Kith and Kin

Foreword

I was led to write a series of articles called *"Kith and Kin",* (about the Patriarchal Fathers and their families), for T*he Australian Christadelphian Shield Magazine* some years ago, when a friend said to me that she thought God would never accept her into His kingdom, because her family was so dysfunctional, and she could not seem to get things right. I knew that God would not penalise her for that, and so I set out to devote some time and thought, and then some writing, to these *Biblical*, God loved and accepted, but dysfunctioning families.

God loves all who wish to make a relationship with Him, as long as we stay connected, and strive to do His will, moving from dysfunction to well function. That is the fact that helps those human beings who find life a disappointing experience, and that living is almost too difficult. The love of God compensates for the mediocrity of existence, and eases us through difficult life experiences. If we stay connected to God He will never disappoint us.

The "*Kith and Kin"* magazine articles has now been revised, and as well, greatly expanded into a book of 600 pages. There is freedom from the constraints of time and space that a magazine, of necessity, imposes. This later text is now in five independent books, though still interdependent as well. Each book is made up of more than one section, except that on Isaac.

The story is not dull and tedious, and hopefully the commentary is not told that way. There are many unanswered questions, and the characters that are assembled on this *Genesis* stage hold the keys to those. We may never know the answers, until God chooses to reveal them. But the consideration of the questions can only enrich our understanding of the delicate family fabric that is placed there for our benefit. The usefulness of questions for discussion may attract the interest of *Bible Classes,* particularly women's classes, or anyone interested in family related *Biblical* topics. *Byron* said, "*A drop of ink may make a million think*". So whatever some people think, it is enough that they think, for they can enhance their spiritual dimensions thinking about Godly things, and come to some conclusions of their own, rather than believing what others say without question.

Perhaps, too often we portray Godly *Biblical* characters in such a glowing light, that they, in their perfections, become an unattainable model, and too hard for people to follow. Young people, especially, can feel frustrated at their own efforts, and can easily give up. Maybe looking at these Godly characters and discovering their deficiencies as well, is a positive move.

BIBLE STUDY

The benefit of *Bible* study is that it shows us how much we do not understand but we do learn that our spiritual flow is increased, the more our desire to know Him is fulfilled and then our potential to be "*in Him*" is realised. It is not easy to understand how the process works, and we are not required to do so. There are unfathomable mysteries, but the heavenly truths surpass the earthly show, and that helps us to more easily understand. As the sorrows and joys of our youth pass into treasured memories, with the serenity of old age, when the slanting rays of the sun lengthen, we understand better the futility of trying to define our being. The sculpture of the world, or indeed the universe, is beyond us, and it seems it matters not if we don't know **everything**. **We just need to know Him.**

If we fold the wings of intellect and allow the wind to drift us into the realm of trust in our **Heavenly Father**, we shall find great support in that **hallowed** place to enrich the treasures He has given us, in His **name**. We will look for His **kingdom** and welcome His **will**. He will provide our needs especially our spiritual **bread,** and that is enough. We need not focus on our **sin**, and certainly not on the sins of others, but it is with the grace of God that we will not endure too hard **temptation**, and be that we will be **delivered from evil**. If we keep in the shadow of His wings, growing in Him, we will eventually be with Him in His K**ingdom**. For His is the **power** and the **glory, forever, Amen**. **And that is indeed enough**

THE LESSONS FOR US IN KNOWING GOD - JOB AND PETER

Job answered God, finally, in *chapter 42*, when he ceased questioning Him, and said, "*I know that you can do everything well*". He now sees with the eyes of faith and spiritual understanding, that God and His purposes are supreme. He says to God, "*You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak'*". He now has listened, and accepts suffering as part of his life, a sort of down payment. He had now "*stilled and quieted his soul*", *Psalm 131*. We need to still and quiet our souls, understand and listen, let go and let God.

Perhaps **Peter** was an ideal *New Testament* scribe, **preserved, because he fell, and revived, and fell again**, like us. He wrote letters of encouragement to the first century believers, for when Rome put such harsh penalties upon those who were convicted of being Christians, they fell, and revived, and fell again, and he understood their frailties. Our own are no better. **Peter, with an unshakeable and profound faith, even in the face of falling**, can provide us with a philosophy that will transform our lives from a conglomerate of fortuitous changes into a meaningful divinely arranged plan, where we fit in the big picture. "***I would have you believe that in everything God works for the good of those who love Him, according to His purpose", Romans 8:28,*** said *Paul*.

Our times are in God's hands. Because of that, it is possible for us to fulfil in every detail the purpose and plan He is working out for us, **and** endure the evil days. It is how we deal with the evil day which helps us to shine in the good day. It is useful to keep white stones and black stones, to remind us, like the messages from God, "*yes*" or "*no*", or perhaps "*maybe*" or "*not yet*". No man, or woman, can live a life full of contentment, assured, secure, and satisfied, but the man, or woman, who accepts all of the discontent that life turns up, and turns it into positive life experiences, is truly blessed. That is where *Genesis* is so comforting, **that God loved this family of the patriarchs, as He did Job for all his arguments, as He did Peter, for all his vicissitudes. And He loves us as well.**

***BIBLICAL* DRAMA AND SOME IMAGINATION MAKES IT REALISTIC**

Some parts of *Scripture* need reading with great drama, and much of *Genesis* falls into this category. There are so many sad bits, and happy bits, and thrilling bits, and wicked bits and evil bits, and joyous bits, which can only be understood in the great dramatic settings which have been provided by Moses. If then we can suspend our cultural setting and enter into their setting, the benefits will be enormous. Sometimes the text of "*Kith and Kin*" can only survive, if that suspension takes place.

There is relief also in some chapters in the "*Kith and Kin*" text, such as when we read of

Terah's family in Ur

How Abram heard about God

Eliezer's mission for Isaac's wife

Eliezer's comfort of Jacob

The Family Firm, **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products**

The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company

The ten Cain heads

The Memphis baker's shop

What Potiphar's house was like

The gilding of Joseph

The houses of Egypt

Jacob before Pharaoh

Jacob's burial

What happened to Joseph while he waited for the bowing down family

These views might seem far fetched, or unnecessary for the story, but when we are filled with anxiety for the actual story being told in *Scripture*, there is need for some comforting relief. The facts may, or may not have applied, but like all tragedies have the literary tool of comic relief, this tale is not tainted by the extra comments of possibilities. Any worthwhile commentary will stretch our imagination without adding to God's *Holy Writ*, and it is not untenable to fill out the stories where detail is missing, for example, that Jacob could have wrapped Rachel in silk, when he so sadly buried her in the earth near Bethlehem, outside the Machpelah family tomb

PRESENT DAY LESSONS

We have spiritually intense moments where we are transported to high and noble plains, where God is present with us, helping us to understand, as much as He was present with the *Genesis* family. We can feel Him with us if we believe He is. It would be foolish to diminish those moments when our personal faith can well be renewed. They save us from the despondency of what is ignoble in our lives, as their great moments saved them from their ignominy.

The lessons are often under the heading "***Comment***". There are many times when we do not understand everything about this story and so questions are placed in great numbers under ***"Consider".*** There is a ***FOCUS*** direction and a relevant text to direct discussion, and a ***CONCLUSION*** for each chapter. **HEADINGS** are numbered within the chapters to help the progression of that discussion. There are some ***Digression*** passages unrelated to the text, but considered interesting and appropriate to include. May it all help us towards the continuing need to apply these truths of God towards our own development, and to remind ourselves of the truth that God does love us if we stay connected to Him.

There is something for everyone in the book of *Genesis*. Certainly there are tales of success and great joy, but there are also tales of great sorrow and ill. Everyone will find themselves.

There are the unloved, the abused, the left behinds, the neglected, and any other disadvantaged that you may conceive.

There is child abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, substance abuse, and neglect, and any other abuse that you can imagine.

There is incest and homosexuality and dysfunctional parent/child relationships, owner/slave relationships, inter racial relationships, poisoned gender relationships and any other soured relationships that you can think of.

Find yourself and see what happened. Was it a good result, could you have done better?

There are God/saint relationships, and those give us great joy

I have read with interest the discussions of the minimalists with the maximalists and have felt sorry for those who believe that the patriarchal narratives are folkloric, with everything late and fictional. The minimalists claimed that potential memory for oral tradition is 150 years, and some of the narratives told to this Genesis author are over 500 years old, so "*they could not be true*". Now historical and archaeological evidence, recently uncovered, together with the *Biblical* internal evidence has proved this viewpoint untrue.

Consequently it is pleasing to record in the text, as they arise, some emphatic and stylistic viewpoints on the inspiration of the Pentateuch, and as well, for the early compilation of Moses, rather than a more recent redactor.

The brilliant narratives may not carry very many ancient memories but together with their overriding inspiration, they have a power and authority that is more compelling than ordinary history and so it is a record of an era in sacred time.

REFLECTIONS

I readily admit to feeling passionate about the subject, and that might have seeped into some of the text, and may seem obvious. The connections in the Patriarchal well functioning and dysfunctioning families, with our well function and dysfunction, is so keen that we are brought to the presence of God in the management of our lives, as they were in theirs. I have thrilled with all of the studies, more than I thought possible. I have cried and cried with that involvement, and had my heart in **my** mouth and a lump in **my** throat. For the five years that I have been involved, I have felt that a part of my brain never switches off from this saga, whatever view I see, wherever place I am, whatever happens in my family, for this *Genesis* family has become part of my own family, and, like my own biological family, they are ***"on my mind"*** all the time. "*I am sure that I know*" how they felt, and what they thought, and what they saw and heard. It is as if they were at my elbow, whispering, in my ear. I have heard God's tune, "*not yet, not yet*", until the "*yet*" has come, and His croon "*soon, soon, soon*" to the disappointed ones, when I, also, have been disappointed. Certainly I could hear the bleating of the sheep, the anguished cries to God for children, the continual pleadings of the seemingly abandoned women, the severe and painful cries of the neglected and the abused, and the grieved - and I could hear the chariot wheels. Anyone can, if they listen intently. I've never had a writer's block, and so I fear some will criticise that I have included too much, but it has flowed freely, and for me it has been a truly spiritual experience. I don't wish that to be disrespectful, nor to diminish the great privilege that has been mine to complete this work. I have learned enormous lessons, and have only thought to share those, not to pontificate about others.

To write so prolifically leaves one vulnerable and exposed. I am conscious that I am opening my private thoughts to scrutiny and to allow people to see what is "*under my skin*". I wish, therefore, to say that I am not in any way presenting this as a definitive study, nor am I confident, with all

my care, that it is error free, but I offer it as a study that may help us understand our *Biblical* brethren, and the dysfunction and conflict in their lives, and one that can help us to make wise decisions for ourselves, when we are in that same shadow of discontent.

There have been times when I have begun to think that the work would never be complete, for Ted would find me yet another resource on the subject. There is still so much more to be said, but there must be a conclusion now. This is not a book for skim reading, and with all the detail, there are ideas on how the incidents happened. There are many sources, and influences, and endless puzzles. Sometimes the questions are answered later in the text, but often, there are no easy answers to our questions. With all of that I hope that the readers find the text accessible and helpful in understanding the Patriarchal Fathers and their families.

RESOURCES

All *Biblical* quotations are from the *Authorised Version*, 1611, unless otherwise stated in the text. NIV refers to New International Version. Massoretic, Septuagint, Vulgate and Pentateuch texts are noted in the text, (but not in the bibliography); as are ancient documents such as the Apocrypha, Talmud, Book of the Dead, Code of Hammurabi, Nuzi Tablets, Dead Sea Scrolls, Nag Hammadi Parchments and Mari Letters, and the Koran, except for direct quotes. *Scripture* references, and *quotations*, *authors*, *book titles* and *sources,* are all in *italics*. **SOURCES** are stated at the end of each book, that is, the bibliography, and permission noted, where applicable which may help with further reading. Some of the information is repeated, where a repeating relevance is necessary. An **OVERVIEW** of the 5 books in "*Kith and Kin*" follows this Foreword, and as well, a **CONTENTS** file of each book for reference, all before **BOOK 1**.

I would mention that there has been no little help from published Christadelphian works and in them also there lies a strong predilection for me. It would be difficult to enumerate the historical novels, newspapers, magazines articles, research papers, commentaries and concordances. There are records of lectures, exhibitions, museums and art galleries that have given me ideas. Some are contemporary, some are centuries old. I am indebted to fertile minds, with unique gifts, and have mentioned them within the text where possible, rather than with footnotes. Access permission to texts has been acknowledged where necessary, under the guidance of the Australian Copyright Council.

It is remarkable that the *Hebrew* and *Greek Scriptures* are now so readily available for our contemplation, in so many different English translations. We can now readily see the actual influence of translators in all the *Biblical* texts, and will eventually have more truth unveiled to us when the *Dead Sea Scrolls'* research is made fully available.

Some commentaries have come to us through retranslation from German, like the books of *Thomas Mann* on which I have heavily drawn, and feel a debt. Some, like the Scottish theologians, were prevented access to the texts, so it is only comparatively recently that they have been privileged to add their ideas. I have found that the moderns are as helpful as the old commentators, especially as new knowledge develops for their interpretation.

Of interest might be a Multi Generational Transmission Chart and a Time Age Chart of the Patriarchal Family, both recorded at the end of **BOOK 5**. Also included, with permission, is a **CONTEMPORY AGE REFERENCE CHART** compiled by Denis Arthur of Brisbane

A course I have attended, with 24 sessions over this past year, on studies in "*Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*", has included the writings of over 80 authors, and over 15 speakers on video. They have encouraged me towards the imperatives for missioning, either to be a "*goer*" or an "*active sender*", or an "*equipper*" and I have not resisted the impulse to write about that. To fulfill the mission mandate is the reason that so many have gone out to the un-reached peoples of the earth, to live with them for decades, to translate their languages at great cost, to tell them about God, and to tell them about the Kingdom of God that will be established on earth. The work being done with our Australian aborigines in our interior, translating *Testaments* in their own languages, is quite remarkable. The histories of these missionaries are in the *Bible* bookshops now, for us to read and can only inspire us to follow them. We can read of those women and men who went fearlessly, under God's hand, and with His blessings, to India, and Nepal. Many perished, but some lived to tell the tales. There are the stories of the 200 who went to China in the late 1800's, all recent American University graduates, of whom only 100 survived danger and disease after two years. The remedy was to return with another 100 the next year. They helped to establish 20,000 house churches until the purges of Mao. The remnant people of those house churches, who survived the terrible atrocities of that revolution there, are a tribute to that work. Churches learned some hard lessons about missionary work in China and are now trying, once again, with different methods. There are stories of the cannibals of Samoa, and of those missionaries who were eaten alive, and of those who managed to escape. There are stories of the cannibals in New Guinea, and how the missioners persuaded them, with great difficulty, that killing and eating people, was not the same as God sacrificing His only son, and that the bread and wine, were only symbols of the flesh and blood of that son. It was, and still is, therefore, very important to explain that those elements do not change into the actual flesh and blood of Christ, our Lord. There is the story of the Peace Child, where an indigenous mother and father "*willingly*" gave up their loved child to another, to help to make the point, of God's sacrifice. For us to be a piece of the puzzle, in the mission mandate which God gave to those who responded, is a great privilege.

The Mission Mandate, or **The Great Commission** of *Matthew 28:19, 20,* is the reason for the story of this book of *Genesis*. It is the reason for God's very choosing of that patriarchal family and the reason for their record placed in our hands. **It is the Will and Power behind the whole message of Creation**. **The mandate** for this is found -

In **Creation**,

In the story of **Noah**, and

In all the **covenants made between God and men**.

The great golden cord is paramount in this story -

In the **promises to Abraham and his family**, and

In the examples that follow in ***Scripture*** of ***Biblical* men** who evangelised for God outside their own ethnical groups.

We see it in Abraham, and then in Joseph in Egypt, and Daniel in Babylon. It is the message of Jethro and Rahab and Job and many others, who faintly heard, in their Gentile state, (how, we do not know), and responded to God's call. Even these went on to evangelise, after their response, in God's name, and it is remarkable, that even some of them, as well as the Jewish ethnic preachers, had *Bible* books named after them.

The mission mandate incentive is really the message of the whole *Bible*, and so it will inevitably creep into our story and will provide the protective layer over the faults that lay in these patriarchal families.

All of them, within their human frailties -

 # Pledged to serve God,

 # To glorify His name,

 # So that all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Together with the **Great Commandment**, they had the **Great Commission,** no less have we, if we accept His blessings.

DEDICATION

There is here a dedication -

To my resource producer, Ted, and live in research assistant, and great encourager, who is always able to refine a discussion.

To my family, who have endured the focus that I have had,

To the computer experts, who climb the cliff, and are so readily at my side, when I had difficulties with my word processing and printing and production,

To my proof reader, who has known me all my life, and whose wisdom I appreciate.

And to my dear friends, fellow labourers, really, who have helped me in discussions over difficulties, and who may see themselves in this book. They will recognise the valuable contributions that they have made,

Above all, to my Silent Partner, and Friend of Abraham, there is **an enduring gratitude for what He has done for us all**. My prayer is for all families in the earth to learn the lessons, so that He may come to bless us all. May God continue to be with us in the days ahead, until that time, is the prayer of Beverley Russell, 1999.

Beverley Russell – Sydney, Australia, 2000

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KITH and KIN

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Historically,

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5. ABOUT UR ON THE EUPHRATES RIVER

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The story of Genesis begins with creation, where God made man and woman in His image, but where soon came rebellion and consequently God's judgement. There may have been relief at the first gospel promise, that one day the woman's seed would crush the offensive serpent. Unfortunately, it was not a cherished promise. That Promise, that Seed, that Idea, that Son of God, was in the plan of God, from before the foundation of the world, that is, before the creation, *Ephesians 1:4, 5, John 1:1-5, Colossians 1*.

The story moves quickly through world history, where the monotheism that God established, is replaced by polytheism, and soon there were only scattered God worshippers, who are briefly mentioned - like Enoch and Noah "*who walked with God*".

1. FROM THE BEGINNING UNTIL UR

- A SHORT SUMMARY OF *GENESIS 1-11*

In the first eleven chapters of *Genesis* we are told the moving story of the first 2,000 years (generally speaking) of history, then comes the next 2,000 years in the rest of the *Old Testament*. The next 2000 years brings us to our times. It is remarkable that we find ourselves now, as far away from the Son of God in the year 2000 AD, as that Patriarchal family was in 2000 BC. We are looking back, as they were looking forward, to the salvation point provided by God. The historian Usher proclaimed the formation of man to have occurred 4000 years before our Lord Jesus Christ. So this summary is meant to take us quickly through the first chapters of *Genesis* in order to meet Abram.

We read-

+ Of God's presence in charge of the universe,

+ About the great lights that move around the heavens,

+ Of God's creation of the planet earth on which we live,

+ Of the building of the sustaining plants and animals,

+ Of the preparation for His gift of man and woman

+ Of the creation of Adam and Eve, both in His image.

The matter created is made subject to laws and arranged in order, vegetable life is created, and animal life is created. To the highest form is given human reason, not predestined by God, but with free will. In this high form, and with the foreknowledge of God, all of this gift may be coupled with a spiritual nature, with the possibility of life with the Lord, on the inherited earth.

This is Purist Monotheism in the Garden of Eden.

God, with foreknowledge, superintended it all.

Next, there is -

After that, there is -

+ The sadness of the first sin, and so **God's first crisis**,

+ The first murder, when Cain kills Abel,

+ The first family dysfunction,

+ Family dysfunction, where the murderer, probably repentant, and justly fearful, wanders away from Eden,

+ But with a warning sign from God, to keep Cain calm and safe.

+ The posterity of Adam and Eve, divided into two lines, Cain and Seth.

+ A later Cain son, Lamech, the first to practice polygamy.

+ This Cainite family marked by arrogance, lust, violence and cruelty.

+ Nothing more heard of the alienated Cain family.

+ A third son, Seth, born to Adam and Eve, 130 years after creation,

+ A "*firstborn*" and forebear of the Promised Seed,

And then there is -

+ Marriage of the sons of God (Seth) with the daughters of men (probably Cain).

+ Overall degeneration into great wickedness,

+ A time when "*God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt*", *Genesis 6:12*.

Then God with a heavy heart -

+ Made a great flood that covered the sin and wickedness.

+ Saved only one man, Noah, who had been the ignored preacher of salvation, a descendant of Seth, and his family. **This is the second crisis in God's plan.**

Next, Noah, and his family, built a new life. God gave this family -

+ Another covenant, *Genesis 9:11-17*,

+ A promise that He would never destroy the earth again.

The three sons of Noah spread to the corners of the world -

+ Shem, Ham and Japheth,

+ And became the forefathers of the three mighty racial strains that we know even today.

+ **Shem's** five sons went to pasture their sheep, into what we call now the Middle East, the olive skinned race, the Arabians and the Hebrews and the Syrians, the Amalekites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Ishmaelites, and the Midianites and the Edomites.

+ **Ham's** four sons went south to where the black skinned peoples are today, becoming mighty builders, and founding empires. They were the Cushites, in Arabia and Ethiopia, (Asiatic and African Cush), the Egyptians, the Libyans of North Africa, the Philistines and the Canaanites, (who took the place of the Cainites),

+ **Japheth's** seven sons, fair skinned, wandered in barbarous hordes over what we know as Europe, and the Celt countries, and went to Turkey, Greece, Italy, further north into Germany

and far up into the northern Russian European continent and then east, as the Red Indians, Chinese and the Alaskans.

2. THE PEOPLE AS GOD'S WITNESS

By no stretch of the imagination can we divide the world in this way today, for races move, and intermingle, and intermarry, and are obliterated, but *Genesis 10* gives us a good description of what happened to Shem, Ham and Japheth at the time of the repeopling of the earth.

Comment:

It is remarkable that in the 19th Century, so much was known about these peoples that inhabited the earth, just after the flood. The *Speaker's* and *Ellicott's Commentaries* explain the nations in astonishing detail. *Breasted's* and *Rollin's* Ancient Histories also were (and are) remarkable books, of those days. "*Time-Life History of the World 3000-1500 BC. The Age of the God-Kings*" is a worthwhile and readable, recently written history (1987) of the nations that had to do with Abram and his children. This text will hereafter be referred to as "*Time-Life History*".

But now, as we move into the twenty first century, there is so much **more** knowledge about this age and area. For instance, it is remarkable that in a Sydney Botanical Garden, at Mount Tomah, we can view a rose plant that the Plant Archaeologists assure us, according to stone "pictures" now available, was grown in the Middle East in 1750 BC, at the time of these *Biblical* patriarchs.

It also appears that *Biblical* language and thought, and areas of consideration, have achieved enormous heights. There are agencies working to translate His *Word* into so many languages, like the great *Wycliffe Mission*, that there is little excuse for lack of knowledge of God's way. Now less than 1500 languages, of the 6793 known languages, are yet to have a translated *Testament* (with 1229 in progress at the moment). This number diminishes year by year, with hopes that the job will be completed by 2020 - (statistics available *Wycliffe Magazine,* 10/98). This is a great memorial to Wycliffe who was burnt at the stake in 1394, for his efforts to make God's word available to everyman. *Ethel Wallis* and *Mary Bennett* wrote, in 1960, "*Two Thousand Tongues to Go*", the story of his life and mission. It seems that blessings abound for those who stimulate this explosion of knowledge about the *Bible*, and we owe a great debt to those who gave their lives for our privilege. Computers have now made an enormous difference to the ability to transcribe and translate languages, but *Wycliffe* set the stage for God to work to alleviate what is called the Babel influence of our time.

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It appears then, that God developed from the line of Shem, a people to be His witness, *Genesis 11*, because there was a need to save all the people of the earth. Ignoring the beautiful rainbow with its promise of God's loving care, men built the Tower of Babel in an effort to equip themselves with the mind of God, a high tower to save themselves if He happened to send a flood again. So God shattered these plans by scattering men over the earth and confused them with different languages, a consequence that brought a confusion, which many people with language translations and education are now trying to heal. **This was the third crisis in God's plan.**

3. GOD'S LOVED PEOPLE

Our story begins, in ***Genesis 11,*** where we meet a God loved family. The family was promised prosperity, land and generational blessings, - a wonderful answer to anyone's prayer. That family

story is the foundation for our hopes and aspirations, as Gentiles, if we wish to serve God in **our** families. Paul, in *Romans 2,* makes it quite clear that believers in God, whatever their race, will be beneficiaries of this promise, and will enjoy the blessings of salvation, for they are international and universal. He emphasises that Abraham was father of us all (circumcised or uncircumcised). That the first family did not have their promise fulfilled, but were content to see it far off, is a lesson to us to be content, as well. We can learn innumerable other lessons if we think about their lives, and as God was with them, through all their trials, He will be with us, if we invite Him, to be our constant guide and companion.

Yet *Genesis* times were culturally different from ours, and relationships that could have been strong and loving, and had begun with a great journey into the unknown, a leaving of "*kith and kin*", and such great potential, ended, for some, in disappointment, trauma and jealousy. There are great stories of courage and enduring love, and those who stood firm for God, but woven into the strong fabric of greatness, are the threads of weakness that characterise all of us, as well. These are the stories that make the fabric of *Genesis 11-50* so remarkable. They are known as "*Patriarchal History*" by the scholars, and are about **Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph**. These stories lead us into examinations that pitch our experiences against their experiences.

Consider:

*** If they are God loved then who can say that we are not?**

* When our family life is dysfunctional, for we all have dysfunction at some time or other, and everything is in shadow, and we try so desperately to hold the thread with God, who of us cannot say still, **that we are God loved in spite of it all**?

****

There are some threads in this story that do not go in the direction that we would normally think. The woof has little knots and we cannot see how God is working, the weave often leaves holes where the thread does not catch properly, and we are left without any solution to the problems that arise.

However, in the entire pattern, we know -

That God is the architect and supervisor,

And that He,

In the end,

Creates this fabric

That bears the Glory of His Name,

And that from that thing of beauty,

There is an invitation to us,

To come into His Kingdom.

The narrative in these chapters, frequently concentrates on the life of a later son, not a firstborn, emphasising that,

DIVINELY CHOSEN MEN

is not the product of an hereditary line, a natural or worldly line, and sometimes behave in an unseemly fashion. This is a lesson to us that God may do as **He** pleases, *Psalm 115:3*, that He does not have to act in any arbitrary way, *Romans 9:14*, nor how we would expect Him to act. For He is the potter, and we the clay.

Divinely chosen men are -

A product of God's grace,

A divine sovereign intervention into the affairs of men,

Missioners about God and His purpose,

Part of a consecrated thread of people,

Called to His kingdom,

Places where His glory shines,

Channelling His blessings on the whole of the earth,

A representation of what the whole will be,

When *"all will be in all".*

***CONCLUSION**:*

Genesis 3, and *Genesis 6*, and *Genesis 11* contain the three records about man moving away from God, from the His salvation offer, to make a name for himself, at God's expense. Each time God gave them up. Now, after the third crisis in God's plan, we will examine the next phase, the life of the patriarchs, and what they did with that great commission. The children of these patriarchs, as well, eventually lost **the Great Commission**, that we hear about right through the Biblical texts, until it is recorded, hand in hand with **the Great Commandment** during the life of our Lord, *Matthew 5:43, 44* and *28:19, 20*. He then gave the commission and the commandment finally, once more, to those who will preach in His name, whether they would be teachers or supporters in this great effort.

BACKGROUND

"***And Terah took Abram his son…", Genesis 11:31*.**

FOCUS:

From this third crisis where the evil human community was shattered, (which we find in *Genesis 11),* we come to *Genesis 12*, and a wonderful hope for all mankind. God introduces us to Abram in Ur, and we hear about his family, ***Genesis 11:25-30*.**

1. WHY WAS ABRAM CALLED BY GOD*?*

It may not have seemed like a wonderful hope and blessing for all nations to begin with, but when we see Abram outreaching for God, and we see Joseph in Egypt, Moses with Jethro, the spies to Rahab, Naomi to Ruth, Esther, Daniel, and Ezekiel and Jonah, and Job, and many more, we realise that God has even created books of the *Bible* about people who recognised the desire of God for **all nations**, and their responsibility to mission them. Not only that, but Ruth

and Job are books of the *Bible* whose main influencing characters are not directly biologically related to this special family by birth. For those (adopted by God, and so belonging to God), are called "*Abraham's seed and heirs*", *Galatians 3:29*, and are His people.

Comment:

After Babel there was a need for another way -

 # To bring men to God,

 # To show them His purpose,

 # To show forth His glory and

 # For man to witness to His purpose and

 # That man might mission all the peoples of the world.

****

So God prepared Himself a special family in a man who was a descendant of Seth. This man was called Abraham and he and his descendants, were used by God, not to set up an elitism to promote His Name, but to be an election of people to begin that work, so that all peoples of the earth would be blessed, in the seed of Abraham, who was Jesus Christ our Lord. The promise for this came before Abraham's circumcision so that the promise was for all, not just the circumcised. Abraham and his family were to be a minority to serve the majority. It was not a narrowing of God's purpose, but a means of reaching all those who had been scattered

This witness (the Jews) did not materialise as He wished, but the plan that He would provide a special Son, to focus the sinners of the earth, and to provide a Way for salvation, certainly came to fruition. To that end, 64 generations from the first son Adam, came the second son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who provided a way to save men from their evil ways.

Moses gives us the family history of the development of this family of Shem, where some were specifically "*called by God*". He told us of the father Nahor, who begat Terah, and of Terah, who begat Abram, in *Genesis 11,* from Noah, in ten generations. It is the beginning of this large family, as numerous as the sand of the sea that we are concerned about in our study. It was a semi nomadic family never fully absorbed into the carefully constructed Sumerian civilisation. Still they would have heard of the flood, read from an incised clay tablet by a scribe, for it was a fable of their host country. However, because Abram's family's own oral tradition was very important to them they probably heard of it passed down within the family. By this oral tradition Abram would claim membership in his own tribe, and it would also explain the relationship of his tribe itself to other tribes. We are enlightened by history, especially the history of these God loved and dysfunctional families. Their stories help us to understand human complexities, and their history sharpens and extends our moral imagination.

2. WHERE DID ABRAM COME FROM?

Sumer, in the city of **Ur**.

The male children of the very wealthy in Sumer sat on stone benches in school, and inscribed clay slates with styluses. By 2500 BC the scribes had evolved better styluses with a triangular shaped point, wedged, rather than a point. If they made a mistake it was easily corrected by rubbing out on the damp clay. If they wished to store or preserve their work, it was left to dry,

and then they could very easily slide it into a clay envelope. School was a rare experience for most children, and only for a privileged minority. These students were later employed as scribes. They wrote down laws, contracts and communications of all sorts, for example, for battle commanders, and for almanacs. There was advice and other practical documents, and the records and laws for the sales of land, property and slaves, and for marriages and divorces. As well, these scribes were used for scribing the immense collections of poetry and literature that had until then been transmitted by chant or recitation, to the accompaniment of a harp or lyre. Up until that time, all this learning lived in the memories of people. There are enough tablets unearthed now for people to learn the scripts and translate the messages and literary constructions on the tablets for us. Many of these are readily available for us to read. "*The Epic of Gilgamesh*", a 3,500 line piece of prose, is classic literature of the day, preserved in clay tablets, and it dates from the third millennium BC, that is, **a thousand years before Abram.** It is the finest and oldest literature in existence, and it is a wondrous experience to sit and read the translated story through, when it was authorised so long ago.

There was a stepped pyramid, or ziggurat in Sumer, in the city of Ur, to the city's god, built at the same time as the great Khufu's pyramid at Giza in Egypt. The school was attached to the temple, and recorded the donations of grain, that is, wheat, but usually barley, and other offerings to the moon god, Nanna, chief deity of the Ziggurat complex. The rent from the temple's vast land possessions went to support the temple weavers, metalworkers, potters and carpenters, and the multitudes of folk who worked in the complex. So the populace was easily subdued, if you didn't work for the temple, you tilled and grazed animals on land owned by the temple.

The Sumerians had a bureaucratic thoroughness, as each temple offering was recorded twice on clay tablets, one for the donor, and the other was deposited in the sacred archives. The school also taught "*a healthy dose of mathematics*", based on the number sixty, which can be divided by twelve numbers, and an easy and sensible method for calculations on the division of food, and the subdividing of land, and for paying wages. In "*Time-Life History*", *page 20*, we read how the people of Ur learned and honed their "*sexagesimal skills by solving practical problems*" and we know that traces of those wonderful skills survive today in such familiar manifestations as the 60 second minute, and the 60 minute hour, and the 360 degree circle. Thank you for that, Sumerians, 2000 BC, host to our Aramean father, Abram, *Deuteronomy 26:5, NIV.* There were many advantages in this harsh and hard civilization.

This resource book also includes the history of writing in Sumeria and Egypt, on *pages 37* to *53*. As well, in the *Biblical Archaeology Review* for *November/December, 1998,* we learn that it was not until the late 1890's that archaeologists realised that it was the earlier Sumerians, and not the Babylonians and Assyrians who had first used writing to keep their records. At Nippur, the religious capital of the Sumerians, there is a "*Tablet Hill*" where thousands of tablets have been found, as if in a library, quite remarkable.

So it is entirely possible that written histories were kept, in all civilisations, and the record of the advanced learning of scribes in Ur, with their little wedge shaped marks, helps us to build our argument that God had already ensured those written records were available for Moses to use. There are several sources that may have been available to Moses.

There is now a new chapter in the history of writing, and it shows that nothing stays "*first"* for long. *Dr Gunter Dreyer*, a contemporary German archaeologist, has discovered writing as early as 3300 BC, in Southern Egypt, so there is a rival for **first** with the skill of recording. There are lists, documenting linen and oil, delivered as taxes to an Egyptian king. There are notes,

numbers, king's names and institutions, all marked on clay tablets not much bigger than a postage stamp, encased in clay jars. These records were essential for an authority expanding an area of influence, and can be legitimately called writing because the each symbol stands for a consonant and together they make up syllables, *February 1999, The Australian Christadelphian Shield Magazine*. However the Egyptian papyrus records that abound today are still the best Egyptian historical records available and descriptions of these are found in the texts of this present study on Joseph as he came into power in Egypt.

3. WHAT ABOUT THE RECORDS?

It is thought by some (see "*Introduction to Genesis*", *Ellicott's Commentary*), that an account of creation was already in existence at the time of Abram in Ur, and that Terah, and later Abram, may have inherited a copy somehow. Perhaps it was a treasure that Noah took into the ark, for we only know the animals that went in. That does not preclude other treasures.

It is worth considering, as well, that Noah may have caused a record to be written just before his death. He died two years before the birth of Abram and might have been known to Terah. Terah was of the stock of Noah's son, Shem and therefore related.

The word for writing at this time, means "*to cut*" or "*to dig*", so it would not have been parchment as in Egypt. We already know that such an account is in the literature of the Assyrians, who obtained it from Ur of the Chaldees, be it a corrupt legend, with all of its monotheism gone. One clay tablet found at Nippur, in Sumeria, records one man and his family safely surviving a flood.

Picture writing gave way to a system of abstract symbols over 1,500 years. By 3300 BC we can readily understand the abstract pictures, but by 3000 BC they were turned on their side and not so readily identified. The use of the wedge shaped stylus brought about another change and by 1800 BC cuneiform, from the word "*cuneus*", that is "*wedge*", was produced, not much related to the old picture writing.

Perhaps if Abram was not an idolater, which seems unlikely, he made himself unpopular, trying to teach these now polytheistic people, that they were worshipping the created for the Creator, for they worshipped the heavenly creatures. The Jews, despite worship irregularities, never fell into the trap of formally worshipping these beings to the total exclusion of YHWH, (for He never left Himself without a witness, or continuing remnant). They were better taught by the first chapter of *Genesis*, than their idol worshipping relations. Even we Christians use the name days that signify worshipping of the sun, moon and planets. God specifically emphasises Himself as Creator, in this first chapter, and this was to prove a bulwark against the attractions of animal worship so prevalent in Egypt where Abram's family would later seek refuge. This document of great authentic weight and authority would have been a precious treasure in the family of Shem, if indeed he had one, and would account for their later rejection of idolatry, and their persistence, that Abram's family had in Canaan, in the belief of one sole Deity. The document would have been highly prized and religiously preserved. It would have travelled with the family over the generations, wherever they went, trussed in soft cloth (silk), against breakage, and carted, or stored, most carefully.

It provides the reason for the faith of Abram in following God's directions, and his Godly actions then become intelligible.

It provides the basis for the noble character, trustful abandonment of his home to the wishes of his Lord God, the firm faith that set him apart, so that God from then on favoured him, and his family, with more revelations, for he was certainly fit for them.

It is then more easily understood how Moses, may have pieced together his *Genesis* record in the first five books of the Bible, - from the preserved record belonging to the called away Abram. But if the record is no older than Moses it would be difficult to account for the earlier possession by the Chaldees of so much of the inspired narrative. The same holds true for the Chaldean Legends of the Flood, of the Tower of Babel and other *Genesis* stories, (argues the commentator *Ellicott*). There are present day tribes in Africa, like the Ethiopians and the Maasai, that have, in their shrouded origins, known stories so similar to the *Genesis* story of say, Jacob and Esau, and practices, like circumcision and food taboos, that some commentators think that even these present day tribes, can lay claim to the ancient Hebrew peoples, as their ancestors, see *page 75,* "*Enkop Ai, My Life with the Maasai*"*,* by *Catherine Oddie.* Still this does not preclude the idea that some have, that the inspired word dropped into the mind, and then to the pen of Moses, from God.

Thus **Moses,**

instinct with the prophetic power,

that God had bestowed upon him,

placed the record into a revelation.

Being himself a prophet,

he recorded it in such a form that

would make it fit for the permanent use,

first, of the Jewish people,

and then of the Christian Church.

Without the Genesis record,

so much of the rest of the Bible

would be unintelligible.

Therefore to Moses,

under God's guiding hand,

or/and to those who remembered

the oral traditions,

and to those who kept and guarded

the records,

we have a great debt.

4. ABRAM - REAL PERSON OR FICTION?

The discoveries that have now been made, affirm our belief that Abraham did exist, at about the time of the Sumerians, for we do understand that recording was possible at the time.

In his Biblical context, even with the **unexplained contradictory or duplicate incidents, and episodes hard to understand,** that we find in his life, and with the **anachronisms** that we can detect in the texts, there are **not** sufficient grounds for doubt, or signs of weakness, or signs that composition of the record took place long after the incidents took place, which seem to be the three main arguments. Some jejunely wish to assert that as Abraham did not go with the flow of the huge and pressing military campaigns, therefore the *Biblical* records of his journeys must be invalid, but that is not to say that he could not have travelled in the opposite direction, as has been discovered that other tribes have done, as well, without hindrance. There is enough evidence of identification of places where explorations have been made now, in our day, to preclude invalidations of the journeys of Abraham, - Ur, Haran, Shechem, Bethel, Salem (if Jerusalem), and Hebron. Gerar is still unidentified, and there is no positive evidence yet of the Beersheba location of yesteryear, though we know of the water well there.

Historically, we may easily seat Abraham long before the Mosaic Law, before Joseph and Moses, about 2000 BC. The *Nuzi* and *Mari Tablets* texts provide us with so much information that show us that Abraham followed closely in the practices and laws of the time in which he is historically placed, with treaties, for land and wells, and other documents. The *Genesis* text deserves no preferential status, if we wish to place it alongside other evidence, when comparing the historical texts of the time, but it can be shown to be consistent.

There are no other names, like "*Abraham*", "*Isaac*" and "*Jacob*" in the *Biblical* text, and neither are there any in other historical texts, only in derivatives, which allows them a particular uniqueness, which serves our purpose, for we wish to add the point of the extra recording incentive of inspiration, as well.

The idea that other current cultures could preserve their history, with autobiographical records and texts, conveying factual information and narratives and conversations, similar to *Genesis*, stimulates us to think the Israelites did as well, and so a great source of information, (as well as that handed down by word of mouth over so few generations from Joseph's death to Moses' recording ability) would be available to Moses for the *Genesis* record, (65 years from the death of Joseph to the birth of Moses). The "*Contemporary Age Reference Chart of Biblical Characters*" compiled by *Denis Arthur* is useful here.

Religiously, Abraham was aware of God's uniqueness and righteousness, yet also aware of others who worshipped Him, such as Melchizedek. He was prepared to witness to God with his public worship, and so he differed from other religious practices around him in Mesopotamia and Canaan and Egypt. He had a mission mandate from God. It is uncomfortable for the secular historian to find that the monotheistic faith was unique in the time of Abraham, and so he/she accordingly reckons it unlikely and treats it as a retrojection from later times, when it **is** possible to prove its existence. The fact that other religions have exploded from one man's vision, for example, Islam, and the Akhenaton "*heresy*" of Egypt proves that it **is** possible, and highly likely that it developed this way. **Both of these imposed a religious monotheism upon a polytheistic society**. In the case of Egypt, this monotheism proved to be an advantage to God's people, just when they needed advantage. Abraham's faith quietly handed down through all the generations of the family, until its formal formulation under Moses is equally and entirely credible. It is fanciful that fragments of that monotheism lay in the libraries of Egypt from the "*heresy*" time of Akhenaton, to influence Moses in his writing of the Law, and that's where it

came from, that is, not through Abraham. The priests uprising had overturned the "*heresy*" that was prevalent at the time of Joseph, and so Moses entered the Pharaonic court, at a time of polytheistic power, inhospitable to the Israelites.

There are some studies of the different names of God used in derivative forms in other cults, but undoubtedly the absence of the divine name of God in any pre Mosaic personal name, is significant. Abraham naturally had a similar religious language to those about him, with animal sacrifices, altars and gifts to his God after a victory. It is therefore more remarkable that YHWH worship persisted, and was not assimilated. This is then another tribute to the care and preservation of His worship, by the Almighty who deemed that it to be so. These ceremonials, which were afterwards required of the Israelites, were later replaced in the Christian era, with different and more encompassing expressions of worship, which included the Gentiles as well. Abraham did find Melchizedek, (as Moses found Jethro), whose worship he could share, but he otherwise never joined the cults of the Canaanites.

Sociologically, Abraham is placed easily into a seminomadic culture not as yet controlled by a Mosaic law, moving long distances with all his possessions from Ur in Mesopotamia, west to Egypt, and back again, along with many others at that time, but more generally in a Canaan of city states. Around 2000 BC we know of warring tribes, for example, the Amorites, who were moving up and down Mesopotamia, but that does not exclude the movement of clans or tribes as well, who struck camp for long periods, or migrated for food, with their herds, as necessity arose. Even the Israelites, as did others, travelled for long distances to wage military campaigns that were in their own interests, for example *Genesis 14,* but seemed to ignore the great military campaigns that went on round about them, up and down in Canaan particularly. It would be comforting to think that they were not affected by them, but that seems hardly likely. Movements and treks of great and small tribes were reported to the Amorite King of Mari, by a series of fire signals, in the absence of human spies, and recorded, because town and steppe dwellers were dependent on each other. The Egyptians are known to have controlled the great influx of migrations in drought times by erecting forts along the way, and a wall at the entrance. For the same reason China (much later) erected their great wall.

Ancestrally - Abraham lived before the monarchy or leadership order of Israelitish history, but was recognised as the clan leader of that huge itinerant group of people, and therefore the Israelite's revered ancestor, and patriarch, a thing not unusual for large tribes of that era. The role is amply described in the extensive archives of the *Mari Tablets*, now available. Family life was important, even amongst these itinerants, who maintained strict rules and traditions to protect that social context. Marriage contracts were in use, and progenitive lines could be sustained by the use of a slave girl, and are now recognised as appearing in cultures outside of the *Genesis* record, where **we** first hear of them. Burial caves and particular care of the dead were rights practised by other wandering tribes as well as the Israelites, giving them a focus in their movable lifestyle. "*Dialogue Documents"*, such as Abraham had with the Hittites for the purchase of the Machpelah land for burials, have been found. These were fashionable in the 7th to the 5th centuries, but such documents have now been found early in the era of 2000 BC.

Culturally - Abraham fits neatly into the Near Eastern context at the period that the Biblical text indicates, where tribes moved around in tents, and with animals, as described in *Genesis*, and became wealthy and traded with high standing among the local people, a cherished estate. (That's why the incident at Shechem troubled Jacob so much.) There are records of a Palestinian presence in the Delta of the Nile, sometime after 2000 BC, a Middle Bronze age settlement, and paintings on a tomb at Beni Hasan of 37 Asiatics arriving in Egypt at that time. This is not to say

that there was no conflict among the tribes and petty kingdoms at the time, as recorded in *Genesis*, for secular literature attests to this also, and indeed it was the reason why city walls and gates became common.

Objections are numerous, but not unexpected, once the *Genesis* text is considered. Naming places or areas after a people, later inhabiting a land, can be put down to a scribe making the text more palatable to his readers, and are only minimal anachronisms. At the same time the texts are basically authentic and historically valuable so that the anachronism does not affect the sense of the narrative, if the reason for the anachronism is understood. The story is not falsified by the naming of a place or a people using titles in place six or seven centuries later. It is an adjustment easily made, if the circumstances are known. There could be other reasons for seeming anachronisms, that circumstances may not be what are first thought. For instance, it is now considered, after so much doubt, that camels may have been introduced in the time that the *Biblical* records mentions them, *Genesis 12;16,* and so their appearance in the text is now treated as history, not as an anachronism

Absence of Evidence is occasionally raised against a belief in the existence of Abraham. Archaeologists argue continually whether the absence of evidence is evidence of absence. This is groundless for the once written documents now available, (and there are enormous numbers available to us lay people) must be minute in proportion to what **was** actually written. If Abraham's treaty with Abimelech at Gerar, was written, it would hardly be available to us, for being written on parchment it would decay quickly in the climate, or, if on a clay tablet, it would be lying undamaged in the undiscovered ruins of Gerar, (quite a problem), awaiting the spade in the right room in the king's palace there. Abraham's encounter with the kings of the east in *Genesis 14* remains a puzzle for some, but considering it is of a period of only fifteen years of history, where a political picture can change rapidly, it may not be dismissed as an historically impossible fact, but rather a fact of historical ignorance, for no one is in possession of such historical detail as yet, (though *Speaker's* and *Ellicott's Commentaries* of the last century offer very convincing descriptions of these places and kings). We hope that clarification may soon emerge. The epithet of Abraham "*as a Hebrew*" in *Genesis 14:13,* is appropriate in the context, where kings are defined by the states they ruled, but as Abraham had no state or fatherland, the "*Hebrew*" term in history, "*wanderer from the other side*", (of the river), denotes exactly that circumstance in the Middle Bronze Age.

Duplicate Narratives continue to be puzzles. The say you are my sister narratives, and the wells incidents to point. The former can be explained away as being well known and documented practices, and here neither Abraham nor Isaac had unmarried relatives to offer to cement alliances and renew treaties, and also, it needs saying, that both men were afraid, at that time, and without faith. Both patriarchs had trouble with the men of Gerar over water rights, and again the narratives are accused of being one and the same. However father and son living in the same area, in such ancient and unstable times, might easily have to negotiate twice for the same property. One could defeat the enemy, and in the next generation have to defeat the very same enemy, albeit another generation.

Conclusions can be made, not that the history of Abraham demands such a date as 2000 BC, (not precisely, but rather generally speaking), but that it **allows** it, in accord with *Biblical* literature, and that date **is** sustainable. The advantage of this *Biblical* record is that Abraham, "*the friend of God*" was a real person whose life story, however handed down, has been preserved reliably.

God expects that our faith be informed, not blind. God called Abraham and Abraham obeyed and experienced growing faithfulness. Without Abraham a major building block to the foundations of the establishment of the kingdom, of Judaism, and Christianity is lost. The return, for God, was His wish for "*glory*", and He gave the mission mandate. A fictional Abraham might institute a belief system, but it would be with no rational approach to worship, and could supply no rational evidence for faith because any other community could invent a totally different figure to do the same. In as much as the *Bible* claims uniqueness, and the absolute of divine revelation, with provable inspiration, the Abraham narratives therefore deserve a positive and respectful approach by any who will study them.

So there is no need to consider as valid (or even doubt) our belief in Abraham.

(Many ideas and arguments in this section "*Real Person or Fiction*" are from *A. R. Millard,* "*Abraham*", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary.* Millard's headings have been used, and are here acknowledged.)

5. UR, ON THE EUPHRATES RIVER

There is an elaborate system of law and order and custom and tradition, and 40 centuries of history in between the people or Ur and us, but they are just like us in their passions. To imagine their stories is to imagine ourselves there.

The son of Terah, Abram, married Sarai, in Ur of the Chaldees, a wonderfully civilised and commercial teeming city, (population 40,000 in 2100 BC) on the banks of the Euphrates River. The complex architecture, three storey buildings, with wide sweeping staircases, and effective plumbing and drainage, indicate the elegance and richness of life there. Several royal tombs have yielded a huge array of valuable goods, and show the surprising ingenuity and sophistication that made life in Ur pleasurable and productive. From their potting wheels they could easily see that by flipping them on their sides they would have a means of locomotion. They were solid wheels at first. There is abundant information about Ur, now that the patient archaeologists have uncovered so much there. This has led to novels like "*Abram, Son of Terah*", by *Florence Bauer*, of the young boy Abram in this priest ridden, now crumbling empire of Sumeria.

The grasping priests exact their tribute, and take their bribes and presents, to build their vast treasuries, and while the king constantly raises taxes to meet the increasing cost of trying to hold together this unwieldy empire, the people and the provinces seethe with unrest. In the city the artisans work with copper and jewels, make bricks and buildings and walls, and baskets, and hundreds of other commercial enterprises, and on the land the serfs struggle to bring the water to the crops and pray that their god will bless their efforts, so that they can feed everyone.

Terah, a Sumerian by association, is an aging coppersmith, and Abram is his son, in a large household, within the city, where Sarai is the daughter of a favoured concubine. Terah's great, great, great grandfather was Eber, ("*Eber*" is the origin of the word "*Hebrew*") and according to *Genesis 5* and *11* and in the "*64 Generations from Adam to Christ*" genealogical charts in the *Scriptural* records, Noah is number 10, and Eber is number 14, and Terah is number 19. So the novelist, *Bauer,* has chosen a family name, Eber, a captive Amorite slave, a Canaanite, and from Eber, Abram gets his first inkling of true belief. Eber is a worshipper of YHWH, and Abram observes his Godly habits, and learns about Him. When Abram's family life becomes precarious and crowded and threatened with destruction, the house of Terah needs some drastic solution, and so the idolatrous Terah, *Joshua 24:2*, decides to move to Haran.

Well, we may not accept this novel story, so we might -

Consider:

* How was Abram's faith awakened from his idolatrous family practices?

* By reading the Godly accounts?

* Or by a messenger sent by God, say, one from his relative Shem, or even Shem himself?

(Noah died just before Abraham was born, and Shem died when Isaac was around 40 years old),

* Or both?

* Where did Shem live at this time?

* What did he know of Abram?

* And why would Terah want to move?

* Was Terah's business copper art, or shepherding, or both?

* Did they live in or out of the city walls?

* The city of Ur was made up of a mixed multitude, may we say that Terah was a Sumerian at that time only because he lived there?

Considering that these Shemites had influence in Ur, not being new settlers -

* How much would Terah be missed in Ur, being a reasonably wealthy and influential man?

* How much of an idolater was Terah?

This question assumes that there are different degrees of idolatry. * Is that a fair assumption?

****

There is a wonderful picture in "*Time-Life History*", *pages 22-23,* which shows Ur along side the Euphrates River, with a canal surrounding it and a harbour on each extremity so that ships could come up/down the river, from the Persian Gulf, pass into the canal, decide which harbour was convenient for unloading, and berth for port facilities. The two harbours were connected by an internal canal as well. It passed right through the middle of the city. The city was easy to defend as the surrounding land was marsh and often flooded. It is obvious to see why this city was such a sanctuary for its ramparts were easily defended and it was built on past and abandoned structures and therefore elevated. Although the empire was crumbling this city managed to hold out until the fertility of the surrounding soil declined and became salty, after years of irrigation and constant and necessary agriculture. Then the food supply dwindled and the city peoples began to be haunted by anxiety. They began again the old habit of warring amongst themselves, and their political strength, after millenniums of squabbling and in fighting, sapped away. The Elamites easily took Ur, and then later the Amorites, who had been entering the city as traders and mercenaries, eventually overran the city. Hammurabi, the Babylonian conqueror, later, (1800 BC) using Sumerian and Amorite laws forged his remarkable code that was in use in the land of Canaan in the days of the Patriarchs. The Greeks later extended Mesopotamia and included Sumer.

The chapter on Ur concludes, with Sumer under Babylon rule, and the last of those Sumerian poets sorrowfully jabbing cuneiform sticks into the soft clay, pouring out great sadness with their lamentations, for the political demise of their land. Yet in their very act of writing, they were ensuring for us, even today, that the ideas and ideals of Sumer would not die, but would leave their wedge shaped marks on every future civilisation, enriching many cultures through the centuries to come. Well, Terah and his family had long left them by then.

While Abram had already heard God's call in Ur, and so was happy to move, *Acts 7:2-4,* Terah's motive might have been safety. Since the Elamites destroyed Ur soon after, this move might well have saved their lives. We know that God worked on the mind of Abram, but He may well have worked on the wishes and initiative of Terah, for it is with one mind that they migrated. *Genesis 11* describes the family lineage from Shem to Terah, and the migration and death of Terah in Haran. Abram's brother Haran, lived in Ur, and died there, before his father, Terah, but his son Lot travelled with Terah. The Hebrew spelling of brother Haran and the city Haran are different, and thus probably have no connection. Milcah was the daughter of Haran and therefore Lot's sister. She married her uncle Nahor. She was the mother of Bethuel, and the grandmother of Rebekah, and of course that family also travelled to Haran with Terah. By Jacob's visit, after the deceitful blessing incident, they lived at Nahor, still in the Haran vicinity. Milcah was related to Abram through his brothers, Haran and Nahor.

CONCLUSION:

We have noted the wonderfully civilised city of Ur and the luxury that was there for Abram. Now we praise God that He found the faithful Abram, who was prepared to eschew that security, to fulfill His purpose. So we go with Abram and his family from Ur on the journey to Haran.

Section 1 - Abraham begins his Journey

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CHAPTER 1 - A CYCLE OF PAIN BEGINS

CHAPTER 2 - ABRAM ENTERS THE LAND

CHAPTER 3 - ABRAM AND LOT SOLVE SOME PROBLEMS

CHAPTER 4 - IMPATIENCE OVER THE PROMISED HEIR

CHAPTER 5 - HAGAR AND ISHMAEL AND ABRAHAM AND SARAH AND ISAAC

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CHAPTER 1

A CYCLE OF PAIN BEGINS

"***And Terah took Abram took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran... and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees ... unto Haran, and dwelt there", Genesis 11:31.***

FOCUS:

In this chapter we see Abram rewarded for his faithfulness, as he travels from Ur to Haran with his father Terah. The intent of the discussion here, is to highlight Abram's growing friendship with God, ***Genesis 11:31-32.***

1. ABRAM OBEYS GOD'S COMMAND, SO THERE ARE PROMISED REWARDS

Using the *Companion Bible,* "*Chronological Chart, Appendix 50*"*,* it was in 1946 BC, when Abram first heard the call from God, in Ur, when he was 50 years old, and Sarai was 40. Other notable scholars place the event earlier in the 1900s. It may be disconcerting to know that *The Septuagint*, the oldest translation of the *Old Testament,* from about the 2nd Century BC, (nobody is quite sure "*when*"), does not mention Ur, but it has been included in later texts and, of course, "*Mesopotamia*", "*The land of the Chaldeans*" is mentioned in the *New Testament, Acts 7:2* and *4*, when Stephen describes Abram's journey before "*Charran*". The present day Kurds claim to be the ancient peoples of Mesopotamia, who unlike the Israelites, have never been given a home by the United Nations Commission. They are now a troubled and homeless race, asking for justice.

Abram, back then, took their library books, and all their documents, and went with his father and his nephew Lot, and all their cattle, and sheep, and donkeys, and goods, to Haran in the land of Canaan, 1,600 kilometres away, and dwelt there. This is the first of a number of journeys of the people of God. God chose a portable people who moved about thus spreading His message. The family firm that developed from Abraham's good farming techniques, **Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products,** was ideal for this spread of the good news of the kingdom and glory of God, and the advantage of the travelling salesmen, is obvious.

Just previously there were turbulent Amorite incursions all over the Fertile Crescent, from the northern fringes into the weakening Mesopotamian cities, until nearly every important city was ruled by the Amorites. Disorder soon turned more orderly, and peaceful migrations then occurred, including, among many others, Abram and his family.

From then on Abram and Sarai were encouraged by God with regular communications throughout their lives that their lives were on course. The promise to Abram was sevenfold.

1. "I will make you a great nation"

2. "I will bless you"

3. "I will make your name great"

4. "You will be a blessing"

5. "I will bless those who bless you"

6. "Whoever curses you I will curse"

7. "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you"

These promises, or parts thereof, were repeated and repeated over the lives of the three patriarchs, inclusively five times, and through Joseph were initially fulfilled, and later were repeated to Moses in *Exodus 3, 6-8,* and *6:2-8*. They are referred to 55 times in one sense or another in the rest of the Old Testament. They contain the blessings of holiness that show forth His name. They are a very important part, at least it should be said, the most important part, of the whole *Bible*. They contain the very essence of the mission mandate of Abram to be a blessing to all nations. The evidence of the success of Abram's commission is seen in the large number of books of the *Bible* which are written either to, or about, or by Gentiles. The finale is contained in the genealogy of the one come to save, and through whom all these blessings would flow, for of the five women mentioned only his own mother is from the ethnic stock of Abram, *Matthew 1*.

2. ABRAM MOVES FROM UR TO HARAN

Abram's family had been used to renting from the Sumerians, being semi nomadic, so they may have rented grazing land from the Mesopotamians for the price of an animal or two, as they travelled up the Euphrates River, to Haran. In Haran they saw the beehive shaped huts of the Amorites, not so civilised as Ur, and pitched their black goat skin tents outside the city. They had carried with them clothes and blankets, and food, and utensils and tradeable goods, as well as all their agricultural and livestock gear.

A Jewish children's song, "*A wandering Aramean was my father*" endorses that known about Abram, who was not a Sumerian, *Deuteronomy 26:5, NIV.* It is suggested that their ancestors were either Aramean nomadic people, or a nomadic people who came to live in an Aramean environment in the Haran district from Ur, and therefore became associated with them. Terah and his family genealogically belonged to the Hebrew peoples who are the descendants of Eber in *Genesis 10:21, 25,* but they had close associations with Arameans before, or after coming to Aram-naharaim, or the "*Aram of two rivers*", or Mesopotamia. Terah and his family settled there for a long time, so that Abram could have called the Haran region "*my country*"*, Genesis 24:4*, is the opinion of *Yoshitaka Kobayashi,* in "*Terah*"*,* in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary.*

Both Ur and Haran were centres of celestial being, moon worship, which may be the reason that the journey halted at Haran, where Terah would feel an affinity of worship. Haran, was a great trading city, and was a frontier still, at the extremity of the much later Babylonian empire. It was a prosperous Amorite town and serviced trade caravans. Haran and Mari, which city was on the Euphrates River, were their capital cities. Babylon was further south east along the river, and

then Ur. All three important cities were spaced along the river North West to South East and accessible by water from the Persian Gulf.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

Later, on leaving Haran, Abram and his family were left to more fully pursue the hitherto awakened interest in YHWH. The emotional ties that bound them into Haran were broken and Abram took his courage and his substance and moved west, before turning south.

Consider:

* Why did Abram halt with his father's family at Haran, when the command had been more specific?

* Or was there an unrecorded direction from God to stay there, for a time, so that the family could consolidate to be the wife resource for the future generations, (that is, to strengthen the God blessed, family line)?

This family line was not of great importance to God, for He has often broken that expectation. Still it was important to Abram.

* How much were Abram's beliefs and worship compromised in Haran?

* Does *Joshua 24:2* still apply at this time in Haran?

* We know of Rachel's gods at this same Haran, later in this story, so was worship here an eclectic affair?

When Abraham did leave Haran, he took Lot with him

* Should Lot have been part of the father's house left behind?

* Did fatherless Lot fulfil a role for this childless couple since Ur, and in Haran, and that is their compunction for taking him into Canaan?

* Or did they take Lot because he just happened to be there, and was a relative?

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The question of Lot accompanying Abram is more fully addressed further in the text, when Lot's life and influence deteriorate.

3. ABRAM MOVES FROM HARAN INTO CANAAN

It was from Haran, twenty five years later, after Terah's death, that eventually Abram did remove from his father's house to go to a land that He would show him, for *Genesis 12* begins with what the Lord God **had** told Abram, (and from *Stephen* in *Acts 7,* we know that God had asked him to move when he was in Ur). There is the promise in *Genesis 12;7*, that Abram will become a great nation, and from now on, we see the emergence of that nation Israel, with the family saga of **Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph.** Meantime we leave Abram in Haran, with his father Terah.

CONCLUSION:

Abram has come a long way from Ur to Haran, but at Terah's death he and his wife, Sarai, leave the family compound, with his nephew Lot. Abram then begins a great journey of faith into Canaan, with God as his guide.

Digression:

It may be interesting to relate a fabrication of the Jews about Abram. *H. L. Ellison*, in "*Fathers of the Covenant*", *page 44,* draws our attention to a "*lovingly embroidered story*" from the *Talmud*. One day, in Ur, when the young Abram was left minding his father's idol shop in the city, (for Terah not only worshipped idols, he sold them as well), Abram who had, for some time, been dissatisfied with the worship of the night lights that faded during the day, took a hammer and smashed pieces off the idols. When his horrified father discovered the damage, Abram retorted that the idols had argued so much that the largest (in whose arms Abram had placed the hammer) had used the tool to quell the arguments. When his father angrily told him, "*But there is no life or power in them to do such a thing*", Abram then retorted, "*Why then do you serve them? Can they hear your prayers, when you call on them?*"

We can readily see the Jews using such attractive, but fabled, non authentic arguments, to confound their polytheistic and pagan neighbours.

CHAPTER 2

ABRAM ENTERS THE LAND

"***Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from they father's house, unto a land that I will show you", Genesis 12:1.***

FOCUS:

Abram and Sarai and Lot, under God's guidance, move right through the land of Canaan and south west into Egypt, for they are unsafe and insecure. Sarai is put at a disadvantage by Abram, but God is there later, when Abram calls on Him, and Abram learns to trust again, ***Genesis 12:1*** **to** ***13:4.***

Abram, who is at the beginning of a long journey, went further south from Haran, with his family, to the land of Canaan, then further south into Egypt, before returning again to Canaan, ***Genesis 12-16.*** Since, from childhood, Abram had been taught that the Canaanites were their enemies, (because Noah had cursed Canaan, *Genesis 9:25),* travel in their land may have been an anxious time for him at first. These settled tribes, as did the Egyptians later on, welcomed the nomadic herds to graze on the short lived herbage, for they ate the stubble after the harvest and so provided the manure to enrich the bare fields ready for the next harvest. There were certain regulations and strictures, but in all it was an acceptable and mutually beneficial practice.

1. ABRAM ARRIVES IN SHECHEM, THE PLACE OF DECISION

Abram probably went to Damascus on his way into Canaan, where he may have purchased Eliezer, his trusted servant. Eliezer became insurance for the progeny promise, (as Lot may have been), as Sarai remained childless, and Abram actually offered him to God as his heir. God refused, as He did a later offer by Abram, of his son Ishmael, by a bondwoman.

Damascus is an amply watered location that made it the main caravan outfitter's city on the trail from Haran to Canaan. In *The Reader's Digest,* "*Great People of the Bible*", *page 37,* we read about the later Assyrians who called Damascus "*the city of asses*", with the flowering fields there, and the refreshing and rushing streams, and the productive farms that they cultivated. It was an exciting centre of trade and commerce, news and novelty. Dozens of different tribes and nations jostled one another every day, bartering goods and services. The large Damascan donkeys were everywhere. Heavy shouldered and coloured dark brown, these intelligent beasts were hired out, and were the essential component of every caravan.

Abram probably left Damascus in a large donkey caravan which regularly left the city and travelled on the trade routes. One caravan might include up to 3,000 donkeys, but 300 to 500 were more common, with large numbers of people and goods for trade.

Abram and his family and animals would have made up a large proportion of the caravan. The women would have travelled in cylinder type tents on the camels. These saddle tents collapsed sideways, from which the veiled and shawled ladies found it easy to dismount. There was no river here, except for the Jordan Valley, but jealously guarded springs and wells, the use of which had to be delicately negotiated. Abram would have learned from the caravan leaders the art of watering so many people and cattle, as we know he later sustained his and Lot's family and all their herds. He also became proficient in digging wells, the purchase of wells and the general negotiation for water rights.

It was easily possible to travel 24 kilometres per day, in caravan fashion and the settled Amorites kept themselves aware of the movements of all the migrating peoples by sending fire signal messages at night, though they tolerated these wandering cousins, Abram and his family, for they caused no trouble. "*Hebrew*" over the centuries came to mean "*wanderer*", "*serf*" or "*people with less than full citizenship*", or "*the man from the other side*".

Several days after Damascus, they arrived at the frontier of the land of Canaan, "*the land of the purple, the Promised Land*", and Abram then realised that this was the land to which he had been directed.

Then this family of God, led by the "*friend*" of God *(Isaiah 41:8)* came to Shechem. Shechem figures prominently in our story, and proved to be a place of decision for Israel at crucial times of their development over the centuries. It was a place of shame and destruction and figured largely in the dysfunction that dogged this family over the next three centuries. It is mentioned, because the Semites, who followed the Sumerians, (as we know from Egyptian records), had been recently banished from the land by the Canaanites. It was a Baal worshipping Canaanitish place, and lays in the pass between two mountains, at the crossroads of central Palestine, *Genesis 12:6.* Dothan and Bethel were other favourite cities, under whose walls Abram and his family sheltered.

"*Great People of the Bible*", *page 29,* gives us a good potted history of the time, and tells of a contemporary Egyptian story, of a youth who fled to Canaan at that time. He said, that it was a good land, and figs were grown in it, and grapes. He said that it had more wine than water, with plentiful honey and abundant olives. Every kind of fruit grew on its trees and everyone enjoyed the pickings. There was no limit to any kind of cattle, and bread was made for him as daily fare. Wine also was a daily provision, with cooked meat and roasted fowl.

God "*appeared*" and spoke to Abram again, in the plain (or oak) of Moreh, near Shechem, and restated the promises, and so Abram built an altar there to God, and called on His name. This is

the first public worship of God by Abram, according to how it was revealed to him. Now we can say an on going mission to the world of the message of life that God offered, has now been established again, after Noah's "*vain*" mission, when he earnestly preached salvation from sin. And this is the first time an appearance is spoken of.

We need to consider this appearance to Abram, whether it was an angel, and whether this was Abram's own special angel, that had guided him, and would continue to guide him throughout his life. It may be that this begins the education of men for an earthly appearance of God's representative, that is, His son, much later in history. It certainly does imply that Abram is now worthy of God's manifestation to him, as the later prophets were.

2. ABRAM GOES TO BETHEL - THE PLACE OF GOD'S BLESSINGS

Next, Abram and his family moved further south, a day's journey, and pitched their tents on a mountain near Bethel. Being nomadic, and running short of food and water, the large family moved further south again, but as the prevailing famine began to affect them, they eventually moved into Egypt.

Abram must have been very fearful of going into Egypt, for he would have been a match for the thinly scattered and long hated Canaanites, especially now, for his confidence in Canaan was rewarded with an easy and prosperous nomadic life, but he thought he would **not** be a match for the mighty and powerful Egyptians. Still necessity made him proceed, *Genesis 12:14*.

3. ABRAM GOES TO EGYPT FOR RELIEF FROM THE DROUGHT

It is here that Abram's faith wavers, and he asks his "*beautiful*" wife, Sarai to masquerade as his sister to save his life, because the Egyptians are sure "*to kill me, but they will save thee alive*", *Genesis 12:12*.

It seems that Abram might have arranged this ploy with Sarai at the time of leaving Haran, *Genesis 20:13*. Perhaps it was a widely used custom amongst this family. When the response is the same for the same problem, at later incidents, we would call the devaluation of women endemic. We may be tempted to give the patriarchs excuses for this sinful practice, but this hardly seems a wise response to a problem. It did not cause the patriarchs themselves lasting hurts or consequences, but it doubled the fear for their wives, and it almost caused them to commit adultery, for they could not resist such powerful men, in such circumstances, when they were given strictly for the purpose of concubinage. As well, it was the cause of slander upon God's people. It was promised that slander would be a consequence of David's sin, and so it was for Abram/Abraham and Isaac. It was a distinct retraction from the "*they shall be one flesh*" ideal.

It **is** a distinct lie, not even worthy of an equivocation about her being a relative. In a position of danger, or just to make a questioner happy, some will lie readily. Truthfulness is an heroic virtue, and from the martyrs, who died in the name of God, and his son the Lord Jesus Christ, and for those who believed that we should have a printing of His *Word*, we have learned a greater lesson. The lie is not the only sin, for Abram would have known of the "*one flesh*" ideal of the creation of Adam and Eve. Even though multiplication of wives was an acceptable custom, multiplication of husbands was not. Passing on wives as concubines was unacceptable. If Sarai was as fearful in Egypt as Abram clearly was, this solution would double her fear.

The Egyptian Pharaoh took the advice of his princes, who were always on the lookout for beautiful concubines for their king, and bought Sarai from Abram, for a good price. Sheep, oxen,

he asses, she asses, camels, menservants and maidservants. Sarai was considered a valuable acquisition, and Pharaoh believed that he was acting lawfully. She was of a different race, and even though she was middle aged, she would have been beautiful and unique to the Egyptians. But it was God who saved the situation and sent a plague into the palace, which led Pharaoh to question the integrity of the purchased goods.

There was most likely a time of purification for concubines in this period of Egyptian history, and so we assume that God probably used this time to keep Sarai safe from Pharaoh.

Amazingly, Pharaoh did not punish Abram for his deceit, (and God does not comment on it in the record), but the king commanded his men to give Sarai back to Abram, and help the family remove north again. We can only assume that God's hand in the solving of this problem was known to Pharaoh as well.

So the lying sin, caused

- Double fear for Sarah

- The expectation of adultery, with continuing concubinage

- And a multiplying of husbands, which she knew was sinful.

Also there was now

- The fear that she could be sold on to someone else.

The cause for slander on God's people was enormous with this incident, and we think of Ishmael's later taunt of Isaac, "*mocking*" probably about the identity of his father, *Genesis 21:9*.

Consider:

* What sort of a plague settled into the palace?

* Who told Pharaoh the solution to the plague problem, his priests, (for it would be reasonably easy for soothsayers to work out)?

* Or did Sarai confess under interrogation?

* Or did he act graciously, without knowing why he did so?

* What happened to the purchase price?

* Did Pharaoh's purchase price for Sarai, help to make Abram rich?

* If so, did Abram, later, use the lesson from this unwise situation, not allowing a king "*to make him rich*", *Genesis 14:23*?

Besides the virtuous Egyptians, (on this matter), there are two large family groups who knew about this folly. There is the family of Abram and Sarai, and the family of Lot, each family now influenced by the evil, or at least, the appearance of evil, depending on how much information was available.

* What could the supervising Eliezer do in his teaching to mitigate the circumstances?

* What attitudes were taken by Abram and Sarai within the migrating caravan to ensure this dysfunction would not be normalised?

* What steps would be taken to uphold the dignity of the elders?

****

4. ABRAM RETURNS TO BETHEL AGAIN

The families returned to Bethel, *Genesis 13:2,* and Abram, still with Lot and his family, "*was very rich in cattle and silver and gold*".

There, in Bethel, Abram was pleased to call on the name of the Lord God again, for it was now a sacred place. We are not told any details of this act of worship. Perhaps it was the beginning of the acknowledgment of sin and the seeking of forgiveness.

CONCLUSION:

God led Abram and Sarai and Lot a long distance in their quest for a place of safety and security, and during that journey there had been some dysfunctional behaviour, disadvantageous for Sarai. Our chapter concludes with Abram calling upon the Lord God in Bethel. The lesson for us is that God will forgive dysfunction if we are seen to try to repair it, and if we affirm that we will work towards well function.

CHAPTER 3

ABRAM AND LOT SOLVE SOME PROBLEMS

"***And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwelt together", Genesis 13:6.***

FOCUS:

Abram and Lot have so much substance between them that a solution needs to be found to manage the great herds, but Abram finds that there are other blessings, ***Genesis 13:5*** to ***15:21***.

1. ABRAM AND LOT HAVE FAMILY PROBLEMS TO SOLVE

Lot's flocks and herds and tents became too much to manage in the one big Abram entourage, and with so many people, and so much cattle, the land could not sustain them all. Remember there had been a drought and dearth, providing an environmental problem for Abram to solve. This caused strife among the herdsmen, and so the family leader and patriarch, Abram, **advised the separation** between the two families, Lot did not. Probably the situation had been untenable and ready to explode for some considerable time. As the two families began to be irritated by it, Abram generously acted, *Genesis 13:7*.

2. LOT SEPARATES TO SODOM

When Lot had the first choice of which way to go, he chose the plain of Jordan, the well watered riverside, truly a Garden of Eden, and good for his herds. But of course strife, in the form of temptation, was there as well, in the city of Sodom. Once more a choice was made, perhaps unknowingly - sin or righteousness. It is so often in the most attractive of circumstances that sin lurks, hidden in the shrubbery. And it was so for Lot. There is more about Sodom later in this story, in *Genesis 19,* when the demise of Lot's family is recorded.

Abram gave Lot first choice, not so much on the basis of pious generosity which has the negative effect of emphasising Lot's greed, but because of his strong belief in the promise of the

land. Rather, Abram was thinking of Lot's proleptic inheritance of the land, an assumption that he **would** inherit the land at his uncle's death, with Abram **still misunderstanding** God's plan for the land inheritance by a **son**.

Perhaps Lot was too inexperienced to understand the risk in going to live near the evils of Sodom. Until now they had lived together under mutual protection. Perhaps there was some resentment on Lot's behalf and Abram's advice had not been sought. The whole situation could have been fraught with misunderstandings unless they were entirely honest with one another, and we have no indication of that.

3. ABRAM MOVES HIS TENTS TO HEBRON, ON THE PLAIN OF MAMRE

When Lot departed, Abram was left with the less promising, but, as it proved, safer inheritance of the hill country of Judea. God spoke to him again and the land promise, was once more reinforced, and God gave the command to walk in the length and breadth of it, and it was so.

Consider:

* Was this walk advised by God, as an inspection of the land?

* Or to exercise authority over the land?

* Or to demonstrate to others his ownership of the land?

* Or reinforcing to Abram alone, and his family, the promised ownership?

****

Abram, the Hebrew, descendant of Eber, *Genesis 14:13*, then removed his tents to the plain (or the oaks) of Mamre at Hebron. We hear of the person, Mamre, later on, but here the confederate began, with the Amorites, and a treaty was established. Moses personified the name, but the original tradition behind this record was that "*Abram was dwelling at the Amorite sanctuary of Alliance*". It was later Mamre's plain, or oaks, so perhaps the plain was named after him.

This oak grove, outside of Hebron, (which is still, today, a busy trading centre), became a special and permanent station for Abram. Here he was comforted, in the separation from his kinsman, Lot. Maybe he was disturbed that Lot could have been motivated by self interest in his decision, and was disinterested in the special consideration that God had for his uncle. Abram had entertained plans for Lot, but Lot seems unimpressed. The plans God had for Lot, were not the plans that Abram envisaged for Lot.

The narrative in this section of *Scripture*, *Genesis 14*, has a wealth of geographical detail, as seen by the headings in our study. It traces the invasion route of the Eastern kings along the north south road. Here for the first time *Biblical* events and external history blend into one story. We know so much about these towns and their surrounds now, that we know what Abram and Sarai must have seen and felt, about their surroundings.

4. ABRAM HELPS LOT WITH A SKIRMISH

Lot was bothered by a skirmish around Sodom, a political and military situation, and was taken captive, along with his wives and family and goods, *Genesis 14: 12, 13*. The commentary of *Matthew Henry* on this section of *Scripture,* makes the point that Lot was not recognised by the invaders as being different from his compatriots, and so was not excused from the fray. It often happens to us, that if we are in the wrong place at the wrong time, we are part of evil, and

suffer accordingly. Abram, who was living in tents away from any cities, and therefore not a target, was told of this tragedy, by the Amorite, Mamre, from a family of three brothers, or three allies, or three allied nations, *verse 13*, confederates of Abram. We discover the name of the informant as the third "*brother*", from *verse 24*.

Comment:

This is probably the clue that the novelist, *Florence Bauer,* used to make Eber, the Amorite, a Canaanite, a slave, and YHWH worshipper, the teacher of young Abram, way back in Ur.

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Abram pursued the retreating confederate over towards the sea, with 318 armed men "*born in his household*". It seems that they all worshipped with him as they had this intimate connection to him. So Abram had a sort of ecclesiastical gathering, in the sense of a gathering of a group of people. He turned it to a spiritual group with his worship, and taught them the narrow way, with the worshipful service expected of the Israelites. He included the mission mandate, that is, the charge that accompanied their covenant, according to *Genesis 26:5*.

It is amazing that Abram had grown such in number. He pursued the kings unto Dan, a very long way. We are surprised to see Dan. It is an editorial comment by Moses, the author of the account. If we readily accept these editorial comments the sense is always perfectly clear. See also, *Deuteronomy 34:1*

W. F. Albright in "*The Biblical period from Abraham to Ezra"*, in his section on *"Genesis"*, argues convincingly that Abram, the Hebrew, or Habiru, *Genesis 14:13*, came from a family of caravaneers, and that would explain why he could suddenly draw on so many men. Caravanning may have been the family trade, after they left Ur, which Abram may have continued. As the family became more settled in the later Abram/Abraham and Isaac and Jacob years, the family business expanded to include sheep flocks and sheep products, as well.

Abram would have called his men to the headquarters at Hebron, and suspended his business during the expedition. There was a slaughter of Chedorlaomer, but Abram recovered Lot and his family and goods. This is the first indication to Abram that God really will fulfil His promise, of greatness and blessing. It is a pity that Lot put himself outside the immediate blessings for Abraham towards the end of his life. Certainly he was secured in another covenant from God, as the descendant of Terah through Shem, but not now in Abram's covenant.

This secular operation suddenly assumes a religious significance, with Abram's intervention. Abram is beginning to realise that to receive the gifts of God he must show God's glory and he must show forth His name. The responsibilities of the covenant and his blessings point him in the direction of being a saviour to Lot, and Abram takes on that role. He becomes a witness to God's purpose. He is hopeful that there will be some righteous found in Sodom. The King of Sodom was grateful to Abram and wanted to repay him, but Abram, apart from a meal for his 318 trained men, would not touch anything of the King of Sodom, lest the king said, "*I made Abram rich*"*, Genesis 14:23*. Abram, by now, knew of the wickedness of Sodom and so anything belonging to the king would be loathsome to him. He had previously taken riches from Pharaoh in Egypt. Wise man indeed, now. Wisdom and faith building together.

Frank Anthony Spina in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* argues the case for the presence of Lot in "*Abram's Migration*" and some of those arguments are here presented in this section. (The

question is more powerfully argued again at the demise of Lot). Certainly there are some questions to consider in the arguments put forward here.

Comment:

It seems that Lot's role was important and strategic to Abram, when he left Haran, for Sarai was childless and possibly barren, and his dead brother's son was a needy *"child"*. The inclusion of Lot enriches the textural story, but there may have been much more in Abram's mind. He may have even particularly planned to take Lot, for Lot provides a safeguard for Abram, who was anxious for the progeny promise to be fulfilled which he expected to occur forthwith. Yet he was confronted with the childlessness of Sarai. Some even regard it as Abram having a sense of responsibility to take Lot, but others regard it as a lack of faith on Abram's part, perhaps being the first faithless incident recorded, but not the last, where faith/faithlessness is not infrequently a characteristic of the actions and life of both Abram/Abraham and his wife. It is maintained that Lot was **firstly,** a sort of security deposit towards God's recent promise of nationhood, and **secondly,** as a potential heir, for the recent land promise, Lot being a righteous man.

Sadly, after entering Canaan, every episode relating to Lot, has, if not a negative effect on the patriarchal ambition of Abram/Abraham, at least an ambiguous impact on the future that God has in mind for all of the patriarchs. From the incident of quarrelling kinsmen that must have gone on for some time, and then escalated to something unbearable, and then the resulting separation, the story rolls on until Abraham has to muster a military force from among his men, and travel a great distance to rescue his nephew, Lot, and while there are no disastrous results from this humiliating incident, if it had turned out differently, it may have jeopardised Abraham's tenuous tenure in the land and certainly his reputation.

****

The history of this war is thought by some to be accurate with authentic records of people and places. If it was a document and available, then it could have been incorporated by Moses in his great work. Remarkable details of these kingdoms, appear in the *Speaker's* and *Ellicott's Commentaries,* for these two commentators of the last century felt sure that these kingdoms and their positions could be pinpointed with reasonable accuracy.

5. ABRAM'S BLESSING FROM MELCHIZEDEK

A wondrous meeting between Abram and Melchizedek, the King of Salem, (next called Urusalim, a small town in Jebus, so it is probably where Jerusalem was later situated), is slotted into the text here, *Genesis 14:18-20*.

We cannot be dogmatic that Salem is Jerusalem, but the link is drawn by the writer to the *Hebrews, Chapter 7:17,* about our Lord Jesus Christ offering himself (in Jerusalem) as a priest, "*after the order of Melchizedek*". Abram and Melchizedek met in the Vale of Shaveh, or the king's dale. The only other reference to the king's dale is *2 Samuel 18:18,* which as Absalom's pillar or place, which is definitely near Jerusalem.

We tend to think that Abram and his family have exclusive rights to the blessings of God at this time. This story precludes again that view of exclusivity. Abram and his family were elected to best do God's work, they were not ever an elite society. Obviously Melchizedek had come to know the Lord God and was a worshipper of YHWH, a high priest, of the LORD. He, like Hagar did later, may have also had "*discussions*" with God, for he is spoken of, later, as a prefiguration

of the Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest, *Hebrews 7:11*. He brings a meal to Abram, bread and wine, and blesses him, but there is no sacrifice here. In this blessing we can see that Melchizedek recognised the developing righteousness of Abram, that righteousness is accounted unto him, *Genesis 15:6*, because of his belief in God, *Romans 7:3,* for he is yet uncircumcised, *verse 10*.

Consider:

* Why does Abram give Melchizedek a tenth of everything, a tithe of his spoils for God, to a king?

* Was he then a superior of Abram, a superior priesthood to the priesthood of Levi, which was still in the loins of Abram, compare *Hebrews 7:9-11*?

* Was this man really Shem, as the ancient Jewish scholars believed, who **did** live until the time of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah?

* Or was he then a converted Canaanite, or a privileged Semite?

****

Abram was anxious to resolutely name God as his beneficiary. He knew that he was blessed so that he could bless others, that is, so that he could be a blessing to the nations. He did not consume or keep any of the booty from the skirmish for himself, but **he offered a tenth of all his wealth to God**, (when he gave it to Melchizedek, who was a priest of God).

Abram had not been a great missionary up until this time, although his public worship was a witness. His missionary career had been fraught with difficulties and he had actually been dismissed from Egypt, a far cry from witnessing to the glory of God.

We need to remember that -

God reveals His glory to all peoples so that He may receive glory from all peoples.

This double dimension of glory can help make sense out of the ancient stories that God has given us, especially as we see Abram move into the missionary mode. As he understands the covenant God made with him, we watch his concern for his family grow to his concern for the nations.

Abram's tithe was a very significant gift of worship to God and went hand in hand with his blessing of God, in return for the blessings that he had received. It was then a worshipful event, part of the memorial offering.

God had been anxious to know how Abram would react to His blessings. God wanted to know if he would render the received blessings back to Him as tithes. God wanted Abram to have an obedient and priestly passion about Him, and was looking for an indication of how Abram felt. God had placed great faith in this man who He had developed from the line of Shem to be His witness.

Cornelius in *Acts 10:4* was praised by the angel for his alms as part of his "*memorial*" and worshipful service to God. Perhaps Cornelius had heard an echo of the lessons that Abram had learned, and in his own way had so witnessed to God's glory among the poor.

God had tested Abram to see what sort of servant He had.

Now God noted Abram's generosity and was pleased with him.

Comment:

If God had a whole worshipping worldwide people with their entire being jealous for, and committed to, God, then God's intent to bless would not ultimately be dissipated in self service - is the opinion of *Steven Hawthorne* in "*Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*", *page A 37*. This book is a reader for the course in the *Centre for World Mission* and is a useful and valuable text in leading us to mission awareness in our lives, and that God wants us all as missionaries to use all our talents and gifts and possessions in His service. It is a personal challenge by our Lord Jesus Christ recorded by Luke, in *Luke 24:47,* and repeated by him in *Acts 1:8*. It is "**The Great Commission**". It is a joy to hear the little children, even as young as two, sing along with the CD about it, and because of that, they know it well. They can quote verbatim, "*The Great Commission*" in *Matthew 28, verses 19* and *20 …,* so that even they, and certainly us, know of our responsibilities, to tell people about God. Preachers and teachers are supported by those who stand behind, all acting therefore on the mandate to preach to all of God's people.

The World Mission Centre emphasises the tithes of Abram as a part of our worship service. Then with regular commitments in that area, one of the ways that we can support those who are able to go missioning, is not only to support them in prayer for their spiritual welfare, but to help supply their practical welfare needs in an organised fashion, so that they are secure, and their work is blessed. We can be a "*goer",* an "*active sender"* or an "*equipper*". Then we would have missioners of all ages and potential, and God would be blessed, and the whole world would hear about God. God would note our generosity, and our commitment to serve Him would be blessed.

****

Melchizedek lived in Canaan. He was not obviously of the Levitical order, which came later, but a universal sort of kingly, God blessed priest, who has no beginning or ending in our story, for he is not a known name. It is significant to note that there were then pockets of God loving righteous men living in Canaan, and therefore possible suitable women to wife, but not of the family line, as in Haran. It is difficult to ascertain what special consideration made the family of Terah chosen as family marriage partners, when the Melchizedek family would have the faithful qualifications. We understand the patriarchs being wary of their children marrying amongst the nations round about, but when this Godly group of people have been discovered by Abram, we wonder at the untapped wife resource.

So, as Moses found Jethro, so Abram found Melchizedek, with whom he could share worship. Similarities in the Canaanitish worship had not tempted Abram, and he had remained apart from them. It was the same for this man.

So **Melchizedek,** the man of God, **was a wondrous blessing for Abram**.

Melchizedek taught Abram, and incidentally he teaches us, that gifts, or alms, or tithes, or pledges were/are all part of our worship of God. He later taught Jacob about promising blessings back to God, where the matter is discussed again, in "*Kith and Kin*", Book 3.

Consider:

* How do we view our gifts to the Lord, that is, our gifts in our collections?

* Could we make them more part of our worshipful service with prayer and praising music, and regard them truly as "*offerings to the Lord?*"

* How do we cater for the needs of our own group when we are absent from the Lord's Table there, and not able to partake in the offering worship at our regular place?

* Could we ease the planning for the community if we made regular banking transfers to that fund, as well as partaking in worshipful offerings, via ordinary collections, for other causes?

* Could we help all those in the congregation to feel that they are important in this worshipful part of the service, and so feel the necessity to contribute, rather than to pass the collection on?

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Comment:

This may be a particular problem to older women in worship, for in the past, they may have been made to feel excluded from some services, or never had money of their own to contribute.

Any large, enthusiastic congregation in this day, will be supported by pledging members, both men and women. We need to see how other organisations encourage and nurture their members, to see whether we can improve.

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6. THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

The three Amorite "*brothers*", Aner, Eschol and Mamre, took rewards, or portions, (of food) from the King of Sodom, but that does not preclude them from being eclectic worshippers of YHWH, as well as other gods, sympathetic and therefore helpful to Abram, *verse 24*. It could be that they were also confederates of Melchizedek.

Abram's Melchizedek experience, with the blessings of bread and wine, may have fortified him to reject the offer of the Sodomite king. For Abram had a confederate alliance with Melchizedek that was worth much more to him than that of the King of Sodom. Besides, Abram had seen and heard information about Sodom that he did not care for.

It is called "*Abram's Great Renunciation"* in the *Companion Bible*, where the incident is signalled as one of with great significance.

The Amorites were an old established peoples living west side Jordan, north of Salem/Jerusalem, Canaanites, worshippers of Baal, and early promoters of child sacrifice. They had been present north of Ur and were making incursions there when Abram was a young man. These three Amorite men may set themselves apart from their fellows, because of their views about YHWH.

The muscles of faith grow strong, through training and testing and that is sometimes painful. For Abram it was so. Abram was a lover of family, he stayed with Terah until he died, he had travelled with Lot since Ur, over 30 years ago, and now he is on his own. God talks to him again at this time, in *Genesis 15*, and God assures him of His loving care. God's address to Abram, in *verse 1,* is one of "*kingship*" - that is "*shield*" stands for "*king*". Abram has now extended his worship of God to include his wealth.

Abram **is** wealthy, but **God is his greatest treasure.**

7. "WHO IS MY HEIR?"

"HOW WILL I KNOW THAT I WILL INHERIT THE LAND?"

"*The word of the Lord came unto Abram*", *Genesis 15:1,* this is the first time of many that this is so expressed. Questions about offspring, *verses 1-6*, and possession of land, *verses 18-21,* are in Abram's mind.

Abram is puzzled by the two questions, now that Lot is not a consideration.

Firstly, Abram asks about his heir, seeing that Sarai is still childless.

What a terrible trial and worry this childlessness was to Abram and Sarai, but especially to sterile Sarai. Fecundity is still an honour, and considered a Godly blessing in the east. However, in God's wondrous provision, a special child would be born to them, far from Ur and Haran, and therefore free from the post Babel peoples and their wicked practices, all in God's plan. Still Abram and Sarai in their grief are not considering the big picture. It is a fault of all of us, for the big picture is out of our focus. It takes a faithful servant to realise that all things work for good, and our little scenario is a tiny puzzle piece and can easily be foregone. We need to opportune for the big picture.

Abram offers God a trusted house steward, for God to recognise as his heir, Eliezer of Damascus, probably acquired on the journey south from Haran, and not *"born in his house"*, a mistranslation. Perhaps Eliezer had already been made custodian of Abram's estate, now that Lot had separated, in the event of Abram's death. This was an approved custom of the time, for a childless man. But God declines the offer, for His heir of the promise, which would renew Abram's faith in God at this point, and spells out the fact that Abram shall have his own son. The promised progeny will be as the stars of the night sky, and Abram is led out into the night, to see for himself.

1. It is recorded for the first time, that Abram "*believed in the Lord*", and his faith is credited to him "*for righteousness*", ***Genesis 15:6*****. This is the oldest and most profound definition of faith. The verse is so full of the unspoken message of faith, and forgiveness and repentance, and reward and glory, that it is awe inspiring.**

2. Then, God talks to Abram about the land again, and Abram questions how he will know that the land will be his. **God is understanding of this doubt, and a great incident in Abram's life now is played out, where God gives a mighty prophecy about his family.**

This is a covenant ritual where the two parties to an agreement pass between themselves two halves of a dead animal to invoke a similar fate on themselves if they should break from their pledge. So Abram sat on one side, and having made his commitment, waited for God to take the initiative, to emphasise the fact that He alone made the covenant. The wording here in this segment of *Scripture* exactly follows the contemporary legal form for a treaty between two people.

First comes the identification, and then the historical introduction, in *verse 7,* then next comes a statement of future relationship and obligation, *verses 18* and *19*. But unlike the usual human treaty, this one is a vertical treaty, unilateral and unconditional, as God Himself

assumes an obligation without "*imposing reciprocal responsibilities*" on Abram, (*Charles and Anne Hummel,* "*Genesis*", *Lifeguard Bible Study, page 101)*. The stipulation, *verse 9,* was that the animals to be sacrificed, were to be three year old animals, which was the prime age for most sacrificial animals.

Abram waited all the next day, for God to speak. After the preparation, he had flicked the flies, and shooed the birds off his sacrifices, (if indeed they were sacrificed), for it is in the evening that Abram fell into a deep sleep, and God informed him of the future history of his family, of their treks and troubles, how they will go into a land that will afflict them for four hundred years. This family story is the theme of this book. But God promises that there will be a rescue and return to this Promised Land to which they will bring great substance from their servitude. It is a full and accurate prophecy, for the veracity of a great trek out of Egypt has now been established. (This prophecy and its fulfilment becomes a powerful tool for the authenticity of the inspired record, if the post Exodus recording of it is allowed as authentic.)

Abram is promised peace, and many years in the land with his family, where he will be buried, before the great trek into Egypt. However the ownership of the land is not promised within Abram's lifetime, although now God says, "*have given*", not "*will give*". There now has to be faith in faith, Abram needs to know that God has promised so firmly that He can say "*I have given you …*". Accompanying this promise is, therefore, also spelled out the notion of resurrection, for that is how Abram will inherit all of this when he dies before it is accomplished.

In *1 Chronicles 16:13-22*, David delivers a psalm, thanking God for his mercies, and included in that song is the story of the wandering "*Abraham*", and Abram's experiences in the land that is not his. God speaks of protecting him, His anointed and His prophet, *verse 22*, but the land is not inherited, still.

***Comment**:*

* **And so Abram now begins to understand the great truths of God, and believes.**

* **If Abram believes, it is imperative that he believes he will be resurrected.**

Abram is then surprised as God awakens him *"to newness of life"*.

* **It is as though God makes the covenant, and Abram, who has been sleeping, has no part in it.**

* This awakening is meant to reinforce the great truth of resurrection, and the lesson that all can have a part therein, if God is glorified.

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The Chinese proverb, *"Be not afraid of going slowly, be only afraid of standing still",* if it is applied to our lives, gives us an important sense of growing, in God's knowledge and grace, as Abraham did.

Consider:

* **Why do we feel fear?**

* **Is *"standing still"* a choice, or a neglect?**

* **Do we realise that standing still, is impossible, and to diminish is the only other possible direction?**

* **Is that the fear?**

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CONCLUSION:

The problem between the flocks of Abram and Lot has been solved, but Lot has now ventured out on his own and has his own counsel. Meanwhile Abram has found a new friend, and has spent some time with God, and is truly blessed.

CHAPTER 4

IMPATIENCE OVER THE PROMISED HEIR

"***They two shall be one flesh", Genesis 2:24.***

FOCUS:

Dysfunction begins to fester as Sarai and Hagar are culturally affected in this patriarchal family, ***Genesis 16***.

1. WHAT DUSTURBS THE PEACE?

Throughout this family saga, the harm and destabilisation caused by polygamy is constantly evident, and gives rise to enormous troubles that bring down this prized and God loved family, from the heights to which they ascribe. We can observe the breaking of the special and complementary roles in marriage as unwise, if not sinful, for it is a breaking of what God said in the beginning that "*they two shall be one flesh", Genesis 2:24.* It is one of the much recidivism in this story. The revisiting of "*sins*" perpetuates the dysfunction.

What we know of today as a blended family with all its dissension, resulted from Abram's union with Hagar and the resultant child Ishmael, for Abram and Sarai had been impatient to produce the promised heir. Indeed God did reject Abram's offer of a surrogate heir, of Lot and Ishmael, and had been content that a child would be born from his wife's own body, *Genesis 15:4*, but their impatience returned, and they began looking for their own solutions again.

Sarai may have become fearful at this time of more Godly promises that, as her name was not mentioned, (in the *Genesis 15* promises) that Abram would take another wife to provide the promised heir. We would need to have more information about Keturah, to attempt an assessment of Sarai's attitude.

We are not sure when Abraham took Keturah to wife, because it is evident that *Genesis 25:1-10* is out of sequential historical order. We know Abraham did not die until the Isaac's twins were 15 years old. Yet later in this same chapter, after Abraham's recorded death, comes the record of their birth. It is a family record chapter, inserted by Moses, rather than a continuation of the family history, or toldoth. So Abraham's wife, Keturah's history within this family is obscure. We can only assume that Keturah became Abraham's wife **after** Isaac's birth, and, hopefully, not while Sarah was alive.

Sarai, in her disappointment, after three years of childlessness, offered Hagar, her Egyptian acquired handmaiden. This must have been a very hard decision for her to make. To this day the Arabs and the Jews carry on the family feud (between Sarai and Hagar) with each laying claim to the land of Israel because Abram/Abraham is their father. One child was the first born - Ishmael (and the approved line for all Muslims), the other the favoured son - Isaac. Even today we are unable to sort out lawfully and compassionately the rights of surrogate and natural mothers and Abram found it difficult, as well. This is altruistic surrogacy, done for a high motive. There may

have been a preconception contractual agreement, or it may have only been a dialogue document. However, any document was ill conceived in this case, for the unexpected happened. The birth mother and the baby were both rejected.

Any mother (or father), ethically or spiritually minded, makes a promise at the time of conception, about the child that is to be born. Godly parents make a commitment to bring the child to the Lord, like Hannah, then to take the treasure God has graciously given, and in years to come to give back to the Lord a spiritually mature being for His Glory. With the lesson of Abraham and his family, constantly played out before our eyes in the world news, we can see that surrogacy does not easily follow, as is expected, in some people's eyes. Either there is a terrible struggle, when it does not work out according to the plan (like Ishmael and Isaac), or another is responsible for the child, and the mother whose gift it was, has no control. Gestational or social motherhood are issues involved in surrogacy, and should be treated with the greatest caution. Present day thinking Israelites probably regret Sarai's decision to surrogate Hagar for her much desired child.

2. ANIMOSITY KINDLED WITHIN ABRAHAM'S FAMILY

We know that the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were special in God's eyes and His plan, for He gave them special promises. They had a unique relationship with God. Their descendants reached all the way to the Lord Jesus Christ, and one would not criticise those so God loved.

However, their cultural life had great bearing on their personal relationships, and because those cultural differences are so diverse from ours, we can only guess at the dynamics that might have been present within these families. We do know that animosity was kindled and rekindled at both Ishmael and Isaac's birth. Eventually Sarai, being enraged by Hagar's superiority, pleaded, "*Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be heir with my son Isaac*", *(Genesis 21.10),* and this was Hagar's second turning out.

Even when Abram consented to Sarai's wishes there would be no family peace. We know that they were real people like us. Though they lived so long ago, the hint of family dysfunction in this incident is enough to allow us to think that there may have been other family dysfunctions.

3. FAMILY DYSFUNCTION BECAUSE OF POLYGAMY

The *Biblical* matriarchs, Sarah and Hagar and Rachel and Leah, seemed to follow a pattern whereby one wife is paired with a rival coexisting wife, a complementary pair, each contributing a characteristic which the other lacked. Each represented incomplete womanhood, like reflections of each other, and were destructive, until one could expel the other, in some way.

Barrenness represented

1. A lack of status in this labour intensive society, where the production of sons was imperative, but more importantly, in **this** family, barrenness, they thought, represented

2. An impediment to the fulfilment of God's promise of posterity.

Gale A. Yee in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* "*Sarah*"*,* is of the opinion, that particularly in the case of Sarah, when she knew

1. Of God's promises,

2. And Abraham's expectation of fulfilment,

3. And his disappointment at the delay,

4. When progeny for the promise was sought "*exogamously*",

5. That is, through Hagar,

The *"endogamous"* practice of the Hebrews was *"in conflict"*, and therefore ***"the promise"*,** and even ***"the covenant, was in jeopardy".***

It was a foolish path to take.

a. Sarah beautiful, but barren, is the older of the two women.

b. Hagar is young and fertile, but without status, and because of it, is exploited by the privileged woman.

c. Sarah is a victim of the patriarchal society which defines her in her capacity to produce sons, especially in light of the promises.

d. But Hagar is a double victim because of her class and her sex.

Both are "*victims*", and both are "*victimisers*", *Yee* comments.

So a terrible circle of oppression, contempt, disdain, jealousy, cruelty, emotional abuse, expulsion from the household and subsequent neglect, is born.

The message is -

 # That women cannot bond as co wives, even if they have a common goal in one husband.

 # Self interest, and competition and abuse soon rear their heads. But it is more than that.

 # It is the unwillingness to share a beautiful relationship,

 # For to share it, is to destroy it.

It is a rare woman who would prefer polygamy, and it could only be for a less than idealistic reason.

The whole concept of "*more than one wife*" contributing to family dysfunction cannot be better illustrated than in this story. Polygamy was not God's choice, nor divorce, for it destroys the union of man and woman *(Genesis 2),* but for man's sake He allowed it - and then allows man to take the consequences, which are not inconsiderable. Lamech was the first polygamist, *Genesis 4:19*. It is there specifically mentioned, probably for reprobation, and practised from then on, amongst the sons of Cain. It was considered noteworthy by Moses, because it was not the God ordained way.

Comment:

Polygamy continues to be an enormous problem in many cultures today and is a constant cause for worry and stress amongst those who suffer the practice.

The religion of the Mormons has undergone change in the matter of polygamy. It was tolerated in the United States for generations until the 1890's when a constitutional change outlawed it. The state of Utah was then accepted into the Union. However it is still practised by some of them in the breach, but these members are shunned by the leaders of the church.

Divorce may have made the difficulties of polygamy more easily managed.

This may be illustrated, even today, when we see the first wife of a prominent person easily discarded, and there is no competition for his second wife, because a divorce has taken place. Yet a prominent official (of Papua New Guinea), practising the culturally acceptable polygamy, may plan which wife to take with him to important occasions. Some women in

Papua New Guinea are not against the culturally accepted polygamy, but against the fact that wives are not equal. Multiple wives can never, ever, be equal in status, for that is asking too much from human nature.

Polygamy is still allowable in many Asian and African countries. It is defended as necessary in a labour intensive society and still exists in some countries today, and so defended. The question of how the work can be done when there is only one wife, is rhetoric.

The excuse, that they are then able to share the family work load is an equivocation, and a misunderstanding of the whole function of the marriage union. It encourages the idea that women are the beasts of burden and their feelings unimportant. It is so in the tribal states of

India, where women must work to contribute to the family income, yet are expected to do all the home work. Their child bearing and rearing and limited sleeping hours, as well, contribute to breakdowns in their health and their short life spans. It is hard to understand why the men cannot break the customs as women are impotent to do so. Men could respond

that it is not a shame to help with the homework.

Polygamy is well documented in Muslim countries, where the *Koran* has regulations for the practice, that is, for four wives, if they can be supported. The first Muslim wife can put a clause in her marriage contract to preclude other wives, but then she runs the risk of not

being accepted as a wife. The binding of this contract is doubtful.

God, under the Mosaic Law, relented and allowed divorce for the hardness of man's hearts, but in the beginning it was not so. The law of marriage is given in terms so stringent and binding, *Genesis 2:24*, that even our Lord could add nothing to it, *Matthew 19:3-6*. When the Pharisees continued to argue, he admitted Moses' later ruling, that diluted God's

ideal ruling on marriage, *verse 7-9.* He was not unaware of the difficulties that accompanied such situations. Current or consecutive wives all have problems with their rivals.

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4. SARAI'S CONFUSION IN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Sarai would have been ashamed of her jealousy of Hagar, for she knew it was culturally acceptable for a man to have two or more wives. However, the rivalry of Peninnah, provoking Hannah "*sore*", because of her barrenness, gives us an indication of the explosive situation, and how they were estranged, "*adversary*"*, 1 Samuel 1:6*.

But conversely in our story, Sarai had suggested the promised fulfilment could come another way than through her, as Abraham's wife. She **offered** Hagar, *Genesis 16*.

Middle Eastern culture of the time sanctioned this way of obtaining children. Archaeologists have discovered Nuzi texts, "*Ancient Texts Relating to the Old Testament*", see *NIV Study*

Bible, from the 15th century BC, that include marriage contracts with this stipulation inserted, to guard against the possibility of being left without an heir. Male impotence was not a consideration.

After Hagar conceived, the relationship between the three changes. **Hagar** despises **Sarai** and shows false pride, **Sarai,** repenting of what she now sees as a mistake, unjustly blames **Hagar**, and **Abram** shows unwarranted neutrality in the face of his participating role. When Hagar gives birth to Ishmael, Abram names the child Ishmael, assuming responsibility once more.

However Abram, at this point, cannot judge between the two women, and tells Sarai to do what she will. Sarai behaves so badly. There is a reason for the bad behaviour of Sarai, but we need to establish whether it is excuse enough. Reason and excuse are different concepts, and should always be established where there is bad behaviour. God can discern the difference, and we should learn the difference also and behave accordingly. It is one of the hardest concepts to teach children in behavioural management.

Polygamy is such a vital factor in the dysfunction of the families of Abram/Abraham and Jacob that it has become an important aspect in preventing well function. It is often revisited in the text, and is prominent in the summing up of the whole *Genesis* story in the end commentary on the Jacob and Joseph account, "*Kith and Kin*", Book 5. In no measure can we view it as an acceptable, Godly practice, but only as a cultural relativity to be considered.

5. ANGELS MEET HAGAR NEAR EGYPT, AT BEER LAHAI-ROI

Because of family tension Hagar flees, *Genesis 16:7*, to the wilderness of Shur, (probably modern day Suez) to a water hole, on the frontier of her native land, Egypt, where an angel meets her. The well is then called Beer Lahai-roi. "*Whence camest thou? And wither wilt thou go?*" He asks her, *verse 8*. He tells her to return and submit to Sarai, but He buoys her up with promises about her family, that it will be numerous, that the son who would be born to her, she would call Ishmael, "*because the Lord had heard thy affliction*". The angel describes to her the hairy man Ishmael will become, a forefather of many. God promises her that her son Ishmael will bear twelve princes. Isaac bears twelve princes, as well, through Jacob and his twelve sons. No wonder some people make confusion and competition between the *Koran* "*truths*" and the *Bible* truths

So it is from this *Biblical* dramatic incident, Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, the stage has often been set down through history, for conflict, and retribution. One family's dysfunction has now entered our world stage, and we experience the effect of that conflict, as we see the representatives on our neighbourhood streets, in our schools, at the shops, in our community, and everywhere that we may venture, "*outside*". God gave us this witness as well, in the words He spoke to Hagar and Abraham.

6. HAGAR BACK AT HEBRON ONCE MORE

Hagar was thankful for God's care and blessing and returned to Sarai and Abram who were now 76 and 86 years old.

Consider:

* Did she return because she had nowhere else to go?

* Is her Godly blessing a factor in her return?

* Would she have made any power terms or conditions at her entrance back in the compound?

* Is this personal experience important in the developing faith of Hagar?

* Why does God offer her an opportunity for faith in Him?

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There are others outside the family line, who are given opportunities to develop faith. This rules out exclusivity, and foreshadows what would happen when the house of Judah rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, and God commanded Paul, to preach Christ, and him crucified to the Gentiles. Paul later calls it "*my gospel*", *Romans 2:16,* and by inference then, so may we.

CONCLUSION:

The pain and confusion of Sarai and Hagar emphasise the dysfunction now caused in this family by polygamy. As it becomes endemic, so does the suffering.

CHAPTER 5

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL AND ABRAHAM AND SARAH AND ISAAC

"***And Hagar bare Abram a son, and Abram called him, Ishmael", Genesis 16:15.***

"***And Sarah bare Abraham a son, and Abraham called him, Isaac", Genesis 21:3.***

FOCUS:

Now the stage is set for the great conflicts of history, and the beginning scenes are played out in ***Genesis 16,*** which we have just considered. It may of interest here to have a chapter here, which is a ***Digression***, where we can examine our current Australian position within this conflict.

Digression:

(From the main Bible Theme)

THE CURRENT WORLD RELIGION OF ISLAM

The story of Abram's response (later named Abraham), to God's call, when he was beyond the Euphrates River in Ur, to leave there with his family, and later to travel on to Haran, and then into Canaan, has cast a long decisive shadow over the Jewish, Christian and Islamic cultures over the centuries.

1. THE THREAT OF ISLAM

When Sarai (later named Sarah), saw her barrenness as a stumbling block to the fulfilment of the promises that God made to her husband Abram, that through his son would the blessings come, Sarai offered her handmaid Hagar to Abram, so that he might have a son. In time a son, Ishmael, was born to Abram and Hagar.

From the offering of Hagar to Abram, to produce their God promised heir, Sarai unwittingly provided the world, since then, with the main adversary of the Jews and the Jewish faith and their promises, especially in these latter days.

Certainly the prophecies against Israel as a nation, for her disobedience of God's commands, has brought punishment through many nations, but since the discovery of oil and the world's reliance on the Arabs, together with their escalating wealth, we see today in the rise of Islam the greatest threat at this time to the land of Israel. When the Arabs stop quarrelling among themselves and become united against Israel, her troubles will really begin.

