implied contrast in the narratives between chapters 19 (Lot, the one who pictures the mixed multitude) and 20 (Abimelech, the righteous sojourner).”⁸⁵

1. Compare and contrast the events of Gen. 12:10-20 with this chapter.

“Apparently, shortly after the announcement of a birth one year hence, Sarah is again taken into another man's harem. The reader is to infer that if there is an heir, he is in danger of being reckoned as Abimelech’s not Abraham's. But Yahweh intervenes once again and preserves Sarah (20.6b) and restores her to Abraham.”⁸⁶

In verse 7 Abraham called a “prophet.” This is the first explicit reference to a prophet in the Old Testament. Prophets received direct revelations from God and communicated to others the will of God on behalf of God. Here the role of the prophet includes that of intercessor, as it does elsewhere in Scripture.

2. Why did God bless Abraham at the end of this chapter?

3. What is the point of this story if it is similar to the events of Gen. 12:10-20?

⁸⁵John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” p. 161.

⁸⁶Larry R. Helyer. “The Separation of Abram and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 26 (June 1983), p. 84.

I. The Birth of Isaac (21:1-34)

There are similarities in structure between the two Hagar scenes (16:1-16; 21:1-21).

Genesis 16:1-16		Genesis 21:1-21	
1	Sarai's infertility	1-5	Sarah's fertility
2-3	Sarai's response of "sleep with my maidservant"	6-8	Sarah's response of praise laughter
4	Hagar pregnant, abuses Sarai	9	Ishmael abuses Isaac
5-6	Sarai complains and drives Hagar out	10	Sarah complains, "drive out Hagar"
7-9	God speaks, sends Hagar back	11-12	God speaks, "Send Hagar out"
10	Promise to increase descendants	13	Promise to make the son of your maid a nation
11-14	"Ishmael will be a lone wanderer"	14-18	Hagar and Ishmael alone in the desert
15	Ishmael born to Abram	19-20	Ishmael saved
16	Ishmael born to Hagar	21	Hagar gets Ishmael a wife

1. How did Abraham and Sarah respond when Isaac is finally born in verses 1-8?

2. What is the contrast in verses 9-10?

3. What did Abraham do and why, according to verses 11-16?

In verse 14 the word "child" does not necessarily refer to his age but rather the Hebrew word, *naar*, refers to one who is inexperienced.

4. What was the problem in verses 22-34 and how did Abraham solve it?

In verse 31 the word “Beersheba” can mean either “well of oath” or “well of seven.” It is a pun, where both ideas have been used in the text.

5. Why is this story included in the narrative?

“The reader is forced to ask why the author constantly draws attention to the fact that Abraham was dwelling with the Philistines during this time [cf. v. 34]. The purpose of such reminders may be to portray Abraham as one who had yet to experience the complete fulfillment of God's promises.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 177.

J. The Sacrifice of Isaac (22:1-24)

1. Why would God require Abraham to sacrifice his son, and what does this say about God?

In verse 1 the word “tested” means “to test; to try; to prove.” Unlike Satan, God is not tempting Abraham here; rather, God tests to strengthen us and prove our worthiness (Ex. 20:20; Deut. 8:2).

In verse 2 the designation of “the land of Moriah” occurs again in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as the mountain on which the temple stood in Jerusalem.

2. What kind of faith did Abraham demonstrate in verses 3-8?

“In fact, the God who requires Abraham to sacrifice his only son after the manner of the Canaanites (2 Kings 3:27; Jer. 19:5), is only apparently the true God. The demand was indeed only made to prove that Abraham was not behind the heathen in the self-denying surrender of his dearest to his God, and that when the demand had been complied with in spirit, the external fulfillment might be rejected.”⁸⁸

3. What do you learn about Isaac from verses 1-10?

4. What is the significance of God’s statement in verse 12?

“The sacrifice was already accomplished in his [Abraham's] heart, and he had fully satisfied the requirements of God.”⁸⁹

⁸⁸ F. Delitzsch. *New Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 2, p. 91.

⁸⁹ Keil and Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, 1:250.

5. What did God do after He stopped Abraham?

In verse 16 God makes the covenant with Abraham unconditional. For God swears by Himself that because of what Abraham did that day, God will most certainly bless Abraham and his descendents. From here on, all of Abraham's descendents will reap the benefits of the covenant because of Abraham's faithfulness. The fact that God makes a big deal about swearing that He will honor His promises based on Abraham's actions here and does not use any conditional language demonstrates that this is the first time that the covenant truly becomes an unconditional covenant.

In verses 20-24, the genealogy of Nahor establishes the background for Rebekah who will become the wife of Isaac.

“This section signals a change in the direction of the narrative. It moves from Abraham to the next generation and its connections with the East. The record of Nahor's 12 sons prepares the way for the story of Isaac's marriage. It also shows that Rebekah was the daughter of Bethuel's wife Milcah (v. 23), not the daughter of Bethuel's concubine (v. 24). Isaac's marriage was very important because Isaac was the heir of the promises (ch. 24).”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 163.

K. The Death of Sarah (23:1-20)

“Abraham's purchase of a burial site in the Promised Land demonstrated his intention to remain in Canaan rather than going back to his native homeland. Since he was a sojourner in Canaan his friends probably expected him to bury Sarah back in their home area, namely Mesopotamia.”

“The two major events contained in this chapter continue Moses' emphasis on God's faithfulness. They do so by recording the death of Abraham's wife, the mother of his heir, and by showing the beginning of the fulfillment of the land promise that God had given to Abraham.”⁹¹

In verse 1, Sarah is the only woman in the Scriptures whose life span is given, showing her importance. She dies when Isaac is 37, three years before he is married. Abraham will outlive her by 38 years.

1. How did the Hittites respond to Abraham in verses 5-6?

“Why did Ephron want to sell Abraham the entire plot of ground in which the cave lay rather than just the cave as Abraham requested (vv. 8-11)? Hittite law specified that when a landowner sold only part of his property to someone else the original owner had to continue to pay all taxes on the land. However if he sold the entire tract the new owner was responsible to pay the taxes (cf. 1 Chron. 21:24). Consequently Ephron held out for the entire tract knowing that Abraham needed to make his purchase quickly so he could bury Sarah.”⁹²

2. What was Abraham's attitude toward the Hittites?

3. What is the significance of this story in the larger Abraham story?

⁹¹ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 163.

⁹² Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 164.

“It should be stressed here that the world of the patriarchs was that of a developed and organized society and not what is usually regarded as a simple pastoral-bedouin existence. Throughout Genesis 12-50 there are connections to Mesopotamia and to Egypt as well as negotiations with local political centers (Shechem, Salem and Hebron) as well as Gerar in the Western Negev on a branch of the Coastal Highway.”

“Much of the theological relevance of the patriarchs is based upon the fact that there were other more attractive lifestyles available to these early Biblical figures. The option they chose gave them few of the advantages they could have enjoyed elsewhere, especially in Mesopotamia where their family was established. In light of this fact and the great promises made to Abraham during his lifetime, his remark to the leaders of Hebron after the death of his wife, Sarah, takes on new meaning.”⁹³

⁹³James M. Monson. *The Land Between*, pp. 153-54.

L. A Wife for Isaac (24:1-67)

In verse 2, the statement, “put your hand under my thigh” is reference to the loins—a euphemism for the seed of Abraham, which is Isaac. The point here is that because Isaac is the seed of Abraham, he will receive the blessing of the seed—in this case, the Abrahamic Covenant. The servant is asked to do this not because *he* is going to receive the blessing but because he must ensure that the blessing continue by finding a wife for Isaac, the seed.

“The privacy of the *thigh* and its association with begetting (46:26, Heb.) made the oath particularly solemn.”⁹⁴

1. Why did Abraham send his servant and not Isaac to find a wife?

2. What were the actions of the servant in verses 10-21?

In verse 15 the meaning of the name Rebekah is unknown.

It was custom in Hurrian society to consult the bride before going to the family. Likewise, the brother usually took the lead in giving his sister in marriage. Notice that Laban is the principal negotiator who represented the family rather than Bethuel, her father (v. 50). The description of the family farewell also reflects this system of fratriarchy (vv. 59-60).⁹⁵

3. How is Rebekah portrayed in verses 15-27?

4. What is the significance of repeating the events of verses 1-33 in verses 34-49?

⁹⁴Derek Kidner. *Genesis*, p. 147.

⁹⁵See Stuart A. West. “The Nuzi Tablets.” *Bible and Spade* 10:3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1981), pp. 67-68; Ephraim A. Speiser. *Genesis*, pp. 184-85.

In verse 29, Laban's name means "white," which is a metonym for the moon (Isa. 24:23; 30:26) and shows his family connection with the pagan gods.

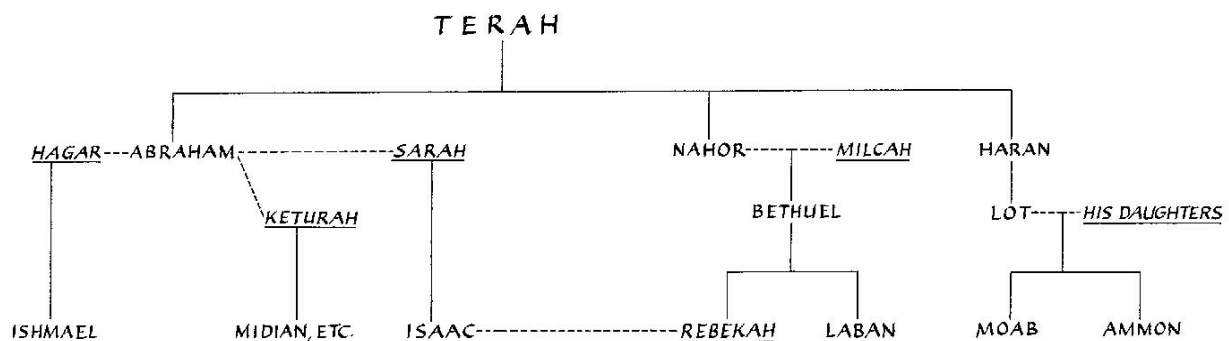
5. How is Laban portrayed in verse 29?

In verse 60 the blessing that is pronounced upon Rebekah echoes God's blessing upon Sarah (Gen. 17:16). Just as Isaac is the seed of Abraham and continues the covenant blessings, so Rebekah becomes the next matriarch who will join Isaac in the continuation of the seed and blessings

In verse 65, Rebekah covers her face to show that she is the bride. Israelite women were not normally veiled (Gen. 12:14; 38:14). However, they would wear a veil on their wedding day.

In verse 67 Isaac's taking of Rebekah into his mother's tent once again shows Rebekah's connection to Sarah. The two things that make one married according to God are the consummation and the public declaration. Though Isaac's marriage was arranged by his father, which was not uncommon in the ancient Near East, both of these elements are present in this story. Likewise the narrator emphasizes Isaac's commitment to Rebekah in that "he loved her."

"The final remarks (v. 67) again show that God's guidance in the mundane areas of life is good for those who put their trust in him. When Isaac took Rebekah as his wife, he loved her and was comforted with her after the death of his mother. In other words, Rebekah had taken the place of Sarah in the line of the descendants of Abraham."⁹⁶



⁹⁶John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 178.

M. The Death of Abraham (25:1-18)

Keturah may have been a concubine like Hagar. It is not possible to prove that Abraham married Keturah or that he married her after Sarah's death. The text makes no attempt to date this marriage or the offspring; he may have married her earlier in his life while Sarah was alive.