For our interest, a series "*My Islamic Neighbour*" in *The Christadelphian Magazine* of *April-September 1982,* is designed to help us understand, under the headings -

The Origin of Islam

About the *Koran*

What Muslims Believe

The Pillars of Islam.

We are advised that a Muslim is hard to win and there are some helpful points to be made if we are considering this. As well, we know that the *Koran* states that a strayed Muslim must be killed. If this is not carried out, at the very least, a Muslim is ostracised from family and friends so there is a great responsibility in converting a Muslim. For further study a *Koran* is easily and cheaply purchased at any bookshop.

There is an enormous struggle within Islam for the many converting countries (and this includes many former Communist countries) to be ruled by the extreme fanatics. A Jihad (or holy war) is justified violence (in the *Koran*).

2. ISLAM ON THE RISE

Countries like Malaysia and Indonesia now have strong Muslim governments, and are continually trying to influence others in their regions towards the Muslim faith. They, in turn, are harried by countries like Iran and Iraq, to become more strict. Present day Egypt's decimated tourist trade is a strong example of what can happen when two extremes try to gain power, and the fanatics struggle for supremacy. The huge tourist industry was similarly destroyed in Lebanon, when Lebanon was destroyed, and Afghanistan endures terrible turmoil, where women are denied many privileges that men enjoy. Morocco and Algeria Muslims are blamed for the bombings in France, their former colonisers. The Russians claim that their Muslim states are bombing the Russian city buildings, (and so they are bombing them in return, 1999).

The fundamentalists (the Shiites sect from Iran) are struggling to make these countries fully Islamic states, but those opposing say they are happy at last to have their freedom to practise religion. They do not want a dictated religion, nor even, more stringently, a dictated sect from that religion.

Women in some countries must wear "*the burqua*" not just the hijab, but a helmet like veil that billows from a skull cap and has a mesh screen covering the eyes, a complete covering - making women non persona outside their homes, rather like a body bag. Other countries allow female hands and faces to be shown. Muslim countries, for example Egypt, with stringent laws on how women should dress and act outside their homes, cannot bring themselves to outlaw female

circumcision (as Australia and other Western countries have done), though they say the custom is cultural, not religious and not required by the *Koran*.

Iranian law forbids women to drive cars - this is a cultural law in an Islam state, where there are many laws and restrictions to control the people. A law of shame may be invoked in Muslim states. It keeps Muslims in check, especially women, in all aspects of life where shame is brought on Islam. Twenty thousand women have been shot since the Ayatollah gained control when the Shah was deposed, (1992 statistic) and girls as young as 10 years can be shot, for boys the age is 15 years.

Even though the west put a trade embargo on Libya, they allowed compassionate leave for its subjects (suspects even, of the Lockerbie bombing) to travel, including a visit to Mecca mid year. The West recognises the compelling need for a Muslim man to travel to Mecca at least once in his lifetime.

It is interesting to note that Britain has a Muslim Parliament, set up by extremists in that country, trying to change many of the Westminster laws that do not suit their cultural pattern. Now there are more practising Muslims in England than church going Anglicans.

The fastest growing religion in America is Muslim. They now far outweigh the Jews, but the American Jews have enormous wealth and that brings with it great power.

In 1982 Muslims made up a sixth of the world's population. 10 years later in 1992 a quarter of the world's population of nearly 5,500,000,000, were Muslims. Three quarters, of the now over 6 billion, make up all the rest, Christians, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists and others. There is a fulfilling of the promise God made to Hagar, that He would care for Ishmael, and from him would come twelve princes, and a great nation, *Genesis 16:10*, *17:20*.

Australia has many of these war experienced, poor migrants from these countries, from either side of the spectrum, both Muslims and Christians. The estimated 300,000 Muslims in Australia, in 1995, are an insignificant statistic on their world Muslim population growth graph. However, they claim enormous growth patterns here. There are 20 Mosques in Sydney with more planned. They are financed by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and Libya - poor countries like Lebanon, where many Muslims come from, cannot help.

Nationalities do not divide Muslims but rather sects, for example, the Lakemba Mosque are Sunni, and are more represented on the Islamic Council of Australia. The Arncliffe Mosque Shiites are more fanatical. The fanatics represent only 10% of the world's Muslims, yet hold great power and influence.

3. AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Manning Clark, the Australian historian, was heard to say that Australians were mostly a godless people and that Australian history was in part, the story of a struggle over its two hundred years, to find meaning in a world of no faith and very little spirituality.

We were a secular nation, but it's no contradiction to say that at the same time Catholics and Protestants played a major role in our daily life, our school time, the business world and the political struggles of our country for the first half of the twentieth century. A minority of Australians have taken their religion seriously, but these prominent Catholics and Protestants have had a disproportionate influence in the affairs of this country.

This conflict between the Christian faiths, Catholics versus Protestants, boosted by the refugees, Catholic and Protestant, from Europe up until the 1970's, waned then, for at that time migrants began to arrive from the Central Eastern countries and Asia. They brought their culture and religions with them. Buddhists and Hindus made their presence felt, but by the 1980's Islam had become a major Australian religion. All these religions flourished, but Islam had the greatest increase of any non Christian group. It has now outnumbered those of the Jewish faith, not only in America but Australia as well.

With the Australian multicultural perspective, cultural and religious diversity has been encouraged and protected with our non discrimination laws. We need to appreciate that these same laws can protect our combined worship, or, if we are careless, harm it. Within this protection Islam has flourished, and is often seen to be uncompromising. However their religious leaders have become less confrontational in their public statements over the last decade, when our government threatened expulsion, and so they have won more community support, and people are much more accepting of their diversity. The Lakemba Mosque Imam has revised his former critical statement about non Muslim Australian women, and now has generously said publicly "*with great pride we state that we have had more freedom in Australia, than we have often had in some of the native countries from which we have come, we have a great bond to Australia*". Like many religions they have begun their own schools.

To follow the world's largest (a Muslim claim) religion, Islam (especially as required by the fundamentalists) has a profound effect on the daily life of a Muslim. There are some liberals who do not follow the rules to the letter, but they are scorned by the fundamentalists. To go to school with, to teach with, to work with, to shop with, to have as a neighbour, to have as an worshipping neighbour, a practising Muslim has a profound effect on any with whom they come in contact. It is meant to be so, for they are proud of their heritage.

4. THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT

Polygamous marriage is forbidden in Australia but it is nevertheless recognised when family units migrate in that structure. They are not forced to change, and our law recognises that. For welfare payments that family structure is recognised as wife, and defacto, and treated as our multiple partner relationships are. However the difference is that Muslim women are expected to be friendly to one another, and coexist.

Polygamy can be argued for (by Muslims) on the grounds of -

1. **Prevalence of women due to wars over the centuries**

2. **It provides for sensual men**

3. **A wife may be diseased, or childless**

4. **It prevents prostitution.**

A Muslim may have up to 4 wives, according to the *Koran*, as long as he can provide equally for them. If wife 1 wishes to be a sole wife, she must make that condition in her marriage contract prior to marriage. This contract is a legal and religious one, not a sacrament. Love may come later but it is better to have a contract based on common spiritual values. Courting Muslims are never alone before marriage. Marriages are mostly arranged as a contract between families. No man may chose chastity. Spinsters are unknown, as arranged marriages and polygamy solves that.

There is a duty to marry, and Muslims have a problem, therefore, with the prophet Jesus who never took a wife. Muslim women may marry very young, 13 or 14 years, or as soon as they reach puberty. In India, for example, in Hyderabad, at the marriage market, girls may be married before puberty to older Muslim men, often Middle Eastern Arabs, and the bride will be required to wait at home until puberty. The poverty of the country is a big factor where dowries, are expected. Girl babies from poor families in, say India, are a liability and other than being sold, have little other value. Dowries, amongst Hindus or Muslims, in India are illegal but still very prevalent. It is said that dowries denote -

***a*. Serious intent about marriage**

***b*. Ensure the ability to provide**

***c*. Provide an obstacle to divorce**

A Muslim woman may marry only a Muslim. A Muslim man may marry Christian or Jewish women, however, many women convert to marry Muslim men in Australia, at least.

All property becomes the man's at divorce. A Muslim man may say "*I divorce you*" 3 times, on 3 separate occasions, within a 3 month period. An Imam from the mosque will try to reconcile the couple, but within fully Muslim States, a man may dispose of a wife with little effort.

5. WOMEN'S SUBSERVIENCE

Inheritance for women is half of that of men, but men are instructed to provide properly for women. Women therefore may keep their inheritance for themselves while men have to look after female family members. Women are said to be better off. There is only education for women if men are catered for first - after all they will be cared for by male family members so education is not necessary for women. Men are regarded as the protectors of women, and women feel secure within this male authority. There are no complementary roles in marriage, for men are regarded as superior to women.

Muslim women are happy to chose who will see their beauty and are content to wear the long flowing robes and the hijab, or the burqua, outside their homes. They tell us the breezes catch in their flowing gowns and even in Middle Eastern countries they are not hot. The black (Persian) chador clutched continually with the left hand to cover the body must make outings a great inconvenience in Iran. The *Koran* does not specifically state that women should wear veils and masks but the divine (to them) message of modesty is for men and women, and are pivotal values. ***"No Muslim may dress in a way that will attract the sexual attention of the opposite sex".*** This teaching is taken as literal and applied in extreme to women in countries like Iran where the lady police will pick up offenders and invoke a law of shame. A woman, not so clothed, in say Australia, may feel unprotected against molestation and rape, and this is one reason why Muslim women are encouraged to dress "*appropriately*", where they are "*free from the prying eyes of men*". Iranian women have "*elected to be more covered*" in black, outdoors, since the Shah's overthrow. They project a strict "*economy of flesh*" otherwise they can expect to be raped. "*If a man sees a woman so exposed he is going to feel some sort of sexuality towards her. You would not so expose a precious jewel nor would you buy a banana without peel*" says a sheikh from the Lakemba Mosque. In like manner, a Muslim man always wears long trousers, never shorts, but apart from that, does not have the restrictions, that are impinged on women, who take the responsibility for sexual misconduct, or not.

In Kerala, in India, women are required to sit at the back of the bus, because the drivers, tempted, were not attending safely to their task. It seems that **still** in many cultures, women must take responsibility for the behaviour of men. India is predominantly Hindu, but neither Hindus nor Muslims reject polygamy.

6. RELIGIOUS RITES

It is unclean for a Muslim man to touch a woman and he must wash often. That is difficult, in countries like Australia, for Muslim men teachers in crowded coeducation school corridors, or on busy streets, or in shops. A Muslim man praying 5 times a day must wash his body parts 3 times. Muslims believe circumcision is essential.

The fast of Ramadan (40 days early in the year) has far reaching effects on schools and workplaces in our community, for eating and drinking (not even water) are forbidden, except after sunset and before sunrise. It makes for tired children and workers and this must be accommodated for religious freedom. The ritual of daily prayers must similarly be accommodated - the washing, kneeling and prostrating 5 times a day.

The Muslims moral perspective may be attractive to some of us and many of their beliefs are close to the Christian faith, for they believe in one God. However, paradise is not to be equated with the Kingdom of God, and the fact that Jesus is no more a prophet than Moses, and is not the Son of God, would be a principal point of departure. They say that they believe in coexistence with Jews and Christians for they share a common ancestor in Adam and Abraham, and they recognise Moses and Jesus as prophets. The more numerous and powerful that Muslims have become, the more intolerant of other faiths they are, and it seems that they wish to be world leaders, and annihilate those who share their ancestry. It is a *Koran* imperative that those who do not convert should be killed.

Muslims believe that their prophet Muhammad is now dead, he is not sleeping, or waiting with God to return. Whoever worships Muhammad is dead, God is the only God to worship, and He is alive. They believe that Muhammad had the final revelation from God to man, the *Koran*, in the 7th century. The *Koran* does not portray Hagar as a bondwoman. Abraham and Hagar's first born son Ishmael was a near sacrifice offered by Abraham, but God intervened and Abraham offered a ram instead. This incident is commemorated in the Mecca pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, once a year, by thousands of Muslims. The promises to Abraham come down through Ishmael and so the Muslims are the promised people, with God's hands outstretched to them, and not the Jews. The Jews, says a note in the *Koran*, will appear, in paradise, disabled, with their right hand stuck to their neck, *THE KORAN* addendum, of *(CXIV.) SURA V. - THE TABLE MEDINA*. - 65, " '*The hand of God', says the Jews, 'is chained up*'. *Their own hands shall be chained up - and for that which they have said shall they be accursed. Nay! Outstretched are both His hands!*"

7. A POWERFUL FORCE

We remain faithful to God's *Holy Writ*, but the *Koran* is a powerful force in the world today, and believers claim it is God's "*Most Holy Writ*", for it has all the prophets of the *Bible,* plus more, and includes later messages from God. *Revelation 9:1-12* tells of the rise of Islam through the incursion of the Saracens and then the four successive waves of Turkish migration from the east. That influence has never left us, but the dominance of Islam, in the latter part of the 20th century, especially since the demise of Communism in so many states, north of Israel, is a remarkable occurrence in our time from the 1970's to the 1990's. They were a sixth of the

world's population in the 1980's, now they number more than a quarter of 6,000,000,000, in the 1990's.

The sacred sites of Mecca and Medina are in Saudi Arabia. Previously Jordan supplied the cash for the upkeep of the other sacred site in Jerusalem, (the Dome of the Rock). Now the king of Saudi Arabia has offered much more money for the upkeep of the Jerusalem site (which Muslims believe is wholly their property). Certainly Israel has spoils that the Arabs feel belong to them.

To be more acquainted with the Muslim faith, it is necessary to read the *Koran*, and discuss any difficulties with those who maintain that faith. Some traditions are not spelled out in the *Koran* text.

Consider:

* How long will the Hajji, making their pilgrimages, endure the humility of being beholden to the Israelis for their passage through to the Dome of the Rock sacred site?

* How long will the Jews refrain from taking that site to build the next temple?

* Whose rock is it?

* Is it the place of the near sacrifice of Isaac, or Ishmael?

It all depends on your point of view. There are many Muslim nations now, not just Arabs.

* What part will Muslims play in God's plan?

* How many of us, like Sarah, would make an unwise decision and unknowingly commit an act that has such far reaching consequences for so many?

None of us would condemn her, for our unwitting acts are not infrequent.

* Is it time then to seriously float the idea that the Muslims will in the end prove to be a much greater threat to the Jews, than we have hitherto contemplated?

* Was it all in God's plan from the beginning, once Sarah offered Hagar, and we have only noticed the rise of these world powers, because they have directly affected us?

* Has God all along, in world history used the sibling rivalry of Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau, to bring about His purpose and will?

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The struggle between these half brothers, Ishmael and Isaac, that is, the Muslims and the Jews, is not unlike the struggle of the twins Esau and Jacob, more of which is discussed later in the text.

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CONCLUSION:

The whole saga was God known, for it was in His foreknowledge. God's plan spans the centuries to us this day - for this mighty story began with Sarah's and Abraham's impatience over their God promised heir

- And Sarah offered Hagar!

The considerable number of sources used in this chapter is listed appropriately under *“Sources”* at the end of *“Kith and Kin”*, Book One.

Section 2 - Abraham - Friend of God

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CHAPTER 1 - CONTRITION, PROMISES AND NAME CHANGES

CHAPTER 2 - TROUBLESOME SODOM AND ABRAHAM'S NEPHEW, LOT

CHAPTER 3 - ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH

CHAPTER 4 - THE GREAT TRIAL OF ABRAHAM

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CHAPTER 1

CONTRITION, PROMISES AND NAME CHANGES

"***I am the almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee", Genesis 17:1,2.***

FOCUS:

There are some reassuring incidents in the story now, for Abraham and Sarah and Lot. They know that God has visited them***, Genesis 17:1*** **to** ***18:15.***

1. SIGNIFICANT NAME CHANGES

When Abram was 99 years old God appeared to him, again in Hebron, and asked him to be blameless*, Genesis 17:1*, reminding him that to be a recipient of the promises, and to have the covenanted benefits, and to be His representative on earth, he must be a faithful and obedient servant. There must have been some response from Abram, but it is not recorded, except that "*Abram fell on his face"*, which can be interpreted as contrition, for God renewed his covenant with him, about a multitude of family, and changed his name to Abraham, from "*exalted father*" to "*father of many*", *Genesis 17:1-8*.

In the ancient Near East, a person's name was inextricably intertwined with the essence and personality. In the *Bible*, name giving has great importance, and a change of name is an event of major significance, symbolising a new character and destiny. Often they were not changed names, but additional names, for example, Jacob/Israel and Saul/Paul, but here Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah, *verses 5* and *15*. The name changes are prophetical and reassuring to both of them, and Sarah is included specifically in the far reaching promises. Women were not included in the covenant rituals, but by their consanguinity to men, women were regarded as being sponsored for by men, and so they were able to benefit from the advantages.

2. OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT RELATIONSHIPS TO GOD - CIRCUMCISION AND BAPTISM

Acts 15:1 refers to "*circumcision*" as the custom taught by Moses, an illusion to *Genesis 17,* where Moses records the command of God to Abraham about circumcision, about 1900 years before the Lord Jesus Christ, and having been recorded by Moses about 1450 BC. Moses knew of it well, for God was about to kill his son, when his wife, Zipporah, quickly took a flint knife and circumcised the boy, calling Moses, "*a bridegroom of blood*", *Exodus 4:24*-26. Later it is included in the law, as a requirement for those aliens who wished to celebrate the

Passover, *Exodus 12:48*. At Gilgal, after the 40 years wanderings, God commanded Joshua to circumcise all those who had neglected the custom, that is, all those that were born in the desert, *Joshua 5:1-8*.

Circumcision was practised amongst the Egyptians, perhaps as early as 2400 BC, and among other nations, as a tribal rite of puberty, where Abraham must have known about it. If this is so, God adapts and transforms an existing custom by giving it a radically new religious meaning, and commanding it of Abraham. For God's people at the time of Abraham, and the present Jews, circumcision is a divinely ordained sign of the covenant, performed on a boy child on the eighth day after birth, a physical act of identification and dedication as a member of the covenanted community. Ishmaelites and Arabians, that is to say Muslims, (and even present day tribes, like the Maasai), circumcise in the 13th year, because Ishmael was 13 years old, when Abraham circumcised him. Sarah did have a specific blessing from God, the same blessings as her husband, that is, as the "*mother of nations*", and so through her, many women were blessed, and not excluded, even though they could not make the physical outward sign. Indeed one, Mary, was so blessed that God worked a wondrous blessing for her, in that, virginal, she conceived the Son of God. Female circumcision, still practised in many countries, is a perversion of this rite.

Here, in *Genesis 17:9-14,* God commands Abraham to circumcise himself, and all male children from this day forward. Later as God's covenants were broken, God made a new covenant through the Lord Jesus Christ, and this old one was abandoned. Sarah would have taken the circumcision of the male, and the promises that accompanied this outward sign, to herself. This is how God intended it to be, but because of the hardness of men's hearts, women were restricted by men, often excluded, in so many ways in the following centuries, and God heard their cry. When the Son of God was crucified, was resurrected, and then rose to heaven, women flocked as well as men to make the new outward sign of relationship to the death and burial and resurrection of that Son. From that day forward, women could make a relationship with God through the outward sign of the physical act of baptism, also an act of identity and dedication.

3. GOD SPEAKS ABOUT SARAH AND ISHMAEL AND ISAAC

God speaks some more to Abraham, saying that Sarah, under her name change, is promised a son, and from that blessing a very large family will ensue. Abraham finds this ludicrous because he is now 100 years old and Sarah is 90. It is understandable that his (and her) faith slips again, for they knew about biological clocks. Maybe we can call it temporary disbelief.

It is now abundantly clear, that it is imperative, for God's purpose, that Sarah and Abraham must be the parents of this promised child. The Terah stock is to have the clear lineage in these earlier generations.

Abraham's concern for Ishmael is made the subject of a plea to God, "*If only Ishmael might live under your blessing*", Abraham might have felt that his son, Ishmael, might die, because of the renewed promise about a son for Sarah.

So God continues, reinforcing His promise to Hagar, about Ishmael, making sure that Abraham knows about it. But He returns to emphasis and reassure him that the soon to be born son, Isaac, (within a year), is the heir of the Godly promises, *verses 15-22*. Abraham fulfils his promise to God, and circumcises himself, and all the males, including, of course, the 13 year old Ishmael, *verse 23-27*.

4. ABRAHAM HAS THREE VISITORS

In *Genesis 18:1-15*, the message of a promised son, is dramatically delivered, once more, to Abraham and Sarah by three men, (angels), who come to their tent, near the great Mamre tree, at Hebron. Jewish commentators say that an angel can bring no more than one commission, and explain the number by saying -

1. That one came to heal Abraham

2. And one to give Sarah the message

3. And one to destroy Sodom.

Abraham washed their feet and the three men ate a meal hastily prepared by Abraham, before the visitors pronounced their message from God. There is discussion about whether spiritual beings can eat a meal. But our Lord ate a meal after his resurrection. However the consumption of it precludes the idea that it was all a vision. When the message is delivered, Sarah laughs at the suggestion of a son, **now,** and wishes, no doubt, that she had not, when "*Is the thing too hard for the Lord?*" is the reprimand.

It is a true encouragement for Rebekah, and Rachel, and Manoah's wife (Samson's mother), Hannah, and the Shunemite woman (Elisha's friend), and Elizabeth, and any others who need the help of the Lord. Nothing is impossible for the Lord. But following Sarah's rebuke immediately comes encouragement, as the angel says, "*at the time appointed, I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son".* Sarah was afraid and denied that she laughed, but the men of God knew that she **had** laughed.

Consider:

* Was Isaac's name, and the using it, a constant reminder to his parents of their faithlessness?

* Or were they able to think of it as, not incredulity, but joy?

* How can we turn our temporary disbeliefs into positive reinforcements?

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5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEATH (TO PRODUCE LIFE) – AND RESURRECTION

Now we realise that not only had Sarah been sterile, but she was in her menopausal years, and Abraham, after his virile years, considered himself impotent, *Romans 4:19*. He laughed also, that he would have a child*, Genesis 17:17*. Maybe God had waited for this stage in their lives to remind them of His ability to perform miracles, and to impress upon them the enormous significance of the child.

In other words they were both dead to reproduction, but God can make a live thing from a dead thing. It is in a sense a resurrection again. And Abraham and Sarah recognised that once more.

From now on faith compounds and hardens, and their delight in the welcome signs of Sarah's conception, when it happened, must have been cause for great thankfulness, recognising the failing faith sin in themselves, and a seeking and receiving of understanding and forgiveness from God. God has the "*last laugh*", because He commands them to call their son "*Isaac*", which means "*he laughs*".

CONCLUSION:

Now there is a special sign that men can use to signify their relationship with God, and there is a powerful lesson in the power of God over death and life. That sign is the forerunner to the sign of baptism, which sign both men and women can make to signify their relationship with God.

CHAPTER 2

TROUBLESOME SODOM AND ABRAHAM'S NEPHEW, LOT

"***And the men rose up from thence, and looked towards Sodom***", ***Genesis 18:16.***

FOCUS:

Now in ***Genesis 18:16*** **to** ***19:38,*** comes a diversion from the family saga, and we are reintroduced to Lot and his city, Sodom.

Abraham has, until now, been concerned with his personal and family concerns, but now he is forced to broaden his perspective, and he becomes involved in the problems of a city of wickedness, with pagan influences and sinful practices. He is learning and feeling his way forward in faith and humility, to learn more about God's rule and mercy and judgement. Abraham has learned about God in the small picture, but not about Him in the big picture. Abraham is at first concerned about Lot's status and his comfort in the city of Sodom, and his possessions, the small picture really, but he soon begins to see the big picture.

1. ABRAHAM BARGAINS WITH GOD

The second half of this *Genesis 18*, tells the awful story of Abraham bargaining with God to save Lot's city, the wicked city of Sodom, from destruction. When Abraham's visitors rose up to leave, they walked together with Abraham, a little way and looked towards Sodom.

In *Genesis 18:17*, the angels ask one another a question. "*Will we tell Abraham what is about to happen to Sodom and Gomorrah?*" Then the angels, (God), proceed to tell him what He has planned.

As God had hoped, this arouses in Abraham another desire to witness to save people in peril. Here is another evidence that Abraham knew that missioning was part of his brief from God. He understands that it is not just God's blessings to enjoy, but with the blessings come responsibility to minister to others about God and His saving power. Noah felt that responsibility. Here it is spiritual deliverance for another ethnic group, who are surrounding Abraham's nephew and his family. "*All people will be blessed through you*" is in his mind. In this case God did not respond to Abraham's pleading, but He was pleased that he did so.

The *NIV Study Bible* describes Abraham as a "*chosen*", *verse 19*, "*friend of God*", *James 2:23,* and "*prophet*", *Genesis 20:7*, the first man to bear this title, *Psalm 105:15,* and because of this relationship, God convened a heavenly council at the door of his tent. He had already announced to him His purpose for Abraham, *Genesis 18:10.* Now He tells Abraham His purpose for the wicked in the plain, *verses 20-21*, for redemption and judgement, and gives Abraham opportunity to speak in His court and intercede for the righteous.

Consider:

* Why did Abraham try this persuasion on God?

* Was it because of his newfound status with God?

* Was God giving Abraham the opportunity to understand God's mind and nature through prayer?

* Was Abraham answering God's call to mission to all peoples about Him, like Noah did, a generalised commission to mission?

* Or was Abraham's prayer for Lot rather than for Sodom?

* What of his concern for Lot and his family, whom he had not seen for some time?

* Did he know that Lot was living on a knife edge?

* Was the plea really for the **repentance and salvation** of **Lot**?

****

This indicated that Abraham believed that God could have His mind, or course changed, or conversely that He adapts to man's particular needs, when man acts with free will. It means that God "*accommodates*" Himself to man. It also indicated that Abraham would try using convincing arguments of justice and mercy, which he knew, now, personally, were part of God's character anyway, towards men who were redeemed sinners, made righteous. This interchange with God indicated Abraham's and God's mutual accessibility, and an amazing "*friendship*" with God, *Isaiah 41:8*.

Abraham's accessibility to God has been built on the maturing respect between the two, as Abraham developed his friendship with God. This providential interaction is too difficult to define, and to try to discuss the mechanics of it is distracting. Suffice it to say it does happen and we would be unwise if we neglected to tap into the phenomena. God's provision for us, is aligned alongside His foresight of our needs, so we always are provided with what is best for us. That provision includes God's personal involvement with us, and with that proximity there is a contrast with some of His other traits of omnipotence, and majesty, which imply a more distant and different, but, as well, essential relationship.

God spoke to Abraham directly, through angels, in visions, in dreams, and through other ethnic peoples like Melchizedek and Abimelech. He did miracles, increasing Abraham's virility and his wife's fertility, and consequently Abraham believed that God was near to him, and with his every decision. When he did wrong, we know that he was quick to renew his relationship with God again, for providential care was important to him. Abraham made a lifestyle choice, when he left Ur, and was bound to God for guidance as to where his future path lay. Again when he was puzzled about the sacrifice of his only son, he said "*God will provide*". There is a mighty lesson for believers, when we view Abraham's faith in God, and the benefits that accrued from the deposits that Abraham had made with God. When God spoke to him outside his tent, in *Genesis 15*, God knew of the mounting faith that Abraham had, and counted it for righteousness. Abraham could not count the stars, but God promised that his seed would be as prolific.

Abraham's ever increasing faith became the pivot for God to require even more from him, and so His providential care also increased.

Here is a lesson in the benefits if we submit to God's requirements of us.

David Levin, expands the foregoing idea in *The Christadelphian Tidings Magazine* for *October, 1998*, and he talks of three fazes,

1. Abraham's faith,

2. God's revelation, and

3. His providential care

entwining together like a threefold cord which cannot be breached. The great lesson we learn about Providence in the life of Abraham teaches us to look at God not only as the One who gives the great promises, but also as the One who abides with us in all aspects of our lives until those promises become fulfilled, at the coming of His son. "*God is with us*", or "*His spirit guides us*", is an essential belief for those who live Godly lives.

This instance of Abraham bargaining with God is remarkable. Would that we can also claim that we are "*the friend of God*", as Abraham obviously is. He does argue directly about destroying the righteous and the wicked together. It is the same argument used today about evil coming upon "*innocent children*". Some people forget the argument of consequences, which often overrides the argument of justice. We cannot escape consequences, even after forgiveness, for example, David.

2. ABRAHAM GIVES UP ON SODOM

But here Abraham's argument crumbles, as God stops bargaining at ten righteous men in Sodom. Perhaps Abraham had been counting all his relatives in Sodom, and now gives up on his plea. Abraham returns to his tents, and God says that He will come down and see the sin of Sodom, - that is, a figure of speech, implying His righteous judgment, and that He does not act on the complaints of others.

Consider:

* Abraham is appalled that the righteous will die with the wicked. Is that the age old argument of innocent victims?

* Moses tells us that Sodom is to be destroyed, whatever, so why does Abraham so argue?

* Does God need telling there are ways to save the righteous for being destroyed with the wicked?

* Does Abraham think that God should be a fairer judge?

* Is God forcing Abraham to ponder the consequences of the definite destruction of Sodom on his concrete family circumstances, that is, the possible destruction of part of the blessed family?

* Is this the reason for Abraham's anxiety?

* Or does God allow the discussion so that Abraham may be tested, to see his leadership skills, and his role as a teacher of righteousness and justice to his children, and as well, to the nations round about, in his mission role?

****

Abraham does not mention Lot in the whole discussion that he has with God, but God knows Abraham's gracious motive for the discussion, and his recognition of his need to preach salvation. The whole story is reminiscent of the flood stories, where Noah, too, recognised his responsibility for preaching salvation, where wickedness is targeted, and only one family was saved. Noah's family was more united in purpose and the outcome for him was a more happy one, than it was for Lot. The wickedness here is sexual debauchery, human hubris and violation of the law of hospitality.

3. WORSHIP - AS A GIFT FOR GOD

Scripture abundantly tells us that God is pleased with righteous worship. If people really lived out well behaviour and righteous worship, and brought it to Him as a personal gift, then that would be a witness to His name, and more would be moved to worship Him and show His glory to others so that they in turn might receive blessings from Him.

Certainly resounding declarations of the gospel are important, and to dismiss other false gods is imperative, but there is more to evangelism than that. There is praise that comes to God because of His holiness, because of His creation, and His beauty and order, and His worthiness and strength. If people come near to Him - not empty handed, according to His expectations, then that is glorifying God as well, and His grace will then envelop us.

With Abraham it was his first act of public worship, in *Genesis 14:18-20*, a restarting again of what Noah had done when he nobly but vainly preached salvation from sin. Abram was a blessing to God and to the nations when he helped the King of Sodom to regain his goods, including his nephew Lot. He was called blessed by Melchizedek, *Genesis 12:7-8.* Abram did not keep anything but gave a tithe of all his goods to this priest of God, a study in meaningful worship, and with that beginning of righteous worship, he continues in our present story. His missioning is no silent witness.

4. LOT ENTERTAINS TWO ANGELS

Now in *Genesis 19,* **we** have a chance to glimpse life in the city of Sodom. Lot meets two angels at the gate of the city of Sodom, where he was accustomed to sit, being an important city official. The *Companion Bible* on this section lists six downward steps that Lot takes, as he left Abraham -

"***Strife"***

"***Beheld"***

"***Chose"***

"***Pitched toward"***

"***Dwelt in"***

And this sitting - ***"At the gate"***

is the final step down into strife once more.

It was an important open space, as in all cities, given over to legal judicial and administrative services. *Genesis 13:13* amply describes the place, at the time of Lot's choice.

Some regard Lot's gate position, as a place of warning to those who entered in, like, "*turn away, this is no city for you*", but there is no evidence for this. It needs to be remembered that he was alone in the city, with no resources to overcome the iniquity spreading amongst his family. We wonder then again, why he stayed, under such circumstances.

There were three angels present with Abraham, now there are only two. Perhaps the third angel stayed with Abraham, continuing the discussion and reassuring Abraham, *Genesis:18:20*.

Lot insists that the two visitors come to his home, which we realise, from subsequent events, is not a tent, but a substantial dwelling. Lot's hospitality measures up to that of his uncle, and we see that he goes to great pains to protect his visitors. In the end though, it is not Lot that saves his visitors, but the visitors who save Lot. He knows the wickedness of the city, and the danger of the men sleeping in the town square. At home Lot prepares a hasty meal for them, and as he sits with his visitors the men of the town come to demand homosexual experiences with the men. Lot protects the men as best he can, even offering his two unmarried

daughters for the men's gratification, but this does not appease the men.

When Lot failed to ameliorate the men, the "*visitors*", acted like the angels they were, and pulled Lot back in the house. They shut the door, and struck the men outside with blindness, (a dazzling light), so they could not see the door, and so they dispersed.

5. RIGHTEOUS LOT

The "*just Lot*" comment, proclaiming Lot *"righteous*", by Peter, *2 Peter 2:7, 8,* is a difficulty, even allowing for the fact that women were not highly valued. Lot was under an obligation to care for his visitors, but not at the expense of his daughters.

Perhaps Lot was only "*righteous*" relatively. He certainly was not righteous in the protection of daughters example he left us. From the teachings of Abraham, about *Genesis 2:24*, he would know of the true desire of fathers for their virgin daughters, to keep them chaste for their complementary partner in a Godly union. Jacob later learned a valuable lesson in keeping a daughter chaste.

Consider:

* Is it viable to apply the term "*righteous*" to the time of his sojourn with Abraham, when he was influenced by the example of his uncle, for since then, his recorded experiences seems negative?

* Or in understanding the description "*righteous Lot*", in *2 Peter 2:7,* are we meant to see God's over riding of the unwise self determination situations, with negative outcomes?

* Is the matter of offering his daughters a substitution of a greater sin, (the rape of his visitors), for a smaller sin on Lot's behalf?

If so, there would be an excuse for men practising every form of wickedness, for sins would be viewed as only relative, surely an unhealthy standpoint.

* This intent (for his daughters) on Lot's part is a matter of sad debate, and asks us to question, how much influence does cultural relativity have on such a suggestion?

* Or does Lot know that the men will refuse his daughters?

This though is hardly an excuse for the making of the offer.

* How would we react if we were part of such a frightening siege? Any better than Lot?

* Do we consider, and plan, for trials and temptations, like we do plan for fire evacuations in our homes?

* Why are disaster plans and crisis management plans more uppermost in our minds, than plans to resist temptation?

* Was Lot's house really a house of God?

* We would not take this incident as an example of how to solve problems, yet the record does not condemn it. Why?

* Was Lot only *"daily vexed"* to such an extent that he was willing to put up with life in Sodom?

* How do we regard **our** life in our city of wickedness?

* If God sent a message to us to leave our place of wickedness would we linger on?

****

Lot is no example to believers in these situations, however the incidents *are* "*not remembered*" by God, that is, "*accounted by Him*", for he is noted in the *New Testament* as "*perfect*". We have the example of Asa, wholly forgiven by God, for he was *"perfect with God all his days*", though in the end he turned from the advice of God and died, "*diseased in his feet*", *2 Chronicles 15:17,* and *16:12*. This may mean diabetes, gout, gangrene, or even a euphemism, - an oblique reference - to a sexually transmitted disease. Whatever, there is an implied rebuke that he took the matter to the physicians rather than God, and therefore was not "*perfect*". Sadly the fact is that *"all* (except the Lord Jesus Christ) *have sinned and come short of the glory of God*". but they may be forgiven and counted righteous. That does not mean that we have to equivocate for them, or white wash the imperfections, which the *Scripture* is careful to record.

So the New Testament statement "*righteous Lot*" is an eloquent and powerful reference, and one like the elegant description of Rebekah, in *Romans 9:10-13,* where **her** self determination and negative outcomes are not remembered. "*Not by works of righteousness"* which Lot did, "*but according to His mercy He saved"* Lot, *Titus 3:5*, and blessed him.

Lot knew that the city was not a safe place to be out in the open in the evening, yet he was not "*vexed*" enough to move back to Abraham's circle of influence, and had been apart from Abraham for a long time. He traded his religious privileges for the worldly advantages of Sodom, and degradation surely followed. He was only able to save part of his family.

And Lot intending to do rightly, only manages to do so timidly and imperfectly. He only belatedly recognised that he was entertaining angels.

In the end Lot was compelled to move from Sodom, under the compulsion of God, and then became an object of lust, which brought his <u>twice</u> saved daughters into disrepute.

6. THE ANGELS OFFER A REPRIEVE TO LOT

The angels offered safety, after delivering God's judgement, and Lot gathered as many of his family as he could. But not his sons in law, (perhaps only engaged to his daughters), who

thought he was joking. It is no wonder that in the light of Lot's compromising, that his "*sons*" thought he was *"mocking*", *verse 14*.

In the morning, the angels urged Lot to take his wife and those two precious daughters, leaving the rest of his family, and flee, for God would destroy this city. In fact, in the end, "*for the mercy of the Lord*"*,* the angels took their hands, (for they "*lingered*" *Genesis 19:16*) and led them to safety. They were in the presence of God, and they "*lingered*" against His command. Astonishing that they would behave so.

In the end the saved people of Sodom were four, not ten.

God kept His word and rained down fire and brimstone on the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The natural ingredients of destruction were present in this region with bitumen, petroleum, sulphur and salt. While geology gives no evidence of volcanic activity, it does show an immense system of rift valleys, running north and south. So an earthquake that shaped this valley could have been responsible. The lightening would have ignited the gases, and there may have been raining down molten sulphur and salt, producing the smoke which Abraham saw, *Genesis 19:28*. However it was done, it was not a random disaster, but a judgement of God on a specific target, at a prescribed time, and with that moral perspective for those at that time, we can take the moral lesson for us in this time. We are now concerned about the increasing number of earthquakes and climatic changes that happen today on this globe, some of which will eventually destroy much of God's beautiful creation. We have thought that we could take out, and put in, to the earth and air, whatever we wanted, and wonder why our earth, as we knew it, is collapsing. We are learning to care for it better, than we have until now, almost too late. That will not stop God's judgement, if He wants to use such methods, but it will show Him that we do care about His blessings.

Lot and his family were told not to look at the destruction, but Lot's wife could not resist, (she lingered too long) and was turned into a pillar of salt, for her disobedience. She is proverbial, not for her beauty or character, or deeds, but for her disobedience. The ruins of this catastrophe have been discovered, and the many natural pillars of salt formations that we see there today are regarded as shapes like Lot's wife, and called by that name. Lot went on to live in the caves of Zoar, with his two daughters. So God answered Abraham's prayer. However Lot lost all of his wealth , his married family, and his wife, for they were all consumed by the iniquity of their reluctance to abandon the high life of Sodom.

The reasons for Lot's rescue may be more Abraham's pleading than a reward for his hospitality to the angels. **He may have been rescued no matter what he did -**

For his ineptitude, and

His lingering, and

His failure to follow the instructions God gave him, and

The fate of his wife

all worked against his rescue.

Abraham arose early the next morning for he had some distance to walk before he could see what happened to Sodom, and his brother's child. We are not told whether he knew of Lot's salvation, but that did not affect Abraham's faith in God. Perhaps he never found out. He did ask

God to save some inhabitants of Sodom, in fact, he opportuned for a time, as we know, and then left it up to God.

The salvation of Lot and his two daughters can be directly traced to Abraham, but perhaps Lot never knew about that. We do not hear of any more contact between Abraham and his nephew Lot, though we know that their descendants regarded one another with animosity.

7. THE CURSE AND BLESSING ON LOT'S DAUGHTERS

Lot's two daughters, spurred by their cultural insignificance of having no children, and perhaps thinking that they were alone in the face of the destruction, encouraged their father Lot to become drunk and then lay with him sexually, and produced heirs for their future security, the future Moabites and Ammonites. These two tribes, together with the Edomites, where Ishmael went, became bitter opponents of Abraham's family, in later years. Still, they had inherited a land that was not part of the family inheritance, so that Lot was rewarded with a just inheritance for his "*righteousness*", though it is a sadness that he would not have known of God's blessing. It was the wickedness of these peoples that later destroyed them, there was no punishment there of father's sins on children, it was their own sins. In later times the great line of the Messiah was enhanced with the Moabitess, Ruth, another blessing, unknown of Lot.

Some comment that the daughters drugged the wine, giving this as an excuse for Lot's behaviour, but there is no indication of that. Lot's passivity to the daughter's situation, or his inability to solve it, makes him culturally responsible for his actions and their actions, like Judah, over Tamar's childlessness, later in our story. They made him drunk, but he did have a choice to be more responsible. He also must bear the responsibility for the incest, though family intermarriage was a known fact, and preferred, in the Ur descendants of Terah, to the righteous in Salem, of Melchizedek.

The renowned Australian poet of this century, *A. D. Hope* has penned, in 1950, a long poem about this incident, "*Lot and His Daughters*" not absolving Lot from guilt, but in his drunken state, exulting God, remembering the Abrahamic covenant, and his wish to be part of that as well. Lot remembers that God was with Abraham, and that He will be with him as well, to "*breed his ewes in the wilderness",* for did not the angels take his hand? His tribe shall be numbered with the sand, and with the stars as well, and "*my seed* ***shall*** *thrive*", he says, as his daughters stand smiling back, inscrutable, patent and content, for they have the solution.

Consider:

Cultural relativity is in place, and again these "*men*" behave within the framework.

So, rightly regarding this incest as a sinful act

* How much is this sin accounted to them?

* Even in their belief that they alone were "*left on earth*", *verse 31*, is their act justified?

* Did these daughters "*twice saved*", know that God would have blessed them if they had asked?

* Is it a matter of Lot's education of them, that these girls, in the face of their two times salvation, saw no other way out of this new dilemma?

* Was the influence of Sodom too much upon them?

* How can the recipients of so much grace, as these girls were, misunderstand God's gifts?

* Was the saving of Lot and his daughters, a token of Abraham's faith, and not Lot's faith?

* Was the faith of the saved daughters stronger than Lot's faith, and stronger than Lot himself, who had decided to live out his days dwelling in a secluded mountain cave, apart from and frightened by those, who thought he carried a curse?

* Did the girls realise that any potential husbands around them were as bad as their husbands had been, so they would have none of them to father their children?

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8. THE SAD END OF LOT

Lot's feeble faith is then crowned with dreadful wickedness and he is heard of no more in the Divine narrative. He is saved from Sodom, but is now an outcast, widowed, homeless, hopeless, with nothing to call his own, and no doubt despised by his daughters.

Lot received not the promise, though he had taken it on, in travelling with Abraham, and "*wandered the earth in caves, but had received a good report from God*", *Hebrews 11:37-39*. He did not receive **the** promise, we might argue, but God also wanders "*the whole earth*", His eyes searching for those who's "*heart is perfect towards Him*", *2 Chronicles 16:9,* and found Lot, and recorded the "*perfect*" judgement for us.

Comment:

Lot's choice of the plain, led him to temptation and danger, yet he was saved in comparative safety from destruction.

His feeble faith seems to be linked with the fact that he would rather live in a city, than trust God to care for him in the family nomadic lifestyle.

He lingered, as the destruction came, yet still God was merciful to him.

He doubted that God would decide on a safe place for him and was afraid, yet God persevered.

****

Sodom and Gomorrah were plague spots and had to be obliterated because of the danger of infection. The story of Lot gives us opportunity to speak to our young people about homosexuality, as does the later story of Ishmael and little Isaac, if we take the newly advanced theory. We need to take these opportunities, whenever we can. There are plenty of denunciations of the practice, but sometimes real *Biblical* life incidents help as well.

Lot could never have guessed how the English word "*Sodom*", coined in 1055 AD, would come to mean "*wickedness of the grossest kind*", and to us the word for the sin, is easily recognised. Metonymy.

However, we need not feel so self righteous for how **we** live. The culture of Sodom recorded in *Ezekiel 16;49,* and *Luke 17:28*, is not that of sodomy, (though we note that sodomy **was** present in Sodom and that it affected even the angels of God), but the sins that may in the end lead to that. Perhaps we can more easily condemn the "*sin of sodomy*" that does not affect us, and highlight it, and so more easily cover over the other sins of Sodom, that might

beset us. The sins were of pride, of a surfeit of food and drink, and of an abundance of idleness, and of ignoring the hardship of the poor and needy, where "*the hungry are advised*", by society's intransigent attitude to them, "*to eat the homeless*". We ourselves are not unfamiliar with that attitude. What an easy solution to the poor and needy problem.

9. THE END OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABRAHAM AND LOT

Frank Anthony Spina floats more arguments for the sparing of Lot in Sodom, in "*Lot*", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

It seems that Lot **is spared** from destruction and death, **because** of his close relationship to Abraham, and **because** of Abraham's pleading his nephew's case. However Lot is removed from the city and the city **is NOT saved**, **because** of the possible presence of a number of righteous men, (which had been Abraham's answer to the problem). **So God did not accept Abraham's advice.**

However God would have been pleased to see **the development of Abraham into a just and righteous man seeking compassion for others, so that he could become a teacher of justice and righteousness to his children.**

The ironic twist that followed, in the conclusion of Lot's recorded life, brings us again to consider the consequence for Abraham of bringing him to Canaan in the first place. No doubt this would have weighed heavily on Abraham for the rest of his life. If he had known the trouble that these tribes, the Moabites and the Ammonites, would cause the Israelites, his great grandchildren, when they were coming into Canaan, directed by God, fulfilling the Land Promise, that he treasured so greatly, he would have been even more sorrowful. They became persistent enemies and an eternal reminder of the fact that Abraham **invited** Lot to join him in his quest for the Promised Land. Still, Lot had free choice, he was not predestined by God to make the choice of the plain, and Sodom.

The covenant of circumcision, from God for Abraham, (symbolising his relationship with God) came after the separation from Lot, so that we do not know whether the descendants of Lot followed this ritual. Were it not for this journey from Haran, had they stayed with the others, the family of Lot would not have had such a deleterious effect on Israel, and would have been more passive relations like those that they left behind, and who proved a resource for Isaac's wife and the wives of Jacob. Still, "*if only s*" are indulgent thoughts, and not helpful, and can never be conclusive, so we need to avoid them.

The Ishmael (Ishmaelites in the Wilderness of Paran) tribes, and Keturah (Midianites) tribes and later the Esau (Edomites) tribes, rightly claiming Abraham as their father, together with the Lot (Moabites and Ammonites) tribes, were all rejected from the main God promised blessings, and suffered for their wickedness. They make up "*half*" of the formidable near opposition to the Israelis today, east side River Jordan, Jordan, Syria, and others, **and** they are descendants of Terah. However the future of all of these families, in the Canaanite experiences of Abraham, were all secured by other covenants given to them by God, so He **did** care for them and wished them to have an inheritance.

Genesis 10 describes the two sons of Eber, (from Shem), Peleg and Joktan.

The descendants of Peleg (meaning "*division*") are described in *chapter 11*, down to Terah, and went north and north west, created channels from the water courses, and founded cities, and

eventually divided off, from the main stem, in the two Lot tribes, the Ishmael, Keturah and Esau tribes.

The other "*half*" of the opposition, is this second blood line, Joktan, in *chapter 10*. It was the first separation from the main stem, the Joktanites, when the primogeniture passed to the Hebrews, through Eber. It is the claimed line of the now wealthy oil Arabs, who are currently heard saying, disdainfully, "*we are not from the same line as the other Arabs, **we** are Joktanites*", - fishermen on the Persian Gulf. Joktan went much further south than Peleg, into the Arabian Desert, expelling the Hamites, who were then pushed further south, towards their "*brothers*" in Egypt. The Joktans became pastoral people, not founding cities. They are further away from Palestine/Israel, along the Persian Gulf, in the south of Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and surrounds, and along the Red Sea.

Again it would be foolish to try and determine the tribes today, but it is interesting to note that, to this day, a division is claimed between the Peleg and Joktan Arabs, by the Joktanites.

CONCLUSION:

If we are convinced that Lot sinned then we need to define that sin, and make our own resolutions that we may face the same situations in a more determined manner. We also need to remember that through the whole episode, God remained with Lot and remembered him. He did not absolve Lot from the consequences of staying in Sodom, but gave him opportunity to escape the fireball, and led him to safety.

CHAPTER 3

ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH

"***And Abraham said of Sarah, his wife, she is my sister", Genesis 20:2*.**

FOCUS:

The account of the sojourn of Abraham in Gerar is remarkable for the demonstration of honour and responsibility, intrigue and reaction, and complaint and negotiation, ***Genesis 20* and *21*.** In this long account, however, we find that dysfunction rears its head once more and this family suffers again.

1. ABRAHAM MOVES AWAY TO GERAR

In *Genesis 20*, we return to the affairs of Abraham. Abraham moves his household from this place, Hebron, once more south to Gerar, near Kadesh, where Hagar had retreated, before Ishmael's birth. The King of Gerar admired Sarah. Abraham and Sarah denied that they were married, and told Abimelech that Sarah was Abraham's sister, *Genesis 20:2*, and so the king took her for his wife.

2. "SARAH, SAY YOU ARE MY SISTER" - AGAIN

From seeing the best in Abraham at Sodom, we see here his near worst as he pursues a deceitful course to save his own skin, and once more asks of his wife more than he should. We are motivated to ask ourselves about this say you are my sister plan, and why it was ever conceived, perhaps in Ur. It seems remarkable that it was never cancelled after the humiliation in Egypt. It seems that Abraham is not skilled in understanding potentially dangerous situations,

for this king was friendly and the kingdom peoples here understanding of his needs. It was not a place like Sodom, and deserved a better assessment.

Sarah knew that she could not belong to another man, as well as Abraham (women could not multiply husbands), so she must have been thoroughly confused when Abraham, **once more**, asked her to say she was his sister to show him her love for him - denying her wifely role. They expected that she would multiply a husband within this deceit. Multiplying husbands was never a custom. So, added to the lying sin, was the unacceptable husband multiplication, when God's ideal of "*one flesh*" was flouted. As well Sarah knew that concubinage was no stable occupation and that she could be sold on at will, thus multiplying her sin state. She must have been exceedingly fearful.

It first happened to Sarah in Egypt, *Genesis 12:10-20*. She was long suffering in negating her role, but, culturally, women were expected to obey their husband's wishes. Queen Vashti, in the Persian court, was banished for refusing her husband's orders to display herself to a drunken audience. She was banished for her disobedience, but also because that disobedience may have caused other women to rebel, *Esther 1*. The incident is a disgraceful devaluation of women in the Persian court.

Abimelech is the innocent party in all of this, and probably had a divinely sent illness, so that he could not approach Sarah, *Genesis 20:4*. God has a conversation with Abimelech explaining the situation, and shows His confidence in the king to remedy the situation.

In this second say you are my sister incident, the women of the house of Abimelech have their wombs shut up, so no woman conceives at this time. This is a Godly protection of the seed line of Abraham. If Sarah's womb was also shut up, that was a second precaution.

Abimelech had accepted God's pronouncement of death of his malady, if he persisted in pursuing an adulterous relationship with Sarah, *verse 3*, that is, death for adultery. He had expected God to slay the whole nation of Gerar, *verse 4* and *7*. So he pleads that his nation is a righteous nation. It may be that Abimelech had heard of the wickedness of Sodom, and knew of God's judgement there. He may have been a friend of God also, but more likely a tool in the drama, when Abraham is moved to place more trust in God. Abraham's faith needs growing points and this incident provides another of those landmarks. However that does not preclude the tool from also being shaped by the Potter, and Abimelech's respect seems to grow for the God of Abraham. The fact that Abimelech expected death for adultery, emphasises the depth of the sin that Abraham had committed, almost causing this king and Abraham's fearful wife to commit adultery. Abimelech had no wish to invite the inevitable slander. No wonder the king was offended

3. ABIMELECH GROWS IN GRACE AND FAVOUR

We then have to accept that **Abimelech pleaded his righteousness with God, when God exposed his unknowing sin over Sarah, and God accepted his integrity.**

When speaking to Abimelech, God calls Abraham "*a prophet*", not to aggravate Abimelech. In using the word, God intends far more than an advantage in the present situation. He means to encourage Abimelech for He sees great potential in him. God now tells Abimelech that Abraham will intercess for him - not only now, but for all time.

A prophet to intercess for him. Wow, Abimelech is amazingly blessed.

Comment:

 # This assumes that Abimelech will need a spokesman to declare to him the will of God, to teach him about the way of the Lord, to help him maintain his religion and holiness (as he has not a near relation to do so).

 # Abraham could speak for God, as prophets were the mediators, forerunners, and even representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ, in their role of forth telling for God, until he (the Lord Jesus Christ) came.

 # Abimelech may or may not have recognised that he needed a fuller instruction, that he ought to try for a higher level of holiness, and that Abraham could therefore become his prophet, in the true sense of the word.

 # Whatever, God recognised this in Abimelech.

If we can assume this, it is an amazing invitation to Abimelech from God.

(There are more ideas about the later establishment of the "*Schools of the Prophets"* in the commentary by *Ellicott.)*

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4. ABRAHAM IS QUESTIONED BY ABIMELECH

When Abimelech asked Abraham what he saw, he meant,

1. To ask what Abraham saw in Abimelech that encouraged him to think that the king would dishonour him (that is, in the question that Abimelech pointedly asked Abraham), and

2. To ask what caused Abraham to view him in such a poor light that he would think that the king would take men's wives and murder their husbands.

We may find this a remarkable suggestion, for we do know another divinely appointed, and God loved king, who did do just that. David knew these Pentateuch records, and surely must have assessed the noble Abimelech, yet he did that in the matter of Uriah, the Hittite, when he took his wife.

In any case, giving and taking wives is sinful, **a wife exchange is a thing of abomination to God,** and Abimelech was offended that Abraham would think such a thing of him.

Abraham tries to explain his way out of the difficulty when confronted by Abimelech, saying that she was his sister. Indeed she was a relation, though we do not have her genealogy. She must have been the daughter of Terah by another wife, or a favoured concubine, for any other could hardly have called her daughter a "*princess*". Such liaisons were not allowed, by law, in later constitutions, but were in heathen nations. Or, perhaps she was the daughter of Terah's Ur son, Haran. However Sarah's wifely role should have taken precedence. It could be said that Abraham's excuse was after all true. It was true then, also, in the Egyptian incident, but the Pharaoh was not impressed then, either. Sometimes there are other excuses, "*only a gentile*", Pharaoh and Abimelech, gentiles. When that excuse is made, "*that it is O.K. to defraud a gentile*", it is unworthy of those who believe that God loves all his creatures, and promotes the erroneous idea that good behaviour is only conditional.

Some think that Sarah was rejuvenated since the promise of conception, and therefore was attractive, others think that Abimelech would have desired Sarah only as a political alliance. Neither matters, for **Abimelech desired Sarah.**

The penalty/consequence for the king was undone, when Sarah was released, and Abraham pleaded with God for all the palace women to be healed. She brought back with her many gifts, sheep, oxen, menservants, and women servants and 1,000 shekels of silver to atone for his offence, that is, **Abimelech's offence.**

We may wonder whether this is the total value of the gifts, or as well as the gifts. What ever, Abimelech gave Abraham servants as well, and it is interesting to note that the term "*women servants*", *verse 14*, is different in *verse 1*7, where the word for concubines is used.

5. ABRAHAM ASKS GOD TO HEAL THE WRONG HE HAS DONE

Abraham showed that he feared the king and the people, prejudging them, acting deviously, deceitfully, and testing Sarah's love for him beyond what he should have asked, or expected. He doubled Sarah's fear to allay his own, as he had done in Egypt. This slip of faith again, is afterwards regretted by Abraham, who prays to God to heal the women from the condition that God had placed upon them, to save Sarah from conception there. We are not told the prayer, but contrition and repentance and forgiveness, must have been stated and requested by Abraham, and accepted by Sarah and God.

It is consoling that Abraham asked God to be relieved of the consequences of his action, and God granted that, which gives us hope that sometimes, just sometimes, we can be forgiven, **and** allowed off the consequences. It is a notable and rare incident of undone consequences, a notable privilege and gift from God to Abraham.

The advice of Abimelech to Abraham, *Genesis 20:16*, is obscure, and may mean that Sarah,

- Should be veiled, because of her shame at the wrong done to her, or,

- Should be veiled, to indicate that she had been treated with honour, despite that wrong doing, or

- Should be veiled, and so shielded from further prying eyes, or,

- Should have a more "*protective veil*" in Abraham.

A more protective husband would

- **Not have frightened her** so much,

- **Not have caused her to** (almost) **commit adultery**,

- **Not have caused her to join a concubine's house**, where her existence there could have easily been jeopardised, with her sold off in anger to someone else, thus multiplying more husbands.

- **Nor have caused her to be the object of slander.**

Comment:

The process of sin healing has been spoken of so much in our secular lives, at the moment, for past national wrongs. The principles and process spoken of are right and we are grateful for that.

We are told that there should be acknowledgment of the sin, and then apology is the next step, reconciliation comes next, and then restitution can take place. These are Godly requirements, but required today by professionals also, who feel that for any healing to take place, (in this case for a nation to heal itself) from past inequities, certain processes need to take place.

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Earlier Pharaoh was gracious, but Abimelech has an outstandingly positive reaction to the hurt done to him. He is a gracious person and we would do well to emulate it. In the end he still called Abraham Sarah's "*brother*", *verse 16,* and he allowed Abraham to decide where he would live within his (Abimelech's) kingdom. With this gesture, Abraham's stature is fully restored, *verses 14-18*. "*Behold my land is before thee, dwell where it pleaseth thee*". And Abraham's family and all the gifted servants and sheep and oxen returned to his compound.

Consider:

We are told that when Abimelech told his servants of the message "*from the Lord*", and what had happened in the palace, they were "*sore afraid*".

* How much did the king, and then the servants know?

* How did God "*shut up the wombs*"?

* Why were all the wombs shut, and not just Sarah's womb?

* Did this preclude sexual activity, or only the production of a child?

* What was the effect in the women's house of the circumstance of "*shut up wombs*"?

* If the condition was known by the women, how would they react to Sarah?

* Once again, how did Abraham's household react to the situation?

* Once again, what damage control would have been put in place, for this repeat offence?

* If we think Abraham's stature was restored with the king, what happened within Abraham's own household?

****

This second incident of the say you are my sister request, is more astounding still when we consider that Abraham knew that within the year Sarah would bear Isaac. When Abimelech called her to be his wife, it was God who saved her, but it, perhaps, gave rise to the later mocking of Ishmael. She was indeed in Abimelech's house after the promise that she would bear a child, and within twelve months of Isaac's birth.

If the later insult of Ishmael, hurled at Isaac, that he is illegitimate, comes from this story, then Ishmael did not know of the wombs shut up. Perhaps Abraham managed to keep the incident quiet to some degree, but this insult would then be a consequence still endured by Abraham. It seems that Judah may have been forgiven the incest with Tamar, because he publicly atoned for the incident, as did David. Still, we are left with many questions.

Sarah must have known of Abraham's fear, and perhaps was fearful herself, and that because of that fear, her husband was ready to sacrifice her - twice - to other men's households, **palaces**, no less. He would hardly be able to assail a palace, to gain her back, surely a more fearful thing

for Sarah, for she knew of the consequences for her, if she was not returned to Abraham. Others, in the family, may have wondered about God's providential care, and courage, in the face of danger, and Abraham's lack of confidence. It all looked unworthy for God's servant, and was indeed a sin against God's law of *Genesis 2:24*.

When Sarah is returned to Abraham, she conceives and bears Isaac, and Abraham circumcises his son, *Genesis 21*. He is 100, and Sarah is 90 years old, still within the year of the promise at Hebron.

6. HAGAR AND ISHMAEL IN THE COMPOUND WITH ABRAHAM AND SARAH

The birth of Sarah's son, Isaac, must have renewed her youth, for she was able to breast feed him, *Genesis 21:7*. Remarkable in our eyes.

However, the taunting of Hagar and Ishmael spoiled the joy of Sarah, more particularly at the weaning ceremony of Isaac, who may have been as old as five years. (Middle Eastern women still breast feed their babies for more years than western women, for many regard it as a form of contraception).

Abraham intervened in the dispute between the two women, Sarah and Hagar, and sent Hagar away, with her son, and a water bottle. The dispute could easily be the taunting of Ishmael over the paternity of Isaac, considering that Sarah had so recently been amongst the concubines in the palace of Abimelech.

Hagar and Ishmael would not know of God's revelation to Abimelech, or if they did, they may have scorned the information as a prefabricated lie. They would have good cause to think that the child could be Abimelech's offspring. We advise our children "*do not do anything that will cause the adversaries of God to scorn*".

Imagine Sarah's indignation, if this was one of Ishmael's remarks about Isaac. It was, of course, said about the Lord Jesus Christ, implying illegitimacy over the circumstances of his birth, *John 8:41*.

If this is a true assessment, then this taunting is an extra consequence for Abraham to bear, because of the second say you are my sister incident. Perhaps the first incident did not bear too much dire consequence for Abraham, and that encouraged him to use the Egyptian ploy again when he thought he was in danger in Gerar, and that he and his substance needed protection. For Abraham to put Sarah in such danger defies our understanding, when she was, we thought, so precious to him. It is the devaluation for women and their own role in the purpose of God that upsets us. It is, probably therefore, the resultant taunting, at the birth of Isaac that made life in the compound unbearable.

This second say you are my sister incident, as with the first, would hardly have been kept secret within the compound, and it would easily fit into a tease situation. It is most remarkable that, when the incident is accompanied by so much humiliation and teasing, that Isaac commits the same folly in asking Rebekah to say she was his sister, when they came to the palace of another Abimelech, at Gerar, in the next generation. So this becomes a cross, or Trans generational incident.

A more serious offence is suggested, in addition, when we recognise that four words are missing from the *AV* translation, based on the *Massoretic* text, which ends with Ishmael "*mocking*", and makes no mention of the words "*with her son Isaac*". *In* the earlier

texts, *Septuagint* and *Vulgate,* the *Genesis 21:9,* words "*mocking*", "*taunting*", "*teasing*" are better rendered "*playing with*" or "*fondling*", (together with the four missing words). The same word is used in *Genesis 26:8*, where Abimelech, watching from the palace window, realises that Rebekah is Isaac's wife. These same words have a sexual context, and when the king sees the incident, it gives him the clue of a relationship much more than social, or sibling, as Isaac had led him to believe was the case.

Certainly there is a sexual overtone with the word used, so perhaps the *Septuagint* and the *Vulgate* are right about this point. *Jonathan Kirsh*, in *Insight,* where he discusses the point, in the *October 1998* and *February 1999 Bible Review Magazine*, asks us to compare *Genesis 39:17* for the use of the same word, implying "*uncovering of nakedness"*, in the Joseph and Potiphar's wife incident.

Consider:

* Is this teasing in addition to the taunting?

* Was the incident innocent, that is, just Ishmael having a fun game with, or teasing Isaac, enough to make Sarah angry?

* Or did the teasing, move to mocking, and sarcasm, and **that** was enough to make Sarah angry?

* Or was it much more, remembering Sarah's murderous intent for Hagar and Ishmael after the incident?

* If it is more, were the reluctant translators anxious to play down the disturbing sexuality of the incident?

* Did they lose an opportunity to record the incident faithfully and so deprive us of reasoning out, and dealing with the evil of incest or sexual abuse, or homosexuality?

Many disturbing incidents have been recorded, without reluctance, in this family saga, but there are just a few not mentioned, and we know not what they are with any certainty.

Still, the question remains.

* What **did** Sarah see at the weaning ceremony, when Ishmael was between 15 to 20 years old, and Isaac was anything up to five years old, *(Genesis 16:16, 17:17* and *21* and *25, 21:5)*?

* What outraged Sarah so much that she was filled with such murderous intent, that she asked that Hagar and the boy be thrown out of the compound, to suffer exposure and certain death?

* Would Abraham have felt so "*very grievous*" for Ishmael, if it was abominable behaviour?

* How then did this spiteful "*son of the flesh*" persecute the "*son of the Spirit*", *Galatians 4:29?*

* We can ask the question again, was Sarah justified in her indignation?

* Was the incident wholly innocent, - or sexual abuse, or incest, or an attempted homosexual act?

* Was the outrageous incident just one of many, and so all the suggested insults could have taken place?

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7. HAGAR IS FREED BY ABRAHAM

Sarah may have feared that in offering Hagar, Ishmael would claim the inheritance rights. Abraham **did** recognise him as his son. The best way to solve the problem, for Sarah, was to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Thus Hagar would return to the desert a second time, over fifteen years later. Her freedom would limit her claim on the family estate. Abraham's love and concern were dispelled by God's guarantee that He would care for them. He had advised the solving of the problem, *Genesis 21:12, 13,* and reassured Abraham that He would care for Hagar and her child, as Abraham's offspring.

The *Nuzi* tablets, "*Ancient Texts Relating to the Old Testament*", see *NIV Study Bible,* from the 15th Century BC, prohibit the expulsion of a servant girl's son, whose legal status was already weak, so love for his son, and perceived legal custom of the time, played a part in Abraham's anguish and dilemma. Abraham had received from God a confirmation of care and promise, *verse 11*, with a Divine release from the custom of the time, so perhaps that made Abraham more confident of Hagar's and Ishmael's safety.

Abraham seems distraught at this first separation from his son Ishmael. Perhaps he recognises the evil consequences of more than one sexual partner, and the abandoned blessing of "*one flesh"* with his treasured wife, Sarah. No doubt Abraham does genuinely love Ishmael, so the whole episode pains him.

Hagar, encounters great hardship, once more, with her son in the wilderness, where he is the first to suffer from exposure. She abandons him, not able to view his death, and lifts her eyes to God for help. God hears her cry and so they are both nourished by God, with water from a nearby, hitherto unseen, probably covered, well. According to His word, God blesses her in the wilderness and her child grows to manhood there, the Wilderness of Paran. Hagar takes for him a wife from nearby Egypt, and that wife is the mother of his twelve sons and one daughter. We know little more about him, except for his return to bury Abraham, with his step brother, Isaac. He died at the age of 137 years old. It was natural for Hagar to seek an Egyptian wife for her son, especially if her own roots were there, but it would strengthen the heathen element in Ishmael. His seed also is numerous and he becomes a great nation. His name means "*God listened to* (namely the parents' - that is*, Abraham's and Hagar's) their prayer*".

So, the say you are my sister incidents have repercussions that bring great anguish, not only immediate, but far reaching anguish for Sarah. They were not incidents that existed just between Abraham and Sarah, everybody knew about them. Lot's family were with them down in Egypt, for the first incident. Even loyal servants who had been with them through the Egyptian incident, would hardly be able to resist a snigger, as apparently Ishmael could not. The faithful Eliezer would have charge of behaviour in the compounds of Abraham, and it would have been a difficult job to restrain the servants in such a circumstance. We try not to give our enemies cause to blaspheme but this is a shameful incident inviting ridicule. We mostly do not escape the consequences of our anti Christ behaviour, even if we are forgiven.

These are the first of many incidents when God had to intervene, using amazing situations to preserve the precious seed line.

8. ABRAHAM'S FAITH TESTS

Abraham's faith was tested twice in the matter of his public relationship with his wife when he was in a tight spot and his reaction was not ideal. These incidents illustrate that faith is a

developing thing with pitfalls along the way. Abraham was humanly flawed, as was Isaac, as was Jacob, as is any man or woman, and we expect that. That does not take away our respect for Abraham as God's "*patriarch*" and "*prophet*". *Genesis 20:7*. *Psalm 105:15* refreshes the minds of his children, when He reminds them how he protected "*the prophet*" at this time. These are the prophets of *Luke 16:29* that the Jews had always had to lead them to the Lord Jesus Christ, yet, as their voices came down through the ages, the Jews ignored them. "*Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*" is a term used throughout *The Old Testament*, and we revere that.

9. ABRAHAM'S SIN AND FORGIVENESS

There is no record of Abraham's acknowledgment of the sin, or asking forgiveness of God (or of Sarah), though we know he knew it to be an unrighteous act, for he prayed to God to heal the effects of his sin on the Abimelech house. It is difficult to justify from the *Scripture*, except by inference. We may say that Abraham's sin and righteousness became states of being, rather than a ledger account of good and bad deeds. If Abraham reckons himself ungodly, *Romans 4*, he must have recognised his sin, not a doer of ungodly acts, but an ungodly person, thinking of himself as having no standing before God.

Life is not a matter of a series of separate incidents some pleasing to God, some not, by which we are judged. It is a growing process, for no one can stand still. We either diminish, or grow. Abraham was a wanderer, whose life was changing geographically in the land that God had promised him. But he was changing spiritually as well, from the time he left Haran. As he moved about the land he also took the spiritual path that God had laid out for him. He grew in faith as his character developed. Yet, as he developed, he still had room to grow.

Sin is not a catalogue of wrongful deeds and broken commandments, but an inability to reach potential.

Likewise -

Righteousness is not the result of a series of good deeds, (good works) in accordance with His commandments, but from learning built up through the tests of faith that are placed before us.

Abraham believed the promises of God, but he also believed that his unworthiness was **his** stumbling block, and so he acknowledged it. Like his forebear, Cain, he had his "*winter of discontent*", when he depended on God for forgiveness and redemption. But for Abraham the frost of winter melted into spring again, with God. He knew that a sacrifice, or act of his own would not purchase that forgiveness, for he could not justify himself. He only trusted that God would justify the ungodly in him. We may think of ourselves as ungodly, unworthy subjects, unable to attain even Abraham's level of faith, but we can achieve what Abraham achieved, through the indwelling of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives.

Comment:

The general opinion seems to be that Cain's wickedness on the murder of his brother, brought wrath and hatred upon him. However he **was** allowed to live, and no one was allowed to kill him, for the mark of God was upon his forehead. He failed the test God put upon him, for his anger was his stumbling block, and caused his sin. He said **to the LORD**, "*Is my iniquity too great to be forgiven?*", *Genesis 4:13, Companion Bible*. It may be viewed that God is, in this verse, in the process of forgiving Cain, as here, in the beginning of *Genesis*, **Cain recognises the enormity of his sin, and his worthlessness and his alienation. So God begins to speak with him.** It is

the mark of God's mercy and grace that in the face of Cain's acknowledged unworthiness, God condescends to speak with him again, (but ultimately sends him away from His presence).

The Day of Atonement was later introduced for people to reflect and consider their ways, to atone for their sins, and to make renewal contracts with God. It made, and continues to make people think of their capacity for wrongdoing, of inflicting hurt and of being cruel. When the need for atonement for our wrongdoing and hurtfulness and cruelty has been understood, one can then begin taking responsibility for one's actions, exploring the motivation to commit the evil, and learn to overcome that motivation. Reasons to behave are not acceptable excuses. Reasons for sin are not a motivation to sin. "*I can't help my sin because …*". If we fail to understand our motivation, then the repetitive cycle of offences and transgression, and the seeking of repentance, is not broken.

If we continue in sin, the disregard we have for others is not registering. Perhaps we need to acknowledge a need in ourselves that causes us to neglect or abuse. It takes a great effort to acknowledge such a thing and cease to neglect or abuse others. People can hardly do that alone, and sympathetic and caring and professional friends need to help, together with an earnest and prayerful intention to change.

We need help to overcome the feelings of helplessness, associated with our renunciation of the sin, a negativity and fear that we cannot manage. We grieve about our sins, but to recognise our sins, and to ask God to help us, is the beginning of reconciliation with oneself, and the reconciliation with God that we so desperately need. God will help us expand our impoverished resources, so by grace, that victory is assured.

Our spirituality can be measured rather like the four stages of prayer. *Han Suyin,* the contemporary "*Chinese Philosopher and Novelist*" has ideas somewhat along these lines.

Prayer is -

***1*. A weary effort with little gain and small return.**

or

***2*. Something tentative and internal, that puts forth leaves and buds, that can grow, or be shrunken and withered, depending on the nourishment.**

or

***3*. A connection with God that enables us to converse with Him face to face, and know Him, like a tree blossoming in the sun.**

or

***4*. A stage, or state of spirituality, where there is no more toil, there is no more change, no loss, and no seasons, where flowers always blossom, and the soul enjoys undoubting faith, and given certitude, where the heart loves, and knows not that it loves.**

Oh, for that connection with our Lord Jesus Christ that he might lead us to our Heavenly Father, with such unfailing certainty. The stories of these patriarchs and their journeys, may lead us in that path to glory, if only we will have faith as they did.

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10. THE WELLS INCIDENT, AND ABIMELECH AGAIN

There is another incident tucked away in *Genesis 21:22-34*, which indicates Abimelech's continuing good relationship with Abraham, and his regard for his God. There is a dispute over a well that Abraham had dug for his sheep. Abimelech and his commander Phicol, question Abraham carefully, for Abimelech regards Abraham as an honourable man, but Abimelech's servants say the well is theirs, and have seized it. Abraham swears that the well is his, and makes a treaty with Abimelech.

There is a remarkable echo of this story when the same thing happens to Isaac in *Genesis 26*. There is another say you are my sister incident, and there is also a story of Abraham's wells stopped up by the Philistines, wells re dug by Isaac, and quarrelling over wells, with Abimelech and Phicol featuring in the two stories. We conclude that the two names are titles and therefore repeated in the next Trans generational story, and the trouble with the wells, is a continuing squabble between herdsmen, and probably quite frequently occurring, and caused by roaming Bedouin families.

The treaty, at this time, is sealed by Abraham and Abimelech with the gift of the seven ewe lambs to Abimelech by Abraham "*as a witness that I did dig these wells"*. So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men had sworn an oath there. So Abimelech achieves his end of a continuing good relationship with Abraham.

And Abraham planted a tamarisk tree, an evergreen, a hardy plant, with wonderful shade, and called on "*the name of the Lord*". To plant a tree is recognition of permanency, an intention to stay, and Abraham often planted a grove of trees, reinforcing his right to the land, as a promise from God. There is such a shady tree in the courtyard of a Children's Home in Moinabad, India. That tree is a blessing there also, and provides loving care for all of those who sit under its shade in the heat of an Indian midday sun.

Abraham lived there in Beersheba in peace for many years, by reason of the treaty which existed between him and this king of the Philistines, *Genesis 21:34*. It was place of abundant water and is so today. Because of this, it was a place never to be violated, a sanctuary for those who needed water. Flocks have gathered here every day for five thousand years. The wells were indispensable to Abraham, as they were to General Allemby of the Allied Forces, this century, in World War 1, when twenty four hours after capturing Beersheba, he was pumping and supplying four hundred thousand gallons of water a day to his famished troops.

CONCLUSION:

These two chapters in *Genesis* provide us with details of Abraham's life in Gerar and his precious friendship with the king, Abimelech. The story serves to emphasise the dysfunction that is becoming endemic in this patriarchal family. We wish it was not so, but the lessons for us are obvious. Relationships in families need faithfulness and Godly support, and only then will we obtain grace, and be at peace with the treasures He has given us.

CHAPTER 4

THE GREAT TRIAL OF ABRAHAM

"Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac ... and get thee into the land of Moriah: and offer him there for a burnt offering", Genesis 22:2.

FOCUS:

There remained one greater test of Abraham's faith in God, and then his closing history, and that of his wife Sarah, ***Genesis 22* and *23*.**

The intent of this chapter is that we might understand the overwhelming faith that Abraham has for God, and understand as well the great sadness within his family.

1. FATHER AND SON, ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

God's trial of faith of Abraham, for him to sacrifice his son, *Genesis 22:2*, was a confusing request from God, for two reasons.

Firstly, that it did not follow the path to which Abraham aspired, and what he thought God required.

Secondly*,* that it followed the pattern of child sacrifice that was being practised in the heathen nations round about.

Because of the Godly family's belief in YHWH, any resemblance to the heathen, would have been an anathema. The near sacrifice, then, must have had a profound effect on Isaac, and Sarah, as well as Abraham.

2. THE TERRIBLE PRACTICE OF CHILD SACRIFICE

Many religions have practised child sacrifice, a sickening practice to contemplate. The Canaanites practised this at this time, but in later years, became quite addicted to it. It also happened in the lands surrounding the Canaanites. The Israelites fell into the wicked practice themselves, *Psalm 106:37, 38,* where the people are reminded how they provoked God, when they polluted the land "*with the blood of their children*". Only now, in the icy mountains of Peru, are archaeological finds being made of 500 year old Astec remains of 8 year old girl and boy sacrifices. The children died with their parents blessing, and the parents glorified in being chosen to sacrifice their children. There are many such remains now being brought to light and they are found to have endured terrible poisonings with fearful consequences for each tiny person. These were not passed through the fire, but left on the icy summit.

Before the "*foundation of the world*"*, Ephesians 1:4, 5,* (not creation, but the when God first thought of, and planned this world), God decided to give man on this earth free will. Then with His foreknowledge, He prepared for the provision of a Lamb, and so He determined to sacrifice His only son for the sins of the world. This was so that self willed, sinful people could recognise their sins, recognise the supremacy of God, and return to Him, and be prepared for His Kingdom.

Eventually after man inhabited this earth, God made a Code of Conduct for His people, and gave it to them at Sinai. **In that code there was no requirement for men to make child sacrifice.**

Under the Law, the requirement for a willing sin, was death.

However God ordained animal sacrifices to atone for the sins of ignorance. In the beginning, the sacrifice of a perfect, precious, valuable and hopefully first born animal, was the requirement of God for His people, to atone for their sins.

The perverse heathen practice of child sacrifice, at different times in history, went further than animal sacrifice. To appease their gods they took on the extra form of sacrificing their children. It also acted as a population control, a form of family limitation, safer than abortion, and a way out for families to rid themselves of the unwanted girl babies. It also served to dispose of the babies born to the temple maidens. These were children conceived during the wicked temple fertility practices. Archaeologists have no trouble in defining the temple houses of prostitution, because of the mountains of children's bones in the graves that accompany them, mostly lying underneath the buildings, in order to save people's sensitivities towards the murders that needed to occur.

To sacrifice a child, is to sacrifice something almost as precious as yourself, especially if it is a firstborn son. A wife is not within that state of preciousness. A wife can be replaced, a firstborn son cannot. Something of great value can therefore be given in death that is, killed, as a token of turning away the wrath of a god. It became a convenient solution for gross sin. To sin therefore was more gratifying and satisfying, than the instinct of saving alive one's child from death.

The request from God to his faithful Abraham, cannot be considered in the category of child sacrifice. Because God was prepared to give His son for the sins of the world, He wanted Abraham to **feel** the same way. And Abraham did.

It was the supreme act of faith in Abraham's life, for his faith had now matured. Now, in that matured faith, God asked Abraham to give back to Him, the gift He had given him.

1. Abraham had recognised his sins and was strengthened.

2. He had passed through the years of uncertainty about an heir, when he had none.

3. He had rejoiced in the birth of his son, Isaac, but he had sent his other son, Ishmael, away.

4. He was comforted by the news of Ishmael's well being, so he had walked peacefully and profitably in the land of Promise, and was content.

Now God came to Abraham with a request that broke his heart. His childlessness had been a terrible burden to him, now this request from God was hardly endurable, that of the death of the God given treasure.

Matthew Henry in his commentary, establishes the argument that Abraham may have had with God, about

- The prohibition God had established about murder (remembering Cain and Abel),

- An evil report that would be generated about Abraham and his faith,

- The fatal consequences of such an example,

- The consequences for the ratified promises, which had been ratified again and again with Abraham. With the arguments answered by God, Abraham goes on in "*holy wilfulness*"

The request from God seemed to Abraham to be confusing, because Isaac was the fulfilment of all Abraham and God together had wanted and needed for the Divine promises to be fulfilled. Still God was the blesser of all gifts, none more than this son, Isaac, and Abraham recognised that to be a true son of God, one had to give back to God blessings in His name. He had learned well the blessings of giving tithes, or pledges, to God.

With faith and faithlessness overbalancing each other, once more, Abraham continues to argue with himself.

a. Now, it seemed, God wanted him to destroy the vehicle for the development of His promise, *Hebrews 11:17-1*8.

b. He tried to set apart his overwhelming love for Isaac, but he could hardly set aside his faith in the future of the Promise.

c. He could not understand the thinking of God, when Isaac had a religious role to fulfil in the future, and worth as the appointed heir, and means of the blessing and salvation of the world. That could not happen if Isaac was to be extinguished.

So Abraham, with God's help, overcame his misgivings about the sacrifice, and decided that he would give God the sign of his strong faith. He believed that God would find a way to fulfil His promises, so he began to prepare for the journey.

In the matter of telling Isaac, we might think that Abraham led him on to Moriah, desperately hoping for a more equitable way to show his faith to God. In the matter of telling Sarah, we may think that he never told her anything, and she was left to find out later, from Isaac, or the servants. Abraham had not hitherto acted wisely with Sarah, so we may be justified in thinking he did not confide in her.

Abraham would have known God would raise Isaac if the sacrifice was carried out, *Hebrews 11:19*. We know that he already believed in resurrection. We would hope that Isaac may have learned some of Abraham's ideas about resurrection to help his thinking when the crisis arrived.

3. THE TRAUMA FOR ABRAHAM AND ISAAC BEGINS

This near sacrifice of Isaac, is called the "*Aqedah*", by the Jews, or "*the binding of Isaac*", that is, his legs, as with an animal.

The trauma must have had a lasting effect on Isaac, and certainly on his mother when she heard of it. Whether she knew of Abraham's intention before the journey, or heard of it afterwards, it is hard to believe that, with all the other traumas in her life, she would not be affected by it. Trauma reshapes people's lives; they become hypersensitive to seemingly innocent incidents. Isaac's trauma, comparatively early in his life, considering he lived until he was 180 years, would have affected him for all his days, as Sarah undoubtedly was affected.

In this near sacrifice, Abraham's heart, because he was the instrument, must have been breaking, but Isaac's life was at stake. However, the available facts allow us to interpret that Isaac was a willing sacrifice. Certainly Abraham found a true heir in his son's willingness to remain on the altar (for he was strong enough to overpower his father, and bolt from the situation), but he surrendered to his father and to his God, accepting the challenge. This true heir foreshadows the willing sacrifice of the later Son of God, wishing that the cup would pass, but still willing to be obedient.

Three days was the necessary journey from Beersheba, *Genesis 22:3-8*, to Mount Moriah (Jerusalem). Mount Moriah became the Mountain of the Lord, or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, during the Israelitish monarchy. It became the symbol of the sort of faith that God requires of his servants, and of the ultimate and most worthy sacrifice of His beloved Son. However, El Shaddai "*through your love and through the ram, you saved the son of Abraham*", but we know, El

Shaddai, that Your most awesome work was done for us, once and for all, through the frailty of **Your** Son.

Mount Moriah is now occupied by the El-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, and is the third most holy place for Islam, after Mecca and Medina. According to tradition it was from here that Muhammad ascended into heaven. It is a forbidden place for the Jews, being the worshipping mosque for the Palestinians of Jerusalem. Christians and Jews are prevented from exploring the site, but a limited view of it may be had from the rail inside the Mosque. The west side of the platform includes the Wailing Wall where Jews have traditionally come to mourn the loss of their own temple, (and do so now), that previously stood on that site.

The actual location of Abraham's Mount Moriah is in doubt, mainly because the Mount Moriah of temple fame was wooded, and they would not have had to take wood. Nobody is quite sure, but there may have been other reasons for taking wood.

Also, it is possible that God would not have allowed the actual spot to have been known for men would have made a monument on it, like Moses' tomb and Elijah's grave. It is suggested that God wanted the actual spot of the near sacrifice of Isaac to be kept clear so that later our Lord's cross, that this near sacrifice so neatly represents, could be raised on the same spot. It is not inconceivable that God would use the same piece of ground.

If obscurity of the text, (where Moriah might have been), leads to misinterpretation, then that is a pity. However to link it with the Temple Mount, or with Golgotha, the experience allows us enormous interpretive points to consider. No harm is done, but God does not help us to identify the place, only the act.

Abraham did take the wood for the sacrifice, on the journey and probably gathered it from the tamarisk trees he had planted some twenty years earlier. Perhaps Abraham felt that the collection of wood at the journey's end may have distracted him from his task, so he took the wood. When they were near the end of the journey Abraham told the servants to wait, and then went on alone, with Isaac, to the altar spot. Isaac carried the wood on his back, the last few kilometres. The resolute faith of one, and the trusting submission of the other, can be likened to God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. At Mount Moriah, Abraham repaired the altar. Jewish tradition has it as the same altar that Adam had used, and Abel and Noah as well. Whatever it was, or had been, it could be quickly built or demolished according to need.

Isaac probably only knew of his near fate as he was being bound for the sacrifice. He had earlier asked where the animal for the sacrifice was, and Abraham had answered, with a heavy heart, that God would provide it. Whatever and whenever Isaac knew, there are some hard questions to debate.

Consider:

* Did he hear Abraham say, "***we*** *will come again*", *verse 5,* and assume that Abraham would find a different way?

* How willing was Isaac?

* How much of the willingness was obedience to his father, rather than submission to God?

* How much had Abraham taught this son of his about God, about the conditions of faith, and about God's blessings, about the responsibilities of accepting the blessings?

* Did the degree of willingness permanently affect Isaac's relationship with God?

****

Abraham's faith was recognised by God and Abraham's hand was stayed.

In this incident, that is, in the act of providing the sacrifice, he represented the **Father**.

Isaac lay down willingly, as a Lamb, on the wood that had been on his back.

In this incident, that is, in being a willing sacrifice, he became the representative of the **Son**.

There is no sin here, only a **faithful Father** and a **precious Son**.

In all his life, Isaac was less memorable than at this time, but with this ultimate deed of his, he needs nothing more. Isaac's life then, like Abraham's, was also sanctified.

We are in no danger of reading too much into the text, for that is a luxury that we are allowed. Others may wish to read more, others less, into the text.

Isaac's earlier question of a lamb for the sacrifice, *verse 7*, was avoided by Abraham, who no doubt hoped his intent would be seen by God as the act of devotion to Him, and that the sacrifice of Isaac would be avoided - as indeed it was, though too late to prevent Isaac's terrible anticipation.

From the outcome of the near sacrifice, we understand that the intention for the deed was enough for God, and there was no need for a true resurrection. The fact that the sacrifice did not happen, and that the heathens round about would not have known about God's request of Abraham, and of Abraham's intention to obey, reinforces the fact that there is no connection, between God's request of Abraham, and the heathen's dreadful practices.

Missioners note that the concept that God required the death of His son, for a sacrifice for our sins, is very difficult to teach to non Christians, who practise wife and child immolation. If the elements of bread and wine in a memorial service, are described as being the **literal** body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ consumed, as some do, then there is a greater difficulty, for those who practice the ungodly sacrifices, for now the body is cannibalised. Enormous understanding and wisdom are required to provide the Godly answer, but we can more readily understand the position from where they come.

The incident concludes with the sacrifice of a ram caught in a thicket. As the ram was slain, and the son, Isaac rose from the sacrifice, we may see all in one,

The whole of the willing sacrifice for sin, **and**

The resurrection from the dead of that Sinless One.

Then in *Genesis 22:15-18*,

Abraham's victory of faith is rewarded with a personal blessing, and a solemn promise about his posterity.

Blessings abound, and are multiplied, and they concern blessings for his seed,

and indeed for all the nations of the earth.

They are not promises now.

There is now a contract between God and Abraham.

4. THE IMPACT ON ISAAC OF HIS NEAR SACRIFICE

It is interesting that Isaac was the son of the sacrifice, and Ishmael was the son sent into the wilderness to die. Each son was saved at the last possible moment by God's intervention. It is a sign of remarkable parallelism with the later ritual of the priests casting lots over the fate of the two goats on the Day of Atonement. Abraham is richly blessed for his faithfulness in carrying out the requests of God. Since then, the Jews, under the Law, asked for God's forgiveness for their sins by ritually obeying His ordinance, and based their actions of the obedience of Abraham. Since the near sacrificing of both these sons has been too terrible to contemplate, there is little mention of the connection between the atonement sacrifices and the incidents of the near sacrificing of Abraham's two sons. Perhaps we would also find it too much of a forward parallelism.

However there may be a point to be made in describing Isaac, as "*Sarah bore Abraham a son in his old age*", the point being made three times, whereas the Bible describes Ishmael as "*the son whom Hagar bore*", indicating a closer relationship between Abraham and Isaac, than between Abraham and Ishmael. There is a missing resonance in the two stories, for they do not parallel, or resonance against each other, they are different in emphasis, and rather contrasting, to make the point.

Isaac, from that day, must have accepted the near sacrifice, although it was traumatic for him and his father, that it would further the good of the family household towards the fulfilment of those blessings made by God upon his father Abraham. We wonder whether his understanding grew with his maturity, or whether he was an early maturer and always understood.

Comment:

Throughout history men and women often younger than Isaac have accepted the challenge of a life sacrifice, for example, in war or persecution, for the benefit of others. The Japanese midget submariners, or the Kamikaze pilots, or the Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel, to name a few, in our time.

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See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

5. MUSLIM ISHMAEL, OR JEWISH/CHRISTIAN ISAAC - NEAR SACRIFICE?

It must be said that Muslims also have celebrated the near sacrifice story, for in their tradition it is the origin of the Feast of the Sheep, in which the victim is Abram's son Ishmael, not Isaac, which takes away, of course, the reverence we wish to place on Isaac's sacrifice. The story is told in *THE KORAN*, *(L.) SURA XXXV11*. - *THE RANKS MECCA*.- at *101,* but the text itself does not identify which son Abraham is ready to sacrifice.

6. THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISAAC'S NATURE

Isaac, from now on, would have been wary of uncertain and fearful situations and would have a liking for all things secure and predictable. Isaac would have had a lack of trust in the heathen nations round about, and a great need for strong attachments, especially with his mother and father. Abraham's noble explanation of the event would not cast out the effect. Imagine Abraham's reaction to the deception that occurred at the end of his days with his family. Isaac,

quiet, pensive, peaceful Isaac, knew about much of it, which would have been a great grief for him, considering he had been with God on the Mount, and appreciated Godly faith and wisdom and honour. His placid character is shown in the details of his life, in his obedience to Abraham, his long quiet mourning for his mother, his acceptance of his wedding preparations, his later following in the footsteps of his father, to Gerar, the say you are my sister wife denial to Abimelech, as his father did, his dealing with Abimelech and Phicol, again like Abraham, over the wells, and his renewing of oaths of obedience.

In that he was deceived, in his naivety, by his wife and son, we see his need for love and trust. He was content to be like his father Abraham, as he could within the confines of his own nature. Abraham was large in his view. It could benefit us if we could view our lives like Abraham's large view.

We would not criticise Isaac (or his family, before or after him, either), for we know God blessed him and placed his name in the Hebrew roll call. We only wish to explore how they felt, as *they* reacted, or not, to the commands of God. Each of the patriarchs (and matriarchs) had a Godly heart, but was humanly flawed. If we can learn from them we may be blessed with a Godly heart as well, and be less humanly flawed.

Isaac became the wonderful type of our Lord in the sacramental episode that befell him, as Solomon became the type of our Lord in the kingly, majestic role he played. They are not like our Lord in every facet, or they would be him, but in important phases of their lives we can see a foretelling of the greater one.

Our children's lessons are not explicit on the infamous deeds of these families - rightly so. Certainly we need maturity to assess the Godly lesson and understand the failings. The patriarchs and their families were influenced by their cultural heritage and, though not excused for transgressions, the transgressions are understood.

7. ABRAHAM AFTER SARAH'S DEATH

Whenever *Genesis 22* and *23* are read aloud**,** the drama of it, and the pain and sadness of the events described there seem overwhelming. The stories in the two chapters about the near sacrifice of Isaac, and the death of Sarah in such juxtaposition, can leave the reader in a state of angst.

Sarah was 90 years old when Isaac was born, so if he was a lad at the time of the near sacrifice *(Genesis 22)* he was probably no more than 20 years, and Sarah was 110. She died *(Genesis 23)* at 127 years of age. We are fortunate to know her age, as she is the only woman in the *Bible* whose age is mentioned. The narrative tells us that Abraham had to journey to her place of death, and buy a plot of ground to bury her. If Isaac was 20, then there must be therefore about 17 years between the two chapters and we have no clue what happened in those years. Some think that Isaac was much older, say 33 years at the time of the near sacrifice, (linking it more readily with the death of our Lord), the *Companion Bible,* "*Chronological Chart, Appendix 50*". This would then also shorten the time between the two chapters, and the two incidents. It is a sadness that Abraham and Sarah were not together when she died. He had gone back to the family compound to Beersheba, after the faith testing incident, and we are told she died at Hebron, where there was probably another family compound. So she must have removed from the Beersheba tents at some stage, before her death, going 48 kilometres north, up in the topography, 500 meters. We wonder why Abraham and Sarah were not living together.

It may be that too much is being read into the situation, and that Abraham had been gone only a short time, on a journey of property supervision. However with the troubles and disappointments in Sarah's life, it would be of no surprise that eventually she became tired of it all, and withdrew into a sort of depressed seclusion. Perhaps the frost of old age fell upon her, and the damp and the cold spread in her bones, and her knees would not work and her elbows pained, and her fingers swelled and she never laughed again. Perhaps then though, her dementia like seclusion prevented her from continuing to suffer from the angst, and the depression lifted and the selective memory process took over, and she remembered with great joy and happiness and contentment the little son who she bore with such love and affection and relief. (There is a comment about the culture of the ageing in "*Kith and Kin*", Book 5, at the death of Jacob, which may be useful to use here as well.)

Comment:

Perhaps because people know that the future is so short, they like to fill the space with memories. With little to look forward to, we look back. There is then "*a commemorating imagination*" which seems to come alive, flickering at first and then breaking into light. It begins to have a life of its own, something that we are powerless to avoid. Perhaps we don't even want to avoid it. Even in our everyday life, the heightened encounters with memoria grow, as if it happened yesterday. The regurgitated memories of people and places, and instances and circumstances, that jump into our mind's eye, uninvited and unannounced, are the foundation of the character of the old. They come like flat pages, not necessarily connected. They are things that happened, without the dimension of the course of time, and are without pattern and meaning, until we deal with them in our minds. The images that flash into our minds which demand attention, and our efforts to deal with them, make us chew and swallow. At night when we cannot sleep properly, the flashes of errors and misfortunes and misdeeds, sprinkled with the salt of remorse, keep us endlessly awake, and together with the worries of tomorrow, force us into fitful sleep, which is little use to us. The sleep deprivation matters not too much though.

James Hillman's recent research in "*The Force of Character: A Study in the Meaning of Ageing*", leads us away from despair with what is happening, into something that is much more comforting. He thinks that a life unreviewed, or never chewed over and swallowed, is a life lost, and then there is no understanding of events of our life.

However, the patterns of life become more discernible as we age, and there is more understanding of our walk through, or review of, the failures and the successes of our lifetime experiences. When we are younger events happen, when we are older those events assume proportion and key onto the pattern that we set ourselves.

Hillman recommends that it is too difficult to extract from memories the lessons of life, before we are sixty years old. "*Inflated subjectivity*", not character, has too much of a hold before then, we are too concerned with the "*I*". For mature modesty, and reticence, and honesty, about the whole picture is what is necessary for character. We are "*more eloquently and wisely equipped and empowered*" to review our failures and successes and make conclusions, after we have reached the age of sixty. There is, then, a full litany of dates, and jobs, and trips, and illnesses, and family personages and things that made us cry, and things that made us smile. Up until then, we only enjoy a biography of empty life patterns, the timetables of life, filling up diaries and log books. That's a reason, among others, why we call those senior years "*prime time*".

"*The pickling of the past*", as *Hillman* puts it, is what some people find so annoying and irritating in the old. Their rooms, (actual brick and mortar rooms, as well as their memory brain rooms) become "*period museums*", and nothing, even endless persuasion and correcting can change them, and not even the determined moths can get at the long term memory, once it is set in concrete. It is as if comfort and warmth finds its way into the cold storage vaults of the mind.

In older age, the images become more pleasant. Arduous struggles, envious rivalries, even betrayals and the poisonous jealousy thorns that hurt us so much, come back within a new frame, and present with a new valence, and often a new context. They don't hurt then so much. The musing about these memories may even make them amusing - and smiling and laughter after all is the best medicine. The long illness, the wrong marriage, the lost child, the soured friendship, the wrong career path, all those slings and arrows of outrage and anger and desperation and despair, lose their fire and forget their aim.

It seems that the dark and unhappy days of the past seem to lighten up and not matter so much, in our eventide recollections. Perhaps God is giving us a subtle hint that in letting go of the weights that we have been carrying, we can more easily let go, and let Him take our breath and character back to Himself, who first gave it. This is a premonition of death, as a place of rest until the call of the King to come to his Kingdom. It is as if there is a euphoric tone, something golden in these years, now coating many of our worst experiences, so that we feel that there is little left to forgive, and that, after all, we made too much of it all. At the end of the three score years and ten, in our seventies, those whom we have found most difficult to forgive, will not have their deed remembered, because in old age they do not need to be forgiven. Their deeds have simply been forgotten. May we be able to recognise that forgetting, that knack or skill of the old person's mind, may actually be the truest form of forgiveness and a blessing for the aged.

In the chronicle of the long lived patriarchs we can assume that the ageing processes happened with the same pattern, so the relevance of the foregoing brings us an understanding of them, as well as ourselves.

****

Perhaps in Sarah's move to Hebron we can see that she passed through the bitterness that must have spiked her character, because of the family troubles that beset her, and she moved to a time of peace, and she did indeed remember again, the joy and happiness and contentment, as is the wont of the aged. She would remember the little son she bore with such love and affection and relief.

Abraham (sorrowing, no doubt, for the joys as well as the disappointments) grieved at Sarah's death for the normal period, and then married Keturah, (or had already married Keturah), and acquired other concubines and produced an entirely different and large family, including at least six more sons. He later sent them away from Canaan with gifts, probably cattle, to set up their own flocks, and they became the Midianites. So Isaac was his only heir, in Canaan.

Comment:

Ellicott states: "*It is probable that Abraham married Keturah after Sarah's death, but we can not be sure*". Abraham had a large family with Keturah, so whether that influences our opinion of "*when*", we must decide.

The *NIV Study Bible* comments that "*took*" can be "*has taken*".

Keturah was an ancestor of Moses' father in law, Jethro.

The Jews feel

- Hagar and Keturah (both Egyptian) are one and the same,

- That *Genesis 22 and 23* follow on immediately, and

- That Sarah died over the trauma of the near sacrifice.

****

Consider:

* Why did Abraham marry Keturah "*outside*", when he was anxious that Isaac marry "*inside*" the faith?

* Or was Keturah one of the righteous of Melchizedek's Salem?

(A clue might be her relationship to the later Midianite, but priestly Jethro, *Exodus 3:1*).

* Did Abraham's marriage to Keturah cause Isaac more angst, that after all, his mother was not so cherished?

****

Later Rebekah recognised the same difficulties, when she preferred Jacob to go to Haran to the family for a wife, rather than marrying "*out*" amongst the unbelievers as Esau had done.

8. THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ABRAHAM AND SARAH AND ISAAC

Because of the near sacrifice incident and Isaac's need for security, Sarah and Isaac must have had a special relationship. He was her miracle baby, promised by God. Sarah eschewed her cultural identity by producing Isaac, albeit at the age of 90 years, almost too late, and he was her one and only chance at motherhood. She needed him, and he also felt that bond. He needed her, as well as he needed his father's reassurance.

We are told that Isaac, 37 years old when his mother died, three years later, at 40 years old, married Rebekah, but was still grieving, (*Genesis 24:67).*

Consider:

* Did this strong mother and son relationship have an effect on Isaac's marriage and cause the emotional turmoil in his later life?

* Were her life traumas too much for Sarah to bear?

* Did she separate from Abraham in those long years?

* Is this the reason they were not together when she died?

* Were there so many family compounds, because of Abraham's wealth that he was, of necessity, often away from home?

* Or - did Abraham place Sarah carefully in the most comfortable place so that her dimensional end would occur with peace?

Certainly depression, fear, self guilt, lack of faith, confusion over the promises, despair, dishonouring and degrading herself, and negating her wifely position, had all had a part in her pre Isaac days. Her post Isaac record portrays her as a woman of certitude and power.

* Is this a reasonable assumption about Sarah and her character?

* How much was she able to change?

* Did Abraham support her in her anxious state, or did he find it all too much?

* And what of Isaac's trauma, was Abraham supportive of that, explaining his and God's position?

A discussion cannot bring any conclusions, and we are each able to make up our own minds, with a conclusion or not. To think about it enhances our understanding of this wondrous family, and helps us understand our own families as well.

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(A tiny snippet of history of Abraham's brother, Nahor, is slotted in here, after the repeated multitude descendants promise is repeated, *Genesis 22:20-24*. It introduces us again to the family back in Haran, - ready for the soon to be told story of a wife for Isaac.)

9. ABRAHAM ACQUIRES SOME LAND FOR SARAH'S BURIAL

It follows, in the narrative, then, in, *Genesis 23*, an account of Sarah's death and the coming of Abraham to bury her. He bought a field, on which is a cave, in Hebron. It is thought that this field could have been the field of Mamre, *Genesis 13:1*8, and *14:13*. It is a Jewish legend that Abraham was divinely guided to this burial place field, as Adam and Eve were buried there.

It was a field owned by the Amorite, Mamre and his brothers. Now it belongs to the Hittites, who are happy, and gracious enough, to sell it to Abraham. The field, with the cave, then became a patriarchal burial site, and because of this, over its long history, a place of pilgrimage and investigation, and a place of reverence for Jews, Christians and Muslims. It began as a sacred site for Jews and then had variously churches or mosques erected over it, as Muslims and Crusaders, laid claim to it. It has a mosque there now. The Jews and Arabs used to live side by side in Hebron, apparently in harmony, but that seems no longer possible. There is reported to be a monument to Adam in it. There was a recent exploration of it in 1967, by the lowering of a twelve year old child through the twelve inch cavity, with a torch and measuring and recording devices, which yielded no further information, other than that which had been gathered over the previous millennia.

The necessary purchase, by Abraham, of a plot of ground for the burial of Sarah, from the Hittites, was a generous gesture, on their part. Abraham would have probably paid with silver trinkets and jewellery, that is bracelets, and rings, measured and weighed out on a pair of scales. Gold was of less value then. There is a section later in the text of Jacob and his sons, at Hebron, where trading and currency is extensively dealt with.

The cave was really a rock sepulchre, as the land there is, and has served the family from then until this day. It may, or may not, have needed some hollowing out then, but certainly, as more coffins came to be buried there, digging out must have taken place.

The Hittites offered their own sepulchres as gifts, but for obvious reasons Abraham wanted his own. Other nations burned their dead. To have been able to keep the sepulchre for so long indicates,

1. How the Hittites viewed the integrity and importance of Abraham,

2. The binding nature of the purchase document, known now as a ***"dialogue document"*,**

3. The Providential care of God for this special family, even in their death.

The importance of that site, even today, is noted, for the Arabs recognise Abraham as a great prophet. In commemoration of Abraham's hospitality, as recorded in *Genesis 18*, it became a place where pilgrims were treated hospitably.

If Ephron, the Hittite, had allowed Abraham to buy only the cave, according to the prevailing law, Ephron would still have been responsible for the rest of the field, and this may have caused some conflict. So Ephron opted for selling the whole field, with the cave, and Abraham is happy to oblige. This cave of Machpelah became a valuable focus for God's wandering people. They had no other settled development. They owned two pieces of ground, the Shechem plot and the cave plot, but Abraham had not **inherited** any of the Promised Land.

In this cave, Machpelah, Abraham buries Sarah, and Isaac mourns his mother, and sets out to build his flocks and herds. But he is alone and from that position cannot extend the family blessings. It is three years before Abraham acts to remedy this situation, and in that time we only know that Isaac built up his herds.

Three things distinguish Abraham.

***a*. Obedience to God.** "*He went out not knowing where he was going*"*, Hebrews 11:8*.

***b*. Trust in God**. He lived in tents outside the cities depending entirely on God for his safety.

***c*. Willingness to believe in God's future purpose.** He was laid to rest in Machpelah with his eyes still looking for the fulfilment.

His faith hesitated on several occasions and each time he was in danger of swimming in the normal stream of life. But he raised himself to greater heights, and God forgave him.

The families of Abraham and Isaac demonstrate many inappropriate relationships, and terrible crises and dysfunctions, that creep like cancer through families and infect the personnel involved. However, God continued to use them. He did not abandon them on that account. The dysfunction happened around, and in spite of, the high points of God's specific interventions in their lives. We can take great heart in that - that is, in the mercy of God.

CONCLUSION:

The cycle of pain that some families experience does not discredit them from God's love. Rather, if the families work through the pain, without denying it, acknowledging it, accepting it, talking about it, solving the difficulties, the pain will be less, and the solution can be arrived at, and the future looks less dim. We can step out, outside the pain, understand the pain, and instead of repeating the same mistakes that we so desperately wish to avoid, we can choose a different journey and learn to live the present differently. For by God's grace, great things are accomplished, if only we will ask.

***Digression*:**

MODERN ALLUSIONS TO THE NEAR SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

"Then Abraham bound the youth with belts and straps

And builded parapets and trenches there

And stretched forth his knife to slay his son

When lo! An angel called him out of heaven

Saying, lay not thy hand upon the lad,

Neither do anything to him. Behold,

A ram, caught in the thicket by its horns;

Offer the ram of Pride instead of him.

But the old man would not so, but slew his son

And half the seed of Europe, one by one".

Wilfred Owen's allegorical retelling and redirecting the Bible story of Abraham and Isaac in "*The Parable of the Old Man and the Young*" describes the human reaction to pride, with the destruction of countless young men in the 1914-1918 World War - "*the war to end all wars*".

The soldiers are likened to Isaac, and those responsible for the war (and its mismanagement) were likened to an Abraham who would not listen to God's instruction and restraining hand, a disobedient Abraham.

Owen's poem reaches a dramatic and poignantly different conclusion to our *Bible* story. It illustrates the pride of man, (not a faithful Abraham), willing to sacrifice a whole generation of young men to ill founded and ill advised, careless and destructive decisions. *Owen* himself, died on the Somme battle field the week before the war ended. He said, "*My subject is War, and the pity of War*"*,* declaring that "t*he Poetry is in the pity*", meaning that a poet can warn in his poetry.

A. D. Hope later penned similar objections to the pride of man, not faithful men, with the words "*Go tell those old men safe in their beds*"*,* that we "*took their orders and are dead*".

It is interesting to see the use of God's stories used to denigrate human folly by sliding from one picture to another, and the stories separated by millenniums. The opposite conclusion makes the terrible point of the uselessness of sacrifice required of others, that is, by foolish men, who live without a Godly context. Abraham's command from God makes the difference. Other men, all believers in God, ordering war, hide behind a Crusader, Christian, Jewish or Muslim context, and decide themselves when it is time to make war, or peace. It is interesting to note that 2% of men can kill other men at close range without concern, but 98% of men have to be actually taught to do such a thing, and one of the great worries that commandeers in war have, is how long this learned skill can be maintained.

In 1963, *Bob Dylan*, using direct *Biblical* references, composed a long and angry song about those same prideful men of war, who *"fasten the triggers for the others to fire"* and "*then you sit back and watch*" (with pride*)* as the "*death count*" gets higher and higher.

And so the poets have reduced the glories of war to folly, and conscientious objectors bask for now, in the general tenor of peace, not war.

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The Man of Peace

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CHAPTER 1 - THE MARRIAGE OF ISAAC AND REBEKAH

CHAPTER 2 - THE CYCLE OF PAIN PASSED ON

CHAPTER 3 - THE PAIN CYCLE CONTINUES

CHAPTER 4 - HISTORY REPEATED - THE SAY YOU ARE MY SISTER

EPISODES - ISAAC, REBEKAH, ABIMELECH, PHICOL

CHAPTER 5 - ISAAC AND ABIMELECH AND ANOTHER WELLS INCIDENT

CHAPTER 6 - THE PAIN OF SEPARATION

CHAPTER 7 - THE FOUR MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE ISAAC STORY -

REBEKAH, JACOB, ESAU, ISAAC

****

In the five chapters, recorded in *Genesis*, which introduce the story of Isaac and his family, there is a man more sedentary than his relatives, quiet, and gentle, and probably much given to meditation.

****

CHAPTER 1

THE MARRIAGE OF ISAAC AND REBEKAH

"... and she became his wife, and he loved her", Genesis 24:67.

FOCUS:

In the story of Isaac, the first long chapter, ***Genesis 24***, contains a moving and exciting story of the choosing of a wife for Isaac.