1. Why did the narrator include this genealogy?

2. Why did Abraham send his other sons away in verse 6?

In verse 8 the phrase "gathered to his people" implies reunion in Sheol, the place of departed spirits, with friends who had died previously. It presupposes continued personal existence after physical death (Gen. 15:15; Heb. 11:13).⁹⁷

Verses 12-18 forms the seventh *toledot* and show that God fulfilled His promises regarding Ishmael (Gen. 16:10-12; 17:20). Ishmael, like Nahor and Jacob, fathered 12 sons. The inclusion of the fact that Ishmael lived "in defiance of all his relations" (v. 18) shows the fulfillment of God's prediction to Hagar (Gen. 16:12).

From an Israelite perspective, a natural death at the end of a long and satisfying life was not thought of as punishment, but as a great reward (Gen. 35:29; Ex. 20:12; Jud. 8:32; Ps. 21:4; 91:16). In contrast, an early death or death in exile represented God's punishment (Ps. 102:23; Is. 65:20; Deut. 28:58-68).

In Genesis 46:30, Jacob said that he was ready to die after seeing Joseph alive. He was satisfied, and he regarded his life as complete. However, when he believed Joseph to be dead, he anticipated that his own death would be a bitter one as a result (Gen. 37:35).

Similarly, Numbers 16 records several examples of premature death, which came through the judgment of God. In verses 29 and 30, Moses indicates that this was the only kind of death that would be interpreted as the judgment of God. The thought of a premature death was abhorrent to the righteous Israelite, who feared being cut off from his people and from the worship of His God (Ps. 88).⁹⁸

⁹⁷ See Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 169.

⁹⁸ Robert A. Pyne. *Soteriology*, p. 30.

III. The Life of Isaac and Jacob (25:19-37:1)

This division begins the eighth *toledot*. Although it says it is “the account of Isaac,” it is really the narrative of Jacob’s life and faith in God.

“The figure of even a great man may be dwarfed by comparison with that of a distinguished father or of a famous son. Thus the character of Isaac is overshadowed by the majesty of Abraham and the dramatic interest of Jacob. There was a third factor, which diminished the importance of Isaac; he was the husband of a clever and masterful wife. No matter how exciting the scene in which he may appear, he is always assigned to a minor part. At least, by contrast with these other actors, his role in life was prosaic, uneventful, obscure.”⁹⁹

The main focus of this account is God’s promise of guidance, protection (Gen. 28:15; 31:42; 32:9, 12; 35:3), and blessing given to Abraham (Gen. 24:7), which is then passed on to Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 28:3-4; 31:1-5; 35:11-12).

Genesis 25:19-35:22 forms a concentric parallel:

- A Oracle sought; struggle in childbirth; Jacob born (25:19-34)
- B Interlude: Rebekah in a foreign palace; pact with foreigners (26:1-35)
- C Jacob fears Esau and flees (27:1-28:9)
- D Messengers (28:10-22)
- E Arrival in Haran (29:1-30)
- F Jacob’s wives are fertile (29:31-30:24)
- F’ Jacobs flocks are fertile (30:25-43)
- E’ Flight from Haran (31:1-55)
- D’ Messengers (32:1-32)
- C’ Jacob returns and fears Esau (33:1-20)
- B’ Interlude: Dinah in foreign palace; pact with foreigners (34:1-31)
- A’ Oracle fulfilled; struggle in childbirth; Jacob becomes Israel (35:1-22)

N. The Birthright of Esau (25:19-34)

1. Why was Rebekah barren just like Sarah was?

⁹⁹Charles R. Erdman, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 86.

2. Why did God choose Jacob instead of Esau, the firstborn?

In verses 25-26, Esau means “hairy one,” and Jacob means “may he protect,” as in “dogging his heels” = following him closely. The Hebrew *ya'aqob* (Jacob) is similar sounding to *'aqeb* (heel). It is later that Esau will ascribe a negative meaning to Jacob’s name (Gen. 27:37).

3. Compare and contrast Esau and Jacob in verses 24-28.

4. What did Esau do for food in verses 29-34 and why?

“The birthright was the privilege of being chief of the tribe and head of the family (27:29). In Isaac's family it entitled the bearer to the blessing of Yahweh's promise (27:4, 27-29), which included the possession of Canaan and covenant fellowship with God (28:4). It included a double portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:17) and the privilege of being the priest (spiritual leader) of the family.”¹⁰⁰

5. How are the characters of the brothers contrasted in verses 29-34?

6. What does it mean that Esau “despised his birthright?”

¹⁰⁰ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 174.

“The frivolity with which he [Esau] sold his birthright... rendered him unfit to be the heir and possessor of the promised grace.”¹⁰¹

“How often do we put the question to ourselves, 'What is my mess of pottage?' It is important to verbalize the question. We are in constant danger of being tempted to give up something very precious in order to indulge a sudden strong desire. The desire may involve greedy eating and drinking, lusting after money or material things, letting loose our anger in abandonment of reason, succumbing to depression without check, cursing God in despair or disappointment without even thinking of the trap Satan set for Job and is setting for us, giving in to a sweeping sexual desire without waiting for the right framework. The mess of pottage that is dangerous to you and to me is any temptation to gratify the 'feelings' of the immediate moment in a way that shows we 'despise' the promises of the living God for our future.”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Keil and Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, p. 1:269.

¹⁰² Edith Schaeffer, “What Is My Mess of Pottage?” *Christianity Today* (March 14, 1975), p. 50.

O. Isaac, Rebekah, and Abimelech (26:1-33)

In verse 1 is a reference to the Philistines. The major migration of the Philistines into Canaan took place in the twelfth century B.C. However, there were some Philistines already in Canaan at this time (Gen. 21:32, 34). Gerer is a city in the plain territory on the southwest coast of Canaan.

1. What is significant about what God said to Isaac in verses 1-6?

In verse 5, the terms “my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” are legal designations for sections of the Mosaic Law and presuppose the existence of the law. Some Rabbinic teachers taught that Abraham had fulfilled the Mosaic Law before it was even given. However, this would make Genesis 15:6 sound like Abraham’s obedience to the law is what saved him and would contradict Paul’s teachings in Galatians 3 and Romans 7. It makes more sense that the narrator (Moses the Lawgiver) described Abraham’s obedience by using terms that the Israelites were familiar with. Thus, he depicts Abraham as the model of obedience to God’s commands, whose example Israel should follow.

“In choosing Abraham and not Moses, the author shows that 'keeping the law' means 'believing in God,' just as Abraham believed God and was counted righteous (Gen 15:6). In effect the author of the Pentateuch says, ‘Be like Abraham. Live a life of faith and it can be said that you are keeping the law.’”¹⁰³

In verse 8 the name Abimelech is a title rather than a personal name and means “royal father.” This may have been a ruler other than the one Abraham dealt with.

2. What is the significance of the narrator including the events of verses 7-11?

3. What is the significance of the events in verses 12-22?

4. What do we learn about Isaac in verses 23-33?

¹⁰³John H. Sailhamer, “The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (Fall 1991):253, 254.

P. Jacob Takes Esau's Blessing (26:34-28:22)

The concentric parallel emphasizes the blessing of Isaac.

A Isaac and the son of the birthright (Esau) (27:1-5)

B Rebekah sends Jacob on the stage (27:6-17)

C Jacob appears before Isaac and receives blessing (27:18-29)

C' Esau appears before Isaac and receives antiblessing (27:30-40)

B' Rebekah sends Jacob from the stage (27:41-45)

A' Isaac and the son of the birthright (Jacob) (27:46-28:5)

1. Why did Esau's marriage cause Isaac and Rebekah anxiety in verse 35?

2. Was Isaac faithful to God in his desire to give Esau the blessing?

3. Why did Rebekah tell Jacob to deceive his father in verses 5-10?

4. Why did Jacob deceive his father, and did he demonstrate faith in God in gaining the blessing?

In verse 28 the reference to “grain and new wine” is the image of a banquet and the idea of plenty and abundance that God will provide as a blessing of the covenant. This blessing will be repeated again in Deut. 7:13—when Israel enters the promised land—and in the prophets, it will stand as the sign of the Messiah and the kingdom of God.

In verse 36 Esau gives Jacob's name a new meaning. Rather than his name meaning “one who protects the heel,” he is now “one who trips the heel.”

In verses 39-40 Isaac's blessing serves as a foreshadowing of who Esau the father of the Edomites will be.

“The mountains of Edom are some of the most desolate and barren of any on earth. They stand to the southeast of the Dead Sea. The Edomites served, revolted from, and were conquered by the Israelites repeatedly during their history. Saul defeated them after they enjoyed a long period of independence (1 Sam. 14:47). Then David made them his vassals (2 Sam. 8:14). They tried to revolt under Solomon but were unsuccessful (1 Kings 9:14 ff.). The Edomites were subject to Judah until King Joram's reign when they rebelled successfully. In Amaziah's reign Judah again subjugated them (2 Kings 14:7). They finally achieved permanent freedom from Judah during Ahaz's reign (2 Kings 16:6). John Hyrcanus conquered Edom about 129 BC, forced the Edomites to submit to circumcision, and incorporated them into the Jewish nation. Later through Antipater and Herod they established the Idumean dynasty over Judah that lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.”¹⁰⁴

5. What was the result of Jacob’s deception in verses 41-45?

In verses 42-46 Rebekah uses her dislike for Esau's wives as an excuse to gain Isaac's permission for Jacob to go to Paddan-aram and find a wife. More specifically, it is to remove Jacob from Esau’s anger. This suggests that Isaac is not aware of the tension between the two brothers.

6. What is the difference between the blessings in 27:27-29 and 28:1-4?

7. Why did Esau go to Ishmael to find more wives in 28:6-9?

The Aramean women had the reputation of embracing their husband’s faith where the Canaanite women would seduce their husbands to join their lifestyle.

In verse 12 the word “stairway” refers to a stone staircase, like the steps of a ziggurat, rather than to a ladder or sloped hill that some have suggested. However, unlike the ziggurat of the pagan religions, man did not build this one nor do men ascend it to become like gods. Rather, the angels are the ones who ascend and descend, bringing the will and blessings of God to men and taking the prayers of humanity to God (Heb. 1:14). The ancients viewed the ziggurat as a gateway to heaven, the top being the house of the gods. Thus, Jacob sees this stairway as the true gateway to God and so names the place

¹⁰⁴ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 184.

Bethel, which means “house of God” (v. 17).¹⁰⁵ God gives Jacob a glimpse of heaven and shows that the kingdom of God is open to him through the Abrahamic Covenant.

8. Why did God bless Jacob in verses 13-15?

9. What is the nature of Jacob’s vow in verses 20-22?

¹⁰⁵ See C. Houtman, “What Did Jacob See in His Dream at Bethel? Some Remarks on Genesis 28:10-22,” *VT* 27 (1977): 337-52.

Q. Laban Outwits Jacob (29:1-30)

The well mentioned in verse 2 is a cistern. This is a large raindrop-like hole that was carved into the bedrock and collected rain during the rainy season. Once it was filled, it would be covered with a large, circular stone. With no light or air, the bacteria would die and the sediment would settle to the ground, leaving purified water in the cistern.

1. What did Jacob do when he arrived at the well?

The chiasmic structure of Gen. 29:20-30 emphasizes the deception and its consequences.