1. ABRAHAM'S CONCERNS ABOUT A WIFE FOR ISAAC

Abraham was fully convinced that God would bless a journey to Haran, and was quite confident that a suitable wife would be found for his son, Isaac, and it was so. Abraham had very special concerns about this wife for Isaac, and spells them out to his servant in *verses 1* to *9*. He had two concerns, marrying "*out*", that is, amongst the Canaanites, and the problems that would bring to his protection of the seed line, both religiously and geographically. There were political concerns as well.

1. Abraham was fearful for Isaac's well being if he married at home among the Canaanites. Such a union could have enhanced the Israelites future property rights (part of God's promises), but Abraham viewed the familial and religious considerations to far outweigh any territorial advantage.

There is never any question of Isaac marrying into the righteous of Salem, which peoples Abraham had befriended, so perhaps, to Abraham, the Ur family line meant better marriage partners in terms of familial considerations.

2. Abraham might have regarded the act of returning his son in person, out of the land, to Haran or Ur, as an act of unbelief and disobedience. Perhaps Isaac's safety was in question if he went to choose his own wife, or perhaps, Abraham was fearful that he would not return to this Promised Land. Abraham is quite definite about that, *verses 6* to *9*.

3. So as a third choice, the servant was sent instead.

This servant was willing to make an oath to Abraham, "*touching his thigh*", (a symbol of the reproductive organs, or organs of generation, and so very sacred), making a solemn obligation to carry out a superior's wishes, in a matter of great concern. It was Abraham's concerns for his posterity that he would get a suitable wife for Isaac. The thigh touching is a token of submission by the toucher for him so touched. The man, Abraham's servant, obviously knew of Abraham's special faith, and was even himself, possibly, of that persuasion. This incident brings to mind a later momentous incident in Jacob's life, (Isaac's son), when an angel touched **his** thigh.

The occasion is beautifully narrated in a high literary style, and forms the conclusion of the Abraham saga. The story is told in great detail, and the conversations are very realistic. The dialogue lends itself to theatre, with a **narrator**, a **servant**, the intended wife, **Rebekah**, the **family**, and the **entourage** (who return with the servant).

There are contrasts here with Jacob's choosing of a wife, when he comes later to this family. This present instance is a much happier one, and a joyful, expectant scenario, full of grace and promise for Isaac, on the strength of the reputation of his worthy father, and the wonderfully credible presentation of the loyal and gracious servant.

2. ELIEZER SETS OUT FOR HARAN TO GET A WIFE FOR ISAAC

So Abraham sent his trusted, oldest servant, probably Eliezer, (as Abraham had named him as his majordomo in *Genesis 13*), with presents of gold and silver and clothing and costly gifts and ten camels to Haran. Interesting that silver and golden ornaments and clothing are valuable and acceptable presents on such a Godly mission, probably as evidence to the family in Haran of Abraham's prosperity.

As Eliezer set out now, he was as confident as Abraham, that he would return with a mother for the promised seed, next in line, and that he would conduct a marriage by proxy. If it did not happen as they both planned, Abraham had offered an escape clause to release Eliezer from the mission, *verse 8*. Here are the last recorded words of Abraham, although his death is not imminent, over thirty years hence. However, Abraham is at pains to ensure the continuation of his posterity, and the land that God promised them, and will do all that is in his power to ensure that. He is setting his affairs in order. He was doubtful at first how God would manage it all, *Genesis 15:2* and *15:8*, but he is now more confident in God's ability to ensure that. It is interesting to note that if the trusted servant was Eliezer, it was him that the childless Abraham had offered to God as an heir. God said "*This shall not be thine heir*". If it was not the trusted and God fearing Eliezer from Damascus, then there must have been another willing and faithful servant easily persuaded by Abraham to perform this duty, which seems highly unlikely. The evidence seems to be strong that it is Eliezer, so it will be assumed here to be so.

At the city of Nahor, (probably named after Abraham's brother, that is, Nahor's city), south of Haran, but still in the Haran district in Mesopotamia, this special servant made his camels kneel without the city, at a well, so that he can unload them, and he prays to God, the first recorded prayer for personal guidance in the Bible, *verses 12* to *14*. Eliezer makes a detailed pact with

God, for he is concerned that he will know the right wife for Isaac. With this prayer (and its answer), we may conclude that this servant had a special relationship with God, and that God had sent an angel with him on the journey.

He prayed that God would speedily answer the request of his master, Abraham. He asked God that the wife for Isaac would be the woman who readily answered his request for water and offered water to his camels also, *Genesis 24:14.* God did answer his prayer in all the detail and more.

In the evening Rebekah came down the steps, and filled her pitcher with water. Wells fed by natural springs were reached by a flight of steps. Cisterns were fed by rains and were narrow at the top and wider at the bottom. Rebekah was beautiful to look at, a virgin, *verse 16,* whom no man had known. The last phrase is a Hebrew poetical repeating to emphasis the foregoing statement. Eliezer did not know this detail, though he would know of Abraham's requirements in the matter. This comment by Moses in the text is significant. Perhaps there is some detail in her dress, say, veiled in a particular way, which gives Eliezer the clue of her sexual status. However as God had guided him so far, it may be that God said, "*this is the one*", as He did to Samuel at the anointing of David from among Jesse's sons, *1 Samuel 16:12*.

It is important to note that the word for *"damsel"* is of common gender, of either sex, and signifies that this is indeed an ancient text, for the feminine or masculine gender is not used by Moses in any of the Pentateuch books, and only comes into stylistic writing in later books. This is a reason to disallow a more recent author of the book.

Eliezer watched Rebekah closely, when he first saw her at the well, and when she was kind enough to let him drink from her pitcher, and filled the trough twice for his camels to drink, he was sure God had guided his searching. He gave her the gifts he had brought for this special person, a golden nose ring (usually placed in the left nostril), and two bracelets, *verses 21* and *22*, and she offered him accommodation in her family compound. Eliezer was amazed and astonished, and already felt that God had made his journey prosperous, and that he had found what he was looking for. He had not asked for a vision, or for a miraculous event, he had asked for God's guidance through clear signs, in natural circumstances. When he later tells Laban and Bethuel, son of Nahor, (her brother and father, who are arranging the matrimonial proposal), *verses 33* to *49,* his awe and excitement are obvious, that God has blessed him. This Haran family is impressed, not only with the servant's integrity about his belief in God, but in his anxiety to do as his master, Abraham, had asked him. Eliezer would not sit to eat, until he had stated his mission and had some sort of understanding. Eliezer's anxiety is understandable, but it was also the custom to state a request before the obligatory meal, so that the meal became a sort of celebration of the decision. It was considered courteous to grant the request, if possible.

In the matter of the wonderful choosing of Rebekah, encouraged, no doubt, by the angel, who travelled with Abraham's trusted servant, we can see how appropriate she was for the duty ahead. She was considerate and gracious, kind and courteous. She had led a sheltered life, was anxious to please and do her duty, a fitting bride for a God blessed patriarch's son.

Eliezer had prayed to God for guidance, at the well. Later when he recounts his story, he repeats his prayer inexactly, *verses 12-14* and *42-44*. This is another indication of the inspired word, because someone else initiating the story would, probably, have quoted from the previous incident more accurately. However the Spirit, through Moses, records the prayer and the remembrance of it, inaccurately as it was from Eliezer's lips. The important place that prayer

has in this story indicates that Abraham's prayer life was well established in his compound, that is, it was a natural activity, not hidden from others, and emulated by his servant.

3. REBEKAH'S DESTINY IS SEALED AFTER HER QUICK RESPONSE

Eliezer made an amazing request of this family in Haran. *Genesis 24:33-49*. They were probably surprised and stunned by his words, when he asked to take Rebekah back to Abraham's family, to marry Abraham's only son, Isaac. Hopefully Rebekah had joy in her heart, when she heard of the request, and not fear.

Rebekah may have recognised, with great relief, the God loving servant (after her initial courtesy). She could have married successfully "*out*", among the Hittites round about. Her wealth, her station, her high living and learning could have enhanced any family if she linked with the neighbours round about. But her family did not press the point, *verses 50* and *51,* nor even raise the issue. They told Eliezer to take her.

Eliezer was so overcome that he worshipped God, then and there, thanking Him for his loving care over the mission he had from Abraham. He bowed down, and the family observing this impressive behaviour of Eliezer, must have felt confident in the planned journey, and comforted in the impending loss of their prized daughter. Eliezer must have had with him, among the ten camels, adequate provision for the safety of Rebekah during the return journey, and sufficient evidence of a skilled and influential family, to whom they sent her. Then there where were more gifts, for Rebekah and her parents and brother. These gifts all help to indicate Abraham's success and wealth in the land to which he migrated. There are three generations noted here, Nahor, Bethuel and Laban, Abraham and Isaac are only two generations, but Isaac's parents were very old.

At last, they all sat down to the meal that awaited them. Laban seems to be the main consultant in the matter, for Bethuel, Rebekah's father, may have died, or was incapacitated in some way. He is mentioned in the text, but not as having any pronouncements. So it was Laban and Rebekah's mother who asked Eliezer to wait for ten days, or a long period of time, (the time period is obscure), and we are reminded of the much more stringent conditions which Laban called for in the later generational call for a wife for Isaac's son Jacob.

So they all asked Rebekah would she agree to the plan, and she said, "*I will go*", *verse 58,* meaning she would go immediately.

Consider:

* Why did Rebekah respond so quickly?

* Did God speak to her?

* Or was she waiting for a God directed union, and she could see that, in this proposal?

* Did her family also see a divine purpose for their daughter, or were they already slipping in their worship of the true God towards their later eclectic worshipping practices?

* Or was the waiting plan so that she would be sure?

* Or so that they may savour their final days with her,

* Or was there a trick in store, which never eventuated, like Laban later played on Jacob?

****

The family gave Rebekah a gracious blessing, *verse 60*, which indicates they knew also of the promises to Abraham. They blessed her with fruitfulness and victory in war.

This is the promise to Sarah, *Genesis 17:16,* at her name change, and the promise to Abraham, *Genesis 22:17,* at the time of the near sacrifice.

Rebekah was waiting for her own religious class to claim her - to be bound with a fellow Hebrew seems her goal. Her decision was swift, within a day, for she recognised it as providential, and so she and her maids mounted the camels and waved away their previous life, *Genesis 24:61*. As the caravan moved off, she must have held great hopes in her heart, but there were tragic disappointments ahead. The precious nurse, Deborah, was with her. The lament at her death, *Genesis 35:8,* shows how Rebekah and her son, Jacob, cherished her.

The journey may have taken several months, and Abraham would have been shifting his herds around from station to station, though his location would have been known. It is therefore likely that Rebekah visited all of these compounds, moving south to Beersheba, before coming near Beer Lahai-roi. They were searching for Isaac. He was returning to Hebron to his mother's old compound, from the wells, where he may have been already pasturing flocks and herds. This remote southern station was Hagar's well, before she went off into the Wilderness of Paran. It became Isaac's favourite residence, *Genesis 35:11*.

Consider:

* Where are these compounds?

* Did Abraham remain in Hebron, where Sarah had died? This was where her compound was, for Isaac had taken over her tent, into which he invited Rebekah.

* or did Abraham return to Beersheba?

* Where was the well of Lahai-roi of *Genesis 25:11*, compare *Genesis 16:14*, which Isaac favoured?

* Or is only the meaning of the name "*Well of the living One who sees me*" important?

* When did Isaac set up this compound much further south?

* If it is Hagar's well, and so close to Egypt, on the trade route actually, why choose that spot to settle?

****

4. ISAAC IS WAITING FOR HIS WIFE

And Isaac was waiting for her. He had waited a long time for a wife arrangement. He was in the fields meditating, or mourning his mother. When Rebekah saw Isaac, she got down off the camel, and veiled herself. It was a custom, and still is in some countries, for women, or inferiors, to walk, not ride, in the presence of men, or superiors. Unmarried ladies were enveloped in a body and face veil, when approaching their bridegrooms, and Rebekah did so, because she was respectful and courteous, and also because Isaac needed to identify her as his bride. It is thought that married ladies did not wear veils, for the Egyptians and Abimelech saw the beauty of Sarah and Rebekah. There were many types of veils for women to use for

different occasions. It is interesting that, today, Christian women are not veiled, while other religions have differing practices with reference to female face veiling.

Isaac took Rebekah to his mother's tent and she became his wife. His mother's tent was in Hebron, and so together Isaac and Rebekah built their family life together there, until the move to Gerar. By the death of Abraham, at least 35 years later, Isaac had moved to Beer Lahai-roi, where he had a compound. If Abraham had stayed in Hebron after Sarah's death, (for he had come to bury her from Beersheba), there would have been two families there, and this seems untenable, and not the usual custom when families were not interdependent. Isaac had herds of his own already. Close family proximity engenders too much strife between herdsmen, as happened with Lot. Abraham probably moved back to Beersheba with his immediate family, but he sent away the sons of his concubines to the east country, away from Isaac. We know that Hagar and her child went to the border with Egypt, and Keturah's people went to Midian, south eastern Sinai.

Abraham must have been comforted, that the plan to marry off Isaac worked so well. Eliezer told him all about the journey, about the family in Haran, about their history, since Abraham's departure, about their wealth, and no doubt about their spiritual well being.

But as Isaac glanced around, in the distance

A far off train of camels meets his eye.

And as they come nearer, he can see,

- A maiden veiled

- His unseen God sent bride.

Many poets over the centuries have been roused to write of this wonderful story and that sombre story moves us as well.

CONCLUSION:

It reads for us in *Genesis*, as a great love story beyond Isaac's greatest dreams. The little space in his heart for hope had been nurtured by his father who had made a grand plan for him, and sent Eliezer to Haran. The little space had grown larger as he saw the approaching camels, and he was more pleased still, as he realised who and what Rebekah was. He was blessed with a lovely wife. Truly this was a blessing from God. Isaac's heart was now filled, not with hope, but with gladness, and he was at rest.

Here is a chance for the dysfunction that has plagued this family to be repaired, and we wish this newly married couple many blessings and pray that God's way will be shown through them.

CHAPTER 2

THE CYCLE OF PAIN PASSED ON

"***Because thou hast not withheld thy son … I will bless thee", Genesis 22:16, 17.***

FOCUS:

The section of Scripture about the closing days of Abraham, ***Genesis 25:1-18,*** with its genealogical lists, detailing his descendants, is a witness to God's faithfulness in fulfilling his promises. Abraham's entire biography is framed in promise and fulfilment. The intent of this chapter is to bring to a conclusion Abraham's life with his loved son, Isaac.

1. THE CLOSING DAYS OF ABRAHAM

The chapter opens with the marriage of Abraham to Keturah, which we have already discussed in relation to Sarah. We are at a loss to understand when that event took place, and the text is no help. We have our predilection, of course, and hope that it was after Sarah died.

The details here are not in chronological order, and serve only to tell us what happened to Abraham after Isaac's wedding, and thence to Abraham's death, which is fifteen years away, at least. The section about Abraham and Ishmael closes off a big *Genesis* section, making way for the section about Isaac's family life. The two sections are written quite differently and the genres reflect the characters of the two men. Perhaps it was an oral history passed down in two separate family lines, or perhaps the histories were recorded at different times, or initially by different people, before Moses took charge of the inspired recording.

Tucked in, in *verse 11*, there is a comment about Isaac's wealth and his sedentary nature, for he did live by the well, in Lahai-roi. Finally there comes a history of Ishmael, *verses 12-18*, all before the birth of the twins to Isaac and Rebekah. The twins were 15 years old when Abraham died.

2. THE CONSEQUENCE OF ABRAHAM'S AND ISAAC'S OBEDIENCE

We would not question "*why"* God required of Abraham the sacrifice of Isaac (and here remember with gratitude God's sacrifice of His own Son). We are content with the *Hebrews 11* explanation. But we are able to discern, without implied judgement or criticism, the two contrasting characters of Abraham and Isaac, and speculate the impact that the mighty Mount Moriah incident had on both men.

It is as if the two men have been painted by two artists on two different continents. Abraham's and Jacob's momentous lives, not without conflict, with their conspicuous life experiences and grand God blessed journeys, contrast with Isaac's quiet peaceful existence, obedient, submitting, trusting God. Isaac knew of Abraham's growing lifetime faith, and would have heard, and realised, later in his life, of Jacob's learned faith through God's discipline, his misplaced self will and purging disappointments. Surely Isaac in his family concern would hope that **Jacob would overcome the deceit that Rebekah and her brother Laban would later weave into his character.**

* It is interesting to note that in the near sacrifice incident, **Isaac could see, but not wholly understand.**

* In the later deception of Isaac, by Rebekah and Jacob, **Isaac could not see, but understood that something was wrong, *"Is it really you, Esau?"***

The holiness of the *Bible* is not confirmed by a record devoid of painful stories. They are there for the purpose of strengthening our resolve to be like Him. So many of the stories have no God condoning, or God condemning judgment, but that does not prevent us from prayerfully deciding what is right and wrong, and how we should behave from what He has revealed of His mind in other sections of His Word. However, it does prevent us from making our own judgments from our own standards and beliefs, rather than from those of God.

The pattern of pain passed on from the Abraham and Sarah generation is present in the Isaac family unit, but we shall see there are future characters in this family not yet born, who can recover from this disorder. God provided very special circumstances for this family, but men and women often behave dishonourably. Still from this special family dynasty comes a character who literally saves them all and they do, against their inclination, **bow down to him.**

1. Isaac was the son of a famous father

2. And became the husband of a clever woman.

3. He was under the hand of a gracious God,

4. and the management of Abraham,

5. And as well, Rebekah.

6. Never master of his own life,

7. Or of his house, so it is recorded, no harm there for we are leaders/followers.

8. He was cared for, in his failing sight,

9. And organised in this or that,

10. And in a great humiliation, cheated.

Consider:

We could assess the following statements.

* Did Isaac surrender too much for peace?

* Did he degenerate into apathy and thus easily became the tool of the more active members of his family?

* Was Isaac at liberty to be at peace, because of his acquiescence to God's command of Abraham to sacrifice his son, that is, the then young Isaac?

****

In the three years since Sarah's death, with Abraham his only company, Isaac, an only child, was saddled with enormous wealth and an immense inheritance - for Ishmael had long been sent away with his settlement (though Muslims have it that the future promised inheritance belongs to them, through Ishmael).

This might have contributed to Isaac being given to much solitude and meditation. He was overwhelmed by the faith of his father, his goodness, his great and mighty deeds with kings and counsellors, his wealth, his influence and his enormous extended family - a specially chosen man. If Sarah had been away from the main family home, and Isaac had been alone with Abraham, at her death, the bond with Isaac would have been a close one, and would have been even more enriched after her death.

The certitude of Isaac's mother and her forceful personality also contributed to his character, (for we are all conditioned by both parents, as well as our environment). Since Hagar and Ishmael had been banished, and in Abraham's absence on company business, Sarah would

have shared with Isaac the reflected glory of his father, and that would have influenced him as well.

While Isaac was a single man, but mature, he helped with the family herds and went on to establish his own herds, at Lahai-roi, even further south than Beersheba in the Negev region. This existence would have shored up his independent streak and given him steel in his backbone to be a lone person. To be happy alone is not a possibility for some of us, but perhaps it was for Isaac.

And when he was older, Isaac's blindness, would have contributed to his inactivity. His incapacity for 40 to 50 years may not have so distressed his demeanour, or his character, for he naturally, and without effort, was a partaker in the high thoughts that accompanied the patriarchs, sharing in this knowledge of God, and His plan of Redemption. He appears to be an accessory to the great dramas that went before and after him, and that happened round about him. He was probably very content with his spiritual thoughts and his priestly activities, for with Abraham's gift of all his wealth and possessions *(Genesis 25:5)* he had more than enough for comfort, and therefore no concern apart from management, about the family daily existence.

It is possible to note two high points in Isaac's life from the record available to us.

Firstly: the birth of the twins must have been a high point after the long childless years.

Secondly: when the twins were 15 years old at the death of Abraham, when Ishmael had returned to help Isaac bury their father in the expensively acquired cave of Machpelah.

It was the first landed property of the patriarchs for a great specific purpose, and can be seen to this very day. However, it was purchased land, and not inherited, as God had promised the land possession would be.

Abraham had been a sojourner in the land for 62 years and the laying of Sarah in the tomb became the first real occupation of the land. For this mighty occasion 48 years later (the laying of Abraham in the cave) Ishmael, 14 years the senior, and Isaac perform the duty - with or without Abraham's other sons by Keturah. We are not told. This occasion would have been a hiccough in Isaac's placid life, *Genesis 25:9,* and perhaps he would have been grateful when life settled into routine again. It would have been a considerable journey for Ishmael depending how many wives and progeny and servants accompanied him. The occasion would have been a family reunion, as funerals often are, for the two great families may have not seen one another in between times.

There are later low points in this family life of which Isaac may have felt ashamed.

However we could conclude from the record that Isaac's life was generally commonplace.

3. COMMONPLACE LIVES

Those of us who live commonplace lives with a hiccough now and again can take heart that we are represented in *Holy Writ* by Isaac. Life for some seems so plain and ordinary that sometimes they question their importance in the scheme of things, why God has not chosen them for higher things. It need never be questioned, if those (commonplace) lives are lived for God's glory. Isaac (with the details we are given) does glorify the commonplace, except for five or six recorded occasions. His comfortable existence, after the crowning obedience to his father's will of the near sacrifice, and then 3 years after his mother's death, begins with the coming of Rebekah and the beginning of his family life.

4. WELL FUNCTION/DYSFUNCTION MAY BE A MULTI GENERATION INFLUENCE

However, we are about to begin to see that there is a multi generation transmission process at work here in this story, crossing the generations in an alarming way. We begin to see how the Godly heart works, but also how human goodness and human flaws are learned, and how the generations can influence one another for good, but also for evil. Families are complex structures and from being part of the family unit we can learn positive vibes and behaviours, but also negative ones.

It is often in this way, that "*the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children*", *Exodus 20:5,* and perhaps there is something of that in our patriarchal story. Certainly physical attributes can be transmitted, we know that, but often just by modelling, emotional and behavioural problems can be transmitted, as well. Punishment often works itself across the generations, and certainly consequences do, so that the children **are** "*visited*".

Comment:

Spiritual worth can also be transmitted, if great care is taken in valuing Godly things, without extreme. Extremity with self righteousness is not good modelling.

****

Meantime our *Bible* readings about this family teach us not only the facts, but lessons as well, so that our lives may not repeat the mistakes. If mistakes do occur we ought to do everything we can by lengthy discussion, and loving care, and earnest understanding to repair

breaches and prevent re occurrences. We should talk openly about predilections towards generational family dysfunctions that work themselves across the generations - it is a known fact that it can occur. To be aware is, hopefully, to prevent. May God bless our efforts to prevent re occurring family, or indeed, community worshipping dysfunction.

It is interesting that dysfunction is more likely transferred than well function, for so quickly disorder can come from order, before you know it, really; but order from disorder is more difficult, and takes great skill and perseverance.

CONCLUSION:

Now that all the Abraham's family lineage and history and inheritance details have been dealt with, we can move on in Isaac's story.

CHAPTER 3

THE PAIN CYCLE CONTINUES

"***Two nations are in thy womb … and the elder shall serve the younger", Genesis 25:23.***

FOCUS:

Some mighty and deceitful incidents are discussed here, and the results indicate that God forgives the unspoken or unrecorded contrition that must have been in evidence, ***Genesis 25:19-34***.

Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob comprised a small family unit of four characters where all the evil passions show that man *"is deceitful above all things and his heart is desperately wicked".* Isaac was a passive family head, making little effort for influence over the two boys who were so contrary in disposition and lifetime pursuits, not taking control as his father Abraham had done, not keeping in touch with God over the problem, as Abraham had done over his problems. This family situation is described in *Genesis 25* to *28*.

1. FAMILY DYSFUNCTION IN ISAAC'S FAMILY

Rebekah replaced Sarah as the mistress in this next patriarchal group and as she learned to live without her family, she and Isaac, who had married at age 40 years, waited patiently for 20 more years for an heir through which the promises could proceed. Rebekah repeated the childlessness experiences of Sarah, which must have been no less of a trauma for her, unfulfilled as **she** was in **her** cultural role. They knew the promises depended on the birth of a son, and the long waiting period was of no less concern than Abraham's and Sarah's, although Rebekah's waiting time was much shorter. The people of God often require more than one lesson, and it is significant that this couple did not resort to surrogacy, or any other way around the problem. Their full dependence on God was critical and it seems they learned the lesson. Eventually Isaac's prayer is heard and his wife becomes pregnant.

Perhaps Isaac was slight of stature and not physically strong, as he was the son of aged parents, for his birth was almost as miraculous as our Lord's birth, (and Isaac's return from certain death almost as miraculous as our Lord's resurrection). We do not know of any physical differences in beings born of aged parents, and if it is so, God, in this case, would have made up for any disadvantages.

In any case, it would not have been a physical weakness that prevented the birth of his sons for 20 years, but rather that God needed time to emphasis that the continuance of Israel depended upon His intervention.

Rebekah's delight in her pregnancy is overshadowed by the answer from God when she enquires about the children fighting in her womb. She is dismayed. Her inquiry about the movements in her womb is answered. "*Two nations, (peoples) are in your womb, one will be stronger than the other and the elder will serve the younger*", *Genesis 25:23* - not so important today - but the last statement would have set up a cultural deviation, which in those days, would have required great skill to achieve without trauma or family dysfunction.

Consider:

* Knowing this prophecy and Rebekah as an intelligent woman (assuming she told Isaac of God's message) and both enlightened and humbled by the tragedies gone before in Isaac's family, why didn't Rebekah and Isaac plan, with God as their guide, towards this momentous event, so that the brothers would understand and accept their reversed roles?

* Did God use Abraham to tell Rebekah about the two nations in her womb?

* Or, did God speak to her directly?

* Or in a dream?

****

When the time came for Rebekah to have her babies, she gave birth in the privacy of her tent. She straddled two cushioned stones, as countless generations had done before her, above a space intended to receive the newborn. Midwives and maidservants helped with the birth and cut the umbilical cords with a copper knife and washed the babies in water. Then they rubbed them with cleansing salt and oils, and wrapped them firmly in clean strips of woollen cloth.

An interesting phenomenon happened as the first twin was passing through the birth canal. The waiting to be born twin had already grasped the heel of his brother and was struggling also to emerge, and as the midwife lifted the first twin, the other brother also came to birth. The first twin, "*red and hairy*" was called Esau, and the second twin, "*the grasper of the heel*", Jacob. In a reversal of this God was later to grasp Jacob's "*heel*", that is, the thigh sinew that ran down to the heel, to keep him at His side.

Jacob grew to be a slightly built like the average Semite, tough, but Esau was a mountain of a man.

* **Jacob *was* a *"plain man",*** (rendered "*perfect*" for Job*)*, and much later, much older

* **He *grew* to be a *"complete"* man,** with all his personality developed, (for the root of "*tam*" means "*to be complete*"), and

* **He *became* the alternately rendered *"upright".***

Jacob is contrasted here with the description of Esau, as a ***"wild man"*** or ***"skilful in hunting",*** *Genesis 25:27*.

Both Isaac and Rebekah must have felt blessed after such a long wait for their family, but dysfunction began to fester to spoil this loving picture. Each boy grew in a different direction, exactly according to how God had predicted. Jacob was more a homebody than Esau. Jacob helped his mother grind the grain, and churn butter, and baked the flat bread on hot flat stones. He knew about spinning the wool into woollen thread to weave their colourful clothes, and the coats of many colours, (one of which became a gift to a favourite son much later in his life). He knew about the great pieces of goat skin and hair to make and mend tents. With all this activity, close to his mother's side, Jacob became his mother's boy.

Esau was the strong farmer type, but his character was not too much influenced by his father, Isaac. Their own animals were slaughtered for ceremonial occasions, but if Esau was a skilful hunter, *Genesis 25:27*, it was because he killed animals while protecting his sheep, or for food to supplement the grain diet, using a poisoned sharp arrow. Deer, bears, gazelles and wild goats were still common in this area.

2. FAVOURITES IN FAMILIES

The model of Ishmael and Isaac was before them where the elder had to give way to the younger in unpleasant circumstances, and the taste of family resentment, would surely still be present.

The *Companion Bible*, "*Chronological Chart, Appendix 50",* reckons that Ishmael had died at 137, when the twins were 63. This means that the whole family structure and the preferences, and their predilections for one another would have been discussed openly and privately, both with, and within, each family group. Now, incident by incident, the case builds up, and the two parents each favouring one child, allows resentment to build like pressure from a boiling kettle, *Genesis 25:28*.

Surely long term planning and loving discussion, under God, with a united consistent approach, by both parents, could have cushioned the disappointment and strengthened the self worth, so that Esau could have been highly valued in this family unit. Isaac tried to do it alone and almost turned, in his anxiety for Esau, against God's explicit instruction.

Consider:

* Did Isaac favour Esau, because he knew Esau would miss the blessing- to cushion the blow?

* Did he overvalue Esau because he, Isaac, was not the strong outdoor risk taker type that Esau was?

* Did Esau lobby Isaac over the years, to change God's predilection?

* Or was he ignorant of it?

Isaac knew the life of a promised child and heir, as he was that himself.

* Why did he not sympathise with, and so sparingly love Jacob, who had that same role?

* Can Isaac be excused, that he did not know of God's will in the matter, that Rebekah never told him?

****

Isaac's characteristic of not dealing with things unpleasant, leads us to think he probably **did** know. Moreover, he blessed Esau with the words "*thou shalt serve thy brother", Genesis 27:40,* which was part of the promise from God to Rebekah, "*and the elder shall serve the younger", Genesis 25:23*.

If Isaac and Rebekah had worked together on the problem, this family disorder so hard to solve, might have been avoided, and both boys could have learned to act in a Godly way without rancour.

Comment:

All parents fail, sometimes, even often. We know disappointment, and that family disagreements and wrong perceptions are very hard to correct. Children have a great capacity to quarrel and have not much wisdom in confrontation avoidance techniques. They have not the maturity to repair relationships. These techniques need to be specifically taught to children. These become useful tools in living skills, especially for worshipping communities, see -

"*You and Your Child" B. Russell,*

"*Dimensions of a Disciple", S Dawes,*

"*Living together*", *S. Dawes*,

"*Choosing to Love", O. Dawes*.

It is possible for relationships to blossom again after disintegration, but we need to learn how to achieve that.

Devaluing of what is important always underlies family mischief and contributes to dependency on addictions or compulsive behaviour. It develops co dependency - the need to have someone

else responsible for your irresponsible behaviour - a distinct lack of self discipline, like Jacob, in his early days.

Isaac had two major family problems, favouritism and competition.

Favouritism is quite common in families, but can be so unjust and destructive. Every child should be loved, no more no less than another - but each loved differently for its own specialities by its parents. Some fit better in families than others, but it's up to parents to fit and refit the "*ugly duckling*", making him/her special too. **Competition** is healthy, if everyone has a turn at winning - and losing.

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3. THE SOLD BIRTHRIGHT IN ISAAC'S FAMILY

One day at the age of 24, Esau came into the compound empty handed and saw Jacob cooking a red soup. He asked for some of it, remarking that he was famished. Jacob agreed to give him some, only if he would trade it for his birthright. Esau agreed immediately, saying that a birthright was useless if one was dying of hunger anyway. We have to accept the fact that Esau did not give it away, it wasn't taken away from him, he **SOLD** it, and ratified the sale with an oath. We need to consider whether there is any virtue either way, - a gift or a sale, they each shows his disinterest.

Jacob was mean to sell his soup, but Esau could hardly have been dying of hunger within the family compound. It is an ignoble and ignominious story.

It is thought that Esau did not think of lentil soup when he saw the rich red soup, but of blood soup which was thought by some to have magical virtues. This was before the Mosaic legislation against such things. The Noachic prohibition of *Genesis 9:4* was probably forgotten, or ignored. One feature of the magic was that the name of the vital element should not be mentioned. This information, from "*Fathers of the Covenant*", by *H. L. Ellison, page 65,* illuminates this *Scriptural* text and makes the story more understandable, though we are astonished at the performance of such a ritual, as well as the result.

Esau objected to the firstborn blessing being transferred to Jacob, when he was 77 years old, *Genesis 27:27-29*, but sold the birthright on impulse, much earlier, say when he was 24 years old, *Genesis 25:31-33*. See *Companion Bible, "Chronological Chart, Appendix 50"*.

Consider:

* Without wishing to downplay the despised birthright incident, is it possible that famine in the land (recorded at the time) did indeed so seriously affect Esau that he was so very hungry?

* Was he taught the import of the birthright ownership by his parents?

* Was Esau immature for his age?

* Why was food being bought and sold within the family - an odd way for Jacob to obtain the birthright?

* Is this a record of an uncharitable twin brother unable to share, or just a mean brother waiting to make capital wherever he could?

* Was God working in these momentous incidents to secure the birthright and then the firstborn blessing for Jacob, or was He content to give one advantage to each twin?

Job told his friends - "*God has made my heart faint* (with unfair suffering) *yet I am not silenced*".

* Did Job cry "*unfair*", or did he only want to understand the "*why*"?

* Why did Esau cry "*unfair*"?

* Is it the same as the seemingly unfair problem of suffering in our world today?

****

Possibly God would have preferred to have His will worked out another way, if it was a loving family. *Hebrews 12* records Esau as "*godless*" for rejecting his inheritance, and notes that his tears (at the blessing time) brought no reversal.

The tawdry depths to which this family sank from such a (loving) beginning could have been avoided (in principle) if Isaac had been less passive and Rebekah had been less scheming, and if God had been consulted and invited to help the difficult situation. The shout of "*unfair, unfair*" should never have been made by such a mature family member - Jacob and Esau were 77 years old. The message that it is not our prerogative to decide on rewards and blessings or sufferings and persecutions, should have been long taught, (God's instruction was **not** a recipe for disaster), and that it is not ours to decide "*fair*", or "*unfair*".

A united and loving approach by the parents in this patriarchal story, would have cemented the group, rather than create favourites, which brought abnormal dependencies and inappropriate behaviour. We know Hagar and Ishmael had cried (to God) "*unfair, unfair*" and God saw fit to provide. With God's help and Esau's acceptance, Isaac could have emerged from this momentous, God blessed occasion at the pinnacle of his life, with dignity and self worth, but it was not to be.

Abraham, their grandfather, died when these boys were 15 years old - he was spared the spectacle, in the next 62 years, of this family's disintegration into jealousy and strife that should never have been present in such a sacred group. Although the death of Abraham is recorded in *Genesis 25:8,* before the story of the birth of Rebekah's twins, *verse 24*, we know that this part of the chapter, *verses 1-10*, is not a sequentially told story, but a record of Abraham's life from Isaac's marriage until Abraham's death. The same applies to *verses 12-18*, which tell the family history of Ishmael.

4. THE RESULTS OF COMPETITION IN FAMILIES

The birthright exchange in this particular family was not a problem, for it was so devalued, but the competition for the blessing must have been enormous. Perhaps Esau did not devalue that, and did not wish it to be thought that he did. By now his wives and sons would have been encouraging him to enlarge his inheritance, and the family prime blessing would seem an ideal way to achieve that.

This family needed, and all families with enormous problems, need

- Especial strength (from God),

- Support (from community members) and

- Help to formulate a success plan.

They needed to avoid confrontation and to learn to negotiate responsibly, to discipline and disciple their children, so that any plan would work with Godly supervision.

CONCLUSION:

Here, in Isaac's family dynasty, is the first record of a changed birthright and firstborn blessing incident. The manner of the change was not God directed though the interests of God were better served by it. It is better to achieve His end in a God directed way, for this way engendered terrible strife.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORY REPEATED - THE SAY YOU ARE MY SISTER EPISODES ISAAC, REBEKAH, ABIMELECH, PHICOL

"***What is this that thou hast done unto us? One of the people might lightly have lien with they wife, and you thou shouldst brought guiltiness upon us", Genesis 26:10.***

FOCUS:

Now is recorded another surprising incident. The proud Rebekah is subjected to Isaac deceitfully passing her off, not as his wife, but as his sister, another say you are my sister incident. The intent in this chapter is to highlight the deceitful incidents that bring worry and trouble, ***Genesis 26: 1-11***.

1. "SAY YOU ARE MY SISTER" - THIRD TIME NOW

Rebekah must have tumbled to inner turmoil, insecurity and a mistrust of the family structure on this occasion. If they had both been fearful in this situation, it doubles the fear for Rebekah, especially as concubinage is not a stable state, and she would know that she could be sold on. As has been shown, slander was/is a consequence upon God's people in the stories of wife giving or taking. The twins, seeing the incident, learn another generational sin lesson, as their father had learned from **his** father. This then is another consequence of all three instances, yet neither Abram/Abraham nor Isaac seems to have suffered any consequences.

Abraham did it **twice** to Sarah

- once in Egypt, where she was kept from a sexual experience but great plagues came upon the king, so that he knew what Abraham had done, *Genesis 12:13*,

- Once in Gerar, *Genesis 20:2*, with the dire consequences in the concubine's house, where reproduction and related bodily functions all ceased,

And now Isaac does it to Rebekah, *Genesis 26:9*.

The terrible sin lesson is

"*It's O.K. to tell lies*"

"*It's O.K. to deceive the gentiles*"

"*It's O.K. to give your wife away in adultery to save your own life*"

"*It's O K. to double your wife's fear to allay your own*"

"*It's O.K. to multiply your wife's husbands*"

and **it all causes slander on the Name of the Lord and His people.**

With Isaac it is the same place as Abraham's second incident - Gerar. History would have recorded the previous say you are my sister incident. It is unbelievable that it would happen again, here.

Consider:

* Does this incident change the hitherto generous nature of Rebekah that had been in evidence at the wife choosing?

* Is it the same king Abimelech and his same captain, Phicol?

* Or are they fathers and sons?

* Or are they titles, and these two men of the next generation are not necessarily related?

****

Whatever, the Hebrew's name must *"stink"* - as Jacob put it, when **his** sons misbehaved.

In this instance the king does not require Rebekah, but his men servants had made the inquiry of Isaac about the beautiful woman, Rebekah, *Genesis 26:7*. So the lying sin consequence had not moved very far. As well, there are no presents this time from Abimelech, after he had sorted the matter. But rather, after a quarrel, there was a withdrawing by Isaac, away from the Philistines. In all three instances the kings react remarkably charitably to Abraham and Isaac, for the deception **did** cause trouble.

In the matter of Sarah, God told Abimelech in a dream, "*You have taken a married woman*". God had kept Abimelech from touching Sarah, and shut up the wombs of all the women in his family because Sarah was in the household.

Abimelech pleaded his integrity, and asked Abraham why he had done such a thing. Abraham's excuse is unbecoming. He equivocates that Sarah was indeed a relation. Now Isaac commits the same folly. Surely on reflection in a saner moment, he would not commit such folly.

These Abimelechs certainly appear to be (at least partial) believers, and not idolaters

2. ISAAC AND ABIMELECH DISCUSS REBEKAH

One day Abimelech, the king looks out of a window in the palace and sees Isaac embracing his wife, in a sexual context. The king then understands that this is no sibling, or social relationship, and so he rebukes Isaac, for saying that his wife was his sister, "*for someone may have been unknowingly guilty of a great sin*". Isaac had used the same family excuse as his father, to save his own skin, because Rebekah was very beautiful. Abimelech tells his men not to molest Isaac or his family and the family, for a time, lives peaceably and prosperously in the land. Twice this Philistine family has been tricked by God's family, the representatives of God on the earth, the chosen race, the missionaries about God to their neighbours. Isaac never defended himself and we need not do so. It's useless to palliate Isaac's conduct, it was unworthy. As with David, it must have caused the enemies of God to blaspheme, if not the generous king, and his subjects. The three patriarchs of God artfully played with the lives of loved women, and are recorded as

dealing in stealth and deceit to preserve their own needs. We are grateful that the *Old Testament* culture has moved to a higher *New Testament* culture where our Lord Jesus Christ elevated women to their rightful place.

In the matter of wife devaluing,

Abraham's actions, and

Isaac's actions, and

David's actions

are really all of a piece,

in the context of moral values.

3. THE DEVALUATION OF REBEKAH

There is no hint of blame recorded over the say you are my sister incidents, as there was over David's murdering a man to gain his wife. **The former (Abraham, Isaac) gave their wives to other men, the latter (David) takes a wife from another man**.

Both are humiliating incidents for the women concerned, if they did have a sense of self worth, but probably both incidents were equally acceptable culturally. It may be that the murder of Uriah was the consolidating wickedness for David's denunciation by the prophet Nathan, when David took the wife of another man.

The lesson of Bathsheba's washing is available today in third world countries, especially if one is accommodated in high rise hotels. Sometimes the only privacy available for those who live in poverty is for us to avert our eyes.

Comment:

It was culturally acceptable for women to be used to cement political alliances, and to demonstrate goodwill to neighbours. Women had few rights and as they had no means of support they went where they were told, and did what others decided they should. The actions of Abraham and Isaac may be better understood in this context, as there were no unmarried female relatives to hand, with whom they could bargain. This may seem a more legitimate reason for the bad behaviour, in some people's eyes, that Abraham and Isaac compromised their wives for political reasons, rather than that they were afraid. It was a well established practice to renew treaties with each succeeding generation, and we have another instance in the wells incident, of Abraham and Isaac. If viewed in this light, it is a better explanation, than the excuse for the repeating bad behaviour, that the story has been confused from one instance, and somehow separated into three stories, and placed in the text as three separate stories, and is no more than literary repetition. For obvious reasons this is a poor choice, for we remember our belief in inspiration (except for the transcription and translation errors) and therefore find this a difficulty.

Fear or political alliance seems the only reason for this lack of confidence in God by these two patriarchs.

As women were so degraded in all cultures and nations as the centuries rolled by, it is no wonder that Jesus, in his teachings, elevating women to their creation status with man, was able to free half of creation and give women freedom to learn, and to live, and to worship together, in

complementary roles in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the family and in the spiritual community. At last both men and women could make an outward sign of commitment, in baptism, rather than the restricting circumcision. The old Jewish prayer of thanks that he "*was not born a woman*", was answered by Paul in *Galatians 3:16* that male and female **were** "*one in Christ*", for he also supported the new, (originally ordained), role for women.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

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Consider:

* To what extent is the cultural position of women, that is, their devaluation, responsible for the behaviour of these two women in the patriarchal family?

* Can it be used as an excuse, or only a reason - for bad behaviour?

* So much harm can be done, can it ever be undone?

****

These deceitful incidents in Abraham's and Isaac's lives, and those of the twins, are inexcusable. What care parents must take for lessons in devaluation of each other. Deceit and lying are easily learned and hardly eschewed, but a lie cannot be a base for Christian fellowship - the end never justifies the means. Those who tamper with the truth, tamper with vital forces in human endeavour.

Down through the centuries

we read of restoration,

that is never complete,

until the Son of Man did come.

We know

that those who love him,

can be forgiven,

and made perfect again,

"***in Christ",***

under God's healing Hand.

CONCLUSION:

Deceit has moved into the family life of Isaac, and continues the dysfunction. That is the price we pay for deceit.

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Digression:

Sadly, soon after our Lord Jesus Christ made the concessions to women, the new and growing church reverted to the old oppressions. The history of women, from the first century, now well

documented by women such as *Susan Dowell* in "*They Two Shall Be One - Monogamy in History and Religion*", reveals the extent of the injustices practised upon women. The *Bible* records some for us, but the records of the Catholic Church and secular history from the first century reveal the effects of division, degradation, divorce, polygamy and slavery. We are told of women, desiring so much to be holy, being told by the priests, that a female child was the result of a defect sperm, that women were required to subdue their femaleness, and so they become anorexic, with amenorrhoea, desexing themselves as best they could. Virginity and chastity were not enough, salvation was by maleness. In the end it was impossible, because they could not eliminate all their feminine traits. They were told to be content that they could never reach the standard, that is, the male standard, which God required.

Although the anti discrimination laws of our times have mostly eliminated injustices in the Western World, rural Indian and African women are still trying to win self determination. The women of Afghanistan are more oppressed than the blacks of South Africa ever were.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not preach new ideals, he preached original ideals, see *Genesis 1:27,* where we learn that God created man and woman in His own image. Although the Law of Moses had, within it, laws for divorce and polygamy and slavery, the *New Testament* writers remind us that in the beginning "*it was not so*", for example, *Matthew 19:8*.

Competition over whose was the first Edenic sin, are odious, for God's image was upon them both. One was deceived, one acted in full knowledge. The sin they committed created a terrible conflict between them, which we are bound by the Lord Jesus Christ to overcome.

CHAPTER 5

ISAAC AND ABIMELECH AND ANOTHER WELLS INCIDENT

"***And Isaac digged the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham, for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham", Genesis 26:18.***

FOCUS:

There is a short story in ***Genesis 26:12-33***, that provides the Beersheba setting for this family of Isaac, and the deceitful blessing incident between Jacob and Esau**.** Isaac lived near the king of the Philistines, in Gerar and became very prosperous, a fact that angered some of the Philistines.

1. THE WELLS INCIDENT

Isaac had come, in a weakened state from famine, where he may have lost many of his animals. He came from the well, Lahai-roi, closer to the coast, to Gerar, prospering greatly there under the Philistine king, Abimelech. God warned him not to go down into Egypt, to wait out the drought, and at the same time reiterated the blessings. After the say you are my sister incident, Abimelech generously passed a law that on pain of death Isaac's family were to be unmolested. Isaac's diligence with inherited wealth and possessions, and good business practices here, made him a wealthy man again, *verse 12*. This wealth indicates that the blessings were beginning to take shape. It caused unrest amongst the Philistines, so Abimelech asked Isaac to move further down the valley of Gerar, from the place where he had sown crops.

The Philistines had stopped up some wells previously dug by Abraham, and Isaac unstopped them. He called one Esek (strife) and another Sitnah (enmity), because of the Philistines objections. They were Isaac's family wells. It may be that the wells treaty should have been negotiated again by the next generation, Isaac, in accordance with the custom at that time, and he had neglected to do so. The digger of a well was really a public benefactor, and so the Philistines quite rightly regarded the water as theirs, if and when they wanted it. Isaac, with increasing wealth in his flocks, could not do without it, so he as well, is rightly concerned.

Comment:

It is interesting that Abraham did not inherit land, yet he dug wells. He held a dialogue document for Machpelah which he obviously passed on to his children. He did not inherit land from elsewhere is what is meant in *Acts 7:5*. Whether he "*owned*" the wells, as well as the field/cave, (Machpelah) is conjecture. *Genesis 21:30* to *26:18* seem to indicate that he did "*own*" them, but the general opinion is that he certainly dug them, but they became community wells at his death. Perhaps Isaac did not claim them at Abraham's death, nor ever used them, and they had dried up in drought times. Perhaps a dialogue deed was not active in the land of the Philistines.

****

To solve the problem Isaac graciously moved on from strife and enmity, and dug Rehoboth (room) and prospered here as well. This well is still there, being identified at the waddy Ruhaibeh, though it is stopped up. It is twelve feet in diameter and cased with hewn stone. Moving again, Isaac found water at Shiba. Isaac asked his servant to try to activate these Abraham wells and was pleased when his servants cried out that they have found water. To this day the well there is called Beersheba, *Genesis 26:23*. Here God speaks to Isaac again, and repeats the promises. God generously gives Isaac plenty of cause to feel blessed, as God keeps repeating His covenant to him. **This compensates Isaac for leaving Lahai-roi where he had long resided**.

Abimelech (again we question, idolater or believer), saw that God was with Isaac and came with Phicol from Gerar, to make a treaty of peace, almost as if Abimelech wants God's blessings, as he sees that Isaac has. It is an act of homage. On the other hand it may have been that Abimelech wanted to retain the friendship with Isaac, when he feared that Isaac may be influenced against him by his new neighbours. This is hardly a cynical thought, but rather that the Abimelech dynasties valued the relationships with Abraham and his son, Isaac. It may be that the two ideas applied to the Isaac/Abimelech relationship, priest/worshipper and friendship/treaty. If so this is indeed a valuable friendship with many facets.

Comment:

We need to note that, in *Genesis 21,* just after Isaac's birth and Hagar's final dismissal with Ishmael, to the Wilderness of Paran, an Abimelech and Phicol had a discussion over a well that Abimelech's servants had stopped up, causing Abraham to complain. That Abimelech and Phicol, some sixty years earlier had come from Gerar, and made a treaty, **here in Beersheba**, with Abraham, using God as witness. The relationship of these stories to one another is unnerving, and the questions should be dealt with. We can omit the literary repeating idea, but we need to assess in our minds again, whether

- They were fathers and sons, or

- The same king and captain, or, rather,

- There was a necessity to remake treaties every generation, according to the custom.

Beersheba never lost its name again, and is so called today, although the exact town location is a difficulty. It is a tribute to the impressive reputation that Abraham and Isaac enjoyed, that their well and its water there, represents the covenant of promise and security made between God and the patriarchs, in return for their obedience. Also that the water of Beersheba, as discussed in relation to Abraham, was available to General Allemby of the Allied Forces, even in this century, during World War 1, when twenty four hours after capturing Beersheba, he was pumping and supplying four hundred thousand gallons of water a day to his famished troops.

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CONCLUSION:

The repeating of the covenant to Isaac at Beersheba emphasises that God has been gracious again, and forgiven the indiscretion against Rebekah.

CHAPTER 6

THE PAIN OF SEPARATION

"And Esau hated Jacob ... and Isaac sent away Jacob", Genesis 27:41.

FOCUS:

Deceit finds its way into the Isaac family once more, and the resulting dysfunction destroys this family in such a way that its unity never recovers. The long story is told in ***Genesis 26:34*** **to** ***28:10.***

At the end of *chapter 26*, and of *chapter 27*, there are two verses that indicate the state of mind of Isaac and Rebekah about Esau. His two marriages to Hittite women were a constant source of grief to them, and no doubt their presence, and that of their children, caused no little stress in Isaac's family compound. On the basis of this little piece of information the story of the blessing incident is then narrated by Moses.

1. THE DECEITFUL BLESSING INCIDENT SETTING

After we are told of the wells incident comes the deceitful blessing incident, *Genesis 27.* It is a story so often told with relish, for children enjoy the sneakiness of it, and adults appreciate the sensitivity with which Moses handles the moral ambiguity. The author of this incident story makes no judgement and allows the narrative to flow to its sad conclusion.

2. REBEKAH DETERMINES THE BLESSING ARE MEANT FOR JACOB

Esau, dutiful, but self satisfied, so much a counterpart of Ishmael, is despatched by Isaac, who fears an imminent death, to prepare some tasty dish, so that he may gather strength to bless his heir, before his death. It is as if Isaac follows the carnal, and not the spiritual desire of his nature. Isaac favours Esau for his heir and intends to so bless him.

At this point

1. It is difficult for Isaac to remember, or

2. It is blurred in his mind, or

3. It is a fact he never knew, that the blessings would come through Jacob. However, it is almost impossible for us to think that Rebekah never told him of God's predilection.

Isaac's wife Rebekah, hiding in the tent curtains, overhears the request, and because she wants her favourite son, Jacob, to have the blessing, as well as the birthright which he obtained from Esau earlier, she tells Jacob what he can do to deceive his father. So many of us think we are indispensable to God's will. We accept God's will, but we cannot trust Him to carry it through. Rebekahs - all of us.

Consider:

* Is Rebekah motivated by a high spiritual motive, that God wants the blessing for Jacob, so she helps that along?

* With the knowledge of Abraham's response to God's call being in the Haran family sagas, (and so well known to Rebekah), and with her own enthusiastic response to be part of that in her marriage to Isaac, can we excuse Rebekah, that she so desperately wants Isaac to do God's will?

****

Whatever her motive, the crisis has come, and Rebekah is willing to pay the price, for she says she will accept the curse (from Isaac, but more probably Esau), and she advises Jacob that the curse is not to deter Jacob from the plan - so now he has a true partner in crime.

We are not told what the curse would be, but perhaps it turned out to be

- The life she lived later with Isaac, without her sons and their families,

- Or even her early death,

- Or obscurity for her, of some sort, until her burial in the family tomb.

3. GOD IS IN THE TERRIBLE DEED

By covering his skin with goat's hair and wearing Esau's garments, Jacob easily deceives his father, even using the name of God to verify it. Jacob affirms that Esau and God are together present in this unholy incident. Esau was not, but certainly God was. Deceit accompanied by a kiss is otherwise known in *Scripture* as well, but here it is accompanied by the deceit of clothes. Isaac's sight was impeded, but he heard the lie and touched and smelled Esau, and it all helped to emphasise this deceitful kiss. Indeed God's sovereignty is present in the deed, even if it is deceitful, for nothing could make the deed Godly if God did not wish it so. God's hands are not bound beyond His will. To steal such a blessing is to steal trash, that is, it is no blessing. That it eventuated as a blessing, and not trash, we must concede then, hard though it is, that it is a God blessed deed.

Consider:

* What are Esau's garments, held in his mother's tent? They could not be his home or farm garments, for they would be in his own tent.

* Were they priestly garments, and had he been doing priestly duties as his father grew older?

* But as he had sold the birthright, did that mean he sold with it the right to be the family priest?

* If Esau had been doing priestly duties, is that why Isaac is confused over the blessing?

* Or had the priestly duties been cancelled?

* Is this making too much about the clothes in Rebekah's tent?

* What is the order of placement on Jacob, of the garments and the hairy skin "*garment*"?

* Does Jacob really deceive Isaac?

* And is Isaac so amiable, that he will participate in the deceit?

* Will Isaac pretend to be deceived, because he remembers how the blessing should be placed?

* Or when does he realise that he has been deceived?

* Is the blessing cut short, when Isaac realises his mistake?

The "*trembling*" of Isaac in *verse 33*, seems genuine enough, and so we should probably take the story on face value, though there are alternatives.

* Does Isaac recognise now that he has sinned?

* Because Isaac had tried so hard to do God's will, does he tremble because he realises God has been present at this terrible deed?

****

There is no record that Isaac ever reproved Rebekah or Jacob, but later, he may have reproved Rebekah, in the tragedy of the childless life that they now entered into. No curse by Isaac is recorded, but probably Esau (and his wives and family), did curse his mother, (and their grandmother).

Comment:

The meaning of "*Who are you my son?*" is "*How did it go?*" that is, "*How did the hunting and preparation go?*" The same applies in *Ruth 3:16*, where the aged Naomi asks Ruth how she fared with Boaz. She knows it is Ruth, and would not have been requesting her to identify herself. In answer to the question Ruth describes the happy outcome. So here, Isaac assuming it is Esau, asks him to describe the hunting scene. Jacob quickly adapts his answer and regains his confidence, and persists in the deceit. But blind Isaac doubting his auditory sense, must touch and smell, as well.

****

Rebekah uses an age old shepherd's trick to convince Isaac that it is Esau. The mother ewe cannot be convinced to suckle another's lamb, unless that lamb is dressed in the skin of her dead lamb. So Rebekah's trick is a well known livestock trick.

In *Bible Review Magazine*, *November/December 1998, Bertram Rothschild* puts forward an interesting point of view. He canvasses that Isaac was not really deceived, and knew all along that Esau was really Jacob. Isaac "*discerned him not*", but *Rothschild* questions Isaac's judgement, and he questioned us as well, asking us to think about, whether "an intelligent man would ask a son to go out, and hunt, and kill, and prepare, and cook, a task of many hours, perhaps even a chancy task, and that Esau would find a suitable animal. And all of this because

he felt ill, or felt himself on the brink of death, or that he had a great need to proceed with a blessing ceremony. There would be quite enough food in such a camp, to restore Isaac's strength, if that was all that was necessary. The voice and hairy skin and venison deceit persuaded Isaac too easily, for he proceeded without very much investigation. Isaac would have to be senile to accept the deception, and so he is more likely part of the conspiracy".

There is nothing in the text to obviate *Rothschild's* idea, though it is difficult to accept deception by Isaac, as well as Rebekah and Jacob, in this story.

It may be that Isaac was party to such a conspiracy, because the Esau camp at home was too numerous and powerful. We do not hear about any of the family's reaction to the deceitful blessing incident, but no doubt there was considerable disquiet, with no small family rift. Considering Esau's unsuitability, and the predilection of God, Isaac conceded that Jacob should have the blessing, but he also knew that he needed to move in a circumspect manner. If Esau fully understood the intention of Isaac, he certainly showed incompetence in being absent for such a long time, at such a crucial time in his life. Isaac needed to **show** he doubts that it is Esau, and with his question, "*Who are you*?" any bystander would think he obviously needed reassurance. But with that question he ironically makes Jacob complicit in the plot, by openly asserting the lie. If Jacob is not willing to be part of the conspiracy, then everyone would have had to wait for Esau's reception of the blessing. But Jacob tells a lie and sets the deceit.

We need to consider the merits of this idea. It certainly cuts across our usual understanding, but that does not discredit the idea. The text is not helpful in the decision.

4. THE POST BLESSING SCENE

The post blessing scene, when Esau cries out in bitterness, must surpass any other Bible incident for pathos. It is an heart rending scene when Esau brings the soup for his father, so that he will be strong enough to give him the blessing. He thinks physically, not spiritually, but is angry at what he hears. He is just in time to hear the closing words of his father to Jacob. He hears Isaac say to Jacob, "*Let thy mother's sons bow down to thee*", and the dominion prerogative for Jacob, angers Esau, and he is filled with murderous intent to kill Jacob after the anticipated death of Isaac.

The scene is piteous, and

Esau cries -

"***He (Jacob) is rightly named,***

He is a supplanter,

He took the blessing,

Like he took the birthright.

What about my blessing?

Is there any blessing left?"

Isaac -

"***What can I do my son?***

I have given the blessing".

Esau -

"***Hast thou one blessing left?***

Only one?

Something, my father?

But ***bless me with something".***

"***And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept", verse 38.***

Comment:

It is because of the tears of Esau, and the fact that they did not value the blessings of Jacob, that his "*brothers*", the Jewish people, have shed so many of their own tears in their life of suffering, that has been their lot over the centuries. **Still, in this time now, they are in conflict**, they are not Esau's descendants, they are Jacob's heirs. They had a tremendous opportunity, but they, in their sinful rejection of God's plan, have not taken advantage of that. They rejected both the birthright and the blessing so generously given by God to Jacob, (and they then were "*allowed*" to stand by God in the deceit).

It is interesting to note that those of Esau's family in the Middle East today have been known to say, "*Who said Esau gave up the blessing, it isn't in* ***our*** *Scriptures. He never did give it all up for it was wrenched from him, and is being wrenched from us again today, at this time"*. This makes their claim for land, legitimate in their eyes, and for us a consideration, before we condemn them outright.

****

It might seem to us that Esau never really overcame the hurt, that began with his careless appreciation and ended with this deceitful blessing, but later in his life, when we meet him again, there are incidents that lead us to think he may have recovered and understood.

It is here that Esau's cry, of "*deceitful*", "*supplanter*" indicates the alternate meanings of the name Jacob, and in this context of Esau's anguish, *Genesis 27:6*, it is certainly true. The heel man had grasped him three times now

firstly - at his birth,

secondly - over the birthright, and

thirdly - now, with the blessing.

Esau probably forgot that he readily sold away the birthright and he probably never knew that the blessing was not to be his. So he wept, when he was left with nothing - and insisted on something from his father.

Esau's great anxiety over the blessing, (no doubt encouraged by his wives of thirty years, and his sons), may have been motivated by the fact that it could have been a means of resecuring the birthright. With inheritance rights, that is the birthright, would come a double blessing. Perhaps this was better understood at this stage in Esau's life, than when he hungered, and readily sold away his right. But it was not to be.

Perhaps the Spiritual import of the blessing had never greatly concerned him, so really it was possessions for which he hungered now. Later he became rich with possessions, so he may have felt the hatred fading and was then more reconciled to his brother

5. ISAAC'S REACTION TO THE DECEIT

Isaac now confused and concerned, tried to demonstrate to Esau his love for him.

Esau did get a blessing from Isaac, because Esau implored him so, but it would not be enough to placate Esau. We wonder at the feelings and expression of this large extended family of Esau after this incident, and even in later generations of the family.

The land that Esau would inherit would be "*far from the fatness and well watered land*", (that is a preferred translation). He would inherit a land, "*which by its barrenness forced him to a life of adventure, military service and free booting*", comment from commentary by *Ellicott*. The richest blessing had been given to Jacob, so Esau had to be content with earning his existence in another fashion. God kept faith with this blessing and the Edomites, in Edom, where he went, did well for some time, but they were later yoked to "*Jacob*". They later succeeded in breaking the yoke, but generally Edom served his brother.

Comment:

The *Old Testament* prophecies tell us a considerable amount about the Edomites, especially in the book of "*Obadiah*". The selfish incident, that we might remember well, was the Edomites forbidding the Israelites to come through their land, "*only on the highway, we will not touch anything, and if we do, we will repay*", when they were journeying into the Promised Land, *Numbers 20:14-21*. But the Edomites would not relent.

****

The final blessing for Esau was "*the time will come when you grow restive and break off his yoke from your neck*". If anyone thinks that a blessing will come to those who throw off the yoke of the God appointed one, they are much mistaken, and it meant ultimate destruction, for this was not a blessing **- but a curse.**

Rebekah, hopefully, tinged the triumphant satisfaction, over her success, with sympathy for Esau's disappointment. But we wonder if maybe she had lost all feelings for him. He had been half her longed for treasure. It seems difficult to contemplate that she had lost her feelings for this precious God given gift.

6. THE AFTERMATH OF THE TERRIBLE SCENE

Jacob was now fearful over the fury of Esau, and his murderous intent, but Rebekah was beside him, thinking up an extension to her plan, to cover this new contingency. "*Get away, get away*", advice, tinged with cover up, "*go, and tarry there a few days … til fury and anger turns away… til he forget… then I will send and fetch you*". "*Why should I be deprived of you both in one day*"? She must have thought, and become fearful, about Esau being a target for blood revenge, if he killed Jacob, *2 Samuel 14:6, 7,* or, she may have, thought that the offended Esau would take his family and go, after this incident. Either way she reckoned she stood to be deprived of both sons until after the mourning days for Isaac's death.

Isaac lived another 43 years after this terrible incident, and that leads us to wonder whether Esau would have made the condition, if he had known of the extended life of his father. The

length of time diluted the murder intent, and gave Esau occasion to shrug it off. An imminent death would have brought a murder scene out of pure unadulterated revenge, and all that would result from that Cain like murder. Still we are thankful that Esau is only a Cain head in the making, and he is prevented from fulfilling his intention by Jacob's flight.

Perhaps Jacob did not know of the condition laid on the intent, (the stay of execution for a more suitable time, after the mourning days for Isaac).

However, with the blessing, came the imperative for Jacob to marry within the Nahor family, so that the blessed line would continue, rather than taking a wife from round about, the same constraint (or privilege) that had been upon Isaac, his father. It is the emphasis on family again, for righteous women would have been available amongst Melchizedek's family in Salem. Still it is more preferable for Jacob to escape north on this occasion.

So Isaac's scheming wife and her favourite submissive son ignited a quarrelling situation into an explosive affair which resulted into a terrible threat of murder of one of the twins, the only children of a patriarch. Shades of another God blessed family. This shadow is a Cain and Abel shadow. In the story of Cain, we remember his possible remorse over the murder of his brother, and the consequence of that sin. We do know however that this Cain head, Esau, was provoked by deceit and favouritism on the part of his parents. That is no excuse, only a reason for his murderous intent. To his credit he later retreated from that intention.

Consider:

* Is the threat as good as the deed?

* Does Esau become Cain like, with a mark on his forehead, to save him from extinction?

* Did he, Cain like, ever have feelings of regret and repentance, when he retreated from the murder intent, or was it time that wore the murder intent thin?

* Did Esau/the Edomites now depart "*from the presence of the Lord*" as Cain did?

****

To our disappointment there are other Cain heads in this story, and we will hear about them subsequently. Meantime, this murderous intent may have been kept from Isaac, as Rebekah struggled to keep the situation under control, and find a way out for Jacob. It would have been extreme cruelty for Isaac to know of Esau's plan and hopefully he was spared that indignity, for the situation must have been, without that knowledge, distressing enough for Isaac. To have knowledge of some terrible deed to be committed at your death would be intolerable. Mother and favourite son would be at great pains to hide the true reason for Jacob's hasty exit from the compound, for Esau, of a more basic nature, would have blurted out his intent to whoever would listen. Rebekah never doubted that he was capable, being strong enough, of carrying out such a threat. Since they had not trusted God to carry out His plan for blessings, she would not now trust him to save the blessed one. So it was left to Jacob to learn from the family far away that personal cleverness and wisdom was not God's way.

7. THE PRESENT HAS FAR REACHING CONSEQUENCES

Birthrights and blessings were status symbols within the family. They appeared to be the rights of the eldest child, but that was not necessarily so. In our story the issue was turned upside down and caused considerable angst.

Comment:

The birthright was the status of the firstborn, which bestowed headship of the family and a double portion of the estate. Here, in this family, this status has a special significance of both privilege and responsibility in continuing the line of Abraham, and fulfilling the promises made to him. Ancient documents show that among contemporary Hurrians, (probably the ancient non Semite Horites of *Genesis 14:6*), **the birthright was transferable, either by a decision of the father (see also *Genesis 49:3, 1 Chronicles 5:1)* or purchase by another brother, *(Lifeguard Bible Study, "Genesis", Charles and Anne Hummel,* *page 105*)*.***

****

We do not need to say -

"*Oh well birthrights were being sold all about them*".

We do not need to equivocate and say,

"*Well, the blessing had to be acquired by the younger Jacob in some way, therefore*

Jacob's treachery and Rebekah's deceit are justified".

That argument obviates Abraham's statement (at the near sacrifice of Isaac), "*The LORD will provide*". God would have provided, if Sarah and Rebekah had waited. It seems God's hand is forced, and the result is not ideal, for two women in two generations have tried to "*commit*" God to work how **they** thought best. God "*accommodated*" Himself to the circumstances that prevailed, but He could have arranged things otherwise, if He had wished. God allowed Rebekah's scheme to succeed. He did not allow Sarah's scheme. In each case the consequences were far reaching, but for Sarah's scheme we are troubled even today.

We must remember that much earlier (37 years before this incident) Esau, marrying, had probably felt, with Rebekah favouring Jacob, the lack of a mother's love. He turned more quickly than Jacob for the love of other women, - Hittites. Perhaps Esau had not favoured going north for his first wives, or Isaac did not request it of him. There would have been opportunity then, to go to Salem for a wife as well, if he, or the family, had been so inclined.

However at this time, seeing Jacob going to the Haran family for a wife, Esau feels urged to conform in the same way, and marries the daughter of the firstborn of Ishmael and Ishmael's first wife, Mahalath, and therefore marries into the family as well (only in a different direction). Still no one turns to the righteous Melchizedek's Salem family for a wife, and the Haran bloodline is still favoured, perhaps only for circumspect reasons at this time.

****

Both Isaac and Rebekah were unhappy with the Hittite women Esau had married, *Genesis 27:46*. Grandchildren from this marriage would be around the dwelling of Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob. Perhaps these offspring had learned the customs of their mothers and were speaking their language, a foreign tongue. Later in *Nehemiah 13:24,* this "*mother tongue*", by the children of Israel's mixed marriages, was a confusion in Israel, causing untold problems. Here, not only would there be language confusion, but as well, they would be learning the ungodly family lessons modelled by this family. It is confusing for children to have Godly lessons mixed in with so much godlessness.

If Isaac and Rebekah were impotent in the matter, the Hittite influence can only be imagined by us, for those grandchildren would be married and reproducing themselves now. The situation must have become a great source of irritation, especially to Rebekah, who though the matriarch, would be entirely outnumbered. One can only imagine the little petty incidents that would cause irritation among the women. Probably Isaac would not care to listen to such trivia.

8. JACOB GOES TO HARAN TO ESCAPE ESAU'S WRATH

None of these four characters knew that Isaac would live for another 45 years, blind and incapacitated. Esau and Jacob at this time were 77 years old. After Rebekah had hatched a plan with Jacob to escape the murderous intent of Esau, she came to Isaac and suggested that Jacob go to Haran, to seek a wife from among their own people. It appears that Jacob never wanted the wealth of Isaac for himself, and to go away now ensures that he never would receive it. His return, as a wealthy man many years later, is still no match for the wealth of Esau.

Isaac is happy to send Jacob on his way with a further blessing, of fruitfulness of progeny and with Abraham's land blessings, *Genesis 28:3, 4*. There is no suggestion here that a trusted servant be sent to secure a suitable wife and, of course, Rebekah would be anxious to avoid such a suggestion, as she knew Jacob himself must depart from this place.

"*And Isaac sent Jacob on his way*", *Genesis 28:5*. Rebekah thought it would be only for a while and she would soon send for him but, although Esau's fury did subside, and he welcomed Jacob back generously, it was not for 20 years, and Rebekah had died and Isaac was old and frail, living alone for many years.

The struggle between Jacob and Esau had begun in Rebekah's womb, and caused her to ask God about it. He told her there were two nations in her womb, one would be stronger than the other, and that the elder would serve the younger. So Isaac had repeated this message from God to both Jacob and Esau, as his blessings, *Genesis 25:23* - one, red and hairy Esau, being held back by the other, heel grasper, Jacob.

Comment:

We can look back upon the repercussions from the Isaac/Ishmael incident, and then compare that with this struggle between these two brothers, (which went on for 77 years), and we see another Trans generational condition. The sibling struggles in these two families, are the basis of the struggles now in the world, between the Jews and the Arabs over the Holy Land. It was a family conflict, it is a family conflict, and will remain so until the Saviour's second coming, and until Israel along with all peoples, repents of the wickedness that has enveloped them. They will then accept His son and God will change their "*stony heart*". For they are now *"not"* His "*sheep*", *John 10:26-27,* for they "*do not hear*" His "*voice*". Our world history tells us that it is not only the Arabs that hate the Jews. The white supremacy movements especially in Europe and America hate the Jews with a positive hate. "*Our hate for the Jews (and blacks and others) is not destructive like a negative hate, it is a positive hate*". Really? That hate certainly could destroy the Jews, as such sentiments in the past have done. Only God will save them.

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Rebekah would have deemed her blessing scheme successful, though it was clothed in misery for her.

Sarah also saw misery, but she never saw from her action with Hagar the rise of the God promised nation and the consequential rise of Islam.

Rebekah never saw any manifestation of the blessings she lured Jacob to attain.

Parental partiality increased the natural rivalry in this family, and the parents took sides and worked against each other. The rivalry was never contained, or dealt with consistently and fairly, and so the struggle became malignant, and almost fatal for this family. The joy of the births of not one, but two sons, is gradually dissipated by the jealousies within the family, so that in the blessing scene each of the four characters neglect the spiritual mind that should have been present on such an occasion. But despite it all, God's love and mercy remains as He works out His purpose.

Consider:

* How could this family not suffer a tremendous fracture, under these circumstances?

* Was there any hope any other way?

* Was Isaac's command*, verses 1-5*, manipulated by the complaints of Rebekah, also instrumental in galvanising Jacob to depart?

Rebekah was sorry when Jacob left, thinking it was only for a short time, *Genesis 27:43-45,*

* How did she feel about Esau's departure the same day, *Genesis 27:45?*

* Did he travel away en famille, wives, children, servants, and possessions?

* With no family left, no sons, no Esau families, just the two of them, did Rebekah still believe that the end justified the means?

It was good advice to Jacob, (to go and marry at Haran), commanded as it was, but the saving of Jacob's life, as well, for it reinforced Rebekah's idea for escaping Esau's murderous fury. Jacob would not have wanted to go, being such a homebody, but he could probably see no other way.

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9. GOD'S INITIAL EVEN HANDEDNESS IN JACOB'S FAMILY

There seems to be an initial even handedness about God's arrangement for these two sons, a birthright for Esau and a blessing for Jacob. But it was not to be. God's plan was discarded over a mess of pottage. Laban, Jacob's mother's brother, continues the deceit, as Rebekah had done weaving it into Jacob's life. His character is shaped by the deceit taught him by Rebekah and Laban, and, of course, there is an effect on his later life. We wonder why we do not avoid deceit when it brings so much unhappiness. Perhaps, with disappointment, his self will is strengthened, and he becomes more purposeful and generous. We shall see.

CONCLUSION:

There remains for us to assess the outcome of this terrible story and the impact it had on the four main characters.

CHAPTER 7

THE FOUR MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE ISAAC STORY -

REBEKAH, JACOB, ESAU, ISAAC

"Why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?" Genesis 27:45.

FOCUS:

If you climb into each of these four characters **(Rebekah, Jacob, Esau, and Isaac)** and allow their characteristics to wash over you for a minute or two, you'll feel uncomfortable. It is the intent of this chapter to explore their characteristics, and assess the outcome of the break up of the Isaac family. ***Genesis 27:40-46*** is a good indication of the relationship of these four characters to one another.

When you think of the Isaac family as an ideal family, with God promised unique goals, sympathy and empathy for His ways, supportive of one another's weaknesses and strengths, each moving for the unity of the group, living in an alien land (a description of our family, or our worshipping communities), we are ashamed to say that their group experiences are often common to us too. The carnal mind overtook the spiritual, at this great moment of patriarchal history. Jacob learned a lesson here, that he, later, (under the patronage of his wise son, Joseph), was able to conduct the blessings of his sons with great dignity and reverence, with prophetical language, and under the influence of the Spirit.

1. REBEKAH

Rebekah's fanaticism, rather like Saul of Tarsus, created terrible destruction in the family relationships. She became the focal point of purposeful activity. She manipulated situations and devised plans to achieve her purpose. Her integrity was compromised, for she was duplicitous. Integers have nothing to hide or fear, but Rebekah did. She was the cleverest of all of the four matriarchs.

She epitomised beauty and was attractive as a virgin at the beginning of her relationship with the patriarchs. She was courteous and self assured, and had an energetic and eloquent gift of speech. The story unfolds for her almost as divine providence, and she seems to accept it as such. The importance of the diplomatic negotiations of the formal treaty between the two families of Terah, and the royal like departure did not escape her.

1. Rebekah's gift of (life giving) water to the servant at his coming

2. The fertility blessing at her departure from Haran,

3. Then the joy of her arrival in Abraham's compound,

4. The consummation of her marriage with Isaac, must have meant for her an immediate gift blessing of family, but that was not to be for twenty years. That may have soured her. **She later learned the certitude and power, which Sarah learned later in *her* life.**

Rebekah believed **- the end justified the means because the cause was right.**

She endorsed this by calling down a curse on herself, not on Jacob, if their ploy did not work. It could be interpreted that her curse was that she never saw her sons again, and her life ended, if not quickly, in obscurity **- she was working for God, His was her cause - she was working for God, and God was on her side.**

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

In this story Rebekah did not, and could not, in conscience pray for success of her plan, nor could she praise God for its '*success*', even though it achieved providential ends. We know He would have it otherwise. Rebekah must indeed have been weary of her life, *Genesis 27:46*.

Rebekah was buried in the grave of Machpelah, with Abraham and Sarah, more probably before Isaac and that grave near Bethlehem, is today an holy place for Jews, and often desecrated by those who fear the Jewish soldiers who protect it.

We need not criticise God - but we may question whether if He had acted sooner, without the interventions of Rebekah, the family disintegration and such long suffered sorrow, may not have followed. However, we should consider how God works, seemingly delaying, to us endlessly delaying, the expression of His will, or using ready made human situations, or creating His own sets of circumstances. We need to discuss why this is so.

Consider:

* Why are our time frames too short for God?

* Or, why are God's time frames too long for us?

* Why can't we be content with God's time frames?

* Was Rebekah's attitude confirmed in her mind as right, because she was the leader in Isaac's passivity?

* Did not Isaac's priestly function help him in the matter of wise judgment for his family?

* How disadvantageous was this family dysfunction in the goals that God had for this family?

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The *Biblical* record does not condone Jacob's heartless exploitation of his brother's hunger, and the crafty deception of his blind old father. He suffers the consequences for cheating, but Rebekah's anxiety over the promise, at the twins' birth, in *Genesis 25:23*, seems to be the catalyst. However Jacob's claim on the birthright and the blessing is God's election and He may take 77 years or more if He wants. Rebekah must take the consequences also. There is a useful article in "*Women of the Bible*". by *Margaret Fowler*, *page 26*, about "*Rebekah*", which is hardly critical of her at all. However we do need to be realistic about her example, and understand why it is there for our consideration.

Comment:

There is a continual need to examine and re examine our motives for the paths we take, whether **end justifies means**. In this day when Christianity is so detested by some other religions, we need to carefully consider in our Mission work, in foreign countries, whether

- We are acting in a circumspect way, or

- Whether we are just equivocating, and thus circumventing the law, or

- Whether in fact we are acting in an unlawful way, by converting people, for it is now against the law to "*convert*" in many countries.

We need to carefully consider

- Whether our good works in foreign countries, are faithful works, or

- Whether we do them in a circumspect way to eventually "*convert*", or

- Whether we are indeed circumventing the law by our actions,

- And whether that is behaving unlawfully.

The boundary is blurred in the work of missionaries, in Christian resisting cultures. It is only God who can decide, for it is only by God's blessings that we can continue.

We need to carefully consider, whether we are doing God's will, for the means to an end may be against His will.

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Rebekah was resourceful and she handled change to the best advantage. She had observation and insight and imagination. She was motivated to go with the opportunities of life, to better herself and those she loved. She did not let life's experiences pass her by for she grasped them and used them for her gain. All of this makes great character for those who work in God's service. And in a sense she did just that, but she was not careful enough to keep her act clean for God. However, like "*righteous Lot*", there is a New Testament statement. It is an eloquent and powerful reference, which over rides the self determining, which seems to us unwise, and which we would not recommend.

Paul refers to Rebekah to demonstrate God's divine elective purpose and grace and mercy and compassion, in *Romans 9:10-15*, and argues the righteousness of God in choosing the way He did, for He will decide these things, and "*will have mercy on whom*" He "*will have mercy*". For all **our** arguments about her faults, God does "*not remember*", that is, "*hold accountable*", the negative outcomes of her/our self determination. We are grateful

because **Paul uses this, as an elegant way to conclude the story of Rebekah.**

2. JACOB

Jacob did not express remorse - he did what his mother told him - he did not exercise responsibility for his own actions - at 77 years - no self discipline here. The dynamics existed for the explosion that followed when two members of the four in the family moved outside their assumed roles. There followed unresolved, unfinished, unaddressed, undiscussed conflict - and off Jacob went to Haran.

He is not to be excused from the terrible act of treachery and deceit. At 77 he was old enough to decide on his own path in working out God's will, trick or wait. He said to his father, "*I am Esau*". It was a lie, yet it was not a lie. He actually was like the "*profane*" person that Esau was, **not an *"upright, perfect" man*,** but a playboy, a hypocrite, as an actor is. Like Esau in character. He wore a lot of make up, a hairy costume, and changed his voice. No Godly characteristics in this deceitful act. Later when the angel asked him his name at the Jabbok, he said **rightly,** "*I am Jacob*", and the angel immediately changed his name to *"Israel"*. He then redeemed his former deceit. But for now Jacob has to escape this present situation, *Genesis 28:5*. After this, he has many adventures and disappointments and tricks played against him.

So, he began, at last, to learn self discipline from these incidents. He learned how to foster better relationships than he had hitherto been able to forge. Deceit continued to be worked into Jacob's character, through his mother's brother. Through the working in, the grinding in, Jacob

learned to eschew it. We always think how it must have felt to have deceit turned against him. The main point, though, is whether we learn by the example of others, as they treat us. If we stay long enough with the story of Jacob we find his days were long, though he thought that they were "*few*", and "*evil*". They were evil for a very long time, but gradually this character was refined and grew to a golden old man, even if he spent his last days in "*the Land of Mud*", he turned to God and God blessed him.

3. ESAU

Esau, loving Isaac, vowed to kill Jacob after Isaac's seemingly imminent death. Cain he would have been. That vow diluted with time.

Consider:

* Was it God's will, that Isaac lived so long after this deceitful incident, to save Jacob from being murdered?

* Did God want to save Esau from the Cain sin, *Genesis 27:41*, and the sin of revenge, or was the oath taken for the deed by God?

****

The term "*mess of pottage*" has come to mean something **insignificant**, in the Eastern vernacular, *Barbara M. Bowen* comments on the incident in "*Strange Scriptures", page 89,* for it is a well known story of a despised significant privilege.

In *Romans 9:4-15* Paul reminds us that God may decide Himself who will receive mercies and compassion, and that no unrighteousness may be attributed to Him. Before these twins were born, or had done any good or evil, the election of Jacob was assured over the older child, Esau. Even in the end of this terrible story Esau did what he could, in his limited vision, to please his mother and father as he left for Egypt (the opposite direction to Jacob) to marry an Ishmaelite - Mahalath, for he knew they disliked his thirty seven year old marriages to Hittite women, *Genesis 28:9.* Surely Esau's limited vision is a lesson to us all in being inclusive of all our children, giving them all a true and unlimited Godly vision.

4. ISAAC

Isaac, sad Isaac, two sons gone, grew weaker and weaker, but lived for another 43 years, most probably a widower in decline, for a great deal of that time, with no family around him.

We are grateful to know of the willing sacrifice that the young man, Isaac, made in obedience to his father, Abraham, who was responding to God's request of him, as a demonstration of his faith. The Aqedah, or near sacrifice, **is** considered a sacrifice, though it did not in the end come to pass, and later Jewish writing relate it to the Paschal sacrifice. They see it as the reason for God's election of the Israelites, *Genesis 18:18* and *19,* for the blood of Isaac consequently sealed the covenant with His people. It is the reason, they say, why the golden calf episode, of *Exodus 32,* was pardoned, and there is the possibility that the near sacrifice acquired a redemptive import for the Jews prior to the Christian era. The immolation of the son of Abraham has never ceased to inspire not only commentators, but poets, artists, playwrights, records of which we have from the Middle Ages to our present day, of which some recent ones have been quoted in the Aqedah section of the "*Kith and Kin*", Book 1 text.

It is a crowning incident for Isaac, as well as Abraham, and affects all that comes afterwards, so that a golden glow of acceptance by God sits upon Isaac. There is another, Joseph, his grandson, not far away, whose golden glow enhances all around him, and indicates God's pleasure. Later, there is, of course, God's Son, also precious in His eyes. Both of these two precious ones, Isaac and Joseph, walked passively and silently on towards their fate, Isaac beside his father, in complete accord, on that three day journey, and Joseph all the way to Egypt. In that they represent the patient obedience of God's own precious son.

Isaac passively waited for his wife to be chosen for him, and really had no noteworthy initiatives on his own account. Perhaps we have no need of knowing any initiatives in his life, for the greatest incident of all his life, is enough. If *Genesis 26* was excluded, we would be the poorer for any detail about Isaac, and would not be **summoned**, as **we are**, in *Genesis 22*, **to give account of ourselves in the same sacrificing light as this child of Abraham.** It is this passivity (notably to sacrifice and self denial) that the later Jewish tradition sought to amplify.

Isaac, together with his father Abraham, and his son Jacob, do attract criticism, from the nihilists, the so called revisionists. They claim that these are only stories, hortatory in purpose, and edited much later than their proposed date. They describe the patriarchs as three polygamous nomads, who get cattle and revenge by prostituting their wives, or cheating foreigners or relatives. As this cannot be gainsaid, we need to accept the criticism in its own context, and in knowledge that higher motives were eventually learned and more spiritual motives pursued. There **are** obvious exhortation lessons for us.

Isaac's prosperity under divine blessings led to envy and contention over water rights; he had to move several times, thus surrendering valuable digged wells in the process, before finding space to expand. He seemed to have a sacrificial determination to occupy the land amicably, and peaceably, an attitude we would envy and seek to emulate.

The Pentateuch is divided into several sections by the scholars, and it is significant that Isaac is mostly ascribed to the priestly milieu, which gives an outline and shape to the patriarch's life, but is nevertheless reflected in a priestly genre by the inspired Moses. *Robert Martin-Achard* in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* gives us a lengthy piece about the opinions of scholars on the Isaac record in Genesis, "*Literary Structures of Isaac*".

It would be a comfort for Isaac, if he came to Jacob's compound with the trusted Eliezer, for his elder and later years. Perhaps Jacob persuaded him to come, to help with the responsibility of managing the remaining sons, and to comfort him after the loss of Joseph. Isaac could have helped in the re establishment of the priestly intercession role which

- With the despised birthright, and

- With the deceitful blessing incident, and

- With the Haran experiences, and

- With the Shechem incidents, as well as

- With the Belah/Tamar sexual relapses,

(all preceding the sale of Joseph)

seems to have been, or **must have been**, on the wane.

Some of these incidents are still in the future in our story, but nevertheless are part of Isaac's own grandsireship. There is no record of Rebekah's death, only of her burial in the cave, *Genesis 49:31,* in Hebron, together with Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac, and Jacob and Leah.

Isaac lived long enough to welcome Jacob from Haran and to hear of his adventures there, though he had never visited himself, and to "*see*" the extended family of blessed ones. He died, *Genesis 35: 29,* 12 years after Joseph went down into Egypt, at 180 years old. So as a widowed grandfather, he was part of the joys and sadnesses of Jacob's great family, whether he lived with Jacob or not.

Of all the patriarchs,

Isaac -

Was the least migratory

Was the least prolific

Lived the longest

Was least favoured by revelations from God

Has the least mention in the canonical texts of the *Old Testamen*t,

And Isaac -

Was prepared to be the sacrificial lamb his father asked him to be,

Was prepared to live the sort of nomadic tent dwelling life his father did.

Perhaps he came to a point in his life that he felt he had full knowledge of God, and God's will, and was content. Perhaps there was no danger in Isaac arriving at that point, as there would be for us. We would hope that the priestly duties in this now tiny aging Patriarchal family would have been continued by Isaac, and that would have revived him with the trouble and sadness that had come upon him and with this would come a returning to the guiding hand of God.

The "*Abraham cycle*" and the "*Jacob cycle*" are often rated by commentators to be of more significance than the "*Isaac cycle*", which is mostly confined to *Genesis 26*. This poorly conveys the significance of Isaac's priestly life, which he seems to have enjoyed. The historicity of Isaac may be in question with some, from the evidence available, and the comparatively minuscule *Genesis* record, but they would do well to remember, that their view may be beclouded now by the lack of evidence, but that evidence is continually unfolding, with more and enriched readings of the patriarchal texts, with greater clarity of the milieus from which they came, and these readings are linked with the study of archaeological documentation. All this is not without consequence. Beer Lahai-roi, Gerar and Beersheba are the three geographical locations that establish the cultic centre, or point of attachment of Isaac, and are not yet fully discovered.

However it must be emphatically stated that there is much more to the story of Isaac than meets the eye in *Scripture*, and because God has not chosen to reveal it, nor thinks it necessary for us to know, the fact should not attract criticism.

We know of Isaac's sedentary existence in the three locations, so that his missioning to those people, who knew of him as faithful and obedient to his father, his father's teaching, and his

father's God, would have been full and meaningful. He was **a man of peace** and his lifestyle would have shown them that.

Isaac knew the veracity of God's promises to Abraham and himself, but he had not received the inheritance of the land. So, together with the other patriarchs, he must have believed in the resurrection, his own resurrection. He would recognise his sins, and repent of them, and request forgiveness and continue on the looking up to God that was required for his own participation in the promises laid out for him, and which he greatly treasured. He is most often mentioned as part of the patriarchal triad, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and so is esteemed by God as part of that royal company. God Himself is often described as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, as in *Exodus 3:6*.

CONCLUSION:

We, being Abraham's adopted children, are privileged to be part of that family. We are living in a different cultural setting that produces in us (as it did for them) weaknesses more than we ought to have. God "*winks*" at those, too, we pray. We do not condemn the characters in this story, only wonder why so many things are so. We do condemn our own story and pray that we might refrain from the way of the anti Christ and do better. May it be that we do learn from these dynamic stories, for that is why we are told them, so that we may live in Him and be truly Abraham's children.

Digression:

Many times in history we see men and women who compel others to do their bidding, not because they are righteous in the matter themselves, but because they "*know*" what God wants, and will have others conform, that is the required end, as they perceive it, justifying the means.

The pages of the history of the church, from the first century, are littered with the dead bodies of those who were destroyed by judgemental, "*righteous overmuch*" churchmen, who wished to work for God and set conforming standards for others, doing "*what God wanted*", which they themselves often did not do. They did not see themselves as the weaker vessels in God's service, *Romans 14*. The beauty of diversity in unity escaped them, for all men had to conform, and so punishments thundered out from the pulpits in Europe, and the loved of God were eliminated, because they did not conform to the standards and traditions set by perverse men. "*God does not love sinners*", they said, the loved of God were disfellowshipped and alienated. Women especially were told they were unworthy to make a relationship with God, because they were not male. Anyone different was "*cut off*", and reconciliation never attempted. The New Testament was forgotten, along with the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is another godless phenomenon in life, where sometimes men and women compel others to do their bidding in religious matters, because it, (some restraint) was done to them, as a sort of outlet to their own frustrations. For example, female circumcision is often perpetrated, in the face of opposition, by older women, because it was performed on them. "*Why should they escape the humility that was ours*" or "*it was good enough for us*".

It may be the lust for power, which comes with age, which constrains men and women to organise things, in an ungodly way, as they think best, against the wishes of others. It may be

that it is easy to slide from doing things right for God, into doing things wrong, as the lust for power emerges.

So often we are constrained

- By the possibility of us causing offence, and

- By the offended, and

- By our bowing to power structures.

Sure, we must not despise the offended (of *Romans 14)*, the weaker ones, and must try to educate them in the Godly way. God does not want disunity, or dissension, or fanatical and judgmental behaviour. Hopefully in time people can move to be more comfortable in the different freedoms we can enjoy, and the way in which we express them.

To justify actions because of a perceived Godly end, to act *"in lies and deceit"* is not God's way. We have a desperate need *"in Christ"* to act according to well thought out standards, to take strength from the study of His word, and with well founded Godly guidance, to act - not by threat and fears, - but to act by taking hold of our freedoms *"in Christ",* and enjoy them, as Christ meant us to.

But God **does** want us continuing sinners to constantly renew our contracts with Him, and so that is the method of ensuring that we still walk in His ways and with His guidance.

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Section 1 - Jacob Establishes his Family

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CHAPTER 1 - GOD SHARES THE PAIN

CHAPTER 2 - GOD IS THERE - IN A BARGAIN AND A TANGLED WEB

CHAPTER 3 - THE TANGLED WEB OF DECEIT RETURNS

CHAPTER 4 - PREPARATION FOR THE GREAT MEETING WITH ESAU

CHAPTER 5 - ESAU MEETS JACOB WITH PLEASURE

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Most historians today have dated the strivings of Jacob to have been around the 1900's BC, and there are a number of extra *Biblical* customs seen to retain their pertinence as historical references to pinpoint their claim. Our introduction to Jacob begins with his flight to Haran, where he immediately becomes enmeshed in the cultural identity of his relations there. There is so much detail about Jacob that there is no significant need to establish the historicity of his story and the great family that he became.

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CHAPTER 1

GOD SHARES THE PAIN

"***I am with thee … and will keep thee … and will bring thee again to this land", Genesis 28:15.***

FOCUS:

The intent of this chapter is to follow Jacob on his lonely journey to Haran where he begins to relate to God. This does not stave off dysfunction but strengthens him to sustain the blows that come upon him, ***Genesis 28:10-22***.

Before moving on with Jacob in his walk with God to Haran, it is necessary to confront the evil details of the story of Jacob's 77 years, for this lays the backdrop for his changed life circumstances.

1. CHARACTER IMPERFECTIONS TRANSFERRED TO JACOB'S SONS

Jacob had gone over the brink into the great deception, when he positively answered his father's question, replying, "*Yes, it is me, Esau*". **He was 77 years old -**

The supplanter,

The over reacher,

The out doer,

A grasper of the heel

(of his rival brother).

Tough words, but that's what his name indicated, when Esau named him well. He had become "*profane*" like his brother in this deceit, for he acted out that which he was not. He came to be other things in his maturity, and was "*perfected*" in his character as he grew towards God in his latter days. He was called "*plain*" or "*complete*" and so he was in personality compared with his brother Esau, whose imperfections rendered him unacceptable to God. Jacob was the perfect man for the fulfilment of God's wondrous plan and God's choice was borne out as best for this position.

Jacob had been deceitful in accepting the birthright **sold** to him by this twin brother, Esau. It was sold to him for food. Their father, had he been involved in such a transaction, would have refused to condone it, and it would not have proceeded. No one wants to equivocate about Isaac, so it ought to be said, that Isaac would have surely thought of a better way to exchange the birthright, if he had known God's predilection, and that the brothers had devalued it to such and extent. But as we know it was a transaction advantageous to both parties, in a most unholy setting. We have already considered the question of why food was being bought and sold within the family.

Suffice it to say Esau had not been taught the value of the birthright for he despised it, and did not esteem it of any great value, *Genesis 25:31-32*.

Esau led a hard outdoor life, and made the most of the present. He was not tuned to the future and the future implications of "*owning*" a birthright, which would normally be the elder son's right, he being the elder. It had God fearing responsibilities. Esau (as many are today) was very willing to sell the birthright, giving up the awesome responsibilities of knowing and fulfilling God's purpose.

A "*profane*" person, certainly in this sense, Esau gave up the right to be the family priest (and all that it entailed) and his double inheritance. Jacob, especially in the second half of his life showed he was better equipped to deal with these responsibilities than Esau, but it is significant that here Esau, himself, readily gave it up, it wasn't taken from him. He **sold** it. And, Jacob was eager to buy it, making Esau ratify that deal with an oath.

Of course the "*icing on the cake*" of this sordidly made deal, was the mighty, Godly Abrahamic Covenant. Jacob's ambition for this, especially this, led him from waiting patiently for a Godly intervention down to a ghastly path of lies and deceit. It seems that God's arbitrament will is expressed through Jacob's apparent complicit trickery, but God "*allowed*" this action so that His plan for Jacob, since his birth, would be fulfilled. He would not condone it, or the unholy row that followed.

It was by God's appointment that Jacob received the birthright and the blessing, not Jacob's, nor Rebekah's wit. "*Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*" It seems God "*allowed*" family dysfunction, (and indeed, "*accommodated*" Himself to the circumstances that prevailed), of rival siblings and competing parents, to extend His purpose. The family circumstance was not His ideal.

It is refreshingly majestic when we see an outworking of God's grace to do the seemingly impossible. Sometimes He works this way and we marvel and never forget the golden thread thrown between us and our Creator. Mostly, though, He does not work that way, especially when we work how we think is best, without including Him in our reckoning, as in this incident.

The deceitful blessing incident, many years after the despised birthright incident, involved much more intrigue, with Rebekah answering Jacob's anxiety (about being found out) - "*Let the curse (of this deceit) fall on me*". Again God "*allowed*" this action so that the second part of the supplanting (the Abrahamic Covenant) could also be Jacob's, and not Esau's blessing. Jacob's and Rebekah's gamble paid off, and now Esau was without the birthright and without the blessing, when he had thought he could have been restored to favour.

Esau's lack of understanding, brought about by his parents' apparent inability to prepare him for God's intention, is now heard as his pathetic cry: "*Isn't he rightly named Jacob; he has deceived me these two times; haven't you reserved any blessing for me? Bless me too my father*", turns to bitter tears, angry rage and murderous intent. **He knows his blessing is second best.**

Now Rebekah has to **continue** the deceit by suggesting to Isaac that Jacob goes to Haran to find a wife more suitable than the two Hittite women Esau has married 30 years ago. This second deceit now must follow the first, for they probably did not tell Isaac of Esau's vow of murder, on account of his precarious health. So deceit piles upon deceit, and has no end, yet.

Comment:

Traumas and desperate situations can be often avoided when parents look ahead and anticipate what may happen and plan to avoid confrontation. An ideal outcome in a family event is achieved when everyone shows up in their best and godly light. Never encourage a child to come with subtlety and deceit. Honesty, especially in the little things, appear as big honest steps to children, and are worth every effort.

When the result of dishonesty and deceit is known, the screaming and angry words and tears and crying and whispering and shouting, all add to the ungodly. Deceit and subtlety may appear to be clever for a short while, but deceit breeds deceit, and the trauma continues. It is unbearable for some families, when it leads in the end to vandalism, to abuse and then to crime.

The anguish, and sadness, and not being able to take back what is done, overcomes one's whole life which is now shaped in remorse, and forever clouded by the shadow of sin. Punishment may not continue, and forgiveness may be won, but the consequences follow. For example, David's sin causes men to blaspheme even today. "*God loved David. David a sinner, adulterer and murderer. God loves murderers and adulterers, ha, ha.*" We have heard the scorn when open air preaching.

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2. JACOB'S LONELY JOURNEY

Now Jacob confronting these evil details begins his lonely journey, and it begins with a parting from the mother he was never to see again. Certainly Esau from now on "*lived by his sword*". His people, the Edomites, were subject to Jacob's people, as the blessing specified, until Israel's ongoing corruption led to their own downfall and the roles of these two peoples were reversed. Vengeance and bloodshed has been part of their history, and the blood not spilt this day at Beersheba, has indeed stained the garments of both families for millennia.

Jacob takes only his staff *(Genesis 32:10)* with him (to comfort him - *Psalm 23)* and travelling about 80 kilometres, he comes to Bethel, which means "*House of God*". (Bethel is often called

by its older name, Luz, though there is a little confusion between the two towns). Perhaps it is his second or third night of the journey, but it is not even a quarter of the way.

Consider:

* Did he feel the enormity of what he had done, what he had allowed his mother to do for him?

* Did he feel remorse for his twin brother?

* Or for the stress he had caused his father?

* Would he ever see them again?

* Was it the evil peak of his life?

* He'd never been alone in his 77 years. Could he survive?

****

This family group should have been a loving unit of Godly behaviour, a sacred witness to all around of God's intent for His creation, missioning for God's glory, as Abraham had been so anxious to do. Instead there were decades of sly, deceitful behaviour.

When Jacob reaches Bethel as the sun is setting, he glances behind him once more and is assured that no evil, (Esau), is following him. He decides to sleep outside the little town and makes no attempt to go inside as he watches the gateman close the single gate. His father and **his** father before him had never availed themselves of the hospitality of towns or cities, believing and trusting in God for their safety. Jacob finds a spot to sleep the night and wrapped himself in his cloak. People were used to firm head rests (in Egypt they were made of metal), so he places one of the stones under his head. He was exhausted and was soon asleep. He needed to rest to prepare himself for the morrow's long journey. His imagination of a vengeful, murderous brother and his representatives, following him as he travelled, was the stuff of fearful dreams. But it was not his brother that he met.

Here the language of God intervenes and a dream is the setting for the great confrontation with God in this place.

This is God's first revelation to Jacob,

It is unexpected,

It is undeserved,

But also it is unreserved in its blessing.

The description in *verses 12* and *13* resemble a typical Babylonian temple tower, the ziggurat. But unlike the pagan version, on which the deity descends and man ascends, angels use the stairway, and God stands at the top of the stairway. There is also another suggestion, but whether or not the high surrounding local rock formation appearing like a ladder, lay behind the dream imagination is irrelevant. Whatever it was, to Jacob the ladder was vividly there.

The discovery of God in this place - Bethel - is unlikely, and probably very surprising for Jacob, except that he knew of the altar that his grandfather, Abram, had made there for God, *Genesis 12:8, 13:3* and *4,* when he had called upon Him. Perhaps Isaac had told Jacob to go there on his

way. Whatever, he has only just left home, and it is appropriate that God should speak to him here, on this night.

From the lush hills of Beersheba (we tend to think of good and abundance in lush places), Jacob looks out over the bleakness and barrenness of the terrain ahead. It is a valley of death, the valley of the shadow of death. Amazingly, God is there in the valley, and here with him, and Jacob is provoked to see Him in a dream. Love and care and promises pour upon him. He, who has come from a family incident of great evil, is roused to acknowledge the presence of God. This is a great mystery to us also, for when we think we are far away from God, He actually is very near to us, also. We cannot escape from him, but we can choose to ignore Him, to our peril. Fear can so often be replaced by security, if we allow it. The Son of God is our "*ladder*" between heaven and earth.

Our thoughts turn for just a moment to Jacob's parents who would be anxious and saddened by the recent events. We would hope that Isaac and Rebekah also had a divine intervention to restore the Divine connection, for this present incident is a holy reconnection for Jacob. We may assume, because of the unholy family behaviour, that the priestly functions were suspended, or only partially performed during this period. Isaac's presumed resumption, and revival, then, of the priestly duties, may have formed the basis for a message from God which is not recorded.

3. A MIGHTY INCIDENT - A GIFT FOR JACOB

But expecting, or not - Jacob dreamed a dream. Angels of God were climbing up and down a ladder or staircase, to and from heaven - there at the top was the LORD, and the LORD spoke to Jacob - *Genesis 28:13-15*.

It is useful to compare this medium of revelation to other mediums, dreams in different forms, some with no words of, or from YHWH, burning but not burning bushes, great words from YHWH from the heavens accompanied by trumpets, YHWH speaking in smoke, asses speaking, angels as men, fleeces unexpectedly dry or wet, and many, many more.

As he lay bathed in the light of this heavenly message, he realised that the angels had been with him through all the toiling, planning, and deceiving, and that they were protecting him in the crooked ways of his own making. They had been with him in his flight from home, and after "*ascending to report to their Master*" they returned to go with him further on his way. They were going up and down, down and up, ascending and descending. In other words, if the angels ascend **first**, then they must have been with Jacob to begin with, thus emphasising the point that Godly men are accompanied by angels, in their work for Him. This humiliating recognition by Jacob, about the angels' continuing comforting envelopment, and the sign of its renewal, ignites in Jacob a desire to stay close to God. In "*Fathers of the Covenant*" *page 71*, we are reminded by *H. L. Ellison* that *John 1: 51 preserves the unusual 'ascending and descending' "*, (upon the Son of man) which you might expect from God's messengers if they are co travellers, until at last "*Glory Himself*" speaks from the top of the ladder. And Jacob is now prepared for God to speak. What a wondrous way for God to ready Jacob for His voice!

The same argument is used by Paul in *Ephesians 4:9, 10,* of Christ's ascension, but he adds a qualifying factor that at first, in God's plan, Christ had descended from God to the earth, at his birth, but when His work was complete Christ had ascended even far above the heavens.

Thus we see a terrestrial order of things (in nature, what goes up from the earth, will return down to the earth) is reversed to a celestial order of things (in the divine, what comes down to the

earth from the Father will return up to Him). Jacob's angels had indeed first come to Jacob from the Father, but were now in ascending and then descending order.

Jacob hears the promises made to his fathers and what a relief he feels. Such gracious words they are - what a balm to his troubled soul. This is positive reinforcement at its best. Maybe Jacob had thought that God could only be accessed through the shrine at Beersheba, where the family had resided for so long. The sanctity of this spot at Bethel may have earlier escaped him. The lesson for him, and for us, is that God is available to all of us, wherever we may be.

First, there is a repeat of the promise given to Abraham, passed to Isaac, and given to Jacob by his father, just a short time before. The "*your father*" link with Abraham is a declaration, not that Abraham has priority as his "*father*", but that Isaac has not compromised Jacob in the misunderstanding of the blessing incident. So, if Jacob **did** deliberately go to Bethel, because he had heard of it, from his father, it would be because he desperately needed confirmation from God that the blessing from Isaac was in place, even despite the deceit that had produced it. "*The land whereon thou liest*" (literally, for he had taken a stone for a pillow) "*to thee will I give it, and thy seed*". **Now he knows that he stands firm before God and that the promised blessing is in place.** A point to think about then is whether the Bethel night stop over was a chance location, or design.

And then, God's grace is bestowed upon him personally, "*I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring you again to this land.*" Oh, what joy to hear such a thing! Jacob must have been overcome with God's mercy (in winking His eye at the transgressions), and on waking, grateful for the far reaching promise and the assurance of immediate personal guidance and protection for what **he** thought would be a short time away from "*this land*".

After the dream, the silence and darkness descended and left Jacob awed and inspired. It wakened him, and so he lay there awake until the dawn, and then arose, not fearful of Esau's murderous intent, but trembling that he was in "*the house of God*" and that this place was at "*the gate of heaven*". Jacob turned his pillow stone on end and set it for a pillar. It became Bethel or "*God's house*", and he poured oil on it, as an act of consecration. This was a reminder for the future, that in this place a theophany had taken place. It is clear that the inhabitants of Bethel understood that it was a place of divine revelation, for centuries later, after the conquest of the land Israel was able to claim the site as one of its chief sanctuaries. *Ellison* reminds us that the polytheists would not mind a small portion of earth claimed by the monotheists, but the fact that it was claimed by the Israelites shows that God's own people realised that this was sanctified ground and that they were rendered holy because of it.

It is invigorating to realise that Jacob's sin and disobedience, with the burden of guilt and failure, did not prevent -

His response to God

Him renewing his relationship with God

Him rebuilding his faith and confidence in God's promises.

4. JACOB'S AWAKENING THOUGHTS

Sin is, of course, not recommended, (we may **not** continue in sin to allow God to show His grace), but sin, in its aftermath, with its own process of rededication to God is not a preventative

to the inheriting of God's promise. Jacob displayed all of the process, and so God accepted his rededication. It is so for us.

Passing through this pagan countryside

From one oasis to another,

Jacob is escaping from his brother

Not, of necessity, from God.

Into the unknown darkness

Jacob is bathed in a heavenly searchlight.

A heap of stones

A holy meeting place.

Beersheba to Bethel

God is everywhere, no escape

Trembling, holy fear,

Rejoicing, resolution, vows.

In a monument of stones,

Jacob meets God.

Jacob was so grateful for this meeting that he vowed a vow (the first recorded) that if God would feed and clothe him on this journey so that he could return to the family home - **in peace** - then he would forever worship Him. As well, he would return one tenth of it all to Him. He offers a tenth of the wealth that he asks God to bestow upon him, - a tithe. This is not a bargain with God, as it appears to be, it is more a pledge, following his awe and homage to God, rather a giving back to Him. He is happy to make the promise and act upon it, "*if* ... *if* ... *if*". This means that from now on Jacob will render worship to God hand in hand with worshipful dedications towards the furtherance of God's purpose. He would regard his tangible blessings as God's gifts.

Consider:

* How did Jacob dedicate a tenth of all his wealth to the service of the Lord?

* To whom, or to what, could Jacob render it?

* Was his return from Haran in wealth, recognition of God's gracious blessing, and so a placing of this promised tithe, in the land of Promise, so that God's purpose would be extended?

* Can we be certain that Jacob did not render his tithe in Haran?

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Comment:

Would that we would realise that our gifts to God, that is, our worshipful "*memorial*" donations, are really tithes, not in the sense of a tenth portion, but in the greater sense that they further God's glory and His purpose. We may call them pledges. Tithes/pledges were originally gifts to

help the poor, like the grains left in Boaz' field. Or they were to help some purpose that needs a benevolent gift. For, like for Cornelius in *Acts 10:4,* "*they come up as a memorial*". It is interesting to remember that Cornelius was as yet unbaptised. In our day, they are extended to further God's purpose, in a way that **we** can relate to. Still the stricture is the same as in the days of Ananias and Sapphira; we cannot dedicate a gift to some cause in God's name, and then direct it elsewhere.

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Jacob is criticised by some for his vow that he is a schemer and tries to bargain with God, and so people show superiority over his method, but we forget that our prayers are sometimes on the same level. With such a criticism we would also forget -

1. That tithes or pledges to God are useless, for all our wealth is His, and

2. We can't buy God's favour by offering our wealth, but we can offer God back His blessings.

We also need to recognise Jacob's patriarchal position, that he was only fifteen when Abraham died, and had not had much guidance comparatively, in patriarchal matters from the retiring Isaac, as Isaac had from his father. Abraham could have advised Jacob about vows and tithes, (which blessings are discussed in "*Kith and Kin*", Book 1, and how Abraham and Melchizedek formed a Godly relationship).

Jacob eventually realises that his wealth is bound up with God, and he worships God and "*pays his tithe*", most likely when he returns from Haran. He is a witness to God in the land of Canaan, though his sons cause him no little trouble in this desire of his. However the doubt and fear never really leave him until the end of his life, and we can trace it throughout all his life until then. We are so like Jacob ourselves that we should beware of criticising him. His terror assails him again, later in Peniel

a. When he returns and faces Esau,

b. When, once more, he lies down to sleep, and

c. When God speaks to him, giving him courage.

Only God knew how long this journey to and from Haran would be, however, there **was** peace when he returned - the anger of Esau had been spent, and he **was** able to lay his tithe in the land, and because of it he prospered more, (despite the behaviour of his sons), and still the blessings were even more fulfilled, and God's work was extended.

What an awesome place this is, God's place, Bethel - now Jacob's place, as well.

God is in charge, as always, yet we often do not think it so. If only Jacob had realised that it had been **God's birthright, God's blessing and God's land** and not to be bargained for between brother and brother, and that **God will dispose of His birthrights, His blessings, and His land as He will. God has the prerogative in all our ways, if only we will remember it.** It was not necessary for Jacob to conquer **his brother, his father's love for his brother,** or (in the future)**, his uncle/father in law** to obtain the promises from God.

God is able to defend His will and His way, without us.

This Bethel incident is a mighty incident.

It is enough to change

One's life,

One's demeanour,

One's direction.

- if we will change

May God grant us a Bethel incident, also.

5. MODERN HYMNS ABOUT BETHEL BRING US CLOSE TO JACOB

We remember the hymn of the nineteenth century "*Nearer my God to Thee"* by Sarah Fowler Adams, and recognise the words as referring to this incident in Jacob's life, for after all the ladder, or "*cross*"*,* raised him closer to God, and Jacob had access to God, and God became nearer to Jacob, as a result. In "t*he sun gone down*"*,* and the "*darkness*" coming over Jacob, and his "*rest, a stone*", Jacob is lonely, yet in his "*dreams*" he is *"Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee*".

"*Then, all my waking thoughts*

Bright with Thy praise,

Out of my stony griefs

Bethel I'll raise;

...

Nearer, my God, to Thee".

and another,

"*O God of Bethel, by whose hand*

Thy people now are fed,

Who through this weary pilgrimage

Hast all the fathers led".

So, as He does us, God guided Jacob's "*wandering footsteps*"*,* and spread His "*covering wings around*", till this "*wandering ceased*" and he reached Haran.

However there is plenty of trouble ahead for Jacob, and much deceit.

And so Jacob's new life, struggling in his need to keep God in his sights, almost overwhelms him, until God speaks to him again - 20 years later.

CONCLUSION:

Jacob is now walking with God, (and we would wish him ease of heart and soul), but he still has not fully submitted to God. Jacob's footprints are beside those of God, but Jacob has not asked God to carry him yet.

CHAPTER 2

GOD IS THERE - IN A BARGAIN AND A TANGLED WEB

"***If … if … if you will … so that … I will …", Genesis 28: 20-22.***

FOCUS:

With the events of ***Genesis 29:1-35*** **to** ***30:1-24,*** about to unfold, Jacob makes a bargain with God, but he cannot erase the consequences of the deceit dysfunction, as we shall see.

1. GOD IS WITH JACOB ON THE ROAD TO HARAN

It was such a long way, and such an alien land. The foreigners he passed looked curiously at him, and the wilderness was full of strange sounds and shadows. It was really a journey of fear.

Now Jacob says of Bethel: "*Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not*". Jacob will turn this fear into a veneration of his God. He has not heard a word of condemnation from God, but knows in his heart that God would condemn. He **is** awed by the experience with God, and strikes a bargain with Him, Isaac's God, "*if…, if…, if you will, so that…, I will …*".

This grand vision rose and fell in its lustre through Jacob's life until he stood in Egypt with Joseph (at the end of his life) and spoke of the wonder of the Godly covenant that he received here in Bethel. May our vision rise, **and continue its rising**, to the end of our life, as we feel the wonder of that Godly covenant for us.

Comment:

With all the travel ease and comforts of today, a journey over the same route is still full of fear. Many of us have indeed journeyed on parts of this road passing through check points into unfriendly countryside, needing plenty of food and water, and safely planned hotels for the night, changing a flat tyre, uneasily worried about the perceptive stares of the gowned Arabs (Muslims) passing by, having stones thrown at us, being misdirected to towns on purpose, overcharged on purchases, almost run over the edge, to the rocky chasms below, when travelling the passes between Jericho and Shiloh, on the outside lane of a gravel road, where not one blade of grass, or shrub, or tree will grow and only the occasional black Bedouin tents betray any life at all. This fear for us is because the Palestinians are protesting (in this present age of demarcation) at the loss of their land rights and properties before 1948.

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Camel trains were popular transport, then, and Jacob was on the caravan route. Perhaps he caught a camel train. We remember, 97 years earlier, that Abraham's servant had taken ten camels to Haran on a wife securing journey. On the night of the Bethel dreams he had come only a fraction of the journey, that is, about 80 kilometres.

Jacob

Walked a long way that day

Maybe easy walking

But ever onward north

He had left home and so he

Lies down troubled to sleep

Hard and cold for body and soul

No comfort or warmth, exhausted

Speaks with the Lord

Messengers from God

Up and down

Is exalted

Jacob

Goes another 640 kilometres,

Over the Jordan,

North east to Haran,

Walking with God

Is now blessed

Not until Jacob's return from Haran does he talk of **my** Lord, rather he speaks of "*your Lord*" to Isaac at the deceitful blessing incident. Jacob waits until God keeps His bargain: "*If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God*".

On his **peaceful** return, full of blessings and care from God, Jacob erected again **his** altar to God at Bethel, and **paid his tithes,** as he had promised, for he had now formally acknowledged his God *(Genesis 35:7)*.

2. JACOB WONDERS WHETHER GOD IS AT HARAN

However he travelled, there was a change in his step for he "*lifted up his feet*" *(AV Margin)*, we suspect, with renewed vigour, "*and came to the land of the people of the east*". Certainly his demeanour changed and expectation shone.

Haran was at the crossroads of the great caravan routes between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. He, at once, saw the black tents of his relatives on the outskirts of the town and behind these were the beehive shaped mud brick huts of the settled inhabitants. Beyond these were the gates of the city itself. Abram had been there and seen it, for he and Lot came from there. Abraham's servant, Eliezer, and friend of his father, Isaac, had seen it.

Jacob welcomed the sight of the well and the sheep and the brethren at Haran. "*He looked and behold*" a new life, a wife "*please God*" awaited him, to comfort him after the loss of his mother, as Isaac did, at Sarah's death, to "*be with me*".

The people at the well, as usual, waited to water their flocks until all had assembled. It seems that Rachel had certain privileges, for she was the last to come, and everyone was waiting for her.

At last Rachel came with the sheep. "*When Jacob kissed her, he lifted up his voice and wept*". There is impressive scriptural language here. We are meant to see the end of the fearful journey,

the relief at finding the family so soon, the remembrances of his mother, who had left this place nearly 100 years ago, so warm in the family's mind. At once Jacob is a strong protector with a soft vulnerability - quite understandable, in his present emotional state. We think of Eliezer's positive experiences so long ago, here at this well. We do so want it to be positive for Jacob. We, with Jacob, can lift up our voices and weep as well, for we can identify so well with -

The depression and the elation of our lives,

The earthly "*Yin*" and heavenly "*Yang*" of life,

The "*black and the white*" (stones),

The "*no*" and the "*yes*" from God.

It is close to Him we wish to be, and yet accepting of the evil and the good that He allows to come upon us.

When Jacob manfully unrolled the large stone covering of the well to water the sheep, he unrolled his own emotion, in that kiss and in that cry, for his relief and gratitude to God for His care. The other shepherds must have been astonished, and impressed with the traveller. They did not know of the ache in his heart for his mother, and the torment of the family situation, that he had left in Beersheba. But Rachel, full of hope, took Jacob home. We can only imagine what Rachel was hopeful about. The text about Rachel's death day is the antithesis of this emotional kiss and cry, and the stone rolling. "*And Jacob set a pillar on her grave*", *Genesis 35:20*.

Laban heard the family history and although there was no outward sign of wealth about Jacob, he would remember that display of gifts from Abraham 100 years before. This fugitive, Jacob, came empty handed. Laban, remembering the bargain contracted so long ago with Eliezer, considers his present advantage over this nephew, son of Isaac. He determines this time to make decisions more advantageous to the Haran family. So Laban allowed Jacob to stay, and after a blissful month, recovering and learning about his new family, Jacob struck a bargain with Laban.

Jacob loved Rachel and offered to work seven years for her to be his wife. *H. A. Whittaker* in "*Wrestling Jacob*", *page 41,* tells us that the *Nuzi Tablets* (found near Haran) give evidence that it was not uncommon for a man to work for his bride thus **providing** a dowry, often given **with** the bride in other circumstances.

Laban, her father, had "*bargained*" with Abraham's servant for gifts. Now another sort of bargain is struck for another patriarchal wife. Laban, now deceitful, deceives the unsuspecting Jacob. Jacob who had schemed and deceived to obtain the benefits of the first born (when he was not) now has against his wishes, the first born thrust upon him.

The all covering veil and the darkness of the wedding night, together with Jacob being affected by the wine at the feast, concealed the identity of his new wife. The light of day revealed it all next morning. Ah, terrible disappointment, that would not have been veiled. Laban can hardly be excused that Jacob did not name the wife that he hoped would be his.

Disappointment was rewarded (probably a week later), for Jacob was then given Rachel also.

Laban is so smug - now in control. Jacob "*forgot to read the fine print*", says *Whittaker, page 41*. Jacob is desperate with his inability to control the situation, as he had learned to do in his own beginnings. His marriage by "*hire purchase*" was not what he paid for.

Laban explains, so generously, "*it is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one*". Yet he knew of Jacob's continuing love for Rachel.

There are some possible motives for Laban to pass off Leah as Rachel. In the terrible deceit and disappointment for Jacob, we hardly think about Leah. Her name meant "*weary*", which might have been an indication of a difficult birth for her mother. Certainly, she may have been shy and awkward and easily embarrassed, altogether a difficult personality. She may just have wearied everyone she came in contact with, or she may have been the one, weary of life, and discontented, but we really don't know how or when the name description applied. The whole compound would know of the deceit played upon Jacob, and would have viewed the reluctant honeymoon humiliation and shame, with behind hand humour. Jacob was redeemed when he was given Rachel, but Leah's pain went on, for she laboured after affection and security, and recognition, with her hopes always disappointed. She was emotionally abused all her life. In "*Women of the Bible*" there is an excellent chapter on Leah, by *Joan Williams, page 37,* and she concludes by using the verses from *Matthew 11:28,* "*Come unto me all ye* (weary) *that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*", for in that sense we are all Leahs striving for the "*rest*" in the Lord, like the saints He has asked us to be.

Leah could hardly have been innocent goods traded by her father, but that does not give reason or compensate for her lifetime of weariness. Her final recognition in her burial, at the Patriarchal tomb, and not her sister, Rachel, may not have been known to her, so her pain seems endless. The resurrection morn will at last bring her joy and she will know of her after death blessing, when Jacob/God blessed her son Judah, giving his name to the Jewish nation.

From then on Laban and Jacob had a deceiver's contest that lasted the 20 years that they were together each trying to outlast the other. Deceit now controlled Jacob, surely a weapon he had forged, and now God turned it, and uses it to punish him - it made it no easier to bear. Weapons of deceit and trickery bring their own bitter fruit in families, and in communities. We need to learn from turbulent church history, where great volumes of history record justified deceit present in the church. They are not pretty stories. Conversely, we find, practising with the instruments of love and understanding that they bring forth sweet fruit - and there are many saved in His name. Sadly, sometimes, even untiring efforts, when tinged with the human frailties of others often cause many to leave the way of the Lord, looking for better paths. God **is** with us, as He was with Jacob, so we need to let Him work His way when deceit comes.

3. JACOB'S WIVES IN THE TANGLED WEB OF DECEIT

Leah loved Jacob, Jacob loved Rachel. If Leah knew of the deception and played her part in the plan, her anguish at the result would have been her punishment. Jacob may have accepted it as part of God's plan for him, and he, being flattered, may have played no little part in the scenario. However, once first married, he did not wish to reject the marriage, and to achieve his loved Rachel, he had to practise polygamy. Some love who they marry, and Leah hoped for that. Alas it did not happen. Some marry who they love, and in this case, Rachel accepted Jacob as second hand goods as better than nothing. So neither wife, nor Jacob enjoyed the ideal marriage of *Genesis 2*.

Sex is the gift of expressing love that God gave to married couples each to enjoy, and is not for despising. That kind of gift should never be shared. A well balanced faithful marriage is the basis for good parenting, and parenting is a preliminary introduction to His grace, where grace from God is for us a balance of love and limits, *Ephesians 2:8-9*. Parenting is also a balance as well,

between love and limits. What we learn about God's grace, we reflect in our parenting. All this can never be achieved in the state of polygamy, and there follows then, such families find difficulty in parenting well.

Jacob's father did not practice polygamy, but Jacob would know of the life and family of Abraham. Esau his brother had brought multiple wives to his father's house. Jacob then would not be unaware of the terrible consequences.

There may have been several circumspect reasons for pursuing the path of having multiple wives, and their handmaids rather than divorcing the unwanted one.

1. A quick breeding family, - Jacob was decades behind his brother in that.

2. Jacob had discerned how this family, under Laban functioned, so he knew he had to quickly gain strength of numbers.

3. There was plenty of work to be done if Jacob was to build up a business of his own, so all the labour he could get would help his plan.

4. If Jacob was caring for **two** of Laban's daughters, Laban would have to give more help to Jacob. Laban would be lending or giving servants, especially as his grandchildren were being born, and nurtured, in the Jacob family.

5. The larger Jacob's property and compounds grew the more privacy he ensured himself, away from Laban.

The multiplying of wives ensured many advantages to help Jacob work out his plan to go south once more to the Promised Land. It ensured God's numerical plan for this family as well.

So the deceiver for the firstborn right in Isaac's family now receives a firstborn for his wife against his will.

Laban married off two daughters at once, and gave each daughter a handmaid.

So that Jacob was suddenly responsible for four women, at least.

We can understand the anguish, when Jacob wanted only Rachel (and perhaps her handmaid), that he could not accept Leah as his God provided wife, and could not love the helpmeet that Laban provided. He wanted to marry whom he loved. In a sense, the unloved Leah **was** the God provided wife.

Marrying for love is a western concept, and scorned by Hindus, Muslims and other cultures, even in our day. To marry for love is a shame in some families. It seems Jacob acted differently, in his affection for Rachel, from the usual custom, which seemed to serve his mother well. It appears that he is punished by Laban's deception, for desiring otherwise.

God recognised Jacob's love for Rachel for his greatest son was born to her. Yet Leah was the God blessed wife, in that she lived much longer, and was buried with Jacob, in the patriarchal tomb.

Leah did forge a relationship with God, when her prime relationship with Jacob failed, and we see her melancholy tinged with fervent piety, and observe her comfort in His Name, for she praises God, and gives simple thanksgiving hymns for the blessings of her sons, for there is no

recorded human affection, or thanks from Jacob. We hope that she was comforted when she knew that God loved her.

Nine months later, at the birth of Reuben, and the naming of him, as her misery, there is a parallel to the birth of Ishmael, in Hagar's misery. Leah soon knew her hopes for Jacob's love, were futile, for they did not bring about her desire. Her later birthing and naming experiences show her desperation, and are pitiful cries.

At **Reuben'**s birth

"*The Lord has looked upon my affliction*",

(that Jacob did not love her),

"*Now therefore my husband will love me*".

And again at **Simeon**'s birth,

"B*ecause the Lord has seen that I am hated,*

he has given me another son",

but still she remains unloved.

And again at **Levi**'s birth,

"*Now my husband might love me*".

Her disappointment must be despair by now.

At **Judah'**s birth her despair is turned

To "*praise of the Lord*".

So she turns to give God a blessing.

This is a loving example to us all.

Her fifth and sixth sons, **Issachar** and **Zebulun**

she believed endowed her

with a Godly and goodly "*dowry*",

and so she hoped that this blessing from God,

would bind Jacob to her,

even though he did not love her.

Her daughter **Dinah** is mentioned, and, at least,

she **was** bound to Leah for life,

as her story yet untold,

renders her ineligible for marriage.

Many strange complexities and confusing relationships were in this tangled web of deceit. They are woven into this unholy incident and produce another dysfunctional family, for jealousy is

paramount amongst the women. During their child bearing years (the 20 years in Haran) every child born of the four women is associated with that emotion and expressed in their names. Because of the pathos and tension between the two wives, and their concubines, revealed in the names of their babies, it is possible for us to sense the atmosphere in this "*house of God*". Perhaps it is not too much different from the jealousies manifest in the former "*house of God*"*,* Isaac's tents, or Abraham's tents.

Rachel, manifesting impatience, and fearing rejection, seeks from Jacob, what only could be given by God. She says to her husband, "*Give me children, or else I die*". Jacob's angry and justified remonstrance with her should have directed her to pray to God about the matter, as the Giver of all things.

There is an Oriental proverb that "*a childless person is as good as dead*", and in a sense that is true, for the name, the progeny, stops dead. This is probably what she meant. Rachel was very young or immature, but her petulance and peevishness, indicates that she was spoilt by Jacob, though, for all of her qualities, he loved her as long as she lived.

Comment:

Perhaps the reason for not approaching the righteous Melchisedec of Salem, who could have supplied wives, was that marriages were endogamous, that is within one's own tribe. If he was actually Shem or Enoch, as previously suggested, it would have realistically been of the same tribe. It seems that the Haran family conformed more to the need for a closer family tribe resource, so Leah and Rachel submitted to the cultural custom, and shared one husband.

The lines of descent were patrilineal, so the blood line was not a concern among these four women. However, the concerns of property and prosperity were not inconsiderable, and there would have been the extra expectation of the patriarchal blessing on any of the sons born to either wife. They did not know, as yet, which one was to be the blessed one.

The custom of giving a handmaid to obtain a child, excluded any religious hope, surely the lesson of Sarah told Rachel that, if she had heard of it. Hagar's child did not inherit the blessings. But Rachel was vexatious and jealous of her sister, Leah, and although the sharing of Jacob was distasteful to her, to both women really, perhaps she felt there was merit in her action of offering a handmaiden, and that she would be counted as generous.

****

So Rachel offered Bilhah, and Rachel accepted Bilhah's children Dan and Naphtali, as her own, for the time being. God did remember Rachel much later, and so Joseph was born to her. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun were all born to Leah, and a daughter Dinah. Jacob may have had other daughters, but Dinah only is noted, because of her relationship to the incident of the forfeiting of Simeon's and Levi's birthright at Shechem. Leah thought, at one time, that she was losing her hold on Jacob, so she followed Rachel's example of giving him her handmaid*,* so that Gad and Asher were born to her handmaid, Zilpah. This is all contained in *Genesis 29:31* to *Genesis 30:24.* Sixteen descendants of Zilpah were among the seventy people who went down into Egypt later in the Joseph story, a not inconsiderable proportion, considering her status. The births may not be in order in these chapters, the only order certain is that of the birthing mothers, **Leah**, then **Bilpah**, (for Rachel), then **Zilpah**, (for Leah), and **Leah** again and at last **Rachel**. Child education would have been transferred to the

men when the child reached the age of eight, but until then a small army of women servants would have been principally engaged in -

Conception and fertility advice,

(Magic, as well as normal advice),

Pre natal education,

Midwife duties,

Nursing,

Wet nursing

Nurse maiding, and

Nannying duties, and of course

Child care.

In the long course of time, Rachel, with great joy, had her child - Jehoseph (Joseph) - the first use of the name of God in a personal name in the Bible. Now Jacob can make no complaint for compensation on Laban, for Rachel's stigma of barrenness is removed.

Consider:

* Was neglect of prayer, and a relationship with God, one of Rachel's big problems, considering that she had a predilection for her father's idols?

* Does blame for this fall upon Jacob?

* Was her barrenness Divine disfavour?

* Did she come to think that her plight was Divine disfavour?

* Was the naming of her children only a token recognition of God in her life?

* Did she ever have a close relationship with God?

* Was it necessary for Jacob to deal more wisely with it?

* Could it have been otherwise?

****

This awaited for event might have been the impetus for Jacob to consider returning to his own country.

1. Now Rachel had a son to make up her own longed for family.

2. The Laban family was too idolatrous, and exerted too much influence over Jacob's family.

3. Esau may feel less murderous now.

4. No more pregnant wives or little babies, which would be disadvantaged by such a long journey.

It must be said that Benjamin, born on the death bed of Rachel, was born to her after they left Haran, (on a journey from Bethel to Bethlehem) and fulfilled Rachel's cry to Jacob, "*else I die*". It was a tragically prophetic cry for she did have "*children*", (more than one child), one more son, but her second child was the cause of her death.

These men are the forerunners of the mighty children of Israel; the twelve tribes of Israel.

Each born out of the conflict,

Each mother striving for love of Jacob,

Each mother struggling with the other,

Some of them commissioning mothers,

Some of them surrogate mothers,

Born of this tangle of emotions of two wives and two concubines and four women,

God worked out His purpose.

Comment:

From the beginning "*it was not so*" planned for man and woman He created them "*and they shall be one flesh*", Of Jacob making these four unions and the resulting jealousies we can say that Jacob did not know the joy of "*one flesh*" with a loving wife, as he first expected he would. He chose second best in the tangle of Laban's deceit over his daughters, and lost the ideal. It happens for many of us, but that does not nullify the ideal to which we would all aspire. Certainly Bilhah and Zilpah were being manipulated by Rachel and Leah into out performing in a field of emotional play that should never exist in any relationship.

Later in Scripture, Hannah talks of her "*rival*" for she shared Elkanah with Peninnah. She wept in disappointment, for she was barren. **Rivals they were, for the favours of a husband they both loved,** *1 Samuel 1* and *2*.

****

Here, in *this* story, bitterness reigns-

One was pregnant *and* one was barren.

There was love *and* hate.

There was anger *and* despair.

There was conception *and* wombs shut up.

There was vindication *and* jealousy.

There was triumph *and* disappointment.

There was power *and* defeat.

There was struggle won *and* struggle lost.

There was a husband's favour *and*,

a husband hired for mandrakes,

There was joy *and* distress.

There were births *and* death,

plenty of rewards *and* so much disgrace.

4. THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF POLYGAMY THEN AND NOW

Polygamy was the custom amongst the Jews until 1,000 years after our Lord Jesus Christ, though Christ had emphasised to the emerging Christians the joy of one man, one wife when he spoke against divorce. "*In the beginning it was not so.*"

Perhaps because these patriarchal days and customs are so far off, our perception of how life was lived in these households, is blunted. But it is difficult to understand how the worship of God could proceed, in the family of Jacob, in an ideal atmosphere when so much effort was tied up in the emotional stress that this family had around them. No little stress is caused by the practice of polygamy, or multiple wives, in all its forms.

(See end chapter note ***Digression***)

Comment:

It is no good excusing the practice of polygamy - "*It was the custom, the women would have known no other, they would be used to it*". If polygamy can cause so much trouble, heartache and harm in 1750 BC as it did in China in AD 1920, and as it does in Muslim, and Hindu, and other culture's households today, and as it does in blended, defacto, mistress, divorce relationships in the western world, no one can say women would/should be used to the custom.

God in His creation wisdom, and our Lord Jesus Christ in his monogamous advice of *Mark 10,* recognised that power given to men over women would so emotionally damage them both that there could be no true worship under such circumstances. Mutually decided headship in marriage is not a license for power of husbands over wives. The picture is emerging, during the discussion in these articles on family dysfunction amongst the patriarchs, that contention in families - most stemming from weak husband/wife, father/mother relationships causes too much harm in God's family. We do well to heed the message of **unity** in family, by complementary roles in service. No one has power over another. God asks us all to submit one to another, and to love one another, Ephesians 5. They are not separate roles.

Polygamy causes so much trouble in these God loved families, the prime cause of the family dysfunction, that it has a special place in the summing up and conclusion of the text about Jacob's death, in Book 5, so there is more about the subject there.

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5. THERE ARE TWO AREAS OF CONCERN FOR JACOB

The narrative then moves on in two separate, but parallel paths:

1. God's mercy and providential care, and

2. Jacob's moral responsibility for his family and goods,

(linked with turmoil within the family - consequences of the sin of deceit).

6. JACOB AND FAMILY STRIFE

Jacob the home lover is forced away from his father's house as a consequence of his actions. He is ruthlessly exploited for years, and tormented by family tensions. Certainly his mother obtained the blessing for her favourite son, and saved him from the anger of Esau. With the purchased birthright and the deceitful blessing, he flew from his beloved home. But he does not soon return, as he and his mother planned, and she died without ever seeing him again. They are buried in the same sepulchre, Rebekah and Jacob, united again, but now only in death.

CONCLUSION:

God reaffirmed the covenant He had made with Abraham and Isaac, and gave specific promises to Jacob at Bethel. This must have comforted him, as he faced his tormentors, through whom his spiritual maturity began to emerge. He must have felt embattled, and it was a hard and difficult way to learn about the blessings of God. But he had to endure it, and he did with fortitude.

Digression:

Released in Australia, in 1992, was a film (English subtitles) "*Raise the Red Lantern*" directed by the famous Chinese film maker *Zhang Yimou*, from the book by *Su Tong*. It tells a story of 1920's China, when a rich man **did** have four wives, as was the custom. They were kept in pampered imprisonment, where each woman was no more than an ornament. Each one's desire to have a son is overwhelming. Male domination supported by millenniums of custom and practice divides and conquers each one, encouraging them to play a terrible power game - no one can flower and develop, in this intrigue and deceit. "*The old men who run China*", says *October 1992, Time Magazine*'s reviewer, *Richard Corliss,* stifled this message, because they see clearly that pictures about rebellious young people, crushed by unfeeling old men, "*abound in political implications*", and there is a danger that they will inflame the educated classes to rebel. To their discredit they deprived their nation of examining historical perspectives and learning from them. The film was banned in China, for some time. No violence or sex is portrayed in the film, but a tour of an exotic land and its customs - polygamy.

If you view the film, and the ceremony of the raising of the red lantern each evening outside the house of the wife who is to receive the master's favour that night, you will be able to see worked out *chapters 29* and *30* of *Genesis,* and how it must have been in the tents of Jacob in Haran, when Jacob had four "*wives*".

CHAPTER 3

THE TANGLED WEB OF DECEIT RETURNS

"***And Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels … and all his goods … for to go to Isaac", Genesis 31:17, 18.***

FOCUS:

Strife continued for Jacob, more now from within his own family, though Laban continued to be a thorn in his side as well. So Jacob's long term plan to return to the Promised Land began to take shape, ***Genesis 30:25-43*** **to** ***31:1-55.***

The man, who purchased a birthright from his brother, is now bargained for by his wives. The matter of the mandrakes, *Genesis 30:14-16,* (thought to induce fertility), are brought into the daily, unsavoury bargain discussion over who would sleep with Jacob that night. What degradation there is in this family, yet not uncommon in that time, nor even today! It is the realised necessary domestic argument between the two sisters, not detailed in *Scripture* which brings out the distaste in the practice of polygamy. The traumatic eternal triangle works its poison.

1. THE WIVES' ARTFUL COMPETITION FOR JACOB'S FAVOUR

The comments of each wife as her child is born, graphically details the jealousies within each wife, and the enormous effort that each employed to obtain Jacob's favour. At one stage Leah's son, Reuben, brings his mother some fleshly roots, mandrakes, from the field (they are easily pinched into a human lower body shape and, then, superstitiously thought to induce pregnancy, when eaten). Rachel, childless, wanted the mandrakes and "*graciously*" allowed Leah to sleep with Jacob that night if Leah would give her the mandrakes. So, Jacob is hired from one wife for the other, for the price of a plant! Leah went to meet Jacob and told him of the bargain. Little wonder that he was angry with his loved Rachel, if she entered into such practices.

Comment:

The mandrake plant mentioned in *Genesis 30:14* still has the reputation of being an aphrodisiac. It is considered the same plant as the ginseng of Korea. The fruit is red and sticky, and the root can be eaten, though the fruit can be slightly poisonous, inducing exhilaration and stimulation, even to temporary insanity. If the wrinkled leaves and flowers are removed, the top can be pinched to resemble the human form. The forked root can resemble the lower human torso and legs. A good plant takes six years to grow, and so it is expensive, and has become a lucrative export from Korea. It is used as a flavour in tea, chewing gum, shampoo, among other things, and is credited with recovering lost youth, and a general feeling of well being and clear headedness.

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It is interesting to note that God intervened in **this** magic scenario in Jacob's family to accomplish His mission, rather like He did with the witch at Endor, *1 Samuel 28:7-25*. One of the patriarchal sons, Issachar, was born to Leah, and she conceived him when she bargained with Rachel for the right to sleep with Jacob that night. To note the story is to understand the tawdry behaviour linked with wicked practices that prevailed in this family.

All of this turmoil led Jacob to become unsettled in Haran, especially when he saw Laban's sons jealously watching his prosperity, imagining that they were being deprived. He could see his wives infected with the idolatry of their father (a later charge Ezekiel brought upon Israel, *Ezekiel 20:24*) and corrupting the minds of the children.

2. JACOB SEES THE NECESSITY TO LEAVE HARAN

So there was conflict in the Laban compound, not only in the Jacob compound. The Jacob and Laban conflict worsened. Both men are convinced that they have good reason to be right.

Consider:

* What reasons could they each give for defending their actions?

* What suggestions could we make for resolving this conflict?

* Is it possible to see Laban's point of view favourably?

* How can we better train ourselves to see the other person's point of view when controversy rises, so that we can better deal with conflict?

****

Jacob approached Laban to ask permission to leave Haran. Strange to us that he asked permission. Laban pleaded with him to stay, saying that he had learned by supernatural means (divination - a pagan practice), that God was with Jacob, and had therefore blessed Jacob, and in turn, himself as well. No wonder the children would be corrupted with such confused signals coming from the adults about God's loving care. So Jacob agreed to stay on, refusing Laban's offer to make him rich (as Abraham had refused the king of Sodom), for God had promised that. However, Jacob did become rich in cattle, no credit to Laban's cunning scheme, and not because of the tricks used showing the cattle, white streaked branches at their watering hole, but because God willed it. It is interesting to note that the *Septuagint* does not mention "*every speckled and spotted sheep*" of *verse 32*, and so it was probably added in, in later texts.

Consider:

* Is this a deficiency in the *LXX*?

* Or was the matter deemed, then, not to be authentic?

* Or inconsequential?

* Or was that piece of record lost, and later found?

* Or was it added to other texts for some external reason?

****

Comment:

We need to keep in mind that our available (English) texts are inspired (except for "*errors of transcription or translation*" - words present in *Faith Statements*), and contain what God wants and needs us to have for our salvation. Then we have no need to be anxious about differing texts.

****

Laban's action in *verse 35* seems to confirm that Jacob's share consisted of the black sheep and the speckled or spotted goats. The procedure with striped rods at breeding time was based on the mistaken belief that a vivid sight during conception leaves its mark on the embryo. We now know that a mother's continued stress can cause unborn babies stress as well, so that they are born with "*failure to thrive*". Perhaps something of this was recognised at the time in animals, as well as in human gestation. However, the plan for this phenomenon was deliberately orchestrated by the shepherds.

Jacob also used selective breeding, and a limited knowledge of genetics - a slow process as Laban doubtless knew. So the explanation for Jacob's increased flocks, in such a short time, can only be God's miraculous power, *Genesis 31:10-12*.

The sisters' status, once they were married, changed to one of exploitation, as far as Laban was concerned. Contemporary documents and codes confirm this status, - of daughters being wedded, with a bride price paid after the marriage. Instead of money, Jacob negotiated labour. Since Laban did not put away the equivalent money, or else he used it for himself, the sisters now say, in *verses 14* and *15*, that there is not even an inheritance for them. Inheritance could only have come through Jacob in any case, especially if they stayed in the family compound. But Rachel determines to have something of value to her, as we shall see.

Laban's sons resented the good stock management practices and husbandry skills of Jacob, (which Jacob had observed from the management of the Isaac compound so long ago). "*Jacob kept sheep for a wife*", *Hosea 12:12*, and was now an Esau, outdoor type. Laban's attitude had changed towards Jacob in the six extra years he stayed. The resolution to stay so long had strengths and weaknesses. It certainly gave Jacob some skills about mending strained and fractured relationships, though they continued to multiply around him.

3. JACOB'S MESSAGE FROM GOD

Jacob must have been mightily relieved to have another message from the God of Bethel asking him to go back to his native land. Without hesitation he calls a conference in his sheep field, *Genesis 31:4*, (probably so he would not be overheard), with Rachel and Leah. He tells them that their father is looking menacingly at him. He outlines what has been happening in the flocks and assures them that his flocks are numerous, and healthy. He also assures them that it has been suggested by God that he leave Haran. In reality he is giving them a choice of whether they go or stay. They respond wholeheartedly to the suggestion that they go, and take all they can with them. As "*the God of Bethel*" had spoken with Jacob, they probably expected to go back to the scene of the anointing of the pillar, and the vow to God, to Bethel.

Laban had sold his daughters (to Jacob), and used up all that was paid for them (Jacob's labour). Jacob did suggest the terms in the beginning, but, no doubt, the seemingly unregistered dialogue document was blurred over the years. In today's terms in Australian dollars, $30,000 a year for 14 years - that is nearly half a million dollars. Jacob did overpay Laban for his wives, according to *The Code of Hammurabi*, a Babylonian legal code of 18th century BC, in force at the time. A man need work no longer than three years for a "*possession*". As well, Jacob had worked another 6 years, perhaps in this time, building up his own herds, without debt to Laban. He lived three days journey from Laban, *Genesis 30:36*, so they must have had enormous flocks between them, so there would, no doubt, have been strife, like with Abraham and Lot. This distance would help Jacob prepare for moving his huge family and all his wealth, in secret.

The Bethel promise of God had been kept, despite Jacob's faith slips along the way. God's continuing presence is working in this man a pilgrimage of faith, which becomes more God directed, as he ages towards his declining Egypt years, when the "*plain*" man, (translated "*perfect*" for Job) of *Genesis 25:27,* may indeed be described as the alternately rendered "*upright*", His Esau like profanity had left him now, for he has no more tricks and deceit, except for his necessary God directed escape from Laban, *Genesis 31:3*.

4. WHERE ARE LABAN'S TITLE DEEDS?

Jacob was easily able to prepare for his journey, for his cattle were on an outreach station south, and he could have easily sent them on ahead. Four of his sons probably would have been working the southern property, but the rest of the family would have been waiting quietly until Laban went off in the opposite direction, when Jacob would send for them.

It is difficult to decide whether the assembled and multiplying herd was Jacob's Bethel promised tithe for God, or did the family itself, (multiple wives and children), fit this promise. Perhaps it was all the tithe blessings from God which, in turn, became a divine gift from Jacob to God, treasures for God, blessings for God, that is, for use in His service.

So for the second time Jacob stole away from his home, this time without proper negotiation with those left behind, about the people, the animals, or the goods.

But Laban pursued the family. It took him seven days to catch them, for he started out three days after their departure. The animals were already three days in advance. Ten days to travel 560 kilometres to Gilead with an enormous caravan of people and goods and animals - 56 kilometres a day. A good authority says that this distance is quite reasonable, though a long day, for such a herd. Jacob was escaping, and so they needed to ride hard.

Laban did have a long way to come, and also had to travel hard to catch them. He came right into alien Canaanitish land, where later the half tribe of Manasseh had their inheritance. He was a long way from home.

Consider:

* Why did Laban pursue them?

* To say goodbye, and to make peace?

* Or was there a more sinister reason?

* Did Laban want to get back the title deeds to his property which he couldn't find at home?

* Wasn't it Laban's present responsibility, to ensure that the deeds were available for his sons in the future?

* How else could Laban stop Jacob, or any future family coming north, and claiming **more** property, especially as Jacob had worked 20 years as a son in law, and had two of Laban's

daughters to wife, plus (as Laban saw it) many of his own servants, and possessions as well?

****

In *Genesis 31:24,* God spoke to Laban in a dream and advised him to speak carefully to Jacob. Laban was a Syrian and no believer in the exclusive God, YHWH. It is interesting to note that God speaks to an eclectic worshipper like Laban, who owned teraphims and practised other pagan rituals. Terah, his grandfather, had more influenced Laban's family, than his uncle Abram had influenced him.

So Laban confronts Jacob with the robbery and preambles his charge with his hurt and concern over their swift departure, giving him no chance for gestures of love and farewell.

"*But why did you steal my gods?*" he asks the startled Jacob.

Why indeed, we ask ourselves also, when the Godly mission had been established in the family discussion in the field, and Jacob had told his wives about the Divine message.

Jacob, astonished, protests that he knows nothing of the gods, and tells him to search, and whoever has the gods will be put to death, a rather rash promise, that shows that he didn't

suspect his favoured wife. It is thought by some that Rachel's early death did indeed fulfil this vow. It is also an indication that the families lived under *The Code of Hammurabi*, for robbery warranted death, whereas in the later *Law of Moses,* it required double restitution. This, and the incident of Jephthah's daughter *(Judges 11:30)*, teaches us to be careful with vows.

However Rachel **had** stolen the gods!

1. She may have liked to have dual deities to pray to (God and gods) for extra protection.

2. She may have thought she could have something tangible to worship on the way.

Whatever her motive, it shows that she was not free of her pagan gods; otherwise she would not have taken them. However, land title deeds and rights of inheritance were often kept inside the teraphim (gods). So this steal, from her father, proves that deceit was bound up in **her** character also. The teraphim were often shrunken head skulls of favourite ancestors.

Perhaps also, Rachel grabbed the gods and the title deeds as well, enough to serve **two** purposes. Indeed

a. Laban (and his sons) valued the images as gods, **and**

b. They valued the title deeds, for property rights.

This becomes evident in the later stages of this incident. Both sisters had complained about their inheritance rights, and perhaps Rachel decided to have some possession of her father's, as well as a family god.

Archaeologists have now found a clay tablet recording the law, that if a son in law possessed the household gods of his father in law, then he was considered a real son in the inheritance - information from *Barbara F. Bowen,* "*Strange Scriptures*", *page 78*. So Laban was justly worried about Jacob's future inheritance claims.

Rachel is now the deceiver of her husband, for he would not have known of her prize, or, now, of her terror. She hears that if she is found out, she will be put to death. Rachel was indeed her father's daughter, and had woven some more strands in the tangled web of intrigue.

Comment:

We note the terrible effect brought on by strange women amidst God's people. *Ezekiel 20:24* tells us of "*eyes*" lusting "*after their father's idols*", and *Jeremiah 44* of strange god idol worship, and *Ezra 9* of the folly of mixed marriages, and *Nehemiah 13:23, 24* of the marriage alliances with strange women who have strange gods. How intolerable, that bringing with them strange languages, the resultant children could not speak Hebrew. We have already noted that Isaac's household would have been so contaminated with Esau's children, (if Isaac and Rebekah had not taken measures to prevent it).

It's interesting too that the *Bible* tells us of the dreadful voodoo, black magic, and shameful occult practices employed by the women, but consistently avoids explicit descriptions (see *NIV Study Bible*, *Ezekiel 13.18*). Even today it is mainly women who promote these shameful practices. It is said that women, in past centuries, being so exploited by men, turned to these wicked practices where they did assume some power (over men). Reason, not excuse, and so not condoned.

****

Rachel had hidden the gods in her camel furniture, which would be quite easy to do, being a seat construction with a side opening roof and curtains. She sat on her saddle bags and concealed the gods and when Laban came to search her tent, she told him she was invalided out for the time, and could not rise up, *Genesis 31:35*. Another point of shame that such a devious excuse could be made. Later the Law of Moses advised every menstruating woman that anything that she sat on was unclean, *Leviticus 15:20*. Laban is outwitted by the daughter he had, years earlier, defrauded of her rightful husband. Laban and Jacob have a conference over the daughters, menservants, maidservants and animals that have been brought from Haran.

a. Laban claims ownership.

b. Jacob claims he paid overmuch for it all.

It is difficult to understand why there is disagreement about the price of the property, as there seems to have been many previous discussions over the matter. They were all probably unregistered dialogue documents.

The agreement on the purchases had changed ten times always to Jacob's disadvantage, and he had borne it all. Jacob's salvation had lain in Haran, but he had fallen into the hands of cruel Laban, and salvation from that, he hoped, came nearer with every step towards home. He now had a fine tuned sense of right and wrong and he would no more be bullied by Laban.

Laban seeing Jacob was determined on his course and not finding his idols/title deeds, proposes a covenant between them. First he asks that Jacob not mistreat his daughters or take any other woman to wife. Ironically Jacob would have preferred only Rachel. Next Laban suggests a stone heap, a pillar between Jacob and himself, "*a Mispah*", a boundary marker, a "*watchtower*". Although Jacob had no such intention of claiming the northern lands, Laban made it quite clear, with a covenant struck, that this was the boundary between Syria and the Israelites in Canaan, and that no claim by Jacob or his family could ever be made north of this spot. He knew his title deeds were in the camp so he nullified those documents with this covenant.

***Mispah - "pillar to witness, that I will not pass over it, to harm thee, nor thou harm me",* said Laban.**

Laban called it in Aramaic *"Jegar-sahadutha";* Jacob called it in Hebrew *"Galeed",*

Both words mean *"heap of witness"*.

Jacob used the Hebrew language, which language was probably from the Shemites, (with remnants still in Canaan).

God was called upon to witness, as the *"God of Abraham"* and the *"God of Nahor",*

and Jacob offered a sacrifice, and they ate a meal together, and next day, they parted cordially.

And Jacob strode on.

Comment:

The Mispah has come to mean a generous and loving "*Peace be with you*" farewell between God fearing people, that is, that "*the Lord be between you and me while we are apart*". Because the circumstances of this parting have been the result of a troubling incident, it does not mean that

we are not free to use the farewell in such a way as we tend to do. However we need to remember "*This so called Mispah benediction in context is really a* ***denunciation*** *or* ***curse***"- *NIV Study Bible* comment for *Genesis 31:49*.

In later Israelitish history, *1 Kings 15:22*, two stone and wood fortresses of Baasha were removed, and King Asa used the material to build two more at Geba and Mispah, to prevent Baasha expanding southward into Ramah. So Mispah came to be regarded as a fortress, to prevent expansion **into** property (as Laban used it), as did the Great Wall of China, but also conversely, like a Berlin wall, to prevent people escaping **out** of a designated property place. Prevention of escape was what Baasha had in mind, trying to prevent the Israelites migrating south and swelling the population and the military force of the less wicked Judah. These walls, or forts, were either inclusive or exclusive, yet we have changed the appreciation of the term, and use the term "*Mispah*", *as* a bridge between people who are apart, as a "*watch stone*".

****

Seven years later, after Jacob's and Laban's Mispah, God asks Jacob to rid his household of strange gods and he obeys without hesitation, *Genesis 35:2*, but sadly it was an ineffective destruction. Jacob probably realised by then that Laban's gods had travelled all that distance back to the Promised Land - for they were by this time well nigh "*home*", his real home, and Rachel was with child (and, as we know in hindsight, so near her death).

Jacob knew that God had been with them, for the nations round about were restrained, by God's compassionate hand, from harming Jacob, or his family, evidenced by the fact that he lived in the shadow of so many cities. He was wealthy and therefore a good trading partner, still if those cities had wished to rid themselves of Jacob and his family, it would have been easy, and would have only brought temporary discredit with their neighbours.

Comment:

Once more, after the god stealing incident, punishment did not fall upon the sinful one, (Rachel). They were preserved to work out their own realisation of unacceptable behaviour, and leaning on God for their salvation, they would realise God's will for them was greater than His need to punish them. Still He did need them to be righteous to show forth His glory. In that sense the patriarchs were his first lasting missionaries. If God had punished them then, that is, turned His back on them, the people round about would question His fidelity to these people. In the end though, with many generations passed, God had to punish them for their wickedness and He did turn His back on them, for the nations round about would have derided God, after so much wickedness, for His tolerance, Ezekiel 36:22, 23.

"*Would you, dear God*", we pray, "*preserve us from punishment for our sins, may we lean on you for our salvation, and may Your will and purpose for us, never be obscured by our sin. Help us to recognise and repair our sinful deeds and to be true missioners of your will*".

****

Jacob and Laban farewelled each other, no doubt, with deceitful Rachel still sitting in her canopy pretending to be indisposed. We wonder whether her father really kissed her and whether there was any love and respect in that cursory kiss. On the other hand, Rachel's husband, Jacob, herewith closes the door on the great learning curve of his life.

CONCLUSION:

With the departure of Laban,

Went the stink of God's chastisement,

The cheating, cheating, and cheating.

Jacob had endured ten times and more.

It came out of his nostrils,

And stung his eyes.

It pained his ears,

And burned his lips,

And swelled his tongue.

His fingers were burnt, burnt and burnt

Until hate must have been in his heart.

What is bred in the bone,

Cannot be got rid of in a day.

Still Laban went north,

And Jacob went south,

And that was the end of that.

CHAPTER 4

PREPARATION FOR THE GREAT MEETING WITH ESAU

"***Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto … the country of Edom",***

Genesis 32:3.

FOCUS:

In this *Scriptural* text we are awed to find that Jacob has another close encounter with God, before he meets Esau, ***Genesis 32***.

1. JACOB HAS AN ANGELIC VISIT ONCE MORE

Two camps have now parted, but now in front another two are about to meet. Jacob had divine assurance for an escort home, but difficult as his father in law had been, the prospect of the vengeance and violence of his brother, daunted him. A wonderful vision of angels at Mahanaim met him and he felt momentarily reassured by God. "*This is God's host*", he said. He knew that God's host was camped here as well and saw that as divine assurance, that God's host had come to escort him to Canaan, see *NIV* note, *verse 2,* about Jacob naming this place, Mahanaim. But there was much more reassurance to come. This sighting is so insignificantly told in *Genesis 32:1, 2,* yet it must have been a greatly significant factor in Jacob's movement towards his brother.

2. THE NEXT ENCOUNTER IS NOT WHAT JACOB EXPECTS

Jacob then heard the report from his scouts. He had sent them ahead to tell Esau that he had large numbers of oxen and asses and sheep, and that he had been with Laban in Haran. Jacob would not be sure whether Esau knew about his twenty years history with the family in Haran.

The scouts reported to Jacob that Esau was now worthy, (a "*conqueror*"), in the land of Edom. Jacob is now distressed at this news and interprets the approach as a threat. His fear rises sharply again into his throat. *George Orwell* in "*1984*" has as one of his central thoughts that in every person there is some concealed fear, which if it is brought out in the open, will break him down and destroy him. In Jacob it was the fear of his brother. Now as they approach one another it rears its ugly head again, and he feels destruction is near.

Jacob's cry to God for help and protection and care, rises above the memory of what God has promised him, and he confesses: ***"I am not worthy of thy mercies", Genesis 32:10.***

This is a beautiful prayer, simple and earnest, the first recorded in the *Bible.* He does not dwell upon his own death, but upon the terrible picture of a doomed mother flinging herself upon her children, trying to save **them** from death. When children are damaged, they are of the most pitiable miseries of war. Jacob fears for his children, for they are his Patriarchal progeny and so part of the blessings of family. We can identify so closely with Jacob and his prayer for his family, for do we not pray in exceptional circumstances, when our heart is in our mouth, "*I know you know God … but please remember …"*. We do know He knows, but we need to ask. It helps our peace of mind, and reminds us of His ever presence, and God needs to hear our heartfelt prayer.

Jacob then reminds God of His promises, that God had said, "*I will surely do you good*", so he knows that God will save him in this next hour of need. Then he lays at God's feet his worry about the two camps in which he has set his entourage. He prays for himself, and for his wives and children, his "*two bands*". Having set his camp in these two bands he is expecting that Esau's wrath and honour will be sated and satisfied with one bloodbath, that is, in the event of an ambush at least half would survive. Of this insurance over all his preparations, *H. A. Whittaker* says "*Jacob in characteristic fashion trusted in God and kept his powder dry*", *page 65*.

Jacob had made some extraordinary preparations for the safety of himself and his loved ones, especially Rachel and Joseph, whom he placed safely, well behind the front lines, as Esau approached. He must have looked back shame faced days later, or even years later, when he had mellowed with age and experience, and felt foolish over the panic that had set in, for God had already recently reassured him. After all God had asked him to return "*to thy country and thy **kindred***" and had promised ***"Peace***". That, in itself, implied that a welcome awaited him, not hostility. It hardly required the psychological effect of a soothing, and huge over compensating gift of 600 (almost) animals, which he later presented in waves as a sweetener to his brother, as well as this insurance plan.

Sure that they were tucked in safely for the night, Jacob remains on the bank of the Jabbok. He indeed, once more, despite God's reassurances, is in need of Divine help and spends another night with the Lord. That other night he could lay down and sleep and dream on a stone - not this night.

3. GOD IN THE JABBOK

This is not just a story about two names and a clicky hip. It has much more sacredness than that. It is God's answer to an earnest prayer. It is a repeating of the promise to care and to fulfil His will, another reassurance. It is also a lesson about the lengths, that is, occasions and circumstances, to which God will go to reassure.

Comment:

E. J. Russell in "*How to Study the Scriptures*", *Chapter 38,* reminds us that the foreboding and terrifying atmosphere of the Jabbok was there from the start, to set the tone of the strange confrontation. There is an atmosphere that confronts a weary descendant, David, many years later, with the same demand to face the issues of life and death. This, we believe, is the very location of the "*valley of the shadow of death*" of *Psalm 23,* a landscape providing the imagery of that psalm, and also possibly that of *Psalm 6*. The crossing of the Jabbok ford was a task of some magnitude and toil.

Here the Jordan pursues a serpentine course through a flat bottomed river valley up to a mile wide, scarred and scored by dry channels where the twisting river has changed its course, and is choked with tangled jungle. The Arabs call this the Zor, or thicket. *Nelson Gleuk*, who was an archaeologist and surveyor early in the 20th century, says in "*The River Jordan*", on *page 63,* that the narrow flood plain of the Zor*,* "*through which the Jordan knifes its way*"*,* is lush green and tropical, like a rain forest.

The vegetation is apparently dense and sometimes impenetrable and rank with thorns and thistles. There are thickets of oleander, cane tangled with bushes, vines, willows, poplars and twisted tamarisks.

In "*The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*" by *G. A. Smith, page 310-312,* there is a frightening description, of a place well left alone at dusk, when night is nigh.

In many parts of this area there are mounds and ridges and hills of grey marl, greasy and salty, with stretches of gravel and small stones, sand clay, and other debris like that of an old sea bottom. This area assumes the weirdest shapes, and gives a desolate and lonely aspect to the vale. But, not withstanding all this poison, vegetation is extremely rank and thick, especially in springtime. The heat is like a forcing house. Wherever water comes through, the flowers and leaves rise to the knee, and herbage, often as far as the shoulder. The drier stretches are covered by broom, or intricate thorn bush and sticks. By all the streams there are swaying brakes of cane, and oleander grows profusely.

The streams dash violently down to the Jordan, their spring floods tearing up the surface of the country, causing erosion in pockets. Flowers and grass and marl and the ruins of cane brake are heaped across the path. Swamps form in large patches, and, of course, there is much malaria. To those who look down from the hills and along any great stretch of the valley, to the Zor trails and winds below, it is like an enormous green serpent, more forbidding and frightening in its rankness, than any open water would be.

Russell, in describing, at length, the geographical features and confluence of the Jabbok, continues the argument that there **are** folk who react to landscape and to the moods of the sky. There can be little doubt that Jacob, as David later, would have found the atmosphere of the Jabbok daunting, confining, overwhelming, and depressing as he remained there alone, hemmed in by the dark, tall walls and the damp floor, of the Jabbok ravine, at night. Perhaps a wind arose and the weather unexpectedly deteriorated as well. There are only the stars and the

sky, and he can only look up for comfort. His loved son, Joseph, was in no less a pit than this ten years later. It was at this very place when David, much later, had cried out, "*My soul is sore vexed*", *Psalm 6:3*.

The insurmountable literal problems that *H. A. Whittaker* raises, in "*Wrestling Jacob*", *pages 69-76,* concerning the incident actually happening, of someone else being there to wrestle Jacob, are resolved if we realise it happened exactly as stated, in Jacob's dream that night at the Jabbok.

In arguing for this incident to be a dream, *Russell* continues that God appeared twice to Jacob in his lifetime, here, and in his dream at Bethel, *Genesis 28:10-22*. They are two theophanies. The stories of Jacob at Bethel and Peniel stand out in stark relief and balance one another in the overall account of his life. Jacob's Haran life is an enclosed within ***two envelope structures*. The dreams are *the first envelope structure* supporting the harrowing Haran experience.**

In further expanding the structure, the dreams are in turn flanked with ***the second envelope structure,*** of Jacob's two fearful expectations of his brother Esau**. The dream episode at Bethel occurred as he was fleeing Canaan from the wrath of Esau, and this dream episode at Peniel occurred when he was returning to face Esau.** So, here, from the pen of Moses, there are two Biblical envelope structures supporting Jacob's Haran experience.

Even within these enveloping structures, other interesting structures are present.

On the **first** occasion**, God gives Jacob the Abrahamic promises.**

On the **second** occasion, **Jacob is given a new name.**

Again,

At the **first** incident, **Jacob's sleep is nourished by a welcoming sustaining dream,**

At the **second** incident, **a vivid dream is punctuated by a seeming torment that prevents his sleep.**

The dream at Peniel takes place in his fearful and feverished mind, no doubt influenced by the circumstances of his presence alone in the foreboding place, and his funk at the thought of facing the dangers of the morrow, and no doubt tinged with the stress of the Laban confrontation which had just happened.

So -

4. Fleeing Esau

3. In Jacob's dream

2. God gives Jacob promises

1. A welcoming sustaining dream

all balancing with

1. A vivid tormenting dream

2. God gives Jacob a new name

3. In Jacob's dream

4. Approaching Esau

"*Are not the events of this narrative the stuff that dreams are made of?*" *Russell* asks, and continues the argument for the absence of reality, that

1. Only in dreams do we find ourselves **doing the impossible and improbable things.**

2. Only in dreams might we wrestle God, and prevail to the point where "**God**" **pleads to be let go**.

3. And only in a dream could a Jacob **bargain the release of God on favourable terms to himself.**

That Jacob came to realise, in the course of the contest, that it was a contest with God, and not a "*man*", is beyond doubt, from his immediate response that he had "*seen God face to face, and my life is preserved*", and his realisation that his thigh disability had happened during the contest.

Consider:

* And how often, as we age, do we awake with a misplaced muscle and a terrible pain, because we have twisted something in the night?

* How much more, if we lay down with a troubled mind, in a damp, dank place, and fell into a deep sleep?

****

Jacob spent the whole of his life until now, wrestling with God, making things so much harder than they needed to be, by doing it his own way. This night his whole life comes up before him in his fear for the worst in the morning, just as a person's life, it is said, flows before them when death is approaching. Above this, there is the great truth in *Job 33:14-18,*

"*God speaks to man in a dream ... in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men;*

... then he opens the ear of men, and seals their wisdom ... to withdraw man from his purpose ... to keep his life from perishing".

There is a powerful argument for Jacob's experience being a dream, but for that, **it is no less a divine face to face experience.**

4. JACOB BECOMES ISRAEL

We are presented in *Genesis 32,* with the details of the story that has no witnesses, we are dependent only on Jacob for the telling of this story. No doubt he related it to somebody, and it circulated orally until it was written down.

Jacob wrestles physically (literally), or in a dreamlike trance and figuratively (spiritually) with the Lord that night. *Whittaker* suggests that Jacob thought at first he was wrestling with Esau, and that's why he used so much strength. If he had known it was God, he would not have struggled so hard, nor would he have thought of a stranger (an angel) approaching him, for Esau, only, was on his mind. This is an interesting and valid point of view.

Comment:

The wrestling went on longer than any physical wrestling match should, until the adversary struck Jacob's thigh, putting it out of joint, and disabling him. We can think back to the oath Abraham's servant made with him over the matter of the wife for Isaac journey. The servant put his hand to Abraham's thigh in a very solemn oath, to carry out Abraham's wishes for the blessing of posterity. The thigh was regarded as the seat of the reproductive powers, and so in this story it is said to be representing the smiting of that descendant of Jacob who would be smitten of God, *Isaiah 53:4*, and by his sufferings and overcoming, justify Jacob and all God's elect, *verse 11*, - the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a solemn oath that God would provide salvation for sinful man.

The inevitable reference in Jacob's experience, to the Saviour's heel biting serpent, who bruised him, but who was in turn crushed in the head by that Saviour in *Genesis 3:16,* is hard to ignore. That sin serpent heel biter was at last overcome, and he whom he bruised, was raised from the dead.

On a simpler plain, *Genesis 32:32* is in the nature of a footnote, and is a dietary abstention custom, not a law, and is nowhere else mentioned in the *Old Testament*. The dietary restriction placed on the children of Israel, was to abstain from eating this sinew, (to remind them of this event), and that restriction for them remains so today. After circumcision, it is the second special ordinance, though not a command, and is to remind them down through their own history of a great historical event, when their ancestor Jacob, became Israel.

****

Jacob's thigh slipped back into joint, presumably, but the great sinew, (and with it the great sciatic nerve), that travels the length of the leg, shrank, and, as a result, made Jacob lame. Not only his thigh, but his whole leg to his heel, is now disabled.

Jacob's heel, as well as his thigh, had been grasped by God, as he had grasped Esau's heel at their births. He was a heel grasper, but God shows him how He is the strongest heel grasper.

The injury is a reassurance for Jacob. In a sense Jacob would "*treasure*" his disability as a constant reminder of God's love and care and promises.

But this is more than that.

It is also an oath with Jacob,

That God will permanently injure him,

So that the injury will serve Jacob

As a memory of this wondrous event,

Where God promises in a name change,

Eternal blessings.

Hosea 12:3, 4 puts it well about Jacob, "*In his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed*", and this endorses that the angel was a direct representative of God. This is a completely unique and exceptional circumstance, where God seems to be assuring Himself that yes, Jacob does trust Him now. He has brought Jacob's fear of Esau to light and has made him confront it and, as well, confront his lack of reality in his faith, for God knows that he is not yet transformed by His power. (The intensive wrestlings that we have with God may also bring on

a physical ailment.) The out of joint thigh, and now weakened muscle showed Jacob that he had to rely and trust in God's promise to keep them all safe from Esau, because **he was now in no physical condition to save them himself.**

Now, realising that he is not wrestling with a man, and that he is now carrying an injury, Jacob clings to this being, no longer struggling, but pleading for a blessing and says, "*I will not let you go, except …"*. This is the desperate hunger for God, where Jacob's inhibitions for the sanctity of the moment are overridden, and we understand that. There's an unexpected response from the being -

"What is your name?"

And Jacob is surprised.

Isaac had asked Jacob his name before he left home, and he had deceitfully answered, "*I am Esau*". It was a lie, and not a lie, for he was an actor. He was as profane as Esau was. Now the question is repeated and is truthfully answered. His name had been bad mouthed by Esau, not undeserved. But now when he said, "*Jacob*", "*plain*", "*upright*", his considered and correct answer, brings an immediate blessing from God, for his name is now changed to "*Israel*", *Genesis 32:28*. In *Genesis 35:10* God later confirms the name change.

When Jacob said his name, at God's inquiry, he knew it **had** meant to others "*out smarter*", but this time it is different, he is helpless, and cannot outsmart anyone. He cannot even flee and leave the chaos behind him, as he had done before. So now, as a cripple, he has to trust in God to deliver him. So God's question of whether he trusts in Him is now answered. Much later, in *Hosea 1:7*, God reminds Judah, through Hosea's naming of his children, that He will save them, and that they will not be saved by bow, or sword or battle. The message has not changed.

Now Jacob knows not only with **whom** he wrested, but **what** was the wrestle purpose, as well. The wrestle is really a blessing because in it, Jacob was so willing to recognise God, His justice and mercy, and continuing care. His hunger for God had been realised. Now the confession of his name, Jacob, that is, not only "*supplanter*" and all the other negative meanings of his name that Esau put upon it, but his evening confession of unworthiness, is a plea that God will see in his name, a man who is worthy and upright at last.

But surprisingly Jacob now gets a new name **and** a new destiny - **Israel**. It means "*He who strives with God*", or more perfectly "*God strives*", for the latter implicitly encompasses the former. God had chosen Jacob, and would not release him until He accomplishes His purpose. Jacob had struggled with God and with men and had overcome. *H. L. Ellison* in "*The Message of the Old Testament*", *page 29,* rightly remarks, that Jacob could not be regarded as an attractive man, but then a man who determines to do God's will "*by his own strength and wisdom, never is*". Jacob's own verdict was "*few and evil have been the days of my life", Genesis 47:9.* Now Jacob has a reason (a faith expressed in him by God) to change.

Jacob asks the name of the being who changed his name, but when there is no response from this Godly messenger, and as Jacob relaxes his grip, the being is gone.

Ellison asks us in "*Fathers of the Covenant*", *page 77*, to understand that people at the time thought that knowing the name of a god would somehow bring control over the god and ensure his help in time of need. This may have been in Jacob's mind, but he knew the magic of those named gods was no match for the God of his fathers, and that He required weakness, trust and dependence. Jacob really knows the name of God, and what God is about.

"***I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved",***

and he calls the name of that place Peniel, (which means "*the face of God*"). Years after when Joseph brings his two sons to visit their grandfather, Jacob, on his deathbed, in Egypt, he says: "*The angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads.*" By the time the old man recounts this story he is familiar with the blessings of God and is comfortable being close to Him. But he does pin point some definite personal experience from his memory. It can be no other experience than this one at Peniel, for indeed it was a crisis, a turning point, once more, in Jacob's life conversion.

Consider:

* Do we long for a Peniel experience, where God could reveal Himself to us, with such a positive message?

****

Jacob vindicated God's investment in him, when his meanness and cunning were eschewed for a far worthier noble life, a plain, upright man. What a mighty episode, was this Peniel night! Wrestling had been part of Jacob's life strategy - Esau, and then Laban - now left alone, and crippled, Jacob could wrestle no one - certainly not Esau any more.

The story deserves a place in *Scripture* because it is about life and death, and struggle and recognition of sin, and confession and forgiveness, and going forward in faith. These Old Testament stories are about the ultimate questions, they are concerned much less with men and women, but rather with the language of God, who is everywhere. He really is the subject, the inner core. People are never important for their own sakes, but always as objects of the divine activity within their lifelong stories. Whether they affirm or deny Him, He is always the inner and most important story. It is His mission that is important, and men and women can be part of that, only if they wish to show by their baptism and then their lives, that they are also committed friends of God, so that His glory is on show, and His mission mandate is being fulfilled.

5. MORNING AT LAST

Shuffling over the brook, parting the swaying canes of the Jabbok, not only disabled, but now running late, Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, Esau was already coming, *(Genesis 33:1)*.

Consider:

* Who will out perform who?

* How goes sibling rivalry now?

****

CONCLUSION

The preparation by God of Jacob, for the task ahead has been inspirational. Now we wait to see if the terrible dysfunction that has caused him so much angst until now, has abated.

CHAPTER 5

ESAU MEETS JACOB WITH PLEASURE

"***And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and, looked, and behold, Esau came", Genesis 33:1.***

FOCUS:

In ***Genesis 33*** there is a tiny slice of family history that records joy and delight between two brothers, twins, who, it appears, have genuinely missed each other.

1. JACOB GETS A GOOD RESULT AT LAST

It is a relief to read the meeting between Esau and Jacob, wedged as it is, between such emotive and action packed chapters. Having recently moved from one confrontation, which Jacob solved peacefully, he is now confronted with another, which is solved with equanimity also. He uses planning and praying, to help him get the best result for this second confrontation.

The struggle to redress wrongs is often difficult, and mostly needs to accommodate fear, humility, a sense of vulnerability, and hope, and in the end gratitude, for what has been accomplished.

This significant incident represents a spiritual shift of emphasis from the individual, to the national identity. The incident occurs on the border of what will become the boundary of Israel, as it is the site of the first victory over the kings of the Promised Land, as they emerge from the wilderness. Jacob/Israel is the father of the emerging nation. **The prayer for help in this confronting situation is a model for us all, when we are fearful, *Genesis 32:9-12*.**

Consider:

*** How was Jacob stronger and weaker, for his utter and complete surrender to the power of God in his time of need?**

*** Does it happen that we get both strength and weakness as a result of prayer?**

*** God gives us the strength to overcome, but do we view submission to others, as He asks of us, as a weakness?**

****

With the change of name from Jacob to Israel, the tone of our narrative changes. Jacob, as we shall see, retains vestiges of his old character that mar the family's God like progress through the land, but, in all, the story now portrays wisdom, and maturity, and a character, moving towards that ideal, uprightness, which is in the name Jacob.

It is noteworthy that as he moves towards the ideal in his name, Jacob has a name change. We need to be careful here for it is not a changed name, but an additional name. Saul's name, *(Acts 13:9)*, was not changed, he kept his Hebrew name, but he was thereafter known by the Greek, Paul. Abram and Sarai had their names changed to Abraham and Sarah, and those names were subsequently used. Mostly Jacob is called by his original name, but his new name, Israel, is used at times of great consequence. Later, in *Genesis 35:10*, after God endorses the name change/addition, both names are used. In *Genesis 48:2* both names are used: "*when Jacob was told ..., Israel rallied his strength*" but the *Scripture* is speaking about the same person. Moses, under inspiration, uses both.

God wanted to underline His message that the great nation He had predicted was now in its embryo - so He uses a name change for that purpose.

2. PEACE WITH ESAU

Now Jacob had told the men who were leading with gifts for Esau to address (through a messenger) Esau as "*lord*" - "*I am your servant*", that is, *("I am reformed")*. He wishes to find grace in Esau's sight.

He does find grace and peace - the peace that God had promised, when He spoke to Jacob, at Bethel 20 years ago, of his return to this land.

Jacob had stolen Esau's birthright and blessing, and made himself chief, now he assumes the manner of a servant, and he and his family prepare to bow down to Esau, recognising the chieftainship of his brother. Jacob bowed seven times. His fear has been diluted by exile and other troubles, but it now wells within him again. His old distress and guilt multiplies more fear, especially when his messenger returns to tell him that Esau has 400 men with him.

Distress and guilt should never simmer. If evil actions make guilt, we need to recognise the guilt and retrace, and undo the deed as best we can, striving for forgiveness. Simmering guilt never enhances a Godly character. Now, here in this story, we see the result of simmering guilt.

Esau, himself grown wealthy, independent of the family, and also blessed by God, as Isaac had promised him, stands before Jacob. The waves of animals that have passed in front of Esau awed him, as Jacob had intended it should. Jacob's double insurance (for God had reassured him at the Brook Jabbok) of a gift for Esau of such magnitude would have also impressed Esau's 400 men. Jacob placed his secondary wives and children in front, and next Leah and her children, and then "*hindermost*" his favourite and beloved Rachel and Joseph. Jacob then approached Esau. We need to remember this incident, later, when Joseph talks of "*bowings down*", for he is watching this performance. Jacob must have been mightily relieved, as he raised himself from his seventh bow, to see that Esau was running to meet him, and embraced him. Indeed the whole Jacob company must have been relieved, but especially this small seven year old child, who must have picked up some of the feelings of fear that Jacob felt, and noted the preparations that went into impressing this uncle of his. He had lived and fled, with his family, from under the subjugation of his great uncle Laban's leadership, and here it seems they have met more humiliation.

Jacob's plan, of the parading show and the enormous gift, seems inconsistent with his prayer, until we realise that God does not expect us to sit back and do nothing. Still we need to hedge our efforts with sensitivity. It could be argued, as Esau did, that Jacob's show was over the top of sensitivity, but Jacob had other considerations in mind.

Esau ran to meet Jacob and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept. Oh, what joy at last! This little boy Joseph, now had this scene, as well, etched in his memory, for, many years later, when he was Prime Minister of Egypt, he also fell on the neck of his long lost estranged brethren, as these brothers did. The sons of Jacob bowed to Joseph many times, as his dreams predicted they would, in a reversal of this humiliating incident.

But tradition has spoiled the beauty of this story and added spite instead. We hope it is more than naivety that hopes the following story is pure fiction. Spite seems entirely out of order.

Comment:

Firstly

- *H. L. Ellison*, in "*Fathers of the Covenant*", *page 77,* tells us of a row of four little dots over the one word in Hebrew for "*and he kissed him*". Jewish tradition explains these as the four teeth marks of Esau as he actually bit Jacob. While we may wish to ignore this piece of Rabbinic fancy, and dismiss it as untrue, and wish to have no further discussion on the point, we may accept the implied judgment on Esau's former unsavoury behaviour, and that this incident is an extension of it. Added to this there is no suggestion in Scripture that his character had really changed.

The most likely explanation, that we may favour, is that God had spoken to Esau, as He had to Laban, and had warned him against any violent action towards Jacob and to any of his family. We cannot really ignore the implications of four hundred men who followed Esau, as his entourage.

Ellison feels that it is tragic that the whole story lives on in Jewish memory, not as an indication of what God expects of His people Israel, (which may be an inditement upon them), but rather as something that affects their diet, even to this very day. Hindquarters' meat has to be "*porged*", that is, have the sinew removed, a difficult process. This means that in many countries, the orthodox Jew does not eat hindquarters' meat. The Israelites did not eat the sinew as a reminder of how their ancestor became Israel; if this fact is forgotten, the prohibition becomes a mere bit of ritualism, and of no meaning to them.

Secondly

- There is a tradition amongst Muslims, in *THE KORAN* addendum, of *(CXIV.) SURA V. - THE TABLE MEDINA*. - at *65*, " '*The hand of God', says the Jews, 'is chained up'. Their own hands shall be chained up - and for that which they have said shall they be accursed. Nay! Outstretched are both His hands!*" They take this to mean, that in Paradise the Jews will have their right hand stuck to the left hand side of their neck. That would almost completely immobilise them. This Muslim tradition claims that God's hands are outstretched only to them. A spiteful belief. No less an incident of spite as the notion of the bite of Esau on Jacob, in the first comment, that is, Jews against Muslims.

From these points, we can understand that there is no effort from either side, in giving the glory for the incident to God.

1. In the tradition of a bite from Esau and not a kiss, the lesson of God working in Jacob's life, and how he came to trust in Him is lost, while the emphasis is on a spiteful act of an enemy.

2. As well, the meaning of the thigh injury is forgotten, in the useless focus on things fanciful and unnecessary.

This is indeed a disappointment.

****

The important thing to stress then here, in "*Kith and Kin*", is, that **God had solved Jacob's pressing problem with Esau,** (restraining, or retraining Esau somehow), in a Godly way. We are not told how He did so, or how long the affection for Jacob lasted. But God's solving of the

pressing problem, did not allow Jacob to escape from it. This time he had to confront it, and God brought him to face his problem in a weakness, dependant on God's strength.

"*Who are those with you?*" asks Esau, and is introduced to Jacob's family - "*God's gracious gift*", Jacob calls his family, (indeed they are, tithes, or pledges, for God, that is, blessings from God for God, to be used in His service). They all bow down to Esau. Note that Joseph now has his forehead to the earth as well and his eyes downcast.

3. ESAU - AND JACOB'S TITHES FOR GOD

- The past cannot be forgotten, but

- The offence can be forgiven only if there is repentance, and

- Then the hurt is no longer held accountable by God, or by the offended.

- The matter of restitution to God and the offended is no small consideration.

There are many unanswered questions here, about blessings and tithes and pledges and forgiveness and restitution. It may be as well to pause and consider the great human tendencies and truths being worked out here in the text, as the two brothers meet. Here are the four considerations.

Consider:

***1*. About - BLESSINGS:**

Esau asks Jacob

"***What meanest thou by all this drove?"***

"***Why have you sent me all these presents?"***

(the presents that Jacob had sent on ahead).

* Can we put aside our surety of mind that these gifts were the result of simmering guilt, and an insurance, and look for a higher motive for Jacob's inappropriate gift?

* Has Jacob realised that to have blessings, is to know that blessings are to be rendered back to God?

* Does Jacob know that rendering our blessings back to God results in a wealth of blessings?

As noble gestures have often been born of the ignoble, we can assume that Jacob is at last a blessing to God. What a pleasing thing that was for God. Jacob calls his princely gift "*my blessing*", (his tithe), because he considered it good fortune that Esau, after all the protestations, received it.

***2*. About - TITHES:**

We have considered that these blessings might have been the tithes or pledges, which Jacob promised at Bethel, before Haran.

* If Jacob has no information about the tithes, is this how God wants Jacob to "*render*" his tithes to Him?

* If not, and if Jacob, as well, is unsure in the matter of his promised tithes to God at Bethel, how else would God like them to be "*rendered*"?

* Is this a further recognition of Abraham's example of the tithing gift to Melchisedec, a recognition that "*giving*" or "*pledging*" is a worship principle?

3. **About - FORGIVENESS:**

"***For therefore I have seen thy face",*** **meaning (as *"the face of God"*), says Jacob of Esau.**

* Does this indicate Jacob's fear, and so he flatters his brother?

* Is it just Oriental hyperbole?

* Or does he really mean that Esau presents a face as gracious and good, as the face of God,

which he has just seen at Peniel?

* Or does it mean that the blessing of the love between Jacob and Esau, where a vengeful Esau does not contend with him now, is forgiveness, and a continuation of the love that God has shown to him (Jacob)?

* Or are Esau's memory and moral nature only obscured by the overwhelming presents that Jacob brings to the meeting as an appeasement (which he accepts, after Jacob presses him to do so)?

* Can we recognise in Esau's initial refusal, that he has selectively forgotten his murderous intent and his anger at Jacob's deception?

* If Esau seemed disinclined to murder his brother after all, what was he feeling and thinking?

* In any case **how can we tell about forgiveness**, where others are concerned?

If Esau no longer has a murderous intent that would mean that the gift or tithe rendering has achieved that aim, at least. So -

* Is Esau repentant of the murderous intent?

* Is Esau now forgiven, like Cain, for his murderous intent, and as his nephews will be in Egypt far into the future?

Forgiveness from God, for such an intent would be another blessing on both these brothers.

* Did Esau now, like Cain, stand marked, but in a state of forgiveness, which he, or his tribes people, may later have cancelled?

4. **About - RESTITUTION:**

Jacob did not know that God had blessed Esau with wealth as well, and that Esau does not need Jacob's presents, so Jacob may indeed have intended his gift as a paying back,

or restitution, or a *"memorial"* to Esau. However because of Esau's wealth, Jacob's gift could not be a *"memorial"* (like Cornelius' gifts to the poor*), Acts 10:4*.

* Is this a gesture by Jacob to give back the blessing to Esau, for he now knows that it is God who gives blessings?

* Although this blessing does not make up for the blessings lost under Isaac's hand, and are the best that Jacob can now do, does Jacob's gesture repair the breach?

* Surprise is another factor - did the display surprise Esau?

* Or had Esau planned forgiveness, and so he was ready to accept the idea of restitution when it was offered?

* Or did Esau still not understand?

* Has Esau's wealth now made up for the wealth that he lost from Isaac, at the blessing time, when he thought he would be doubly blessed?

* Again, perhaps Esau did not really value the Abrahamic Covenant that accompanied Isaac's blessings to Jacob, so, with better understanding, is he now more content.

Well Jacob now has a painful, ungainly limp and seems to be at a disadvantage against a warrior's swagger.

****

Esau had sought Isaac to change his mind over the blessing incident. He had never learned (been taught) to value it, and is later described in *Hebrews 12:16* as "*godless*", and "*profane*". Later, when the children of Israel were travelling to the Promised Land, God asks that they respect His gift of land to the Edomites (the descendants of Esau, *Genesis 36.1*), as also His gift to the Ammonites and Moabites (the descendants of Lot) just as He gave Israel the territories east of Jordan *(Deuteronomy 2)*. The Israelites were not to provoke these peoples (their relations) and God asked them to pay their way with silver, to pay for food and water that they may consume on the journey. However, history records that the Edomites arrogantly rebuffed the peaceful negotiations of Moses, and refused permission for them to travel through Edom *(Numbers 20:14-21)*.

So the hurt is -

Remembered or forgotten?

There is now

Spite, anger, vengeance,

Or remorse and contrition

We shall see.

It's not for us to say.

But there's more.

4. ESAU'S TRIBES PEOPLE - THE EDOMITES

There are some *Old Testament* references to the destruction of Edom for their uncompromising attitude towards Israel. So **there is retribution from God** on them.

"*Because you harboured an ancient hostility (to Israel) … I will give you over to bloodshed and it will pursue you*", *Ezekiel 25:12-14*.

The hostility between Jacob and Esau is here noted. So **it was not forgotten.**

Biographical novelists, after research, record history and within it create their own impressions. *Thomas Mann*, the German novelist, in his mighty work "*Joseph and His Brothers - The Tales of Jacob*"*,* early this century, writes some wonderful stories from small incidents. He weaves a pattern of Jacob's attitude to his brother, and about Jacob's hard inner thoughts about Esau - hardly our generally accepted view of Jacob's humility and graciousness and generosity, and the loving attitude of each brother. We may have only assumed that perspective to suit our sensibilities. It is interesting to note *Mann*'s point of view and expression of Jacob's inner thoughts as "*empty*", "*idle*", "*of feeble wit*", "*a fool, is this brother of mine*", "*for that which happened between us will not be buried*". *Mann* builds a case for Jacob despising Esau*, page 128-131,* and glad to get the meeting over and done with and that Jacob understands that the incident can never be forgiven or forgotten, and that he knows also that this is all play acting.

On the other hand *H. A. Whittaker* asks: "*How could Esau carry on a vendetta against a brother who was now in such a parlous, physical condition?*" *page 78*.

It would be easy, to destroy Jacob, as he is now disabled, if Esau really was still full of hatred. It seems he had now turned from hatred and willingness to destroy his brother. We cannot tell whether it was his own noble idea, or whether God had encouraged him to do so.

5. POST SIN TRAUMA FOR JACOB, FOR ESAU, FOR US

The conversation that follows is not difficult to understand. There are such niceties and courtesies recorded on both sides - no anger, no criticism and no pathos - only courtesy. We wonder whether it is false courtesy. However that is a legitimate way to re establish fractured relationships, because it can lead on to healing, and eventually the falseness of it fades.

Comment:

The birthright/blessing incidents are not covered over.

David's sin was forgiven by God, but not forgotten by God, or by the nation, or by David himself. No one can ever forget, it is part of our brain and we cannot deny it. We can only "*forget*", in the sense that a hurt is not deliberately remembered or counted any more.

David, before it was recorded in *The Canon of Scripture,* sent his *Psalm 51* to the musicians to sing about his sin and its consequence, and its plea for forgiveness. We read about it, and sing about it in hymns. If we had been left to form the *Canon* maybe we would have left that incident out. It did cause the enemies of God to blaspheme, but it is there for all to see.

Sin, when we become anti Christ or anti God, can never be covered over. Damage control, and dealing with the consequences is the only way out. **Post sin trauma** it is called.

Spiritual communities, families, spouses need continually to repair marred relationships. Like cracked glass, we can never return to the pure state, except by God's grace. We need to practise re inventing relationships, replenishing, repolishing relationships continually. Wise eldership will ensure that renewal is part of worshipping management. If sin - bad behaviour, omissions, crack plastering (pretending the crack isn't there) - is ignored, it will fester. Managing imperfection helps renew relationships. Learning about sin, how we sin, and its management, can be a growing experience. God would be pleased that we took the time and trouble, for it is the sin, not the sinner, He abhors.

****

In any case, Jacob should not expect, or ask of Esau, more than he is able to give in this relationship, since Esau's learning experiences within the family towards a point of growth, were limited. Jacob **has** changed. God wrought that change with the experiences He gave him. Esau, not having God's special care towards the development of the great nation of Israel, as Jacob had, will be deficient - all in God's plan. We cannot expect more of a dog, than a dog is able to give - however dogs are trainable in a limited way. We should never stop training, or learning, about sin and what we can do about it.

Jacob declines Esau's offer of help for the journey and Esau, assuming Jacob will follow him to Seir, as Jacob stated he would in *Genesis 33:14,* departs. Jacob went to Succoth. Surely Jacob is not the deceiver again. Esau would feel slighted when Jacob does not appear, and he hears of him at Succoth, unless Jacob sent a message of regret. Perhaps Esau was anxious to show Jacob **his** family and home.

H. A. Whittaker in "W*restling Jacob*", page *80* and *81,* graciously extends Jacob an excuse for not following, giving an explanation of the reply of Jacob: "*Just let me find favour in the eyes of my lord*", infers, "*let me settle here*". We hope that Jacob does not have the same old problem of not being able to state his intention.

Esau is once again confused. Jacob keeps up the patronising "*my lord*", through the conversation, all the time determining his own course without telling Esau. Still, they had too many possessions to live together, *Genesis 36:6, 7,* although Jacob had now transferred many of his to Esau, and was less wealthy.

Another point of view suggests Jacob was not strong enough to travel with Esau, and went to Succoth to recover from his thigh injury. Hopefully, Jacob sent the explanation message to Esau, indicating his intentions and reasons for the change of plan. These are all points to consider

Esau married the daughter of Ishmael, Mahalath, his third wife, after he left Isaac's house. So he went south to Egypt, when Jacob went north to Haran. The children of Ishmael therefore multiplied through Esau, (Arabs, who later mostly accepted the Muslim faith). There is no doubt that Abraham is their "*father*", and their claims of covenantal relationship are substantial.

6. SHECHEM - A SECURE POSSESSION

Jacob, at Succoth, built a place for himself and family and shelters for his livestock. This place is probably at the junction of the Jabbok and the Jordan River. He built a more substantial dwelling than before and his flocks were watered and well fed there. He needed protection to rest to regain his strength from the stress of the two confrontations and the physical injury that he had suffered. He was disabled, and in this place God cared for him and sustained him, and at last enabled him again. We know ourselves that such an injury would take many months to heal, and the resultant inflammation would cause great pain. As well, arthritis would set in, and Jacob could quite possibly have a permanent, or re occurring limp. After some time, probably over a year, when he was refreshed, he crossed the Jordan River.

Jacob then came to Shalem in the city of Shechem in Canaan intending to settle - another stage in the fulfilment of the Bethel promise. If he came peacefully and safely ("*Shalom*" in some versions), Jacob must have been cured of his injury, though not of the consequences. This Shechem is where Abraham first came, in his early days *(Genesis 12:6, 7,* Canaanites' land then, and now - a span of 185 years.

But the big question we want to ask Jacob is:

"*Why, oh why, didn't you go on to Bethel, for it was the 'God of Bethel' who spoke to you in Haran? It was where you had your first dream, your dream place, and where God promised you peace and security?*"

Logically, Bethel was the most obvious destination, but Hebron where Isaac probably still lived, or even Beersheba, would be understandable. However, it's useless to speculate, why Jacob did not go to Bethel, as his wives expected, when the Bible is silent.

Jacob bought (from the sons of Hamor, Hivites, the father of Shechem, after whom the town was **later** named), a plot of ground for his dwelling, and the altar he wished to build to his God. It was here at this altar that Jacob first calls his Lord "*My Lord*". Perhaps Jacob desperately wanted to imitate his grandfather, Abraham, in his stop at Shechem.

Consider:

* Why did Jacob later tell Joseph *(Genesis 48:22)* that he "*took the land with sword and bow*"?

Joseph was present with Jacob here, as a nine year old boy. Perhaps the conversation between Joseph and Jacob referred to the Dinah incident, just about to happen, and the property take over at that point in history, recorded just **after** the purchase of the land in Shechem. Better to purchase it legally, for an altar in the middle of the Canaanites, like Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah.

* Was the Machpelah cave always available?

* How big was the cave?

* Why was Joseph buried here, in Shechem, *Joshua 24:32*?

* And his brothers?

* Did they need another burial place and this purchase in Shechem fulfilled that extra need?

Certainly title deeds were important family documents.

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The ownership of land may have been difficult to enforce in absentia, or when enemies overran small plots of ground, in alien lands. Laban was worried that Jacob, or his descendants may return to Haran, and claim ownership - that's why **he** wanted his title deeds returned (if indeed title deeds were in the teraphim). He never got them from Rachel, but Jacob never intended to cross the covenant line *(the Mispah)*, and never claimed the Haran land.

However, this Shechem plot of land, remarkably, remained a secure possession even when they were away in Egypt for 285 years. The documents retained their validity through all the changing historical circumstances, for later Joseph was buried in Shechem. This does always happen for us even today. It is not a fulfilment of the land promise for it is not inherited from God. This Shechem plot was purchased.

7. SAD CONSEQUENCES - AFTER A GREAT BEGINNING IN THE NEW LAND

Perhaps the Esau meeting incident was so fraught with fear for Jacob that its passing brought neglect, or forgetting, of the vows he had uttered so fervently when his future was precarious. How often it happens to us - how earnestly we pray when life's pathway is rugged, yet how we

lapse, when all seems well. Yet we know the admonition: "*Pray without ceasing*". That means - constantly, without ceasing, be in touch with God.

However, out of this torpor, Jacob rudely awakes. His softness for family and family guidance (rather like Isaac) is rewarded with his children behaving in a way, which made the family's name a shame among the people around them. It is doubly shameful, as Jacob had here constructed an altar to worship God, who required not only prescribed worship, but lawful behaviour and respect, as an outward sign of the faith in YHWH. So the incident shamed God as well. Jacob is punished with consequences for his lack of guidance, by the usual law of family disaster, of the most painful kind, for indeed family dysfunction was operating.

CONCLUSION:

If Jacob had gone to Bethel, the next terrible chapter, *Genesis 34,* telling of a great shame, need not have recorded such a disgraceful incident. The name of God appears immediately before and after the chapter, but not in the chapter itself. God was left out of the picture, where He is so much **in** the picture in the chapter we have just considered. Little wonder God immediately after the incident **commands** Jacob to go to Bethel.

Section 2 - Jacob and His Sons

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CHAPTER 1 - GOD FORGOTTEN AT SHECHEM FOR RAPE AND PILLAGE

CHAPTER 2 - BETHEL - GOD'S PLACE - BUT NOT FOR LONG

CHAPTER 3 - INCEST - ANOTHER SORDID TALE

CHAPTER 4 - JOSEPH - JACOB'S FAVOURITE CHILD

CHAPTER 5 - JOSEPH - A COAT AND SOME DREAMS

CHAPTER 6 - JOSEPH'S PIT OF DEATH - OR LIFE

CHAPTER 7 - A TERRIBLE SECRET AND GRIEF FOR MORE LOST LOVE

CHAPTER 8 - JUDAH'S SIN AND MISERY

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CHAPTER 1

GOD FORGOTTEN AT SHECHEM FOR RAPE AND PILLAGE

And Jacob said, "Ye have troubled me, to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land", Genesis 34:30.

FOCUS:

The setting for ***Genesis 34*** is described to us in the verses immediately preceding this chapter, and it is here we begin this story. Well function is disabled if it is not maintained, and dysfunction will surely follow. The distressing events in this detailed and lengthy text indicate the result of neglect in this God loved family.

1. JACOB MOVES HIS FAMILY TO SHECHEM

When Jacob left Esau, and after he had recovered from his clicky hip, he came to Shalem, in Shechem, and pitched his tent. In his feeling well again he enjoyed a sense of well being, and forgot the implied message from God about his destination, Bethel, when it was the God of Bethel who asked him to move from Haran, *Genesis 31:3* and *13*. Jacob had told Leah and Rachel that the God of Bethel, where he had anointed the pillar and where he vowed a vow, had told him to move from Haran. It is assumed that the two sisters thought that Jacob meant to return to the sacred Bethel. The later message from God, after the trouble here at Shechem, defined Bethel as the Jacob family destination, *Genesis 35:1*.

Well function turned quickly to dysfunction again. He bought the parcel of land on which he spread the tent, from the children of Hamor and built an altar. When Jacob built the altar to God in Shechem he advertised to the surrounding peoples his love for God, his faith in YHWH, and his wish to espouse the teachings of that Deity. Missioning with love and respect for those about him, should have been uppermost in his mind. However that was not to be, and his expectation of staying there in peace was not realised. Perhaps Jacob did not ask God to sanction his pause at Shechem. God used a mighty and traumatic experience to remind Jacob to move.

2. THE FAMILY FIRM IS MISSIONING FOR GOD

The firm that he began to establish **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products** was a moveable, nomadic business. As Jacob was a wealthy man with many sons, with credibility amongst the surrounding peoples, this business began to prosper. We need to remember that this thriving portable business was the means of Jacob fulfilling the missioning mandate that came with the promises to Abram in the first instance in Ur, "*that in thee all nations will be blessed*". Travelling salesmen they were, ideal for God's purpose to spread His name. Not only was Jacob concerned for his own reputation in Canaan, but also for God's reputation. He wanted to preach true worship of God to partake in His blessings.

3. SHECHEM - NOW AND THEN

In the land of the Canaanites, Shechem was called Sichem at the time Abraham paused there and built the first altar. It became Shechem after Jacob built his altar probably after the man Shechem who had lived there when history played out a story with that man's family. The spelling was modified from Sichem to Shechem to suit the history. The present town of Nablus is probably the old Shechem, but the recent exact identification of Shechem has been questioned, and so archaeologists are now not quite so sure where it was.

However, Jacob's well, of *John 4:5*, is said to be the well in the vicinity of this place, and that location is fairly accurate. The evidence of the narrative in *Genesis 33:18,* is that the well is found at the foot of Mount Gerazim, *John 4:20*, and is about a mile south east of Nablus. It is near to the fork of the road which comes from Jerusalem and branches to Samaria and Tirzah respectively. It still has a clear and cool water supply fed by above ground rainwater, and underground sources of great depth. All traditions, Jewish, Samaritan, Christian and Muslim support this as the authentic site of Jacob's well.

Joseph' embalmed body was buried near this place, when the children of Israel, under Moses, came up out of Egypt, and entered the Promised Land, nearly 300 years after this story. They brought his bones, (and those of his brothers also), into Canaan (*Acts 7:16),* and buried them in this parcel of ground that Jacob bought from the Shechemites, and later gave to his son, Joseph, in his death blessings, *John 4:5, 6.* Abraham had bought the Cave of Machpelah from the Hittites, in Hebron. There is some confusion, because Stephen in *Acts 7:16* implies that Jacob was buried at Shechem "*in the tomb that Abraham bought*". "*Our fathers*", Joseph (and perhaps his brothers), though, not "*Jacob*", of *verse 15*, are the ones buried there.

At **this** time, in the patriarchal history of Jacob, as they came to Shechem, that son Joseph, that favourite little son, was nine years old, and together with his much loved mother, was secure in the love that Jacob had for them. Joseph was old enough to understand, the dynamics in this family, and how his step brother and sister, Zebulan and Dinah, were his age.

Comment:

We will allow that Shechem is now Nablus, (or Salim, or Shalem - a little east of Nablus). It's a big town with veiled women, suspicious men, and resentful teenagers - with an Israeli, military presence, for it is part of the occupied territories. Palestinians, angry that Israel will not recognise their "*legitimate*" right to the land of their forefathers Abraham and Ishmael, throw stones and cause trouble.

Nablus is beautiful still, where it lies between the mountains. It is a verdant place in a parched land. It is the most beautiful spot in central Israel. Shade, is not of the mighty oaks, but the olive trees that grow round about. The women in the groves still beat the trees, and so collect the

fallen fruit on mats. They pull their veils around their faces and wave their hands: "*No photos*". Pity, it is such an old world scene. But we are sensitive to their feelings and understand. The children beg, and are scandalised at the small change.

No wilderness, no wild thickets, but verdure. No mountain torrents, yet there is copious water, and the watery droplets in the air create a blue/grey mist. The Vale of Shechem is a narrow valley of a few hundred feet wide in some parts and there the vapours condense. Twenty seven springs are known to water the valley - information from *Stanley's* "*Sinai & Palestine*" page *234*.

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No wonder Jacob was tempted to stop at Shechem after his long and eventful journey. He stayed five years. When Jacob was ninety nine years and still in Haran he had three more children, and, added to those he had earlier, his recorded children now numbered twelve. When those three children, (from two different wives), were six years old, Jacob took his family and left Haran, came to Succoth, and then to Shechem. Shechem's comforting verdure, and the security Jacob felt there, led to his decision to stay at least five years. There is a Chinese proverb, "*chunwang chihan*", "*when the lips are gone, the teeth are cold*", which means one thing is always the result of another. So here, the comfort of Shechem led to a sad circumstance, which was very hard to overcome.

And there was a festival at Shechem, and Dinah wanted to go. Her girlish curiosity overrode her caution and she went probably with few companions and was enticed by the young man, Shechem.

4. A HORROR STORY PLAYED OUT IN SHECHEM

Zebulun and Dinah, probably twins (for twins were in the genetic structure of the family), were the children of Leah. They were now fourteen years old. The other child, Joseph, also fourteen, was a loved child of Jacob's best loved wife, Rachel. They were the youngest of Jacob's children. Dinah is the only named daughter, for the purpose of this story. There may have been other daughters, and for many reasons, none of the children so well loved as the son, Joseph.

This is a story, *(Genesis 34)* sandwiched between two momentous occasions in Jacob's life when God spoke to Jacob and caused him to erect altars to Him.

The sandwiched story is one of horror for Jacob - (as it would be for any of us). It tumbles from incident to incident, "*out of control*". God used this horror, to move Jacob and his family to Bethel. God has used horror, and terror, to move peoples all down history. We know that horror was the catalyst for Jews moving back to the land of Israel, in our own day, when they were so loathe to leave their present day "*Egypt*". And it moved Jacob at this time, for he packed up, frightened that the Canaanites and the Perizzites, now the inhabitants of the land, would gather themselves against him, and that they would all be slain, for what happened to the Hivites.

"*Ye have troubled me to stink among the inhabitants of the land*", said Jacob to his sons. It was only later that Jacob was morally outraged *(Genesis 49)*. As well, he neglects to mention the demeaning influence this incident would have on the reputation of God, for they were supposed to be showing forth His glory, that is, the missioning mandate that went with the covenant.

5. LEAH'S GREAT TRIAL

Dinah was raped. She was 14 years old. It is a cause of great concern to the family that she was violated, but for that to happen they must have left her vulnerable.

"***Leah's Great Trial"*** it has been called.

Leah has been tried and tried and tried (with her anxiety to **make** Jacob love her) and for her (only mentioned) daughter to be violated, so that no other man would **love her** or **have her**, must have been almost more than Leah could bear. It goes to show that one cannot **make** anyone love anyone else. One can hope and pray, but it might be a "*no*" from God. There are many women today in arranged marriages, who hope that, with constancy, love will grow. We do recognise the deficiencies in a loveless marriage and today we hope for something better for young people as they set out on their married life. In the west, women may say, "*Who I love, I will marry*", but in the east women say, "*Who I marry, I will love*", and it is often a shame for them to marry for love.

In this patriarchal society arranged marriages were the norm, but Dinah's future after her violation, was destroyed, and Leah would have considered that a great trial. Jacob could never offer Dinah for marriage now.

"*Wasted*" Dinah is now!

The brothers of the *Song of Songs 8:8-10*, who protected, and cared for, and looked after their "*little sister*", making sure that she was a "*wall*", and not a "*door*"*, verse 9*, for they encased her "*in silver*". She remained virginal ready for her marriage. There was no neglect in that story, as there is in this one. They did not have to have their sister "*boarded up*". This sister, Dinah, was a "*door*", and **is** now "*boarded up*", in the sense that she is forsaken according to these Hebrew metaphors.

6. SO WHERE WERE THEY ALL ON THAT DAY IN SHECHEM?

Dinah was not a latch key kid - there were too many in her family for her to be alone, locked out. She was not the product of a single parent family, or even a nuclear family. There were nurses and servants around. We know that Deborah, Rebekah's old nurse was with this family, though we know not how or when she left Isaac's household, and came to live with this family. Her death, while with this family, is recorded in *Genesis 35:8*, a year, or so, later.

At the beginning of the discussion, it is worth considering whether it was rape, or whether Dinah was somewhere complicit in it, to gain the acceptance of her father to such a union. If it was considered a shame then to marry for love, it could easily have been a ruse.

If a sexual relationship began between an unmarried man and woman, it was obligatory that they marry. If that was the plan, it went awry, because Dinah's maids, and Jacob, and her brothers interpreted it as rape. This discussion will proceed, assuming it was rape.

Consider:

* Were they **all** in and out of the house of Hamor next door?

* Was it familiarity that made access to Dinah so easy?

* Why did Shechem consider he could violate the one (recorded) daughter of this large family, without incurring the wrath of her eleven brothers?

* Did he think the whole episode would be worth it?

* Did he think it would force the family to allow a marriage with an alien family?

* Did he know of Jacob's father's advice "*Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan*"?

* If he did, did he think it would apply?

* Or didn't he think at all?

* Just sexually developed at 14, everyone knows 14 year old girls need to be protected and cared for, - or, do they know that?

* Did they know that?

* Or was the cultural relativity so different, we cannot understand the circumstances?

* What is the lesson for us about compromise?

****

At least we know that, as the word "*rape*" appears to be in the story, it means to imply, in the current meaning of the word, that she did not consent to sexual intercourse with this neighbour.

Today, the story would take a prize. The literary supplements of our newspapers would write glowingly - or alternately, it would make a good film - a money spinner.

But it is a record in *Holy Writ* for our learning.

We need to keep Jacob's life in perspective. The mighty incidents are recorded and the years in between are hopefully full of contentment. Like our life's pattern, we experience mountains, valleys, and plenty of plains. The perspective is so like ours. Jacob working towards the ideal in his name, "*Jacob*", still experiences the life pattern.

It's how we deal with the life pattern that is important that shapes our character and moulds us into His children (or not).

If the family had only just arrived, this incident may have been born out of Dinah's curiosity about her surroundings, but the family had been in Shechem a comparatively long time, five years. However more likely, it was born out of familiarity. It may be that she had gone next door to meet friends, Shechem's sisters (a lesson here). Or perhaps she went (with them) to a festival in the town (as some commentators suggest) and the act happened there, rather than in Hamor's house.

Well, someone told Jacob.

It was probably the maidservants who had accompanied her on the excursion.

And, Shechem **still** wanted her for his wife,

This is unlike the Tamar incident of *2 Samuel 13*, where David's son Amnon, forced his sister and despised her immediately afterwards. Of course, the incest there was an added factor to the rape.

Shechem spoke tenderly to Dinah and she stayed in his house with him *(verse 26)*. He spoke to his father, Hamor, the Hivite, and asked him to get Dinah's family to agree to their marriage. Hamor "*honoured Shechem more than anyone else in his household*" *(verse 19)* - a favourite son, spoilt, used to having the best in a wealthy household, probably.

7. JACOB DEALS WITH A FAMILY PROBLEM - BUT WHERE IS GOD?

Now Jacob decided to call a family conference on the matter. He had hitherto made family decisions and carried them out without reference to God. Yet, he had, not long ago, been in a position of complete reliability on God. So now we would expect Jacob to consult God in this matter. He will need to call a family conference, for his sons are mature and responsible teenagers in the family firm. We expect they will ask God for guidance in such a serious offence against the family that would affect them all. Sadly, it seems they did not include God in their deliberations, or their decisions.

Jacob waited, until his sons, hearing there had been trouble, came in from the fields, to see what the problem was. And then the family conference began.

- They were sorry for their sister,

- And very angry with their neighbours next door.

- It was a disgrace on their family.

Ranting and raving they probably were, and indignant.

- As brothers, they had the right to uphold their sister's honour.

Comment:

A common reaction in families - we think of how we appear to others in a family dysfunction, when we should bend the energy towards solving the problem.

If we need to solve a problem, we can be sure that God will see a clear path, and show that to us. The unresolved problem, with its anxiety and resentment and blame apportioning, can destroy us if we allow it. To "*let go, and let God",* can only refresh our outlook, so that the clarity of direction is revealed and we see the vision clearly.

The early map makers, when the known track wore out, filled that space with demon pictures. It need not be so, though when our faith falters, the vision ahead does seem full of that demon fear. We need to tread safely in the unknown way, and there is only one way to do so. Some of us, as impressed children, may remember England's George VI's Christmas message, coming from the wireless cabinet, when he quoted: "*I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year,* '*Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown*' *and he said to me,* '*Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God, - that shall be better than a light and safer than a known way.*'" Jacob had, by now, put his hand into the hand of God, but he allowed his sons to decide "*the way*".

****

Many instances so far in this story have attempted to destroy the seed line that God had set up for His promises. The say you are my sister incidents were attempts when God intervened, in extraordinary circumstances, to keep the seed line. This may be another thwarted incident, for the rape did not produce a child, as far as is recorded, and Dinah was not married into this Canaanite family, who would have liked to absorb Israel - both their wealth and their offspring. Now Israel faced that absorption - **or** hostility. The incidents that followed caused not a little hostility.

The violation incident itself does not warrant too much comment. Suffice it to say the laws of this land, Australia, and social comment in the 90's, does not lay blame on the woman automatically, and we should not in this case in *Scripture* either. We don't know enough of the story. The 14 year old should have been under some sort of protection and advice and going out "*to visit the women of the land*" is not enough for us to say "*she caused it all*" and "*brought the disgrace*". The description of the incident does not allow consent, or even defiance of guidance. She was in her unmarried state in the wrong place at the wrong time. She is not condemned in the story, though Jacob condemns the actions of his sons, at the end of his life in *Genesis 49:5-7*, when he curses the anger of Simeon and Levi. In his poem, often called the "*Blessings of Jacob*", he says:

"*Simeon and Levi are brothers,*

Their swords are weapons of violence.

Let me not enter their council,

Let me not join their assembly,

For they have killed men in their anger,

And hamstrung oxen as they pleased.

Cursed be their anger so fierce

And their fury so cruel!

I will scatter them in Jacob

And disperse them in Israel", *(NIV).*

History shows*, (Numbers 25)*, that indeed Simeon continuing in base behaviour, is corrected by Levi, and therefore **they are divided.**

8. T**HE SONS'DECEITFUL DISCUSSION WITH THE SHECHEMITES**

Jacob must have looked back at this time, and wished he had the wisdom to stop the deceit that his sons carried in these intervening years, beginning with this treachery. Certainly it was culturally correct for brothers (sons of Leah), to uphold a sister' honour, and perhaps that's why Jacob let them have their way.

In was a fact, that

1. It was more important to uphold the honour of a sister, than a wife, that is,

2. A dishonoured sister was far worse than a dishonoured wife.

3. A sister could never be disowned, that is divorced (*Eastern custom)*, like a wife could be.

4. One could never change the status of a sister, whereas another wife could easily be procured.

If Dinah was 14 years old, and Zebulun and Joseph also 14, then Asher and Issachar were 15, Gad 16, Judah and Naphtali 17, Levi and Dan 18, Simeon 19 and Reuben 20 years old. Benjamin was not yet born (*Companion Bible,* "*Chronological Chart,* and *Appendix 50*"). It seems that Jacob left the dealing of a terrible family disgrace with eleven teenagers, who possessed very little maturity.

With a consideration of any cultural maturity that may have existed among the brothers, they had been in the land a comparatively short time, but long enough to understand the milieu of the people. They were keeping apart culturally, as God had asked them to do, otherwise the brothers would not have been offended so much by Shechem, but not apart enough, for Shechem felt he could win them to his point of view. Perhaps the time they had been in Canaan was not enough time, with their life experiences, to equip them to deal wisely with such a situation without sound guidance from Jacob.

Yet as Hamor was discussing -

a. How his family and Jacob's family could be blended together,

b. How Jacob would cease his Bedouin ways and settle together with them in Shechem,

c. How rich they would become from blended stock and trading,

d. How each could benefit from this marriage contract, for a generous price would be paid for the bride,

e. How the union would raise them to a high rank among the petty states of Canaan,

Jacob's family listened to these plausible arguments - and planned treachery.

They said to Shechem,

"*We cannot give our sister to the uncircumcised for that would be another disgrace. If you wish us to settle amongst you, and become one people with you, you must be circumcised like us then we will give* '*our daughter*' *and take your daughters for our wives*".

(It is hard to know what is meant here, - multiple wives, or none of them married yet),

"*If you do not agree to be circumcised we will take our sister and go*".

Innocently Jacob may have thought his sons meant, as we sometimes do on such occasions, "*convert and marry*". We can allow him that readily enough. That may have been an acceptable solution to the problem.

The argument about settling in the land was not feasible, for the portable life of the family had been a blessing and would be so in the future, in the outreach mission mandate, that the family had on the commission from the covenant, to be a blessing for all nations.

There was a sacred covenant rite - circumcision. It was the sign of God's holy covenant with Israel, and had been commanded of Abraham by God. These young men did not, or could not, understand the great significance of this holy thing, or they would not have behaved in the way that they did. In New Testament times the Jews were discouraged from insisting on circumcision in the new order, but now it was a reasonable request for proselytes, under the old covenant. These brothers though planned to use the rite to bring about the demise of Hamor, Shechem, and all that they owned. They planned to use the debilitation caused by the rite of the taking of their foreskins, and while they were debilitated, to kill all the men, and take all that they owned.

Hitler promised these Jews a washing, that is, a shower, in the concentration camps in the 1940's, and gave them gas instead, killing them.

And "*Heaven looked on, and would not take their part*" (the Jews then, nor the Shechemites in this story)*, Shakespeare's* "*Macbeth*"*, Act IV, Scene 3.* God would not want to be any part of this story.

No true believer would use the sacred rite of baptism

- A covenant between a believer and God, for men as well as women, (now replacing the covenant of circumcision in the Christian era), and

- Use it as an instrument of violence.

But Jacob's sons used a sacred rite for an instrument of violence.

Comment:

Recently, in a third world prison baptism, it was thought suspiciously by the prison officials, that the candidate may use the occasion for a suicide, so an aware guard performed the rite. Of course, it was a true baptism "*by whomsoever*". Baptism is open to evil intent as circumcision is here, in Jacob's house.

****

A believer, being baptised, could easily be eliminated if a baptiser were so disposed. The thought is unthinkable, yet Jacob's sons used that vulnerability, and debilitation to kill Hamor, and his son, Shechem, and every male in Shechem.

So this family of God carried out their despicable plans with impunity on the third day after the circumcisions, when the men were at their most debilitated.

They took Dinah home, carried off all the wealth of Shechem, and their animals. They plundered the "*city*" and took all the women and children.

With fear and horror, Jacob chastises them: ***"Ye have troubled me to make me stink among the inhabitants of the land".*** We wonder at what stage Jacob's moral outrage entered into the condemnation? If it is a fact that he stayed in Shechem hoping to emulate his grandfather Abraham' moral perspective, as **he** moved into the Promised Land, he is now far from that mark. Abraham moved circumspectly, Jacob's sons had caused havoc.

"*I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me, and I shall be destroyed, I and my house*"*, verse 30.* Jacob was rightly fearful for their lives. The commentator, *Matthew Henry,* adds another comment from the mind of Jacob, "*If the Shechemites must be destroyed for the offence of one, why not all the Israelites for the offence of two?*" (of Jacob's sons).

Arrogantly the boys, defending their actions, say: "*Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?*"

This is equivocation for their actions, for they used enormous and immoral power to destroy, and punish, and exact revenge, that is, extensive retaliation.

Not only were they a disgrace to Jacob,

- But they were a disgrace to the requirement of circumcision and

- To the meaning of circumcision, and

- To the Godly mandate to mission to the surrounding peoples.

The example was appalling.

Everyone thought, "*What's in it for me?*" The Hivite and his son may have thought, not only of a bride, but of a dowry and wealth. Protection with this God of Israel, may have led them to allow themselves to be circumcised. We cannot ever, though we may sometimes suspect, speculate on a baptismal candidate's motives.

Motives are suspect here in some of these verses, but surely this is overkill, for the violation of their sister. Rape - the sin was acknowledged and dealt with in the Law that came later, but it was never retribution like this. We don't hear of Dinah's wishes in this story.

The plan of circumcising so many men, needed organization, so a retinue of servants would have been needed. The whole firm and family would have been rallied to help. It is hard to believe that Jacob knew nothing of the plan to annihilate the Shechemites. Assuming Jacob did know, and also knowing that his sons were not mature enough to handle such a situation, Jacob was at fault for not advising them of another course, and being firmly in control of the situation.

Jacob had cause to regret the plan of his sons, and Leah, waiting for her daughter, damaged goods now, would hardly care, for her grief would be overwhelming. Leah had come so far, and been so troubled. Her daughter is never heard of again in *Scripture*. Here family dysfunction is handled so badly. There is -

One father,

Four women,

All of them wives or concubines,

Thirteen children,

By different partners,

All mothers.

Great wisdom would have been required to rule this family. It's no wonder there were hiccups occasionally. This is no small hiccup.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

9. THE SURROUNDING TRIBAL INFLUENCES ON THE ISRAELITES

Leah's sons, **Simeon** and **Levi** activated a spirit of revenge, and are the main characters in the action. They are the only named perpetrators, but they must have all had knowledge, at least, of the plan for the huge destruction. The other sons seem excluded from the action, though many strong men would have been necessary. So many servants, for such a huge task, would have been commanded by more that two brothers, one would think. **Reuben** was perhaps seen as feeble, and opposed to bloodshed, and **Judah** was felt by the others to be too honourable. **Joseph**, we would care to excuse from the debacle, being just a new teenager, and **Benjamin,** not yet born. That leaves six others to consider. Perhaps these other were less passive in the incident, we don't really know. There could be other reasons unknown to us, why Simeon and Levi acted so disgracefully, and led the destruction.