A Jacob's payment for his wife (29:20)

B Consummation of the marriage to Leah by deception (29:21-24)

C Jacob's accusation against Laban (29:25)

C' Laban's defense (29:26)

B' Consummation of the marriage to Rachel by negotiation (29:27-30a)

A' Jacob's payment for his wife (29:30b)

In verse 18, "Regarding marriage generally, the Nuzi tablets provided that if a man worked over a period of time for the father of a girl whom he wished to marry, then he would have the right to take the girl as his wife."¹⁰⁶

2. What is the irony in what happened to Jacob in verses 25-26?

3. What was the agreement that was reached in verses 27-30?

"Jacob had planned to take Rachel as his wife, but God intended him to have Leah."¹⁰⁷

"God remains faithful to His promises to bless His people, but in the process He may discipline them for their previous unresolved sins and often does so in kind."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Stuart A. West. "The Nuzi Tablets." *Bible and Spade* 10:3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1981), p. 70.

¹⁰⁷ John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 195.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 190.

R. The Growth of Jacob's House (29:31-31:55)

1. Why was Leah able to have children, according to verse 31?

In verses 32-35 Leah gives birth to her first four sons. The name *Reuben* means “see, a son” and the name *Simeon* comes from the verbal root *shama*, which means “hearing.” Together the names emphasize that God has seen and heard her in His providential care. The meaning of the name *Levi* is debated, but it sounds like the verb *lavah*, which means “to join,” with the idea that Jacob will be joined with her. The name *Judah* means “he [God] will be praised.”

“Jacob had planned to take Rachel as his wife, but God intended him to have Leah. Thus in two major reversals in Jacob's life, we can begin to see the writer's theme taking shape. Jacob sought to marry Rachel, but Laban tricked him. Then Jacob sought to build a family through Rachel, but she was barren; and God opened Leah's womb.”¹⁰⁹

2. How did Rachel have children in 30:1-7?

In verses 6-8 the name *Dan* means, “he vindicated” or “he judged.” The name *Naphtali* means something like “my struggle.”

In verses 9-13 the name *Gad* means “good fortune.” The name *Asher* means “happy one.”

In verse 14 mandrakes are small fruits that resemble tiny apples. They have a strong, pleasant fragrance, and some Arabs still use them as an aphrodisiac. However, the mandrakes do nothing for Rachel. It will be God who later allows her to have children (Gen. 30:22).

3. What was the result of Jacob having two wives, according to 29:31-30:18?

In verses 18-21 the name *Issachar* means “man of reward” or possibly “there is reward.” The name *Zebulun* means “honor.” The meaning of the daughter's name *Dinah* is unknown and is the only named daughter of Jacob. Counting Dinah, Leah has more children than the other women combined—and the perfect number of children, seven. This shows God's favor for Leah.

¹⁰⁹ John H. Sailhamer. *Genesis*, p. 200.

In verse 24 the name *Joseph* means “may he add,” expressing Rachel’s desire for more children. Once again, we see the compassion of God, which allows Rachel to have children.

“The conflict between Rachel and Leah focuses on love and motherhood. Rachel had Jacob's love, but she could not become a mother. Conversely, Leah was the mother of Jacob's children, but she could not win his love.”¹¹⁰

The jealousy, bickering, and superstition demonstrated by Jacob and his wives stand out in this section. God’s gift of children was gracious and flowed out of His compassion for them, but not because of their amazing faith. The narrator recording Leah using the name *Yahweh* and Rachel using the name *Elohim* shows their true attitudes and relationship with Him. It is not until Joseph is born that Rachel acknowledges God as Yahweh.

4. Why did Laban not want Jacob to leave his home in verses 25-30?

5. What was the deal that Jacob and Laban agreed upon in verses 31-34?

6. How did Jacob increase the size of his flock, according to verses 37-43?

7. Why did Jacob and his wives choose to leave Laban in 31:1-16?

8. What was the conflict in verses 30-37?

¹¹⁰ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 191.

These gods were small figurines (two to three inches long), sometimes carried on the body as charms, many of which archaeologists have discovered. Rachel may also have hoped they would make her a fruitful mother.¹¹¹

“It is curious that Rachel, and not Leah should have almost always turned out to be Jacob’s greatest hindrance in life.”¹¹²

9. Why did Laban allow Jacob to leave?

“The so-called ‘Mizpah blessing’ was not really a promise between friends but a warning between men who did not trust each other (v. 49). They called on God to keep each other true to the terms of the covenant they had just made. They could not check on each other themselves.”¹¹³

10. What was Jacob’s relationship with God like while he was with Laban?

¹¹¹ See Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., "The Linguistic Origins of Teraphim," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1967):230-38; and Gerhard Mehlman, "Genesis 31:19-39: An Interpretation," *Journal of Reform Judaism* 29:3 (Summer 1982):33-36.

¹¹² W. H. Griffith Thomas. *Geneis*, p. 285.

¹¹³ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 196.

S. Jacob and Esau Are Reconciled (32:1-33:17)

“The events of this chapter are couched between two accounts of Jacob's encounter with angels (vv. 1, 25). The effect of these two brief pictures of Jacob's meeting with angels on his return to the land is to align the present narrative with the similar picture of the Promised Land in the early chapters of Genesis. The land was guarded on its borders by angels. The same picture was suggested early in the Book of Genesis when Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden and 'cherubim' were positioned on the east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life. It can hardly be accidental that as Jacob returned from the east, he was met by angels at the border of the Promised Land.”¹¹⁴

In verse 1 the name *Mahanaim* apparently means “two camps.” Perhaps the two camps were those of God and of Jacob.

1. What was Jacob's plan in verses 3-8?

2. What was Jacob's attitude, seen in verses 3-12?

3. Why did Jacob send gifts ahead to Esau in verses 13-21?

In verse 22 the Jabbok was probably just a few miles east of the Jordan Valley. It joins the Jordan River about midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.

In verse 24 the narrator calls the opponent “a man,” reflecting Jacob's perspective at the beginning of the encounter. Later in the struggle, Jacob realize the angel's true identity.

4. Why did Jacob refuse to let go of the angel?

¹¹⁴ John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 208.

“It was when Jacob was alone, having done everything he could to secure his own safety, that God came to him (v. 24). The ‘man’ was the Angel of the Lord (vv. 28-30). Note that God took the initiative in wrestling with Jacob, not vice versa. God was bringing Jacob to the end of himself. He was leading him to a settled conviction that God was superior to him and that he must submit to God’s leadership in his life (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).”¹¹⁵

In verse 28 the name *Israel* means “God fights.” It will be both a promise and a call for faith. In essence, the Lord was saying that Jacob would have victory and receive the promises because God would fight for him.

“The name Israel denoted a spiritual state determined by faith; and in Jacob's life the natural state, determined by flesh and blood, still continued to stand side by side with this. Jacob's new name was transmitted to his descendents, however, who were called Israel as the covenant nation. For as the blessing of their forefather's conflict came down to them as a spiritual inheritance, so did they also enter upon the duty of preserving this inheritance by continuing in a similar conflict.”¹¹⁶

In verse 30 the name *Peniel* means “face of God.” Either Jacob truly believed he had seen God, or it is figurative for how much of God’s character was revealed to him. The phrase “face to face” is used in the Bible only of God-human relationships (Ex. 33:11).

5. Why had Esau forgiven Jacob in this chapter?

¹¹⁵ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 199.

¹¹⁶ Keil and Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, p. 1:307.

T. Dinah and the Shechemites (33:18-34:31)

1. Was Jacob obedient to God in verses 18-20?

In verse 34:1 the reference to the “women of the land” is a reference to Canaanite women who were repulsive to Abraham, Isaac, and Rebekah, but Dinah is going to join them. Furthermore, she goes alone, which is extremely unwise in this culture. Girls of a marriageable age would not leave a rural encampment to go to an alien city unchaperoned.

2. How did Jacob and his sons react to the rape in verses 5-7?

3. What were the actions of the brothers?

Even though the Jews were unique in that God required them to be circumcised as infants, they were not the only culture to perform circumcision. Though it was not a common practice among the Canaanites, males were known to be circumcised as adults as a means of initiation.

4. How did Jacob respond to the actions of his sons in verse 30?

U. Israel Fulfills his Vow (35:1-37:1)

About 10 years had passed since Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, and he still had not returned to Bethel to fulfill his vow there (Gen. 28:20-22). God appeared to Jacob and commanded him to fulfill his vow.

1. What was Jacob's response to God in verses 2-5?

2. Why did God rename Jacob Israel a second time in verse 10?

“The importance of God's words to Jacob in vv. 11-12 cannot be overemphasized. First, God's words ‘be fruitful and increase in number’ recalled clearly the primeval blessing of Creation (1:28) and hence showed God to be still ‘at work’ in bringing about the blessing to all mankind through Jacob. Second, for the first time since 17:16 (‘kings of peoples will come from her’), the mention is made of royalty (‘kings,’ v. 11) in the promised line. Third, the promise of the land, first given to Abraham and then to Isaac, was renewed here with Jacob (v. 12). Thus within these brief words several major themes of the book have come together. The primeval blessing of mankind was renewed through the promise of a royal offspring and the gift of the land.”¹¹⁷

In verse 16 Jacob was not disobedient to God in leaving Bethel. God's instructions to go to Bethel and “live there” were evidently directions to dwell there while he fulfilled his vow. God did not command permanent residence there.

In verse 18 *Ben-oni* means “son of my pain,” yet Jacob renamed him *Benjamin*, which means “son of my right hand.” Jacob's naming him this gives Benjamin great authority and prominence in the family. This is especially interesting since he is the last born, yet he is from Rachel.

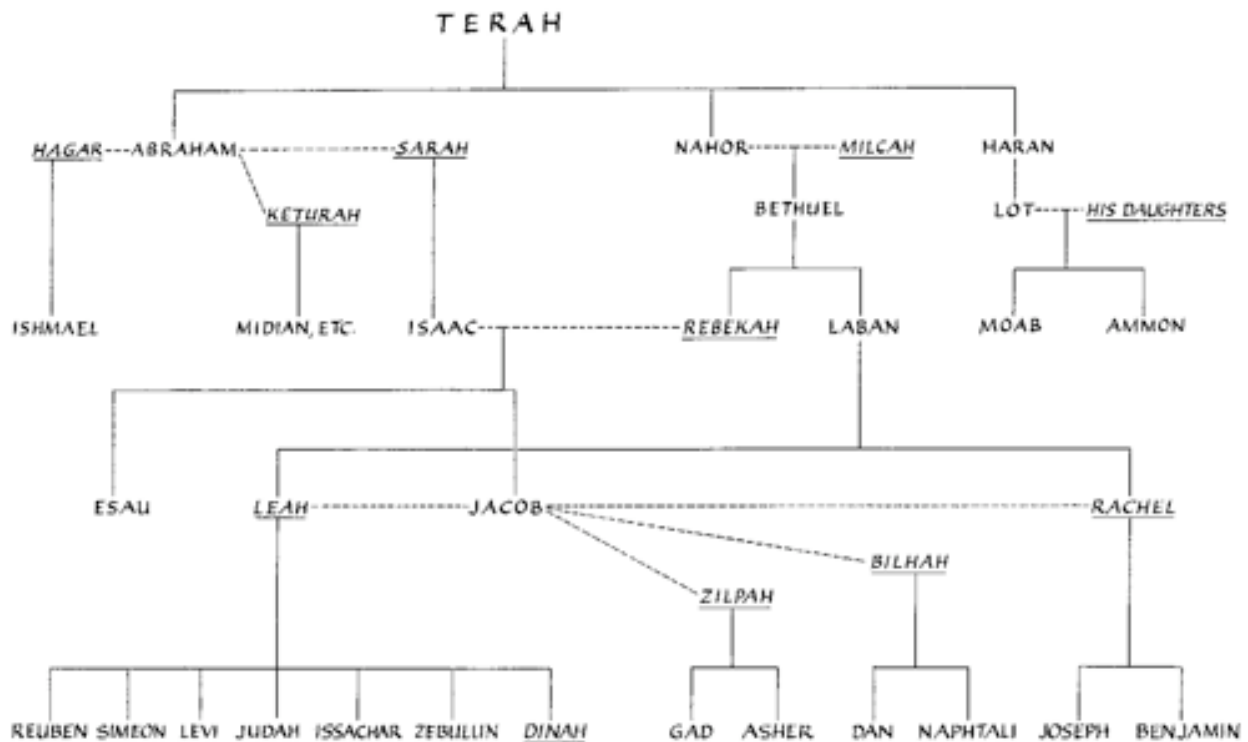
3. What is the significance of Reuben's actions in verse 22?