In any case the family name now "*stinketh*" and the firm of **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products** did not now enjoy such a good reputation anymore amongst their hosts, for they were still "*gerim*" *guests* really. Perhaps some of the sons enjoyed the "*ruthless*" reputation. Well, they had the reputation at the expense of the Godly reputation, though perhaps those same sons did not care about that either.

There were important surrounding tribes who practised circumcision - the Ishmaelites and, the Hittites and the Edomites, a rite brought to them through Ishmael and Esau - so the rite would have been known by the Shechemites. It may have meant that the Shechemites were willing to accept with it, the worship of the God of Abraham. Jacob, probably, would have been pleased with the proselytes, if this had been the honourable outcome. However he would not have been so pleased if they added God worship to the worship of their other gods, which would be the more probable outcome.

Later tribal vengeance could not be activated when all the males were killed and the women taken off, so it may have been felt, that wholesale slaughter was necessary and therefore justified, to protect them from Hivite vengeance. The concept, that God Himself deals with the matter of revenge, not us, was as yet unknown to them.

It showed the nations about -

- How the Israelites could care for themselves,

- How they vindicated family outrage,

- How they must be respected,

- How they could create wealth, for any poverty incurred by the gift to Esau would now have been reversed, with their famous good business and farming techniques, **and** the addition of Hamor's cattle.

It did not show the nations about -

- A Godly people, which was the specific purpose of God for His outreach to the nations.

Compromise with this pagan community resulted in multiple tragedy in this family, but again God comes to the rescue, and advises Jacob to go to Bethel. Jacob was nevertheless fearful of the surrounding tribesmen and **did** wish to move on quietly. This would be a big ask for so many people, with so many possessions, **and the howling women of Shechem with them.**

Later, in the list of persons going down into Egypt, Shaul, the son of the Canaanitish woman, is mentioned. It's generally accepted that he was not a child of Dinah, but a child of one of the women plundered as slaves this day. Hopefully, exposed infanticide practised at this time for population control, would not have been used by Jacob, for a child of Dinah, if she did have one as the result of the violation. Other similar liaisons that appear later in our story, resulting in a child, have not caused the elimination of a child in this way, for example, Lot's children, nor Judah's children, a later family dysfunction.

Moses, relating this story, at a later stage in history, states that Jacob's sons are angry because Shechem "*wrought folly in Israel … which thing ought not to be done*". These words would not be those of Jacob's sons, for the generic term "*Israel*" is not yet in general use. Moses, therefore, has faithfully recorded the incident, and under inspiration, included a comment to condemn the incident of rape.

In *2 Samuel 13:12* almost the same words are quoted by Tamar to her brother Amnon, pleading for her safety before he raped her, "*for no such thing should be done in Israel*". She was another woman who could never be given in marriage, and now damaged goods, "*desolate*" *(NIV)*.

Esau despised the birthright in the previous generation. It appears the covenant of circumcision is degraded again in this generation. Surely lack of education, and being too long among an alien people, who exert too much influence, could be causes for under estimating God's wise provision for their preservation. If circumcision was used by other tribes, perhaps the significance and the importance of it, for Jacob's children was forgotten. Reason, but not excuse, once more.

So God commands them to go to Bethel.

Here begins a God advised enforced separation from the Canaanites that has lasted 3,000 years. They are hated and despised for their separateness but it was the God provided way for their preservation and certainly necessary at this time.

10. JACOB ORDERS A GREAT PURIFICATION

Before they leave Shechem, Jacob wants to correct a family dysfunction. He commands his family and all his servants to cleanse themselves and their garments. Many washings were part of the evolving religious services, which eventually led into the one great washing, baptism, that is required of all God's servants. They were also to cleanse themselves of strange gods. They gave up their gods and their "*earrings*", probably talismans or idolatrous phylacteries, or amulets. We know that "*they*" later made the golden calf out of earrings, and worshipped it, in a place of YHWH, much to the horror of Moses.

So the Israelites have once more been preserved from their sinning to work out their own chastisement. Jacob knows that leaving Shechem was a cementing of the way to God and that the cleansing process would never be complete with idol worship among his family members.

We know that Rachel's teraphim (from her father) were still in the compound. Rachel was Jacob's most loved wife. It is impossible to think that Jacob did not know about her idols, and so because of his love for Rachel, he had been tardy in cleansing the household from the perniciousness of the semi heathen worship that was going on in his house. We assume that there were more gods now plundered from Shechem to add to the collection.

Idolatry practised by some members of the family, and God worship practised by others, bring out all the problems of a mixed marriage, add to that polygamy, and there is a recipe for disaster. The sacred historian Moses does not spare the history which is written for our benefit. May we take the obvious lessons.

So Jacob took the idols and earrings that were in his compound and dug a pit and buried them. This does seem to be an ineffectual destruction for the heathen gods, for buried "*treasure*" can always be retrieved. After all, it was **THE OAK** in Shechem. Moses calls it "*the great tree*" (at Shechem) in *Genesis 12:6,* and it is a well known place.

Comment:

Moses found a better way - he ground the golden calf to powder, mixed it with water and made the Israelites drink it. Then it could never be retrieved. God had commanded them, in *Exodus 20:23:* "*Do not make any gods alongside me*". Yet they had forgotten.

Joshua brought them into the land of Canaan, and died at Shechem, after the exodus from Egypt. They had come to Shechem to bury Joseph, whose bones they had carried from Egypt, in this same plot of land Joseph's father, Jacob, had bought. This plot had been preserved down the years for this occasion. That established the centre of the tribes of Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Joshua says, as Jacob did before him: "*Throw away the foreign gods that are among you*", *Joshua 24:23*. As many times that they forgot, we forget also, so there is no need for our smugness.

It is remarkable that the worship of gods and God went hand in hand. We need hardly make the point that worship of anything apart from God, is pernicious. All of us are in need of purification, like these people constantly were, for we substitute destructive influences as well. Dysfunctional worship should never be present in our communities, or in our personal lives.

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CONCLUSION:

Alas, the web we weave, intending to deceive, makes a fabric that will never function as a garment of righteousness.

Digression:

With the terrible affliction just made known to *Karen Blixen* in "*Out of Africa*" (syphilis, inflicted on her by her husband - she is barren now), she observes that the earth was made round so that we may not see too far down the track - a quaint way of saying, it's best that our life is not known to us before we experience it. Quite so!

CHAPTER 2

BETHEL - GOD'S PLACE - BUT NOT FOR LONG

"***God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there'", Genesis 35:1*.**

FOCUS:

These sons of Jacob are murderous Bedouins. They are without the mark of Cain. They relied on their own great strength to save the family. There are no distinguishing marks on the foreheads of these people of God. Ungodly they were. Now God has rescued His family from this terrible murderous conflict and they are moving towards His place at Bethel*, **Genesis 35:1-20.***

1. JACOB AND HIS FAMILY ARRIVE AT BETHEL - AT LAST

God inspired fear into the tribes around about, so that Jacob was left in peace to travel to Bethel, and we are relieved to see the family move along in safety. Nomads do travel along leisurely, capable of great effort if necessary, but generally with no rush or bustle. There was a constant need to find pasture, and cattle had to be given the time to graze. Perhaps God caused the peoples to leave post harvest stubble. This was normal procedure. It nourished newly harvested land, and was considered as extending hospitality to the flocks of Bedouin tribes' people. On the other hand, they may have been frightened of these ruthless tribes' people because of their Shechem reputation, and they might have offered them safe passage, and

food, and provender, as a means of protection. This is far removed from the Godly missioning Jacob's family was supposed to be about.

So they reached Bethel at last. Jacob must now feel that he has come home. God has preserved them from their enemies, for "*the terror of God*", was upon them, so that those enemies did not pursue them.

Momentous events occur in this chapter, ***Genesis 35*****,** and we brace ourselves for trauma again. We do **so** want it to be peaceful for this God blessed family, but it is not to be.

When Jacob had passed by this way, on the journey to Haran, he had heard an encouraging message from God. He raised a stone pillar, and poured oil on it. Now, here again, God asked Jacob to build an altar for Him. At this point in his life, Jacob must have been encouraged to hear the great promises from God again. This would be balm to his soul, and balm he would need in the coming time. Perhaps he felt God's great mercy would be extended once more, in spite of everything that happened at Shechem.

Rebekah's nurse, Deborah, died here. She must have been of great age (160 years) if she (wet) nursed baby Rebekah. She had come with Rebekah, who was a bride for Isaac. Abraham's servant, probably Eliezer, had brought them to Abraham. She may have come to Jacob, after Rebekah's death, being very special to the Jacob family also. They buried her here, in this sacred place under an oak tree near Bethel. So this link with Jacob's much loved mother was finally broken.

After three years they move again. They leave Bethel, so it's not "*home*".

Consider:

* Is this the oak tree mentioned in *1 Samuel 10:3,* where Samuel gives the newly anointed Saul a direction that three messengers, probably angels, will meet him at the great tree of Tabor, near Bethel, that is Rachel's tomb?

Saul is to be assured of God's purpose with him by meeting these men at the tree. They will give him two loaves of bread. A precious place this, a significant oak tree. "*The oak of weeping*"*,* it is called. Jacob's weeping - but not for Deborah.

* Are we too suspicious in thinking that Simeon and Levi may have been the cause of a hasty departure from Bethel, as they were from Shechem?

* Was there some reason why Jacob decided to leave Bethel?

* Or was Bethel only a stop over on the way to Isaac, who is now at Hebron, or on the way to Beersheba?

* Or was Jacob summoned?

* Was Isaac ill, or near death, or in danger?

****

In fact, Jacob lived near Isaac for the next 16 years of Jacob's mourning, until Isaac died, through the sale of Joseph at age 18, until Joseph, in Egypt, was 29 years old.

Their nomadic life style is difficult for us to understand apart from the mission mandate of Abraham, but their movement through the land in this fashion must have been recorded, at

least in the oral history of the surrounding peoples. When they returned, a great people under Joshua, the Canaanites, at least, would have records of their comings and goings over the previous centuries. May the times in Bethel have been refreshing! Now that we know the end from the beginning of this incident, we can only hope that it was indeed a time of refreshment

2. RACHEL, BELOVED RACHEL - IS DEAD

It is close, so close to Rachel's "*time*", for her to be delivered of a second precious child. She is the loved wife of Jacob, and about to deliver to him another great treasure. He must have been full of joy about the coming event, for his youngest children were fourteen years old. Something entices Jacob to move, to move his whole compound from the God filled Bethel. We cannot conclude what that might be.

The caravan, after packing up at Bethel, is suddenly halted and a great tragedy is played out. The Jews say *"it is a mile from Ephrath",* (or Bethlehem), and indeed that is where her supposed tomb can be viewed today. The dearly loved Rachel dies giving birth to her second son, Benjamin. Oh, the pathos of this, for she had said to Jacob, so long ago, *"Give me children, or I'll die".* These were prophetic words, born of envy. No longing for a child is sinful, but jealousy and envy, directed at another, are destructive.

Rachel dies a painful death, and

Jacob's increased joy is dashed with grief.

The pain of it,

"***Rachel,***

The pain will soon be o'er,

Try Rachel, try, try -

It's nearly finished,

The baby is nearly here,

Don't be afraid,

Rachel, Oh Rachel,

You have another son.

Benoni,

You want him to be called Benoni,

Son of sorrow, no, no, not yet,

Yes, it's difficult Rachel,

But don't give up.

Breathe,

Breathe,

Breathe Rachel,

Oh don't give up.

Rachel,

Rachel,

RACHEL.

Quick,

Tell Jacob,

It's too late,

IT'S TOO LATE.

Rachel is no more.

RACHEL IS DEAD."

The midwives, knowing Rachel's situation, must have been pained with this consequence. They would mix earth and water, and dust themselves and beat their foreheads, and bare their breasts, singing lamentations to the tune of the flute. Perhaps it was a breach birth, as these midwives could tell Rachel the sex of her partly born child. Mothers often died with a breach birth. Jacob tells Pharaoh later, that his years have been difficult - "*full of sorrow*". And this is one of his great sorrows.

However, there were, out of this terrible tragedy for Jacob, some blessings, for Rachel never saw her beloved Joseph sold into Egypt, and presumed dead. There were evil days ahead and great sadness - she was spared this, at least. However she never saw the "*home*" to which she was being brought. It is two days easy march to Hebron, and Jacob had been away for more than 40 years.

In her death she bestowed a blessing (Benjamin) on Jacob, though he would hardly think of it as a blessing at the time, and may have even felt antipathy to the one who caused the death of his loved wife. It is a possible, though immature reaction. He was her "*son of sorrow*". "*Benoni*", Rachel said, knowing her death was coming) and "*son of my right hand*", ("*Benjamin*", Jacob said - as indeed Joseph was, but which Benjamin became after the "*death*" of Joseph).

Comment:

Jacob would command some silk to be brought from the pack, in which to wrap her body. Special worms were used in India, to manufacture special silk, but common silk came as far away as China, along the road that later became known as "*The Silk Road*". We will know soon of a trading company that plied its trade up and down this route, some distant relations of this family. Trading companies of all descriptions were big business.

Jacob's firm would have earlier traded the silk from one of these companies, for some of their own sheep goods from **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products.** This was a fledgling company yet, but had a big potential, if only they could get themselves a good reputation for responsible practices. It had been founded by Jacob's grandfather, who divided it with his nephew, and therefore lost that half. It was only limited then, though it thrived, especially under his son, Isaac, more of a sedentary fellow, who encouraged the pasturing of sheep, with a more settled existence, until his son, the grandson of the founder took over. This

grandson brought a thriving flock from Haran, though he suffered a loss, when he paid a big insurance to his brother, for his safe passage from the north. Jacob, now recovered, and about to join with his father's flocks, the whole herd prospered, until a drought that drove them into Egypt. The firm became more firmly pastoralists, when they eventually settled in the west in Goshen, but that was far into the future. At the moment the firm had some internal difficulties, and certain family troubles which affected business. **The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company** with whom they often dealt was a very old family firm, dealing in goods and slaves, and well known for their honesty and compassionate approach to the slave trade. The leader of the firm was a wise old man and knew many things. He knew how to get ordinary silk or special silk. Perhaps Rachel's shroud was special silk. There is further information about trade, and trade routes, and silk, in the next section that deals with favourites and the sale of Joseph. Trade and sales are an integral part of the story of Jacob and his sons, with the mission mandate that accompanied the blessings, so that all nations would be blessed.

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In the great grief that enveloped this tented site, and Jacob in his great sadness, would command a stone to be hewn, to mark the grave spot, and there where she died, a grave would be dug. So Jacob buried Rachel probably in silk, in that tomb, near Bethlehem.

Jacob held Rachel in his arms

In a last embrace,

And kissed her in the coldness of death,

As he had warmly kissed her, in Haran.

Jacob rolled the stone over her grave,

And sealed her in,

As he rolled the stone from the well

At their first meeting.

Jacob wept aloud,

As he did,

When he first saw her,

Beside the well in Haran,

(The joyful kiss and the cry and the stone rolling there in *Genesis 29:10, 11*, are an antithesis of this *Scriptural* text).

His weeping now

Would be full of remembrance,

Great with sorrow,

And fearful of the lonely days ahead.

Mournfully, Jacob would say:

"***Here* (Bethel) *it began* -**

(his wife search under God's care)

And here it endeth".

"***I must go on without my love,***

But with the child."

But "*How can I let go of my loved one?*

How long will the pain last?

Will I ever laugh again?"

From our own experience we know how Jacob would be questioning himself.

Jacob is not thinking of the pain being "*God's megaphone*", as *C. S. Lewis* puts it. God "*whispers*" to us in our "*pleasures*", He "*speaks*" to us in our "*conscience*", but He "*shouts*" at us in our "*pains*". The pain will worsen for Jacob, for he has forgotten the message from God that He is with him. His "*A Grief Observed*" is brim full of comforting messages for those in the passage of grief, when the arguing in one's mind seems to be most fertile. He admits that the greatest danger, is not "*Why hast thou forsaken me?*" but "*so this is what God is really like. Deceive yourself no longer*". That is, there is a danger that we will abandon God in our grief, *page 8*.

The text of *Genesis 30:22* is appropriate to quote at this Rachel death time. For God did answer Rachel's anguished prayer. He did hear her and God it was who overcame her sterility. It is not recorded, but when she said "*God has taken away my reproach*", implicit in that, is her grateful thanks for His act of intervention in her life, her recognition of God and her wish to be like Him. It may not have worked out as she wished, and as we know, she was not buried at Machpelah, but God did hear her once, and gave her the blessing of a dear son, who she did enjoy for his childhood years. Our tears are tinged with the longing that it was indeed enough for her.

3. JACOB'S GRIEF

In this chapter, *verses 19* and *20* reveal so little of the depression that would have set in, in Jacob's mind. Jacob would have suffered from what has become known today as "*The Widow's Syndrome*", as that depression is called.

Comment:

Extreme sorrow or shock can stress a body into succumbing to a grave disease. Listlessness sets in, torpor, sloth, a snail's withdrawal from the world at large, a castaway, for now the anchor has been swept away. Isolated we are, moving civilly, through a world that is scarcely impinged on the inner world - dreaming of a wonderful release, and never getting there.

Even when one has opened one's heart and begun to recover, it still feels like the bottom of the ocean, with a mile high wall of water on top. Some are more resilient than others, some have a more profound reaction, but all stages are varied, and the density of feeling different, like blades of grass.

We stand about in tears, and try to keep up appearances, meanwhile the tears run down inside like acidic waterfalls, corroding our souls for years. We seem to drag our feet, for the lift in our

step has gone, so it appears to us that our soles are corroded as well. It may last for years and years. We will never be the same again, for a loved half of us has gone.

The system short circuits with grief and sadness, the immune system becomes unstable and we are prone to illness. We are anxious and sleepless, and not good company. We are soporific, and inclined to doze, and don't seem to care. The reactions seem inimitable, for they are so varied. We have choices about how we react to grief, but some of us do not want to make choices, at first. In time, we can force ourselves to make choices, and then to follow them through. Then we can feel we have moved along a little step, and to understand that we need to keep the forward motion going, if we possibly can.

With emotions that have furious intensity like grief, an unanalysable critical point is likely to be reached. It seems that the mind flips over and changes its set, and without the intervention of will or thought, we pursue a new direction. We think we have to do something and that we will be rewarded.

It is true, that to practise something, that you do not wish to do, will bring a satisfactory conclusion, eventually. Be brave even if you are not, you can pretend. Not many can tell the difference, and practice makes it easier. Now is the time to really pray for wisdom and courage and to be led out of the darkness. Every now and again God will provide a moment, or a shaft, or even a splash of light. Try to seize it so that you can glow in the light, just for a little time. It might help to make the glow a bit longer next time. God has promised us, that "*whoever refreshes himself, will himself be refreshed*", so try, just a little, to refresh somebody else each day. Compliment three people a day, remember to say "*please*" and "*thankyou*", polish your shoes, plant some flowers, watch the sunset, relish small pleasures, and think big thoughts, make yourself hum, then sing in the shower, try to smile, at least move the muscles in your face. It may all sound too hard. But try, just try.

Punishment for loving, living with one's love, for letting something, or someone die, is not the answer. Neither is, "*I didn't love enough*", or "*I should have said*" or "*done more*". Nor is "*it seems like I did not love enough, if I do not grieve more*", or "*I can prove my devotion, by profound mourning*", an unhealthy attitude, at best. Punishment of oneself in such a way is only self flagellation. Rigidity or polarisation is not an answer, but fluttering along all the emotions and values is better.

Examine the cause of the grief, the letting go, the detaching. One does not let go of the loving, of the good times, it does not mean indifference. It means that we have come to the realisation, that it all belonged to God, and is God's treasure to bless, or withhold, at His pleasure, when somewhere along the way, we had forgotten that, thinking it was ours. Remember, "*If you love something, set it free*". It is a hard, but necessary fact to remember, even in the good times, for we cannot possess people, we can only enjoy them, for a time. Forgive yourself, if you are regretting, focus on the dreams fulfilled and not the past regrets. Worry can immobilise us whereas action can liberate us. Try not to postpone joy. A little joy might go along way right now. Try it if you can.

It means that there should be no desire to possess things or persons, for in possessiveness lies the pain - the unbearable yearning. In this, we endure the flies that keep on biting - we need to be free of it. With a loss, we have a great need to climb to the top of the ladder, and being free of it all, fly off, alone. God knows the effort and strength that is needed to climb the ladder and will

be with us every step of the way. Say, "*Go your way*", to the object of your grief, - and wait for God's grace. To Him say, "*We can do no more together - thankyou, God, for all we had*".

To reach this point would be a great blessing. Maybe many of our loved friends have reached this point, what a blessing they are to those who are still trudging along the tortuous path.

We know that this strategy applies to all our severed relationships, not only in death. Sometimes we would prefer a death, for it would be more final, or bring with it more dignity. Herein is the lesson that we cannot decide which path we will tread, for God decides. *Ruth Park's* "*Fishing in the Styx*" will provide lots more ideas on coping with grief.

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4. JACOB AND LEAH AND THEIR MARRIAGE

Of the children of the one forefather - Abraham and Sarah (Abraham's half sister as well as his wife), Isaac and Rebekah; Rachel, Leah and Jacob - only the last two remain together.

We have no indication that Jacob loved Leah more, at the death of Rachel, or that he would now have turned to her. However, the fact that she was buried at the patriarchal grave at Machpelah, either before Jacob went down into Egypt, *Genesis 49:13*, or when her bones were transported here from her unknown death place, says more for family position, than for Jacob's love. Both women, powerful in the family, were contending with one another. Women now given power, in this no sex discrimination world, can still wield it over other women, or over men. It is power domination, and is not exclusively a male trait. It is a non gender game, which anyone may play over another. It soon sours all relationships within its orbit. Certainly polygamy was/is a fruitful ground for souring relationships. The major factor in David's troubling relationships with his sons can be traced back to his several wives. It only saddens us more to read in *2 Samuel 5:13* that "*David took more concubines and wives when he came to Jerusale*m", and his son, Solomon, learning the lessons of his father, had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

Leah did not shut down her emotions. When people do, they shut down joyful experiences as well, and become depressed. With joy comes efficiency and enthusiasm, and meaning for life. Shut down, we cripple ourselves. Emotions are of a whole, and if one side is denied, another side soon follows, until emotions are all shut down and covered over. An unwelcome illness emerges, and we are emotionally disabled. Conversely, if we suppress unacceptable emotions and only show approval gaining emotions, we begin to believe self worth depends on other people, rather than ourselves. That is not to say we should expose unacceptable emotions in an unacceptable fashion. We can express them positively, so that people understand our feelings, without us giving offence. Leah did not shut down, but redirected her meaning for life. Rachel was good at exposing her emotions, also, except that she had the cultural attitude that her self worth depended on her producing children.

Rachel and Leah did let their disappointments and jealousies be known, for they are recorded by Moses, on several occasions. As long as these emotions ranged within acceptable limits, they would still have powerful positions within the family - only now Leah, with Rachel's death, had no "*rival*", *(1 Samuel 1:6)*. She may have hoped her true worth would now be acknowledged, where she should have been with Jacob one flesh. "*For male and female created he them*" (in His own image) made "*after the similitude of God*". As a bearer of God's image with true worth, she would now be free from the envy sin, and she deserved the chance (if she loved Jacob still) of re inventing this marriage.

Comment:

We, at different stages in our lives, have the chance to re invent or renew relationships such as in marriage, and are given the blessed daily opportunity of reinventing our unions. We need to find the right person, and then be the right person as well, for from this one decision comes most of our happiness, - or misery. A good marriage does wonders for our children. If marriage does not last a lifetime, everyone suffers. Relationships are dynamic. The ebb and flow of life can/should bring flexibility and renewal. Good emotional health is learning to take responsibility for one's own actions and faults, never blaming others, or letting others goad us into bad behaviour. We should never work for our security, by disadvantaging others. We need to leave everything a little better than we found it, and try to empathise with other people's points of view. Focus on making things better, not bigger. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others, *1 Corinthians 10:24* is surely a marriage precept, and to learn easily identified coping mechanisms, can only enrich us.

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Consider:

The relationship between the two sisters and Jacob can only be guessed at.

* Did the contention between the two sisters spoil the love of Jacob for Rachel?

* Did he tire of the competition for his favour?

* Indeed, did the competition go on, or wane?

* How has Leah's life gone, in the 24 years since the deceit on the wedding night?

* Some of us can look back over 24 years of marriage. What have we got left?

* Have we kept the sad lessons and thrown away the experiences?

* Or do we throw away the hurts?

* What did Leah have left?

We don't really know what Leah had left.

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CONCLUSION:

This patriarchal family moves on in great sadness and the pit of despair engulfs them all. The journey of a lifetime has turned into a journey of despondency and depression.

CHAPTER 3

INCEST - ANOTHER SORDID TALE

"Reuben … lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine", Genesis 35:22.

FOCUS:

As the caravan rolls on again, we read, that Jacob stops his family by the Tower of Edar, a watch tower for protection of the flocks from robbers and wild beasts, and a lookout for

invaders, ***Genesis 35:21-29.*** Here a momentous incident occurs. Then in ***Genesis 36*** the story of Esau is closed off.

1. THE DISGRACE OF REUBEN'S INCEST

Here Leah's eldest son, Reuben, now 24 years old, commits another crime against his father. He loses his claim to the birthright by sleeping with his father's concubine, a Syrian, Bilhah. She was old enough to be his mother, and was indeed his stepmother. She had been given to Rachel by Laban, at least 24 years ago. She had been Laban's concubine, before she was Jacob's concubine. She was the mother of Dan and Naphtali, his (step) brothers

This sordid tale brings with it, also, many questions.

Consider:

* Was Bilhah taking consolation from Reuben at her mistress' death?

It wasn't rape, so responsibility lies with both of them,

- One a servant,

- One a master,

- One older,

- One younger.

* Did the two conflicting family relationships soften responsibility, each to the other?

* Was Bilhah a household prostitute, although she was the mother of Dan and Naphtali?

* If polygamy was rife, were there household prostitutes as well?

If there were sexual relations between an unmarried man and woman, it was obligatory that they marry.

* Was Reuben unmarried?

* Is this obligation the reason why, earlier, Shechem pressed his claim in the manner he did (by rape, then by a request for marriage), because he knew of marriage prohibitions on Canaanites, even before the Law of Moses?

* Was Jacob so prostrate with grief over Rachel that the family lurched on, without his supervision?

****

There is no reaction by Jacob recorded, at this time, except "*that he heard of it*", in the *AV, Massoretic* text, though at his deathbed Jacob refers to this sin, and Reuben is reminded of his instability and that he will not excel. "*Thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch*", *Genesis 49:4*.

The *Septuagint Version* records Jacob's reaction at the time of the incident though, "*Israel heard of it - and the thing appeared grievous before him*", Joseph brought an evil report to Jacob of his brothers, *Genesis 37:2*, presumably this was one of the incidents mentioned.

It was an arrogant act, and a premature claim to the rights of the first born at his father's death, where he could inherit his father's concubine, as concubines could be passed on like wealth and possessions. Reuben was probably jealous of the sons of Rachel, and sought to divert what he thought would be precedence, given by Jacob, to her sons. In *Genesis 49:3-4* Reuben loses his legal status as first born, in the "*Blessings of Jacob*" at Jacob's imminent death. Also he loses his status within the family, at this present time, for the effective leadership passes to Judah. "*Arrogant incest*" the *NIV Study Bible* calls it. In *Amos 2:7* Israel is condemned for their sins, including, "*father and son use the same girl, and so profane my holy name*".

Sexual relations by a father and a son with the same girl were strictly forbidden, for obvious reasons. Progeny would be unlawfully related, and so the relationships were deemed as incest.

H. A. Whittaker points us, in "*Wrestling Jacob*", *page 97,*to David, *2 Samuel 12:18*, taking Saul's wives, and then there is Absalom in *2 Samuel 16:21, 22*, and also Adonijah, in *1 Kings 2:17*, taking, or attempting to take their father's wives, without following the proper cultural pattern.

2. THE WHOLE FAMILY IN DISGRACE AGAIN

However, now, here is another disgrace - within the family, and affecting the family firm. Outsiders looking in must have felt that there was instability here. Of course everybody knew, for this was a family constantly in the spotlight with the business firms and traders round about, with whom they had daily contact. There is no witness here of the glory of God to the nations round about.

Consider:

As God promised "*that He would never leave His people without testimony*", *Acts 14:16, 17,* and that "*the gentiles show the requirements of the law written in their hearts*", *Romans 2:14, 15,* so, there is at this time a dearth of any Godly witness among the Jews. So,

* Where is the mission mandate at this time?

* Is this when people heard (like Job, or Jethro did) from God, about the way of salvation, and the way to worship Him?

In this patriarch's life

* Why does this dysfunction keep occurring?

* Were there too many people to care for, so much journeying, so much wealth in sheep and cattle and servants?

* Is Jacob not able to cope?

* Does certain dysfunction run in families, unless strict care is taken to avoid it?

****

Jacob's disappointment and anger are spelled out at the end of his life, but that does not mean that he is not disappointed now, and with a continuing disappointment all through his life. Still we know it is God's purpose that a great family needed to go into Egypt (70 souls) to be a million people when they returned. There had to be enough to form God's nation and the land of Israel, and fulfil His promise.

God had blessed Jacob. But blessings need care, if they are to continue to be blessings. Jacob on his deathbed pronounced some of these blessings as curses.

Blessings they were,

And mismanaged,

They turned into curses.

3. THE JACOB FAMILY MOVES ON TO HEBRON

Eventually, lonely Jacob travels on to Isaac at Hebron. We cannot tell whether he has visited his father since his return from Haran. The only connection, about which we might know, is that somehow, sometime, Deborah, Rebekah's nurse had come from Isaac, to live with Jacob's family. It is 35 years since Jacob left Rebekah and Isaac, to go to Laban, to look for a wife. Isaac is "*full of years*", and has been partially blind at least, for so long, if not blind, even before Jacob left. Isaac's death at 180 years old, and burial at Machpelah, by Jacob and Esau, is recorded, misplaced in time sequence, in *Genesis 35:29*. The twins were 120 years old at the time of the burial, and Joseph, in Egypt, is interpreting the butler baker dreams. After the funeral, Esau went back to Seir where he had easily established territory for himself - the Edomites. The resulting division of property and servants, after Isaac's burial, by Esau and Jacob would have enhanced Esau's credibility amongst the people of Seir, far more so now. Like Abraham and Lot, Jacob and Esau were now, certainly, too numerous to remain together, and Esau does not renew his post Haran offer to Jacob, of being together, and gathers his possessions, and leaves this Promised Land. *Genesis 36:6* tells us that he turned his face from Jacob, but the whole of the chapter really records the history of Esau's family. At this new stage of the narrative, the genealogy of the other branch of the family, that is Esau, is completed. The chapter is Esau's "*toldoth*" or history, the story of his wives and children, his genealogy.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

Chapters 37 to *50* comprise Jacob's toldoth. It is the record of the removal of Jacob and his family, through the instrument of Joseph, from Canaan into Egypt, as a prerequisite for growing the nation.

If we follow the time line of *Companion Bible*, "*Chronological Chart, Appendix 50*", Isaac dies ten years after the lost Joseph incident, which happened when Joseph was 18 years old. If so it would have been of great concern and sorrow to Isaac that this loved grandchild had disappeared. Sold into Egypt! Sold!

"*Lost! Sold! How was he sold?*" we like Isaac, question. The family was not poor. They had no need to sell anything. Jacob loved his son, Joseph, dearly. He would have been guarded, or, should have been guarded, and cared for, and cherished, and never lost. The lessons of Dinah were not well learned.

This family was specially blessed, and needed to stay together to enjoy the blessings. It would be wrong to divide it, we would think, not knowing the end from the beginning.

The reputation of God's people amongst the neighbours of this family is tainted once again in the next story, and the mission purpose is again lost. Perhaps there is a greater purpose, a provision for later tough times in Canaan, and an established place in Egypt. We do know that answer, but still we wonder about the mission mandate at this time.

CONCLUSION:

Isaac's cup of sorrow will fill more as he lives out his days amongst his grandchildren. Isaac's life began in laughter and great joy, he married for ease and comfort at the death of his mother, and it ends in sadness over a special grandchild - and the suspicion of murder about the other Jacob grandchildren. His Esau grandchildren are far away.

Digression:

As Esau's toldoth, or family history, in ***Genesis 36,*** does not concern us in this study, we will quickly pick out the main points, before we proceed with the patriarchal story.

+ In this chapter, *Genesis 36*, there is information about Esau's family.

+ We read about the people of Edom, who lived amongst the reddish rock formations, primarily sandstone, located south and south east of the River Jordan.

+ We can see that there are their connections with their step cousins, the Ishmaelites.

+ Eliphas, a son of Esau, and his grandson, Teman may provide a connection with Job, who lived in the land of Uz, and whose friend was Eliphas from Teman, *Job 2:11*.

+ We learn about Esau's wives and his concubines, and

+ The great wealth that he had.

+ There is information about Esau's sons and grandsons.

+ There are the dukes and the kings, princes, and the subjects that are reigned over in this kingdom.

There are some problems in comparisons with other texts, but we will not deal with those here. The dates and ages of family members are not certain, although they may seem so in our story, and even birth positions are sometimes blurred. Here, in this chapter, some have been included or excluded for reasons unknown to us. There may be twelve princes, like Jacob's family, but thirteen are mentioned here, and later nine. The explanation is difficult, see commentary by *Ellicott,* and not of much consequence to our story.

+ The text ends as it began - "*Esau, the father of the Edomites*".

CHAPTER 4

JOSEPH - JACOB'S FAVOURITE CHILD

"***Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children", Genesis 37:3.***

FOCUS:

After Esau's toldoth is told, we move to Jacob's toldoth. In ***Genesis 37:1-3***, there is some small, but illuminating detail about Jacob and his family.

There is more grief and angst for Jacob, yet he thinks his cup is already overflowing with suffering. His dearly loved son, Joseph is now lost to him.

1. FAVOURITES IN FAMILIES

Some great purpose had to be achieved in this family. God's all seeing eye perceived a jealousy among these brothers and a willingness to rid themselves of the spoiled child, Joseph. He was Jacob's favourite child. "*Favourite*" that word again. Strong/weak family relationships become, once more, the vehicle of God's will.

So we are introduced to Joseph, a noble character that takes up more space than any other, and with this valuable human biography, we are energised. A favourite son and hated brother, never resentful or carrying a grudge, never wanting to get even. The story holds every human passion and because of it, low level antagonism simmers daily in this family life, and kindness is not evident. It seems Jacob did nothing about the dysfunctions, the incest sex with Bilpah, the Shechem rape and pillage. At least it is not in the text, only in the end of life blessings. It really was time for a well function management practice, so the dysfunction in this family could be curtailed. The dysfunction could have been curtailed in Jacob's worshipful practices, which we are not told about in any great detail, or it could have been in family conferences. But it was not curtailed, and so the stage was set for more family trouble. Joseph was an easy child to raise, and being so, was favoured by Jacob, that's why he was an easy child.

Comment:

Children are loved in different ways for different things. So children in a family should never feel that one is loved more than another. God **rightly** divides (*2 Timothy 2:15)* as He asks us to do. He doesn't equally divide amongst us. A famous black preacher said, "*Black people must never say,* '*It's not fair that my skin is black, why can't I have a white skin and be as free as the white man*'. *God never equally divided anything in this world, He rightly divided it, and so everyone is different*". Children need to be assured on this point, as parents go about rightly dividing amongst their children.

We should make ourselves worthy of the privileges of life and love and joy, and manage them as well as we should our hate, for they are all gifts from God. Negative and positive feelings both have to be managed for emotional maturity.

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Moses tells us that Joseph was Jacob's favourite child, and there was family dysfunction because this was so. It created more jealousy within this next generation - children model on their parent's behaviour. Jacob learned that from his mother's favouring behaviour of himself as a child, and now jealousy is present again.

It is interesting to note according to prevailing law that Jacob may have required payment from Laban for his years of service for Rachel, if she had **not** had children. For many reasons, then, it was fortuitous that Rachel did have a child, but the wonder of it made the child favoured in Jacob's eyes.

For many reasons then, Joseph much wanted, fell into the position of favourite child, with Benjamin not far behind. The other ten sons of Leah, Zilpah and Bilhah had indeed recently caused Jacob much trouble and this also may have cemented a strengthening bond for Rachel's children, especially as this much loved wife was now dead. However we need to consider that it was Leah's children who caused Jacob trouble, so perhaps it was natural for Jacob to favour Rachel's children. This is not however a mechanism for encouraging better behaviour from the boys, and only served to make it worse.

However reasons for favouritism do not excuse the angst caused on those who are less favoured. Each child needs to be treated differently, commensurate with age and maturity and personality. We need to differentiate between needs and desires, and try to fulfil all the needs, and some of the desires, if our family is to be healthy. The needs of the older boys of Jacob were quite different to the needs of these two motherless boys, and in fulfilling these needs Jacob's actions need not have been as favouring one child above another. It may have been a matter of regret to Jacob that he did not manage the relationships within these siblings more effectively. We are not told.

The things that bring profound joy in our lives also bring responsibility and the risk of loss and grief. Jacob had learned that over Rachel, but he didn't know that yet, for his much loved child, Joseph.

Certainly Jacob had cause for great sorrow over the loss of his dear child, Joseph. His habit of living his life with unresolved differences paid the toll of great unhappiness. For decades he lived with the unresolved anger of Esau (until the Jabbok). It was Laban who pursued him to resolve the difficulties that had been present in Haran, and so that resolution (initiated by Laban) was achieved at the Mispah. Now Jacob's sons seek not to resolve the difficulty of the favourite child, causing disharmony in the family, in a reasonable, negotiating fashion, but by disposing of the "*problem*" person elsewhere. They certainly were old enough to negotiate about it, for good with Jacob, or for evil with whoever came along (the trade route). Reuben was twenty four years old.

Comment:

God would be more pleased with the management of our worshipping communities, if we reasonably negotiated with our "*problem*" members and used socially acceptable personal skills, bringing harmony amongst us rather than being relieved, even pleased, when a "*problem*" member moves on. Success in this area can bring great satisfaction. Dysfunction is the "*in*" word, but it has been the "*in*" condition of peoples, including in worshipping communities, for decades. Now that there is so much emphasis on behaviour skills and management, our interpersonal skills can only improve. What a joy to see these skills, together with our open *Bibles,* used for beneficial healing in the fragmentation that persists among people who say that they love God. The endemic condition of misbehaviour can with great strength be turned to well behaviour, by those committed to reform, if we will acknowledge that it is God's way, that He will bless it, and we will learn how to do it.

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2. JACOB'S LIVELIHOOD IN CANAAN

Jacob would have practised the farming of ploughed land, sowing and reaping, half heartedly, as some evidence of permanency, but his true riches and substance lay in his teeming movable property - his flocks. He probably would have rented the fields for ploughing, sowing, reaping and animal grazing, from the indigenous people round about. He had no right to ownership of the land save for dwelling and burial. His grandfather, Abraham, had already bought a burial ground, the cave of Machpelah at Hebron, from the Hittite people, from the family of Heth, and so Jacob once more established himself there, where Isaac lived and died. Jacob also owned a dwelling ground at Shalem in Shechem. He felt unwelcome, as we know, at Shechem, and so when he came to Isaac, at Hebron, he stayed on. Still, he was "*ger*" or "*guest*" in this land, as his

father Isaac, and grandfather Abraham, had been. God had not yet fulfilled the ownership inheritance promise, and there were some restrictions on Jacob's ownership rights.

There are some unknown prevailing circumstances here, that is whether Isaac and Jacob actually lived together, or perhaps just in close proximity.

There would be a difficulty with the herds suddenly blending.

Also we wonder how they managed their new found father/son relationship.

3. JACOB ESTABLISHES HIS BUSINESS AT HEBRON

Jacob was no peasant, and different from the sunburnt tillers of the soil. He would have lived in tents beside the walls of Hebron, inside which the people lived in more permanent dwellings. He was no established citizen, or ruler of the ruling class, but his riches and apparent wisdom (God bestowed) gave him respect and dignity from his more than tolerant hosts. Outside the city, he made no threats, and caused them no expense in protection. He was a go between for any of the traders, and would be used as an insurance agent, recommending clients, or warning off undesirables. A highly valued "*ger guest*", at that! His family firm of **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products** was consolidating the business interests, and had recovered from their difficulties. They had a good reputation for business, but some of Jacob's sons were known to be hard men.

He exchanged what he was able to trade from his herds, for necessary corn, oil, figs, dates, pomegranates, honey, silver, and gold - and he had been known to buy silk to please the women - and these trading contracts gave him civic standing, despite the unusual nature of his existence. He did not want to be thought of as a vandal nomad moving amongst them, he needed fixed and friendly contracts for his need to support his growing family and servants. He traded with these people of Baal, businessmen, tradesmen, peasants, as well as the caravan traders. The town dwellers, but mostly the businessmen, prospered from the trade of the highway that came north and south through the land. Now missioning for God among them, Jacob feels that he has his business and his family under control. Sadly he was under a delusion.

4. ANCIENT HISTORY ABOUT TRADE ROUTES TO AND FROM, AROUND AND THROUGH THE LAND OF CANAAN

It is interesting to note here some details about old trade routes and the possibilities that were open to the plan that God had for this patriarchal family. It was at that time possible to travel north east and North West, as well as south. We marvel, therefore at the provision of a trading company that took Joseph to Egypt, and not one going north to India, or China or Russia.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

5. SLAVES, - AND THE IRONY OF MONEY

The town dwellers in places like Hebron grew rich, as traders do everywhere, and the peasants became their slaves. In their need for the necessities of life, slaves are made, because they borrow from the wealthy, and unable to repay, they eventually pay back with their children's bodies, or their own, labour and/or sex. It happens even in our culture. They sell themselves. Borrowers and lenders flourish where there is trade.

Rich landowners were all part of God's plan for this land. Their wealth was later used to make Egypt wealthy, under Joseph's guiding hands, as the people here, were able to buy food in Egypt, at the time of the drought and famine.

A long way to go to buy food, but for a wondrous reason, Egypt had great warehouses of grain to sell. The silver or gold was willingly given for their bread (of life) and sometimes their children were given as slaves, and Egypt became a great power. Joseph's wonderful economic plan, amassed for Egypt great wealth during the famine. However, the Egyptians later "*lent*" their silver and golden trinkets (and raiment) to God's people to help them on their way out of Egypt. It is ironical that so much of it was used for the making of a golden calf to worship. "*Money makes the world go round*", but it is sometimes a bumpy ride. Instead of worshipping the God who had brought them so many blessings, the Israelites began Egyptian animal worship (a calf), as opposed to this Baal nature worship here, from whence the silver and gold had come. However, these Semitic people from Ur, from Canaan, from Egypt brought a syncretic worship, a mixture of it all. Well may Joshua complain to them, and God be angry. Rachel's gods were never fully eradicated from this people.

6. ELIEZER'S ROLE IN THE EDUCATION OF JACOB'S CHILDREN

Eliezer's fame and honour was in the choosing of a wife for Isaac. He was head servant, house steward. Abraham was the "*father*" of Eliezer, and therefore Eliezer, being the companion of Isaac, was the "*grandfather*" of Joseph. He was probably bought from Damascus and that fact engenders doubt that he was actually a son of Abraham (of a slave/servant girl), as Ishmael was (of Hagar), but he was so close to Abraham, that Abraham offered him to God as his heir, as Sarah was childless. God refused the offer, but Eliezer's privileged family position guaranteed that he well knew the siblings, Isaac and Ishmael, and their step siblings, the children of Keturah. However he would know best the children and the grandchildren of Isaac.

Consider:

* Bedouin chiefs, a whole series of Arabian progenitors and lords of the desert (see Esau's family story, *Genesis 36)* came from this family. It was a mighty family full of wisdom,

and educated at that. If Eliezer was still alive with Jacob now, who better for a teacher for Joseph, than this wise old man?

* If Deborah, Rebekah's (wet?) nurse, having only just died, had come with Rebekah from Ur, with Eliezer, (they were possibly of the same generation), was there a relationship between them?

* Were they both sent to Jacob and Rachel at some past time, and so have been together all along, since Jacob's marriage?

* Or had Eliezer been alone with Isaac and now with Jacob's journey to Hebron, to join Isaac, they were all together, except that Deborah had just died?

It depends on when Deborah joined Jacob. It is all worth considering.

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Isaac is still alive. He died 180 years old, years after Joseph's disappearance, at the time of the butler baker dream interpretation. He is attached to Jacob now, so Isaac would have been

pleased to see a role for this ageing faithful servant. Eliezer certainly would not be younger than Isaac, but he may not have been too much older - say 20 years.

Thomas Mann's description, in "*Joseph and His Brothers - Young Joseph*", *pages 60-63,* of life in Hebron, and his suggestion that Eliezer is Joseph's mentor, helps us to comprehend the reality of it all, as this family lives out His will in their daily tasks.

7. ELIEZER'S WISDOM IN JACOB'S COMPOUND

Eliezer would be a wise old man, if indeed he was still alive - the prevailing Eastern wisdom would enhance Joseph's education if he sat with him under the wisdom tree in Jacob's compound. And Joseph, happy with his sums and his quills and his scripts and his books, would also know wisdom, and like "*Ping*", (in our Digression), he would be sure that home was the best place to be.

Eastern wisdom is foreign to us - we're brought up with Greek logic.

Eastern wisdom does not necessarily seem logical to us.

Eastern wisdom seems sits uncomfortably with us, for example,

God created man last,

- In case someone would say that man had helped God with the task of creation,

- So that man could humbly say, "the blowfly was born before me",

- So that man might sit down, at once, to a meal, after his creation, as the guest for whom all things had been made ready.

Wisdom indeed!

Joseph must have had an excellent teacher to teach him the wisdom that led to his God given vocation, for he knew about the stars and their constellations, about mathematical matters of all sorts, about health, and safety, and how to make and preserve good relationships with people. His sibling relationships were tenuous, but he was immature still. He knew about languages, and reading, and writing. He knew the script of the people of Hebron, the traders, and the Egyptians. He had "*read*" the old fables, and learned the lessons of life, with its pitfalls. He would know the writings of God, for Jacob would command that this be so. However he would not know of the writings of Moses, for they were written 200 years later than this. And he did not know the destiny that God had planned for him.

The education Joseph received, at this time in his life, was critical for his development into the wise and wonderful ruler he in fact became. Joseph was eighteen years old when he was taken into Egypt.

Someone educated Joseph. He excelled in the learning of it, and it showed. He showed it. He became the object of a destructive hatred. This hatred was the reverse side of the universal adoration that was laid on him by Jacob. He was fair to look upon, with grace poured upon him, and as he grew, he found disfavour amongst his brethren. They played a great hardship upon him that led **Joseph to the house of Potiphar, where the finest achievement of any individual in this story was played out.**

8. JOSEPH' ALONENESS SYNDROME

However much Jacob loved this first born of Rachel, he was not able to bestow the same love, on the children of his less loved wife Leah.

Comment:

Love is not like an apple to be divided in portions.

Love has a "*magical*" quality of increasing as it is used - like the cruise of oil, *1 Kings 17:14*.

Love, like the cruise of oil, "*never fails*", *1 Corinthians 13:8*. Both English texts use the words "*never fail*".

1. **If it is apportioned out, or withheld, it debilitates the giver, as well as the receiver.**

2. **If it is abounding and generous, it returns many times over.**

3. **Love is learned in the home, it is difficult to learn it anywhere else.**

4. **To love and be loved is the greatest joy. The power of love cannot be overestimated.**

5. **If you love and care for others, happiness will find you.**

6. In every encounter there is something left behind. A loving encounter can bring great joy, and it leaves behind it a Godly investment.

Children grow up to make the mistakes their parents made, unless educated otherwise. Some of us don't provide a road map for them, and they are left to find their own path. Loveless children, abused, never learn to freely love, and if not corrected can become abusers themselves, it is a known fact. It is essential to break the cycle. Emotional attitudes are endemic, and often Trans generational. Here the favourite child syndrome is repeated, but the cycle of the aloneness syndrome within the family group is broken, as we shall see.

The favourite child, the abused child, the unloved child, the only child, each is unique, and, because of family situation, exhibit peculiarities that need careful handling.

a. They are not easily integrated into a group.

b. They immerse themselves in books, or fantasy, or unruly behaviour.

c. They often have an imaginary friend.

d. They mostly care only for their own company, and are limited socially.

None of these are harmful unless they are carried out to excess. Isaac, Jacob, Esau and Joseph were all lone children, and held remotely by one parent or the other.

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The only person that Joseph got to know was himself, for his brothers *"could not speak peacefully to him"*. He could have sobbed for longing and loneliness, for he would have seen real people, his real brothers, doing the real things in the warm lives they led, the things he pretended with himself, in the coldness of loneliness.

We remember that Joseph had no mother in his teens, and was probably brought up by Bilhah, his mother's handmaid, who had her own children and grandchildren by Jacob. Perhaps there was some bonding between Bilhah and Joseph and Benjamin, in our terms, in a very difficult situation.

It is understandable that Joseph would bring the evil report of Reuben's despicable behaviour with Bilhah, *Genesis 35:22,* to his father Jacob, (if indeed that was part of the evil report that Joseph brought, in *Genesis 37:2*). He would feel that his security with this mother figure was in jeopardy, and hardly understanding the sexual significance, would rightly overlay it in his mind with something evil. So he told Jacob. Jacob may have wondered how he could continue to cope, while his sons continued to break his heart. But this Joseph was Jacob's looked for son, his longed for happiness with the woman he loved, Rachel, and he never broke Jacob's heart.

Love is often born,

In terrible darkness,

And with a troubled face,

And the hope,

That is born with the love,

Soon is dead.

But love is often born again,

In the loneliest,

And most unlikely place.

If it is reborn,

Hope lives again,

And love prospers.

CONCLUSION:

At this time, the love that Jacob and Joseph had for one another, was entering into darkness, and had a terrible, and troubled, and deadly face.

The hope that was in this relationship soon was dead. It was to be a long time before the love and the hope, which these two had for one another, ever lived again in an unlikely place.

For a sliver of hope did emerge. And these two separately entered the unlikely place, and that love was reborn and prospered in Egypt.

Digression:

It is now certain that not only was there an overland route to China, but a sea route as well, trading in frankincense. There is the most amazing discovery that frankincense was exported to China in a special type of small sewn boat. There are patterns of such boats even today in the harbours of the Yemen, amid the ancient debris. Ancient Chinese imports into Yemen, especially pottery, can be picked up, such as broken bowls, and other utensils. It seems that the incense travelled down with the enslaved youths and girls captured or purchased by the Midianites and other Semetic tribes. They had to make the long journey to Mahra on foot and then they were used on the incense boats to China.

It now seems certain that this was a fabulously profitable ancient trade in frankincense, and it began in the Neolithic Age. First it was carried by slaves on their backs and later on donkeys, and finally by camels, for a whole web of trade routes and hostels and inns, we now know, was developed, over the centuries, in these areas. At the beautiful oasis of Sarif, a rich trading centre with accommodation for human porters and camel caravans, that was busy for more than four thousand years, has recently been discovered - information from *The Caribbean Pioneer Magazine,* for *October 1998*.

That is, we now know that this trade was operative in a time **well before Abraham**, (who lived around 2000 BC). This fact boosts our confidence about silk coming from as far away as China at the same time.

Frankincense is still sold in the Sana bazaars, in the capital of Yemen. The long desert road North West to the Mediterranean was called "*The Incense Road*". Frankincense was a very expensive commodity, and few knew where it was grown, which was only in one place on earth, a few misty valleys inland from the Arabian Sea, 1120 terrible kilometres east of Aden, in Yemen. It would be interesting to know how the Israelites obtained incense for use in the rituals of the Tabernacle, in the wilderness, and later in the Temple in Jerusalem. The cost, in effort and purchase price, would be enormous. Jesus as a baby, and at his death, was associated with these spices.

The exhibition mounted by the British museum on Eastern culture, particularly about "*Ur*", and conditions in that city, shows a highly developed mode of living with many modern conveniences. As well, we know of terrible trade routes from the deserts of Arabia, and "*The Incense Road*", and that there was a sophisticated trade route system of hard and soft roads, that managed to traverse the then known world, from south in Africa to the borders of China, and, as well, north into Russia and Siberia. We know now, that a route to China, later known as "*The Silk Road*", had been established **before the time of Abraham**. So it is understandable suggestion that Jacob would have buried his precious Rachel, in the valuable silk brought over the trade routes from India or China. There was traffic from the nearby coastal towns and seaports, and, as well, that traffic from far away in Egypt, was well established. Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, had resided in Egypt for a time, so he knew of that great power to the south west, and the goods that came from thousands of kilometres south, from Africa. The road through Hebron, that linked the north, north east and North West, of the great Eurasian continent, to Ethiopia, Egypt, and south down the Nile, endured some competition because there was a north south parallel coastal road, which linked in as well. Joseph's brothers later tell the Midianites/Ishmaelites to take the coast road, with Joseph, not the Hebron road. Hebron was the usual route, and so Hebron truly was a great trade centre.

It is also interesting that far away cultures, like Japan and China, have ancient myths and legends about a great flood. It is not inconceivable that these stories originated from the tales told by the traders, who transversed these routes, and took, for example, the story of Noah and the Great Flood with them. The Inuit of Alaska, have recently been given independence by Canada, and they claim 4,000 years of history in their land.

Warehousing, lading, conveying of goods were a business of the highways. Some traders may have travelled enormous distances, and hardly ever reached a "*home*" base. Perhaps for some, "*home*" was on the road. Others would have been small time traders, who moved only a short way from "*home*". In any case the road to China, or other civilisations, would have frontiers, towers, guardhouses, and no trader could ever move along the whole length of the route, and

only moved in sections. Imagine the opportunity for graft and corruption, as well as mislaid, or lost articles. The inconvenience of lost luggage, on the great airlines of today, pale into insignificance, when one thinks of lost articles on "*The Silk Road*" or "*The Incense Road*". As well, cargo could be loaded in, and then loaded out, for only short distances, and then the traders like **The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company** that we are just beginning to hear about, would be gone on out of reach, for maybe a year or more.

Those little fat silk worms gnawing away on the mulberry trees in China were never an import of the Romans, for they didn't like silk materials. However, they were a blessing to the people in Egypt, because their silken thread, woven into beautiful materials, and often dyed in stunning patterns in Egypt, graced the fashion houses in On and Memphis.

In 3000 BC there were civilised peoples living in China. They had moved there from South East Asia and earlier from India. They produced a huge array of pots from clay, and they farmed rice very successfully in the Yangtze and Yellow River deltas, and reinforced their clay with rice husks for pottery of greater strength.

There is evidence that the villagers made silk, along with hemp, at that time. Archaeologists have found clay replicas of silkworms in the area and that suggests that the people raised the worms or caterpillars, which spun the cocoons that provided the shimmering fibres of silk, which they wove and then traded the silk material, information from "*Time-Life History*", *pages 129-147*.

Although they were a war faring community the greatest battle was against their river, the Yellow River, which they called their "*River of Sorrow*", on account of the number of lives it took. It was not until 2300 BC that Yu, the Great, tamed the river with a system of dykes, and their rice crops became more regular, and their lives more protected. They trained birds to catch fish in the river. They placed rings round the necks of the birds to stop them swallowing the fish. When they returned to the fisherman with the fish in their beaks, there was a tiny fish reward. We know about this from the children's story of "*Ping*", by *Marjorie Flack*, where, as well, the boatmen, on the Yangtze River in China, allowed their ducks off the boat each morning where they could swim and feed amongst the reeds, and along the dykes, and collected them each afternoon. Ping was always punished for being the last duck to respond to the "*La la la lei*" call. He hid one evening and spent the night in the reeds in great danger. The look on Ping's face next day, when the boatmen came back, assures children everywhere, that whatever happened, home was always the best place to be.

The Chinese were beset, like every one else, with the barbarian and Mongol invasions around 2000 BC. Only the Chinese though maintained their sovereignty and their traditions in tact, and emerged from the tumultuous times unscathed. We know that in the other great civilisations, that we are concerned with,

- The Sumerians, where Abram dwelt in Ur, later fell foul of the Amorites, and then the Babylonians, and that

- Egypt, at the time of Joseph, was depleted by internal strife and alien armies and eventually fell to the Hyksos.

There was trade between all these civilization, especially in precious stones and metals, for the lure of silver, and the lust for gold was as real for them, as it is today. Gold came from Nubia, silver from Sumer, lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, and translucent carnelian from the Indus

Valley, as early as 2500 BC. The Chinese were making tools out of the beautiful jade, and ivory and bones, but most of their tools and weapons were bronze, made from copper and tin. They obtained the tin from the near south. These South Eastern Asians, known in older history books as "*Hither Asians"*, in turn, were sending tin to Sumer, so the Sumerians, with their copper, could make bronze. The peoples of Asia Minor used silver as a common unit of exchange, and so it became currency for traded goods. **The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company** bought Joseph from his brothers for twenty pieces of silver, and those brothers twenty years later, took silver to buy corn in Egypt. It is easy then to see how the long trade routes worked in Abram's time, and how God used them to further His purpose.

The Chinese, being the end of the trade routes, and bound on their eastern border by the Yellow Sea, tried to limit their trading with the outside peoples, although they liked the gold and silver, and needed tin to make bronze. We know that their writing developed in a different way than the Middle East writing did, and so they were not influenced by the Sumerian or the Egyptian scrips. They reinforced the idea that they were a realm surrounded by unenlightened barbarians, and chose to think that they were an intellectual island of order, structure, and constancy, and that attitude pervaded their arts, politics and religion for millenniums. The Chinese had set up kingdoms by 1700 BC, and with this order they tried to stem the flow of those who stole their crops and herds. By the third century BC they had built a great wall, and tried to keep everybody out. This helped to educate their people that they were indeed the centre of the world, but that did not stop the smuggling of the tiny eggs of the silk moth inside a bamboo cane stem, to the Mediterranean countries, and by then China's silk secret was out, and they lost the monopoly on the silk trade. As everyone knows, silkworms consume an enormous amount of mulberry leaves, in their thirty six day career, and a mulberry tree is always an asset for those who keep silkworms. (Any school children, who watch the wondrous production of silk in their classroom, do well if they grow a mulberry tree in the playground).

Tiny mulberry saplings, as well then, would be necessary on that illicit journey so long ago. The roads were dangerous, and the troublesome wayfarers and robbers made trading not an easy profession, so it really would be a good spy story to follow that secret journey of those little white grubs in their cocoons, in those late BC years. Now that they could manufacture silk, it must have been then, that the Arab carpet makers realised that silk oriental like carpets would indeed add allure to their already flourishing carpet trade.

CHAPTER 5

JOSEPH - A COAT AND SOME DREAMS

"***Israel … made him a coat of many colours", Genesis 37:3.***

FOCUS:

Now we have set the stage for the great trek into Egypt, and so the story proceeds with horrifying detail. It is a story of a beautiful coat and heavenly dreams, and it ends in jealousy, and a pit of death, ***Genesis 37:3-11***.

1. JOSEPH' BEAUTIFUL COAT OF MANY COLOURS

Jacob gave this loved Joseph a beautiful coat.

Some suggest

1. That it was his mother's special coat, a treasure kept by Jacob. It may have been her wedding garment, as it had been Leah's, and a gift from Laban, (see *2 Samuel 13:18*, about a virginal daughter's gown).

Other suggestions are -

2. That it was made of different coloured skins, a multi skin coat, for they had wonderfully different skinned animals from Haran, or

3. that it was made of dyed pieces of material and all woven together, a very expensive Midianite fashion, a specially purchased coat, from traders along the route when they came across each other, (Joseph will get to know those traders well, but they won't see him wearing the coat), or

4. that it was a long pointy sleeved garment, two of which were in each Bedouin compound, one for the chief, and one for his appointed heir, or

5. That the coat was the priestly garment, and used in the family's priestly functions. Now that Reuben and the older sons had disgraced themselves from that office, Jacob was happy to give it to his favoured son. The garment would have been a "*passed down in the family*" coat.

Consider:

We remember the "*goodly raiment*" that Rebekah brought from her tent to disguise Jacob as Esau.

* Was it now made to fit Joseph?

* Where had that "*goodly raiment*" been kept?

* Was it indeed the priestly garment, now causing trouble in this family as well, like it had in Isaac's family?

It was a "*long robe with sleeves*", *RSV.*

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Whatever it was, it was more than a garment for a favoured child, and its significance was not lost on his brothers. It represented the firstborn and heir, as you could safely say all these suggested garments could indicate.

Again whatever type of garment it was, the precious wedding garment, or a valuable garment of some sort, more so than the other brothers could possess, or a priestly garment, it would be an anathema to his brothers. If it was not skins, it may have been skilfully embroidered in metal thread, purple and white, olive green and rose colour, black with emblems of stars, doves, trees, beasts all lustrous against the bluish misty background colour. It would be wrist and ankle length with sleeves and would have been kept, preserved in the coffer in Jacob's tent. The Hebrew word "*passeem*", indicates the length, according to a contemporary *Old Testament* commentator, *H. C. Leupold*. In the storage trunk with it would have been other precious possessions, like bolts of silk and the precious toldoths, the Mizpah agreement, legal transactions of land acquisition, and other family historical details. There were still possibly the records of the stories of Noah and Shem handed down from Abraham, unless they were they still with Isaac. (Shem had died within Isaac's lifetime, and the two might have known one another). Other less precious possessions would have been in another trunk, woollen things, mantles, covers, skirts, head cloths, smocks, leather skinned aprons, cloths and caps. A work

garment had no sleeves and was short; this gift garment then was unsuitable to work in. The coat must have said to his brothers, "*you don't have to work like your brothers*".

If it was his mother's garment, perhaps Jacob gave it to Joseph, when he beheld him looking so much like his mother, as he had first seen her at the well in Haran. It is interesting to speculate about the coat. It has caused many to speculate, and sing about it over the years.

Only Benjamin alone, a one year old, and still under the constant attending of women, would like to be with this older brother of his. He had yet to have the melancholy realisation that he was responsible for his mother's death. This fact, unbeknown to him, and certainly not a blameworthy situation, would nevertheless place him second in his father's affection and attention, and maybe a cause for antipathy. Perhaps he was never blamed, or taunted for his mother's death, though the cruelty in this family often did manifest itself.

2. JOSEPH'S HEAVENLY DREAMS

We are brought to the phenomena of dreams again. God used the medium of dreams to instruct Abimelech, Jacob and Laban. Now here are some dreams where God does not speak, but He is tacitly accepted to be the author, though not by Joseph's brothers. Joseph's dream experiences both in his own dreams, and those that he interprets, come in pairs.

Joseph's dreaming, a symptom of his lonely life, was to do with things agricultural, and things heavenly, terrestrial and celestial. Perhaps he readily dreamed on many occasions as an attempt to remedy his isolation within the family, but of course, as in many sibling rivalries, this attempt turned out badly for him. He had later to do with another two dreams, - in Egypt, of the butler, and of the baker, and another two, later, - Pharaoh's two dreams. He was by then known as the dream interpreter.

Joseph's dreams were of:

***1*. Sheaves bowing down, everyone bowing down to Joseph's sheaf.**

So Joseph knew about wheat growing, the family was obviously not entirely nomadic, but grew crops, agricultural as well as pastoral pursuits.

***2*. Sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to Joseph**

This would be confusing, to those who knew about celestial worship.

Consider:

* Sheaves - what does this mean?

* Are sheaves related to something about food?

* Is an "*up*" standing sheaf suggestive of an offered up sacrifice**?**

* Or is it indicative of stored "*up*" wheat?

* Or is "*up*" and "*down*" to do with status?

* Are the heavenly bodies something to do with Abraham's multiplying, God promised seed?

* There are ranking orders in this dream of heavenly bodies, does that mean that even the important patriarchs (sun and moon), and their children, (the stars), will bow down, to another of the children?

* Are we entitled to thrust this dream prophecy down through the centuries to another child of Israel, who is a Saviour?

Joseph had witnessed the whole episode of the Jacob Esau meeting, when Jacob did much bowing down, so it was in his experience. Perhaps he thought, (and God used the thought), "*One day they will do that to me, I will, after all, be important to them, then*".

* Or did God put the thoughts, (dreams), into his mind in the first place, without any outside stimulation?

* Did he really think of himself as an outcast one?

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Since Jacob knew that a significant dream was regarded as coming from outside the dreamer, it would have been unfair to rebuke him for the dream itself. So Jacob questioned Joseph, rebuking him for the parental disrespect that the dream expressed, though observing the telling of the heavenly dream "*Will I, and your mother, bow down to you?*"

The "*mother*" term that Jacob used must have meant Leah, as Rachel had died, or Bilhah. Then, Leah and/or Bilhah must have been part of the bowing down family that went down into Egypt. Leah was buried at Machpelah, so her bones would have had to have been brought back for burial at some stage, like Jacob's bones, like Joseph's bones, like the brothers' bones were. If we are not meant to take this too literally, *Genesis 49:31* may mean that Leah died before they went down into Egypt, at Hebron. This confusing detail need not mean that the dream is a nonsense.

Jacob has not thought of Joseph's dream as a recollection of the traumatic incident between himself and Esau. He thinks of it as a prophecy. The rabbis, in the *Babylonian Talmud*, point out the absurdity in the story, because Rachel is already dead, and describe it as dream nonsense. Not so, as things turned out. It was not nonsense. It depends how literally we interpret it.

Another point of view is that the stories are out of sequence in the *Genesis* record, (as we have seen earlier about the death of Abraham, *Genesis 25:11*), that is, that Rachel died after this dream incident, but the incident is placed here because of the long narrative, that is better not interrupted with her death. Whatever stance we take, it is only a minor difficulty, and not faith shattering.

Joseph's dream may have meant to him, not that the family would be in subjugation to him, like they were to Laban, or may have been to Esau at the meeting, but that he would unite them in a benign manner - as indeed he finally did. He may have yearned to heal the pain that had been gnawing at his family for so long. That moon "*mother*", his own mother, waned in reality with her death, but she might have waxed strong in his imagination.

Consider:

* So, did the moon, to Joseph, mean his own mother?

* Was it only a rewriting of history where he yearned for his mother to be revered?

* Or, did it mean the other wife of Jacob, the present moon "*mother*"?

If it meant Leah, then her own ten sons from Jacob appeared not in the running to fulfil the family destiny, that Jacob knew lay ahead for one of his sons. Perhaps she understood that now.

* Did Jacob know now, that this destiny was Joseph's?

* Or did Jacob think that Joseph was far too fanciful for his own good?

* What did Leah think, remembering the celestial worship in Haran?

****

Only in his dreams could Rachel be exalted, for she was beyond his help in death. The family had passed on from the Rachel influence, and Leah was now the head wife and mother. However, we would not know the longing, the dreaming and the anguish of Joseph over the years of his childhood and teens, for his real mother, only that we know of other children's turmoil when they are left motherless. Benjamin was motherless as well, and missed the first three essential bonding years with his own mother, but Joseph was made motherless at the very impressionable teenage years.

The older brothers called him the "*dream expert*". "*Will you rule over us?*" "*Will we indeed bow down to you to the earth?*" they sarcastically queried him, hating him more.

Jacob's favouritism, Joseph's seeming arrogance, or self satisfaction, and his brothers' envy, then, is all contributing factors to the events that follow.

This mocking has overtones, obvious to us all, of the life of Jesus, when people mocked his message from God. *H. A. Whittaker* likens Joseph to Jesus, and lists similarities at the end of every chapter in his "*Joseph, the Saviour*", so that will not be dealt with here in any of these texts.

The Baal worshipping people round about Jacob and his dwelling were comfortable with the cult of epileptic prophesying, round singing, intemperate feasting, naked dancing, official unchastity with temple women. So Joseph's tendency to see things in the stars may have worried Jacob. However this honourable message from God was not impure - Jacob himself had dreamed a dream (of a ladder to the heavens), and knew that it was a message from God. However this is the first recorded dream sequence in *Scripture,* that does not convey a message from God, or where God does not speak. So Jacob might have been understandably worried about Joseph's dream, but he probably just kept the matter in mind, like we all do when we have a little niggling doubt about our children. Like Mary (about Jesus) kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Still Jacob's wildest dream had been modest, he probably felt, and justified his own dreams, while Joseph's seemed far fetched.

God told Jacob that He would bless him and his family; He would enrich his family and bring him back from Haran in peace. Joseph's dream interpretation meant that all the family would make supplication to him, *Philippians 2:10*, "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow*" is an echo of this. In *Genesis 27:29* Isaac's blessing of his son Jacob, (whom he thought was Esau) is a foretaste of this - a blessing to come, not to the son, but to the grandson.

"*Many nations will serve you and peoples will bow down to you. You will be lord over your brothers, and the sons of your mother will bow down to you.*"

Instability was no qualification for the Godly charge of the preparation of Israel for the conquest of Canaan, and in the end there was only one brother that God looked on, and the instability that reigned in the lives of the other brothers, was their ruination, and disqualifying factor. It was the Irish poet, *W. B. Yeats*, who said, "*I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly*

because you tread on my dreams". Joseph did spread his dreams, and those dreams were soon trampled on by his brothers.

However**, Joseph's dependence on God, ensured his prosperity, *"a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper", Psalm 1.*** Joseph must have delighted in the law of the Lord, and in that law meditated night and day, and that brought out the worst in his brothers and they became the ungodly, at least for a time, of this *Psalm*, and "*the chaff that the wind driveth away*", for "*the way of the ungodly shall perish*".

CONCLUSION:

This fruitful bough,

Flourishing on the tree,

Planted by the river,

And brought forth fruit.

His leaves did not wither,

And he prospered about Jacob's tents,

And became a favoured son,

And God's blessed servant.

CHAPTER 6

JOSEPH'S PIT OF DEATH - OR LIFE

"***Jacob said, 'Joseph is indeed rent in pieces'", Genesis 37:33.***

FOCUS:

In ***Genesis 37:12-33,*** Jacob lives through the horror that parents feel over a lost child. It is a terrible incident in this family saga. Oh, the pain of it.

1. WHAT JACOB'S COMPOUND LOOKED LIKE

Thomas Mann, in "*Joseph and His Brothers - Young Joseph*", *page 86,* gives us a wonderful description of what Jacob's dwellings would look like. He suggests that Jacob's tent would be one of many in the compound (for the three women would each have their own).

Comment:

It would be made of black goat's hair stretched over nine stout poles and fastened by strong ropes and pegs driven into the ground. These types of tents can be seen in Israel today in the arid valleys where the Bedouins live. The tent would be divided into two rooms by a curtain attached to the middle pole. There would be a private storeroom or supply chamber filled with camel saddles and pockets, unused carpets, rolled and folded, separate trunks for clothing and materials, and other trunks for toldoths and family historical documents, precious and ordinary, yet again, other trunks for hand mills and other small domestic gear. There would be skins hung up full of grain, butter, drinking water and palm wine made of soaked dates. Jacob's own

chamber would be carpeted with felt, over which lay beautiful, coloured rugs with some hung on the walls. A cedar wood bedstead with bronze feet would stand in the background covered with cushions and covers. Earthen lamps, with ornamental bases and shallow bowls with short snouts for the wick, were always burning here. The poverty stricken may sleep without a light, but it was unfit for such a person as Jacob, to sleep in the dark. They were lighted in the daytime as well. There were coffers, carved and legged, stools, a brazier for warmth, a small incense burner for cinnamon, styrax and galbanum which produced a perfumed cloud. A false gold basin, on a dainty stand for ablutions, completes the picture.

It does help us if we understand how Jacob and his family lived.

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2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

Joseph had Rachel's power over Jacob, - Joseph did not steal it, and neither did he earn it. It was upon him, for he was her first child. Jacob looked into his face, and saw Rachel, Rachel's eyes and her smile. It made him impotent with the grief that seemed never ending.

The bitterness and strife among the siblings should have warned Jacob of danger but he was unresponsive and seemed helpless about the situation. The shamelessness of Canaan in the Baal worship around the family would be enough worry.

Reuben had shamed him, (over Bilhah), Simeon and Levi had shamed him (at Shechem), so sibling jealousy seemed insignificant enough. Now he began to think of Judah, his fourth son, as the leader. If only he could be sure of Judah.

The large number of sheep could not be contained near Jacob's tents, outside the city walls, and Jacob did not want the family firm to be in disrepute. They were probably causing too much obstruction to the city's life, and so Jacob sent them to the plot at Shechem with his ten older sons. None of them were Rachel's sons, and as Reuben had just forfeited his right to be the firstborn, they knew that they did not have that right any more within their family structures. The inheritance would be divided thirteen ways, but that double portion, obviously, in their mind, now going to Joseph, was not a huge inheritance, so perhaps they were not greatly troubled about that. They did not yet know of the double portion of land for the Joseph tribe later, after they left Egypt. But they hated the favouritism, so when Jacob asked them to mind the sheep so far away, they were happy to go away from his influence. Perhaps Jacob **sent** them rather than asked them to go.

Perhaps **they** decided themselves that it would be advantageous to go north. Maybe they had seen enough of Joseph and Benjamin, and saw a way of leaving home. They could have even demanded this solution. As usual, in families, the older boys would question why Joseph did not help with the sheep, yet they disliked him so, they were vexed with his presence, and would be glad he was not near them. They would question sarcastically whether he (as his father's favourite) was "*an overseer, or are you an assistant?*"

Maybe they questioned his loyalty to them, as well, for perhaps it was Joseph, who told Jacob of Reuben's sin of lying with his father's concubine, Bilhah.

3. THE ARGUMENTS OF THE PASTORALISTS

If they had put the argument for Shechem to Jacob these sons would say, ***"They are a new people there now, because we took all the other Shechem dwellers away",*** we can hear these sons, persuading Jacob.

"***It will show the new Shechem dwellers that our strength has not diminished, in fact, it has increased. We will show them a display of force",*** they would argue.

"***We don't have to live there, but we could run our cattle there. After all we own that land",*** they would state.

Of Jacob's fear of the past terrible incident, they would say, ***"The memories don't hold any fear for us, we had the upper hand".***

We all know the force of argument that young people use to persuade adults. These were young adults, and it was ten against one. They did need the pasture, and they did own the land, for Jacob previously bought it "*to spread his tent*", when he first arrived at Shechem. However there were some legitimate arguments against going so far from home. The family firm would be split and the field workers far from home, and in the place where the firm's name stank. Still the pasture there **was** good.

Perhaps the boys thought of it as a good opportunity to retrieve the family treasures (gods) from under the oak tree. How different the two family groups were. The word "*profane"* may be a description that could be used of them also, like Esau.

The first born, Reuben, had committed a great folly, lying with his father's concubine, Bilhah, which had cost him his favoured position, and the near youngest now has that position. Esau and Jacob role reversals repeated, again badly managed and causing dysfunction.

3. THE BROTHERS ARE FEEDING THE FLOCKS AT SHECHEM

So the sons of Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah were happy enough and minding sheep back on the old Shechem patch about one hundred kilometres away. It was necessary to travel several days journey to get there. So the family, at this time, is physically divided from itself. For some reason, Jacob became concerned about his sons and their flocks at Shechem, consequently he asked Joseph to journey there, to see if all was well. So Joseph dutifully set out.

4. WHY SEND THE LOVED JOSEPH TO THE UNLOVING BROTHERS?

Along the way were locations Joseph knew well, Rachel's, his mother's grave stone, then another stone on which his father lay that night, in Bethel, so long ago, when God spoke to him, and the altar there. And in Shechem he would be in quite familiar territory.

Consider:

* But why did Jacob send this loved child, Joseph, on a five day journey to his brothers in Shechem to ascertain their welfare?

* What thoughts would he have as he travelled to Shechem?

* Why did **he** need to go rather than a servant?

* Was Jacob trying to bind up the failing sibling relationships?

* Jacob ran away from Esau. Did he want Joseph and his sons to tackle fraternal discord in a better fashion?

* Why did not Jacob practice anticipation, with his children?

* Why is passivity so damaging in a family?

****

It was a badly judged decision, and Jacob never saw this child again. The passivity that was his enemy, and flamed the fuse, meant that a fire was about to reach the powder keg, and Jacob never anticipated it. He must have seen the wind, and he took no preventative action. So he reaped the whirlwind.

Comment:

Jealousy must be corrected. It must be countered with goodness, building up and praising positive attitudes. It is such a damaging passion, it is "*as cruel as the grave*", *Song of Solomon 8:6,* and the coals of that fire, have a "*most vehement flame*".

It was a wise and wonderful Egyptian ruler that this child became. He warmly welcomed his ageing father and cared for him in a land, far from this Hebron, twenty one years later. But the angst until then, was almost overpowering to both father and son. It was only God who saved them, and nurtured them and worked out His purpose for the nation of Israel, which they were to become.

****

In Shechem, Joseph had to ask help to find his brothers. A remarkable guide found Joseph wandering in a field and set him on the right road. That messenger is someone to consider.

Joseph would be under God's care, and so perhaps He sent His angel to guide Joseph's steps. Joseph would be unaware of the clues that would have been around, for a pastoral man to find the family outpost that he was looking for. This stranger told Joseph that he had heard the brothers say they would go to Dothan. It was, even at that time, an ancient city. The people there were good for trade and would buy sinews, milk and wool from the shepherds. There was sweet pasture in the valley. It was 21 kilometres north of Shechem and entailed another day's journey. Perhaps animosity, or lack of water, made them move to Dothan, which was a place of two wells.

They watched the dream expert approach and plotted to extinguish this thorn in the family. The fact that they hated him made them murderers, before they had the thought of murdering him, *1 John 3:15*, until now.

Cruelty is everywhere, and we are all injured souls by it, some more than others. Some hearts are well stocked with wickedness. Sometimes this hostile environment produces feral children, untamed, and despised by all. Not Joseph though. Joseph was unwanted as a child by his brothers, and so they stocked up on hatred, and wickedness. They plotted a treachery that is second only to **one** other. Some were more guilty than others. Reuben the oldest, but now without authority, meant to save him some way, and at least prevailed upon the others to put him in a pit alive, rather than murder him outright first. It is thought by some, that Reuben thought he could ingratiate himself again with Jacob, if he delivered Joseph safely home to his father. To be generous though, we would need to consider it a genuine compassion, learned from his new humbling circumstances.

Joseph was wearing his precious coat, on his travels, (unless he carried it in his duffle bag), and when they saw him, they felt inflamed against him. Once they decided, it was easy to get rid of him. Of course, they saved the coat Joseph had been wearing.

"*There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil*", *Proverbs 12*, and deceivers they were, as they imitate the deceit of their father, and their grandmother - they could hardly be ignorant of the story. They grabbed Joseph and lowered him, not too gently, into a nearby pit.

5. JOSEPH IS IN THE PIT

It is quite possible that there was a terrible fight, with the brothers venting their anger on Joseph, before they put him in the pit. The picture of Joseph may be that he was battered and broken in the pit. However, if he didn't look so good they wouldn't have made as much money on the sale of this now slave. Slaves are always body scrutinised for quality. If they did beat him they may have been sorry to spoil the quality. "*Lay no hands upon him*" may have meant "*don't murder him*" as they had first decided.

It was Reuben who tried to divert the murder plot, and used these words. He reminds them of that fact, when they stand anxious in Egypt, before Pharaoh's great servant, *Genesis 42:22,* "*Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.*" (Interesting that they thought of Joseph, when they were in trouble in Egypt, unknowing they were in his presence.)

But it was Judah who said "*There's no money in murder*". It may have been a callous remark, or he may have seen Reuben's plan as a better idea and begun to feel compassionate, wondering what was best to do now. It could be something like - **his father's lamb was Joseph, and now, after all the recent events, his father regarded him, Judah, as the leader, and shepherd** - which might have been his motivation.

They would remember the anger and anguish of their father over the Shechem incident. Their name would doubly stink more among the inhabitants of this land if they murdered, or otherwise disposed of, their own brother. They didn't think of God's charge to take His name to all the peoples of the world, they only thought of their own selfish desires. Glad they'd be that Jacob was far away. Although Jacob would doubt Reuben's ability to accomplish anything honourable after the concubine incident, it does seem that he is the more honourable of the ten here. Joseph pleads, with an anguished soul, for his life, (explained later in *Genesis 42:21),* but they do not listen, and so they sit down to eat a meal, while Joseph lay in the pit.

It was a pit to catch water in winter - it was dry now in summer. It was impossible to escape from them for they were narrower at the top than the base. A lid fitted the top and so they could easily become a prison. "*The pit was empty, there was no water in it*" - is a Hebraism, a repeating of the obvious, for emphasis, a poetical structure common in Hebrew.

Joseph could only look up, for there was nothing else to see in the darkness of the pit, he looked up, past the jealousy and the malice and cruelty of his brothers, past these dark and mysterious events, to his Heavenly Father, his only comfort. His father had done the same in the Zor of the Jabbok. But this was a practice for Joseph's approaching pit time in Egypt, "*Look up, Joseph look up*", for there was nowhere else to look.

We need to remember to look up when things get hard.

He was not aware of any stirrings of compassion in any of his brothers. Because Simeon was cast into prison in Egypt (by Joseph) later in this story we might assume that he then may have been the prime mover.

The very clumsiness of the narrative, with so many questions left unanswered, leads us to assume the inspiration of the recorder, Moses, for a forger would have put in all the details. Reuben was absent at this time.

6. THE BROTHERS ARE DECEITFUL - AGAIN

Joseph in the pit, suffered humiliation, and awaited their decision. Some scholars care to say that he was in the pit three days, an inference taken from the three days these brothers were put in Joseph's "*pit*" in Egypt, *Genesis 42:17*. We have to consider whether Joseph was in pay back mode in Egypt. However, noble minds care little for personal suffering, pain or humiliation, and leave revenge in God's hands. Joseph by then had matured to the degree that he would not consider pay back. On Joseph depended the safety of Israel and its development, and he had been nurtured, and educated, and then sold, all for that purpose.

Only in Egypt, at this time, was the development of Israel possible. Egyptians never took part in the carrying trade, or in the navigation of the Red Sea. They had no maritime pursuits, yet they had great wealth and had accumulated great stores of corn and carpets, etc. The Arabs were the great trekkers up and down this land and many of them originated from within the forefathers of this family. Esau had married one of Ishmael's daughters and so these relatives of Joseph were plying the trade routes in the land.

The brothers, except Reuben, who had moved off at this time, eating their meal and contemplating what to do with their imprisoned brother, Joseph, in the pit, looked, and there coming from Gilead, across the Jordan and going south to Egypt, were some Ishmaelites, a generic term for all the desert people, but they were specifically Midianites or Medanites - all interrelated, and all sons of Abraham by Hagar and Keturah, (Ishmael, and Medan and Midian, *Genesis 25:2*). They are differently named by the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the Syriac and the Massoretic texts. So it could be safely said, that they were **Ishmaelites by descent, Midianites by country,** and **Merchants by profession.**

The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company they were called. And this company met the field representatives of **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products.**

There were probably five or six camels in this caravan with a few pack animals. There would be an old man on the leading bell camel which would be led by a camel boy. His sons, sons in law, and nephews would all be part of this family business. It was no ostentatious multi camel caravan. The caravan was probably going to a fair at Dothan, or to do certain business there. The road through Dothan, that came from Babylon and went to Memphis, was the oldest road in the world, but of course, it extended much further than that, at this time - from China and Russia through to Nubia and beyond, in bits and pieces, some hard, some soft, some defined roads, some tracks, some desert, some lush and mountainous, some over ridges and some along the plains, - the telegraph lines of the world, or how the news travelled. They had taken linen, fine and coarse and glass trifles from Egypt, and had exchanged those for spices, balm and myrrh, sweet smelling, healing and beauty aids in Gilead. The frankincense would have been obtained from an Arab trader from the deep southern route, which came perilously from that spindly desert Arabian tree, since it only grew in the misty valley there. This honourable trading company might have been carrying some more of those bolts of silk, that had come down to

them, from far away China, or India. Still nobody wanted **to buy** silk right now, they wanted **to sell** a body, a slave.

The traders may have bought honey, mustard, pistachios and almonds from this side of Jordan. An extra hand would help with these recently acquired goods, which they now added to everything else they carried. Buying and selling a man, was not unknown to them, sons and daughters often were, and it was the custom, so slaves they were. We need to remember that Laban sold two daughters for Jacob's labour.

"*Yes, we'll sell Joseph and be rid of him*", they thought. The caravan leader looked in the pit. Joseph could have been dead in the pit, as they had first decided, but Joseph was alive in the pit, and for sale.

Joseph would travel with the spices, south past Shechem, Bethel and Hebron (yes, Hebron where his father was), to Egypt. He could have sent a message to his father, but he did not. Well, the brothers thought that he would send a message to Jacob, as well, as we shall see.

7. THE BROTHERS HAUL JOSEPH OUT OF THE PIT

The old man asked to examine the goods, and Joseph was hauled out of the pit. The shepherds were travellers too, for they wandered seeking pastures and wells. They were not like the settled sons of Baal in the cities, and the peasants that worked for them. These shepherds knew the art of bargaining.

Consider:

* What did they tell the Ishmaelites/Midianites about the boy?

* How was he their property to sell?

* Was he nobody's son, was he a villain?

* Did he thieve, lie, and blaspheme?

* Did he heap up sin and have no virtue so that he was worthless to them?

* Was he a useless worker, a lay about?

****

They had to have reasons to sell. "*This man is disobedient*", or "*he costs too much to keep*", or "*he is not suitable for the type of work we do*". "*Surplus slave stock really*". It is hard to think of what reasons they would give for the necessary sale. Joseph would not have said a word in his defence, "*a lamb that before his shearers is dumb*", for the traders would have been too afraid to take him, if Joseph had told them who he was, especially as they had to pass Jacob country. The brothers would have hissed, "*Don't say a word*",

Shame on the sons of Jacob for they were "*crying down*" the merchandise, as they protested that "*this man deserves to be taken down into Egypt*".

Jacob was a better businessman than that. Well then, they would then have to build up the worth of their merchandise.

Joseph's skills and understanding would make him valuable. "*He can keep property lists*". "*He understands mathematics and astronomy*". "*He can read and write*".

Eliezer had taught Joseph so much. From being near worthless, Joseph's value goes up. With the haggling, bartering, boasting, lying, patronising, bowing, praising and great false manners, that is all part of the Eastern tradition. Joseph listens to his fate being decided between his brothers and his far off cousins. They ask his name. "*Oh no, he has no name!*"

What name indeed.

The price is decided - 20 shekels of silver. Two pieces each. This is price of a male of Joseph's age who had been dedicated to the Lord, *Leviticus 27:5* in Israel's later history.

The Code of Hammurabi, of a *king of Babylon 1792-1750 BC*, states the price of a slave to be 20 pieces of silver. It was no accident that the agreed price, for this strong young man, Joseph, was 20 shekels, and because the code was well established at the time, it gives a basic historical reliability to the *Biblical* narrative of this story. The price rose to 30 pieces of silver in *New Testament* times.

Silver would be a load for the Midianites/Ishmaelites to carry so they would not have too much of it on their persons. They might give some to the brothers, and some knives, and some scented gums, and lamps perhaps.

At least whatever the brothers took for the sale, in whatever proportion, goods and/or silver it would have to be hidden from Jacob - so nothing big in size. Joseph was bundled up on a camel, "*Above all*", the brothers said to the leader, "*avoid going along the watershed, the roads have become rough, there are vagabonds there, go straight down to the sea and follow the coast. And most important don't sell him until you get to Egypt*". "*Rely on us for we know best*", and so they did - for that's what God wanted for Joseph. "*Good riddance*", they would hiss again in their teeth.

Reuben, meantime, had gone off with a plan to save Joseph out of the pit. He probably had a shopping list. He'd need a ladder, some rope, some food and some clothes for Joseph. He'd need transport to take himself and Joseph, quickly, back to Jacob. He would hope, not only for his own pardon, but a mutual pardon for everyone. He would hope that his action would soften the blow, of losing the sale, for his brothers, and they would eventually see his wisdom and be grateful. He could also ingratiate himself again with Jacob.

8. A TERRIBLE SECRET FOR TEN BROTHERS

Reuben finding the pit empty rent his clothes. It is so disappointing for him, after his preparations for Joseph's deliverance, and now he is regarded by his brothers with great suspicion. Jacob would now get ten sons back in place of one. "*He will be able to love us all once more. Don't spoil that*", they would say. Because of the suspicion, because there were ten in on a terrible secret, the ten had to have some insurance that no one would tell anyone about this ghastly deed. The only insurance available was an oath.

So, they would swear a terrible oath of secrecy. With much hand piling on the earth, using the many names of God, and gods they knew. They would swear that none present would ever, ever, ever tell. How envious they would be of their other brother Benjamin, innocent, unknowing, beginning his life with their father Jacob - motherless maybe, but at least at the beginning of life, a two year old. Deceit may never be woven into the web of the life that he had just begun to spin for himself.

Reuben had limited knowledge and experience of the transaction so his blame was less than the other nine. He probably had planned to take Joseph when his brothers were engaged with their meal. Now he would have demanded and got the true explanation of events from his brothers. However he, with them, carried the coat home and allowed Jacob to think a wild animal had destroyed his young son. He kept the secret, as he swore he would. He was more afraid of his brothers about the sale, than he revered his father.

They slaughtered a kid (like Rebekah and Jacob did, to deceive Isaac so many years ago) and dipped the coat in its blood.

So Jacob was **deceived** by the **blood of a kid**, as he had **deceived** his father with the **skin of a goat**.

Consider:

* What happened to the herd as they packed up and went home?

* Did some brothers go on ahead, and some bring the sheep?

* Did they each tell a piece to try to dissipate Jacob's anger and sorrow?

The Hebrew implies that they sent a messenger with the coat. That would certainly ensure that they avoided the first burst of anger and sorrow.

****

CONCLUSION:

The deal is done,

The blood is on the coat,

The coat is carried home,

The lies are in their mouths,

And deceit has once more

Worked dysfunction

In this Jacob family.

CHAPTER 7

A TERRIBLE SECRET AND GRIEF FOR MORE LOVE LOST

"***And they brought it to their father; and said, 'his have we found: know now whether it be thy son's, coat or no'", Genesis 37:32.***

FOCUS:

The deception conversation, with Jacob, is ugly and dangerous. They lied in order to have refuge from their father's anger over the treatment of his son. They pretended not to know with certainty, what they very well knew, ***Genesis 37:34-36***.

1. JACOB'S TERRIBLE LOSS OF HIS FAVOURITE SON

Jacob tore his clothes when he saw the blood stained ornamental loved robe, guessing as he was meant to. He put on sackcloth and ashes and mourned for Joseph. He refused to be comforted by his sons and daughters (in law). It was hypocritical of these men to try to comfort their father.

Jacob was naked except for his tough loincloth. His grief, like Job's, was very great. Eliezer and Isaac were also grieving, but not like Jacob. Eliezer would leave Jacob to that grief, but would sit with him through the days and nights, until he learned to cope with it. The Eastern mourning customs were, and are, excellent coping mechanisms. Eliezer would wipe Jacob's brow as the ash and the tears mingled on his head. Jacob was 109 years old. He was 77 when he deceived his father. Reuben is 24 years, and has the stirrings of conscience. But this deceit is superb in its irony on Jacob for it is 21 years before the deceit is uncovered - 21 lost years.

No one told, for they had sworn an oath, and Joseph was not there to tell.

Jacob hints at unspoken suspicion in *Genesis 42:36, 38*. So it must have simmered in his mind from this moment. The horror of the blood on the coat, and the evidence of the tearing, seems real enough, and in his deep depression, Jacob is almost overcome with misery.

Consider:

* How much did Dinah and the wives of these men know of the deed?

They all knew of the depth of Jacob's love and his grief. Isaac was still alive but for many reasons not equal to the task of comforter.

* How many fathers wept for sons, Jacob for Joseph, *Genesis 37:34,* and Isaac for Jacob?

* Was it then Eliezer who sat with Jacob on the ash heap for seven days and seven nights, like Job, when no one spoke?

The horror of the episode was a secret, so the business was not affected in any way, just a great sadness, and sympathy proffered over the accidental loss of a son, to the business man, Jacob.

* If the business community had known that the **Sons** had sold one **Son**, what would they have thought of this firm now?

* Jacob has faced trials, and judgments, and grief, and disappointments before, but this cruel fate he can hardly believe, for now, how will those blessings continue in God's purpose?

He does not think, like ever faithful Abraham, that his son could be restored to him, from his "*death*". And yet Joseph was indeed restored to him.

* Does God hold Jacob in account for this lack of faith that his son would be restored?

* Why doesn't Jacob link himself with Abraham, in the matter of lost sons?

* Has God asked too much of him, expecting him to keep looking forward, in the face of the death of his loved wife, and now his loved son?

* How much did he treasure Joseph, as a consolation for the death of Rachel?

* Can he now see any consolation in any thing, or any one else?

The wild beast theory could easily have been so, except there was a motive for murder, and Jacob knew that now.

* Where was the rest of Joseph's gear, why didn't they follow the beast to the den or lair, or otherwise try to find the boy, or his body?

****

Had Jacob clung tenaciously, in faith, to God, for strength, he might have saved himself, not from grief, but from inflamed and painful angst.

We are asked to have "*faith in faith*",

- The ultimate in faith, that is,

- The faith that you have before God seemingly answers your request, recognising that He has already answered it. It is not "*faith by sight*"

- But "*faith by faith*".

We are reminded of Joshua's message from God, as he sets out to take the land, in *Joshua 1:3*, "… I *have given you*" long before He had given it to them, and so it continues through the chapters. This is *v*ictory before the battle really, even before the instructions for the battle.

Comment:

Our faith is often endangered, because we don't have faith in our faith. A man fell over a cliff, but managed to catch a tree and so saved his fall to the rocks below. He called out, "*Is anyone there?*" A voice came from the heavens, "*Let go, there is a rock ledge just below your feet, and you can drop there safely*". But the man, in his faithlessness, called out, "*Is anyone* ***else*** *there?*"

****

When Joseph is restored to him, Jacob will remember this time of inward looking grief, and as well, there may still be antipathy for Benjamin because of his birth circumstance. **Jacob is depressed**, and could easily hold, or manufacture resentment, and, as well, there is his suspicion of his sons, but he doesn't know. The deceiver is now deceived by his sons. ***"The Great Deceit",*** it is called.

Jacob argued with himself, with God, expostulated, and eventually adapted to his lifestyle, without Joseph. God had not crushed him, but he felt crushed. He resigned himself to this new circumstance. He had to, for he could not change it. But he did not consider that God would work it all out, even better than before. Jacob still had a way to go in the matter of faith, and in the matter of the consolations of God, His favour and His blessings. Jacob considered them insufficient for his needs.

Jacob's sons had an enormous way to go in the matter of their faith and relationship to God. They were now ten "*Cain heads*" like their forefather Cain who murdered his brother. These Cain heads, in their intention, were murderers of their brother. It was later the nation that came from these brothers, who murdered their brother on the cross, so they continued in the wickedness that had been their choice from the time of the child of Adam and Eve. There are three murder my brother episodes of note, within the history of these people, one at the beginning, one at the final renewing of the covenant under the patriarchs and one at the end of their moral history. They may have destroyed God's will, but because of His intervention, the course of history was changed.

- In the case of Cain, another son was born or "raised up",

- In the case of the ten Cain heads, Joseph was “resurrected” in Egypt, and

- In the case of the crucifixion our Lord, by the Jewish Cain heads, he was raised again to be the Saviour of the world. The mission to the gentiles then began in earnest, and **they** were gathered in to be His loved people.

2. AND SO JOSEPH TRAVELS TO EGYPT

Meanwhile Joseph travelled onto Egypt, confined as a slave, and perhaps was sold to Potiphar for **30 pieces of silver.** After all, the Ishmaelites had kept him, though he did work for his keep, but they had to make a profit from the 20 pieces they gave to the sons of Jacob.

Those brothers of Joseph thought that they had now confounded the dreamer and his dreams. They regarded the dreams as foolishness, out of consideration, and trampled on them. Their selling of him into slavery meant dream fulfilment for Joseph, and their only hope of survival twenty years later. He, later, continually told his brothers that they were not responsible, that God had sent him there *(Genesis 45)*. By then, God had long answered the dream question for him.

Consider:

He would have questioned himself “*how can I forgive the evil that has befallen me?*” for he knew how sad his father would be.

* When did he forgive them?

* Why did he **never** send a message to Jacob, even when later he was a ruler, and not a servant, and had power to do so?

****

Potiphar was a captain in Pharaoh’s guard, military duties and police work kept him away from home. He was married, probably an eunuch, and his wife was badly neglected, and sexually promiscuous. Joseph is poised in this land of opportunity.

Joseph would have decided that, if it was God’s will for him to be a slave, then he was determined to be content with nothing less than being the very best of slaves. (Often people put in terrible circumstances of prison, or affliction of some kind, think this way, as an antidote to despair.) Joseph decided that whatever his position required him to do, wherever he was, he would do with all his might and all his heart, as doing it “*unto the Lord*”. He would learn how to meet injustice, wrong, cruelty, inhuman humiliating treatment, abuse, temptation and misfortune so as to take no harm from them. He would learn how to keep his heart sweet and gentle, and kindness would be his virtue.

He would keep his mind pure and clean,

He would keep his spirit brave, and

He would be strong, and good, and

He would keep his faith in God bright and clear.

Right now though, Joseph is poor and loveless and lonely for his family, and homesick.

He will never know again that home was the place to be, for he will have no home until he becomes the Prime Minister of Egypt, twenty years later. The poverty and loneliness and lovelessness spilt over the wall like dampness and rust, and it ran in rivulets upon him, until he was made strong by God, and given great faith to face these cruel and harsh conditions. And so we watch the golden thread of faith begin to stalk the *Genesis* text now, and in the next 13 chapters, we see this unique son of Israel, live and die in faith, as few men have done in His name.

CONCLUSION:

We must leave this story now. It is hard to resist the urge to go on and record Joseph's Egyptian experiences as most other commentators do. But there is another terrible story that needs some telling first.

CHAPTER 8

JUDAH'S SIN AND MISERY

"***She has been more righteous than I", Genesis 38:26.***

FOCUS:

The lesson to be learned from this sordid story, in ***Genesis 38***, is the fact that, although Judah acknowledged the sin, and ceased from his incest sin - "*And he knew her again no more*", it did not take away the bitter taste in his mouth, nor did it take away the consequences. Oh, how he would have wished that he had never taken the path to the Canaanite's house.

1. THE SAME STORY ALL OVER AGAIN FOR THE SAME REASON

In a former story, the story of Lot and his daughters, drunkenness and incest, is performed for the same reason as this incident. These two desperate attempts show the powerful urge of cultural relativity, in this case, the female's need for progeny. We are not told of Lot's response to the sin, but we are told of Judah's response.

Comment:

Sin is like that - Judah's forgiveness, and his trying to right the wrong, does not make it much easier to forgive himself. The consequences of sin continue to remind us of our sin. However the point of family dysfunction in this family is that although this patriarchal family is forgiven by God, and is so God loved and blessed, they found it hard to forgive themselves. Later David's sin over Bathsheba was forgiven, but he never forgave himself. That's a lesson of life for us all. There would have been no censure from the surrounding people, for Judah's sin, to them was no sin.

We need to remember that from Judah's name came the term "*Jews*", which is still in use today to refer to the Israelitish nation. Certainly the world calls them that, even if they do live in Israel. It was Jacob whose name came to mean Israel.

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2. A TERRIBLE STORY THAT NEEDS TO BE TOLD

Many commentaries ignore this story, but the verse by verse ones have of necessity to deal with it. There are so many stories that deal with sex, prostitution and incest within this family that

perhaps some feel at saturation point. It is painful for us to consider it, but it is written in His *Holy Book*.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 1***)

3. JUDAH, SON OF JACOB, IGNORES THE NEEDS OF HIS DAUGHTER IN LAW

At the time of the family's descent into Egypt, Reuben is 45 years old, so Judah is just over 40 years old. We know he is a grandfather. Jacob is 130 years old. Isaac had died 10 years previously at 180 years and Esau had come to help Jacob bury him. Some time before they went down into Egypt, the *38th chapter* of *Genesis* is played out. The chapter is another insertion into the family saga, and like David's sin with Bathsheba, and many other sordid tales, would not be in the canon of *Scripture*, if we had to do with the compilation.

The events of this chapter impress upon us all, that the danger that these people faced in this land, was enough to destroy the seed line. They needed a refuge where they could grow, and be strengthened, and that was provided for them in Goshen. Joseph was rewarded by Pharaoh for his skill on behalf of the Egyptians, and God's people benefited by this reward. The Egyptians hated the Israelites and were glad they were confined to Goshen. Their identity was thus preserved.

However, incidents such as Abraham's "*marriage*" with Hagar and with Keturah, and the resulting children, the say you are my sister incidents of Sarah and Rebekah, the great move back to idolatrous Canaan from Haran, the rape of Dinah, the incest of Reuben, and now the use of a prostitute by Judah, all illustrate the point that God needed to go to great lengths to preserve the promised line. He later strengthened Joseph's moral integrity, to resist the introduction of an unsuitable Egyptian seed, and preserved the seed line once more. The story shows the utter hopelessness of God's family trying to live in Canaan at this time. Abraham had managed at that time, (but Lot had found it difficult). Now idolatry overtakes his grandson's family.

In this story, Judah voluntarily separated himself from his brothers, unlike Joseph who was torn away. We might think that there were no sons left at home, but we really cannot decide for sure who still lived in Jacob's compound.

Judah went to Adullam, a town south west of where Jerusalem came to be. He stayed with Hirah and married a Canaanite woman named Shua (or daughter of Shua). She bore 3 sons to Judah, Er, Onan and Shelah.

The firstborn son, Er, married Tamar, maybe a Canaanite also. However Er was a wicked man and God arranged his death, *Genesis 38:7*.

Consider:

* The grandson of Jacob is so wicked that he cannot live?

* Would Jacob know of him?

* Would Jacob mourn his passing?

* Was Judah estranged from the family at this time?

****

Judah said to his next son, Onan, "*lie with Tamar and produce children for her*". But Onan unwilling "*to raise up seed*" for his brother, according to the custom, practised a form of birth control, and spilled his semen upon the ground. The custom of raising up seed, became a legal obligation, in the later *Law of Moses*, *Deuteronomy 25:1-10*, and remembering the story of Ruth, we can see that the nearest living relative of the dead husband, not always a brother, was expected to become the participating male, as long as the widow was of child bearing age, and had no children. Widows past child bearing age, without children, had no such protection.

However, Onan did not want to produce children who were not counted as his, and so practised this form of contraception. When Onan behaved as he did, God, also, killed him for his wickedness. It was a blessing for Tamar that she was a widow from these two ungodly men, though she did not realise it. Her name meant "*palm tree*" and she was resilient, and able to survive. She had strength and courage and determination, as we shall see.

4. WHAT NOW FOR TAMAR?

On the loss of two husbands, the third brother was not bound by law, to marry the widow. The deaths of two sons must have been a great anguish for Judah, for it would be a prime agony for one child to die before the parent, let alone in such circumstances. After the death of his first and second son, Judah then said to Tamar, "*Wait for Shelah to grow up, and in the meantime go and live in your father's house*". It seems Judah was afraid for the life of his third son, *Genesis 38:11,* and although he may not have blamed her for the deaths, he would know that widows of two husbands were often called murderesses. That was the suspicion that allowed the third son out of the bind.

Even if Judah did not blame Tamar for the deaths of his sons, he may have had other hopes for an alternative marriage for his third son. At the very least he wanted Shelah to escape the wickedness that had killed his other two older sons. So he hesitated and did not ever give Tamar to Shelah his son, and she became more and more distressed over this, as she waited over the years.

She lived in her father's house with the terrible reputation of being a murderess. The later Levitical law, *of Leviticus 22:13* recommended that the widowed daughter of a priest may return to her father's house, and to his table. This has encouraged some to think that Tamar was of priestly descent, perhaps of the priest Melchizedek, "*Tamar*", from "*Women of the Bible*", by *Lorna Fifield, page 49.* It is highly likely that Tamar asked God for His blessing on her trial.

There was great wickedness abroad. No doubt it would have been related to the Baal worship round about. Prostitution and temple prostitution were all part of daily life amongst the Canaanites, and was the main problem in this story.

5. JUDAH SEEKS OUT A PROSTITUTE

After many years Judah's wife died. Apparently he only had one wife, when polygamy was the custom. It seems Judah's need for a prostitute, a fast solution to a particular urgent need, indicates that he only had one wife. The solution he sought to relieve his need, brought him sin and misery.

Judah had sheep from Jacob and had built up his own herds. One day Judah and Hirah, his friend, went up from Adullam, to the sheep shearers at Timnath. One would think that Judah's family firm would have had been shearing sheep. Perhaps there was some rift with the family, or

that Hirah's sheep needed the shearers. It is possible that shaving and cutting instruments were very scarce, and not possessed by this family of Israelites at this time.

Tamar heard that Judah was going to Timnath, so she sat down on the pathway. Of course, Judah saw her, and because she was veiled, or covered like a prostitute of the Phoenician Venus Astarte (the female votary was required to perform this sexual vow once a year), he thought she was available as a prostitute, and offered a kid goat from his flock to be sacrificed to this pagan god.

Tamar, like so many others in this family, was distressed that she had no children. That was enough of a culturally unacceptable position for a woman to be in, let alone being a widow twice over. Tamar also wished to collect an inheritance, because of her former marriage to the firstborn, Er. She is prepared to go to great lengths to restore her position. However once again the seed line is protected, for Judah was saved from having intercourse with a regular temple prostitute.

The sons of Judah's deceased wife, Shuah, a Canaanite woman, were also prevented from being part of the seed line, for Tamar was childless to those sons. So there must have been something special about Tamar, which God wanted.

But Judah unknowingly commits incest. This is later forbidden in *The Law of Moses*, (*Leviticus 20)*, but this prostitute situation is hardly a more worthy course for Judah to take.

Tamar did conceive from this union, and through one of the twins that she bore, came the promised seed, our Lord Jesus Christ, *Matthew 1:3*. It is not beyond God to use prostitutes in the progenitors of our Lord. We would not have chosen it. He does. He accommodates His will to the free will of wicked men and women. By doing that he does not condone wickedness, or dilute His moral law. He decides, and steps in when **He** wishes, either to prevent man's course, or to promote it. He also uses the pure seed line when He deems fit, or not, as He decides.

Tamar was not worried about her payment (of the sacrificial goat, for, of course, she was not performing a pagan rite). She wanted recognition from Judah. As the goat was not readily available, which probably pleased her, she asked for a pledge. Judah asked the woman what she would propose as a pledge, and she suggested,

1. **His signet**, (a sign of authority - not always a ring, but sometimes something hung around the neck),

2. **His bracelets**, (armlets, or the neck cord for the signet),

3. **His staff** (probably of considerable value and his emblem of authority), **three very important and valuable gifts**, (or down payments). Judah agreed, and gave the tokens to Tamar, who was pretending to be a prostitute.

Then, having paid for the sexual favour, Judah lay with Tamar and she conceived. **God does not condone the incest,** but promotes the progenitor, as He has in other incidents. Tamar went back to her home and put on her widow's garments once more, and waited. She is not consumed with guilt, for she deliberately planned it. She had decided, rightly or wrongly, that if Judah's sons did not fulfil her right of children, then Judah should do so.

Judah remembered his promise to the prostitute and no doubt wanted to retrieve his valuable property, so he sent his friend Hirah with a goat suitable for the offering, to that place.

Hirah returned to Judah, and Judah is greatly shamed over the whole incident.

"*I cannot find the woman*", Hirah said, "*not only so, but the men of that place said that there had been no harlot there!*"

"*Oh well*", said Judah, "*we won't worry about it, otherwise we will become a laughing stock*

in this place. After all, I did try to send her a goat, as I promised!"

He had tried to fulfil his promise, and prostitution was rife, so surely he had no need to be embarrassed. This was no breach of the law, or even the later Law of Moses, although no Jewish woman could become a prostitute, *Deuteronomy 23: 17, 18*, but prostitution was not forbidden Perhaps he had a flicker of guilt for indulging in a Canaanitish evil. He probably recognised prostitution as a matter of "*lawful, but not expedient*".

However for us, God's holy law assumes we know the value of one man one woman, (that is, complementary roles "*in Christ*"), He would not need to forbid prostitution. Logic and common sense would then tell us that it is forbidden.

Judah knew he would be judged by his contemporaries, so he kept the matter secret.