In verse 27 Jacob returns to his father's inheritance. Jacob presumably visited Isaac in Hebron on various occasions following his return from Paddan-aram. However, on this occasion he moved his family to his father's encampment and evidently remained there as Isaac's heir.

¹¹⁷ John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” p. 218.

“Jacob had left Beersheba with only a staff in his hand. Now he returned with 12 sons, a large household, and much livestock. The most important aspect of God's blessing was his 12 sons, grouped here with their four mothers, through whom God would fulfill His promises to the patriarchs.”¹¹⁸

“The end of the Jacob narratives is marked by the death of his father, Isaac. The purpose of this notice is not simply to record Isaac's death but rather to show the complete fulfillment of God's promise to Jacob (28:21). According to Jacob's vow, he had asked that God watch over him during his sojourn and return him safely to the house of his father. Thus the conclusion of the narrative marks the final fulfillment of these words as Jacob returned to the house of his father, Isaac, before he died.”¹¹⁹



Genesis 36:1-43 forms the ninth *toledot* about Esau's genealogy. “Moses included this relatively short genealogy (*toledot*) in the sacred record to show God's faithfulness in multiplying Abraham's seed as He had promised. He also did so to provide connections with the descendents of Esau referred to later in the history of Israel. Among his descendents were the Edomites (v. 8) and the Amalekites (v. 12).”¹²⁰

Perhaps the major lesson of this genealogy is that secular greatness develops faster than spiritual greatness. Consequently, the godly must wait patiently for the fulfillment of God's promises.

¹¹⁸ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 210.

¹¹⁹ John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” p. 220.

¹²⁰ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 211.

IV. The Life of Joseph (37:2-50:26)

This division begins the tenth and final *toledot*. Although it says it is “the account of Jacob,” it is really the narrative primarily of Joseph’s life and faith in God and secondarily of Judah’s.

Judah was not the firstborn son but the fourth (Gen. 35:23), yet he has now become the firstborn by title due to the sins of his older brothers—Reuben’s sexual sin (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4) and Simeon and Levi’s act of violence (Gen. 34:30; 49:5-7).

“Just as Abraham had two sons and only one was the son of promise, and just as Isaac had two sons and only one was the son of the blessing, so now Jacob, though he has twelve sons, has two wives (Leah and Rachel); and each has a son (Judah and Joseph) that can rightfully contend for the blessing. In the narratives that follow, the writer holds both sons, Joseph and Judah, before the readers as rightful heirs of the promise. As the Jacob narratives have already anticipated, in the end it was Judah, the son of Leah, not Joseph, the son of Rachel, that gained the blessing (49:8-12).”¹²¹

Genesis 37:2-50:26 forms a concentric parallel, which emphasizes the reconciliation of Joseph with his brothers.

A Introduction: beginning of Joseph story (37:2-11)

B Jacob mourns “death” of Joseph (37:12-36)

C Interlude: Judah signified as leader (38:1-30)

D Joseph’s enslavement in Egypt (39:1-23)

E Joseph savior of Egypt through disfavor at Pharaoh’s court (40:1-41:57)

F Journey of brothers to Egypt (42:1-43:34)

G Brothers pass Joseph’s test of love for brother (44:1-34)

G’ Joseph gives up his power over brothers (45:1-28)

F’ Migration of family to Egypt (46:1-27)

E’ Joseph savior of family through favor at Pharaoh’s court (46:28-47:12)

D’ Joseph’s enslaving of Egyptians (47:13-31)

C’ Interlude: Judah blessed as ruler (48:1-49:28)

B’ Joseph mourns death of Jacob (49:29-50:14)

A’ Conclusion: End of Joseph story (50:15-26)

¹²¹ John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” p. 218.

A. Joseph Rejected by His Brothers (37:2-36)

In verse 2 a possible translation could be “‘Joseph, his seventeen-year-old son, was pasturing his brothers among the flocks...’ This indicates that perhaps Jacob had placed Joseph in a position of responsibility over his brothers. This could explain in part why Joseph's brothers resented him. It is also interesting that this phrase prefigures Joseph's later shepherding role in relation to his brothers, after they became dependent on him.”¹²²

In verse 3 it is not clear what this tunic was like because the meaning of the Hebrew word that describes it is uncertain. The idea that it was a coat of many colors comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. More accurately, it was a long robe that was richly embroidered. The sons of nobles wore long robes with long sleeves and ornamentation, like Joseph's, as did Tamar, the daughter of King David (2 Sam. 13:18). It marked the exemption from labor and special privileges for the heir of the father/king.

1. Why did the sons of Jacob hate their brother Joseph in verses 1-4?

2. What were Joseph's dreams in verses 5-11 and what did they mean?

3. Why did Joseph tell his family his dreams and what does this say about him?

“This revelation at the beginning of the story shows God as the Director behind the entire account. This is the first dream in the Bible in which God does not speak (cf. 20:3; 28:12-15; 31:11, 24). It forms a transition in the dominant means of God's revelation from theophany in Genesis 1-11, to dreams and visions in Genesis 12-35, and now to providence in Genesis 36-50. These three stages resemble the three parts of TaNaK (i.e., the OT). In the *Torah* (‘Law’), God speaks to Moses in theophany; in the *Nebiim* (‘Prophets’), he speaks in dreams and visions; and in the *Ketubim* (‘Writings’), he works mostly through providence.”¹²³

4. Why did Jacob send Joseph to check on his other sons?

¹²² Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 213.