Three months later, when someone told Judah that Tamar had behaved like a prostitute, and was now pregnant; Judah righteously condemned her for her behaviour. This behaviour, later condemned in the *Law of Moses*, according to Judah, is adultery, and merits punishment - being burnt to death, according to *The Code of Hammurabi*, which was then in force throughout Canaan.

So Tamar then, had risked her life with her deception of Judah, in her desire for a child. Judah sends for Tamar, to come from her father's house. When she is accused, by the messenger, she produces the tokens and sends them to Judah. She does nothing to bring about the downfall of Judah, only quietly sending the tokens, not creating a scene.

It may be that Tamar's family was greatly disturbed by what had befallen their daughter, especially if they had a high standing in the community.

"***By the owner of these tokens, am I with child!"*** Oh, the sin and the misery.

a. With no negotiation about her widowhood, or her childlessness, Tamar's position seems hopeless, until she resorts to an age old trick.

b. With no acknowledgment of any problem, Judah falls into the trap.

c. Joseph never fell into the trap that Potiphar's wife set for him,

d. Though he endured the punishment for it.

And so may we.

Being morally right does not guarantee immunity and peace, as Joseph later found.

Judah immediately recognises the tokens and is consumed with guilt, and assures Tamar that she is more righteous than he is. Tamar did not publicly disgrace Judah and had waited patiently for the birth. She did know that she would be accused of sin, but she was disgraced anyway, for having no child, and for being twice widowed, and considered a murderess. One disgrace, or the other, it mattered not to Tamar.

Judah had added to the disgrace, by not procuring a husband for her, indicating that she was damaged in some way, or that he agreed with the judgement of the community about her being a murderess. He knew now though, that he too was condemned for another sullied embrace within this family.

Consider:

Prostitution, concubinage, polygamy were all of a piece,

* Why separate one condition from another?

* Was it possible for women, who were used to being property and baggage, to make distinctions?

* Were they expected to make distinctions?

* Tamar would have heard the family dysfunction stories, did she learn from them as we can do?

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6. THE SIN OF JUDAH AND TAMAR IN THE ECCLESIA OF GOD HERE

The cause of her "*sin*" was Judah's lack of justice towards her. That is not an excuse for Tamar, only a reason for her action. Judah is accused and accepts that, but does not accept her as his wife, "*for he knew her again no more*".

It seems that Judah has left the "*worshipping community*", or "*ecclesia*" that Jacob has set up, with the altar of YHWH, to go and form a group of his own called out ones. It was a shaky and shabby worship when he refused to deal with the inequity that Tamar felt over her progeny. Judah consequently condemned Tamar for prostitution when she tried to remedy the problem herself.

Tamar was banished to her father's house, but remained faithful until she eventually forced Judah to recognise her righteousness, and she was received back into his fellowship (but not his bed), and the fellowship of the saints at that time.

7. TWINS AGAIN IN THIS PATRIARCHAL FAMILY

As Tamar's time for the birth came near the midwives assured her that she would have twins. Again as in Rebekah's case, the twins in her womb struggled to be born. A little hand emerged, and receded, but not before the midwife tied a scarlet thread around that tiny wrist. Perhaps this was a common practice with midwives, perhaps it is today.

When the hand was withdrawn, the other twin pushed out. He was called Pharez, or "*breaking forth*". He became the head of the leading clan in Judah and the ancestor of David, *Ruth 4:18-22*. He is mentioned in *Matthew 1:1-6* in the book of the generation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

After Pharez was born, Zarah, his twin was born. He it was with the scarlet thread on his wrist. Apparently a withdrawn hand appearance was enough to say "*firstborn*".

Comment:

Certainly this birthing incident would cause discussion over who was really born first. It should not have caused confusion, but knowing the heart of man, first born rights were probably under contention, as they had been down the generations. Our country has trouble defining the rights

of a child, or a foetus, in matters of abortion. Since the women in this story practised abortion in all sorts of ways, the contentions would not be the same as ours. Restrictions, if there were any, would be difficult to police. Contraception, or population control, were all in the realm of fantasy, witchcraft, and included insensitive practices like abandoning unwanted babies to the elements. The common practice of sacrificing children to Canaanitish gods also indicates a different attitude to ours.

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It is uncertain how much the family, or surrounding people knew of this episode, that he was father to his daughter in law's twins. Hirah certainly knew about it. Judah had said to Hirah, to cease from searching for the prostitute for people would laugh at the searching. So certainly Judah's falling into Tamar's trap, would be a cause for mirth among those who wished ill of him.

We wonder whether Tamar ever called on Judah for favours for her twins. He certainly did not marry her, or have any sexual relation with her again.

Moses knew about the incident, and it is clearly stated in *Ruth 4:18* and *Matthew 1*. Judah could easily have concocted some story to take away the rights of inheritance. To guess, we would have to have some facts about Shelah, who is not mentioned again. Tamar might just have lived with the fact that she was considered a prostitute, **and** a murderess. It was little enough, in the joy of her sons, and once more, she also felt, that the end justified the means. She went proudly down into Egypt with her twins, and would have counted Judah as family.

She may have loved Judah, or she could have been twisted with bitterness, we cannot tell. She may have lived in a new aura of peace, because she knew that God had blessed her, with something very special. She probably did not know that she had made a special contribution to God's family.

It may have helped her if God had sent a message that her babies would be blessed later, in Egypt, (if indeed He did not tell her). She had to hide in the Goshen black tent curtains to hear Jacob's last message blessing about Judah. Then her pleasure and blessing basket, "*bound in the bundle of life", 1 Samuel 25:29,* would, at last, have been filled.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 2***)

Comment:

There are so many questions about this story, and so few answers. We wonder if we would have the wisdom and experience to handle these lifestyle circumstances of Jacob's family, for they are hardly in our experience. However coping with stress put upon us by outside factors, often replicates the stress that the children of Jacob presented to him.

Some of us manage well, some fold up and collapse. "*Honourably Wounded - Stress Among Christian Missionary Workers*" by *Marjory F. Foyle* has some excellent advice for those who find their Christian life stressful.

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CONCLUSION:

Jacob had gained lots of experiences, though he often stumbled. His children shamed him, and they struggled as well, to recover from their sins. Despite it all, God loved and cared for Jacob,

blessed him and them, and kept him from danger, as He had promised. They were a dysfunctioning God loved family.

May He care and keep us also, and give us wisdom to deal with life's vicissitudes.

Digression 1:

Because of the great number of stories in this saga connected with sexual imperfections, there is a need to use sexual terms to describe the situations and relationships. It is interesting to note the use of terms in the *AV* and then compare them with the newer versions, *NIV* in particular. The *AV* terms are not now in common use, whereas the *NIV* uses terms and expressions more familiar to us. However between the old Shakespearian English of the *AV*, and the more modern versions, has been a period of history, the Victorian era, when English usage, sought to cover the sins that were there. Speech in those situations then takes on expressions of its own - nicknames and flippancy, - which does no credit to language, or conversation, or discussion, rather bringing it into disrepute, with sniggering and innuendo.

"*Shall not be named among you*" does not mean "*do not talk about these things, keep them secret*", it means "*don't do them*". We often have a need for discussion on such subjects and we need to do that carefully, openly and with dignity.

Now that schools have courses in living skills and human development programs there has been great encouragement to use correct terms for body parts and functions. The younger ones are quite comfortable with this, but it is harder for the older ones. Perhaps in *Bible* times people *did* talk about body parts and functions more easily than we do - circumcision must have been discussed more openly. The original Hebrew words in phrases such as "*the tender mercies of God*", would shock us, (the original refers to "*bowel movements*"). Moses and other writers, used descriptive language of the time, which must have been the vernacular, but our translators, to suit **our** sensibilities, replace the concrete language of the Hebrew with euphemisms, and turns the English to a more acceptable body organ, the heart. In doing so, they blur the image.

When our English translations could not cover up some of these stories, our grandparents coped by leaving these chapters out of the family readings, and certainly, community and worship readings. We should resist the temptation to gloss these stories.

Of course, familiarity can bring contempt with our children, so we need to temper the human development programs with a Godly focus, and add the Godly requirements for each sexual bodily part, which will not be added in the secular education programs.

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Digression 2:

"*The law of the Levirate where the brother of the dead husband was required to marry the widow was of far more ancient date than the Law of Moses. It prevented the extinction of any line of descent, a matter of great importance in those genealogical days, and secondly, it was an obstacle to the accumulation of landed property in a few hands, as the son first born after the Levirate marriage inherited the property of his deceased uncle, while the second son was the representative of the real father. A similar custom existed in parts of India and Persia, and exists among the Mongols today.*

The Mosaic Law did not institute, but regulated the custom, confining such marriages to cases where the deceased brother had died without children, and permitting the brother to refuse to marry the widow under penalty, nevertheless, of disgrace. Onan by refusing to take Tamar, may have been actuated by the selfish motive of obtaining for himself the rights of primogeniture, which would otherwise have gone to his eldest son, as heirs of his uncle", Commentary by *Ellicott*.

It might be expected that there would be here a discussion about the irrelevance of women in these laws and deliberations.

Nevertheless turning from that, we do realise, and accept that there were constraining influences, and cultural relativities, that affected God's women pilgrims in the matriarchal line, before the advent of our Lord.

When the new privileges came, with our Lord Jesus Christ's teaching, there was a huge pouring out of grace upon the women, sisters of the Lord, and other repressed minorities, and those people were instantly attracted to the Christian message.

When women came to realise, and experience the enormous changes, they recognised that God had indeed blessed them, more than any other women since the fall. They could at last make their own statement about their relationship with God, and instead of circumcision for males only, which was now abandoned, they could be baptised as well as males.

In the beginning Adam and Eve had complementary roles, and were "*made in His image*", until they both "*fell*". It must have seemed like a reward, when our Lord Jesus Christ came with the new conditions, for their new acceptance, or at least tolerance, from their repressed and second class state, (like possessions), for over two thousand years of history, **before** Christ.

Sadly, minority groups were targeted again before long, and *Susan Dowell*'s research piece called "*They Two Shall Be One - Monogamy in History and Religion*", is informative about the evils that have befallen women once more, over the two thousand years **since** the time of Christ.

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Section 1 - Pit to Potipher

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CHAPTER 1 - JOSEPH GOES DOWN INTO EGYPT

CHAPTER 2 - IN AND AROUND EGYPT - 18TH CENTURY BC

CHAPTER 3 - EGYPT - HOST TO GOD'S PRECIOUS CHILD

CHAPTER 4 - JOSEPH IN POWERFUL AND MIGHTY EGYPT

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The next chapters of *Genesis* introduce Joseph to Egypt, and go on to describe his journey into the unknown. The next four chapters in *"Kith and Kin"* can be considered as *"Comment",* and interesting and possible but speculative. We leave the *Scriptural* text at *Genesis 37:36*, and while the story of Judah is told, we travel with Joseph to Egypt, until the *Scriptural* story takes up Joseph's tale again in *Genesis 39:1*.

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CHAPTER 1

JOSEPH GOES DOWN INTO EGYPT

"***And the Midianites sold Joseph into Egypt", Genesis 37:36.***

FOCUS:

In this stark lesson of purity for us all, we travel along the road to Egypt. There is no record in the *Scripture* of how many days that journey took, the journey that began in ***Genesis 37:36***, but now that archaeology is such a fine science, there is much evidence of what would have happened.

1. GETTING THE PICTURE ABOUT JOSEPH'S JOURNEY

These comments are based on the history as we now know it. The journey is considered an enormous factor in the education of Joseph, so it is important that we have some idea of what happened to him over that long period, when he changed from a boy to a man. There is a wealth of material available about nomadic life on the route between Canaan and Egypt, and about Lower and Upper Egypt. As well, in the early 20th Century, a German historical novelist, *Thomas Mann*, painted graphic pictures for us, in his series about Jacob and Joseph, "*Joseph and His Brothers*". *Genesis* is a wondrous story, and we can create a tale around the events that can be taken or left at inclination and will.

Least among them,

Noted by none,

Named by no name,

Joseph, son of Jacob,

Dreamer,

Came into Egypt.

2. JOSEPH'S USEFULNESS, AND HIS EDUCATION ON THE TRADE ROUTE

Joseph's education is not yet complete for his arrival in Egypt, where God will use him to prepare the promised seed for their return to the Promised Land. So at the very least, we can learn of **that** process from history and weave it into Moses' story. We do know that God prepared Egypt to receive Joseph, and many years later to receive Moses, after his flight to Midian. Moses' reception was not as easy as Joseph's for the multiplicity of gods had, by Moses' time, made it imperative that the Israelites should leave Egypt. That was necessary if they were ever to be allowed to worship the One True God, and to mission to the nations round about them, about the wondrous God of all the earth, and His promises to include all men in the blessings. Egypt, at the Joseph time, was a generous host to God's child, but by the Moses time it had made itself an enemy of God. The very plagues that were sent upon them by God, were aimed against the false gods, and the oppressive power structures that were revered with fanatical zeal by those who worshipped them. These gods were now impotent to halt the devastation that was being caused by the plagues. The elite deities were shamed out of honour and power. But for now, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph elected this protective crucible for the Israelites, where they were most welcome. Moreover He sent His angel to go with the Midianites/Ishmaelites, as they carried this precious burden to Egypt.

There was a stranger that led Joseph from Shechem to Dothan. Perhaps this angel just never went away, and remained to preserve him, and to guide the trading company, and care for them. In any case God was with the camel train, whether or not He used an angel. He did send an angel to be with Jesus to strengthen him, *Luke 22:43*.

Psalm 105 talks about, *Joseph,* "*sold as a slave*". They bruised his feet with shackles; his neck was put in irons, until what he foretold came to pass, til the word of the Lord proved him true. The poet here takes the freedom to use a later conventional description of prisoners. Shackles are not spoken of in *Genesis 39*, and iron came into common use at a later time. Earlier shackles were made of bronze, *NIV Study Bible*.

So, rather than shackle such a prisoner, it is possible that these consanguineous relatives of Joseph, recognised his trustworthy and reliable nature, and the old man in charge of the caravan, allowed him to be part of the working team. They are descendants of Joseph's great grandfather, Abraham. These trading people came from the families of Abraham's union with Hagar, and their son Ishmael, or from Abraham's marriage with Keturah, now the Midianites. They were the honourable **Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company**

So there was not a place for him within the now slow and more cautious family life, that was Jacob and his sons. He did not fit, he had been tipped out of that, tipped out of the nest, ill fitting bird that he was. His brothers regarded him as an ugly duckling and never imagined the beautiful swan he was to become. He, no longer, had a stake in the family firm, **Jacob and Sons, Sheep, Shepherds and Sheep Products**. He learned that his destiny lay in the path without paths, where he went ahead into the unknown, with his hand in the hand of God. He was to learn the capriciousness of a life like that, at once, exhilarating, with the terrifying loneliness away from his family, soaring to heights, and then the plunge to the despair of the depressed. His prayers to God, now really His only Father would have been filled with the pleas of those who cry out, "*Please make me strong*". Loneliness can crimp the style, and set the stage for depression, and bring on suicidal thoughts, all hopefully now much better understood than in previous years. May our understanding of the condition help us to practise our compassion to the fullest extent. However, Joseph's loneliness did not bring on the illness of depression.

Joseph was naturally courteous, and had a sweetness of nature, wholly unimpaired by competition, or a desire to escape. This made him an ideal slave. He carried nothing with him, and he was content, for he knew that we all have nothing in the end. We might possess things for a time, but we don't even own our wedding rings really, or our slave rings, nothing. If he had a slave ring, he knew that it could be changed many times in his life, and so it would never be his. Even his life (like ours) was not his own to keep or lose.

Self effacement was now grafted into the sweet nature of Joseph, and it flourished there. It might have been his brothers who put it there, but God used it to advantage as he entered the next phase of his life in Egypt. We see it later when he appears to us, to be eternally youthful, carrying the crown of Egypt with ambassadorial bearing, with a chronic ability to behave with the clarity of crystal, never jaded, fresh and intent upon the work of God. Perhaps, often we feel jaded in the work of the Lord. That is not the fault of the work of the Lord.

Joseph would help with the selling, and the buying, the saddling and tethering of the camels and pack animals, the cooking and the domestic chores of such a train, which regularly trod that ancient mighty road. The routine would be well established, and Joseph would easily fit in, being an amenable chap. Perhaps he knew to keep busy, while he could, until he mastered his loneliness, for this would help his solitary, sans family state.

Comment:

They carried cottons, spices and precious stones that had come from India, for these trade routes were well established at the time of Abraham, some 270 years before this incident. It is now known that there were tenuous trade routes into China, up into Siberia, and down into Africa. They were hard and soft roads and much of it dangerous as well. The trading routes have already been discussed in the earlier books about this family. The roads centred in great cities north of Canaan, for example, Ugarit, Ninevah, Haran, Mari, Carchemish, and the old man and his band of family men, trod up and down to Egypt, from these great cities, trading as they went. *The Times Concise Atlas of the Bible*, *1991*, provides a fund of information about these ancient trade routes.

****

The Talmud suggests that Joseph was sold from one trading company to another, on his travels down into Egypt, but for the purpose of this text he will remain with this one company. So, the old man leader continued with the education of Joseph, perhaps for as long as another year, as they made slow progress, stopping and beginning again, in the profession that they were about. The slow progress is a blessing to Joseph, though he does not know it. He is being strengthened for that which lies ahead.

3. ABOUT JOSEPH - BLESSED ARE THEY WHOSE WAYS ARE BLAMELESS

If Joseph was later to "*instruct his (Pharaoh's) prince as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom*", *Psalm 105*, it was because he had been, and he still was, a seeker after wisdom, God's wisdom. *Psalm 119:9-16* is about a young man keeping his way pure. Moral behaviour leads to ethical conduct, and all of those, from this time forward, in Joseph's life, recognised a God blessed, great man. An unexpected, unfair, unusual, momentous occasion leads unexpectedly to a deviation from the established family, recycling, painful pattern. Family dysfunction is at last, by great intervention on God's behalf, turned into healthy well function for this great dynasty of God loved people. The endemic dysfunction lies dormant, at least in

the *Biblical* record, from the Judah/Tamar incident onward. Joseph, with twenty years absence from the family, thrust into this inimical situation, copes better than expected, and is under God's guiding hand, "*for blessed are they whose ways are blameless*".

The synergy (of all these functions) provides the catalyst for the great exodus out of Egypt and the deliverance of God's people. At this stage though, of Joseph being sold into Egypt, and the fragmented family state, the limitations seem too great for solving. Assuming the attitude of no knowledge of future events, we are consumed with sadness.

Joseph **had been** a tale teller, but he did not send a tale (about his brothers) to Jacob, in fact he never contacted him again until God arranged the family assembly in Egypt, twenty years later.

It was to Jacob the silence of the dead, but both Joseph and Jacob, it seems, bore the burden, for Joseph was not dead, and he shared the sadness of the loss with Jacob, though Jacob knew nothing of the sharing.

Consider:

* Was it now more honourable **not** to tell, with Joseph's better understanding of God's purpose, that is, best to remain dumb?

* Would not Jacob's anger have scattered his children and resulted into a forced march into Egypt to save his prized son, all contrary to God's plan?

* Did he "*forgive them for they knew not what they*" did, those deceitful brothers, or, did he think "***God** is sending me on this journey for it is not their fault, so I will not send a message*"?

* Or did God **prevent** Joseph from sending a message?

Later, when those brothers came down into Egypt and the family trek is proposed, Joseph says to them, "*Do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you*".

* Was this realisation born at this time (of the selling)?

* Or did it come slowly over the next twenty years?

* Did he at once (in the pit), realise that it had been blind and deadly to test men beyond their strength (provoking them to jealousy)

* Or did it occur only after the vicissitudes of this journey, and his time in Egypt alone without them?

We cannot tell, but Joseph **never** sent a message to Jacob, and at this time it would have been quickest and easiest to do so, but **he did not**.

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4. JACOB'S ACHING HEART

The aching heart of Jacob burned with sadness, in a furnace of sorrow, and he began to weld with Benjamin. He had an incurable misery over Joseph and must have rued the day he ever deceived **his** father with a hairy goat skin. The similarities for Jacob are too numerous for us to think he is impervious to them. The sorrow simmering with guilt, over his own deceiving, and his fault at loving one of his sons more, and loving his other sons less, led him to a great depression.

He had not held the balance evenly. Now he was incapable of functioning in balance, and lost his authority over his family until he was able to function more equitably again.

Our lives are full of tension when both extremes seem right and we must hold the tension between the two. All the players in this tragedy suffered from Jacob's lack of mature guidance. Great love, coupled with neglect and forgetfulness, is not a natural balance, and so the natural law of evil and embittered hearts resulted. Nature does not forgive; it follows a course, and does not change. Natural consequences we call it.

Joseph,

"***Trusting that wisdom underlies,***

And worketh in the end - His will"

leaves them all, with only the whispers of God to encourage his departure into the unknown. Jacob's departing north had been lonely as well, with only the whispers of God, but he had the stone pillow dream, where God's voice gave loud and strong encouragement. Here God's euphony for Joseph, the whispers of God for Joseph, is not recorded for us.

But the mourning is left behind, and it continues, and Jacob is hardly comforted. Almost everyone, sooner or later in life, enters the state of mourning. Sometimes, and with the healing of time, most times, the tears of sadness dry. A heavenly light, with comforting words from *Scripture*, can often lighten that darkness. But there is always a tiny part of misery that never lightens. All of us in life's experience, must come to realise, that all that we call our own, is only lent for a short time, and to cling to earthly happiness is tenuous. Our comfort is only "*in the Lord*".

Comment:

If you love something set it free.

If it returns, you haven't lost it.

If it disappears and never comes back,

Then it wasn't truly yours to begin with.

Author unknown.

It is a lesson to any of us who prefer to hold our relationships in such a grip, for fear of loss, that love is stifled. How hard is it to let go, when our children mean us to let go.

Joseph was Jacob's North and South and East and West,

Joseph was Jacob's working time and his Sabbath rest,

Jacob thought that Joseph's love for him would never die,

And that Joseph would accompany his bones to Machpelah,

But now all is lost,

No more dreams,

The stars are nothing now,

"*Pack away the moon and dismantle the sun*".

No one will stand where he has stood,

"A*nd nothing now will come to any good*"

"*Funeral Blues*" of the 20th Century poet*, W. H. Auden*, comes to mind.

The dream stars and the moon and the sun seem to be "*put out*" and "*dismantled*" and "*packed away*" for Jacob, it was after all only a fanciful dream. The love that he had for his son did not after all "*last forever*" til his death. And now the pall of grief hangs over them all, and the lights are out. It is only the knowledge we have of the future of this family that keeps those lights shining for us, but they did not shine for Jacob.

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5. AND SO TO GAZA - JOSEPH'S PURPOSEFUL JOURNEY

As Joseph and the Ishmaelites move down the coastal route, taking the advice of Joseph's seemingly honourable and trustworthy brothers, that the parallel hill country route was dangerous at this time, he would look up to the highlands on his left, and think of his despairing father.

Flight would hardly be on his mind. There would be great danger, if he tried to climb the eighty kilometres from the plains to the hills above, before he could reach his father's arms. Wild beasts, robbers and murderers **did** abound in the crevices. He resists the temptation, as he resists a far sweeter one later on, and in both cases holy thoughts strengthen his determination.

Joseph says to himself,

"*How could I sin against God's purpose and plan?*

How can I escape this purposeful journey?

How can I escape the planned intelligence that takes me from the old, and brings me to the new?"

His time in the pit has shown him his folly of being open and proud of God's blessings on him, so much so that he over tested his brothers. Now he resists the impulse, strengthens his will, holds his tongue, and strides out of the known way (of his father), steps into the path of his great grandfather, and puts his hand into the hand of the angel of God, and resolves to go to Egypt.

These nomads travelled on, not knowing the truth of the conflict, or that they were all relatives. They were of Hagar's family and had Egyptian blood, as she had probably come from Egypt at the time of the first say you are my sister incident. This blood had probably been mixed with that of Keturah's children, and of Esau's children.

The trading company travelled on slowly, as was their wont, for they were never troubled about time. Their only concern was that their leisurely progress lay in the right direction.

They travelled south, from one Philistine coastal town to the next, Ekron, Asdod, Ascalon, and Joseph could have acted as a clerk, at a little folding table, recording and arranging the transactions, on the road to Gaza.

Comment:

Along the way were forts, fortresses, station posts with walls and battle towers. The soldiers, here, were pleased to trade with the little caravan. The Egyptians had established these posts on their many forays out of Egypt and the local kings were happy to use them now. Gaza, a strong walled city, sat on the edge of the desert and was always the first stage for the wagons and foot soldiers that rampaged through under the Pharaoh's banner. There were stragglers here, still in Gaza, those who decided to stay instead of going home. They were broad shouldered, high nosed and white clothed, (Egyptians), and they walked the streets. Joseph noted them. After Joseph, these Egyptian excursions grew more purposeful and frequent in their expansion into Canaan. However, by the time of the Exodus under Moses, the Egyptian (north) and Assyrian (south) military excursions had waned, and it was the other smaller nations who tried to pass through. Those in the land had by then gained confidence (for a time), and they required tribute and often captured stragglers for slavery.

Excellent grape vines grew here, so, to the little spicy onions that grew in Ashkelon, and the olives and figs and dried fish, the old man added wine as well - two camel loads. Ashkelon's ruins, the Temple of Dagon, the city walls running down to the beach, are there today. Recently Gaza was difficult for the soldiers of Israel to defend, from the Palestinians who lived there, and so in the end Israel gave it back. One thousand fishermen in yellow boats, really control that city, smuggling weapons for the men of Hamas, an extreme Muslim terrorist group. It was a moral dilemma, whether to keep the Gaza strip, for it is such an important piece of land, smothered in history, or whether it was circumspect to give it back to their Palestinian relations.

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6. THE LITTLE BAND PREPARES TO CROSS THE DESERT

The inhospitable desert lay ahead of the little trading company, and as well as food and drink added to their trading wares, they needed a guide to keep them safely on the track. They probably waited at the caravanserai for a group of traders going in the same direction. However they needed a special bell camel and guide. Joseph was startled when he saw the guide chosen from those employed to do such things. He was soon mounted up front. Déjà vu – "*but where have I seen this stranger before, was it in Dothan?*" he asked himself. Perhaps our guardian angel can take this form, unknown to us.

Certainly God's guiding hand was with them, and they were reassured that this guide could take them safely over the desert. It was through a melancholy underworld, as it were, nine days in breadth, a frightening expanse, accursed and perilous, where there could be no loitering from well to well.

Comment:

It is perilous today, and for those who travel by bus, that now well established highway past the Bedouin tents, carrying the businessmen and the tourists, whoever can afford the fare, it is still a dreaded desert. It crosses from Gaza to the Great and Little Bitter Lakes, part of the now unimportant Suez Canal, known well to those who sailed to, or from, England, in the great ocean liners of the last 50 years. To stand on the deck and watch the desert go by, and know that Joseph's and Moses' feet had slid upon the sand there, was a sobering thought.

Recently, in this desert, the Nawamis, incredibly well preserved burial structures, from the Chalcolithic period, six thousand years old, have been discovered by *Avner Goren*. The studies of these remains give us a new understanding of these desert societies, from the time well

before Abraham. *Avner Goren* is a contemporary Jewish archaeologist who specialised in the Sinai until 1982, when Israel returned that territory to the Egyptians. He founded the Museum of Bedouin Culture, (information from "*Biblical Archaeology Review Magazine*").

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6. THE CROSSING - WITH THE GUIDING ANGEL

The bell camel, easily guided by Wisdom from above, found each well station amid the frightful confusion of sandstone - grotesque boulders towering in massive formation above them, - and so it was never an easy path. Bleached skeletons of camel and human would have been then strewn on their path. The dune ridges, ruffled by the wind, produced a sand that whirled in the air and around there faces, and in their eyes. They wrapped their heads, and tried not to look. Fiery pillars, small cyclones, in which whirling dust turned flame coloured by the sun, led them on. As long as the fiery pillars kept on, the dust *abubu*, thankfully did not follow, to parch their water skins. The leaders kept up with the fiery pillars that were moving on ahead, leading them on. Fiery pillars had moved in the opposite direction hundreds of years later, when they led God's people out of Egypt. Abraham would have followed the pillars when he went down into Egypt many years before, and when he came out. Joseph may not realise that this is a well known patriarchal path.

Their water skins saved them, for the **Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company** always planned well. (Even today we must carry loads of water). They were not parched, though everything else was. The nine day journey came to an end, and they were out of danger. They had escaped from the desert horror. Pity the Egyptian soldiers who manned the forts along the way. They had passed four Egyptian forts since Canaan and just here there were scattered five more. The gates of Egypt were heavily defended.

The region before them was colonised and administered by Egypt, and the little caravan moved on past the frontier stations, until they came to the barrier, or Sovereign Wall, as it was known, right on the brink of the River Nile.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 1***)

Comment:

The great wall, connecting all the canals and lakes, of the Delta of the still great River Nile, had been built across the neck of land, between the Great and Little Bitter Lakes as a protection against the savages and sand dwellers who thought to drive their cattle upon the Pharaoh's soil. It was a menacing precaution and defence, a mighty barrier. It had to be surmounted, passed through, each time the traders went in and out of Egypt, from the East. There was a floating bridge, in the middle of the great wall, with bronze wing gates. Two storey forts rose atop the wall, strong against persistent siege, bristling with defence ledges, battlements, constantly on alert. The fort of Thel was a powerful offence, constructed by the refined and fortunate, and hitherto vulnerable land of Egypt, against the poverty and rapine and necessity of those who lived to the East. It is to this day a gateway into Egypt. A huge figure of a bare necked vulture was graven deep into the masonry and painted glaring colours.

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(See end chapter note for ***Digression 2***)

7. THE MIDIANITE/ISHMAELITE TRADING COMPANY ENTERS EGYPT

The old man, the head of this firm, who passed this way maybe every two years, knew the routine. He held a valuable letter, a scroll of polished goatskin, on which, in Canaanitish script, a friend, a businessman in Gilead, had hand written to another business friend, in Djanet, in the Delta. Of course this caravan would move further south, up the Nile, but the letter would serve its purpose at the gate, and no one would question them. The letter proved that they were traders, and not looters.

The wise old man instructed the party to clean themselves, wash their ears, put oil on their hair and paint their eyes, for their dusty misery and lack of elegance made them look suspicious. The troop leader must stamp the certificate at this point of entry, and so he did. The passport was tucked away, and the soldiers of Thel swung open the bronze wing gates, that gave the Ishmaelites access to the floating bridge, and they entered Egypt.

Least among them,

Noted by none,

Named by no name,

Joseph, son of Jacob,

Dreamer,

Came into Egypt.

8. THE HISTORY OF IT ALL - JOSEPH NAMED BY NONE

Comment:

For all the records, historical and otherwise available, there is no mention of one, Joseph, son of Jacob, passing into Egypt. We can only say the historicity of the *Scriptural* recordings of the movements into and out of Egypt are authentic, so that the addition of the characters only is the doubting point for some. There is some small internal evidence, when we know the outside historical evidence, like the derogatory reference of Potiphar's Egyptian wife to Joseph as a "*Hebrew*", and the unusual acceptance of the Hebrews by a ruling power, known to be sympathetic to them, in a tiny window of history. However, Joseph is still "*named by none*", and that is a continuous point of discussion in magazines like "*Biblical Archaeology Review*", and "*Diggings*", where the search goes on for confirmation. We need to realise that the effective description of a culture does not in fact establish the *Biblical* record as authentic, but then again it does not deny it either. Archaeology does not prove the *Bible* true.

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9. THE STORY WITHIN THE SAGA - JOSEPH'S TOLDOTH WITHIN JACOB'S TOLDOTH

Before we begin to study the narrative with the toldoths, or histories, there are some overall points to consider.

In theory Joseph is not a patriarch, but is one of the eponymic fathers of the twelve tribes, which began in the crucible of the broken family structures, and the resulting familial strife of Jacob's twelve sons. The period of the four fathers though is referred to in scholarly circles as "*The Period of the Patriarchs*". The critical role of the promise theme, with its propensity for a great number of descendants to witness to God's name, depends on the success of Joseph in Egypt, but the overlaying and somewhat unifying theme is always strife in the family, as it had been in

Isaac's and Abraham's family. Joseph is really the secondary story, or a story within a story, for it is bound into the saga of the patriarch Jacob. We are told in *Genesis 37:1* that Jacob "*dwelt in the land of … Canaan*" and in *Genesis 47:27,* that he "*dwelt in the land of Egypt*". Here is a literary device enveloping the Joseph story in eleven chapters. This Joseph story, as controlled by the narrator, leads us through the four great Joseph Egyptian themes of

Firstly, Potiphar's house,

Secondly, the prison,

Thirdly, the royal court and

Fourthly, the family in Goshen.

We are led by the narrator in surprising directions, where we might think

1. Guilt of selling a family member should be punished,

2. Yet it is not. *(Deuteronomy 24:7* later makes provision for such punishment).

3. Next, traps are set and sprung, and tension builds,

4. But the brothers are dismayed at the revelations.

***5.* They expect the worst,**

***6.* And receive the best.**

Seemingly reconciliation is effected, but still in the end one is left to wonder whether the strife ever did fade, or whether the reconciliation is a sham from beginning to end, and only deceivingly affected to gain asylum in Egypt. Esau had fallen on Jacob's neck, *Genesis 33:4,* as Joseph fell on Benjamin's neck, *Genesis 45:14,* "*and kissed all his brethren*". The reconciliation contrasts with the negative of *Genesis 37:4*. Yes, we can say that there is no reconciliation in Joseph's sporting with his brothers, teasing them, in Egypt. There are arguments to defend that. However his complete exoneration of them, averring that his move to Egypt was for the good of the coming generations, where not only his immediate family, but **all** nations can eat of the bread of God, is more than they can expect. The transportation to Egypt represents the reconciliation of this family broken apart by strife, and we accept it as that, and put our doubts aside. Joseph's integrity as an administrator facilitates the reconciliation, even in the face of **their** doubts at the death of their father, and their need for reassurance. It moves the family from strife and contention to prospects for the future, linking them to the intimacy of the Garden of Eden, before that strife, and before the strife of the Flood, and before the strife that was the Tower of Babel. They are returned, by Joseph, to God. The bond about the removal from Egypt of Joseph's bones and the fulfilling of that promise expands the story, with its reconciliation, into the future.

Consider:

* Will a reconciliation restore and keep that intimacy of God's people in the next generation?

* Do the negatives in the Joseph story, indeed in the whole of the patriarchal stories, anticipate the negatives in the Moses and Exodus stories?

* Is it because of negativism and rebellion that these people are never able to get it all together, and become what God wanted them to be, that is, missionaries for Him to the world so that all nations may worship Him?

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The reconciliation wrought by Joseph, is one of the important keys to the whole Pentateuch story. The story is of a common hope and a future union, where the stories of the tribes of Joseph's two sons are ranged against the stories of the other tribes, and it forms a bridge between the Genesis and Exodus records. Here at the end of the Genesis story, in Egypt, the mission mandate is set to spring into action as the children of the patriarchs are led out of Egypt, to worship God. This was the request of Moses to Pharaoh, to let YHWH's people go "*so that we may worship Him*", *Exodus 5:1-3*. The request was preceded by *Exodus 3:15*, where God explains to Moses about His people, "*this is my name forever and this is my memorial unto all generations*". This implies, because of the covenant with Abraham, that "*in thee all families of the earth will be blessed*", that at last all nations will come and worship Him, because of the memorial that these people will become. The fact that they failed to do this does not obviate the covenant, for God, later, finds another way.

CONCLUSION:

Joseph was the saviour for all Israel, to fulfil the covenant that God had set up with Abraham. That does not detract from His son the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the ultimate Saviour for the entire world. He **had** been in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world for God in his foreknowledge knew that man with his free will would chose sin. This servant, Joseph, was only a shadow of the true saviour.

Digression 1:

Winston Churchill in his *History of the English Speaking Peoples,* in his discussion of the North African Campaign of Second World War, said of this river, that the Nile was the life blood of the lands through which it flowed. It has been the cause of war, and it has also been the means by which the wars have been fought. It has been the end to which the contestants have aimed. The armies camp beside, or in front of its bank each night, knowing that the stream is unfordable, and so they are safe. They offer or accept battle each day, but at night they are refreshed. To its brink morning and evening long lines of camels, horses, mules, and slaughter cattle hurry eagerly to refresh themselves. Emir and Dervish officer and every soldier, "*friend or foe, kneel alike to this god of ancient Egypt, and draw each day their daily water*" in goat skin, or canteen, or pail. Without the river none would have started their journey. Without it none could have continued their journey. Without it none could have ever returned from whence they went. The Nile River from its source is 6,632 kilometres long.

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Digression 2:

There is a present day description of Nepal.

"*This is the land of gods, and here this service is the most common single activity, whereas in other regions, work and human pleasure, the pursuit of human satisfactions and greed, gears the place of all activity. Here worship takes precedence. Here more food is given to the gods*

than to humans, and although there is always a food shortage in the valleys, the cows and the bulls are fat, and the children go hungry. Here religion is not only an integral part of life; it is the first and foremost energy consumer. All human doing is subordinated to divine interpretation, implicit in all actions. Birth, copulation and death are not the cycle of animals and humans, but the material manifestations of a divine eternal cycle of which all happenings in the universe are a reflection. The reflection of these three functions is portrayed in the images that adorn the temples, every building, every house, any taxi and any wall. And it all has meaning beyond human meaning. Nepal today is already touched by modern progress, and is gradually being invaded by twentieth century strivings, to leap into ***the eleventh century***" Travel brochure, *Nepal, 1988*

Well, so it is, and we are culturally uncomfortable as a guest in that land. There are books by *Thomas Hale* and his wife, present day missionaries in Nepal, describing everyday life there, and the struggles to turn the Nepalese to God. This description of Nepal almost fits Egypt, as we may imagine it, as Joseph would have seen it. Everything, there also, was a sacrament to a god. But Joseph did not intend to convert them, as God had another intention.

CHAPTER 2

IN AND AROUND EGYPT - 18TH CENTURY BC

"***And Israel dwelt in the land of Goshen", Genesis 47:27.***

FOCUS:

The intent of this chapter is to focus our minds on the cities of Lower Egypt as Joseph travels to Potiphar's house, ***Genesis 39:1***. It was the Jacob family's first experience of Goshen, which became their permanent dwelling place, and where "*they were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty", Exodus 1:7*

It needs to be said that this chapter is mostly *"Comment"* on the cities that Joseph encountered as he travelled south in the land of Egypt, so it will not be noted as such.

1. PRESERVATION OF THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDS

There are currently available papyrus records of life in Egypt from 3,000 BC, which show a highly sophisticated and culturally civilised lifestyle there. So to describe the life of the people in **1727 BC, a likely date of the sale of Joseph into Egypt**, *(The Companion Bible, "Chronological Chart, Appendix 50")*, is comparatively easy. Other historians place the Hyksos at 1650 BC. This is a puzzle, for either these dates are wrong by 100 years, or everything must move forward 100 years, or the Hyksos were not ruling when Jacob en famille, came down into Egypt. If they were not ruling then the puzzle is how to explain the sympathetic treatment of the Israelites. However, dates are not that important in these studies, rather the sequence of major events. Even the sequence of minor events in *Scripture,* are sometimes placed to remove them from disturbing the main emphasis, as has been noted.

Egypt, because they kept papyrus records, preserving them well, has an abundance of historical data available. There is still much more to be uncovered and the historians and the archaeologists feel that those records will double in our time, as more is uncovered. It is like *Bible* research, it is possible to greatly enhance our understanding of those times, if only we will use what is available for us.

Lists of one large household in 1740 BC (when Joseph was a baby) records 79 domestic servants, among them Asiatics with Sumerian names, but the main source of information, are tombs, as ideal storage conditions. Tombs contain many furnishings for the comfort of the dead and if the tomb was a child's we learn that dolls, tops, leather balls, board games with stuffed dice were play toys of Egyptian children. Pieces of painted linen shrouds are still in evidence.

It is a privilege to see "*Ginger*" (for the colour of his hair), preserved in a sand pit since 5000 BC, at Gebeleis, in Upper Egypt, (reclining in a foetal position), in the British Museum, with skin sinews, bone fragments, and hair.

While many Asiatics spent their time in Egypt in humble fashion, they are also known to have reached high office as Joseph did, when he went down into Egypt. The Hyksos Pharaohs (Semitics) had power at this time, though they were not popular, understandably, with the indigenous Egyptians.

There are four intact skeletons of horses, introduced to Egypt by the Hyksos invaders about 1750 BC, at the time of Jacob's marriages in Haran. They were related to the Hittites, of Asia Minor, they eventually ruled in Egypt at the time of Joseph's entering in, for about 180 years until the indigenous rulers based in the southern capital of Thebes, defeated them, and drove them out at about the time of Moses birth 1570 BC**.** After that, the inhabitants of the land of Goshen, the Israelites, also staged an uprising, to be released out of Egypt, under Moses. This is probably how the Moses Pharaoh "*knew not Joseph*" for he was not a sympathetic Hyksos, and why the Israelites, in Goshen, were treated less sympathetically and indeed with great hardship.

Thomas Mann in "*Joseph and His Brothers*" calls Egypt ***"Sheol"*** and for Joseph it was, though it was not apparent right now on that journey down. Egypt was the pit again, and in the end everyone in his family went down into the pit.

2. HOSPITABLE GOSHEN - HOME FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

But here, where Joseph arrived with the caravan, it was Goshen - the eastern part of the Delta, and fertile. The land of Goshen was the future crucible for the post Joseph generational mix, that were the bulk of the two million mixed multitude, that came out of Egypt, over two hundred years later. This Joseph now 18 years old, died in Egypt, at the age of 110 years, but was never buried there. His bones were carried to the Promised Land with this multitude, 144 years later, under their great eighty year old leader, Moses, to be buried at Shechem. Moses was born 64 years after Joseph's death, and it was from Goshen that they began their journey.

"*In the days of Abram, Canaan was the highway to Egypt, and so large an immigration of men of the Semitic stock found their way thither, that they overspread the whole delta, and finally under the name of the Hyksos, made themselves masters of the throne of the Pharaohs, and retained their supremacy for several centuries*", is a comment from *Ellicott*.

While the Hyksos ruled, the migration of the patriarchs in and out of Egypt was undisturbed by the bitter power struggles among the wealthy aristocratic southern Egyptian families. This did not hold true for the Israelites under "*the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph*". The Pharaohs began the political consolidation of Egypt, about 3000 BC and during the twenty nine dynasties that followed their spiritual supremacy was established. They were God Kings.

Just inside the gates of Egypt was fertile grassland, good pasture land, a great place for sheep and shepherds, away from the main cities of Egypt. Later when the sympathetic Hyksos were

overruled and banished, the Egyptians still thought it a good place to banish these shepherds, so Goshen suited everyone.

3. THE MARSHES OF PER SOPD

Our little caravan reached Per Sopd via the causeways that spanned the little canals and water courses, where all manner of long legged birds, storks and ibises stood in the chocked streams, straining for their dinner. Wonderful information about the Nile is contained in *Time-Life History of the World, 3000-1500 BC*. The mounds beside the canals were formerly called turtle backs, the soil of which had been laid down by millennia of sludge washed down the Nile, in regular supply for unlike the Euphrates, the Nile was regularly flooded yearly, with a passage of water, 6,632 kilometres long, from the source, from streams in mid Africa and Ethiopia. This regularity encouraged agricultural planning and building projects, and in the culture a great sense of harmony. Agricultural taxes were levied according to how much benefit a farmer received from the flood; a "*good Nile*" was a flood level of eight metres. Duck ponds surrounded the villages and the cone shaped clay roofs of their houses and storehouses dotted the ditches and dykes. The geese flew over the monotonous marshland - and Joseph thought of home where **his** pasture land had not been so lush and well watered. The shepherds here sheltered from the drizzling rain by stretching papyrus mats above their crooks, and they squatted underneath with the jackal eared dogs. They looked out over the smooth water and watched a flotilla of boats floating eastward taking advantage of the breeze - monstrously tall sails on a swaying mast - water traders.

It was south our friends went, ***"down",*** but really ***"up",*** that is against the flow of the river - to Pharaoh's palace.

4. THE CATS OF PER BASTET

But wait, nearby was Per Bastet - the city of cats.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 1***)

As our "*stranger*" moves "*up*" Egypt, the inhabitants of the next town would laugh and say, as they did of all the tourists who came south, "*You came from Per Bastet, didn't you?*", for they smelt of it.

At Per Bastet, there were cats everywhere, black, white, any colour, any shape, and any size, in the temples, where they were offered the hateful herb among the worshippers in the court. They were stealthy, inquisitive, playful, frisky, persistently charming as is their habit, snoozing, purring in the streets, in the shops, in private houses, on the walls - everywhere. Yet they are always represented as upright sitting cats. They were never gods by themselves, but co ruling gods with other more significant deities. Bastet was the lioness (or cat) headed goddess of war. Lions were prominent in the great houses, but cats represented the poor man's lion, and were available as pets. Other domestic animals were dogs, baboons, monkeys, crocodiles, sheep and goats, and oxen.

The reputation for gaiety among the people of this town suited the cats, with the drunken feasting and plenty of scraps to eat. The cats approved of the jolly nature of the inhabitants, and of all the tens of thousands that came down river, by land or water, clapping, dancing and singing, whistling, rattling whizzers, and generally behaving with roguish abandon, to worship in the temples of Per Bastet.

The cats enjoyed the three day feasts, with sacrifices and dancing to the dull rolling of drums, always around the street fairs that accompanied these celebrations. Story telling, juggling, snake charming, etcetera, all added to the excitement. The consumption of so much grape wine lulled everyone in their tents, into a great stupor. The human bawling, an inseparable feature of these primitive feasts, sounded not much different from the caterwauling of the cats.

Joseph, not affected by this animal worship, peculiar to Egypt at this time, would have been disappointed to learn that his descendants stooped to worship a golden calf, one of the Egyptian gods, when they left this land, taking animal worship with them, much to Moses' and God's displeasure.

Today, the archaeologists are discovering the cat tombs at this place. Rows upon rows of mummified cats have been found under the earth, and in the caverns that acted as their burial grounds. Like the Egyptian human mummified remains in the British Museum, that display so much detail about the bodies, their hair, their sinews, the skin details about them and their clothes, so these remains display their fur, and in some cases, it is possible to tell what colour the fur was, and so many other details about the cats. Cat mummies accompanied the human mummies displayed recently at the *Australian Museum* in Sydney, as part of the "*Life and Death under the Pharaohs*" exhibition. With protection and encouragement, the cats multiplied, and by the time per Bastet was finished the cat population had indeed been trillions. There was a lucrative priestly trade selling special cats for worship.

Cats and kittens here, and there, and everywhere. This was Per Bastet; it would be enough to make Joseph twitch.

Today in India, in Rajasthan there is a Hindu Temple. The priests there worship the rat, and after death people hope to come back as a rat. Man has worshipped animals for a long time.

Perhaps the worship of animals had evolved from the known practice of placing animals on altars as part of YHWH's worship. In time as animals were seen to come and carry off the animal sacrifice and the people have seen the animal as representing YHWH, or a deity. In Per Bastet it was cats.

5. THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF ON

The Ishmaelites move on, troubled not about time, generally in the right direction, south, and came to On.

On was the largest place that Joseph had ever seen, and it seemed to be built chiefly of gold. They continued trading as they went. At the well curb, they watched the muddy fluid from the river, being drawn up in the leather bottle, tied to the wooden arm, supported on a fulcrum, with a lump of clay attached to the other end to balance it. It was called a "*shaduf*", The water was poured into the channels and ditches, that it may nurture the corn, against the coming of Pharaoh's scribes, who acted as tax gatherers for the mighty king. The corn was sent to the great granaries of Egypt and made the country prosperous. This was the hated Egyptian house of bondage known by Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

The Ishmaelites traded their lamps and resin for necklaces, head rests (made of metal) and the linen, that the peasant women made out of the field of flax, on which they were also taxed. So much of everything they grew and made, was taken in tax, and Egypt grew wealthy - all in God's plan.

Joseph breathed this vital air, as they traded their way along, but it was not an entirely foreign scene to him. Pharaoh's campaigns had passed up and down through the Jordan valley, and left many relics of passage and transit. The Hyksos Egyptian rule, (probably beginning before Joseph) may have, at one time, extended as far north west as Joppa, in Canaan.

With this Egyptian influence from the south west, and the Babylonian plain influx, and influences from the Arabian south east, Joseph was quite cosmopolitan in outlook. He had a multicultural perspective, rather like Sydneysiders do, as opposed to folk in other Australian cities.

Apart from the considerable difference, in the amount of blessing accorded to Joseph, and his family, God had not only been a particular advantage to that family, but worked in worldly spheres, showering blessing and cursings on all He controlled, so bringing further blessings on the family.

Abraham, his great grandfather, had discussed this with the man Melchizedek, about the degree of unity between them in their worship of God. So Joseph understood discussions of that sort when, at this time, the priests of On had made pronouncements on the relationship of their sacred bull, Merwer, to the Dweller on the horizon. It is foreign thinking for us to discuss how we link our worship of God, with animal worship, but everyone here talked about it, and every transaction was accompanied by a discussion of the relationship between the two, God, and god, and how others in far off lands reconciled their worship.

On (Heliopolis), situated at the apex of the triangle, at the converging of the rivers, was a city thousands of years old, at this time of Joseph's coming. It was the university town of ancient Egypt, full of learning. It was the dwelling of the Sun, morning Kheper, midday Re, and Atum in the evening. "*He opens his eyes and light arises, he closes his eyes and darkness comes*" said the priests about their deity.

6. ON, THE CITY OF JOSEPH'S FUTURE IN LAWS

Joseph would not have remotely considered that he might one day be connected to this great city, for he later married, Asenath, the daughter of Poti-pherah, the priest of On. Because of Joseph's future intimate connection here, it is important to know about the experiences he may have had here.

On, with its great temples of the sun, was overlooked by a huge obelisk, made of highly polished flame coloured granite. Atop was a gilded four sided cap. The obelisk here, when Joseph saw it, was already ancient. It's no wonder modern day Egyptians are aghast that their statues and monuments and obelisks were carried away, and grace the museums of the world. Still, they hardly cared for them themselves. They fit inside the great halls of those museums with great difficulty, and one stands in awe at the mighty gates and monuments housed in just one building in London - the British Museum.

7. GOLD, GOLD, GOLD

As well as being the largest city that Joseph had ever seen, it was also city unlike any that he had ever seen, indeed it was unlike any other Egyptian city. The temple made of gilded bricks was unlike any other Egyptian building. This Sun Temple of Ra was destroyed by the Persians, but the ruins are still a remarkable sight. The whole city glistened with gold - like the sun. Its citizens had inflamed and weepy eyes, such was the glare, no sunnies in On, but they drew their hoods, or mantles, to protect themselves. The roof of its ring wall was gold, and golden rays darted

everywhere, such as we see when the sun catches a piece of our jewellery. This happened all day, every day, everywhere outside, and even inside, where the suns rays penetrated.

The rooves of the dwellings, from the Nile mud bricks huts of the poor, to the dwellings of the rich, all had an emblem of some sort, reaching up to the sun, a serpent, a shield, a snaky spiral, a shepherd's crook, a winged disk, a hooked wheel, an axe, a scarab, a golden ball, an apple, an eagle, lions, sphinx, bulls, goats, eagles, falcons, sparrows hawks, anything made of gold, on the roof on **every** roof. Every building, private or public, everywhere was the province of the sun, and kissed daily, all day long by it. It was the precinct of the blinking, for every eye was kissed by it, and every skin was shiny, with kisses by the golden rays, and - probably cancerous. Joseph and his friends were more than kissed by the sun, no wonder they wrapped their heads in cotton, like the people around them.

Not only was it so outwardly illuminated, but it was inward as well. The city was concerned with wisdom, a doctrinal scientific wisdom, and discussed the mysteries of the universe and time and space, while all of it, of course, had to do with the worship they made. So here in On, there were more lessons for Joseph to be learned, if only by listening.

The ancient city, built at the triangle apex of the Delta was formed with its houses and streets like an equilateral triangle. Temple courts extended as far as the middle of this triangular city, and at the temple gates, there were banners and passages painted with delightful representations of the seasonal activities on the land, and their fruits. In front of the gates was an open tree planted square, where our Ishmaelites spent all day with the weak eyed people of On. The servants of the god, their eyes running from so much sun gazing, came out too, to do business with this gathering of worldly traders, for they brought news and communications of all sorts from the eastern peoples. Joseph listened, as the old man discussed, with wisdom, the problems of time and space, how they measured time, and divided the calendar, for it was them, or at least their forebears, who had invented the sundial. The priests dressed in their short priestly garments, earnestly propounded their own propaganda, over who was the oldest and most revered Egyptian god, for they had a distinct bias. The Gnostic heresy proponents of 100 BC, and those who surfaced again in the *New Testament* ecclesias, tried to link their beliefs back to this ancient "*wisdom*", where knowledge was the most important attribute.

There has been a recent uncovering of some scrolls, at an Egyptian town, south on the Nile, called Nag Hammadi. Sand is a wonderful preserver, and often, when blown away, even to this day, unexpected finds occur. This discovery explains more about the Gnostics. Amongst the finds there are shopping lists, and lists and descriptions of household members. The Egyptians were fanatical about lists, and Joseph had been trained in the art also. There is, as well, a resume of the Gnostic doctrines, in a letter written to someone here, from someone who lived in Colosse, at the time of Paul's writing to Timothy, at nearby Ephesus. The Gnostics were causing no little trouble in the new ecclesias, and Paul denounced them. "*Adam **was** first formed, then Eve*", he said, *1Timothy 2:13*, for the Gnostics, especially the Gnostic women, had other ideas. Some Gnostics believed that God formed women first, that is, "*wisdom*", and that they were much more important than men, being God's partner. Paul advised Timothy to silence them, and later to withdraw from those evil ones, who disputed perversely about these dangerous doctrines. This research on Gnosticism is now readily available in the *Bible* bookshops.

The Gnostics present in the first century ecclesias, did not believe in the bodily presence of Jesus. They believed in spirit beings. The Gnostics are here today, and hold regular meetings in the suburbs of Sydney. And - they were in Egypt then, and Joseph heard their perversity.

These priests encouraged the traders to approach the alabaster table and offer doves, bread, fruit, and/or flowers according to their ability to pay. The fatherly head priest sat on a golden chair, mild, and smiling, at the foot of the great obelisk, a golden cap covering his bald pate with its aureole of white hair, and white robe flowing about him, a winged sun's disk at his back. Gold and white. It really was a stunning sight, and Joseph watched it all. Little wonder that the wise and wealthy laughed at the cat people of Per Bastet.

8. THE LAND OF THE PYRAMIDS AND SPHINX

And then the Ishmaelites bent their heads and stepped further into Egypt - up the Nile. Joseph noticed that these were even more religious peoples. This all pervading spirit of Egypt, even on the dung roofed and mud brick dwellings, half hidden among the towering date palms, were stamped with the form and symbols of gods, conditioning the picture.

The reeds and mud of the irrigation canals made passage easy upon the roads skirting the corn and barley fields, the desert not far away. He saw the men standing on little platforms in the fields employed to shoo away the birds, slingers, who drove the birds away, with stones in slings. Cattle and sheep were pastured, as well, upon these blessing zones, that lay between desert and desert. Vultures and white falcons soared above. The causeways among the reservoirs and groves were busy with people and wagons drawn by oxen and donkeys carrying ducks and fish to market.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 2***)

The people here, Joseph saw, were lean, reddish, flat bellied folk, square shouldered, inoffensive, jovial people, with their face bones projecting behind their ears, noses little and broad. They led frugal and harsh lives, but they often wore a blossom behind their ear, or stuck one in their aprons, worn long at the front, for carrying burdens, and high at the back. Their hair was smooth and cut straight off around under the ear lobes.

The simple people here living on the Nile, loved to see tourists, and laughed, not unkindly, at them. Joseph strained, listening to them, and tried to speak with them in their idiom. The Ishmaelites travelled and traded along this narrow strip of land - Libya to the west, and Arabia to the east.

Near the cities, and around the palaces, Joseph saw the rich and powerful. They were easy to distinguish from the poor and simple. Wealthy women often wore elaborate wigs, with braided additions, of human hair, looped around the head, elaborately plaited and scented, especially for public occasions. But men as well as women decorated themselves quite elaborately for baldness was considered a shame, and grey hair was covered as well. Face paint was first used to ward off sunburn, but later became fashionable for decoration. Jewellery in silver, gold, polished stones, enamel, alabaster, glass (not yet made by blowing though), comprised their anklets, bracelets, necklaces, earrings. Joseph had seen jewellery, but never as profuse as this, worn on every digit and every limb.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 3***)

7. THE PYRAMIDS

As soon as Joseph saw the pyramids he would be mindful of the hardness of the work. He would know it was all too much for human beings, and yet the work was done by the ancestors of these same folk, who lived there now. These children of Kempt had performed the task, with

their bleeding hands, and panting hearts, and lolling tongues. **They** were the wonder of it all, not the pyramids. They performed it for the sun, for they worshipped the sun, and the wisdom she gave them. It is easy to see how the Gnostics could worship wisdom, like these folk, and turn it into female, and then themselves, as the partners of God. Even the Hebrew in the *Old Testament* portrays wisdom as female, *Proverbs 8:1, 9:1,* and we need care to understand the absence of a neuter gender, does not give us license to create male or female attributes for every circumstance. These great piles of death were more monuments to the thousands that died there, more than to the kings buried there. They really were cursed tombs. They stood there, at once, sun monument, and sun tomb. Their vast triangular surfaces polished, and glittering to the apex, adjusted to the four quarters of the heavens. For ten years the people dragged and chiselled, and for twenty years they built and gave away their time and their lives, and as much tax as could be extorted from them. And with all this labour they created this landscape of stone that Joseph viewed around him.

Even now Joseph noted that the people were terrified of the god king Khufu, for they knew that he required more than the superhuman effort they gave. The temples of the dead that leaned against the great pyramids were already crumbling to dust. The people so long ago in Joseph's day watched the ravages of the desert on the tombs, and comforted themselves with the thought that the pyramids were invincible, and would never crumble. Today, in AD 1999, with the encroaching of the city, Cairo, the exhaust fumes of Egypt's cars are taking their toll, and now **the pyramids are beginning to crumble.** Like Stonehenge in England, built about the same time, and monuments in Greece, people will be fenced away, because people of this century, like none before, have caused too much damage.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 4***)

Joseph, having lived within the Baal worshipping cult of the Canaanites, was familiar with controversial religious practices, but nothing would have prepared him for the monstrous rituals and beliefs of Egypt. We wonder how uncomfortable Joseph felt with all this god worship, living as he did in the glare of the Egyptian deities, with all the magic that entailed.

8. THE SPHINX

Nearby is the Sphinx, with it's never solved riddle, enigmatic, and the sand mounts up upon it, its face already disfigured. "*What does it mean?*" Joseph asked himself. The sand blew upon it as he passed by, for desert sand is never still, but the question remains the same.

The Sphinx was uncovered in the 19th century, for then only its head was visible. One paw the size of three houses, (to give an idea of its size) still stands as support for the monster in its regal head dress. Still it is not as big as the pyramids at Giza. It gazes towards the east. Joseph gazes into the eye, eye to eye with the forbidden.

The Sphinx bids him come and worship, but Joseph holds with the Father, and answers, *"How shall commit a deed, and sin against God?"* and is not enticed. Joseph travelling the road to Egypt, with its enticing sounds and sights and smells, practises at every turn to be a servant of God, *and is never enticed*.

9. THE CONFUSION OF MEMPI

Along the west bank of the Nile on their right as they faced south - was Mempi. Above it towered the heights, where stone was quarried and where the city buried its dead. 100,000 souls lived in this confusion of narrow winding streets, each one sloping towards their centres where waste

water ran into a drain. Reeking of sewage, and seething with trade, it had smiling lush gardened villas for the rich, elegant and distinct, and dirty brick compounds for the poor and the traders. This is the caravanserai where our traders led their group, and the Ishmaelites lived here for a time. It was crammed with specimens from all sides of the human race. Blind beggars played musical instruments, barbers shaved, cobblers cobbled, (making sandals and many leather goods); potters potted, and turned their vessels.

Great wagons rolled along the streets, steeds crowned with feathers, heralded by panting runners calling "*Abrek*" - "*Take care*". The wheels used to be solid, but now they were spoked.

Mempi, or Memfe, or Noph, is now Memphis, and is on the opposite bank to Cairo. Mempi had been the royal city in the time of the pyramids, when it was the end of the first ever trading route, and now in Joseph's time, the mood of the superseded and outmoded settled upon the people here, and they laughed in pride at their former glory. No wonder we can account for so many name changes, if it is so very old. It was like Per Sopd. The northern Egyptian glory had faded in favour of the south, except for On, of course, where the gold still gloriously glittered.

CONCLUSION:

It was all a confusion to Joseph, he had learned so much on the journey, but God would soon make it plain and clear.

Digression 1:

Cats are here,

And cats are there,

And cats and kittens are everywhere,

"***Hundreds of cats,***

Thousands of cats,

Millions and

Billions and

Trillions of cats."

The children's story, "*Millions of Cats*" *by Wanda Gag*, with its repeating metrical pattern, has delighted teachers and children alike, since 1929, now seems not so much like fantasy, and full of magic, but could have been quite possible, in Per Bastet. Gag's cats lived on grass and water, and there was plenty of that available in Per Bastet.

The smell pervaded everything - it flavoured the food, it lingered in the garments. Some of us may remember the comic strip, "*Felix the Cat*", who went berserk every time he was lured with catnip. Catnip, available in the grasslands here in Egypt, is the cat's favourite herb. It is offensive to anybody else - it can turn a person's stomach, and it makes a stranger highly identifiable.

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Digression 2:

In the 20th century a series of six cataracts, formed the great dam complex, constructed across the upper Nile, at Aswan, and further south, to service the great cities of Egypt. So much of the beautiful upper and lower river valley of the Nile then lost the rich verdant lush plains and water courses. The ebb and flow of the seasonal wet was destroyed and with it the people and their crops that for millenniums had been there. The anchovy industry, on the Nile Delta much further north, has been destroyed, for the ebb and flow is no more. Joseph saw it, - we cannot now. We destroyed it, like so much of the earth that we have destroyed this century. The industrial revolution has brought us so much advantage, at great cost.

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Digression 3:

There are many pyramids in Egypt (about 80), from metre high constructions, poor, working men's graves, to massive constructions, for kings, that puzzle us about their construction. Some were step pyramids, and they now began to appear to these travellers. Joseph saw the great pyramids at Giza (near present day Cairo), and with his wise and understanding heart, knew of the sweat of the slave. He knew that they were lashed and coughing, under the weight of those huge stones, brought from the Arabian quarries, across the River - big granite slabs, piled into a triangular shape to sit on a tiny chamber where the king and god lay (with a sprig of mimosa on his heart). Men fell and died there, their tongues hanging out, with the super human effort of it all. People paid their taxes, often, with labour on the great state enterprises, and pyramids like these cost so much in human terms. These mighty structures were built, sometime well before the time of Abraham, and were 1000 years old when Joseph saw them. Even now we don't know how it was done, except that computers are now helping to unravel the story. They say the architects, (with their plans) were buried inside them. Joseph would look at the awesome, accursed, symmetrical elevations, composed of triangular surfaces, which met at the base in four square corners, and ran together to a point at the top. Today people sit under pyramid shapes to "*enrich*" themselves, with an energy supposedly encompassed in these converging triangles. They do it for inspiration, and may rig up something in their homes. But now special places are set aside, in some Australian cities, for such activities, where pyramids of glass are constructed.

In these last few years, as Cairo engineers have rebuilt their drainage system, they have uncovered the towns where these wondrous poor workers lived and the tombs where they were buried. Over six hundred multiple body tombs, have been discovered. Not being royal they are not mummified, but buried carefully, with their heads to the north and facing east, in the foetal position. Their bodies show many fractures, properly set, so they were probably splinted, but there are terrible signs of arthritis in the lower back and the knees. They are young, in their thirties or early forties, and show the signs of hard physical labour, arthritis and calloused hands and feet. We know that hard physical work reduces the death age, for it inhibits intellectual and physical development, and makes people vulnerable to infectious diseases and illnesses, (see the World Health reports on the poor in countries, such as India).

At Giza beside *The Great Pyramid*, commissioned about 2575 BC to house the remains of a fourth dynasty Pharaoh, Khufu, (known later to the Greeks as "*Cheops*"), excavators have now uncovered boat pits on three sides, with unassembled wooden life-size boats, bundles of wood. These boats were intended for funeral boats and could have plied the waters of the River Nile, - information from *Diggings Magazine, January 1999.* He reigned for 23 years.

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Digression 4

The "*Book of the Dead*" is a collection of 200 magical spells, or tomb texts, which enable the dead to overcome death, and take the passage to the afterlife. After dying the people had to pass tests, to be accepted into the afterlife. Firstly they had to stand before a large number of the deities, each of whom assessed a different sin. Then their heart was weighed on scales against the feather of truth. If they passed they could move forward into the afterlife. The whole of Egyptian life was lived in the shadow of these deities who pervaded every day activities, in a most complicated fashion. There is no civilisation today that equals it for religion and practice, but countries like Nepal can give us some ideas.

CHAPTER 3

EGYPT - HOST TO GOD'S PRECIOUS CHILD

"***In that day … the Lord shall smite and heal Egypt", Isaiah 19:19 and 22.***

FOCUS:

The wickedness of Egypt would be punished, but their sanctuary for God loved people would be rewarded. Egypt had been host to God's loved children before this time, but now a precious child has arrived, "*sold into Egypt*", ***Genesis 37:36***.

1. THE WICKEDNESS OF EGYPT

Thomas Mann and others have well fleshed out our story of Joseph travelling in this wilderness of sin, and given us more understanding of how it was for him, and consequently a greater respect for his rejection of it all. It vividly re create**s** the sights and sounds of the environment and the atmosphere in which Joseph finds himself and this chapter is mostly a ***"Comment"*** upon that theme**.**

Joseph, with God's help, was able to cope with the enormous changes, and to resist pressures to conform. "*Thou shalt make to thyself no graven image*" was graven on his heart, and here in Egypt graven images were everywhere. **Joseph was not enticed**.

2. BY BOAT TO NO - CITY OF THE PHARAOH

They stood crammed in the crowd, at Mempi, watching as the people called for the bull god, Hapi in the temple court. *Mann,* with an eye on the future, suggests there was a fat bellied man in sandals standing beside them, in the crowd. He had on a knee length apron of coarse linen. His short hair was smooth on his round pate, and his head was covered with a little round cap. His face was shaven. He was the baker, Bata. His wife had gone to take flowers to worship at the goddess. After considering the Ishmaelites for some time, he spoke to them. He did not pound dough, or put his head in the oven, but he employed half a dozen men, journey men and distributors who carried excellent rolls and croissants in baskets through the city, and even to one of the Pharaoh's residences. Woe to any distributor who did not cover the trays, or wave away the birds who tried to pounce on the bread to steal it, for the thought of it made him jittery, and he was known to dream about it. He was such a good baker that he was often asked to come and bake at the palace. He possessed land outside the city and grew some of his corn, but needed to buy more for his business had expanded. He would need to consult with

Pharaoh's officials about that. How much better he always felt when he had viewed the Hapi - and his "*business prospered after that experience*", he told the traders who had come from Dothan.

The Ishmaelites went to the landing place at Mempi (or Memfe, or Memphis), and procured for themselves and their wares passage on the boat "*Shining in Swiftness*", *Mann* calls it, a clumsy freighter with ample cargo space. The pilot was named Thot-nofer and had met the old man at the hostel. He knew about this honourable trading company. The river flowed down to the north but the wind blew more strongly from the north to the south, and the boat was propelled swiftly against the current. Egypt had plenty of stone, but little wood, and by now had begun foreign trade and brought in wood from Lebanon. They were skilled at boat building, but they built river boats, not sea going boats.

Life's contentment comes from the ebb and flow, the advantage with the disadvantage, from contentment and agitation. One without the other doesn't achieve a balance. It is useful to have a pot of white stones and another of black stones to remind oneself of the inevitability of the life re occurring pattern. **Joseph, living with all of it, continued under God's care, and doing His will, and was not enticed.**

The water journey passed villages and palm groves, nine days in all, along this great highway of Egypt. Nine days was a working week for Egyptians, for then they had one day rest. So they had a ten day week. There were many feast days, and holy days, so there was plenty of time for play.

Boats were sophisticated modes of transport in Egypt, and used extensively. Sometimes narrowing through the curves or widening into a lake, the river was hugely diverting, with many boats plying up and down the river, the oarsmen or sailors, calling to those on shore, trading and passing the time of these nine days. Where they found themselves, they tied up at night, and slept, and each morning they floated on. They rowed when the wind fell - the younger Ishmaelites helping, for there was only a little crew. So advantage and disadvantage brought satisfaction until they came to Amun's mountains, the heights of No. Another night went by and then they entered the city, still in the boat.

Pharaoh's famous city glittered with gold as On did, but it shimmered with rainbow colours, as well. Without going on shore they sailed along this wonderful boulevard and flowed between celestial structures of temples and palaces in gardens of delight. Colonnades, gold tipped obelisks, colossal statues, turreted gates, sphinx, and avenues with doors and flag poles. Gilded and painted scenes and inscriptions on the buildings cinnamon red plum colour, emerald green, ochre yellow and azure blue. They all swam together in a great sea of colour - the scene was stunning. *Thomas Mann* gives us some of his well researched ideas.

Joseph, nearing the end of his journey with these relations of his, will soon be parted from them. He can only think of being where God wants him to be. The old man pleaded for his patience. The customs authorities will make the landing as troublesome as any landing can be - but there were the pedlars of sandals, caps and honey cakes, the music of jugglers, the bleating of herds being unloaded nearby and the splosh as ropes and other inconsequentials fall in the water. It was vast confusion, and Joseph and the Ishmaelites leaned against the lumber at the stern of the boat, waiting until they could be released and go to the hostel. The old man had to vouch for all his party and pay his harbour dues. But because he was so good at establishing human relations and giving little presents, he was

able to expedite his business quickly and take his little party, including Joseph, into the city. Joseph - still unrecorded - noted by none - named by no name.

3. NO, CHIEF CITY ON THE RIVER NILE, AND ITS MULTI RACIAL BLEND

There is now a lengthy descriptive section about No, and the Cushites who stood out so significantly in the crowded city. **The *"comment"* continues as the rest of this chapter, but will not be noted as such.**

There is no mention of Joseph and his friends in the history of No. But the Wisdom from above has made them "*wisdom*" as well, whether No knew about it or not it was a blessing for this little band in No, and a great blessing for Joseph.

Weset (Wese), also called Nowet Amun (No), also later called Thebes, and also called Diospolis, chief city on the river Nile, was a marvel to all the world, both near and far. No, as it was known, and what we will call it, was beautiful, beyond word, or measure. True, there were slum parts as well as rich parts; there were the narrow, winding, dark, smelling, poor streets, as in any man made city, large or small. The richer sections, with fewer people, of course, were less numerous than the poor, and were spacious and charming and architecturally beautiful, and endowed with temples and palaces, rich in treasure, so that one could measure the gold with a scoop. Even some houses were enriched by Pharaoh, like the temples and palaces. The Pharaoh did not live in the city itself. His palace, to the west on the edge of the desert, under its red rocks, high in airy grace amid pleasure gardens, was splendid, with a lake and pleasure waters.

A very great city it was also, in its graciousness and intensity and living. It believed itself the centre of the world. Joseph knew it was not, for he knew of Babel (later Babylon) on the Euphrates. The people of Babel said that Egypt's stream flowed the wrong way that all rivers should flow south. They believed that the rest of the world stood in an admiring circle around **their** city. The Chinese at the other end of the world, as has been discussed previously, were exhorting their population that theirs was the only country in the world with such advantages. This was all possible, of course, before travel and education and communication became widespread, and it certainly kept a grip of control on the peoples.

Nevertheless, these cities and countries did not have the fullness of beauty in its buildings, as did No. The city, No, was not yet at the height of its fame. It later had a name change (by the Greeks) to Thebai, Thebes. Greece had a city, Thebes. No, now paused in history, on its way to full splendour from its dark and small beginnings centuries ago, and Joseph saw it at his journey's end, on its splendid way, opulent and already famous. Little did he know at this time of the influence he himself would exert over this city.

Later Jeremiah warned the men of Judah against going to Egypt, to relieve the punishments of the Chaldeans, even though God promised to build them up again, if they stayed in Israel. God promised them death, but they determined to go, and so in *Jeremiah 43* and *44*, these cities of Egypt are mentioned in the destruction of the men and women of Judah. The Judah women had made cakes in the image of the Queen of Heaven. It was the custom that they had to have permission from their husbands to make vows to the Sun god, so the men were part of the evil behaviour.

On their way to the hostel Joseph saw a multitude of people hurrying up and down the narrow streets about their daily tasks, a multitude from the four corners of the earth. Animals there

were too, being led by chains - whining panthers and baboons, greyhounds, a giraffe tall as a tree. What treasures of merchandise swelled the bazaars. Here the merchants and travellers from the ports far north of the Nile Delta and over the seas had come to see the might and power of Egypt. The Egyptians were not a sea faring people (although they traded in ships along the coasts), so these people probably had come in foreign ships. Later these sea peoples tried an alliance with Libya, to overcome this powerful Egyptian influence, which lasted down through the centuries.

During the last years that the Hebrews lived in Goshen, and for 300 years, till 1200 BC, eight Pharaohs made excursions into Canaan and Syria. In the lists of cities conquered and routes of their marches there appears the names of about 90 cities and towns of Canaan many of which figure large in the subsequent history of Israel. No wonder Gaza was a great staging post as they turned from the desert into Canaan. It was Tuth Mosis III, 1504 - 1450 BC (after Joseph and shortly before the Israelites came into Canaan under Joshua) who established Egypt's control over Canaan by making almost annual campaigns into Asia during his 22nd and 42nd years. The soldiers were highly trained in shooting arrows from swiftly moving chariots. If Egyptians could not pay tax with grain or produce or craftwork or manufactured goods, (that were stored in the great government controlled warehouses), they had to give labour. This helped in the massive building projects, but also supplied soldiers for this mighty army. Annals carved into the walls of the Temple of Amon at Thebes are a memorial to the god who gave him the victories. It is no wonder then that the chariots pursuing the Israelites to the Red Sea, made them quake in fear. It is also no wonder then that these god fearing soldiers plunged their chariots onto the dry water walled track, believing they were invincible.

God against god. We know who prevailed in the contest. Like Baal against God in Elijah's day, Moses had returned from Midian to save them and he took them this way again across the Red Sea. Not a usual Egyptian excursion route.

In *2 Kings 22* and *23*, good King Josiah humbled himself, and responded to the words from God, by Huldah the prophetess, and cleansed the land. Yet God did not turn away His anger, and Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt, who was coming to support Assyria in her struggle against Babylon. Josiah tried to stop Pharaoh Neco from using the pass at Megiddo. Perhaps he feared an Assyrian/Egyptian alliance, *NIV Study Bible*, *2 Chronicles 35:20-24*.

4. THE CUSHITES

Our bearded Asiatics in their coloured garments contrasted with the white skirted, clean shaven Egyptians, but were not strange enough, nor infrequent enough in number, to cause any remark from others in the streets. There were Moors, with ebony black skins, with incredibly thick, lips that appeared swollen. They had ostrich feathers on their heads. Women bare to the waist followed their men, carrying their children, with grace and skill, in baskets, on their heads. These were the men who led the chained animals, often giraffes, but more often leopards. The men carried valuable presents (obvious, for they were wrapped in gold cloth) probably gold and ivory, as tribute tax for Pharaoh. There were massive deposits of gold in Nubia, (as well as that in the desert between Luxor and the Red Sea). This mission that Joseph saw, was from the land of Kush, south, far up the river. These were the peoples of Cush, one of the four sons of Ham, and grandson of Noah, whose distribution over the world at that time, is recorded in *Genesis 10*. It was a non compulsory tribute, irregularly sent from the governor of the southern lands of Egypt, the viceroy and prince of Kush. It was sent so that Pharaoh may be pleased, and take joy, and think well of him, so that he might not be recalled. It was a "*job for the boys*", and there were

boys aplenty bending Pharaoh's ear. "*Surely, now it's my turn to go south?*" they would think, waiting for their summons to represent the king, in the great southlands.

The prince of Kush trembled for his post, while Pharaoh's courtiers plotted and schemed. The prince prepared his presents with great care, for Pharaoh liked to be surprised with gifts.

Kush is known variously as Cush, Ethiopia, Nubia, a country south of Egypt, "*up*" the Nile. Nubians are still used as soldiers and police in Egypt today for their appearance is still one of great strength with authority. It is interesting to note that the old Nubia, (or the land of Cush, Kush), is under the wall of the largest dam at Aswan, and the Nubian people were relocated by the Egyptians in the 1960's. 60,000 people were moved away from their long established position on the Nile River, to the flatlands, which is supported by a newly built irrigation system.

Black figures, tall Cushites, are portrayed frequently in Egyptian art. They were beardless, with blunt broad noses, and small tight black curls. They were mostly compliant mercenaries in whatever army they joined, but not always, depending on their sense of justice. There have been many of those armies down through the centuries. They used arrows with particularly long bows, and were skilful with horses and chariots, and used elephants in war. Hannibal's elephants (3rd century BC) probably came from Cush. The Island of Elephantine, where the Jews later had a synagogue, (5th Century BC), was on the Nile here, so called because the rocks there looked like the backs of elephants, bathing. Elephants were plentiful then.

The Egyptians made many incursions into Cush and were sometimes repelled. When the Cushites were inducted into the Egyptian army they often acted independently and rebelliously, Perhaps they felt vexed towards the Egyptians who gave them no little trouble. They were present in the Assyrian and the Babylonian armies at different stages, and fought against Judah in the reign of Asa, *2 Chronicles 14:9-15*.

Cushites are mentioned 54 times in *Scripture*. In *2 Samuel 18:19-33,* Joab chose a Cushite to take news of Absalom's death, to his father David. It is a casual reference, and probably indicates that Cushite soldiers were not unusual. Moses had a black wife, a Cushite, *Numbers 12*.

When God sent King Nebuchadnezzar to punish sinful Judah *(Jeremiah 38:4)*, King Zedekiah became irritated with the harping of the prophet Jeremiah predicting doom, and allowed him to be put in a muddy pit to await his death. Ebedmelech, the Cushite, interceded on Jeremiah's behalf, with Zedekiah, that he might rescue him from the pit.

Interestingly, the prophet had said earlier, *Jeremiah 13:23*, "*Can the Cushite change his skin colour or the leopard his spots?*" Jeremiah rhetorically points to the entrenched and unchanging sin of Judah. The repetition in *Jeremiah* of the blackness of the Cushite, might be presenting the irony of his foreignness. We might say there would be no one more unlikely to deliver the prophet, and to trust in God, than the black Cushite, a Gentile of Gentiles.

Maybe the people of that day were colour blind regarding race. Not so today, for the Jewish Ethiopians entering Israel, have to fight for their rights for equal opportunity, which they feel is restricted to them because of their dark colour.

Cush means "*outstanding*", so that all the recordings of Cushites, in relation to the prophets and people of Israel could be taken to mean just "*outstanding men*". However that would diminish the race. The Greeks **did** think of Cushites, the Ethiopians, as an outstanding people, with the

longest life span, the tallest height, the handsomeness faces, and the most pious actions. No mean reputation.

Jeremiah 13:23, then, can take on a different interpretation. "*Is there anything intrinsically wicked about Ethiopians or leopards?*"

Cushites were salesmen of live leopards and leopard skins all over the ancient world. No one would buy a spotless leopard skin. The spots are its beauty. The Cushite's skin is his beauty. Certainly an enlightened way for us to think of non white skins these days. Looking at it, in this light, this could be *Biblical* verse to support non discrimination on racist grounds, or skin colour, for inclusion of **all** as servants of God, does not depend on skin colour, or nationality or ethnicity, but on faith. It has been the case that in slavery, men have argued from the *Bible*, that white skin colour has been given supremacy by God.

Recent *Bible* research has flooded Bible studies with information dealing with women in the *Scriptures*. These studies have challenged many traditional views, and we have come to accept many complementary roles in worship for women. This has greatly advantaged our worship.

There are numerous black figures across the pages of *Scripture*. It is interesting that *Bible* research has **not** yet carried over to blacks, another marginalised group. Perhaps when those studies come, they will also challenge many of us. Secular education is leading the way in discrimination issues, certainly in directions that some of us may not accept. However the principle is there and our children will help us to overcome our predilection, and will encourage us to make choices not on any prejudice, but on *Scripture* alone.

Joseph saw and heard it all in the market place on his way to the hostel, for these Moors - Cushites - caused no small stir. He would no doubt learn much more about these people in future. Joseph was not named or noticed. There were all shades from the human race from this ebony black, through tones of brown and yellow to cheese white. Pale faced, the Libyans were, from the oases of the western desert in coloured woven skirts and plaits standing straight out from their heads. Little did Joseph know that he would be one day in charge of the tribute that came from these viceroys and the taxes from the traders, and that people, later, in a great seven year famine, would even sell their children and then themselves for food. So Egypt gathered under it, great wealth and many peoples. In time it was Joseph who worked out the great interest bearing loans and levied the taxes that filled the coffers of Egypt.

One hundred and forty four years after the death of Joseph, the Hebrews left Goshen, under Moses, with much gold to embellish God's sanctuary (and to make a golden calf). It was because the Egyptians (under God's hand) had this great wealth to "*throw at*" the Hebrews to ***"get rid of them".*** The Israelites did not go empty handed, *(Exodus 3:21, 22)*, as God foretold - they spoiled the Egyptians and took their jewellery and precious stones, and valuable vessels and artefacts and all that they (2 million) could carry with them.

At this stage in history the Egyptians were glad that the pestilence would go, but at the time of Joseph they were busy, extorting much gold and making their wealth and Joseph was educated by Pharaoh to do just that for Egypt.

5. THE PUNISHMENT OF NO

Young's Concordance tells us that No was a city on both sides of the Nile, the capital of Upper Egypt, also called Thebes and Diospolis; the chief seat of the worship of Amon with the famous temple. It was destroyed (by the Romans) in BC 81.

Jeremiah 46:25, ***"I will punish the multitude of No"***

Ezekiel 30:14, ***"... and will execute judgments in No"***

Ezekiel 30:15, ***"I will cut off the multitudes of No"***

Ezekiel 30:16, ***"No shall be rent asunder"***

Nahum 3:8, ***"Art thou better than populous No?"***

So the yokes of Egypt imposed upon other peoples were finally broken, (compare *The Companion Bible,* "*Chronological Chart, Appendix 50*"), 1410 years after Moses left Egypt - a long time before that prophecy was fulfilled. Read the *NIV* text and verse comment, and the accompanying comments for *Ezekiel 30:13-19*. Compare the *AV* as well. It will help with the understanding of the punishment of Egypt, and also with the names and name changes of the cities that have so far been mentioned in Joseph's journey "*up*" the Nile. The city names mentioned by Ezekiel are only a literary form of emphasising the extent of the purging, but for us, as students of this ancient geography, we are grateful for Ezekiel's prediction list.

The mention, in *Isaiah 19:23, 24*, of Egypt and their bitter enemies, the Assyrians, who had clashed in mighty battles for centuries, crashing up and down, pursuing one another, on that highway through Jerusalem seems remarkable. The three nations will be blessed, under the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, when the whole world will be under blessing. They will be linked in a bond of friendship, sealed by their common allegiance to that Lord (compare *Isaiah 25:3) NIV.* They *"will throw away ... their idols of silver and idols of gold, which they made to worship", Isaiah 2:20*. Note how the Abrahamic promise is divided equally, among the three nations (not only Israel). *"Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance",* - the Lord Almighty's blessing and the healing of them, when He responds *"to their pleas", Isaiah 19:22*.

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CONCLUSION:

Now Joseph has come to the end of his journey. He has been blessed by God, and that is the indication that He will continue His blessings.

CHAPTER 4

JOSEPH IN POWERFUL AND MIGHTY EGYPT

"***And the Midianites sold him into Egypt", Genesis 37:36.***

"***And Joseph was brought down to Egypt", Genesis 39:1***

FOCUS:

Now that we have spanned the journey into Egypt we are poised in the city of No, near to where Potiphar lives, ***Genesis 39:1***.

1. FROM NO TO POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

If our caravan took nine days to cross the desert with all of its dangers, we wonder how the Egyptian army managed with its chariots and horses.

We wonder whether they had their own military road with its stores, and water cisterns, and horse change stables, or whether they used the public roads. It must have been difficult to maintain supplies in foreign countries, but no more difficult than the Americans today, with military bases and rocket facilities in Australia and elsewhere. Perhaps they built the roads and part of the toll for that was safe passage, when ever they needed it. Eventually their confidence knew no bounds and with the scuttling of anything in their way, they began to feel they could overrun if they pleased, and they did.

They would hardly employ runners in this remote territory, to precede the chariots, calling "*Abrek*", as they did in the big cities**.** Besides speed was essential here and they could manage that.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

We often overlook the knowledge that Joseph had in this Land of Mud. His knowledge of Egyptian writing and reading and all things Egyptian was outstanding, but it began with an education in things in Canaan, not Egyptian. His ability to absorb education of things Egyptian began with his entry into Egypt, and as we have come on this journey from Canaan, we know how that education had begun. It was, of course, with God's intervention. One important aspect of faith is the ability to see God's will in the opportunities He offers us and our need to grasp them. Joseph had set himself on this course, knowing it was God's will for him. So now he learns to read and write in Egyptian as well.

2. THE ARRIVAL OF JOSEPH AT POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

At the hostel in No, our little band, of Joseph and his owners, slept fitfully under their cloaks. It was like the inn in Memfe, where they had crammed into the great courtyard, with one of them awake, to guard their valuables. It was the same here. The old man knew the innkeeper at No, for he was a Chaldean from the Euphrates, so all these who travelled from that district (so far, so very far - Abraham had come that far) lodged here. He gave them a Chaldean dish for breakfast, pappasu, prepared from sesame - bed and breakfast.

All the while with this press of humanity the old man, a real salesman, traded and pressed the press for silver or copper or goods in exchange for his trinkets. What education this wise old man crammed into Joseph's already wise head. They waited their turn to wash at the well, for the courtyard and the well and the crowd of people was all that was needed to make Sippar's Inn (named after the Chaldean town), an inn. Then setting out again with their little caravan of packs and animals, through the streets teeming with masters and slaves, rich and poor, the confident and the cowed, the owner and the owned, the little band, the trading company, turned East, out of No, towards the houses of the rich, for the old man had indicated to Joseph that they would go to one of these houses of blessing, and there it would be that God would have him. Joseph, anxious to be where God would have him, strode on, leading the old man's camel, until they stopped outside a great house. Joseph is now full of mixed emotions and we can only wonder, at this son of Israel standing there, willing himself to fulfil God's will for him.

3. THE SALE OF JOSEPH

The Asiatics (as they are called - *page 18*, of "*The Times Concise Atlas of the Bible*", in the section "*The Sale of Joseph and His Entry into Egypt*", moved into the courtyard at the invitation of the overseer, who had instructed the gate keeper to allow them through. Here was an estate rich in blessing beyond a doubt. Joseph looked it over. *Thomas Mann* describes what he saw. The courtyard was covered with hard clay, and from it, they could see an inner double gate and another courtyard, beyond where the master's main house lay in the centre of the complex, surrounded by lush gardens. It had painted columns, and on the roof three cornered ventilators opening to the west. The largest building was facing westward, as they all did, without a wall, to catch the breezes. Through its doors went maidservants with tall jugs and platters of fruit and on the roof other women sat singing and spinning - the harem. The building was guarded by watermen. There was another house from which steam was rising, the cook house - there were vats and grain mills here. Further behind were the orchard and another house where workmen were busy with their tasks of repair and maintenance of garden and building. Further than this, in the North West corner lay the cow stalls, and the granaries filled with corn. Ladders lay against them.

Joseph, though keen to see it all, had to help with the unpacking - they unloaded the camels and set up shop, spreading out the goods. He would soon see it all, **as we now have,** for before long, he would be head steward of it all. They were soon surrounded by a crowd

There was some previous information about the house of 1740 BC (round about the time of Joseph's birth) that had 79 servants, 45 non Egyptians, of Asiatic appearance, with Semitic names. Traders would, therefore, be familiar with the needs of some households.

The old man merchant was God guided to this house. Maybe Joseph's angel whispered it in the merchant's ear, and told him to come here. The house dwellers were seduced by the goods for sale. The merchant displayed incense resins, goat's thorn gums, brownish labdanum, eye paint, myrrh, spices, balsams, walking sticks, solid and of the hardest wood, ornaments, chains, necklaces, rings, vitreous paste, and knick and knacks of all kinds. Gold, electrum, and good stones, lazuli, cornelian, crystal made the knick knacks pretty and/or valuable. A monkey or two sat on a shoulder and chattered with the people. There were two dwarfs, in this household, and they stood by to watch the fun. The two dwarfs were on little fat legs, a comic and an intellectual, one named Bes-em-heb, after a foreign comic dwarf god.

"*Stay with us young sand man*", he whispered to Joseph as the old man with hand around Joseph's shoulder presented him as the best buy of all to Mont-kaw.

Mont-kaw, the overseer over all, approached - an elderly man, (in time, to be replaced, **we** know), beautifully dressed in white, accompanied by scribes who with reed pens behind their ears, bowed before him and wrote down his words on tablets. The servants scattered, and Joseph was exposed to view - and the pricing began. First with the more valuable items on the mats, Joseph helped, advised, added and took the goods for goods, honey for onions, and wine. There was copper and linen and writing paper and beer and bread for hoes and cow horn tweezers, and cow horn spoons. His bearing, his usefulness, his diligence, his preciseness, his cleverness, his attention to detail and his cataloguing, and whatever else God laid upon Joseph at this precise moment, surprised Mont-kaw, so that he looked with admiration upon God's servant and without knowing why he was so inclined, he desired him for his own. God was working in this house on the minds and actions of the people here, more than anyone could have possibly imagined. The words of Joseph, for a slave, even an educated one, were unusually subtle and shrewd. This young Asiatic Bedouin had a striking and arresting

beauty that associated in the steward's mind with something divine. He was, of course, Mont-kaw noted, not a god, but a human being.

Thomas Mann names the characters, and invents the dwarfs, and spells out some wisdom conversations for us. Together with the immense historical detail, now available, and interwoven into the tapestry, it helpfully fills out the story.

Consider:

* How did the old man merchant know to bring Joseph to this house?

* Did he know these people from past trading?

* Did he have relatives and friends here among the servants?

* How did he receive this feeling of the divine about Joseph?

* God blessed has a bearing, does it not?

****

It evoked in Mont-kaw a feeling that he was in the presence of someone blessed. And we know that feeling was quite real, that indeed he was in the presence of the divinely chosen one, and was powerfully moved. The old man sensed this, and when Mont-kaw enquired of Joseph, he was ready.

"*My seventh gift*" he said - and proceeded with his sales pitch about Joseph being a Canaanitish youth who can bake (pancakes on stone) and write, and has a clear head for accounts.

"*His wisdom, intellect and expression are such that he can say goodnight in 365 different ways and still have some left over from his treasure-house of speech, with never a repeat*."

"*But we have no vacancy, our numbers are full*", countered the overseer, "*but where did you get it - this gift?*"

Then in the manner of the uncivilised (to the Egyptians), the old man then broke into the habit of speaking in a riddle.

Guess if you will.

"***A barren mother bore him"***

(Eastern wisdom at its best)**.**

"***How can a woman be both a mother and barren?"***

"***Why a whimpering soul came from a dry well - and we gave the child milk when we drew him from the well's belly."***

"***Was he there three days?"***

"***The well was the mother - the pit was empty and had no water in it", Genesis 37.24.***

(This is a Hebrew poetical form, repeating for emphasis, a rhymed thought)

"***- and the well was certainly a barren mother".***

"***How then did this child come into the belly, the slave into the well?"***

How indeed.

Here we must leave the sales pitch, for we cannot guess how much the old man knew - how much Joseph told him, if anything. It would have been a great worry to Joseph to decide how much to tell the old man merchant.

"*Tell me some of your wisdom. What would you say to me at the end of the day?*" asked Montkaw.

Joseph paused before he spoke.

"*Rest gently,*" answered Joseph,

"*After the toil of the day,*

May your soles, that are scorched

From the heat of your path,

Move blissfully over the mosses of peace,

And your languid tongue be refreshed,

From the murmuring springs of night".

This sounds like the wisdom of *Ecclesiastes*. In *Ecclesiastes 5:18,* "*It is good for man to eat and drink and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labour under the sun - for this is his lot*", echoing *Genesis 3:19*.

"*How so? How are you called then?*"

Joseph hesitated before answering,

"***Osarsiph"***

"*The dead one*", dead to his father at least, and he is from a dead pit. This is a foreign sounding name to the Egyptians.

He is still least among them, but now noted by some, named by the old man by the name, **Osarsiph**, son of an empty pit, for that, or ***"Sand Man"*** or ***"Pit Man",*** must have been the name the old man put on the migration entry form at the Customs House at Thel. Joseph, son of Jacob, came into Egypt and was purchased for the house of Potiphar.

The price was high, (30 pieces of silver, or similar, probably), and the old man threw in some Phoenician wine and Ascalon shallots and traded some insults about the snub nosed sand rabbit, while the dwarf whispered encouragement to the overseer,

"*Trust me, I know wisdom when I see it. Buy the young sand-boy*",

and was paid 200 deben of copper.

Thus the old man was more than repaid for his trouble and care of Joseph over the long journey, and minus the 20 shekels of silver he paid to Joseph's brothers on that first slave sale.

"*Oh that I had wings like a dove*" *(Psalm 55:6*, and now the beautiful Mendelssohn song), is the prayer of David, when he has the need to be delivered from what he feels is certain death "*for*

then I would fly away and be at rest". He is confident that God will deliver him. "*As for me, I will call upon God and the Lord will save me*", "*he shall hear my voice*", and He did.

Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed too, "*Father if thou be willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done*", *(Luke 22:42)*. God answered his prayer too and an angel strengthened him in the garden for what lay ahead.

Joseph coped with this remarkable second sale of him, by putting himself into the hands of God. Apart from the cultural relativity of the custom, which would give him certain immunity, it would all be so foreign to him. For Joseph, like that other prophet *(Isaiah 6:8)* had unconsciously said, as he searched for God's plan for him, "*here am I, send me*".

"*The Lord was with him*" is so often repeated in Joseph's story and so we know for a certainty that God did strengthen him.

Consider:

* Did an angel of God strengthen Joseph as one did Jesus?

* Did he pray for the wings of a bird to take him out of this foreign land, with alien gods, and discomforting customs, where he could not openly worship God, back home to his father?

* Did he use the "*never the less*" as Jesus did?

It must have seemed to Joseph that he was "*down in the pit of destruction*" in this alien land, and that it was not his, but God's will that he be there.

****

CONCLUSION:

Sometimes we find ourselves in alien circumstances. It is only the sustenance of knowing God's word, and His will for us, which sustains us until we are safe again. That's why continual practice of God's way, infusing ourselves with God's word, and nurturing ourselves on prayer to Him, are important when we can, so that when we can't, our resources are intact. God switches in, onto our case, when we, of necessity, switch off. He will maintain us, **if we cannot,** for He delivers us from evil, and like a dove on the wing, helps us to fly away, - or, He will give us strength to continue with the dreadful, evil circumstance, whatever He thinks best. "*He will sustain thee*" *(Psalm 55:22)* if only we will know Him, and trust Him and cast our burdens upon Him.

Digression:

***Leen Ritmeyer,* now living in England, worked as an on site archaeologist for Temple Mount Excavations, in Israel, in the 1970's and 80's. He has some illustrations and diagrams in *"The Times Concise Atlas of the Bible".* There is a reconstruction site at Arad *(diagram 2, page 12),* a great walled city, to repel such as the Egyptians, with effective defence towers. The Egyptians swung around here, (near Gaza) from the desert, wheeling left, pausing for breath before proceeding up through Canaan, trading at first, and then as they became more powerful, making war.**

In the days after Joseph in Egypt, and for 300 years, even when the Israelites had moved into the land, it might have been precarious to live in Canaan. They could never rest easy, as they cannot now. For us though, ease of living is not a blessing, and can be quite perilous, and can often turn people away from God. For them though, in the path of rampaging armies, it was often a matter of life or death.

Not only were the Egyptians passing north on the coastal plain, then south as they returned home, but the Assyrians were passing south, and then north, as they returned home. None of the inhabitants of the land could prevent them. The Egyptians and the Assyrians engaged one another in great conflicts of power. Ruthless nations they were. The minor skirmishes that occurred between tribes and families, for example, the Dinah incident, the Israel family against the Shechemites, would only add to an already precarious life in this little strip of land.

Section 2 - Potiphar to Pit Two

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CHAPTER 1 - POTIPHAR AND POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

CHAPTER 2 - JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE

CHAPTER 3 - DOWN TO THE PIT AGAIN

CHAPTER 4 - THE SECOND PIT

CHAPTER 5 - ESCAPE FROM THE SECOND PIT

CHAPTER 6 - JOSEPH ARRIVES IN THE ROYAL CITY

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CHAPTER 1

POTIPHAR AND POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

"*... **and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmaelites", Genesis 39:1.***

FOCUS:

We now return to the Biblical text, and we find that Joseph has been sold into Potiphar's house. The angel of the Lord is with him still, as we shall see, ***Genesis 39:1-6***.

1. JOSEPH IS PARTED FROM HIS FRIENDS

The last verse of ***Genesis 37:36*** is then repeated in ***Genesis 39:1***, with some extra details, as the story is taken up again. Joseph's hosts, now called Ishmaelites were previously called Midianites - just different, but legitimate ways of describing these tribal peoples. They have been assumed to be his friends - it is almost unthinkable, that they had been anything other than that in the heartbreaking journey moving further and further away from his loved home.

But now **The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company** with the wise old man, who had befriended Joseph, had moved on, but the angel, we know, stayed with Joseph.

2. A REGAL EGYPTIAN

The master of this house approached the gate. His servants lined up before him with their foreheads to the ground. The runners panting, shouting in front, preceded the two proud, glossy plumed chestnuts which drew the little, two wheeled car, a sort of gala chariot with pretty, curved rails. It was just large enough for Potiphar and his driver, though Potiphar preferred to drive himself, and so his driver became extra decoration. Behind the little car ran his fan bearers. The Jewish historian, *Edersheim*, cited by Swindoll, in "*Joseph*", *page 24,* says Potiphar was Pharaoh's executioner, so no one trifled with him. The wheels of the chariot had bright, sparkling stones let into the spokes and they shone as they twirled and caught the sun. Joseph stood and saw Potiphar, who now owned him, and wished Benjamin could see the little car, which appeared to have fireworks on the wheels, when it was in motion.

Potiphar himself was bejewelled - precious stones and beautiful enamel in his collar and gold bracelets upon his limbs. He may be no more than 40 years old, rather like Reuben in size, but

not strong and muscular like brother Reuben, who worked in the fields - more fat, for all Potiphar's wealth gave ease of living. His hair was short, his head small and balding, his nose hooked, his mouth delicate looking, and a prominent pointed (not ugly) chin and long lashed haughty and proud eyes. An Egyptian. *Thomas Mann* in "*Joseph and His Brothers - Joseph in Egypt*" and others describe and paint Potiphar and his chariot, as Joseph first sees him.

Joseph, knowing he was God blessed, and realising God's wondrous plan for him, wondered how long it would be before, according to his dream, they all bowed down to him. Joseph would wonder about his dream and when people would be bowing down to him. The favoured circumstances seem along way off right now. Perhaps he wondered whether there was a larger presence for the omniscient circumstances that he knew were predicted for him, greater than this large house.

The pit had been an entrance into a grave. There seemed no way out. Joseph thought that God had ended his life of ease and folly. Now it seemed that he was resurrected to a new life. But this life, too, would be full of bitterness and anxiety, before he received a "*crown*" to stand by Pharaoh. He knew not how God would arrange the favourable circumstances. He knew not yet of another pit, another grave, another resurrection.

So Rachel's and Jacob's loved son became the property of Potiphar.

3. THE ROLE OF THE TRAVELLING SALESMAN

The old man merchant had taken the place of Joseph's parents, right back there at the Dothan pit. He is now unaware that he has become superfluous in God's heavenly plan for this boy. He was the substitute mother and father, but now he himself is supplanted by Potiphar. He has protected the orphan child, and provided for this foundling, and had kept this second sale until he reached the most prestigious house in Egypt. He wanted this boy to have something special. He certainly knew how to get the best price, and the resident scribe at Potiphar's house, at a disadvantage, could not gainsay the offer. The old man had been led to understand that this item was very precious. God had put that into his head. If the boy had grown to be precious in his relationship with the old man, as well as just precious cargo, perhaps the sale made the old man miserable.

Joseph was the son of the "*well*" (to him), this wise and ever learning child, had taught him in turn, gracious and holy things, as well as being of use to him. The old man had been his father really, in place of Jacob. Now Joseph was to be dead to him as well. So he would suffer a grief too. However he pulled himself up quickly, "*this was a silly bit of sentiment, just when I need to act to safeguard the business and to disregard my own needs*". He did not suspect that the greater Interest was at work, and his advantage was only peripheral.

Something, not himself, had impelled him to bring this boy so far to this house, over such a long period of time. This boy had advanced his lot to great advantage, and therefore to ask a high price would impress the household with the value of the "*gift*". He felt well paid for his trouble, in monetary terms, and he would deal with his grief. We might assume that this trading company would continue to enjoy God's blessings, as they continued on their way, as a reward for the safe delivery of Joseph into Egypt.

Comment:

God had supervised it all from Dothan to the Upper Nile. It all goes to show that we may be often unaware that God supervises our large and small journeys through life. If we were always aware, we would act less contrary to His will for us.

****

Joseph's arrival in Egypt in good health (instead of India where the Dothan road led in the other direction) is remarkable except for the preservation by God to that end. A tortuous road to China was in existence at this time, so God's preservation and direction was absolutely necessary in a world so largely and dangerously inhabited, and navigated.

4. JOSEPH IS NOW THE POSSESSION OF POTIPHAR

However, arriving in Potiphar's house, Joseph brings blessings to the house (*Genesis 39:3)* and becomes an overseer of all of the compound. He uses his recording skills, and with his writing materials, keeps an account of all the expenses and all the labour done. He was a good person and well liked. He attended to Potiphar in all things save for the preparation of his food.

It is interesting to note that Potiphar is described as an Egyptian, though he may have been of a noble Nubian strain from the south, or of the Hyksos tribes from the north. We may expect either, for it is thought that the Pharaoh's of this time were of the Hyksos strain, and with Potiphar in Pharaoh's court, it would not be expedient to employ a pure Egyptian. For a period, Pharaoh's capital in the south, Thebes, (No) was superseded by Memphis, (Noph) in the north, which suited sensibilities about their origins. They were responsible for introducing the horse into Egypt, and reigned in Egypt during the 13th Dynasty, 1786-1570 BC. They were very careful and punctilious about their Egyptian etiquette *(New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press*, under "*Egypt")*.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

But God moves in the kingdoms of men, and so this period of Hyksos rule, was therefore *"sympathetic"* to the Hebrew milieu of the time of Joseph's arrival in Egypt. When the Jacob family came into Egypt, that growing multitude became the hated Israelites, and their removal under Moses was a two million mixed multitude.

But before we move on to the stark lesson of purity, which begins in verse 7,

Where Joseph shows us all, that -

The sins of the fathers need not necessarily

Be committed by the children,

When the cycle of pain can be broken,

Where goodness can come from evil,

Where righteousness does prevail,

we can enjoy some background historical detail, that fills out the next eight years or so, that Joseph stayed with Potiphar. It was ten years for Joseph from leaving the Dothan pit, to the Egyptian pit, but because we don't know how long the journey took, we don't know how long he was with Potiphar.

The old man, on completing the sale, might say to Joseph,

"*Farewell my son,*

Thank you for bringing goodness to us.

Show thyself worthy of kindness and honour.

Be tactful and courteous and obliging to all.

Bridle thy tongue and compel it to be still,

When it twitches to criticise,

And to practise itself on injurious circumstances,

Like that between the honoured and the dishonoured.

For destinations such as that,

Bringeth one to the pit,

Fare thee well"

Such advice to a present day western young man or woman, might not be much appreciated, but Joseph used to such Eastern wisdom, over the long journey from his father's house, must have felt there was a great well of wisdom to draw upon, and so it would continue to support him, and to prepare him for the Egyptian royal court, to ultimately save his people. The old man knew not that Joseph would go to the pit again before long, again through no fault of his own, except that he was comely and good.

5. JOSEPH'S FIRST GLIMPSE OF POTIPHAR'S WIFE

Now alone, Joseph wondered what he would do, until the dwarf whispered, "*Throw yourself on your face*". From this prone position Joseph peeped ahead, through his crossed arms, to see a train of peoples passing from the women's to the master's quarters. Leading the front of the procession were five servants in aprons and caps. Behind the procession were five maidservants with long and flowing hair. Between them "*swaying on the bare shoulders of Nubian slaves*", there was a sort of gilded carrying chair, like that for royalty. The arm rests were adorned with the open mouthed heads of lions. Leaning among the cushions, entirely at ease, with crossed feet, was an Egyptian lady of some class, exquisitely adorned in glittering golden ornaments, in her curled hair, about her neck, and upon her fingers and arms. Her arms were like lilies, "*one of which - very white and lovely - hung idly down at the side of the chair*". Beneath the wrought gold, jewelled wreath upon her head Joseph saw her profiled face. "*It was peculiar and personal*" and quite a "*unique and individual profile*". The eyes of this lady were "*lengthened towards the temple by enamel cosmetics*". She had a flattened nose upon her shallow cheeks. Her mouth was thin and soft and "*sinuous as a snake between its two corners*", *page 141,* of *Thomas Mann - "Joseph and His Brothers - Joseph in Egypt*".

Potiphar's wife was off to her evening meal. She was the lady of the house, and consort of Potiphar. Unknown to them all, including Joseph, Joseph's fate was invested in this woman. She would decide what would befall him. Her name, according to the *Talmud,* was Zelicha.

Joseph began to serve his Laban time, like Jacob his father. He began with nothing, but his God given skills, and built that position into one of trust, so that Potiphar felt it a great advantage to put all of his affairs into Joseph's hands. No deceit was ever here in Joseph's mind. Joseph,

though, had ten back home who were against him, and deceitful, while his father, Jacob, the deceitful one, had only one brother against him, when he had been at home. However, both Jacob and Joseph were strangers, in an alien land, when they left home. Joseph was sixty years younger than his father had been at his Laban time. For one so young, the twenty years will age him so that the ten do not recognise him when they make obeisance to him - it is not only dignity and rank, but the ageing of a youth that makes him unrecognisable. Jacob at 77 and aging to 97 would not be so unrecognisable to Esau, when Jacob returned from Haran, as Joseph will be to his brothers.

To begin with, the barber cut Joseph's hair in the Egyptian fashion so that he looked like those wayfarers he had seen along the canals. They were poor slaves and so was Joseph. He was then taken to the wardrobe room where the apron skirts and sandals were kept. The wardrobe chamberlain fitted him with skirt and sandals, the livery of Potiphar - one set for best, and one for common wear.

We would wonder though, why Joseph, an Asian, a Hebrew, was not led to the fields for hard labouring work (for which he was entirely unsuitable and untrained). He would probably be shaved as well, if he was to serve in the private quarters, for they thought of him as young and comely. David and Absalom are described in the same way, "*well built and handsome*". This was an unusual situation. Jacob, his father, has not been a field man like his brother Esau, nor was Joseph like his brothers who were field men.

"*Something*" told the overseer to keep Joseph in the house, even though there would have been contempt for the Asiatic lad indoors. Hebrews were an abomination to the Egyptians. The fields would keep them at a distance from most of the labour force and certainly from the family. They were outdoors people anyway, who lived in tents.

Potiphar did not accept food from Joseph - though he was happy for all other contact - simply because a Hebrew was an abomination. It was the custom, *(Genesis 36:6)*. Remarkably, Joseph, twenty years later, becoming to all intents and purposes an Egyptian, did not sit at table with his Hebrew brothers *(Genesis 43:32)*. "*Asiatic louse-beards*" they were called, as Egyptians were clean shaven, except when they were in mourning, for then they did not shave. Joseph would sniff with his thick nostrilled nose, for the Hebrews themselves felt many nations round about **them** were an abomination. This all goes to show that the conception of uncleanness and abomination was not peculiar to the seed of Abram, the Hebrews. If you could not abide your neighbours, if they were an abomination and unclean and not your brethren, *you did not break bread with them*. The Egyptians practised that - against the Hebrews. Actually the pig was an abomination to them both.