¹²³ Bruce K. Waltke. *Genesis: a Commentary*, p. 500.

In verses 15-17 it was not uncommon for shepherds to lead their flocks many miles from home in search of pasture. Shechem was about 60 miles north of Hebron. Jacob owned land there. Dothan was 17 miles farther north.

In verses 18-20 the statement “Here comes this master of dreams!” shows the brothers resent the dreams as much as the dreamer. The extreme measures Joseph’s brothers go to in order to silence him suggest that it was not just personal hatred that motivated them; they may have wanted to alter the will of God revealed in Joseph’s dreams.

“The brothers’ hate is therefore a rebellion against the matter contained in the dreams, against the divine power itself, standing behind them, who had given the dreams. The expression usually translated by ‘the dreamer’ [v. 19] means much more than our English word, namely, the one empowered to prophetic dreams.”¹²⁴

In verse 20 a cistern is deep, teardrop-shaped hole that was carved into the bedrock to collect rain during the rainy season for drinking water. If a cistern developed cracks over time, it was converted to a winepress cellar or dungeon. As this one was empty (Gen. 37:24), the brothers have chosen a dungeon for Joseph.

5. What is the irony in verses 25-28?

6. How are Reuben and Judah contrasted in verses 21-31?

“They had not only sold their brother, but in their brother they had cast out a member of the seed promised and given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from the fellowship of the chosen family, and sinned against the God of salvation and His promises.”¹²⁵

Jacob had deceived his father with the skin of a goat (Gen. 27:16). Now his sons were deceiving him with the blood of a goat (Gen. 37:31).

“Had Jacob believed more strongly in God’s revelations in Joseph’s dreams he might not have jumped to the conclusion that Joseph was dead, and his sorrow might not have been as great. Jacob’s fears were groundless, but he did not realize this because he chose in this instance to live by sight rather than by faith.”¹²⁶

In verse 36 the name *Potiphar* is a shortened form of the Egyptian name *Potiphera*, meaning “he whom Ra (the sun god) has given.” The title “the captain of the guard” might mean he is either Pharaoh’s personal bodyguard or the head executioner in Pharaoh’s court. Either way, he has great authority and influence in Pharaoh’s court.

¹²⁴ Gerhard von Rad. *Genesis*, p. 353.

¹²⁵ Keil and Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, p. 1:332.

¹²⁶ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 216.

B. Judah Sins Against Tamar (38:1-30)

1. What is the significance of Judah's marriage in verse 2?

In verses 8-10 Judah tries to ensure the levirate rights of his daughter-in-law Tamar. The levirate marriage is where a brother is required to marry his deceased brother's wife. This requirement ensures that the widowed woman and her children have a male provider responsible for them. It also ensures that the inheritance of the deceased husband/brother stays within the family. Deuteronomy 25:5-10 requires that if the woman has no children then the brother of the widowed woman's deceased husband is required to provide a child through the widowed woman. This child would then take the name and inheritance of the deceased husband/brother, thus maintaining the family name and line. In addition to this being part of the Mosaic Law, it was also a common custom in the ancient near east before the giving of the Mosaic Law.

2. What are the problems in verses 6-11?

3. Why did Tamar go to Judah as a prostitute in verses 12-14?

In verse 21 the Hebrew noun translated "cult prostitute" is derived from a verb meaning "to be set apart; to be distinct." The term refers to a woman who did not marry but was dedicated to temple service as a cult prostitute. The masculine form of this noun is used for male cult prostitutes. Judah thought he had gone to an ordinary prostitute (Gen. 37:15), but Hirah went looking for a cult prostitute, perhaps because it had been a sheep-shearing festival.

4. What is the irony of verse 24?

5. Why did Judah call Tamar righteous in verse 26?

“Judah’s response to his sins against God and Tamar seems to have been genuine repentance (v. 26). He confessed his wrong and repented by ceasing from further sexual relations with her, his daughter-in-law. It is evidently because his repentance was genuine that Jacob did not exclude him from receiving a special blessing as he did Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Because he humbled himself God raised him to be the chief of the house of Israel and blessed the children that he fathered even though they were a result of his sin. (Compare God's blessing of Solomon even though he was the fruit of the unlawful union of David and Bathsheba.)”¹²⁷

In verse 27-30 “Perez (meaning a breach or one who breaks through) was the first of the twins born (vv. 27-30). He became the ancestor of David and Messiah (Matt. 1:3). Moses may have included the unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of these twins in the record to emphasize God's selection of the son through whom the line of blessing would descend. The scarlet thread marked the second-born, Zerah (dawning, i.e., red or scarlet). It did not indicate the Messianic line. That line came through the other son, Perez. The thread is perhaps just a detail of the story that explains the names given.”¹²⁸

“As the Jacob narrative began with an account of the struggle of the twins Jacob and Esau (25:22), so now the conclusion of the Jacob narrative is marked by a similar struggle of twins. In both cases the struggle resulted in a reversal of the right of the firstborn and the right of the blessing... The brevity and austerity with which the narrative is recounted leaves the impression that the meaning of the passage is self-evident to the reader. Indeed, coming as it does on the heels of a long series of reversals in which the younger gains the upper hand on the elder, its sense is transparent.”¹²⁹

It is obvious by now that the family of Jacob is becoming corrupted by the influence of the surrounding Canaanites. In His mercy God will remove them from this influence so that they do not continue on in their corruption. This is why he has chosen Joseph—in order to take them away from the Canaanites for a time.

6. Why did the narrator place this scene in the middle of the Joseph story?

¹²⁷ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 220.

¹²⁸ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Genesis*, p. 220.

¹²⁹ John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” p. 232.