6. JOSEPH IS FILLED WITH GREAT AMBITION

Whatever the reason, Joseph was **not** sent to the fields, for he "*remained*" in Potiphar's house. He did not ask for favours, they were there, because God willed it.

Of course, later on, he was overseer and administrator. Once more, some prevailing Hand kept him in the house where he learned more of the royal ways and customs than he would have ever learned if he had been sent to the fields. Joseph's soft hands indicated he'd been in the house and not in the fields with his brothers, when he lived with his father. This had been one of the causes of jealousy among his brothers. Joseph was comfortable with the comfort and wealth found there, and here, with the sense of family and descendants with historical perspective. The near royal status that oiled the machine that ran this house was familiar to him. **He knew** he

could drive this machine and to that end and purpose, with great ambition, he launched into his first career. He would become the driver, like Eliezer had been, for Abraham.

But -

Beware, beware,

It is there, it is there,

In the corridors of fame,

When men smile,

It is there.

Even when all is well,

It is there, it is there.

The ears of the wall listen,

And then the jealous and evil tongues,

Betray, betray.

Expect temptation

In the portals of prosperity

Not in the days of toil

And privation.

Beware, it is there, beware.

Joseph noted the influence of the nations in this house and the evidence of trade. He himself was that, but there were mute evidences as well of Egyptian imports from countries near and far. There were Syrian horses in the stables. Syrian or Babylonian horses were a stronger strain than Egyptian horses. We know that Pharaoh used stallions only, for his war chariots. And a mighty, formidable war weapon they were. In the *Song of Songs* we read, "*she is like a mare among the stallions*", not a mare harnessed in a chariot, rather, "*loose among them*", a mare attracting attention among the horse drawn Egyptian chariots of war, *Song of Songs 1:9, NIV Study Bible.* It is known that the Hittites used mares to turn Pharaoh's army into disarray when they released them among the horse drawn war chariots as the Egyptians thundered down upon them.

There were lots more imports in Potiphar's house. Cattle came from the Amorites, though Egyptian cattle with lyre shaped horns were not inferior. Fashion may have dictated what herds one had. Potiphar carried a walking stick from Syria, from whence also came the beer and wine. The jugs, the weapons, the musical instruments, the bejewelled little chariot with its pretty wheels, and the huge ornamented vases almost as high as a man (that stood in the alcoves of the long rooms) were imported through the Delta ports, by sea, or land, as he indeed had come. The vases came from Damascus and Sidon, though there were some eccentric looking ones from Edom (from the place of the Red One, his Uncle Esau). The gold came from the Nubian mines, and from the south, came also, ivory, incense, and ebony black slaves, Moors.

Joseph did not, at once, have work in the house. The bakery provided no work for a non skilled cook. He could not make sandals, or mats, or pottery, or furniture in the craft man's work rooms. But he could make lists of all the work being done in these work rooms - the bakery, the craft room, the laundry, the granary, etc. He could note the labour hours done, and the equipment that needed repair, the expenditure, and anything else that needed listing. The Egyptians loved lists, and we are discovering so many of them today. Perhaps in looking for ways to be useful, he initiated the very direction in which God wanted him to travel. He lived, ate, drank and chatted (now he could use their language) in the servants' quarters. Indeed he mixed his Asian wisdom way of speaking with their Egyptian ways and enriched his expression to their delight.

He said, "*I am in the greatest joy of the earth"* when he was happy.

Describing an overseer he said, "*He raged like a leopard of Upper Egypt*".

"*He is in the rooms beneath the rooms*" was a way of saying "*ground floor*" - however, the exalted grandparents lived in the upper storey.

"*As true as the king liveth*", he also emphasised his truths.

All these he incorporated into his own embroidered speech and told stories of far off lands. His own linguistic sphere and literary influence had not been limited. His tongue was of better use than his hands.

Joseph gained their respect and was soon able to give orders. He had the welfare of the house in his hands, and God had given it to him. He did not deceive to get it like his father. The little man, the dwarf, cared for his sand man and brought him dainty breads and sweet meat to supplement the leeks, onions and plain bread that was the servants' fare. Grapes, figs, roast beef and goose were aplenty especially on the feast days. Joseph needed an ally to help him maintain his physical and emotional well being and his position in the house. The dwarf always dancing and performing at the tables of the shut in ones, could indicate to Joseph his rising acceptance among the family as well. The shut in ones were old and deaf, and shouted at one another, so it was easy to discern who was popular and who was not. Joseph was grateful to his dwarf friend and as his accreditation continued to improve, he grew more confident.

Consider:

* But there were, naturally enough, jealousies, for what was known of this "*son of the well*".

* For "*well born*" is not well born, so what does it mean?

* Born in bondage?

* Why the well?

****

Joseph could hardly explain the jealousies in his own house. Hardly would he be able to understand them in this house. What evil is spawned of jealousy!

Here in this house there was dignity for the position of Potiphar

- So close to Pharaoh,

- Executioner,

- In charge of the guard,

- In charge of the king's prisons and prisoners,

- His wife one of the first ladies of the land,

But it is probable that their marriage was all a sham.

Joseph thought of his own mother,

Rachel, loved yet barren

(and Bilhah brought in to give birth upon Rachel's knees)

Feeling rejected by God

In her unfruitful womb,

Striving through Bilhah

To gain maternal dignity.

That was a sham,

For it was pretence and only half joy.

Joseph knew of many shams in *his* family.

CONCLUSION:

Better for dignity to be won by true perseverance in God's will for us, not by what *we* think is right and true. We need to examine ourselves continuously to avoid the sham.

Digression:

We could think of it like the Germanic influence on the throne of England.

1. The House of Windsor is of German extraction and so German/English characteristics are mirrored in that reign, no less so than pre World War II days, when we now know the Duke of Windsor was sympathetic to the Hitler cause and prepared a way for the British royal family to be used in power, if and when Britain was conquered by Germany.

2. Albert, consort of Victoria, when he wished to send Christmas cards to his relatives in Germany had some printed in England with typical snow scenes - mid 19th century. *Tellis rex tellis grex*, as the king so the people. The British populous followed the custom and Christmas cards with German snow scenes (for Britain hardly ever has a white Christmas) became the custom. Surprisingly, Australia with hot summers at Christmas has followed the custom too. So, also, the Hyksos introduced some new influences to the Egyptian court.

CHAPTER 2

JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE

"***But he refused", Genesis 39:8***

FOCUS;

We need to fill out some of the details about Potiphar's house and his household, **before we begin on the golden story of Joseph refusing Potiphar's wife, *Genesis 39:7-20***

1. THE SETTING - POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

Joseph must have impressed Potiphar, for upward mobility, under Potiphar's blessing, was the only way for Joseph to go. So Potiphar began to reward this pleasing slave of his.

The man Potiphar was tall and fat, and balding, but always elegantly clad. His clothes were of the finest cotton, with lashings of gold braid. He held the Syrian walking stick with a crystal knob in one hand, a fan in the other hand. There was a necklace in the pattern of flowers and leaves around his neck. Leather gaiters protected his shins, laced with leather thongs. Leather, papyrus and bronze comprised the sandals he stood in, with the point running between his great and second toe. From his brow dangled a lotus flower. Many used the lotus flower for decorating their persons.

Potiphar had come from one of the seven doors of beautiful red wood with fine wide bands of decoration above them. Those doors closed off the vestibule from his dwelling. Above these beautiful doors were windows of fine open worked stone slabs, and more stone slabs with decorated bands. The roof was supported by pillars of red wood set in stone bases with green capitals. Outdoor supports were always stone pillars. But there were small obelisks everywhere; they were the carved histories of Potiphar's noble family tree. There were bowls of pine cones and other pungent smelling aromas meant to stimulate the senses. The stone floor had a beautiful design of the heavens with its constellations, with hundreds of figures of birds and animals to enhance the design.

The little gate in the ring wall, through which Potiphar had moved, led him to the shade of the sycamore trees, date and doum palms, and fig, pomegranate and persea trees. Potiphar's long brown eye lashes shaded the eyes that gazed at the exotic gardens, filled with so many lush and colourful plants and beautifully plumed birds, that surrounded his house. A strutting peacock swished its tail and snuffled about among the insects that lay exhausted and expired on the paved courtyard. Paths of red pebbles or gravel ran across the grass. Among the trees on a terraced mound stood a gaily painted summer house - "*a smiling little pleasure house*". It was open towards a square basin of water, a lush little pool, bordered with papyrus leaves. On the green pond swam some bright feathered ducks among the lotus blossoms.

"*Go clean yourself and make yourself ready, for Potiphar has asked for you. Get a silver apron from the store house for your waiter's service, and a fitting garland for your hair from the gardeners, and stand behind Potiphar's chair as he dines to night. You will hand the dishes and serve him. After he has eaten, read to him from the book rolls, which you will get from the book house*". A body servant and a reader! Joseph's career has begun to flourish!

He took the silver apron and service, and a wreath for his hair and ran off to borrow the book from the library. This son of Jacob stood out for brilliance, charm, integrity, honesty, intellect, and business acumen. With all of this, he soon enhanced this family. And God made it so.

The dining room was high and bright, off the vestibule. Reflecting the light, painted friezes ran around the wall near the ceiling. So many of these friezes are still on view in Egypt today, so we do know about them. The wooden beams and supporting pillars here were sky blue. The pillars had larger round white bases. There was delightful decoration on the pillars, and ornaments

were wherever they could be. The dining chairs were ebony and ivory and gold, and adorned with gaping lion's heads and the seats were filled with many coloured, embroidered, down cushions. Lamp stands, bowls of burning incense balancing in tripods, basins, ointment jars, broad handled wine jars in holders - all elegant, glittering, gleaming, and giving off the most pungent perfumes. Roast goose, roast duck, joints of beef, loaves of bread, cakes, vegetables, melons, cucumbers and Syrian fruits were served from the buffet table - and Potiphar was hungry.

Comment:

There is a considerable amount of information about ancient Egypt and the Middle East, and all of it is valuable to understand the customs and culture of the two extremes from slave servant to honoured lord, that was Joseph. He lived and learned and loved within it.

Thomas Mann again helps us understand the setting where Joseph might first have been noticed by Potiphar. There is also an abundance of pictorial and other historical records available to help fill out our understanding. The children's picture book, "*Joseph"* by Brian Wildsmith, is also a good resource, beside the general history texts that are now available. In *Alan Millard's* "*Treasures from Bible Times*" there is a lovely picture of a mosaic - a standard from the "*Royal Tombs of Ur*", *page 46*. It is made of shell, red limestone and blue lapis lazuli and it is claimed that it belongs to the period several hundred years before the time of Abraham. It is a work of great beauty and consummate skill. It is amazing that such work is available for us to look at today. Lapis lazuli is still mined in Afghanistan in a slightly less primitive way, and it still comes along the same road to the west, that old Silk Road, on ancient trucks, and is still subject to robbers, and the miners and the middle men must still be heavily guarded, as shown on a recent television documentary. It was mined as early as 4000 BC.

"*Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*", *1857,* by *John Wilkinson* gives us great insight into the times of Joseph in Egypt, and of the Israelites sojourn in Egypt. Their geographical background and history had been linked since the time of Noah, for both Canaan and Egypt are reckoned to be Ham's descendants in the *Genealogical chart of the 64 Generations from Adam to Christ* with its accompanying chart, "*Distribution of the World's Races"*, and "*Repeopling the Earth and the Four Universal Empires"*, by *John Thomas.* However Abraham had descended from Shem, further north, from whence he came south into Ham's land, following God's direction.

The Carnarvon Collection of Egyptian Artefacts, on that archaeologist's death, was bought by the *New York Museum*. Also in French museums, and in the British Museum, one can see what times were like. In 1923 the Egyptians halted the practice of shifting their history overseas, and so now the Cairo Museum displays their own history. It is possible from all of this to draw a credible word picture of Potiphar, and his house, and it is easier to understand the Joseph story in a setting.

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2. JOSEPH'S PHENOMENAL RISE, AND FALL

Joseph served his master well, and when the master profited well, Joseph took it to be a sign from God that He was with him. As Solomon said, "*as he who keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured"*. When he was not needed with Potiphar, he (who had dreamed such dreams) knew that he was born to govern, spent every moment straining for understanding and knowledge to prepare himself for the special plans that

God had for him. Still, putting himself in the centre of things, hardworking and working out God's plan for his people, prepared the jealous and evil tongues, that eventually, with the woman, betrayed him.

There could have been 80 servants in this house, over half of them Asiatic *(The Times Concise Atlas of the Bible)*.

Maybe, if Joseph's journey and work in Potiphar's house lasted ten years, the first seven may have resulted in his elevation to Eliezer like status. We read of him being sold and sold again, but never freed, so that perhaps Joseph remained ever, legally a slave, until his death. It is interesting to think about the possibilities, if he was never decommissioned.

There would have been receipts that someone held. That fact might have been embarrassing in Joseph's later years, if there had not been a release from his slave status. His phenomenal career rise ignored the legal fact of his status, and because of the swift elevation to ruler, perhaps it never came into question, or if it did, it fell foul, into the dust, by God's design. God made remarkable provision for that possibility, for the seer quality of successful dream interpretation, did not allow his elevation to be questioned. Among his Egyptian dream interpretation peers, he alone was successful. The mathematical story of the ten years in slavery (with perhaps the last three of those years being his trials by Potiphar's wife culminating in catastrophe) leaves three prison years, before the age of thirty years, when Joseph stood before Pharaoh as successful dream interpreter, (*Companion Bible* - "*Chronological Chart, Appendix 50*").

There is a remarkable coincidence with his three days in the pit at Dothan. There are other obvious coincidences.

3. THE POISON THORN OF JEALOUSY

Jealousy can often, in the end, work against God's plan, though God will find another way to nurture those who wish to work in His service. It was then, in Potiphar's house, and it is still in God's house, - an ungodly thing.

(See end chapter comment for ***Digression***)

Well, the poison here had set in, and so nothing saved Joseph. He again was brought down within another family. He was much loved by his father, and this led to the jealousy poison fermenting in the chalice that held his brothers. He may have been loved by Potiphar, but too much loved by his wife, which later turned to hate, and laced the poison into the chalice. Pleasure and profit was before him, and fidelity was not the custom. The wife in this house was a licentious woman, and lived the common Egyptian woman's lot of unrestricted activity, never veiled, and not secluded. She had the power to own property, access to her husband's property and a formidable personage, whose sense of power it may be unwise to offend. In fact rather the same sort of power that women in the western world have today. Those privileges need not be exploited, but Potiphar's wife did exploit them, and Joseph was the victim.

When a powerful man or woman in a prominent position flaunts the integrity of his or her marriage, before the eyes of the world, values are changed and society adapts, and these things become more commonplace, and expected. It is an ungodly path to tread, and Joseph, with great presence and faith, resists. He was powerfully supported by that grace, which "*kept him from falling*".

"***A wretched man from the retinue of the desert, a fly by night.***

A sand dweller of the Ibrium - a sand man you call him, a foreigner.

Whoever bought him to be a slave here amongst us?

He has far too much power in this house.

A scabby Asiatic living in this house in Egypt.

What work does he do?

Does anyone ever see him work?

Or does he just enjoy the power of his position?

Our levels have dropped.

We were pure, when we were small, and poor.

And the gods looked after us.

Now we are impure, and large, and rich and we are have grown lax.

We should have kept nerved and sinewy, and on guard.

No one would know which god preserves this house.

There is no god to preserve our great wealth, and the awe for our sceptre and crown.

All the gods will look upon us with disfavour if we keep this foreign slave.

What do we know of him?

He is an Asiatic louse beard, and we heard he came from a prison pit.

Potiphar has too much affection for him.

And that affects his affection for all of us.

How can we dispose of him?"

said the servants, on and on, seeking injustices, and were quick to seize any opportunity.

In the days and years before Joseph was consigned to the prison pit, jealousies worked their poison. **Now here again is another good set of jealous reasons, to plot to fill a poison chalice, which would force the hand of Potiphar against Joseph.** They reasoned, rightly, that Potiphar would **have** to act to save his personal prestige and honour, whatever the outcome. Other prominent spouses might grit their teeth, and for political prestige and honour bear the humility, and pretend that it is all normal. But there is too much at stake here.

4. JOSEPH'S FAMILY BACK IN CANAAN

Joseph is more than 17 days away from his family. Think of 17 days journey for us, that is a long way. This is further than Jacob was in Haran, from Isaac and Rebekah. However his great grandfather and mother, Abraham and Sarah had lived in Pharaoh's court, not here, but a little further west. Ishmael's mother, Hagar, and his wife had come from Egypt, all Shabirites, or Hebrews, with direct Egyptian experiences.

Now in charge of this household, and able to command, Joseph still does not contact Jacob.

There may be several reasons for Joseph's "*neglect*" in not contacting Jacob. He would know that, without him, there would be more harmony at home. Jacob's interference, if he knew Joseph was alive, might wreck, or at least disturb, the smooth path of Joseph's rising star. Because Joseph loved Jacob dearly, and knew of his expected reaction, he may have steeled himself against contact. It was a double pity pit, for,

First, ***Jacob*** thought of his son as dead, and then**,**

Second*, he* was not dead.

However, the "*security*" of the death thought omits the thought of further suffering for his loved son. All Joseph's brothers kept the secret and allowed Jacob to think that Joseph was dead. So Joseph had a sort of contentment that allowed him to get on with the business in hand: "*he had not a crushed spirit, nor did his bones dry up*". The seeming heartlessness of Joseph is really an act of heart, for **Jacob** does not share Joseph's trials, he **knows him only in his triumph later.**

Jacob would not know him now (as he had changed to be a man) except for the quickened, confused, fleeting thought, a scrap of old remembrance, like a broken mirror glass, that comes to us when we say,

"*Do I know that person, have I seen him before?*"

The thought can flutter and trouble us, but without fruition can fade away.

Jacob's thought, later, would be brought to fruition, but not yet. Jacob would be hovering between being

***1*. a doubter,** not because he believed nothing (on the contrary he had believed everything was possible for his son, Joseph, to be the vehicle of the promises). He doubted because Joseph was not, and being

***2*. a realist**, "*for Joseph is dead*", so the promises may not proceed because of some great obstacle. By now he was probably realistic, but patient, and faithful, for "*God would find a way*". His grandfather Abraham had proceeded in faith, and his son, Isaac, would have lain dead, except for God's intervention.

"*If my son Joseph is dead, then God will find a way*", is both realistic and faithful, and Jacob needed to come to that point. We don't know when that happened in Jacob's mind, that is, that his self pity had abated. The proof of Joseph's death lay in Joseph's silence - so silent (from sending Jacob a message) he was, still.

God had four times now set on course His covenant and it had been decommissioned three times before, with Adam and Eve and the fall, and Noah and the flood, and again at the Babel Tower, each time, when God was rejected, and His mission to witness ignored. At these times men had decided that they could work out their own salvation, without God. If Jacob had thought this through, he could have suspected that this was another decommissioning, of the covenant to Abraham and his seed. However we know that God was very tolerant, and did not decommission His people until long after this time. By then, He had pleaded many times with them, and only then, when their sins had become wholly intolerable. He then passed the mission mandate to others, *Malachi 1:11,* and the remnant went on to praise and preach in His name, so that "*hearts of fathers and children were (and will be) turned to the Lord*", (better

translation). His people were, no longer, part of The Great Commission, when God's worship forms were scandalously perverted, and the prophets were impotent to teach them repentance. God no longer delayed the shaking of the nation, and they were separated from the land, and the house of God was burned and broken to rubble. The Jews of the Great Synagogue, Sydney can hardly be said to have the Covenant of the Fathers and hold the Mission Mandate that was theirs, when they go to their graves believing there is nothing after death, no resurrection, no Kingdom of God on earth, no law going forth from Jerusalem. They proclaim to visitors that all the prophecies are fulfilled. It may be that policy and traditions and beliefs, including the Sadducidic ideas, are decided by the Rabbi, and not necessarily guided by the prophets.

Israel was not, and still is not, the showcase for God's blessings, as He meant them to be, for they are now *"not his sheep".* YHWH had a covenant with them, an understanding made between them, with which He promised them great blessings if they would keep His covenant. They failed to keep their part of the covenant, so the covenant collapsed, and now they are, in this century only a **mute witness**, with their return to the land of Israel. His "*sheep hear*" His "*voice*", but as He speaks to the Jews, as a nation, they do not "*hear*", *John 10:26-27*. Jerusalem will be the centre of all worship, but they, at this time, with their disregard for Him, have themselves**, as a nation**, forfeited their right to meet with Him, and to be His active witness to all nations. They were tethered with Him for the culmination of God's purpose, for His glory to draw all men unto Him, but the prophets could not avert their perversions. He then had to remove them from His national covenantal showcase and He now showcases those that "*hear*" Him and love Him, and His son. Their shattered glass remains today where individuals show forth His glory, but not the nation. When our Lord Jesus Christ returns and if they accept him, and repent, then they will be His people once more, as will be Gentile believers. They could have looked forward, dying with their faith in Him, expecting resurrection as did these patriarchs, but they would not. So they will be left in their graves, as their spokespersons themselves predict they will.

The prophets had pleaded for them, with God, so that God would not be derided for forsaking His people.

"*And He withdrew His hand*", from punishment, *Ezekiel 20:5-22,* for

"I*n their sight*", that is, in the sight of the nations, He had

"B*rought them forth*" from Egypt.

He did not wish the nations to think that He was playing with Israel.

However, in the end, their great wickedness moved God to act, **because** the nations derided Him, for **not** acting against them, *Ezekiel 36:22, 23.* God's holy name had been profaned in the midst of the nations, so He punished them,

"F*or then shall they know that I am the Lord*".

This was all so far ahead in history, and the wickedness of such great proportion, that the anomalies, in this family of Jacob, were insignificant. Still Jacob may not have felt them so.

5. HIGH LIVING IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

Potiphar accepted and trusted Joseph, and enjoyed the blessings God rained down on this house. Joseph in turn was nourished by all things Egyptian, in the food he ate, the water he drank, the sun that brightened his day, the soil beneath his feet, the words he spoke; they all

gave him an Egyptian flavour. Egyptians had a fundamental decisive character, a national characteristic, as we can see in national characteristics in people today. It was different to that of his family who had always been *gerim,* (or *guests*) in the land where they trod, but the adaptation practised by them, accommodating to their circumstances, allowed for a detachment, as well, from the practices of the Canaanitish Baal. This detachment from Egyptian worship was difficult to maintain here though, for it was so all pervasive.

6. JOSEPH'S DIFFICULTIES WITH BEING PURE AND POPULAR

These abominations, though none of us would advocate the conditions, added stiffening to Joseph's upbringing and taught him to stand alone, without family, amid the abominations. He remained detached from the godless worship and direction in which he lived. It was not an easy task, for trade, with which he was concerned, functioned in the temple courts, springing eternally around the feast days of the particular gods, carrying him, with the great sea of humanity, from city to city, where his presence was required. It was not only the cat city of per Bastet that held an unedifying mass of jollification and drunkenness, but all up and down the Nile there were pilgrimages, to which hordes thronged, and markets thrived. Anyone to do with trade and extending wealth (as Joseph was entrusted with Potiphar's goods and money) needed to be involved, yet Joseph kept himself pure and popular in the market place, for he was so successful at the work assigned to him.

Sometimes, the crowd would drink for four feast days, and then for extra days (like the great beer cities of Germany now). They were places of drunkenness, to which there was no shame. There was a goddess of drunkenness.

Joseph hid his lack of sociability behind the demands of business. Joseph would often be present at the gates of the gold palace of Pharaoh when the people would line the route. Pharaoh's gold chariot, with its gold wheels and gold axles - all covered with gold embossed pictures - was difficult to see, for it glittered so. The dust blown up by the hooves of the horses, reflected in the sun, was like a smoke from a flame, frightful to behold - a yellow light, like we see at bushfire time. Pharaoh had a gold and blue crown head-dress, set with yellow stars, but on the brow above the nose a gold cobra reared glittering with coloured enamel. He came out accompanied by a small eight or nine year old boy, heir to the throne, youthful, but delicate, (there is evidence that this son suffered from a kidney complaint but he did not portray his illness in his visage), in contrast to his sickly looking father, short, stout, puffy. His son travelled in his own chariot.

Comment:

In another chariot rode the Honoured One, his chief wife. Egyptian women were not secluded like Syrian women, nor veiled, though they did not hold high office. They were known for their intense social life and licentious behaviour. Research would probably show that cervical cancer afflicted many of them, and diseases like AIDs, and sexually transmitted diseases, were prevalent. They were married as early as 12 or 13, but marriage did not necessarily constrain them. The lower class women worked as labourers, but that was not viewed favourably. Pharaoh's wife was chief lady in the land. It is likely that Potiphar's wife was chief lady in waiting. The queen wore a luxurious silken (silk again, from China or India) gown, weightless, like woven air, white, in the fashion of the day. She was petted and indulged in her palace, carried in the arms of subordinates, like so many of these special ladies were. Strong and tall Nubian slaves were kept in readiness to propel these honoured ladies and gentlemen, wherever they wished to

go. The honoured ones were knelt to, loved from all sides, and twisted and turned in the delights of their own desires.

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Potiphar's wife may well have learned that **her** desires, in **her** house, might also be gratified. Potiphar may have been a eunuch, for Pharaoh's sake. The Hebrew for "*captain of the guard*" denotes "*eunuch*", *Speaker's* and *Ellicott's* commentaries. Potiphar was in charge of the guard, and it was customary for the guard to guard Pharaoh's private quarters.

Servants and guards were made eunuchs to stop sexual activity where it should not be. It ensured that the house progeny remained pure, and it enabled women to move about the house/palace freely. In some cases it was thought that to deny a man his sexual propensity, was to subdue his lust for power and wealth, for **we know** today, that lust for power, wealth and high sexual activity often travel together, in men of high consequence.

So Potiphar, probably made a eunuch as an employment condition, had bought a handsome slave for his house. This may have been a purposeful choice, to please and satisfy his wife in an area where he could not. We cannot tell.

If Potiphar was an eunuch for Pharaoh's sake, then sexual practises and preferences in **his** house, would at the very least, be startling, especially as there would have been a women's house for the concubines, and Potiphar's marriage would be a sham. However anything went in decadent Egypt, and men and women did not necessarily "*drink water*" from their "*own cisterns*".

There is a marriage lesson here, for the marriage state, important as it is, requires that both parties be satisfied and fulfilled. Potiphar probably neglected his wife, or was not able to satisfy his wife, so that she sought greener fields, perhaps with his knowledge, and maybe with his permission.

7. THERE IS A WINDOW ON THE FUTURE FOR JOSEPH

The future is born from the present. Indeed the future grows out of the present, and the future is fraught with sexual dangers for Joseph. Chaste Joseph is tormented with frightening temptations by Potiphar's wife. There is no chastity, where there is no capacity, and Joseph was a virile man. Certainly he married later, but he kept his virginity, as long as he associated its surrender with the idea of temptation and fall. Chastity was not due to inexperience, more the opposite, for it was due to a universal love and respect for all about him. He had a window on the future - that led him to keep his faith. He understood the need to bridle his passion and keep his virginity.

The lesson of Joseph for young people is a mighty force and can never be utilised often enough to keep them (and indeed ourselves) chaste and pure, *Genesis 39* and *Proverbs 7*.

Consider:

* **Why don't we talk about the lesson in this story more often?**

Surely the embarrassment of the story does not preclude us.

* **Or does the new open sex morality make us timid about making the point?**

* **Or do we think the young people will think we harp?**

Potiphar's wife kept up the temptation for days, and days, and days, and days, so the temptation was not over in a fleeting moment.

* **How can we shore up our resolve, and be like Joseph?**

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Joseph's chastity was an expression of:

a. **His compliant spirit for righteousness** - he knew about suffering and death and forbidden sexual activity; the punishment for pride, jealousy, and deceit. He knew how **not** to imitate those that had caused the family dysfunction and pain amongst his own kith and kin. He was sensitive to the dignity of others in such matters.

b. **His overcoming of the overpowering temptation,** like that of Adam and Eve over the fruit of the tree, **to know good and evil**.

c. Potiphar's wife may have seen the seduction of Joseph as an accustomed thing but **Joseph did not see it as a usual practice.**

d. **His knowledge of his inferior slave status** to Potiphar's wife, his superior in every way (except in his love for God). He could not have a relationship with a superior, where he would have to be passive, and do her bidding, in a master/slave, power situation, not a loving one.

e. **His recognition of his own family's need to keep racially pure,** for he would know of other occasions when the seed line was threatened - he would not wish to be party to that.

f. **His knowledge of his father's hatred for the land of Egypt**, in which he found himself - his father loathed Hagar's land, where they worshipped the dead, and animals. He knew his father, as well, loathed the notion of market sex, where both boy and girl prostitutes practised freely, and daily, and where the gods blessed it all. "*He would not go awhoring after the gods of Baal*". Joseph had seen enough of that in Canaan.

g. **His wish not to shame the father.** Even though Joseph had not contacted his father for so long, his need not to shame him would be a paramount consideration. It was the same for Jacob and his father, Isaac. Noah's shame by his son, the shame of Lot by his daughters (to raise up seed), the shaming of Jacob by Reuben, with Jacob's concubine (Bilhah) were known to Joseph. Nakedness and sex, in their right place, are innocent and unsuspect, but when they acquire a transferred significance, as Baal folly, it is sin. Jacob thought Joseph was harmed by the Baal practices, when he took so much interest in the stars, but it was a Godly message, and he was not harmed. So Joseph, **knowing that sex has a price tag for the unmarried, is** influenced by what shame he might cause his father, or his God.

h. **His understanding of sin, *"against thee only would I sin"*.** Joseph, like David, knew that sin, ultimately, is sin against God, and Joseph's sense of rightness kept him from sin.

i. **Joseph saw it as a denial of the promises to Abraham.**

j. **His knowledge and understanding of the blessings given by God to the fathers. He knew that with the covenant blessings came responsibilities as well, that is, to witness about YHWH to those about Him.**

8. JOSEPH'S SECOND PIT

The blessings had hovered over Joseph, he knew and treasured them. He would never throw them away, like a Reuben, sporting with a Bilhah, in this situation, injuring his future prospects.

Perhaps it was impossible for Joseph to avoid the jaws of the next yawning pit. He might have begun to realise the outcome. Some people flirt with danger and the thrill that goes with it, and that is a dangerous place to get into.

Surely Joseph was more responsible, and would not deliberately teeter on a brink. Man, it seems, does sometimes open the door of evil choice, rejoicing in the freedom, enjoying the thrill, "*playing with fire*", in a self confident and irresponsible manner, saying, and "*I know when to stop*". Well, the best advice for these situations is "*don't ever start;* ***do not be enticed****, not even a little way*".

It would be almost impossible, for Joseph to separate himself from the household, and its mistress, for,

- When she called, he ought to go, especially if he had been chosen by Potiphar for such gratification.

- If she **was** the wife of a eunuch, the temptation would be so intense.

- Joseph's pedagogue behaviour, as he went about his work, ignoring her designs, would intensify the demand.

- Therefore Joseph's scorn of the offer would anger the woman,

- But his resistance would accordingly be enhanced.

- Perhaps he unknowingly trifled with her emotions, as he did with his brothers over the dream incident, not understanding how people viewed his behaviour.

- Nor would he realise how young and comely and desirable he would appear to such a woman.

Perhaps she thought his reluctance was caused by his slave position, and that she must make the first move, and the second, and so she keeps up the intensity. Her sin was the bait, and his would have been the bite, but she baited and baited and baited, and he did not bite. He fled, fled the bait. "*Run, is the message of the Bible*", says *Charles Swindoll* in his book "*Joseph*", *page 30.* And we would agree that The Spirit of God forcefully commands "*Flee*". In circumstances like this, there is nothing else to do, "*you cannot yield to sensuality if you flee from it*". Perhaps Joseph did not mind the inevitable outcome too much, as he knew that God had great gifts in store for him.

"***My master hath committed all that he hath to my hand:***

And there is none greater in this house than I:

Neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee,

Because thou art his wife.

How then can I do this great wickedness?

And sin against God?", *Genesis 39:9.*

Noble words from a noble son, and noble slave.

Words for all of us in our desires, for none of us is alone, nor different in our desires. Loyal service to each other is required in all of us that we may not affront, and shame the dignity and sensitivity of another with disloyalty, for, in the end, it is always God that we offend. They were alone in the palace, there would have been no witness, but Joseph knew he could not hide the deed from God, nor could he live with it himself. He may have been forgiven, like David, but also, like David, he would have been unable to forgive himself.

The greatest gift that we can bring to our life partner is purity and fidelity, moral and ethical self control. We need to remember that the persuasion of Mrs Potiphar was all a lie. Yield, or resist, is the only choice, and to resist, you must flee.

Swindoll advises that -

You must not be weakened by your situation.

You must not be deceived by persuasion.

You must not be gentle with your emotions.

You must not be confused with the immediate results.

The great speech of Joseph, *Genesis 39:9*, should be engraved on our hearts to stiffen our resolve when temptation calls. Deceptive baits are all around us, and especially for the favoured young. It was the greatest moment in the life of Joseph, for he turned all the family dysfunction that had gone before into a muddy back water. The stream ahead flowed crystal clear, free and pure, though the way was rough. When he was stripped of his coat once more, he found again, that he was clothed with *"the heavens' embroidered cloths",* (W. B. Yeats).

Joseph practised *"safe sex".* The best safe sex there is. Would that the world would see it that way. We can't tell our children often enough.

Potiphar's wife was a woman scorned.

She tempted, he resisted.

Now a *"fury worse than hell",*

Overtook her.

She caught his cloak.

She used the cloak to accuse him.

She waited for Potiphar, and with the cloak as evidence.

She told him of the wicked slave who had betrayed his trust.

She told him of her strength in resisting him.

She painted the picture black.

She blamed Potiphar for buying a foreign slave

And putting all the women at risk.

No doubt, if Potiphar indeed had to conform to the job requirements of castration for himself, she would have reminded him of that also.

Potiphar did what he had to do, but not one whit more. Women were so powerful in Egypt, and considering the Gnostic heresies, they felt mighty superior, so much so, that Potiphar had to accept her story, for he may not have wished to offend her. The punishment could, and should have been much worse, but Potiphar's love for his hard working slave, together with a tiny doubt led him to send Joseph to his prison. We can imagine what that tiny doubt might be. But matrimonial peace was high on Potiphar's agenda. If indeed Potiphar was castrated, it was a cruel thing for his wife. It is then easier to understand why he would not wish to offend her. Whatever path Joseph had taken would have led to a prison of sorts. He chose a noble path.

Comment:

We need to resolve to read this chapter, *Genesis 39,* together with *Proverbs 7*, where the enticing prostitute incident is detailed, *"to keep* his *commandments, and bind them upon"* our *"fingers, and write them upon the table of"* our *"heart",* so that we will not be enticed.

Dylan Thomas, in "*Poem on His Birthday*" in 1949, mourns that - "*Tomorrow weeps in a blind cage*", for "*dark is a long way*". So it seemed to Joseph, as he went down the second time to the prison and the pit. As well, we might feel in the darkness, that so much more is required of us, than we are prepared to give, but for Joseph, that thought probably never entered his head.

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CONCLUSION:

At the foot of Joseph's height he dwelt once more, he was down, down, down again, he knows his valleys, and his depths, but he does not know how high the mountain peak will be, when at last he approaches it. We do know.

"***Soon Joseph, soon, soon, soon",* is the croon, the voice in the wind, the message from God, as He whispers in Joseph's ear. *"Be patient I am ever near".* It is the still small voice of God. Soon it will be like a thunder clap, and the lightening of His voice shall light his way around Egypt - but *"not yet, not yet",* and Joseph doesn't know when, or what, that *"yet"* will be.**

Digression:

Jealousy in God's house, is a difficult emotion to deal with, and can be so destructive, poisonous really. Men and women are easily attracted to the downcast eyes of evil and ill will, and they flourish in the climate of initiative, cleverness and blessing. This peer pressure causes the eyes of the jealous ones, to cast boundary stones further out from them, as they say "*you overstepped it*". It poisons initiative, and usefulness and the joy of service. To cut down a tall poppy, (because anyone who works well, shows up mediocrity), is an evil that denies use of a talent in service to God. The comfort zone of mediocrity is not a Godly place to be. **Bold for God** is. We need to ask for change when mediocrity produces such poor results. We need to ask help to activate change.

If the tall poppy is still bound by his/her motivation to serve, the talent is lost to those who denigrate it, and the poppy turns to another path. If the poison is complete, then may God forgive us the destruction we caused. We need to realise the damage we do to ourselves, **and to God**, if we crush a spirit, motivated by a love of God.

Discrimination in God's house is ungodly - and often borne of jealousy. The human being is born with natural survival instincts of self preservation, and to watch a tiny child striking for his own needs to be met, then, changing to being generous and loving to others, is a wonderful lesson in how God feels, when we change and want to serve Him. Self preservation is not an evil in itself, it is a primitive instinct, but goodness has to be learned. Self interest is inherent, but selflessness can be taught in a loving family, where graciousness is extended to all within its ambit.

To discriminate on who will receive grace and favour, and for that ambit to grow smaller as one grows older, is no path to God's Kingdom. The lesson for the Jews of Paul's "*mystery*", where Gentiles were to be included in the *"good news"*, should teach us that. We cannot love, or like, some of those who God judges as His servant, and despise others, that is, "*look down on*", *Romans 14:3*. We should not cultivate a poison thorn to prick and undermine those for whom **we** do not care, and destroy their gift to God.

It is amazing that this country, Australia, has moved within fifty years from a wretched (for many people) White Australia policy, to a multicultural one. Right or wrong, it is now against the law to discriminate. Now we have advertisements to encourage everyone, including the elderly, shut in ones, and yes, even the jealous ones, to accept the all embracing policy. We have also been taught to love and respect the first Australians. The church did not teach it, but the state eventually did. We **had** to be taught, for we were taught otherwise for so long. New ideas can totter on the anvil of criticism, and so they need to be more cleverly enshrined, so that the whole lesson is learned, but they will remain, for they are Godly. Some find it too difficult to learn the lessons, even in our own worshipping community, but that does not change the lesson. Their protests will die with them, and the lessons **will** be learned.

The human soul can be so difficult. It seems it often cannot be gracious over another's success, finding it hard to praise and give support, and easy to snort and sniffle and bring down. We often enough say, "*Love one another*", but it seems we need to actively teach one another to accept our fellow workers, our brothers and sisters, more graciously. We cannot decide who we will love. God accommodates Himself to the paths He knows we will take, which we tread with free will, so we need to accommodate ourselves to those who wish to introduce change, within the guidelines, without so much resistance (for it is often those who attract the poison thorns).

Resistance and confrontation ultimately saps enthusiasm and energy, and eventually success will falter, and they will leave the poisoning community, and find another place. This is the result most wished for by those who poison, and so they are glad. But it is not the result God wished for. There are lots of techniques we can use to negotiate with one another.

"*Please do not speak amongst us like that*". "*May we speak again to morrow when we are calmer?*" and good discipling is done in an atmosphere of love and respect. Being right does not entitle discipling to be done with aggression.

CHAPTER 3

DOWN TO THE PIT AGAIN

"***The Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison", Genesis 39:21*.**

FOCUS:

The disappointment of it all must have been overwhelming for Joseph, but if he looks on the bright side; he will see wonderful opportunities ahead in this prison of his, ***Genesis 39:21-23***.

1. KORAN WISDOM

There is a section on this story of Joseph in THE KORAN*, LXXVII, SURA XII - JOSEPH, PEACE BE ON HIM, MECCA*, at *20*, suggesting judgement on the matter of Potiphar's wife, that if his garment was torn at the front, there was no doubt that Joseph was involved. If the garment was torn at the back, then he should be proclaimed innocent. This piece of wisdom may not impress us, and would not impress Potiphar, if he was bound, in duty, to resolve the matter in his wife's favour. Joseph was therefore condemned, no matter where the garment was torn.

2. JOSEPH'S PRISON

Joseph's chastity and his punishment, over the matter of Potiphar's wife, shames his brother Reuben (with his lack of chastity over his father's concubine). And now Joseph is taken (as ***Psalm 105:18*** **tells us) "with his feet in fetters and restrained with irons**", to the prison***, Genesis 39:21-23*. It could be no other time in Joseph's pit experiences**. It could not be the long trip from Canaan to Egypt, for it would hardly have been appropriate to keep a prisoner fettered, especially one as congenial and useful as Joseph.

We can assume, that at first, Joseph's imprisonment here was without dignity, and that he was brought tethered, (no iron yet), - perhaps to appease Potiphar's wife. Nelson Mandela's great quest to be treated with dignity during his long internment, eventually won out. He used many strategies for this. Joseph had God working for him, to improve his conditions, and things changed for him also. Potiphar might have had second thoughts, or all along knew it was a lie, for the prison director could hardly have treated Joseph kindly, imitating God's "*mercy and favour*", if Potiphar did not command it. Prison keepers are not naturally so, they are not known for soft hearts, but they, as well as other men, are in the hands of God. Even so Joseph would know that he was incarcerated just for the sake of matrimonial peace in Potiphar's house, and that would teach him that confidence in man was a vain thing. Paul was allowed paper and ink, and begat thereby many saints for the Lord. Without this generosity, and the epistles which were produced, we may not be in a relationship with the Lord, about whom he so ardently wrote. Paul and Joseph provide great examples for those who are restrained for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Joseph used **his** prison experience for God's glory in another direction as we shall see.

We cannot tell where this prison was. *Speaker's* and *Ellicott*'s commentaries favour Potiphar's prison nearby, even attached to his house. Perhaps he was there in the house attachment for a time, but the hatred of Potiphar's wife for Joseph, would encourage him to send Joseph to the regular prison, where he could more easily avoid her murderous intent. This was the great prison of the Kings on the Lower Nile, favoured by many others. Joseph had seen it before. It was an island prison, past Memphe and Bastet, the city of cats, and retracing that journey ten years before, now down the Nile, he would remember the huge gates of Thel that swung out across the river. The fortress prison island and the customs house were contained here - though Joseph

knew in the terms of the well loved hymn, "*a mighty fortress is **our God***" - not man made prisons.

It was seventeen days journey, a distance of 480 kilometres. It was the Lower Egypt district of Djedet an abominable goat district. If we consider that Potiphar's prison would not have given Joseph the opportunity to display his talents, and would be an unlikely place for the long imprisonment of the "*traitors*" - butler and baker, for "*a season*", probably a year, we would decide it was the larger prison of the Kings.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 1***)

The hardness of God can be viewed as kinder than the softness of man, and so it was that Joseph resided under God's care, in the second prison pit.

Comment:

God can soften the pain and dull the grief but if He does not, it is because He wants us to look forward out of the shadowlands of *C. S. Lewis*, and to the glory that is to come.

That is the secret of grief and sorrow and trouble, for God, as the sculptor, brings great pain with the chisel, but it does produce a lovely piece. The lamp and light of our feet and path (of *Psalm 119:105)* is the dream (nightmare often) ended, and, a known way, longed for, prayed about, is always ours either in this life, or the next, whatever God decides. It is always light after shadow. We must not begrudge the shadowlands for it foreshadows the light. The setting sun, (on the grief laden, loved of God, the left behinds), will indeed soon rise for them too, in time, in God's time. We sing *"the sun that bids us rest is waking our brethren 'neath the western sky",* and we understand the wisdom of God in the turning of the earth. Neither *"The voice of prayer",* nor *"the strains of praise",* then, is ever *"silent",* and his children continue so to bless Him, because of this wondrous Heavenly phenomenon. That continuum must be a blessing for God, and for us, for even when *we* are asleep the prayers to Him, and the praise for Him continues by others who are waking and walking in the western sky. So in the spiritual life of His children, the shadow becomes light. Often our greatest fear is our greatest victory and God never means us to waste the shadowlands, or the suffering that comes with it.

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There is a symmetry between *verses 1* to *6*, and *verses 20* to *23* of *Genesis Chapter 39*, for in each situation Joseph is praised for good work, for the Lord was with him, wherever. Surely Joseph's perseverance, even with this shattering reverse, is instructive to us. He would not sin against God, wherever.

Joseph's misery (whether he went to a nearby, or far away prison) would be touched with his sense of destiny, for, at 28 years, he is the son of Jacob, of Jacob's best loved, and only treasured, and now dead, wife. His state was hideously familiar to that other pit state of his, where he lay in a hole in the earth with worms about him. Each pit had been the result of domestic intrigue. Each time his "*Technicolour* (dream) *coat*" had been torn from him, and from a position of great privilege. He now had on another prison/slave garment and his privilege garment in both cases had been evidence against him, by those who had torn it from him. He wore no more the privilege, coloured, Jacob coat, and now again no more the slaves' hip apron, and the curled wig, enamelled collar, armbands and necklace of red and gold, of the steward of

Potiphar - no more "*a walking work of art*" as *Andrew Lloyd Webber* described him - only "*fetters*".

Twice disrobed,

Twice disgraced,

Two slave garments,

Two pits

Joseph might have been thinking of the corn and planting time, for it was festival time. He had been left alone at Potiphar's house, *verse 11*, probably because of a feast festival attended by the rest of the household. The "*dead*" corn buried in its pit, would soon burst forth in newness of life - Joseph knew that glory was to come. The glorious dream and the interpretation was enough to keep him from wavering. Truly dreams are the forgotten language of God - how precious were the dreams that God gave these patriarchs and Joseph. How precious (to the beneficiaries) were the cow and corn dreams of Pharaoh.

However, the glory to come does not prevent the weeping, nor should it. Incarceration, or illness, or the shadow of death, are all good reasons to mourn. They are all honourable estates, and part of the development towards the glory. It is the future glory that helps us steer the course, like the ancient mariners used the stars. We need not wish away the unpleasant present, though, as we look forward to the future joy. To wish the present away dishonours it and the learning processes that God has given us. The philosophers tell us that we live in the past and the future, and only 5% in the present. If we stopped to savour the present it might intensify the happiness and enhance the future (to help us to deal with coming trials). We are children of the moment, hurtling forward; everyone is "*busy*" - too busy? "*What's next*", we cry, in our culture of impatience, and consult our diaries. "*Slow me down Lord*", please, "*there is more to life than increasing its speed*".

3. JOSEPH'S HINDSIGHT AND FORESIGHT

Joseph now had to learn to savour this moment in his life. At least, he is released from the pressure of the woman. Surely it was becoming unbearable, surely now he could rest for awhile, and not struggle against his temptress, or his bonds.

Noah had been wise, because he built an ark to save his family from the flood to come - anticipation, or foresight it's called. Joseph had not lost his far sight, not lost sight of God, nor cast himself away, but ensnared in the immediate situation, his foresight had been lacking.

He must have chided himself, for this situation had led him perilously close to losing all - into the jaws of death, for that could have been the penalty. Similarly, lack of foresight had led him almost to death, once before, when his seeming superiority ignited his brothers' resentment. Still,

Useless regretting for old things

Embitter the new,

And to whip oneself with hindsight

Is useless,

Better to equip oneself with foresight.

And Joseph learns the lesson.

Still Joseph is in the pit again, and by the greatest of good fortune (God's provision) - not dead.

Consider:

* Had Joseph been too long in Potiphar's house?

* Had it all made him a little careless?

* Had Joseph become complacent in the outer garments of ease to which he had become accustomed?

* Had the technicolour of all around him, blinded him?

* Or was there nothing Joseph could have done better?

****

The Egyptians never cared about the future for themselves. Their *Book of the Dead* was a collection of spells and utterances to assist in the afterlife. Anxious about the course of their lives, and their afterlife, they employed priests and wonder workers and soothsayers and magicians and they made endless provision for misfortune both for known and unknown calamities. Every chink in their armour was covered - just in case, - by magic, charm and divination of every kind. Thus they never had to have concern or foresight about the future, for they had the future covered. No wonder they loved Joseph and his prediction of plenty and famine, and his solution. Ah, the fickleness of these children of Ham.

Comment:

Lack of foresight is not a sin, and Joseph did no sin, but it's a good common sense life awareness skill to nurture. We teach our children foresight, though they say we worry too much, and we smile when we see them trying to teach their children the same skill. We wanted them to see the pitfalls, before they fall into the pit.

Lot flirted with temptation by living with the people of Sodom, though Abraham moved away. We don't want our children to go so close, like Lot, that they must be snatched from the fire. It is a difficult skill to teach, without appearing anxious. Oh may He enlighten the darkness *(Psalm 18:18)* and teach us to be wise and understanding parents, anticipating and preventing the pitfalls with foresight, never neglectful, yet never over anxious. There is an achievable balance between anticipation and over concern, and it takes maturity to develop the skill.

Anticipation is one of the great motivates for little children that a mother can employ. If there has been a bad day yesterday, it is so easy to start the next day, with plenty of love, and talks about what good things will happen today, "*how everyone will be sooooo good today, and what a happy day we will have together*", with reminders throughout the day, about how well we are managing, not mentioning the sad day, and never threatening, - with plenty of quiet, quick prayers for God to help you, is a the best strategy. Positive reinforcement is far better, and discipline worked out with **love**, (rather than violence for punishment, which breeds **fear**), will prove to have better results. God wants His children to learn -

1. To take the consequences for their actions,

2. That malpractice brings with it justice, and

3. That self discipline brings its rewards.

He would rather have His children be well behaved because of **love,** than behave well because of **fear**, and **threats**.

Deliberate acts of discipline, without violence, may be in order in some cases, but the lessons of consequences (now in place in our schools) are very effective. The effect of a child having to take home a pink slip (or whatever colour) to disappointed parents is such a deterrent, and helps parents and teachers work together for better behaviour.

God did threaten justice, but he laced the management of His Israelite children with love and mercy. The justice turned out to be consequences following their wicked deeds. He retrieved them repeatedly, but in the end He did not save them. "*If you will I will*", or "*if you will not, I will*", God promised them, over and over again, and gave them so many chances, but they were eventually rejected, for their consequences could not be reversed.

The *New Testament* positive messages of love and support, for **our** efforts to overcome our sins, are so welcome.

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Joseph never did **fear** the Lord in that sense, but walked aright for **love** of Him. He trusted that He would deliver him. Still his lack of foresight, or lack of anticipation, caused him abasement, in two disrobes and two pitfalls.

Still not dead though, as we keep reminding ourselves.

4. CONTEMPORARY EVENTS IN THE FAMILY OF JACOB

Sometime while Joseph is in prison, Isaac died. It would be comforting to know that Jacob and Isaac were together, that they loved one another, and in the circumstances of their later lives when they were widowed of their treasured wives, they loved one another well.

The deceitfulness of Jacob's earlier time with Isaac (when Jacob was 77 years old) seems to have been paid for over and over. The two mighty incidents, when God spoke to Jacob, at the going to Haran (at Bethel) and the coming from Haran (at Peniel), were two purging incidents, or dreams, that helped Jacob to cope with the vicissitudes of his family life until now. We are not told, but Isaac and Jacob may have truly cemented the breach after Rebekah's and Rachel's and Joseph's death. We truly hope that it was so. Joseph's "*death*", for Jacob, still remains, and wisely so.

Esau came at the death of their father, Isaac, (140 years), and the twins buried him, (*Genesis 35:29)*, and divided the inheritance. Esau would take goods away home with him, and Jacob would keep the land on which he dwelt. Jacob's breach with Esau had been healed at Peniel seventeen years earlier, it seems. We assume that Esau hears, on this family occasion, of the "*death*" of Joseph as well. When he later hears of the "*revival*" of Jacob's son, and the circumstances surrounding his disappearance, he will surely be astounded. Maybe he would think his more "*normal*" life is more preferable, and after all the drama in the family home over the blessings, **his** family life has been more settled and fulfilling, away from them all. Jacob's family life certainly had not been one of contentment.

5. JOSEPH - SECOND TIME SLAVE

Joseph could equivocate that he has added to his status, not now Potiphar's slave, but Pharaoh's slave. He knows he will still gain his freedom, and they in this prison don't know that. Not for Joseph the philosophical reflections of the *Ecclesiastical* man when he speaks, at the beginning of *chapter 4*, of the evil that is done under the sun, the dead who had already died, are happier than the living who are still alive, but better than both, is he who had not yet been. Jacob thinking, maybe, not Joseph. Although for Joseph the sun had clouded over, the midnight moon was there. God's smile was not withdrawn from him. That midnight moon was slowly, silently walking "*the night, in her silver shoon*" - but Joseph would not see "*the silver fruit upon silver trees*", that *Walter De La Mare* did in "*Silver*", but only her beams, catching on the casement of his prison windows.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 2***)

6. EGYPT'S PRISON AND STONE QUARRIES

The prison wherever it was, would not have been a place of "*ease*", but one of intense slave labour.

Comment:

The Times Concise Atlas of the Bible informs us of a prison register of the time, now available, from Egypt's past. Still more finds are becoming available from fruitful Egyptian digs. It is exciting that so much of both *Testaments* can be illuminated by these recent discoveries, so well preserved in the dry sand, and easily found, when the sand blows away.

 # The prison system worked quite methodically with

- A director, or captain of the guard, and

- Keepers, like warders.

They filed inmates under seven entries from

- Name and sex, through to a final discharge tick, equivalent to a case closed.

 # Also, manuals have been discovered which give instruction in the important practice of dream interpretation, which skill, God given in Joseph's case, is the overlaying factor in the detailed story of *Genesis 40* and *41*.

The prison consisted of

- Cubicles (cells) and

- Barracks (for soldiers),

- Garages (for carts and chariots),

- Stables (for horses),

- Storehouses,

- Passages and connecting corridors,

- Courts (for trials).

A high wall surrounded it all, and at one end was a Migdol tower and the residence of the director, or governor of the prison.

This prison residence was too far away from Pharaoh to house Potiphar, and so could not have been Potiphar's prison. There is a delightful picture of a huge prison in Brian Wildsmith's children's book "*Joseph*", a building with millions of plain bricks, two pillars and few decorations, austere and scary.

Languishing in the prison in Djedet meant the stone quarries. *Thomas Mann* gives us some information about this. Eight kilometres away, inland, "*languishing*" was a metaphor for slaving in Pharaoh's stone mine, hewing, mining, cutting and hauling. Jacob had taught Joseph a hatred of the bondage of Egypt and Joseph now saw it first hand. He'd seen enough of it (in *Genesis 39:3, 4*) when he was in Potiphar's house, and done what he could to alleviate it. Here in prison it was that softness and loving care, that brought about his elevation once more *(verse 22)*. Of course, he could manage lists and records, but he also continued his care of his fellow man.

The records that went off to the capital not only recorded, accurately, the business of the place but, in his honest, trustworthy and sympathetic manner, Joseph helped establish a model prison, even, say, to the hospital where a man may be shamming but given the benefit of the doubt.

- Eye salve from Byblos (a seaport of Lebanon) helped to soothe the inflamed eyes (from stone dust);

- soothing poultices for belly fever;

- Insect bites (gnats and other insects) with the resulting infected discharge, were treated with goose grease mixed with an emollient powdered herb;

- And for bloated abdomen, a chewing of castor oil plant berries mixed with beer.

- For rubbing and moisturising, vegetable oils and fats were used extensively.

These were all treatments used at the time, and probably effective. Mixed in were many magic spells and weird practices. And if you drank warm beer by mistake, it meant that you were about to undergo a period of suffering.

In *Jeremiah 46:11,* the prophet speaks of Egypt's multiplying remedies in vain. Egypt had a reputation for expertise in the healing arts, but there was no healing for them in God's plan, spoken of in this chapter*, verses 2-26*.

Of course, Joseph had made himself full of knowledge and could tell how much **bread, beer, fish, and grain** was needed to sustain each builder.

He also knew

- The number of bricks needed to build a ramp.

- And he knew 50 sacks of wheat could be held in a vat and

- That cat grease smeared around the openings of the granaries was enough to keep the rats and mice away.

Cat grease - that means dead cats. They worshipped the cat in per Bastet, - perhaps they were offered as well, and the resulting grease collected. In any case good clean, mouse free granaries were essential in Egypt - good for selling corn and enslaving starving peoples.

Joseph knew

- It would take 12 oxen and 50 asses to carry food to 500 stoneworkers, officers and overseers.

- knew how many men were needed to move a large block of stone;

- How deep to dig the hole for the stone;

- How to clear a path and make the tracks;

- How strong to make the ropes;

- How to tie and plait them;

- How to make the wooden A frames to support and guide the ropes.

- How often to wet it under the sledges;

- When to use the grease;

- That rollers would need to be brought to supplement the sledges in the difficult spots.

(It is only recently that mathematicians, with computers, have been able to work out how the great stones were moved into position.)

Some people are made like computers and Joseph must have been one of those. It was always recognised in Joseph, and always led from the pit to the keeper of the books, first with the hairy Ishmaelites, then with Potiphar, and now in prison. Of course, the fetters were soon removed as Joseph was such a useful chap. But with all of this, it could not become a model prison, without sympathetic justice to his fellow prisoners, and Joseph added that as well. He was active, positive and led an individual mission for God.

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(See end chapter note for ***Digression 3***)

7. JOSEPH'S SHINING LIGHTS

For Joseph

It was not all dark,

For the stars were there.

Their tiny lights had given him courage.

His shining true was the star's reflection.

This little glowing light in the earth,

Down in the pit,

Shone true,

Waiting for the next brilliant robe,

Still to come,

Third one now.

So Joseph waited for God to guide him further into Egypt.

Joseph was now like a caged bird;

It was as if he had fallen from another nest,

Overbalanced really,

Having been pushed out once more.

But as he sniffed the air,

And looked around,

He knew God was there.

Only Joseph was pure and clear - he learned that, as he learned about God. Many would have a hand in his education - men and women - ungodly men and women - God guided.

The prison keeper, *"paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph, and gave him success in whatever he did", Genesis 39:23*

CONCLUSION:

God had often, in our story of the patriarch's, adapted, or accommodated Himself to man's will, - using Plan B, instead of Plan A - for man had proved himself unable to follow Plan A. Joseph was remarkable in that *"he let go and let God"* - use Plan A.

Digression 1:

Abou-Saif in 1990 wrote *in A Middle East Journal* (an American Christian woman's journey into the heart of the Arab world - formerly an Egyptian national) and talks of the cities of Egypt along the Nile, on *page 6,* as - "*beige and grey sand cities*". She says that the people's faces are the same beige colour - "*as if they have been sculptured from the intervening desert*". Over 90% of Egypt is now arid desert with most of its population living on the Nile Valley. The sand pervades it all, the building the roads the people and even the refuse and garbage are covered with sand. The trees are beige and all the plants are layered with sand dust. The River Nile splits Egypt and its cities into two and its width keeps the noise and poverty of the poor away from the rich.

The sand would have no less effect in 1717 BC, (if that is a reasonable date to place this story) and the river (with dredging) still winds round and round towards the sea, and the buildings appear now, as they did then, as mounds of cooking biscuit mixture, the little craft with its melancholy and brooding prisoner aboard takes that same course. Joseph must like all men "*endure their going hence*", of *Shakespeare's* "*King Lear*", - but perhaps Joseph will see that every situation, however wretched it seems, has some sort of comfort attending it. Schoolgirls used to call it - "*being Pollyanna*" (being "*glad*" - *The Glad Books*, we used to call them) always finding good, a ray of hope, a silver lining to every cloud.

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Digression 2:

It is the same sun and the same moon for us. When we look, we know he saw them too, and felt the wind, his wind, our wind, upon his face. Joseph has been where we go, he saw what we see,

he felt like we feel, and God was with him, as He is with us. Actually it may be, or may not be, the same stars that we see that Joseph saw, for the star pattern slowly changes over the centuries. New stars are created and old ones explode and disappear, but we would like to think the general star pattern is common to us all. The star pattern is uncertain, for several reasons, for example, what we call *The Southern Cross* as recorded by the Romans, disappeared from the Northern Hemisphere before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and was only noted again by Banks, in the night skies above Australia, when he arrived here with Captain Cook, just over 200 years ago. It had been thought it might be viewed from the great south land, and so that was one of his commissions. It is not known for how long the *Southern Cross* could be viewed from Australia before that. Astronomers predict that the Earth will continue to turn so that "*we*" will no longer be able to see that *Southern Cross*. So, of course, the stars do not change their station so much as our earth revolves, and it may be that the southern cross **is** there for parts of the northern hemisphere to see, but it is daytime for them, when they pass so they cannot see it.

But it was *A. B. Patterson*, who told us of the well known Australian "*Clancy*" (of the Overflow), who saw -

"T*he vision splendid*", when he viewed "*the sunlit plains extended*"*,* but at night "*the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars*", as Joseph did. They were everlasting, and a joy to him.

****

Digression 3

Caroline Chisholm, in the early part of Australia's development, led a crusade for colonial women to work as "*God's police*" in civilising the men who were misusing convict women. Not **all** men would have then been uncivilised, and yet this presupposed they were. It was an unnecessary burden to put on women, and let the men off the hook too easily; it's everybody's work (not to be God's police), but to encourage everybody, by example, towards a caring community. Moral behaviour is for all.

Anne Summers in her thesis on the "*The Colonisation of Women in Australia*", *pages 21* and *22,* explains why this crusade did not work. It was the children who needed education. The children of the poor convicts were working, as little adults, on the farms, and in the factories. This impaired their health and intellectual development. The refined women in the community, employed nannies to rear their children, and so the children learned from the uneducated nannies. Compulsory education and parenting skills are comparatively recent innovations in Western society. The necessary education towards unselfishness and high moral values began in the second half of the nineteenth century. Even today human rights groups are trying to prevent the carpet manufacturers in India, from using children for long hours in their factories. Education is a key factor towards better conditions for children in India as well, and those who establish schools as well as factories, can use the Rugaid tag for their carpets, and are viewed in a better light.

The family is the place where children learn to be unselfish. They are certainly not born that way. Watch any 18 month old child, with self purpose in mind. There is no thought of others, yet. It is a joy to develop that in a child, and we would be remiss if we did not do so. Unselfishness in families is so common it's almost the general rule - we might wonder what happens to change that. David learned the lesson of consequences - even though God forgave him for the Bathsheba incident; he lived with the consequences all his life. However he was impotent to

discipline his children because of it (sin and its consequences); Jacob was also impotent (over deceit) with **his** children.

Arthur Boyd, a twentieth century Australian artist, in his *Biblical* paintings of the late 1940's, portrayed humanity as moving endlessly from

- The spiritual, to the bestial, and back again.

He painted

- Love and despair;

- Desire and guilt;

- Life and death;

- Cruelty and passion;

- Hopelessness and the hoping.

He painted

- The tragic, yet magnificent spectacle of humanity with great compassion and sympathy, and then with angry and urgent brush marks, he portrays the evil in us all. His war paintings are magnificent, portraying disappointment in the continuing bestiality of man. There is often a little white dog in his paintings, quite out of context, symbolising hope, and light, so longed for by the tortured souls in his paintings.

But we are not all black and despairing like this, and there is always light and hope.

CHAPTER 4

THE SECOND PIT

"***And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers… and he put them in the house of the captain of the guard, the place where Joseph was bound", Genesis 40:2, 3.***

FOCUS:

There is now a remarkable story that paves the way for Joseph to enter Pharaoh's house**, *Genesis 40*.**

This is a story of a butler and a baker.

The two men had been sent down from on high.

They had been on high looking down.

Like any of us *"on high",*

They had a long way to fall.

Better for us all to look up

- Rather than down.

1. PHARAOH'S BAKER AND BUTLER

The baker, a supervisor of Pharaoh's sweet meats (lists of 57 varieties of bread, and 38 varieties of cakes, are on record). The art of confectionery was carried to great perfection.

We will assume that this man was Bata the baker of Mempi, whom Joseph met ten years before when he first entered Egypt.

And the butler was an overseer of Pharaoh's wines, - the poor people drank beer - the butler was the highest serving position to a sovereign in the East. *Plutarch erroneously suggested that there were no vines in Egypt, but this has now been abundantly disproved with the discovery of engravings depicting them* - from the commentary of *Ellicott)*.

The baker and the butler were both implicated, rightly or wrongly, as traitors. Perhaps they were less sympathetic to the Hyksos, than to the indigenous Egyptians, who wished to take the throne. They now found themselves stripped of their hitherto lofty positions, and they were offended at being **thought of** as traitors to the king.

Comment:

Again there is plenty of information about the baker and butler Egyptian occupations, and these two were the premier servants of Pharaoh.

Although Egypt has not been a great producer of wine, there were grape vines from one end of the country to another. The tomb pictures show that the vines were not festooned as in Italy, for there were fewer trees. There is every process of vintage depicted, grapes in baskets, men trampling grapes, various forms of presses for squeezing out the juice, jars for storing it, and of the various processes of fermentation.

It has now been discovered that there was a productive wine industry in Georgia, (known to us as formerly part of Russia), 4 millenniums ago, at the time of Abraham, which they are now successfully reviving. It is amazing how peoples can now trace their forebears and their activities so far back in history.

Baker and cupbearer, that is**, bread and wine**, there is no strength in making anything of that, except that the it was a conduit for Joseph's rising. It would be blasphemous to do more than note it. But it **is** interesting.

A palace coup has been recorded at this time, when a concubine and her son, attempted to dispose of the aged king, and his sickly son. The formerly well loved concubine (perhaps an indigenous Egyptian rather than an Hyksos sympathiser) believed her son Noferka-Ptah should be king. (We need to recall that the Saul and David dynasties behaved rather much the same). They hatched a plot to poison those in the way, perhaps a serpent bite. A traitor to the concubine quickly raised the alarm, and revealed the plan, and the pretender was banished to the southern Nubian states, (like Russia's Siberia, or England's Australia in the eighteenth century). His mother was strangled by eunuchs. Nubians are still serviles in Egypt, today.

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These two men, Pharaoh's baker and butler, cried out in their pain and anguish, for the charges laid against them.

No crime or name is recorded in *Scripture,* but it could easily be, chalk in the bread, and flies in the wine - or poison

On *page 65,* of *Thomas Mann*'s, "*Joseph and His Brothers - Joseph the Provider*" there is a word picture of the butler and the baker "*coming down*" from the palace on a prison float. They were pale with fear "*ashen, corpse colour*", fearing for their families, for they had always had the best of care, until now. Fluttering beside Pharaoh's royal ensign was the little "*flag of suspicion*", that told anyone who watched the boat glide by, that suspected traitors were on board. They disembarked and were marched forward and were delivered to the holding outer prison, the vulture hut, and secured to the back wall, and locked in, in disgrace, "*under the ridgepole, adorned by the outstretched winged vulture*". Others picture the suspects as arriving at the prison gate, in the company of soldiers, having carried on their backs, for a long distance, along the roads, heavy portrayals of the gods whom they betrayed.

The baker of bakers and the butler of butlers, found themselves also, like Joseph, at the bottom of the greasy pole.

2. THE BUTLER AND THE BAKER IN JOSEPH'S PRISON

J**oseph, now in charge of the butler and the baker, was kind to them and allowed them little privileges.** They were used to having their feet and their backs scratched, and their necks massaged, and their hands manicured, and many other little luxuries. They called in the chief dream interpreters when their sleep was troubled back in Pharaoh's court. They had lived in great luxury and comfort, and now they worried themselves sick, how would they manage. They dreamed dreams that troubled them, and Joseph enquired of their health, when they looked so sad. The day of their trial drew near. It was soon to be Pharaoh's birthday and the birthday honours list would soon be produced. Alas, also, the list of executions.

Egyptians made careful preservations for their dead and had elaborate and large graves (believing it prepared the dead for their after life). As well, they placed their material wealth in with their bodies. The destiny of an execution, therefore, would be horrific, especially for families as these two had, for they had been such noble personages. (A later birthday celebration, that we know well, Herod's, also brought an execution, for John Baptist's head was lifted from his shoulders. But John's after life was assured for him, with God - eternal life.)

3. BUTLER AND BAKER DREAMS

Joseph hears that these two had dreamed, and have no interpreter. Joseph explains

- That significant dreams come from God,

- And that He has the interpretations.

However

- God has given Joseph this gift.

- In fact, his brothers called him a dream expert.

Joseph explained also

- That he was a dream man, of a dream man,

- For his father had two portentous dreams

- When God had spoken to him and

- Those moments with God had given his father great credibility and great integrity.

4. THE BUTLER'S DREAM

The butler came eagerly forward - what joy now.

"*In my dream*", he told Joseph, "*I saw a vine. Pharaoh sat under the vine. It had three branches, among the others, that before my eyes grew and grew, the great leaves like hands, multiplied on the branch, it budded and blossomed and their clusters of grapes hung upon that vine, purple, bouncing, bulging vessels of juice. I took Pharaoh's cup* (no stemmed glasses at this time, but flat cups or saucers to fit in a cupped hand) *and filled it with grape juice from the vine.* (There may have been honey or cool water in the cup, as the juice was often used before fermentation and mixed with substances, like a sherbet, or sharbat, as served in Egypt today.) *I then gave it to Pharaoh to drink*".

The dream was ordinary enough, the dream for the dearest wish of the butler, but Joseph recognised that it was no ordinary dream, and thanking God for the interpretation, he explains.

Joseph was pleased to tell the butler that the three branches represented three days, (very specific, and here not indicating ordinariness) within which time: "*Pharaoh will lift up your head of shame, and restore you to his palace. You will again offer him his wine, as you did before*". Literally, "*Pharaoh will lift up, promote, elevate*".

Now a delightful piece of humanity takes place.

Joseph had a request to make of the butler: "*When it shall be well with you, when you are restored, please remember my kindness and do not forget me. Show me kindness. Tell Pharaoh about me that I may be brought from this prison. I was stolen from my home with the Hebrews,* (the land and settlements of the Hebrews in the land of Canaan) *and have been twice put in the pit for nothing*". The Hebrews were known in Egypt, distinct from the Canaanites. Abraham was known in Egypt as well.

Noble men do not discredit their relatives or disclose family feuds and Joseph did not. Nor do noble men blacken the name of their tormentors (Potiphar's wife) and Joseph says no more. Sexual sins were sins against God - *Psalm 51:4*, "*Against thee only have I sinned*" *(David)*.

Joseph is neither a sinner

Not against God, nor Potiphar, nor his wife,

Nor was he an accuser, it seems.

A noble and preferred attitude,

considering -

He resisted the sexual sin in the first place.

He did not believe in,

Nor practise *"free love"*

As all those about him did

- we can emphasise it to our children.

5. THE BAKER'S DREAM

Encouraged, Bata, the baker, comes forward to tell his dream. He was the chief baker, and never stuck his head in the oven to cook, nor delivered the goods like an apprentice, but in his dream he was carrying bread.

Three baskets full, wicker baskets, white. They may have been perforated or loosely woven wicker baskets with holes, through which the white cloth showed. He carried quite a luxurious selection. In this improbable situation (so are all dreams) he holds the three full baskets: "*The topmost basket with crescents, rolls and buns attracts the birds. They come in flocks wheeling, screeching, swooping* (just as they do today if we put bread out), *picking, pecking, bob bobbity bobbing their little round heads, grateful for such a supply. Of course, unknowing of the trouble they cause me, for I have no hand to brush them away, why, oh why, did I lift up the basket and carry it uncovered? How could I take those messy baskets now to Pharaoh's table? With no shooing away they flapped, and fouled the bread, and the basket smelt bird smell not bread smell, and they spoiled the freshness of it all. Of course, those birds only behaved as birds, and thought I meant to feed them.*"

Joseph was loathe to tell him that his dream meant that in three days (the three baskets), Pharaoh would have his head lifted from off his shoulders and that his body would be hung on a tree for the birds to eat. But he did not shrink from the unpleasant task. He could have lied. Literally, "*Pharaoh will lift up, execute*". Joseph was bound by his honesty to tell the bad news, as he had promised, and the so the baker died three days before he really did die, for his heart was dead for three days before his body was dead, for he could think of nothing else. In fact, the interpretation of the dreams was true and the butler returned to Pharaoh, but the baker was executed. Both of their heads were lifted up "*one to honour again, and one to shame*". The baker of Memphe had the shameful end, for all his trouble and skill. "*Cursed is the man that trusteth in man*", *(Jeremiah 17:5).* Later Joseph became Zaphnath-paaneah, the "*revealer of secrets*", but it was important for Joseph to testify even now, that it was God who interpreted for him. If he had not told the interpretation, he could not have given God the glory. Whether the baker was hardened in wickedness, or used those three days to learn about God from Joseph, we cannot tell. It is also inconsequential to wonder why one is favoured and one is outcast. Those judgments are not ours to make, God may decide. There is a need to strive to be favoured by God.

So the cupbearer was the divinely appointed agent for Joseph's introduction to Pharaoh, but it didn't happen at once. However the restoration to Pharaoh in three days, was a mighty Divine testimony to Joseph, and to the butler, had he paused to consider it. It is a melancholy truth, and often a great disappointment, that fortunate people do not always feel compassion for those less fortunate. Joseph's disappointments with his jealous brethren, those unjust in Potiphar's house, and now the neglectful butler would be enough to depress him. However, knowing not of his own release time, but sure in this testimony from the Lord, he kept his faith.

The butler suffered from "*forgettery*", and it wasn't until two years later, when Pharaoh had a need, that he stubbed his toe on the memory of Joseph. Pharaoh had a dream and found it difficult to find an interpretation, and that prompted the cupbearer's memory of Joseph.

However the gift of interpretation from God, (for it all happened just so), sustained Joseph during those two years. The fulfilment of his own dream had so far taken ten years - two more to go.

God has used other butlers to work out his plan for his people, *Esther 5:3, Nehemiah 2:1-3*.

Consider:

* Did Joseph pray for wisdom as Solomon did at the beginning of his reign?

As the events turned out in Solomon's reign, his God given wisdom could not have been overall, but rather of a specific kind, say for judgement of his people.

* What sort of wisdom did Joseph pray for?

* Did Joseph know that the butler would forget his request?

* Did he pray for patience, as his request was such a long time coming?

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6. HONOUR FOR ONE AND DISHONOUR FOR THE OTHER

With the pronouncement of honour for one, and dishonour for the other, the one would be elated, and the other downcast, each making comparisons with the other. It was probably inevitable that it would be so and here again, Joseph's wisdom would be needed to deal with this situation in this prison, for he was in charge. **They had come together, this butler and baker, under the same cloud, now one had broken into the glorious sunshine, and the other went deeper, into a black cloud - depressed and without hope.**

Comment:

Although the world is round, there is always an "*upside*" and a "*downside*", allowing for this, none is better or worse than another, and the argument of the friends in the book of Job, that ill befalls us because of past sins, is just not so. We all sin; some are caught in the deceitful web they weave while others are not. We all come short, but some take the long shot, and that succeeds for them, for a time. We need not have any pride in our better place, for it is only in a manner of speaking (this side of the kingdom). Perhaps we are only "*good*" because the persuasion of "*evil*" was not so intense for us. Perhaps not so much was expected of us, and therefore we were spared. **Our perception of ourselves and our great strengths may be quite contorted - we may be sure God has not a distorted view of us.**

The weak are those who are tempted and succumb, but we need not feel smug about them. It is God's grace that lifts us out of that path, not our own strength: "*There but for the **GRACE** of **GOD** go I*".

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It was not Joseph's grace, it was God's grace, that the prisoners enjoyed, **GOD'S GRACE** that pervaded the whole prison, and here these two stand before Joseph, one for honour and one for dishonour. God's grace again for the cupbearer, as has been said, was divinely appointed, to return Joseph to Pharaoh's court, not because of his own merit. Perhaps grace comes upon us, not because **we** merit it, as we may erroneously suppose, but because we are needed to fulfil some function that God wishes of us. In any case we know grace does not come upon us in abundance, because of our continuing in sin.

See end chapter mote for ***Digression 1***)

7. THE POETIC STRUCTURE OF THE SCRIPTURE STORY

In *Genesis 40:9-23 (Companion Bible*) we find another poetic structure.

1. The Butler's Dream

2. The Interpretation

3. Request Made by Joseph

and

1. The Baker's Dream

2. The Interpretation

3. Joseph's Request Forgotten

It is helpful to be aware of the Hebrew structures of the record of these stories, which the newer versions do give us. We do find generally, that the recording of the events of Joseph's life, are more detailed than those of Abraham, and especially Isaac. For our benefit, God has chosen what should be revealed, but the imbalance of the recording is interesting, and may be seen by some as an imbalance in these books on the patriarchs. If that is so, then Moses would stand accused of the same.

Again, interestingly, it appears that God speaks to Abraham continually, yet to Jacob only twice, although we know that could not be so. It surely is only in the style of telling, not in the actuality.

The style develops over the telling like a novel. If it came by telling to Moses, then it is interesting to note how many generations the story would have to pass through by word of mouth - not many, if indeed he used an amanuensis, which is, literally recording, under inspiration. Time/Age Charts are available. God's inspiration is overriding the recording by Moses, of course. Again, the remarkable events in Joseph's life are **mirrored** in the remarkable events of his children's march out of Egypt.

Jacob/Joseph

and **Moses/Israelites**

1. Canaan, where God sent Abraham,

4. The safety of Goshen,

2. The pit and drought in Canaan,

3. The escape from Egypt,

3. The entrance into Egypt,

2. The sin and trials in the wilderness,

4. The safety of Goshen,

1. The settling into Canaan.

The national anthems of *Psalms 135* and *136* - twin *Psalms* - echo Israel's feelings about their remarkable history.

Joseph, already numbered among the dead in his own country, is again being numbered among the dead in his adopted country, that is, imprisoned, dead to life. All that time, beneath his graves, is a gold mine, for God is there, God is with him, God interprets dreams

for him, and enhances his progress towards Pharaoh's palace. In the two years that remain, he does not need to listen to his own singing, for he hears the urging voice songs of God, God's whispers, God's wisdom, God's care, God's love in this dungeon. Joseph might have ranged along the land of Canaan, and never touched royalty as he had now, (the king's butler and baker).

8. JACOB'S PRECIOUS SON

For a moment, once more, it is helpful to think of Jacob, unknowing of Joseph's life, since Joseph has been long since "*dead*", and that Jacob was accustomed now to his "*death*" (knowing the future story as we do). Perhaps God thought it was the best way for Jacob to deal with the thought of his lost son.

Charles Swindoll talks about Jacob as having a horizontal viewpoint, rather than a vertical one. The vertical one takes in God's viewpoint as well, with every vicissitude of life. Jacob's fear maintained a cold resisting point of view, and his thoughts were horizontal. We understand, that it **is** difficult in the most trying circumstances to "*Stick a Geranium in Your Hat and Be Happy*" (a book by *Barbara Johnson),* and Jacob did not.

The momentous circumstances of Joseph's birth, led Jacob to be a man who walked with "*his heart outside his body*". That heart smiled, when Joseph was with him, but when Joseph was "*killed*" the flowers of laughter and joy were replaced with the weeds of sadness and depression. Grief became like a mobile, pieces flying everywhere in the wind, and tangling. Whether Jacob could have possibly developed a sense of thankfulness for his surviving children and their families, or not, we don't know. It would be a great difficulty for Jacob to feel thankful for those whom he secretly, and suspiciously, blamed for the "*death*" of his loved child.

Comment:

It points us, does it not, to the reality of being limited in controlling the destiny of our own children. For all our training of them, doing our very best, they may develop evil ways, forsaking God and their love for Him. God loving parents, could, in our permissive society, even hear from their child that they are now "*out*" and wish to be known as a homosexual or lesbian. Think with compassion of the mother of twin sons, who announced to her that they now wished to be known as homosexual, and would live so. There is nowhere she could turn to, but to God. A double treasure from God, lost! It means that we must release such a problem into God's care, realising our own impotence to solve it. It is too late to lecture about God's way, and the evil of the lifestyle. The total end of ourselves in quoting *Scripture*, frustration, pleading, anger, and all the other emotions spent over years, that we may bring to bear on that child and his/her life style, will not change it - is the experience of those who have tried.

Actually picture yourself wrapping your child in beautiful paper, and then add a lovingly tied bow. Then climb a staircase and present the parcel to Jesus, who will convey it to God (as we do with the incense of our prayers), and that may help us to let go of the problem, to *"let go and let God".* Only in the death of a child can you finally relinquish the concern and care for that treasure. Age is no barrier. Children may try to reason with us, but they will only learn the lesson that we can never abdicate the parental role, when they have children themselves.

The only way to relinquish wayward treasure that you cannot care for is to give it back to God. It is a matter of building up enough faith, to place the gift back with Him.

Otherwise

- It becomes like an elephant on your chest,

- A knot, or even a plug in your throat, so that you cannot swallow,

- A bitter pill in your mouth

Guarantee your child your love, and hold the door open.

You never know what God has in store for you. Death is final - never wish for death to solve a problem. Some of us know that death can take with it more than the problem, and it's too late to wish it otherwise.

9. THE BROTHERS DISREGARD FOR JOSEPH DID CHANGE

The monumental disregard Jacob's other sons had for Joseph did change, to a degree beyond which they would have never believed of them, when Joseph as a child told them of his dream. Like David, he was the "*youngest*" son chosen to lead - the difference being that Jesse's sons knew of the purpose of the passing parade, and the anointing of the youngest brother. The leadership role came to Joseph in a dream, so no one was witness to the choosing. In so many cases, in the history of Israel, the youngest son is chosen as being the fit vehicle for the promises. It is an interesting concept to consider.

Comment:

Isaac was a younger son, as were Jacob, and Joseph. We can go back as far as Shem to see this pattern. It is, of course, not always so, but often enough to make the point that eldest sons are not necessarily chosen. Birthrights and blessings are different circumstances, as we see in this family. However, birthright children often expected the blessings, and even parents (Isaac) sometimes expected to combine the two. Jacob had more sense in this matter at the end of his life.

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(See end chapter note for ***Digression 2***)

Inheritance laws aside, the introduction to *Genesis* in the *NIV Study Bible*, "*Introduction to Genesis*" reminds us that the Genesis account frequently concentrates on the life of a later son in preference to a first born, Seth over Cain, Shem over Japheth (see the study notes on *Genesis 10:21*), Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Judah and Joseph over their brothers and Ephraim over Manasseh. God is not bound by the rules of our society. Where there is such an emphasis on divinely chosen men and their families we can, in Genesis, detect a prevailing literary and theological characteristic of the book as a whole. From this we can understand, and the fact is emphasised and underscored, that the people of God are not the product of human developments, or their own evolution, but are the result of God's sovereign and gracious intrusion into human history, for after all it is His to do with as He wishes. It brings out of the fallen human race, a new humanity, re consecrated once more to Himself, called and destined to a new covenant, to be the people of the kingdom, and as they keep covenant, to be the channel of his blessing to the whole earth.

10. PAIN FOR US ALL

Jacob resigned from being Joseph's caring father, for with his death there was no more care necessary. He experienced great pain and grief, but in time his misery was overcome, and he learned to manage his life again.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 3***)

If it does go wrong and our heart is breaking, we must make the best of it - like Jacob made the best of it. Surely his sons committed every sin that any of our children may commit, dysfunction was endemic in his family, and our families are no different.

We can hate the sin,

- But love the sinner,

- And such love

(Whether it brings the sin to end or not),

- Is ennobling,

- And what God asks us to do.

At the end of the day, you could never be pleased, that you turned someone away from your love, *for example, "I never want to see you again", "get out, and don't come back"***,**

There are lots of loving ways to deal out discipline, and to remove a bad influence, but these quoted **words are not Godly.**

You can still feel satisfied, at the end of the day,

- If the sin was not concluded,

- At least it was not enriched by your impervious stance,

- But that you kept the loving rays (of hope)

- In the presence of that sin, til the end.

That is the noble way of God.

That is how God deals with us, what God does for us all.

CONCLUSION:

God nurtured Joseph in the prison circumstance, and in turn, he became ennobled for God. At last the mission mandate began on its path again, after all the bad modelling that had doused the plan that God had for His light. It now shone forth and the path was well lit for the children of God to enjoy salvation.

Digression 1:

It pays to remember that there are three classes - those who rise, and those who fall, and those who find no temptation (they think) at all. Smug we may be, in our lives of ease. The books and films that abound right now of life lived in other countries in the 20th century, in **our** time illustrate **our** life of ease and other people's wretched lives. We really cannot tell how we would behave in a wretched life.

Books like *Wild Swan*s, and films about China are banned in that country for they won't accept any criticism, or pleas for human rights. It is fashionable to decry the humanists, and rightly so, but with a proper understanding of the humane rights for which they stand, against all forms of abuse, against discrimination, of any kind, we can see that many of their policies are Godly. It is easy to label as humanist behaviour, that which is ungodly, and it was/is convenient for the church to decry them, when traditionalists rule/d in the church and cover/ed the abuse. A prominent, contemporary Catholic nun is quoted as saying, "*I used to pray that the church would save the world*". In her disappointment over sin in the church, she says, "*I now pray that the world will save the church*". The humanists gave up on the church, and certainly God could also see that reform would not come via the church. The humanists persevered, and while not approving of the humanists, God used them to push for reform. Now discrimination and abuse in the church and everywhere else has been revealed, and reform is under way. Now the church is shamed into dealing with those who took away the rights of others, and every religious sect must look to its history, and change the way they have viewed abuse. It is a pity that it is the humanists, not the church itself, who have brought the church, and its members, to the position of recognising the sin amongst them. It is naive and foolish, and dangerous to say, "*It does not exist amongst us*".

The history of women in the church over the centuries, from the second century and especially the fifth century, when they were told they could not attain God's grace unless they emasculated themselves, to mirror males, who were accepted by God, has caused untold misery, from which the church is just now emerging. The old monasteries of the past are littered with the bones of women who through amenorrhoea and anorexia tried, unsuccessfully, to emulate men. The bountiful blessings that our Lord Jesus Christ bestowed upon women, are now, once more, being regained. But we need to think and care for those outside our national boundaries, where women are still, in this age degraded. The Tibetan word for "*woman*" is a word which means "*inferior born*", and that gives us an indication of the enormous problems that many women still face in following their normal daily life, their choice of marriage partners, the way they are required to bring up their children (with gender differences), and even their spiritual choices (who they will worship and how).

Schindler's Ark/List incites some people to say that the Holocaust did not happen. The books of *Babi Yar* about life in the Ukraine, in this century, illustrate awful human suffering. Some even use *Scripture* to endorse their policies of 80 years of apartheid in their oppression of South African blacks. Now, none of the churches formally stand by the self serving justification of slavery and apartheid in terms of *Scripture,* though they formerly did, saying it was divinely appointed and making a life of great hardship for the blacks, (not that their new found freedom has delivered them the ease that they expected). The text of *Genesis 9:25*, was used by the British Empire, and in the Americas to justify slavery, and they reasoned that God's scattering of the people of Babel meant that He wanted people to be separated and some more superior than others. *Deuteronomy* and *Acts* provide references that show that God approves of boundaries and separateness of different nations and peoples, and some, still blinkered by the precepts learned from the cradle, act according to their perception of superiority and their interpretation of *Scripture. Proverbs 24* gives some good advice to those people who are smug and superior about their well doing, for their slothful sleep and folding of the hands bring poverty. Be vigilant in judgment of others and not partial, never gloating. "*The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom*, *and humility comes before honour*"*, (Proverbs 15:33)*. Therefore we cannot look on others within our own orbit and be smug about our position of "*righteousness*".

Humility is the greatest leveller of us all. May we never use *Scripture* as a tool to dishonour our brethren or any of His creatures for it is God's book, not ours.

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Digression 2:

It does not affect the laws of inheritance which do differ in cultures, even today. English law required the eldest son to inherit family estates and other sons joined the army, the civil service, or the church. Thus the big estates survived even until today. French law accommodated all the sons in land inheritance, and this has caused very small farming plots to be created all over France. So now there are problems for small uneconomic plots, when the French government, bows to world market pressures to remove tariffs. Even Australia's own dairy market is affected by French tariffs. There is no little discussion about inheritance laws in all countries. Some countries do not consider females in inheritance laws, and others give only cash inheritances to women. In the *Islamic Code*, the males receive the inheritance, and it is the same in the *Jewish Code*, except there is a double portion for the eldest son, and a reversion of sold land, back to the family, every 50 years. In both these *Codes*, women were/are expected to be cared for by their brothers - or husband in the new family. No man was permitted to be a bachelor, and in times of war, where there were fewer men, they were expected to take multiple wives.

In *Numbers 26:33* we read of Zelophehad of the tribe of Manasseh, who had no sons, but five daughters. When Zelophehad died (honourably) his inheritance is given to his brothers. The five daughters stood before Moses and Eliezer, and pleaded to be allowed to inherit their father's land, *Numbers 27*. Moses brought their request to God, who judged it justified, as long as they married within their tribe. Moses then pronounced their inheritance as part of the law, as God had commanded, *verse 8*. So it was acceptable for women to make a petition, and this is vindicated in the granting of their request. Also in *Joshua 17:3, 4*. In *Joshua 15:18* we note Caleb's daughter's request for a field and her father's gift, not only of south land, but springs as well. "*He gave her upper springs and nether springs*" as well. So there was compassion for the predicament of women in some instances, where all along God had provided for them, but the privilege had not been allowed. Man made customs and traditions, not *Scripture*, have been too heavy a burden for women.

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Digression 3:

Human history, when God does not intervene, leaves all of us, at one time or another, in great pain. Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional, and so we need to have skills to deal with the pain.

Lifeache,

Is when the whole of your life is sore;

It hurts when you move it.

and

Pain will subside eventually.

Lifeache cannot ever be cured,

But you can learn to -

MANAGE the SYMPTOMS.

That pain is not only from within our own lives, but from the lives of our spouses, or the lives of our children, for our hearts wish to take on the pain of those we love. We are so vulnerable. We also "*wear our hearts outside our bodies"* for those we love. Some of us will live with great pain, and for the moment while we look for books to help us deal with momentous problems (such as a homosexual child) the books of *Barbara Johnson* will help. They are obtained through the *Bible* book shops and tell us what we can do when our life really falls apart. The worshipping communities will know how to deal with those situations, but **the parents** will need great skills to keep the door open.

***Hugh Mackay*, commentator, is curious to know, in relation to the high incidence of youth suicide in Australia in 1998, when our children fail to reach the potential we set for them, whether we have, in our obsession with materialism and all the things we want, together with our impatience with the numinous (divine), failed to inspire the young with the idea that life is an adventure, to be enjoyed, and never cut short. Did we forget to talk to them about the big questions in life, and the universe, and their very existence? These questions are all still worth considering and exploring for us all. We don't need to give them pat answers that we think they should have; they are too well educated for that. But we limit their visions, and their horizons, and we are often too influenced by our own cynicisms and prejudices or even apathetic about our own negative response to adversity. Perhaps we limit the vision of our young people by our own cynicism, and by our retreat into prejudice and apathy, and by the increasing toughness of our responses to adversity. In that sense we do contribute to their despair.**

These are reasons not excuses, but still worth pondering. Our pat answers are too easy, and we need to listen, and answer our treasured teenagers much more specifically. It takes great wisdom to get the balance just right, as any parents of teenagers will attest.

CHAPTER 5

ESCAPE FROM THE SECOND PIT

"***And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed", Genesis 41:1***

FOCUS:

There is no oil,

Without squeezing the olives,

There is no wine,

Without pressing the grapes,

There is no fragrance,

Without pressing the flowers,

There is no joy,

Without sorrow.

and Joseph soon has the oil, the wine, the fragrance and the joy, ***Genesis 41:1-14***

1. JOSEPH STILL IN THE SECOND PIT

While Joseph remained in the pit for two years *(Genesis 41:1)* after the release of the butler, and the execution of the baker - both imprisoned per favour of Pharaoh - the Pharaoh of the butler, and the Pharaoh of the baker, died. We are not sure whether it was two more years, or two years altogether.

Patience must have been the virtue that Joseph has, that keeps him from questioning God's seeming indifference to his plight. It is the prime of life for Joseph, and "*hope deferred maketh the heart sick*". David said, "*How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord?*" It must have been Joseph's prayer as well.

So the Pharaoh changed. Pharaoh is always the same, but he comes and goes, and changes. We are not sure of the alignment of a new Pharaoh, who he might be, and when Joseph's release occurred.

We know that the dates of Joseph's time in Egypt, and the dates of the Pharaohs are still uncertain awaiting confirmation, perhaps, in future archaeological finds, as the sand blows about. We do know though, that the "*new*" Pharaoh was the one that knew Joseph *(Exodus 1:8)* the one who prepared so well for the famine. However with the dreams this Pharaoh was, if not different, a changed man, with a different outlook. And with this change came the wonderful events of ***Genesis 41.*** Pharaoh means "*great house*" and so it was.

Assuming that there was a death and new coronation, the story will proceed as before, providing useful information about Egyptian customs of the time.

2. THE DEATH OF PHARAOH

There are continual finds now throwing light on Egyptian history and especially about the Hyksos rulers. It is very difficult now to make decisions about where they fitted into Egyptian history. However we are quite sure whatever rulers were favoured at this Joseph time, there were others in the wings trying to make life difficult.

The old Pharaoh had died after all, soon after the traitors of the butler/baker palace coup incident had been caught and punished. What we know of the rule of the Hyksos Pharaohs, of Semitic extraction, and the overpowered indigenous rulers, who were biding their time in the southern cities of Egypt, makes us realise how tenuous the reigns and lives of the Pharaohs were. This Pharaoh's wife and entourage had not been walled in with his body in the tomb, as had previously been the custom. For some reason the wallers in, and the walled in, ceased to perform this rite at this time. It has been noted by archaeologists as a practice in China, when the first Ming emperor, ordered and was entombed with his wife and 46 concubines, as late as AD 1398. This Chinese mausoleum has only recently been located in a complex underground burial chamber.

So this splendid coffin containing the Pharaoh's body preserved in salt and bitumen with all manner of spices, and wrapped in great quantities of linen bandages, after seventy days, was drawn on a golden sledge, by oxen, to a many chambered tomb in the hills, and there left with great wealth for eternity - alone, - or until the grave robbers arrived. There are many well preserved mummified bodies from Egypt, on display in coffins, in the British Museum. The

walled in ones have only a few skeletal remains - they were not preserved, as they were alive at the time of the walling in. Well - this Pharaoh's wife did not follow him, she was not a walled in one, nor were his servants.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 1***)

In Thebes (No) the court sat with its head on its knees and mourned, waiting for "*the moon to come right*". Father and son had ruled as co regent, a method employed by the Pharaohs to get the people used to the new heir, trying to avoid an uprising, or revolt. The eldest son or daughter (there were four women Pharaohs) of the chief wife provided the heir to the throne. Theoretically, the Pharaohs were absolute rulers of the people and their property, but they depended on the cooperation of their family and high officials and priests, which gave rise to tension amongst the ranks. They readily and regularly travelled up and down in the land from Memphis in the north, to Thebes in the south, and were constantly concerned with their popularity in the remote provinces in the Near East and Nubia.

This son was only 15 years old, but the mother, "*feathered in splendour*", attended with him in the throne room in the palace, in Upper Egypt. Women in Egypt enjoyed power, like none other (of their neighbours), inheriting land, accumulating wealth, able to divorce, with ease. Here, near Thebes today is the present city of Luxor with its beautiful temple - The Temple of Amon. The great Aswan Dam is about 250 kilometres south, upstream, towards the Nubian Desert and the Sudan. Another 1440 kilometres south on the river we would reach Khartoum in the Sudan, the British Colony we hear so much about in the stories of *Lawrence of Arabia*. The Nile indeed was, and still is a mighty, long and famous river.

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(See end chapter note for ***Digression 2***)

3. THE PHARAOH WHO KNEW JOSEPH

In Thebes, the new boy king was throned and crowned with the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt. Soon he was married too, to a daughter of the nobility, who became his consort and mistress of the two lands. All this Joseph missed for he was in prison (except he would note the drunkenness of the prison guards for three days, not uncommon for celebration, feast days.) He did not need to be part of it, but he would benefit greatly from that union and crowning ceremony.

The boy king was anxious to carry out the wishes of his father to fulfil the plans to build a temple at Luxor, near Thebes at the site of his crowning. In his impatience he used the smaller stones from the quarries nearby, not waiting to haul the huge stones from the quarries further north on the Delta. Of course, Joseph in prison there, heard of the building (being engaged in stone quarrying) for "the haste of it" brought much discussion across the whole of Egypt. There was a heritage problem, with the architects, in Egypt, in that far off time. They did not use conforming materials and methods for the extension. Or was it the persuasive powers of the powers that were?

Consider:

* How sacred was this temple and consecration ceremony?

* Why so fast?

* Is it the same problem of a Hyksos verses indigenous ruler?

* Was the boy king (encouraged by his mother) concerned about his own situation, and worried about his portion of authority?

* Maybe he would remember the pretender banished into the desert?

* Did he wish to quickly link himself to the divine?

* Was he priest or king, or both?

****

4. PHARAOH'S NEED OF JOSEPH

So Joseph - in 1716 BC - listened again to the voice in the wind - a croon really, "*not yet, not yet*", but "*soon Joseph, soon, soon, soon*, *be patient for I am near*". And he waited for God to call him south to Thebes.

And so He did, according to His word.

And **our** despair, as well as Joseph's is lifted, and we allow ourselves a tentative smile of relief, like Joseph for it seems it might all be coming right.

Thomas Mann helps us with some remarkable historical detail here, and fills out our exciting water journey with Joseph. As we know he favoured the Nile ferry transport, rather the road transport.

One day, a bark arrived with a purple sail. It fairly flew, so light it was, manned by 10 oarsmen, 5 on each side, bearing the sign of royalty, an express courier, a comet from Thebes. No suspicion flag here. The courier leapt ashore, breathless, though he had not run, breathless with the import of his message. It was a message for Joseph, to "*come at once to Pharaoh*".

"***Are you not the captain's aide,***

Who was in charge of two of Pharaoh's prisoners,

In the vulture house two years ago?"

"***Before Pharaoh's will, nothing stands,***

For his need of you,

Above all his greatest scholars,

And magicians,

And soothsayers,

And interpreters,

Is known,

And so you must come.

Of course, if you fail

To be wiser than all Pharaoh's inventors,

The punishment will be greater than theirs.

So you had better think well of what you will say.

You have been named in this crisis,

And so the king has sent for you".

"***What of the (unjust) charge against me?***

What of my (terrible) sentence?

What of the (sentence of) bonds and chains?

What of the (restraining) bars and gates?

How can I leave (with honour)?" reasons Joseph

But he is persuaded -

"***May God help me as I stand before him".***

Joseph considers that God is with him,

And that he will not fail,

To endure the death punishment,

But that he will succeed,

To win the crown.

And so Joseph is hurried

"*Out of the pit and drawn out of the well*"

- same pattern as before.

Now three times out of the well.

The butler has just stubbed his toe on the memory of Joseph, since the king's dream crisis.

Consider:

* Would Joseph forget **his** prison friends?

* Would **he** remember them "*when he comes into his kingdom*"?

They would ask this, like the thief on the cross (in *Luke 23:42*), and like we do of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will come again into his Kingdom.

****

Joseph sat aboard the bark underneath a shading pavilion, on the after deck, and was shaved. The beard was a disgrace in Egypt, shaving a disgrace in Palestine, *(Companion Bible)*.

Mourning Egyptians could wear beards, and false beards were a fashion accessory for men, a male ornament. The Pharaoh wore a ceremonial beard encased in a tiny leather case and strapped on to the chin. Stone friezes show men of low estates, or captives, with beards. Joseph was also rouged and dressed for the presence of the boy king.

5. A DIFFERENT PHARAOH FROM HIS FATHER

The dynasty ruling Egypt at this time, anxious about its authority, was keen to show their superiority, and so the young king was expected to perform great feats.

The young Pharaoh had grown a little older, and without his mother's consort, timid and frightened by the prospect of the custom of war. A war he had to wage, and to be victorious, bringing home bounty and booty to present to the gods, to validate his always precarious position of power. The war could be to the Asiatic or Negro lands, North West or east, or south. He really wanted to be a Prince of Peace, not only that, but his frequent illnesses, faintings, and headaches, made the thought of war, setting the neighbouring princedoms under his feet, a horrifying prospect. He would have to think of other ways of gaining respect and power, all the while not knowing that the attaining of that respect and power were going to be overseen by God. He was supposed to, with his own hand, be seen to slay a half dozen prisoners of war of high rank - elevated for the purpose if need be. It all made him more ill. He called it all off. The plunder would not take place. He would not even consider any arrangements for such a thing, and put it all out of his mind. Why, all the lands of the world lay at his feet anyway, if he wanted to fight, but he wanted to be insignificant in matters of war, and no one would picture **him** on the temple walls, or on the archways slaying anyone.

And no one did.

This is the Pharaoh that knew Joseph - and we begin to admire this man, Joseph's friend and benefactor, for he was blessed by God, though he hardly knew it. He spent endless hours on judicial business, sentences, tax registers, plans for new canals, foundation stone laying, building supplies, the plans for quarries and mines in the desert - learning about it all from his viziers and making the pronouncements they expected. He was educated in things royal, and in things judicious and things religious. King and Judge and Priest he was. The whole cumbersome ritual of it all, with the obligatory excursions to the miserable outpost peoples, who invited him or not, whether they wanted him or not, wearied him and he sought to remove north to On from Wese Nowet-Amun (also known as No, and later Thebes), but the priests prevented him from going north permanently. They said he was necessary. They wanted him in the city of Great Ram. If only he could transfer to On at the top of the Delta. It was the old university city of Egypt, and he enjoyed the discussions there, and the intelligentsia. He would be happier and healthier in On - not so much incense burning, as he had now to do in the temple. Still there was there shining gold, which was a vexation to his eyes and made him squint. But still there was gold everywhere in Egypt, and his eyes were always squinting anywhere and everywhere.

The court chroniclers often recorded the journey of the king and his family by boat, or by wagon up and down to On - they knew his pleasures there. His conflict between this devotion to the gods, and his own duties as judge and king - god/king - gave him conscience and conflict headaches. He had tremendous stress, and the viziers, with their continual advice, made the headaches worse. The fact that the Hyksos/indigenous king contention was always raging, made him nervous, for he thought too much was expected of him, to keep power in the right Hyksos hands. Why did the other indigenes want to rule anyway? It was a terrible job.

There were sometimes two viziers, one in charge of the north, and one south. Pharaoh's role as both priest and king confused him, and without his parent's wisdom and guiding hands, he attended to the imperial business without enthusiasm. But ha ah. Here is the great delusion. This king, this young, unenthusiastic, ineffectual god/king was God's figurehead in Egypt, and he

represented an assurance against holy and necessary processes which must proceed, to allow the fulfilment of His will.

The king made his way to On once more, together with his pregnant queen, the queen's sisters, and his mother, and floated in his own bark. Other boats floated down the river, either well in advance, or behind, or wagoned down the road with all his servants and supplies and all that was needed for the royal personages. We can place On, about nine kilometres north east of Cairo. The king's bark was followed by the others in their barks on the great river. There is an event chronicled where Pharaoh sits under his bark's canopy eating roast pigeon and sharing it with his wife. He uses the bone to further tempt her with sweetmeats dipped in wine. The river inspires people with its slowness and "*weather permitting*" is never an issue. The bark journey was always pleasant.

One day, some time later, at On, after partaking in discussions with his advisers, Pharaoh falls asleep amidst the cushions of his exquisitely ornate bed, which stands on a dais, in the middle of the room. The bed head is decorated with ivory figures of jackals and goats. His dressing and undressing slave slept at the door threshold. *Thomas Mann* has a good description of these particular dreams.

Pharaoh begins to dream - a vivid dream complicated, impressive, absurd, pastoral and agricultural, and so he begins his task of being God's agent in Egypt.

6. THE DESCRIPTION OF PHARAOH'S DREAMS

He is standing on the banks of the great river in a lonely, marshy spot. Suddenly up out of the river rise seven cows - magnificent cows, smooth and fat. Cows were a sacred Egyptian animal, the symbol of the earth and its cultivation, so they are a fitting dream symbol. They had been in the river up to their necks to keep themselves from the worrisome insects and the scorching sun. **The cows begin to graze among the reeds,** sedge and rank, or marsh grasses, usually luxuriously growing beside the river. **Then again another seven cows - lean, hungry, and wretched - rise out of the river and approach the well favoured cows. They are scarcely able to keep their legs, but they leap on the fat cows and devour them off the face of the earth - none left. Afterwards the lean cows look just as lean as before, no sign of being any fuller, and they looked satisfied and sinister.**

Pharaoh awakes, but for all his disturbing sleep, and impressed by the images he had seen, sleeps again - and dreams again.

He is on the banks of the river again and there in the rich loam there is movement and a tiny stalk comes forth, curls over, and grows, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven ears of corn on one branch, full with golden fullness, fat ears. This is a common Egyptian corn strain, i.e. seven ears, but growing so close to the river indicates that the water level must have been very low. **Then the stalk continues to sprout - seven more ears - but these unhappily are poor, pathetic, scungy, scorched ears, no good for anything. The grain is turned stony like grit as it pushes out, being blasted with the East wind,** north east really. The *NIV Study Bible* tells us this blighting, withering wind is known as the Sirocco in Palestine, the Khamsin in Egypt, and blowing in late spring or early autumn withers the crops and destroys the pasture. **They devour the fat ears. They also are just as lean as before, pathetic to look at. If they had eyes they would also look satisfied and sinister.**

Pharaoh was troubled. In his dream he had worn his "*kingly*" garments so they were obviously "*king*" dreams and must be made public, for they must be an alarming portent with a significant meaning. **No lean cows or scorched ears should consume fat cows and fat ears.** Danger threatened, credibility would be doubted - answers must be given, authority displayed, for this picture language of impossible greediness needed interpretation. His cow and corn dream assumed huge proportions in his mind for of course, **God made it so.**

The audience in the council hall stood near Pharaoh's splendid seat together with the prophets and the dream experts. It was still the same box like chair (except for added ornamentation) as at the time of the pyramid builders - but people no longer threw themselves on the floor in prostration in front of the king. Pharaoh tried to tell the dream experts, magicians, sacred scribes, astrologers and the learned priests about his dream - it seemed so preposterous - they nodded their heads and shook their curls, and tried to help, until in utter frustration he sent them all away, with no gold this time. They had murmured, and muttered and spoken nonsense and ineffectually babbled on, for their solutions did not fit the dreams. **Their** *Scriptures (The Book of the Dead)* did not help them, so they could not speak sense. **Of course God was preventing them from making sense.** It is a proof that God stopped their well oiled minds, for one would have thought that they could have combined, and produced some solution to save their skins.

7. JOSEPH IS REMEMBERED

The oppressive silence was broken by the cup bearer, stubbing his toe on the memory of Joseph. (Not really, for **God put it in his head**). He had never told any of the wise men about Joseph, for if he had remembered and told, Joseph's method might have given them some clues about dream interpretations. Or again, if he had told they might have lost their jobs. It seems now that they **have** lost their jobs so there is nothing to loose. Yes, he knew a man who could help, for this man in the great prison of Pharaoh, two years before, had been able to predict from a dream, that his restoration to the king would soon be complete. Indeed in the field of dream exegesis, he certainly was an expert, for his handsome father had also had, and interpreted dreams, as had his other forebears. The butler's own very presence in the presence of Pharaoh was proof that this man's expertise in dream interpretation was highly recommended for had he not predicted that he would serve Pharaoh again.

Joseph never held a revengeful thought, neither for his brothers, not for the Potiphars, not for the selfish cupbearer. Disillusionment and disappointment in people did not lead to cynicism for Joseph, for he would not then have been able to see God. Job for a time could not see Him.

"*Behold, I go forward but He is not there,*

And backward, and I cannot perceive him;

When He acts on the left, I cannot behold Him;

He turns on the right, I cannot see Him", *Job 23:8, 9*.

Not only must we see, but listen as well. God does not announce his appointments in advance, like some companies do. Joseph did not know, but he listened, was ready and waiting.

It is a fact that "*unless thy law had been (his) delight,*

(He) should then have perished in (his) affliction", *Psalm 119:92*.

Comment:

God does not need to shout to us in our pleasures, but when our consciences fail us and the pain descends, He shouts at us, and it hurts so much, but it is only then that we listen.

- For we need to hear Him,

Because we so often forget to listen to Him.

We need to remember that we cannot stand still, in the silence, as we progress, slowly turning on the spit, for we either progress towards "*a hellish, or a heavenly creature*".

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CONCLUSION:

Patient, listening Noah waited over 100 years for it to rain. **Joseph forgot his bad memories, he remembered to forget**. But, like Noah, he remembered to be patient and listen. He had overcome the sting of abandonment, and had waited in the silence for God to act. And God had not forgotten.

Digression 1:

The custom of wife immolation has only recently been outlawed in India, where at funeral pyres of great Hindu men, wives, also, were persuaded to the incineration, to die with their husband. In some cases in American Indian tribes women walked out into the wilderness to die (we remember Hagar and Ishmael following the practice, being excluded from Abraham's care, at Sarah's request).

Perhaps women, everywhere, saw their means of support had disappeared, and added to their grief, lack of security made it easy for them to be walled in, incinerated, or otherwise to commit suicide. It is known, also, that they were encouraged and assisted in the suicide process.

It seems that, even today in some tribal areas of New Guinea, women must be taken into the forest and killed by their brothers, if their husband dies, especially if they have his particular knowledge about magic practices. A brother will stand on either side of their kneeling sister, and with a rope entwined around her neck, give a quick pull, and she is dead. Most cultural practices can be changed, in time, with patience, and respect for *Biblical* teaching, to Godly customs, but child sacrifice and wife killing are two practices that Christians resolve to change as soon as they can, for obvious reasons. This may be accomplished with great difficulty, and requires enormous skill, when they first begin the mission process.

In any case, wife killing was, and is common, even when it is outlawed. It is remarkable that men never followed their wives to death, so it was not done for love. Of course the remaining multiple wives, and children, needed support. The new widows in worshipping communities don't find it easy to fit into their role, as well as cope with their grief, and we need to be especially caring of them and their needs. There are so many widows in worshipping communities, helping to make a gender imbalance. We need to question the stress we put upon men, and we need to share the load, where we can within scriptural guidance. The wonderful provision in *The Law of Moses,* and the later Christian principles, for widows, must have been quite unique, in their time and circumstance.

It is interesting to note, though, that for thousands of years in Jewish funeral processions, the Jewish wife walked in front of her husband's coffin as a "*recognition*" of her prominent place in bringing sin into the world - her husband now suffering the consequence - death. God punished them both, of course, for they both sinned, in *Genesis 3,* but Adam **did** blame Eve, and tried to cover his sin, in his excuse to God. Perhaps Egyptian, Hindu and other cultures have something of the same reason to require a wife to suicide or be killed. Burial customs (of men) have often been disadvantageous to women. The blaming of Eve is enhanced by continuing the custom of blame for the woman at a man's death, and it is only education that can change that pattern.

The legacy of a millennium of Confucianism is particularly cruel even in this day, in many Asian countries, where young girls need to borrow their social status from male family members, until they are married. If there are none, she falls into abuses of all kinds. Confucianism believes that women are too difficult to educate, and so must be bound, ignorant and obedient to men. The older matriarch becomes a woman of power, especially over younger women. The diversity of beliefs about women over the centuries is interesting, and now there are numerous research pieces to help our understanding of the subject, for example, *Susan Dowell*'s study about monogamy in history and religion, "*They Two Shall Be One*". The same customs and expressions of devaluing women, like female circumcision, are still perpetuated in many tribes, like the Massai people of Africa. The fundamental Muslim faith in many countries, exercises the same control over the lives of women.

It is imperative then to recognise in the Christian faith, the valuing of women, where men and women enjoy complementary roles. The two Marys were the first true apostles, *("one sent*"), by Jesus, to give the news of his resurrection to the disciples, *Matthew 28:1-11*. *John* records the event also. If Jesus can entrust women with so great a message, then surely for men to denigrate her, devalues her role. Phebe's qualifications for an elder, or a deacon, in the new church, in *Romans 16:1-2,* closely followed what Paul required of them, both men and women, in *1 Thessalonians 5,* and *I Timothy 3.* She is the only person so commended, not only for her *Titus 2:3-5* role, but as a "*sister*" and "*succourer of many*", particularly Paul.

Herein lies a very powerful gospel message, which has a wonderful reception where women have lived in fear of their lives. No wonder other religions where cultural practices have women in great submission, wish to exclude Christianity. They will do everything within their power to prevent women from hearing our Lord Jesus Christ's message of complementary roles of service, and submission for all "*in Christ*", not just for women.

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Digression 2:

Verdi wrote "*Aida*" to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal, in 1869. The canal was blocked by the Israelis in 1958, and after that the liners, to and from Australia, had to go round the Cape of Good Hope. This Capetown detour was a bonus to those of us stranded in England after the canal closure, but a tragedy for freight from the Far East, for the middle and Far East were no longer easily connected. To overcome this, big freighters (mostly for oil) were built to cope with the high seas of the Cape. When the canal was unblocked in 1986, the new huge freighters could not fit, and so the Suez Canal never revived as a great trade route. The opera, "*Aida*" was performed in 1986, in the Luxor Temple ruins, to draw attention to the canal again. But *Verdi* had set his opera at the Vulcan Temple in Memphis, near Cairo, about 560 kilometres north, in 1000

BC. The story is of an Egyptian princess pledged to marry an Egyptian Captain of the Guard. He falls in love with a slave girl, read Nubian, and so the love story is played out.

Perhaps the Luxor site was more appropriate for some reason, and it **has** been developed as a tourist site. However, now that the Moslem extremist's suicide bombings have happened there, tourists do not feel secure at Luxor any more.

The tombs and temples here at Thebes were discovered early in the 19th Century, by French scholars, who were attached to Napoleon's army.

CHAPTER 6

JOSEPH ARRIVES IN THE ROYAL CITY

"***Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh", Genesis 41:14***

FOCUS:

So arrangements were quickly made and

That is how Joseph,

The sooth saying youth,

Came to be propelled

In the beautiful bark,

Towards the great obelisk,

At On,

Once more,

to stand before Pharaoh, ***Genesis 41:15-42*.**

1. THE RUSH TO PHARAOH'S PALACE

Such a rush, such a hurry,

From pit to pinnacle,

From pinnacle to prison pit,

From prison pit to higher pinnacle

- to the palace.

The wonder workers of Pharaoh had all been banished, they had lost their jobs, and Joseph was urged along with the fleet footed messenger towards the great presence.

Though we all know the end of it - how it all fell out - we must remember that Joseph did not. He only had his faith in God and his conviction of presumption that God was with him and that this was indeed His plan, His path, and His will.

Comment:

Not for Joseph the self distrust of Moses, and the self doubt of his ability to speak to Pharaoh. We are all of us extremes, like these two were at the beginning of their Pharaoh dialogue - or somewhere in between. God can, and does, use everyone, and will compensate for our peculiarities, restraining the servants who are seemingly confident, (He adds in some humility), and supporting the doubters, (He added Aaron, who came to stand beside Moses). There are, of course, the hypocrites who talk about nothing, never achieving anything for God, whose mouths well oiled conceal their lack of commitment to Him. If we are honest we can recognise our own category. If you were a Moses or a Joseph you can assess how you would feel. It is a pleasant muse to decide which Godly character you would like to be, and what assets you would ask God to give you to complete His task.

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So Joseph arrived in On, the city of the triangle, the city of obelisks, the city of sun, for everything pointed to the sun. It was the city of blinking too, like the city of the Great Ram, but here the sun worship enhanced the glare. One endured the glare to sit in the apex of the triangle, any triangle and be a servant of the sun. Joseph had seen it all once before, when he was with his friend the old man from **The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company**.

And so to the steps of the palace, and up, Joseph climbed, all the time being carried on, and hurried through the pavilion, gaily coloured, with landscapes on the walls, and ornamental columns, and arrived at a fountain hall shining with pillars of rare and polished wood. The armed men, probably with daggers and short spears, helped speed Joseph, through the antechamber, with deep doors each side, until they arrived in a very large dining hall, where servants were cleaning away fruit plates, brushing up crumbs, plumping up cushions, seeing to the lamps, and incense vases sitting on tripods around the hall. Silver and gold beakers were being cleaned and rearranged on the buffet, ready for the next meal.

All these descriptions lay the foundation for us to understand the opulence and sumptuous palaces that became so familiar to Joseph, and the glory that Joseph displayed for his family, so we must not disregard it as unnecessary detail. Besides to saviour the brilliance of it all, after the tawdry prison, emphasises and extends our joyfulness for Joseph at this time, for he is about to become glorious. He might be full of fear at this minute, but we, with gleeful anticipation, are not, for we know the end.

Joseph needed some quick instruction on protocol as he was escorted to the resting king. They sped through the passage lighted from above with oil lamps, where the walls were painted with harvesting and sacrifice scenes, and past the entrance to the hall of council and audience, to the little garden house where lay the king, instructing his sculptors of what artistic creations he required. The hunchback one, from much bowing, announced him, and in he went.

2. JOSEPH COMES BEFORE PHARAOH

So Joseph came before Pharaoh. Nervousness, excitement and exhilaration must have been all swirling around in Joseph's emotions, but overriding it all would have been his prayers for guidance and help. Too much confidence would have made him insulated against God's help. Pharaoh needed to accept Joseph. There is, on surface value, not much to recommend this stranger from afar.

Moses was pushed, but Joseph's blessing of confidence carried him forward eagerly. The spectacular little logia soon appeared and it sparkled with coloured glass and pretty stones, and designer tiles. The sides were open upon a beautiful garden, with brightly coloured flowers, and a lily pond with islands and bridges and pretty kiosks. The remaining back walls were painted, (obviously by foreigners) of lands and seascapes of faraway places. Such opulence Joseph had never seen, and he took it all in at a glance, and the performing artists, clowns, jugglers, acrobats as well. He saw the little prince with lambskin boots, and particoloured trousers and a feathered headgear, playing with his bow and arrow and fussing around were many coiffured women in beautiful stiff dresses. The dowager queen was there as well, but they all turned to look at his eagerly awaited arrival.

So did the Pharaoh, sitting deep, amid the cushions, in his throne chair, leaning back, and one hand dangling. His legs were crossed, with his linen covered knees drawn up. The gold strap of his sandals ran between his great and second toes, like thongs that we know today. Later in Moses' time sandals had toe pieces that extended from the front of the sole, back over the top of the sandal in a curling point. They were made of leather or strong raffia. Shoes had to be removed in front of someone of greater authority.

Pharaoh was probably seventeen years old (as Joseph was when he had the technicolour coat, and beguiled his father and tested his brothers). *Thomas Mann*'s reminders are thrilling and timely.

The Joseph pattern of suffering and recompense is now concluded.

***1*. His dreams - *his brothers* hated his dreams, yet because of those dreams he was exalted in Egypt, and they were saved from the drought in Canaan,**

***2*. His coat - *his brothers* stripped him of his coat, yet the Egyptians clothed him in byssus (fine linen),**

***3*. His pit - *his brothers* cast him into a pit, but he was finally drawn from the pit in Egypt,**

***4*. His status - *his brothers* sold him into slavery, yet in Egypt he was made a lord by Pharaoh,**

***5*. His ornaments - he was fettered as a prisoner, yet came to wear gold and chains around his neck.**

Now Joseph stands amidst the splendour of Pharaoh who asks him his credentials. The Semitics were treated with respect in Egypt, at this time, but, as well, Joseph had become thoroughly Egyptianised and presented well. Joseph tells the story of his forefathers and their life's determination built upon their dreams. He tells Pharaoh of the God dreamers who made covenants with their God, that it is He who will interpret the dreams of Pharaoh, so that he (Pharaoh) will at last be at peace.

Pharaoh must have been surprised at the story of the young man's journey to the Egyptian prison where he became one of the royal slaves. Pharaoh was used to Moors, Libyans and Asiatics bringing gifts of gold bars and gold rings, silver vases, ostrich feathers, oxen, byssus, leopards and elephants - that is, tribute from his conquered lands, and gifts from his worried neighbours. Interestingly, he is pictured with a tortoise shell lyre (from seafaring Crete). Singers and seers swinging their incense came from as far away as India and Babel, and from Arabia

and Persia (famous for its beautiful gardens), and they left strange souvenirs and divine signs. The oracle and occult experts never looked like this man, and he came empty handed.

Joseph, now not tactless (having learned his lesson), **slowly builds up Pharaoh's confidence in him and patiently listens to the dream story, presenting himself as God's agent through whom God's revelation will be made**. Joseph makes many references to God in his discussion with Pharaoh. First of all, Joseph told Pharaoh (after Pharaoh finished the story) "*it is not two dreams but one - one dream dreamed twice*".

a. To dream twice is not necessarily to have two dreams.

b. It is one dream dreamed in two forms.

c. A double dream, a royal double dream in this case.

d. To dream it twice means that it has emphasis.

e. The second dream, rhyming with the first, attends to the emphasis, its certainty and its imminence.

Even in this dream sequence presentation in later versions we see the Hebrew poetic literary structure that we so often miss in the *AV* (which was unknown at the time of that translation).

Here there is a principle of rhyming thoughts, (rather than, as we think of English poetry, rhyming end line sounds), underlying these dreams. There are abundant examples of this in the *Proverbs*, where the parallelism can be synthetic, or antithetic.

There is another example relevant to our story, *"the pit is empty and there is no water in it", Genesis 37:24*.

The cows are years, seven and seven

The ears are years, seven and seven.

Fat cows and fat ears are years of plenty

Thin cows and thin ears are years of famine.

The harshness of the latter, will consume the fullness of the former.

Dearth and death will stalk the earth.

Famine is a feast for the birds.

Every living creature dies.

Famine leaves whole dead villages.

Comment:

It is possible to have famine because of continuing flood, like the people of Bangladesh experience, when they cannot grow food, so we need not assume that all food shortages come from lack of rain. It is a point to consider. Famine may be caused by flood or drought, (or fire).

The city of Tanis (Zoan, or Goshen) once recorded a poll tax paid by 300,000 men, yet following a drought and famine, less than 100 souls remained.

The monarch around this Joseph time is recorded as constructing a complete set of dykes, canals, locks and reservoirs and an artificial lake, perhaps using the resources of the tax system that Joseph was to put in place. Until this time there was a dearth of water controls on the great and mighty Nile. Since then the controls have greatly helped. Whether the Aswan Dam (in our time) a long way south, up the river, has helped, is now in doubt, as the Delta industries have been too restricted.

Elijah's intercession at Mount Carmel, years later, cut a seven year famine by half, i.e. into three and a half years. *1 Kings 18:45 (*see *NIV Study Bible)*. Long famines in the area are well known.

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Pharaoh reasoned **rightly**

- That as he had dreamed about the food supply this time

- That he has been warned, and

- That he is meant to prepare for the lean years.

If the lean years had come first, the fat years would have been of no help.

Pharaoh agrees with Joseph that

- **Plans should be made to take breath to bear the suffering**

- And to take weapons to deal with the affliction.

Surely Pharaoh realises now that God has given this blessing of provision and the command to provide - a whole fourteen year plan. Joseph had promised that God would "*give Pharaoh an answer of peace*", *verse 16,* and it was so. And God had prepared Pharaoh's mind to receive it. In fact Joseph says, "*what God is about to do he showeth unto Pharaoh*", *verse 28*.

We need to consider whether Pharaoh, and the Egyptians, at this time, are all culpable for not abandoning their idolatrous worship in the face of such a huge acknowledged blessing from the one true God. They may argue that it was a blessing really for God's children and therefore they were only of peripheral account. Still the rain falling on the unjust is not only to give them a random blessing, but also to give them opportunity to repent.

Here is foresight for what lay ahead, a foresight provided by God. Ah, for foresight. Joseph had lacked it, now he provided it **- by God's gift** - for Pharaoh. Joseph suggested a wise and loving taskmaster to teach the people the economy of plenty, (but does not suggest himself). When the famine comes, how their love and trust will increase because of his care of them. The taskmaster's strictness will be forgiven, when they see a wise and loving taskmaster to teach the people the economy of plenty.

3. THE WISDOM OF JOSEPH

Pharaoh recognises the worth of Joseph's suggestion. He sees Joseph, instructed by a God who gives him wise and prudent advice, as a wise and a gifted gift for Egypt. After all Pharaoh had no other wise persons. This seemed to be the best thing to do for the years ahead.

Joseph was 30 years old and he became the saviour of Egypt.

The parallels with God's own son are enormous here.

He would be the viceroy, or the Grand Vizier. The two viziers, one of the North and one of the South, the steward of the storehouses and stalls, and the head of the treasury must all work for, and be responsible to Joseph - no committee here, no counsellors here, just one man in charge. The task is that important. Understandably a Pharaoh appointed committee, at this time, would have no divine and knowledgeable foresight, so it would be impossible to galvanise them into action. Some with faith and some with foresight would create factions and nothing would get done.

Pharaoh is impressed with Joseph's credentials. What other nomadic race would be able to name a great grandfather, his source and his travels. Why, this great grandfather had even come to Egypt during a great famine, and had a beautiful wife, who had impressed the Pharaoh at the time. On the gifted interpretation of the dreams as well as the credentials, Pharaoh asks Joseph to be the mouthpiece of Egypt, over all, except for Pharaoh.

There are three points to make here -

One

Pharaoh's increasing appreciation of the God of Joseph must have made some jealousies at court - and even further away from the palace. *Verse 37*, though, speaks of the goodwill in the eyes of the watching servants, even though the worship of Egypt was not as pagan at this time, as it became later. God continued to bless Pharaoh for Joseph's sake. However there must have been some traitors anxious for a false step, or an opportunity for poison. We have discussed before, in other incidents the effect of the jealousy poison on the life of Joseph.

Two

If we did not know the story, we would be at this point full of wonder. Though glad of our blessing (of being *Bible* literate) it is a pity that we miss the emotion of wonder and astonishment at the first telling. If we do know the story, it is useful to try to experience the excitement and wonder, and to smile with joy, after all the sadness.

Three

The affliction of blindness to futurity affects us all, but Joseph's brothers would have said at this time, "*Oh, if only we'd known*". They did say it nine years later. The lesson for us is obvious.

Joseph accepts the task and places himself in Pharaoh's hands. **Over it all, like an umbrella, is God**. In Egypt, Joseph is not known by this Hebrew name, Osarsiph - the dead one - dead to his father, pulled out of the death pit. It is a possible name, as has been earlier suggested, signed on the Egyptian migration list at Thel in the Customs House, and a name recommended by the old man in **The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company**. He is dead to his father, but not to us, certainly not to the Egyptians. Now Pharaoh has a problem about his name, but he will easily solve that, "*no name*" means Pharaoh can name this Prime Minister whatever he pleases. "And Pharaoh called Joseph's name **Zaphnath paaneah",** Genesis 41**:**45.

New barns will need to be constructed (and smeared with cat grease to scare the mice away). **These granaries of Egypt are today well documented**. Tax officials will need to be educated, and employed with fixed ratings, to eliminate bribes and corruption. The grain must be distributed to the poor and sold to the rich. People will come on pilgrimages from far away places to buy bread and seed corn, driven by need and hunger. They **will** pay, not only with gold and silver and wood, but they will **pay** with their sons and daughters as well - even themselves.

They will not pretend to be loyal, and look at their neighbour with a winking eye; they **will** be loyal, for they will be bound by their own children, who will be slaves in Egypt. *William Blaikie* thinks that Hagar may have come to Egypt as a slave from south of Egypt. It was a common occurrence.

Pharaoh could see that, with the drought expanding, the surrounding nations, even far up, to the river that "*ran the wrong way*" (the Euphrates running south), would be subject to him. No one now doubted the respect people had for him, now no one ever referred to the killings he had to accomplish to gain respect, amongst his enemies. This wonderful plan with, hopefully, its great success, would be a bulwark against the whisperers, who sniffed and spat about his allegiance to the man, who worshipped the Hebrew God. No person prevented the servants of Joseph, each from his function in God's plan, and Pharaoh is recorded *(verse 38:39*) as appreciating God's wisdom and goodness. It is difficult to know whether this was just "*court talk*", or whether there was a real appreciation of God.

With great ceremony Pharaoh took the ring from his finger and placed it on Joseph's finger. "*With this ring I decree that you are my signatory - you have the royal signet to make decrees into law. It is your symbol of authority*" Joseph was indeed first in the land, and whatever law he made he placed the seal upon it

Pharaoh endorsed the authority that he gave to Joseph with a ring, and Joseph remembered to thank God for all his blessings, and prepared for the famine.

On Sahel Island near the modern first cataract of the Nile, a famous inscription records a period of seven disastrous years, when the Nile did not flood. This event may well have caused the 7 years of famine for which Joseph prepared.

Webber like (Andrew Lloyd Webber), we also have a story of a dream coat.

We close our eyes, and draw back the curtain

And see for certain,

That long ago that dream was true.

We know the pleasures of the Canaan ways,

And then the weeping of the Egyptian days

When that coat was destroyed.

The darkness was accompanied by

Waiting and hesitating

Until the dream came true.

To some people any dream will do,

But for Joseph

God's dream was certain.

And in the west as our sun is setting

We return to our beginnings,

To our longings and our dream coat.

Our hands are shaking now, and

With our longing our fingers itch,

To do His bidding.

Our heads are filled with memory,

And our eyes overflow,

And we feel our heart would break.

But with that weeping,

The uncompromising melody moves

To its conclusion and draws us with it

- to His kingdom.

CONCLUSION:

If we recognise a glow in out hearts at this turn of events, Joseph must have felt it intently. All of us know that God is here and that we are on holy ground. Go, Joseph, go, go, go.

Section 3 - Joesph - Prime Minister of Egypt

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CHAPTER 1 - THE GILDING OF JOSEPH

CHAPTER 2 - PHARAOH CHOOSES A GENTILE WIFE FOR JOSEPH

CHAPTER 3 - THE HEAVENS SHUT UP

CHAPTER 4 - JACOB'S RESPONSE TO THE FAMINE

CHAPTER 5 - JACOB'S DILEMMA AND THE SILENCE OF HIS SONS

CHAPTER 6 - JACOB'S NINE SONS COME HOME

CHAPTER 7 - JACOB WRESTLES AGAIN

CHAPTER 8 - PEACE AT LAST, - BUT NO PEACE

CHAPTER 9 - JACOB'S DETERMINATION WILL BE CHALLENGED

CHAPTER 10 - THE DREADFUL SUSPENSE TURNS TO JOY

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CHAPTER 1

THE GILDING OF JOSEPH

"***And Pharaoh made Joseph ruler over all the land of Egypt", Genesis 41:43.***

FOCUS:

This wonderful *Scriptural* text, ***Genesis 41:43-49,*** describes to us remarkable events in Egyptian history. Joseph became "*a man of gold*" by Pharaoh's gracious command and he gilded Pharaoh over and over again and repaid him for his own gilding - and it was so, as the prophecy foretold.

1. JOSEPH'S CHANGED APPEARANCE

Joseph was dressed in beautiful byssus; fine, white linen made from a special flax, later used for the Levitical priest garments *(Exodus 39:28)*. The use of it by Joseph, *Genesis 41:42*, established him into the ruling class of Egypt. Joseph had thick gold chains about his neck (not fetters on his ankles), and the gold signet ring of Pharaoh, the king/priest royal insignia. The Hebrew indicates "*to sink*", and so Joseph was entitled to sink his emblem, on all important documents. The fettered ankles are hard to remember right know that the golden chains adorn Joseph's person.

Always it's better to remember ("*keep in mind*" really) the sad times, for it enhances the feeling of blessing, and the knowledge that God is present always.

2. MIDRASH WRITING IN OTHER TEXTS ECHOING THIS TEXT

Later on, in *Esther 8*, we read of Mordecai receiving the gift of the King's ring, *verse 2*, and his change of clothing to royal apparel, *verse 15*. "*And the Jews had light, and joy, and gladness, and honour*", like Joseph.

This is evidence of Midrashic writing in *Esther*. That is, writing that is the opposite of where someone, or something is looking forward to some future person or event. **It is a looking back,**

not forward. A hearkening back to familiar words and phrases, when they reappear in later books of the Bible, with different meanings, or in different contexts. It presupposes that authors are familiar, or even learned, about the previous texts. The author of *Esther*, a chronicler of the kings of Media and Persia, *chapter 10:2*, is so familiar with the work of Moses, in the descriptions of Joseph's rewards in the foreign Egyptian court of Pharaoh, that he uses the same words for the rewards of Mordecai in the foreign Persian court of Ahasuerus. An example - "*the man who the king delighted to honour*", *Esther 6:11,* uses the same Hebrew word as "*the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh*" of *Genesis 41:37,* There are many instances of Midrashic writing in *Esther* from ***Genesis 41.***

Both the widows of Zarephath and Nain had their sons restored to life as both Elijah and Jesus "*gave him back to his mother*". The same words are used in *1 Kings 17:22*, and *Luke 7:14.* Obviously Luke (a gentile) is familiar with the Pentateuch, and uses a Midrash. Daniel is another example, and so many comparisons can be made between Joseph and Daniel. Elijah uses the Moses term, "*Abraham, Isaac and Israel*", showing his knowledge of the text, in *1 Kings 18:36,* when he entreats God to hear his prayer, against the prophets of Baal.

3. PREPARATION FOR THE FAT AND LEAN YEARS

It is entirely possible that the fat years, in Egypt, were not always fat, full of blessing, and the lean years were not always lean, and full of curses. Life swings around within the orbit of God's plan (and the prophecies He gives us) so that life is not always extreme one way or the other. That is understood by us, and Joseph, during the fourteen years, lived life within the orbit of inexactitude as we know it, generally, in the first half towards the collection of food, and then in the end half towards the distribution of it. People's view of history differ, neither one is right and one is wrong, it depends on the point of view, and on what corner one stands to view the passing facts. One cannot tell all - it would be a madness of detail. However the *Scriptural* detail of Joseph (unusually descriptive word pictures) and the archaeological finds, have tended to give us an almost unbalanced history in length, compared with the earlier parts of our patriarchal story. The chronicler and compiler (Moses and others) and God's supervising inspiration, has deemed it necessary for our good. How interesting that we can, with ease, enter into the excitement of such a story each time we read it, even though the first tell wonder is gone!

Joseph, and the whole of the court, sailed back up the Nile to Nowet Amun where the little gnats flicked and flew about them all. These little gnats did, and do still cause blindness, but the people's eyes were opened wide in wonder, as the court left On (where this story was probably played out) in their golden barques.

The wonder continued, as Joseph, riding in Pharaoh's second chariot, travelled all the roads of the land of Egypt. The chariot displaying the royal insignia is recorded in monuments of the day. Runners ran in front shouting "*Abrek*" - "*take care*", "*move aside*", "*make way*", "*bow down*" - what! ***"BOW DOWN***"! Camels in the east still bow down and kneel to the command "*Abrok*". And so it is entirely possible that our own Australian camels, imported from Afghanistan, would have heard the same command.

The journey around Egypt, of say fifty days, accompanied by all the grandees of Egypt, familiarised Joseph with the land, and what needed to be done. He soon settled in the palace in spacious quarters with everything for his comfort, set in beautiful gardens, with a lake and fountains to cool them, at the foot of the high, sand coloured desert hills. His ceremonial investiture and gilding proceeded without delay - the once purchased slave was surrounded by

servants, bodyguards and fan bearers, and dressed in white linen, and inducted into the ruling class. The people called him "*Adon*" all his life, his slave status mysteriously ignored or abandoned, all by God's commanding, of course.

His bruised and broken heart caused by so many injustices.

Undeserved treatment by his brothers,

Unfair abandonment by his family,

Untrue accusations by Potiphar's wife,

And unexpected restrictions in prison,

had resulted in a crushed heart ready for remoulding, and from that remake c**ame a golden vessel that surpassed all others.**

A calloused and thick heart is a tarnished heart.

But this heart of Joseph's is golden,

And gilded he is,

All under the supervising hand of God.

The extent of his responsibility was not measured by his great importance of godlike qualities, or family background, but because he was an extraordinary man. There were extraordinary circumstances that made such an ordinary boy, into an extraordinary man. He was forced to relinquish his family, but through all the years of family deprivation, he had not forgotten the fabric that makes for good family life, that leads to good community life, that makes an extraordinary ruler. He had emulated the good in others, and meticulously honed his self discipline. He had discarded what was unworthy or impure, and there was nothing redundant in his life. He knew that the land of Egypt had nurtured him, when his family had not, and he knew it would nurture them in the years to come. In the end it would not be Joseph who would liberate the oppressed in Egypt, but right now he felt love and respect for both the oppressors and the oppressed. He was to be the bell whether, who would lead his God loved family, to security and ease, so that they could, once more, worship Him in peace for a time.

4. JOSEPH IS GOLD

Thomas Mann gives us a wondrous imagined description of **The Gilding Ceremony**, in "*Joseph and His Brothers, Joseph the Provider*", *page 184*, where -

From the palace, the royal persons showed themselves at a high window, like a balcony. There were two royal persons, husband and wife, Pharaoh and his queen.

Lower down, on a little structure supported by columns, stood the favoured person to be gilded.

This time it was our loved Joseph, son of Jacob.

Their majesties, then, would lean out, and fling down gold presents of every shape and sort, handed to them by officers of the treasure house, who attended behind them, and passed to them from the piles of goodies.

It is highly likely that such a personage as Joseph would have that ceremony, and this would be a splendid way, for someone who had nothing, to gain power and eminence - people do respect wealth!

The scene was never forgotten by those who saw it for the colour and pomp of extravagance and ecstasy. The beautiful little structure, with banners flapping in the breeze, had beautifully painted woodwork, all framed against the blue sky. It may have been a temporary structure, and so a rare sight, to add to the excitement. It was enhanced by all the flung gold, which was so abundant that two slaves were necessary to help in the catching of it.

One got to keep the gold, so it was a very public way of enhancing a favoured one, and giving him the necessary status symbols to go with his new position.

And all the time the servants, dressed in gala aprons, fanned the royal personages and the fortunate recipient against the prevailing heat. The crowd, jumping and leaping for joy, with the more modest hopping from one foot to the other, were enthralled by it all. The scribes, in their bent over posture, (they all had bent backs), and with their discerning eyes wrote down everything they saw with their reeds - so we can know about it today from stone pictures and papyri.

The sand, and dryness of it all, has preserved the historical details, in papyri, well. The wind blows and sometimes there's no need to dig. Egypt had little timber, (to be made into paper), and so water reeds were the obvious source for developing "*paper*".

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

5. EGYPTIAN OPULENCE AT THE JOSEPH TIME IN HISTORY

Even children's story books today have authentic, historical and opulent details about Egypt at this time in its history - see Brian Wildsmith's "*Joseph*". Each page of the book is edged in gold. Still, the status and ceremony and opulence of the gilding, **all for one man**, would have stunned the Egyptian people, and after that, there would be no way they would question his authority on the long hard road of heavy taxes during the years of plenty.

The godlike majesties had crowns like legionnaire caps, cape like to protect their necks from the sun, enjoyed the gilding ceremony. They tossed gold beads, gold arm bands, gold daggers, gold fillets, collars, sceptres, vases, cups, and goblets, hatchets and many other such things, all glittering in the sun, and a great golden hoard for Joseph.

All this was done in excitement, joy and gratitude by Pharaoh and his queen. Certainly there was no negative emotion with which the Egyptians threw their gold at the departing Israelites under Moses, many years later. It is a sign of wisdom to give good counsel, but it is also a sign of wisdom to be able to receive it, and Pharaoh did that. Joseph honoured God before Pharaoh, and God honoured Joseph in the sight of Pharaoh. Pharaoh was gracious to accept it with humility. Pharaoh had acted quickly, the same day that Joseph had come from prison, to give him immense power. It may not have been possible later. That Joseph was next to Pharaoh in power, was not said to diminish Pharaoh, but to elevate Joseph in the eyes of the Egyptians, and to verify the positive answer that had accompanied the question in *verse 38*. This endorsement (by Pharaoh) prevented any criticism of Joseph, neither at this present time, nor in the future, when Joseph's family would need that endorsement most.

Jacob amassed great wealth under Laban over many years. Joseph received it all at once and his eyes would blink and squint at the opulence of it all. Foreigners said that the streets of Thebes were paved with gold - what they meant was that it was like the dust in the street. It was more precious though than dust, and the bulk of it did not decrease its value. Later Joseph was to send a message to his father: "*Tell the father of all my glory in Egypt*". Jacob would have been dismayed and yet proud of his son this day. He was thirty years old - like another precious Son - and twelve years lost to his father.

6. THREE PEOPLE - WHERE ARE THEY?

Three people we have forgotten.

Consider:

One is the butler,

* Was the butler busy trying to ingratiate himself with Joseph to win favours?

* Was he embarrassed that he had forgettery for so long?

The other two are Potiphar and his wife. Potiphar must have been astounded at the turn of events.

* Did Potiphar look at Joseph's God blessed life, and knew for certain of his wife's lie?

* Where was this wife?

* Was she frightened of retribution?

****

Because we do not hear of them again does not mean that they are not all, at present, at court, as well, fulfilling their duties and in constant contact, perhaps, with Joseph. On the other hand as the Pharaoh changed, perhaps some court personnel did change. Potiphar and his wife may have moved, or been removed, from court. We do not know.

7. JOSEPH COMES INTO HIS KINGDOM

Joseph "*came into his kingdom*", *Luke 23:42*, and had power over them all wherever they were, but we know there would be no retribution on them, from the gracious Joseph. It is interesting though to think of them again as this drama unfolds. In any case the Persian "*musk and attar of roses*" of a later love story fictitiously recorded between Joseph and Potiphar's wife is utter nonsense, for we know the higher and more noble path that Joseph was to forge for his people. He would not take the track of a sickly romance of no substance.

The *Scripture* tells us that Pharaoh changed Joseph's name to **Zaphnath-paaneah** for the meaning of which we have many choices:

"***The revealers of secrets",***

(Joseph certainly was that, as a dream interpreter);

"***Food of life",***

"***Food of the living",***

"***He who feeds the world",***

"***He who feeds the living",***

"***Deliverer of the world",***

"***Saviour of the world".***

Uncanny, it is that the Egyptian Pharaoh gives him a title, which centuries later is one of the precious titles of our Lord.

(It is also possible to accept many other meanings of Joseph's Egyptian name, as the lack of vowels in the writing of the time allows of several other meanings, not connected to the food providing role, such as, "*He is alive*").

Consider:

* Was Joseph universally accepted as wise and wonderful in the beginning?

* Or did he became more so, as his predictions were fulfilled?

It is known that Pharaoh was also a priest, and could delegate those duties.

* Did he also delegate Joseph to be a priest?

* How much compromise would be in that if Joseph accepted it?

* Could he refuse?

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The storehouses stood at their normal capacity at first, while more and more were being built. The heavy tax (of twenty per cent of the corn - a fifth) took away the pleasure of plenty. Probably ten per cent was already committed to Pharaoh, which was a normal tax, and would have been no hardship in the time of plenty. So Joseph permanently rented out Pharaoh's land to the people, doubling the former impost. If you were not a grain grower, there was still tax to be paid, in whatever was your employ. In the end though the grain stored became like the sand of the sea (like Abraham's promised offspring). There was so much storing it was beyond measure and the bookkeeping could not keep up with the storing. It became "*unnumbered*". This is a difficulty - for the Egyptians never gave up numbering, calculating and accounting, and were always writing down and recording. They held it as a fine preoccupation. Perhaps the enthusiasm and abundance of it all, caused the word "*unnumbered*" to be used, and so it is a picture word, and not literal.

The commissioners that Joseph sent over the borders to other countries brought back news of no preparation, just the pleasure of plenty. So through it all Joseph taught his senators wisdom *(Psalm 105:22)*. We assume that the people trusted him well, and they really believed that the famine was coming. To think how Joseph would have managed to persuade them about a coming famine, is to doubt his authority, which was after all given by Pharaoh, and ultimately by God. No need for persuasion, just Joseph's authority. Pharaoh rested, and relaxed in great respect from the people, and he continued to favour Joseph.

The storehouses of each city were enlarged and more were built. Corn bins were constructed on terraced platforms of pounded clay to keep the damp and mice away. Cat grease was smeared around all the openings. They had openings at the top to receive the corn and stout doors below to measure it out. There were also numerous underground pits, well lined with invisible and

guarded entrances. Jacob had talked about Egypt being "*the house of bondage*", and so it was. It would only be truly acceptable to the people when the years of famine began, and the Nile stopped flowing abundantly.

The builders were used to constructing huge public buildings, palaces, and tombs. Now they worked on buildings of necessity. When the workers had worked for Egypt, with their noses bent in great effort, then, of course, they had to pay taxes on what they had done, that is, on their salaries. They paid with skins, copper, wood, rope, paper, cotton and linen, and corn into the warehouses, and if they were unable, they paid with labour. But corn was the absolute essential requirement. The other payments probably helped with the building of the water resources and irrigation channels. The tax forced the farmers to keep everything well oiled and repaired, for they could not, dared not, fall behind in their regular payments, and they were compelled to produce well.

Joseph probably moved to Memfe because of the balance of the two lands and that it would be easier to oversee from there. His friend, Pharaoh, was probably sorry to see him go. Memfe held a commanding position both up and down stream of the river, and certainly was a more convenient city for the expected escalation of foreign trade that the commissioners needed to oversee. It was a metropolis of tombs. The little people of the city had a heritage of hard work (on the great pyramids long ago). Joseph's house would be light, airy, and sunny with a garden, reception hall, fountains, and courts, with numerous Nubian and Egyptian servants, not far from present day Cairo.

It would be comforting to know that Joseph did remember the keeper of his prison and made him his house steward. The house steward was steward over water barks and wagons, horses, store rooms, house servants, scribes, and slaves. He would know the job well, but, remember Joseph would know it too, from Potiphar's house. Management skills had been a priority in the development of Joseph's career.

CONCLUSION:

Joseph is poised at the pinnacle of his career and is about to become the happiest of men. To think about it is to smile, for, after all, God has worked all things well for Joseph.

Digression:

Earlier in these studies there is an explanation of Sumerian writing, on clay tablets, in the section about Ur. It is described in tandem with Egyptian writing.

The "*Time-Life History*", *pages 37* to *53*, has an excellent section on the history of writing in Sumer and Egypt. The difference is that the Sumerians used clay tablets, while the Egyptians had perfected the use of papyrus, - an early find is dated 1650 BC.

Only one per cent of the population (of 3 million at the time of Moses) were literate, for only the wealthy could attend school. Consequently, priests, scribes and all officials, who were necessarily literate, had great status. These scribes were also accountants and tax collectors. The scribes used a curved palette of wood with a little sliding door for a set of reed quills, and two recessions, one for red ink, and one for black ink. There was one on display in the Sydney "*Life and Death under the Pharaohs*" Exhibition, 1998. Letters were full of god references, as if every communication needed the blessing of the deities. Papyrus was made into sailcloth,

(perhaps Moses' basket was made of strong papyrus), sandals, maps, and writing paper. It was strong and it preserved well. The sheets were usually long and rectangular, banded together as books with animal leather covers, or pasted together for scrolls. These are now un pasted, and displayed in single sheets for better preservation, for that long time of preservation is now coming to an end. Arsenic trisulphide was used by the Egyptians to preserve the coloured pigments, especially yellow, but now an ideal conserving agent, (to preserve papyrus writing), has recently been discovered. Isinglass, a gelatine based material, made from fish swim bladders, sprayed on to the papyrus, can prevent the pigments used by the Egyptians, from fading, when exposed to light. The fragile papyri are now being uncovered in great numbers, and so it was imperative to discover some way to preserve them. It is exciting, that, sitting cross legged, with their scrolls on their knees, and with their permanently bent backs, the scribes recorded, for us, so much of what was common in Egypt, and well known by Joseph. The Sumerians first used writing in the land, Sumeria, (that the Greeks later called Mesopotamia), where the oldest forms of writing have been discovered on stone tablets. There is also a tablet at Nippur, found in Sumer, describing a flood from which only one man and his family emerged safely. It is one of the many ancient accounts that refer to the event in the *Bible* known to us as occurring in the days of Noah. So it is entirely possible that Noah's stone record was preserved by Shem and passed on to Abraham, and was one of the family treasures, taken from Ur, and maybe wrapped in precious silk, and passed on to Isaac, soon to arrive in Egypt, with Jacob.

However the Egyptians began using papyrus made from water reeds, for documentation, soon after the flood. Writing was to prove a mighty goad to progress and vastly hastened the growth and spread of civilisation. Hieroglyphics, or picture writing, was common at this time and there are many tomb and statue records available, enough for people to learn the script and translate it for us. If the script did not contain vowels it is possible that many different meanings could be made out of each picture, but the very commonness of it, available today, has largely eliminated that difficulty. There were thousands of script signs. This script later became more sophisticated into what is called a Hieratic script. Block statues were common, with head and hands and feet details, but in a squat position, so that the record of the person, and the event, could be chiselled onto the lap space, and the front and back, and the sides of the statue. So writing and pictures were not only common on parchment. These parchments, and statues, and obelisks, and pillars with their inscriptions are plentiful today.

The Oriental Institute of Chicago is responsible for much of the archaeological work in Syria, Iraq and Egypt, making tremendous contributions to our knowledge of the past. They have now published dictionaries of the Hittite script, the Assyrian cuneiform, and the Egyptian Demotic script, that is, the people's writing. They give the general meaning of every word, and the context in which it has been used. This enables scholars to draw their own conclusions as to the meaning, *Diggings Magazine, April, 1999*. The manuscripts about the letter "S" in Egyptian writing, has filled 150 manuscript pages, because reproductions of the actual pictures are used as well.

Not only did the Sumerians and the Egyptians have writing in common, but as the peoples moved across from the Mesopotamian and Palestinian fertile crescent valleys into Egypt, they came with wheeled vehicles, solid not spoked yet, which allowed them all good mobility, and more efficient farming and irrigation practices. They brought livestock, and seed for planting and grain storage ideas, and so agricultural surpluses, and a spirit of collective discipline, which was crucial for the development of civilisation at the time, was born, before the birth of Abram, around 2000 BC.

CHAPTER 2

PHARAOH CHOOSES A GENTILE WIFE FOR JOSEPH

"***And he gave him to wife Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On", Genesis 41: 45.***

FOCUS:

Pharaoh, like God told Adam, told Joseph it was not good for him to be alone and that he should have a wife, "*so that the heads and feet should be together in perfect peace*". In the matter of marriage, we would expect that Joseph would consult, once more, his Heavenly Father, ***Genesis 41:50-52***.

1. JOSEPH'S EXTRAORDINARY BRIDE

God gave Adam a wife to be a helpmeet for him and later to be the mother of his children. Later after a great sin/sadness God added two children to this family: one a farmer, and one a shepherd. The shepherd was killed by the farmer and so another great sin/sadness befell this family. The first born of all the world was murdered. The first mother and the first father remembered their sin and their sadness.

Joseph, too, had been with the serpent, but she had not tempted him to sin. He had believed God, and kept himself from sin. He had been true to his master Potiphar, as he would continue to be true to his new master, Pharaoh, and do as he advised. Now God gave him an extraordinary bride. Her name was **Asenath**. So both the Egyptian names, of Joseph and his wife, have "*nath*" in them, meaning the blessing "*of the goddess Neith*". Joseph could not gainsay this, and perhaps he was content that Neith, partner of Ra, Wisdom, was God anyway, whatever the Egyptians might think.

This wife for Joseph was the daughter of Poti-pherah, the High Priest of On, further north, down the Nile River from Memfe. She was, of course, expected to marry and mother, but her life had been one of virginity, therefore whoever married her performed the act almost of abductor from her priestly life. The parents may not have been comfortable that their daughter's husband was not an Egyptian, but an Asiatic, and certainly not a sun worshipper, but who could argue with Pharaoh. You may be sure that mother was wringing her hands and saying: "*what will everyone think?*"

"*Maiden*" she was called, and was called upon to be that, until her marriage. In private, the relations between them and Joseph could be quite cordial, but in public, for public show, they had to allow the appearance of strained relations, for after all she was very special. Perhaps they would require that she should be restored to the priest's house, after the marriage, but in fact, the contract only meant that she pay a yearly visit to her parents like any good daughter would.

Asenath was probably the **grand daughter** of that High Priest at On, that Joseph had seen as he passed through On with the Ishmaelites. She was sixteen years old. She, "*who belongs to (the goddess) Neith*", whose emblem was a shield with two crossed arrows fastened upon it, wore a headdress, always adorned with a shield and arrows, - or such an ornament at her throat, or waist, or on her armbands. It emphasised her maidenhood, and we know from it that Joseph married a young virgin. How happy he would be that he resisted the assault on his virginity earlier. There is a portrait of this maiden in all her beauty, in amber. She, too, was summoned by

Pharaoh, as Joseph had been, and was happy to go forward as wife for the highest in the land, and did not look back. It would be hard not to be joyful at such a union and smile at the blessing.

Comment:

H. A. Whittaker remarks in "*Joseph*, *the Saviour*" that there are, of course, other examples in *Scripture* where a Gentile bride is married to an Israelite, and she forsakes her own faith *(Psalm 45)*. Neither Hebrews nor Egyptians were at this time as exclusive as they afterwards became. The precedent of Pharaoh selecting Sarah as a wife shows this, and of Abraham selecting, or accepting as a gift, Hagar, probably an Egyptian servant/concubine.

Stories abound where people try to equivocate on Joseph's marriage to the daughter of the priest of On, making out that Asenath was secretly the child of the unhappy Dinah. That would not make much difference, for half of that child would be the child of Shechem and therefore no better. Asenath was an Egyptian, and whether we like it or not, Joseph's children were half Egyptian. Likely she was a proselyte. We want her to be a proselyte.

Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of Reuel, the priest of Midian, descendants of Keturah. Jethro, another relation, became it appears a fearer of God, or at least, a man open to conviction when it presented itself to him. Joseph would have known that his own mother was not free of the tincture of idolatry, even though she came from "*within*" the family at Haran. He would also know of the marriages of his brothers, "*outside*". We may wonder at Joseph's special licence to marry "*outside*" his faith, considering his Godly position. Isaac and Jacob did not have that licence. Not that any of this, influences against the wise precaution of marrying "*within the faith*". So we assume that what was evil and forbidden is, at this time, wise and prudent. As has been said, there are other examples in *Scripture,* when it was wise and prudent.

It was not wise and prudent for David to marry idolatrous wives, or Solomon, or Ahab, who married the wicked Jezebel. That marriage caused the prophet of God, Elijah, great trouble, as he struggled against her powerful prophets of Baal. The destruction that came upon these families was inevitable, and not one could say as Macduff did to Macbeth, as his children were destroyed, "*Did heaven look on and never take their part?*" For we know the consequences of our sin are played out on our families, as well. Heaven does prevent consequences sometimes, but not often. We can prevent dire consequences, as part of our resistance to sin. It is not for God to protect us from sin consequences, unless there is a special, God given dispensation to change His order of things.

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2. THE VEXED QUESTION OF JOSEPH'S PRIESTLY ROLE

It would seem remarkable that in his new position of high authority, Joseph did not ever put on the leopard skin coat and burn incense in the Temple of Aton. It would seem that he may have been **required** to do so occasionally. He was next to the sovereign and invested with power, and marrying the daughter of a priest, would probably be enrolled in the priestly ranks. Perhaps his power enabled him to distance himself from the priest, Poti-phera, "*he whom the sun god, Ra, has given*". If not, he would be supremely confident that God would treat him with forbearance and consideration. Joseph was not Aton, but Adon, and the people so called him, and because Pharaoh considered Joseph's God wise and prudent, perhaps the worship of Aton came closer at this time to the worship of God, for after all Ra (the sun) was created by God. Still this is a grey

area and difficult for us to understand - we can make no opinion, nor equivocate, nor excuse Joseph. Neither can we regard it as a precedent. We must leave it with God.

It might be just as well that Jacob, perceiving Joseph as dead and permanently eighteen, did not see the wedding ceremony of this loved son of his. His horror hands would be flung up, and his opinion of this land of much mud would be confirmed. The stories about Egypt, told through the fathers, Abraham and Isaac, resided in his heart and made him tremble, even without knowledge of his once loved, now Egyptianised son.

3. THE WEDDING OF JOSEPH AND ASENATH

The women, at this marriage, were gowned and veiled in violet amidst the never ending spectacle. Processions of torches, with myrtle branches and wreaths, were being held aloft. Myrtle was considered sacred to love and death. **The forbidden mystery for Joseph was about to be revealed and we would like to think that Joseph - Zaphnath-paaneah - and Asenath loved one another from the start.**

Virginity met virginity, and out of this great ceremony they pledged their life to one another. Even though it was a state arranged marriage, love hopefully found itself. It often does in the prearranged. They were both set apart for one another and neither had defaulted on that.

We may wonder again at the absence of the use of this story of Joseph for young people, where increasing pre marital sex is accepted as normal. Here is a blessing crown for Joseph, after years of denial, beginning with his resistance of the attempted seduction by Potiphar's wife.

4. JOSEPH'S JOY AT LAST

The moment makes us laugh and cry, for from the lamplight of this wedding night and the overhanging myrtle they sang, as *Thomas Mann* tastefully puts it, "*the song of love with their heads and their feet together*". Joseph thanked God, and at last was comforted, like Isaac was, with Rebekah, after his mother's death. Now Joseph's first born son was conceived. **Manasseh** came in pain to make Asenath mother, and eased the pain for Joseph at last. His name means "*God has helped me forget my toil, and misery*", or "*God has made me forget all my connections, and my father's house*". It does not mean that he gladly forgot them all, it means that Joseph has now ceased to suffer from homesickness, and was content with his lot. He, of course, still pined for his father, but not for Canaan. The Hebrew names of Asenath's children probably mean that she was happily worshipping YHWH. It also means that Joseph thought the elegant Hebrew names essential in the scheme of things. Indeed they were, especially in the "*monkey land*" of Egypt, as it was often called by the nations round about. His second son's name, **Ephraim**, means "*double fruitfulness*", for he had at last left the stark misery of the desert (in his life). "*Joseph was a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall*", said his dying father Jacob, blessing him in *Genesis 49:22*. There is the double birth, so Joseph indeed feels fruitful, after all the drought and dearth and famine in his life. *Charles Swindoll* makes the point that "*Joseph is Manassehed and Ephraimed*" now in his life, God removed "*the sting of abandonment*", and "*doubly blessed me*".

What joy, blessing, and fruitfulness is now part of his domestic life. He had none of his own for twelve years. His patience, industry, and sense of economy in the years of plenty had been -

Taught to him at home

Taught to him by the hairy Ishmaelites

Taught by Potiphar's head servant

Taught to him by the prison administrator,

And now his domestic achievements had been bestowed by God.

His bad memories never defeated him, and his lengthy affliction did not discourage him, so that he is now ready and waiting to accept the blessings of God.

Each of us has reasons why we behave as we do. They are only that, and never excuses. If we choose to wallow in self pity because of our circumstances then we fail to reach our separate potential. Joseph chose to override his experiences, and shine above the dullness of the evils that befell him.

The names of Joseph's two sons reflect the contrast between his present situation and when he first came to Egypt. So his blessed position must have given him great joy, for indeed he had been "*gilded by God*". **However, he would understand that the motives for this placement in Egypt were**

- Sad jealousies, which led to

- The deliverance (God's need for His people).

So there was necessity for Joseph's separation from his family, and that his sons grew up far from their grandsire. Nevertheless, he would be content. He would feel he was part of that family at last with his two Hebrew named sons.

The probable Pharaoh at this time had only daughters - six, failing to produce a necessary male heir.

If we transport Joseph into our own cultural setting we would see him with a beautiful wife, two lovely children, expensive clothes, a beautifully appointed home, a luxurious car, a wonderful career position, stock holdings in the food industry, an expense account, and an unlimited budget, then we might wonder if he could survive as a servant of God. But he faithfully did.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

5. JACOB'S FAMILY AT HOME IN CANAAN

It may be of interest to state the background of the wives of the other sons of Jacob. Perhaps, then, Joseph's wife's heritage may be seen in better perspective.

1. **Benjamin married Mahalia, daughter of Aram, grandson of Terah, and so descended from Abraham, or one of his brothers, and then Arbath, daughter of a man named Simron, a son of Abram (by some concubine).**

2. **Levi's and**

3. **Issachar's wives were held to be the grand daughters of Eber - they could have come from Assur or Elam.**

4. **Gad and**

5. **Naphtali had taken wives from Haran and Mesopotamia, but whether they were actually great grand daughters of Nahor, Abraham's uncle is of some doubt.**

6. **<u>Asher</u> took a wife from the seed of Ishmael.**

7. **<u>Zebulun</u> took a Midianite. Midian was a son of Keturah, Abraham's second wife.**

8. **<u>Reuben</u> married a Canaanite.**

9. **<u>Judah</u> married a Canaanite, Shuah, and had three sons. Two died, but then he had two more sons (twins) by Tamar, also a Canaanite.**

10. **<u>Simeon</u> had married a woman stolen from Shechem - also a Canaanite.**

11. **<u>Dan</u> took a Moabitess, descendant from Moab, who Lot's daughter bore to her father.**

Benjamin was, of course, Jacob's favourite son, though Jacob probably never got over the fact that he saw in this son, the matricide instrument God used to take his dearly loved Rachel from him. However he would be consoled by Benjamin's innocence in the matter of Joseph's "*death*", and perhaps after all, their relationship, even with the *"death"* of Joseph, was a healthy one.

Jacob was tormented by the thoughts and suspicions of fratricide committed by his other sons and even though Benjamin was grown now (a husband and father) he still kept him beside him and saw him daily, thus committing to his sensibility, daily, that the killing beast of Joseph (dare he think it) had ten heads and not eleven. A ten headed Cain. He would cherish this one head more dearly and the ten heads knew it. It may be argued that it was fewer than ten heads (who disposed of Joseph). God would know that, and they would too - but not Jacob. In his heart the dear boy of eighteen, Joseph, remained eighteen still (as do all of our children who die) and by the time that the famine came, he had convinced himself that he had "*given*" his son on that fateful Dothan trip twenty years ago. It was a surrender, (or so it became in his recollection) like Isaac was by Abraham, a sacrifice, a giving of the thing he most cherished, a giving to God. **Perhaps over the years the taking of his son by God, or the giving of his son to God, merged from the first, until the second became more likely to him.** Perhaps the yearning in his heart to freely love God caused him to confess that "*yes - he, too, sacrificed willingly his beloved son*". The yearning sometimes won the day, and he loved God, and he loved his remaining sons - and did not think of the possible fratricide - such is the blessing of time healing - and his sons were dear to him again.

6. DYSFUNCTION AND SADNESS AND DEPRESSION AT HOME

We need to realise that all families are dysfunctional to a greater or smaller degree, at sometime or another, for we all sin. The family or system of relationships wax and wane, sometimes strong and sometimes weak, and everyone in a family is responsible for the dynamics that prevail. In the Jacob family, the waxing prevailed when he forgot the possible fratricide, and the injured or dead Joseph picture faded, but once the waning suspicion returned, Jacob's depression descended again. The depression would have inhibited his aggression towards his sons, and it would have been easier to adapt his behaviour. Perhaps his supervision at this time became more Godly, and so he walked more nearly with God. The depression never really left him, until his days of contentment in Egypt. Those days were not far off now. As we know, the separation from his loved child was a cause of great sadness. When he did find Joseph again, his happiness unfolded out of the sadness cocoon, and he was at peace again. Sadness is a useful tool, for without it we would be without encouragement to retain our relationships with one another. It is the glue that keeps us from breaking our ties to one another. So, although it is said to be a negative emotion, it plays a critical role in our lives. Hopefully it motivated Jacob to renew and strengthen his relationships with his other sons.

Melancholy, a weariness and distress of the heart, became associated with the sin of sloth in the eighth century, but of course it is not so, for inertia is the physical manifestation of the depression disease. The answer is for people to maintain close bonds, and that is where a well functioning family can more easily help and heal depression. It is possible to learn from depression, but whether this peripatetic family was ever able to self analyse to gain from their life experiences, is extremely doubtful.

7. JACOB CALLS HIMSELF *"ISRAEL"*

Jacob at this time began to use his hard won, night struggle for the name - Israel. Despite it all, God **had** promised. For Israel when it sinned and was punished, always remained Israel, wherever it was. It is still Israel today even though it is far away from God, and wills God to abandon it still, by its very behaviour.

From Jacob's daughters in law, Ishmaelites, Canaanites, Moabites, he could see around his knee, half of each child came from idolatrous nations - and all were included in God's blessings promised, and each contributed to the stars and the sand of the sea for number. **So he called himself Israel.**

Here was a puzzle for Jacob. As he could no longer give the blessing birthright to his loved Joseph, and he wondered which one it could be

- Not **Reuben**, who had violated his concubine,

- Not **Simeon** or **Levi** who had behaved like heathen savages.

But **Judah**, his fourth son - maybe. Yes, Judah.

The horn of anointing could justly be poured upon the brow of Judah. But Judah had his own private grief. He was caught up in the guilt of his brothers, over the death of Joseph. He had a son, Shelah, the only son left to him. Like Jacob protected Benjamin, Judah protected Shelah, and because of it, got himself into a shameful situation with Tamar. Later he regarded her righteousness greater than his. Through the twins born between Tamar and Judah came Ruth, Jesse, David, Solomon and so to the Lord Jesus Christ. His older son's presence in the family compound, and his two sons by Tamar, were a constant reminder of the shame he carried.

However this line of genealogy has nothing to do with the blessing/birthright question (see *1 Chronicles 5:1* and *2*), but we are still left with Jacob's present choice of Judah. We must wait until his end to see what the final choice will be.

CONCLUSION:

Meantime Joseph's cup was overflowing with good things and he never wanted anything to change that overflowing cup, ever again. It was a sparkling cup, and the reflected light illuminated everything around him. Joseph had already turned golden, and he had a golden cup, but he also had a silver cup. Both cups were very precious to him.

Digression:

JOSEPH AND ASENATH IN ANCIENT LITERATURE

We are indebted to *Randall Chesnutt* of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* for the information about an interesting piece of ancient literature connected to this story.

"*Joseph and Asenath*" is the name of an apocryphal Jewish romance which recounts the conversion of the gentile Asenath to the God of Israel, her marriage to the patriarch Joseph, and the conflicts surrounding that conversion. This is a Midrashic elaboration of the slight mention of the story in *Genesis 41*, (of Joseph's marriage). It has a 5th Century date, but is thought to be produced at the turn of the era, about the time of our Lord. It is common in 16 Greek manuscripts, almost certainly composed in Greek. However Semitisms abound in it, with a distinct *Septuagintal* influence and it is replete with Hellenistic Judaisms. Attempts to relate it to the Essenes, or any of the mystics, or Gnostic groups have been thwarted, but it was composed in the setting of the conflicts over table fellowship, intermarriage with gentiles, (that is, other than between Jewish Christians), the perception about converts, and the struggle to maintain a distinctive Jewish identity. There is speech concerning those "*who worship God*", and the assertion that conversion meant utter repudiation of idols, and that marriage to a converted gentile was no concession to idolatry. The apocryphon seems to have been composed in Egypt, for not only is it in the *Biblical* story framework in Egypt, but in the milieu in which the author and his community actually lived. For instance, the writer's contemporary view of the Egyptian goddess, Neith, seems to have influenced the portrayal of Asenath at some points. The date depends on being **after** the composition of the *Septuagint*, around 200 BC, (nobody is quite sure of that date), because of the extensive dependence on it, and **prior** to the annihilation of the Jews under programs in Egypt AD 115. There are some more historical specifics, that can pinpoint it even closer, but for the purpose of the "*Kith and Kin*" text here, this is enough.

The fact of it being missionary propaganda, designed to help win gentiles to the faith, (it seems that it is especially concerned to extol Jewish life), is understood by some, as its purpose, but the assumption of a patriarchal knowledge of their history, and scriptural familiarity, leads others to think that it was for those who stood very close to Judaism. Whoever it was written for, it does seek to enhance the status of gentile converts within the Jewish community. The author even has an angel of God appear in the story to endorse the principal of conversion and marriage, with complete acceptance and honour.

There is no concession to idolatry in the story, for Asenath becomes "*the daughter of the Most High*" to marry the "*Son of God*", thus rejecting exonomy. Other familiar, Johanine and Pauline expressions such as "*bread of life*" and "*cup of blessing*", reflect conceptions of God, sin, repentance, and salvation, and images of conversions and new creations, emerging from the death to life patterns, with prayers as well. The "*bread of life*", the "*cup of immortality*", the "*ointment of incorruption*", are all formally referred to, and may be references to some sort of ancient meal, or their own everyday Jewish meal, which always had a solemn religious character, or even to the entire Jewish way of life. The triad of bread, cup and ointment is reminiscent of grain, wine and oil, and as such are regarded, by Jewish tradition, to be the staples of Jewish life, but the most susceptible to impurity by association with idolatry. Whether the triad represents some special Jewish ritual, as has been said, set firmly against pagan rites, or simply representing the staples of Jewish commodities of life, pitted against the defiling food drink and oil of the gentile rituals, is open to discussion. Asenath never receives any bread, or cup, or ointment, but only the honeycomb, which represented her access to the "*bread of life*", and we are told that she had drunk from "*the cup of immortality*" and that she had been anointed with the "*ointment of incorruption*". The honeycomb probably represented the later

manna or food from God. The then/now paradigms, illustrate the importance of this story for the first century Jews.

The blessings are affirmed and articulated and emphasise that Jew by birth is unimportant. Membership is not determined by ethnic descent, but by acknowledgment of the true God and by proper conduct, and appropriate witness to others, thus avoiding the argument of Gentile impurity.

The first part of the story is more acceptable to us, than the second, only because it falls into the category of the literature we are used to, (for we find figure difficult to manage), but it is all interesting.

Chapters 1 to *21* of "*Joseph and Aseneth*" deal in the beginning with the exceptionally beautiful and virginal daughter of the priest of Heliopolis, refusing arrogantly her father's request to marry Joseph, a high Egyptian official who is about to visit the district. When she sees the handsome man she falls in love with him. But Joseph spurns her advances, because he worships God, and she worships dead and dumb idols. There is an antithetic description of the two types of worship.

Joseph prays for her conversion and when he returns in a week, she has repudiated her idols, and penitently turned to the God of Israel. An angel visits her, and acknowledges her conversion, and describes to her the blessings that now accrue to her, the foremost of which are life and immortality. So she symbolically eats the mysterious honeycomb, (immortal angel food). Joseph kisses her and the marriage is performed by Pharaoh, and from the union there are two sons.

In the second part of the story, over eight chapters, the Pharaoh's son becomes jealous of the power and might of Joseph, and enlists the likely aid of Joseph's brothers, Dan, Gad, Naphtali and Asher, to murder Joseph, and abduct Aseneth, (significantly Bilhah's and Zilpah's sons). The plot fails significantly because of timely intervention and the strenuous efforts of some of Joseph's other brothers, especially Simeon, Levi and Benjamin, (Leah's and Rachel's sons). Pharaoh's son is mortally wounded during the conflict; and when his grief stricken father, the Pharaoh also dies, Joseph becomes king of Egypt.

It is interesting to know that the Jews in the first century made capital of this story. However we need to emphasis that whatever they thought, and whatever we think, and however much they/we wish it to be so, we are not told by Moses of Asenath's conversion.

CHAPTER 3

THE HEAVENS SHUT UP

"***And Joseph opened all the storehouses of Egypt … And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn", Genesis 41:56, 57.***

FOCUS:

The dearth years are recorded in ***Genesis 41:53-57***.

1. FAMINE IN AND AROUND EGYPT

The famine is terrible,

The flood had been in Noah's day.

Flood and famine,

Saviours both were Noah and Joseph.

At each catastrophe

The outcome depended on

One chosen faithful man.

Comment:

The children of Egypt were wise and well instructed, but they might have been surprised to know that the wonderful River Nile that supported them so well in those seven years of plenty came from the Ethiopian Alps and from the Great Lakes of tropical Africa, and not from under the ground, but from above the ground - rain. The source of the Nile has been a quest for explorers, right up to the 20th century, only now, of course, it can be easily distinguished and pinpointed, from the satellite photographs of the earth. It flowed across the hills, for 6,632 kilometres into the gorges and filled the water-courses so full of liquid mud that when it died away at the end of summer the crust of mud left behind was greatly fertile and made for good corn.

The Land of Mud,

The Land of Black Earth,

The Black Soil,

The Fertile Soil of Kemt,

- are all apt descriptions of the Egypt of the flood plain.

These heavy rains that fell in Ethiopia and tropical Africa depended upon the cloud bursts from clouds over the Mediterranean Sea. They were driven by westerly winds into the Abyssinian Mountains. Also, the well being of Canaan and the surrounding lands depended upon the rains that came twice a year. (Canaan is poor in springs and only the river served their water needs as well as the wells they could sometimes dig. But water was/is always a problem.) Everything depends on the rain. If it does not rain in Canaan, there are no downpours in Ethiopia and Africa, and then the torrents do not tumble down to the Nile (and back out at the Mediterranean.) We see an enormous connection between the sources and courses of water. God rules it all. It failed in Canaan also, for seven years.

The Egyptian habit of careful, preventative preservation for the future had got into Joseph's bones and into his flesh. The highest office in the land is always blamed for national failure, but not here. His successful planning brought great admiration and he was called "*Adon*" still. The Khamsin, the scorching south easterly, blew all summer hot and dry, and the ears and the harvest were no more. There were no fat cows and there were no fat ears. There was no west, rain bearing wind.

However the preparation in Egypt, under Joseph, for the great drought, had been remarkable. The seven years of plenty must have been bliss, a perpetuity of bliss. But like all things, in the cycle of life, the bliss ended.

It had to be a God given drought, for Egypt always had food in the time of drought. The Nile never failed, by ordinary circumstance. Later, when God threatened those nations with famine that if they did not come down to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles, they would be punished, He thought it necessary to insert a clause to obviate the hopes of the Egyptians, that they would never feel such a calamity, for they would say that they always had food, *Zechariah 14:16-18*.

It must have been a matter of great excitement in 1908 when *Brugsch Bey* discovered inscriptions which tell how for seven successive years the Nile did not overflow and vegetation withered and failed, that the land was devoid of crops and that during these years famine and misery devastated the land of Egypt. The date is somewhere around 1700 BC the last year of the famine. The chronologist, *Ussher*, used by the *Authorised Version* compilers, pronounced the last year of plenty as 1708 BC. The actual year date, (for there are differing points of view), is not important, only the story with its lessons for us. In the many and varied histories of the Middle Kingdom of Egypt dates are as many and as varied - there is no definite proof, but discoveries are still being made, and ultimately there may be proof. We believe in the authenticity of *Scripture* and know that the sequence of events is generally correct, and that is our real concern. The *Companion Bible*, "*Chronological Chart, Appendix 50*" is a good indication of dates with a detailed sequence of events. That it all happened is a matter of tremendous impact and not easily trifled with by unbelievers. The information in The *Companion Bible* demonstrates clearly how important it is to keep up with 20th century research in *Biblical* studies, and the newer commentaries, as well as the older 19th century ones.

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2. ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW ABOUT FAMINES

There is now another theory about the seven year famine.

It is now thought by some, that it may have been a **flooding** of the Nile that brought the seven year famine upon Egypt, for there is evidence of a great flood, in Egypt, too late in history to be Noah's flood.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 1***)

However in our story there **was** a food shortage and famine in far away Canaan, certainly not from flood, which was to serve God's purpose in moving the increasingly immovable Jacob. The two catalysts could be co initiators of the famine in both places.

Consider:

* Was the Canaan famine caused by lack of rain in Canaan, because of an oversupply of rain falling in Egypt?

* Or did corn come on the trade routes from Egypt to Canaan, and when the flood famine came in Egypt the trade route supply dried up, and caused famine in Canaan?

* Or could famine have been caused by a combination of circumstances, flood and drought?

****

3. JOSEPH'S FAITH IN EGYPT

For seven years Joseph maintained his faith in God that all that he was achieving in stored grain was not a useless exercise. He had no network, and alone he stood. His perspicacity endeared him to Pharaoh and to the people, and persuaded them of his authenticity, as a messenger from on High. We hope that Asenath supported that view of him.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 2***)

Consider:

* Like the Arab proverb, did Joseph make his life like a little onion, or make his life like a little honey?

* What would be this balance of tears (onions) and joy (honey)?

* What was the intensity of his prayer for his lost family?

* In our prayer life are we required to accept, rather than continually ask for the solution?

* Do we fall into the trap of laying a problem with God, and then returning to the request, over and over, that is, continually and intensively importuning?

* Are there differences in requests, that either call for laying it down at Jesus feet and withdrawing, - and being an importunate?

* Can we create a balance in our daily prayers for our families, and just remind God of our desperate prayer request, but still lay it down with Him?

It would be possible to do this for a lifetime, if it was necessary, and to die with it on our lips, in full assurance that God would heal it in our absence.

****

Joseph's heart must have been built until now, with a combination of faith and fear. We assume that with time the fear had lessened, and the experiences of faith strengthened his faith. There is no evidence of blunted faith. It appears that Joseph was never torn from God's keeping, but abided in His love and was safe. God it was who calmed the original fear, and gave him faith.

Consider:

* Did Joseph consider the snaring woman, as a fearful thing?

* Were the chains that she tried to put about Joseph, fearful things?

* Did he regard the gods of Egypt with fear?

* Did he continue to ask for faith to take away the fear?

* Or did he accept after the initial prayers?

****

The idolaters

"*Cut a tree out of the forest,*

And a craftsman shapes it with his chisel.

They adorn it with silver and gold;

They fasten it with hammer and nails,

So it will not totter.

Like scarecrows in a melon patch,

Their idols cannot speak;

They must be carried,

Because they cannot walk"

Jeremiah 10:3-5.

God continues in *Jeremiah* "*Do not fear them, they can do no harm, nor can they do any good*". Still these idols were regarded with awe, by those round about. But Joseph escaped, for he was a man who pleased God, *Ecclesiastes 7:26*.

Joseph was self made, and self unmade. He learned and unlearned by himself, with only God as his "*hiding place*", *Psalm 32:7,* by whom his weakness, (fear) could be converted, and he could say, "I *am strong*".

So he was strong by himself. This is no recommendation to try the experience. The surviving men, who built the Burma railway, as Japanese prisoners of war in 1942, say they could not have survived without a mate, each to help the other, whenever the need arose. Yet some go off to try to be self sufficient, just with God as their mainstay, and do manage to do just that.

Perhaps Joseph was a quality imitator of those around him, knowing the good and eschewing the evil. He would have adapted and copied, and added value, and made his life work for God. This time in Joseph's life, when he was increasingly important in the land of Egypt, and still alone, became an astonishing connecting of events, divinely administered. Nothing was trifling, or accidental or minute, or of inconsiderable consequence.

Comment:

Egypt was a mighty nation, in the 17th century BC. It is not until Ezekiel's time, when he prophesies their demise. In 580 BC, *NIV Study Bible, Ezekiel 30-32*, that their power wanes. It is a long lasting link in the mighty chain, not only for the saving of this patriarchal family, and their establishment in the land of Canaan, but in the chastisement for the sins of His people. God graciously intervened in Egypt's history, and they knew it not.

It does not mean that, to be of consequence in God's plan, we must be part of a big picture. We remember the swallow that falls and God noticing, *Matthew 10:29*. The best of things work for the growing good of the world. If every person left the world a better place, enormous good would come. What people do to improve the world, hinges on unhistorical acts! Yet history **is** made and their goodness sometimes prevails over the wickedness, which evil beings multiply around them. Mankind **is** advanced by small steps, and we can be part of that. We can spread goodness, and that is as important to God as the Josephs of the **big** picture.
The **little** picture is where **we** all are, probably.

It is of no less value to God if we fill a **little space** with goodness. The road of amazing grace is scattered with few believers, so there's plenty of room for work for Him. We may not be able to fly off in aid relief to a war torn country, but we can alleviate the suffering we see here now, today.

Sin is falling short of what one is able to accomplish in his name, failing to use our talents. It is failure to stretch to our totality, to the pursuit of the absolute, to our unlimited self - in our families, in our neighbourhoods, in our schools, in our jobs, in our worship. Love for God, love for our fellows, helps lift our spirit above where we might rest it.

It makes our little picture golden, that is, a splendid thing. It is an ennobling thing that we can do for ourselves.

We then can be a "*man of gold*" - like Joseph - in a little picture. The witness for God in the gold is the whole purpose of our being. With our acceptance of Him in baptism, we accept, also, the responsibility to witness to His name. Surely it is not so difficult to remember that how we act is how we teach about Him. Again, surely it is not so difficult to remember that the more we become like Him, the more we tell people about our faith in Him.

I slept

- And dreamed that life was joy

I awoke

- And found that life was duty

I acted

- And, behold, duty was joy.

This old Asian proverb spells out for us the **joy of duty**. The young need to know of it, when they think that duty is hard and loveless and never ending.

The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference. Indifference to humanity, a neglect of duty, really sins of omission - public prayers for sins of omission used to be quite frequent, but not much heard these days. Omission sins will never brighten a picture, but they may cloud the bright picture.

Delight in God's Law, and love for Him will certainly brighten it. Everyone can make a difference. Pray that we be not indifferent. Joseph never was, and that helped achieve God's plan. He said, like *Martin Luther King,* "*I have a vision*" (for the blacks of America). Some men and women do have visions, to make things better, or to build wondrous things. It is a wonderful thing to pursue a vision. They are always accompanied by brickbats, and hardly ever bouquets. To stand out or lead, is to be tall, and attract the cutting knife. Joseph had the natural elasticity and buoyancy of youth, which did help him, and his healthy fellowship with God steeled his sense of morality. He did not give his soul in bondage to the pack, he was not invaded by the will to be mediocre, he sparked the treasure that was his life and multiplied it for Him. Everyone has the power to choose. Everyone can decide on a positive response. Children, who are terminally ill, are required to behave properly, for their own well being. It is no good **to a child**, any child, to allow churlish behaviour, whatever the circumstances. So, even in great illness, a positive response can bring relief. "*I can be joyful, strong, confident, productive, independent and Godly, so that I can be flexible, peaceful and healthy*". This is more so then in spiritual weakness. Everyone has to know his/her own philosophy of life, and live by it.

CONCLUSION:

The example of the patience of Joseph, as he waits for God to solve his family problem, (which will mean the seven years famine bringing his family to Egypt), is telling for us all. The last of

necessary patience is what is required now. The bag bundle is nearly empty and God refills it again for the last lap.

Digression 1:

The evidence for flood causing famine is indicated in the great flood of Bangladesh in 1998 that caused the homelessness of 25 million of the population of 124 million people. The devastation was exacerbated by the fact of food shortages. Two rice crops were destroyed, the one about to be harvested, and the one that could not be planted in time, because the land was still under too much water. If the phenomenon only happened once, and with no humanitarian aid coming from outside the country, the catastrophe may easily cause seven years of famine.

Digression 2:

When Britain colonised India, an extensive network of railways was built. Not only were the rails used to carry out the jewels and spices, but they were also used to carry about the Englishmen and their messages to one another, (together with the telegraph lines), so that colonisation proceeded smoothly. It was considered essential that the remote stations be kept in touch with the news of the English king and country and friends and family. To be with out that nourishment, was considered debilitating. The Siberian railway was built for the same purpose, for the Russian Tsar to keep in touch with his eastern subjects. These great lines of communication also prevented the invaders from slipping into the culture of the invaded, and so be lost to their original culture. These transport lines also served to transport prisoners and relocate whole ethnic unwanted communities to populate hitherto wastelands or replace forced marches of people to more easily managed locations. So there was a political intent as well.

Joseph had none of these privileges, far away from home and hearth, and no reference point to cling to. No word, no visitors, no reminders of the culture of the patriarchs, so alone, so long alone, 20 years.

In our own times there are people who are willing to make seemingly unbearable sacrifices in the name of humanity and Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi's sacrifice of her family shows that humanity's need is a greater prize than the inner voice, which cries out for comfort and security and normality. Nelson Mandella of South Africa, Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia, Andrei Sakharov and Nathan Scharansky of Russia, are all human stories worth reading, whose strength in the face of enormous opposition did not flinch from service to the needs of their people, above their own comfort.

CHAPTER 4

JACOB'S RESPONSE TO THE FAMINE

"***Behold, I have heard there is corn in Egypt", Genesis 42:2.***

FOCUS:

Jacob's terrible suffering over the parched earth and subsequent famine in Canaan, forces him to seek relief in Egypt, ***Genesis 42:1*** **and** ***2,*** and he considers sending his sons.

1. THE OLD FIRM IS CRUMBLING AS A RESULT OF THE DROUGHT

God, for a time, suspended His help to Jacob and his family in Canaan "*he shut the heavens*" so that it did not rain and the ground yielded no produce. It wasn't the first time, and it wasn't the last time that He did that *(Hosea 2)*. The firm, of **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products**, watched as the land flowing with milk and honey now became desolate in drought. *Psalm 107:33-34, NIV*, "*He turned the rivers into a desert, flowing springs, into thirsty ground, and fruitful land into salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there*", and their business failed.

The family firm in Canaan had experienced famine before, in Abram's day. It is clear there were some reserves, or some things continued to grow, for there is the matter of the compensating presents that Jacob later sent to Pharaoh.

Consider:

* Did Jacob have stored provender and valuables and trinkets purchased from **The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company** as they passed by over the years?

* Was the dearth of food, retribution for the wickedness of Canaan?

* Or was it to move the family of God to better pasture - or both?

* Why is it over the centuries that when great trouble comes to Jewish families in Germany, Russia and Argentina, and other places, have they not moved to where God wants them to go?

* Why did God leave Jacob without a message, from Joseph, or even from Himself, at this crucial time?

****

2. HOOKS IN JAWS

With everything made easy, visas to Israel (from Russia) ready to go, they still stay in their millions and compound their wealth. God has "*put hooks in their jaws*", *Ezekiel 29:4*, but they struggle against Him, and so they do not get caught in the net that would sweep them back to Israel. They do not respond to God's wishes. The mute and silent witness, of their unrepentant return to Israel, moves on, without so many of that nation that could benefit, if they returned. It does take hooks in jaws to bring them to where God wants them, and it will continue to happen, and that is what happened to Jacob and his family.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 1***)

Well, Jacob responded to the hook in his jaw, but not at once.

For them,

In the beginning

There was a sense of shrinkage,

As they went from the known way,

Through a valley of sorrow,

Back and forth,

Bringing and taking sorrow,

Until,

At last,

With the sense of sin restored in the ten,

Te father,

Jacob,

Captured

Some of the joy

That had eluded him

For 20 years,

and he went down into Egypt, in time.

God's people now "*were but a few men in number, yea, very few, and strangers in the land*" of Canaan*, Psalm 105:12-24*.

They had been kept safe, for God "*suffered no man to do them wrong: and he reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm. Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread*".

So they were safe,

But they were hungry,

And their business was insolvent,

And the juices of their life had dried up,

They shrunk, and they dried out.

"*Israel came into Egypt and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And he increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies", Psalm 105.* They took refuge in Egypt from the trials and evil in Canaan, in the crucible of development at the time. Comparisons over which civilisation is more or less evil, really matter not, evil is evil.

When he eventually went down into Egypt, Jacob basked in the glory of his son who had conceived a wondrous plan to be the saviour of the world. Egypt was full of corn, and the cats were kept busy, as the mice and the rats did play.

3. DEARTH AND DEATH IN CANAAN

When the sun was in the Leo constellation of the Zodiac in Egypt the River Nile always flooded. The flood began at the end of May and continued to rise until September. It reached Memphis (just near Cairo) a month later, The river's ever swelling path of over 6,500 kilometres from a spring in the heart of Africa to the Mediterranean Sea brought the soil which helped to make Egypt the granary of the world. The country is so dependent on this single lifeline and is therefore the reservoir of the gift of the long and mighty Nile. The soil is born of the flood and all that country needs is soil, water and sun. The Aswan Dam has now banked up the sediment and

so the salt sea is invading the delta and spoiling the sardine catch and the growth there. The sediment no longer replenishes the shoreline as it did up until 1960. The flood is/was the most important event in the Egyptian calendar. Well, in 1708 BC it did not flow.

As far away as Canaan they felt the pressure also for -

The fig tree did not blossom,

Neither was there fruit in the vine.

The labour of the olive fell

And the fields yielded no meat.

The flock was cut off from the field

And there was no herd in the stall,

There was no herd in the stall. *Habakkuk 3:17*.

Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products could not sustain their herds, and the stalls were empty.

"*Food for the sheep*", *they worried,*

"*Why even our own food stocks are low*", *they said*.

"*The cupboard is bare!*"

The dearth was in all lands, *Genesis 41:54*, and with dearth was death.

4. A FIXED PRICE FOR CORN IN EGYPT

Far away in Egypt Joseph sold corn, he fixed the price. It was fair, for the corn growers never saved up corn for probable famine, they sold all to get as much cash as they could, like selfish businessmen everywhere. Now they cried out with nothing to eat. Joseph did not open the granaries, until the people could be trusted to value the corn (because of their pangs of hunger). There are records in tombs, of generous officials who gave to the poor, the widow, the small, and never pressed after the poor peasants for their arrears. Their debts were carried by the state. The grain business was supervised by a staff of ten thousand scribes and under scribes. In "*The Ancient World*" by *Caldwell*, they are called "*the Eyes of the King of Upper Egypt, the Ears of the King of Lower Egypt*", *page 57*. They reached out all over Egypt and back again to Joseph. He reaped the gold and silver from the rich landowners and sold the grain, only on condition that they upgraded their irrigation system so that in future they were more equipped for drought and did not muddle along in inefficiency. The mighty pyramid, tomb and monument building had caused the neglect of the irrigation systems, which would have made a more profitable economy. But devotion to such building, like the building of the huge cathedrals all over Europe at a much later date, was a helpful political tool, and balanced against the long term common good, politics was considered much more important. Those who lived in the shadow of a cathedral (or who had helped to build it) were easy devotees, coerced, if not willing, for employment, housing, hinged on the devotions. Birmingham, not a cathedral city, allowed more free thinking and discussion - from which some small denominations grew.

Joseph rewarded the cry of the poor with bread, and we remember the character of Joseph, his sympathy for the poor and downcast - and he reached the pinnacle of his career, a wise and just

ruler. He was raised up to be a common benefactor to all mankind, and so his wisdom and justice extended far outside the Egyptian borders. Circumstances of human misery, or not, depends on liberality or exploitation. Mild or rigid, kind or severe, Joseph decided, for he was in charge. The containment, or the constriction of his previous years, did not contract his horizons, as it does for some. He was not full of bitterness, nor was he shrunk in ability. In fact, he allowed it to enrich him, so that he was more than ready for the enormous task.

From Canaan, Megiddo, Shahuren, Ascalon and as far away as Syria and Lebanon, came envoys and rulers bargaining for food to feed their people. At this time the gateman at Thel was instructed to list everybody - every person that came through into Egypt must have a name - no unnamed sand man or pit man now, for everyone had their name recorded, and their ancestry. Joseph required it, and because they did it well, enjoying their record keeping reputation, Joseph was able to scan the daily lists. He had heard the news of *Genesis 42:5*.

Consider:

* Why was Joseph anxious?

* What was he looking for?

* Who might come?

* Did he know now how it would all come to pass, or was he just concerned for his family's bread supply?

* Did he hope for his father's wisdom, when faced with this concern, feeling sure someone from the family would soon appear at the Egyptian frontier gate at Thel?

* Or did certain knowledge replace that "*feeling*"?

****

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 2***)

However some historians of Israel, speaking of its origins, make nothing of the miraculous events of our story. The Bible is no history book (to them). There is no mention in papyri (yet) of Joseph. So to them it is all tradition, until proved by ancient documentation to be true.

On returning to our *Biblical* account we have the record (substantiated in history) of food in Egypt. It was there for the taking, if you could get to it, and had the price to pay. **Jacob did**. He'd learned his lessons well in the Laban years. He had a thriving business, thanks to the years of plenty. He realised though, that even if he was prudent, he and his family would soon need help. The underground cisterns and wells were not being replenished with the essential water. The drought and the parched land, he feared, would continue and the rain would not fall.

Consider:

Surely it would have been recorded if God had told Jacob to go down into Egypt. There would have been none of the toing and froing of the following chapters, if God had spoken to him. He would have gone down at once.

* So did God whisper in his ear?

* Or did He put a painful hook in his jaw to tell him to go to Egypt?

****

CONCLUSION:

Jacob knew of others who had been commanded not to go into Egypt, *Genesis 26:2*, so he was unsure. God would have reassured him if he had asked Him, but he did not, and so he was left to respond to the whisper or the hook.

Digression 1:

It is interesting to note in "*The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism*", *Lods, pages 304-312,* in the River Nile on the Island of Elephantine, (see *Chapter 17*) a southern frontier post between Egypt and Ethiopia, a Jewish colony was present in the mid 400's BC, when Egypt was in decline. The Temple existed at the same time as Nehemiah and Ezra were striving to re establish the true worship of YHWH in Jerusalem. How the Jews arrived in Elephantine is uncertain. It is thought that they fled to southern Egypt, after Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC, or perhaps as a garrison of soldiers sent by an invading army - Persia or Assyria, although we do know now, that Jews have been in Ethiopia since ancient times. In any case the Egyptian Pharaoh of the time allowed them to build the Temple which was later destroyed. Depending how the references to YHWH in the Aramaic papyri, are interpreted, it is possible to conclude that the Ark of the Covenant was present at some time there, in that Elephantine Temple. Some archaeologists believe that this is the reason for the existence of the Temple there - God's dwelling place, *Biblical Archaeology Magazine May/June 1995* "*Did the Ark stop in Elephantine?*" The papyrus which was discovered in 1901, in Elephantine, tells of intermarriage, and the worship of YHWH combined with that of Egypt, and elsewhere, which would have scandalised God's earnest prophets back in Jerusalem. This did not stop the Jews at Elephantine appealing to Jerusalem to help them in the re erection of their temple. The Egyptians, worshipping the rams, looked with great disfavour, on the blood sacrifices, with which the Jews sought to honour YHWH. It was deicide to them. The Elephantine Jews wrote to the Persian satrap of Judah, to the High Priest and his colleagues, (duplicate copies of which were found), sometimes with a sum of gold, but there is no evidence of replies. It is a fair assumption that Nehemiah, and Ezra, inspiring reformist attitudes in the Jews at Jerusalem, may have felt that the destruction of the schismatic temple at Upper Egypt was chastisement well deserved, and maybe heaven sent, for they would have been better off in Jerusalem.

The Jews in Persia, at the time of Esther, escaped the evil that had befallen them, by God's grace, even though they had resisted the call, by Nehemiah and Ezra, to return to Jerusalem. They disobeyed God's message through the prophets, and received blessings in Persia. It seems here that, in this case, God **turned away the consequences**.

The attitude of Jews to persecution has not often been that they thought of it as heaven sent, rather man made; it's as if they think that God does not notice their perverse ways.

In an interesting address given by an orthodox rabbi recently, he admitted, under significant questioning, that their persecution **was** the hand of God upon them, rather than just Christian persecution, for their crucifixion of Christ. (The Pope has now apologised to Jews for making that accusation). The rabbi stated, that all that would change, at the appearance of their Messiah, (for us, a second coming), when all Jews would recognise him, including unbelieving Jews, and repent, and be saved, and blessed, - that is, universal salvation for Jews alive at the

time. We may consider whether it is possible for **all** Jews to repent at the time of our Lord's coming. Of course, God will turn hearts of stone, if and when He wants, if His conditions are met. Perhaps there are differing views within their faith in the matter of blame for atrocities. It is difficult then to address what **they** think of their present position on their covenant relationship to God.

Again, at a recent visit to the Sydney Great Synagogue in a question session, the spokesperson declared that they **did** think the hand of God had been upon them for their turning away from God. This particular Sadducee like member also proclaimed that they had no reason to hope for any future after death, for death was final for all. They never considered a literal resurrection, for their life now is the only chance for anyone to worship God. The covenant of God with their forefathers, (the patriarchs, who will be resurrected, and soon to inherit the Promised Land, when the Word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem), does not impress those Jews as of any great importance. This rabbi, and so his flock, believe that all the *Old Testament* prophecies have been fulfilled. The Jews themselves do not esteem the *New Testament* prophecies. So then, in their unbelief, "*they are not*" His "*sheep*", for "*they do not hear*" His "*voice*", *John 10:26-27*.

Digression 2:

In our times, in 1950, Mao Tsetung, the powerful Chinese ruler actually caused a famine in that great country. It was human error, no material disaster, misrule, and 43 million people (of 1 billion) died.

The crippled tree,

The birdless summer

And the mortal flower,

of *Han Suyin*'s documented books on China, did happen "*in all lands*", 3,000 years before, by God's design. We need to consider, how far God extends His design. We do believe that God designs events in the land of China, and so we assume that the events there have a rippling effect that can be felt in the Middle East, or anywhere around the world.

In that sense the Chinese are mentioned in *Revelation*, as a mongol race of people, moving south west into Turkey over centuries, to have effect eventually on His people.

CHAPTER 5

JACOB'S DILEMMA AND THE SILENCE OF HIS SONS

"***Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, … get you down thither and buy for us from thence, that we may live and not die", Genesis 42:1, 2.***

FOCUS:

Jacob knew that now it was a life and death matter. He urged his sons down into Egypt. Perhaps, knowing Joseph had gone down to Egypt, they would have preferred that they be sent somewhere else, ***Genesis 42:1-28.***

1. TEN CAIN HEADS GO DOWN INTO EGYPT

However the ten heads went, the ten guilty ones, the ten "*Cain*" heads, for Jacob kept his loved Benjamin, lest "*mischief befall him*". Benjamin, a grown man with a family of his own, was now a priceless treasure to Jacob - the only true remembrance of his loved Rachel. He was 22 years old. And so the next episode of this intriguing story is played out in ***Genesis 42*.**

Consider:

If we were without the history of this family, we may be tempted to question -

*** Why did God not warn Jacob of the impending famine, so that he could store up grain?**

*** Why was he not blessed like Isaac was in the time of famine, *Genesis 26:1-5*?**

*** How did Egypt have enough for its own needs in this dreadful famine, but also enough for all the nations round about?**

*** Why did not Joseph send a famine saving message?**

*** Why did Jacob have to rely on hearsay to get the message?**

*** What if he had never heard?**

It all seems difficult to understand, until we reflect that God needs not to give account to any about His matters, and His far sightedness is greater than our near sight. The big picture is all embracing.

****

We know from **our** journey the path Jacob's sons probably took, for we went with **The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company** which took Joseph. These ten Cain heads saw the scenery changes, the evidence of world events, wars, and now the strongholds, walled cities and fields outside which the people toiled till sunset. They saw the influence of Egypt on Canaan and pointed the noses of their asses in that direction, and they came to Gaza.

Comment:

In the *National Geographic Magazine, December 1982, Trude Dothan* tells of the excitement of an archaeological dig at Gaza, uncovering first an Egyptian fort with walls over 2 metres thick (mid 13th century BC) and then an Egyptian pool and palace, part of an Egyptian outpost and stronghold (mid 14th century BC). Gaza truly was an Egyptian outpost for hundreds of years. These digs have been possible because of recent cooperation between Israel and Egypt in their search for a mutual past. The mud brick homes constructed then and now, prove suitable still.

****

We know the dangers of the Sinai Desert, and the relief of Jacob's ten sons, at reaching the gates of Egypt, on the eastern border of the Nile delta - Thel. This providential care would have extended to all those in the caravan. The lack of difficulty and trouble surprised them all. It took about seventeen days. The journey was imperative and not to be trusted to servants. These sons were not idle, nor were they cowards, but no doubt skilled in business and therefore with skills able to deal with this new foreign travel. Their age and number (ten) ensured that they were credible. Here, at Thel, they were interrogated, as we are still at the frontier gates (at Thel) in our world today.

2. BORDER ENTRY FOR JACOB'S SONS

“Name?

Age?

Trade?

Origin? Born where?

Father’s Name?

Grandfather’s Name?

Mother’s Family Name?

What means of support?

Reason for Visit?

What have you brought with you?

Open your bags and show us”.

And the immigration officers proceeded to investigate, just as they do today. Jacob’s ten sons had come with money and/or (barter) goods and they each had their own sack and money bag, probably made of linen. We know they brought silver, at least. Joseph heard about it from the ears of the King of Lower Egypt and planned their welcome. He had to, because he wanted their presence in his court. His excitement rose by the hour.

Consider:

* Was it sorrow bringing, or joy capturing for Joseph, for they are all equalised by God?

* Experiences of life are not thought of by God of much consequence, we may say?

* They are all time and chance, noted, but not predestined, bad or good?

Joseph desperately wanted this to turn good. He knew they would bow down; everyone did, or was made to.

* Would it be sorrowful or joyful for the brothers?

****

Well, it wasn’t as straightforward as he thought it would be, as life often teaches us, for they didn’t all come. There was that little piece of cultivable land adjacent to the Sinai desert on the eastern arm of the Nile, a wadi used by the Egyptians to “*detain*” flocks and herds. Well, that’s no use to his family yet. They’ve come - to immediately return - to buy corn. There’s no Jacob, no Benjamin, they’re still in the grove of Mamre at Kirjath Arba in Hebron - for that is what the ten listed as origin - sons of Yitzschak.

3. TEN SONS OF JACOB ENTER INTO EGYPT

Still, it was, at least -

The ten sheaves,

And ten stars.

We will assume it is ten. There is a question of whether ten men could have carried enough provisions for the large family and retinue of servants and their families, back in Canaan. Perhaps there were more than ten.

Maybe they still had some corn and wished only to supplement it, or

Perhaps some servants and their families had been let go, as they could not feed them.

The purpose of the story requires the ten brothers, so we will say that ten came into Egypt.

Joseph sent a messenger to have the ten separated from the throng of people with whom they travelled. He asked that they be sent on to Memfe, to the head office. They were not to be given corn in one of the border cities. He asked that their journey be comfortable in Egypt as they made their way - as they were none of them young, all over forty years - and had endured already, a long and difficult journey. They would be anxious to be away again, home to Canaan so the delay would worry them, Joseph knew. The matter of language had to be settled. Joseph should not let his brothers know he could speak their language, though he knew it well and taught his children. So he needed to enlist the aid of his steward. They must not recognise him at first; if they think it, they must distrust their own eyes. There was terrible anxiety for Jacob, about his father and whether he was still alive, and what had happened to the family since he last saw them, and what about Benjamin absence form the family of sons. These questions gnawed at his mind over the three days it took them to reach him.

Now is the time.

Joseph had waited and waited for this moment. He had the best secret service agents in the realm at his disposal, but he had waited for the right moment. He knew that to act would have jeopardised his whole dream outcome. So unlike his parents and grandparents and great grandparents, who tried to force God's will, he patiently waited.

But now is the time.

His riches and honour and fame had not altered his desire to do God's will, and he knew that God's plan was not in this Land of Mud, but in another country where he would never go to live, but where his bones would eventually reside. This request, casually recorded in *Hebrews 11:22* is the only *New Testament* mention, but he so nearly reminds us of the one whose message is most mentioned in that *Testament*.

Joseph decided to be formal, not friendly, but assertive. He would greet them with suspicion and investigate - pretend he thought they were spies. Of course, he was, at once, again, troubled over the moral position of his brothers, of whether to discount the dastardly deed, because it was needed for the good result. It was the old question of whether the end justified the means.

Life constantly puts these questions to us - means/ends. Saviours past, here, or in the future, Noah, Joseph, Jesus, these all disposed to save God's people from their sins. Others, perpetrators of dastardly evil plans, are always guilty, whether the plan was in God's will, or not, for means does not ever justify the end. There always should be recognition of iniquity and sin, and then repentance just the same. Or is it all too remote, and meaningless, and too hard? "*Well **we** never did that thing*", that is, "*stole the children*". "***We** don't need to say sorry*". Those implicated in taking the wrong, or at least taking the ill advised path, those that have reaped the benefits, can all say "*sorry*" or even if we just feel sad that our culture was responsible, it is helpful to say "*sorry*".

Joseph could have suddenly, at this time, wavered in the faith that had sustained him for so long. As soon as Joseph saw and heard them, he knew his task of bringing them to repentance would not be an easy one. He knew better than to think it was not worth all the trouble, and to let it go, and say nothing. He persevered, with God's help, and his brothers were better for it.

Forgiveness does not mean a brush off of the sin, it means much more than that, even though the new and dictated path turns out to be a blessing in disguise. How often God uses the wrath of man to accomplish His purpose, but sometimes there is an unexpected means and outcome. The unexpected blessing does not negate the sin that made it so, and Joseph needs to see their reactions and accept their confession before he can reassure them, for then he (and God) will see that they need to find forgiveness.

The ten - the wolf pack - as he had last seen them - stood before him, aged now, solemn, fearful and anxious. They touched their foreheads to the ground, but not eleven sheaves, only ten. They scarcely lifted their eyes to the glory before them. Joseph had been watching for over a year for them to appear, *Genesis 45:6*. Joseph knew them all, and had long decided what to do.

4. JOSEPH'S PRETENCE IN FRONT OF HIS BROTHERS

He remembered the 20 pieces of silver worth in their eyes on that day so long ago. It is difficult to assess how much he knew or guessed about the torn garment, stained with blood, the means of the lie. His heart was full of laughing, and weeping, and dismay, and was now overflowing with mixed emotions. His cup was so full and running over. It was difficult to hide his feelings and his tearful eyes from them.

He turned away, and the necessary pauses for the interpretation, to keep up the pretence, gave him time to compose himself. To them he was an aristocratic heathen, and they were immune to any other thought of him. He was now a clean cut adult, 39 years old, dressed like a high ranking Egyptian official - a person of great authority.

So Joseph took up where his immigration officials had left off.

"*Why have you come?*"

"*Our herds are enfeebled and there is little nourishment in our land. They are beginning to die of low fever. Our father is worried that more diseases will come to strike us all in this terrible time. Need is not only the honoured guest at our table, but need is hiding in the cupboards as well. We and our father run the respected Canaan business* ***Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products,*** *and it is with difficulty that we continue*".

Joseph continued the interrogation and they continued to plead their cause.

"*If you are the sons of one man why are you all so different?*"

"*For we are the sons of one father, but our mothers are different. There are four from two, and six from one. But we were twelve, for one from another, is at home with our father, and the other from that one, is now not*".

Now he knows, Joseph knows that his father is still alive.

Joseph also knows the equivocation in *"the other is now not".* Perhaps they now believed their own lie, that Joseph *was* dead. The pretence goes on.

"*Were you treated well from the fortress of Thel?*"

"*Yes, so gracious and kind has Egypt been to us since we passed the King's gate*".

Now Joseph turned their gratitude for Egyptian courtesy, into a suspicion.

"*Why*", he lies, "*we have cared for you so well, because we believe that you are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land, how that we may be invaded, or how our corn could be taken off*".

The Hittites from the north across the Mediterranean, often sent spies into Egypt, and were in constant feud with them, and this route, from Canaan, was the most likely overland route that spies would take. Semitics were known to have excellent spies, but every nation uses spies. Joseph makes the accusation three times, until he gets the information he wants. Meanwhile the brothers become very agitated. "*We are true men*", they said, knowing full well that **they were not.**

Well, it did not seem to matter, whatever their protests they could not establish their innocence, when their supposed plan was put before them. They bit their lips, and looked at their feet, and turned a motley colour, and stood on one foot and then the other. Their pride and resentment at the imputation, was swallowed up in fear. It certainly looked bad for them.

Clear proof of their innocence of the charge of spying may have rested in their proclamation in *verse 11*. Hardly would a sensible spy runner risk ten of his sons, on such a perilous mission as espionage. Moses used spies (Promised Land), and Joshua (Jericho), and it was a legitimate though dangerous occupation. Ten travelling together, though, hardly seemed sensible. However, they needed to prove that they **were** the ten sons of one man, for their protestations seemed not enough.

Joseph could have sent servants to verify their story, but the onus was not on Joseph to prove the story. Presumed guilty, awaiting to be proved innocent. He put it onto the brothers, which of course suited his purpose.

Joseph them turned the screw and said,

"*Prove that you are not spies, by returning to Hebron, and bring down that son that you have left behind with your father at home. Only one of you shall return, and the rest of you shall stay here in prison until the return*".

Hostages, what! Hostages and insurance!

"*Why, this man won't take our honourable word*", they felt, in frustration.

Joseph swears by the life of Pharaoh, *verse 16*. We hope, for Joseph's sake, it is not an oath that Pharaoh will die if they are proved spies. Rather let us understand it as a strong expression like "*as thy soul liveth*", or "*mark my words*". Of course he knew they were not spies, and that Pharaoh would not die because of that, but that is no excuse to use a venerated oath. Jephthah learned that hard lesson, *Judges 11*.

Joseph is entitled to feel indignation, but perhaps in his position of authority, he did not.

"*Woe is us*", his brothers thought, and remembered the 20 years of mourning that their father Jacob, had felt over Joseph, until the father was mourned out. They knew this depriving of Benjamin would kill him. They thought of the seventeen days at the very least, of return, and another seventeen days back again with Benjamin and another seventeen days to return with corn. That would be over fifty one days, without the corn to save their families. It was no dark

and muddy pit, like Joseph's pit, that they were thrown into for three days; it was a civilised Egyptian prison - for three days, *Genesis 42:17*. They were in it, to make up their minds.

Others had been in the pit for three days, Jonah, Our Lord. We can make comparisons or contradictions out of that, if we wish.

5. THE BROTHERS' SELF CONDEMNATION

The ten thought about this man, beautiful and beshadowed, stimulating and disturbing, kindly, yet cruel, sympathetic, yet accusatory, business like, yet ruthless, and so harsh with them, when they had put on such a good front. It puzzled them.

They squatted on their ankle bones, and considered their life situation. It was an unreasonable suspicion, yet they considered that it was the same sort of reasonable suspicion that they had lived under at home. But this suspicion looks like incarceration or execution to them. And, dare they think of it, retribution for their sin of disposing of Joseph.

They did not know why Joseph's image came to their mind, and together with that image came their guilt again. They fell into a trap, and so they **were** trapped.

Comment:

God does not forget sin, not does he allow the sinner to forget his/her sin. David, forgiven of God for his sin, could not forget, and the consequences of that sin affected his whole family, to remind him, if he **did** think about forgetting. We can forgive and forget, but consequences mostly remain. David was aware of his condemnation almost immediately, for he said "*As the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die*", *2 Samuel 11:5.* Then Nathan said to David, "*You are the man*". In *1 Kings 20:39-43,* King Ahab also condemns himself. The king of Israel said to him (the disguised prophet) "*You deserve to die*", (for not carrying out God's instructions). The prophet then said to the king of Israel, "*You have passed sentence on yourself*".

****

These brothers might have been younger when their Joseph sin occurred. They reflected on the sin, and wished now that God had punished them then. They began to see that the suspicion cloud that their father had laid upon them was not their punishment, though they thought it had been. That punishment has been reserved for them now, when their blood could be exacted for Joseph's blood, so they reasoned.

These brothers have equivocated for 20 years, hardly condemnation in their own eyes, yet they had a suspicious cloud hanging over them, and they had found that very difficult to shake. Now their equivocation was dimmed, as they remembered Joseph's pleading for mercy. Now evil had befallen them, because of their sin. Their conscience had been asleep in the graveyard of memory, but now, as it began to awake, they began to take personal responsibility for their guilt, *verses 21* and *22*.

Reuben is quick to emphasis the point of his dissent from the evil deed. **He does not think of his allowing the lie to Jacob to continue. Also his offence against his father, in the matter of Bilhah, is no small matter, but now, with more wisdom, he tries at this stage to move forward the repentance of his younger siblings, and to call in question their destruction of a boy of seventeen, when they did not make allowance for that boy's lack of wisdom and experience.**

It is difficult to decide which blood Reuben meant, in *verse 22*, the animal's blood or Joseph's blood, for which the accounting would be required.

#. It was **Reuben** who prevented the actual shedding of Joseph's blood at the pit, but **for the father**, with the animal blood trick, Joseph was dead, and Reuben was party to that lie. Reuben had **allowed** the father to think Joseph's blood was shed, so indeed **Joseph's blood**

was shed. So then Reuben is guilty of murder.

Judah also had pleaded for Joseph's life, that blood be not shed, and had suggested **The Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company**, but in allowing the lie, he also was guilty of shed blood, that is of murder.

The other eight had been also silent, so had they had the blood guilt of murder, as well.

So, we need to consider whether we agree with the three foregoing statements, that God does take the intention of shedding blood, that is the intention to murder Joseph, for the deed, even if the course was changed and he was not murdered.

They were never adequately punished for the murder, as Cain had been. They never openly repented of it until long afterwards. They were worse than Cain heads.

***1*. They had been unjustly imprisoned, but they themselves had unjustly imprisoned Joseph.**

***2*. They could not forget their guilt.**

***3*. They had, with pleasure, gratified their envy at Dothan, and did not realise the guilt that they were contracting,**

***4*. And the sorrow that they prepared for their father, and for themselves.**

***5*. As they had turned a deaf ear then, the Egyptian lord is turning a deaf ear now.**

***6*. Now that they were in trouble, they would have given a great deal to recover that degree of innocence, that they pretended that they had to this great man.**

***7*. The guilt began to assume a greater sense of suffering, than the injustice of their present position,**

***8*. And perhaps their present suffering is greater than the suffering that they imposed on Joseph.**

***9*. The combined guilt of sin does not diminish the sin, and**

***10*. We need to remember that, if others take part in our sin, we are no less guilty, and cannot hide, or diminish the sin in the eyes of God.**

***11*. As they had sinned against Joseph, they had sinned against Jacob, and**

***12*. As we sin against our brethren, we also sin against God**

***13*. We do not only affect ourselves in our sin.**

***14*. For with our sin we draw in our tail all those who are dear to us, in the sin against our brother,**

***15*. We can never say, I can do this because it does not affect anyone else. Everything we do, does.**

The remedy is obvious to us all.

a. Repair the commission, or the omission, if you are able, and turn again to the Heavenly Father whom you have also offended.

b. He will not turn a deaf ear.

c. Your space for repentance and improvement needs to be as prolonged as you can make it, before you are snuffed out.

d. Confession and repentance must never be postponed.

Consider:

* How did they decide who it would be to go to Jacob and ask for Benjamin to travel to Egypt?

* Who would it be, who had enough influence with Jacob?

****

This seems to them, like blackmail of some sort,

"*What could our family possibly have that this man wants?*" they asked themselves during the three days in discussing Joseph's proposition. Joseph knew what it was like to be in an Egyptian prison for three days. (This fact leads scholars to presume that Joseph was in the well pit for three days.) While they were in prison, they began to think of all the possibilities. Perhaps with them as hostages, the lord would send spies to get the truth about them. Well, he would soon see that he need not have kept them as hostages. It was like an insurance debt that had to be paid, to keep Egypt free from spies, but they had not had any warning of that.

Joseph had three days to better compose himself, and think of a more equitable plan. When they had made their decision, alas, they found this mercurial man had changed, reversed really, the plans.

6. JOSEPH REVERSED THE PLAN

Speaking through an interpreter Joseph tells his brothers, "*This do and live; for I fear God. If ye be true men, …*". He would need to take care that the interpreter used the correct word "*Elohim*", for they could still assume that he meant an Egyptian god.

Then, "*One man returning could not carry enough food for the family. The holding of nine would serve no useful purpose*". So he would give them enough food for the eleven families and the father, but keep one brother instead. So the terms improve. But there is still the question they ask themselves, "*insurance, hostage, blackmail, what is it?*"

Joseph would know that by this generous provision, and the keeping of only one, the story would take longer to be told, and he would be longer in the Land of Mud, without them. He knew, that Jacob, now corn filled again, would perceive the losing of one would not be enough to sacrifice his Benjamin. He would put off the evil day, till the corn was gone and the lamp burned low, again. Well, Joseph's faith in God, that the tale would be told, would sustain him till then, and so be it. He would have faith that **Jacob would live, to see his son in Egypt**, that the true story would yet be told. Joseph had been patient, he could be patient still.

They prostrated themselves on the floor of Joseph's chamber for suspicion made much bowing necessary. They looked indeed like sheaves of wheat with hollow ears, but there were still only ten sheaves. And Joseph turned away with tears in his eyes as he heard, and understood, the chastisement from Reuben's lips. The interpreter must now have departed, for they would never have spoken so if they thought they would be understood outside the present family circle. He now knew that Reuben had tried to save him so he turned from the first born to the next, Simeon.

Consider:

* Was it Simeon, because of the cruel Shechem incident?

* Did intercession with God, during the three days, direct him to keep Simeon?

****

Joseph demanded that Simeon be the one to stay. They watched as he was led away, bound to prison, (we hope for Simeon's sake that Joseph made it a more relaxed imprisonment, like Potiphar's sympathy made it so for Joseph). It was that melancholy spectacle that remained with them on the homeward journey and one which was meant to entice them to hurry their return with Benjamin.

They were heavy of heart and knew that God had asked them, "*Where is your brother Abel?*"

These "*Cain heads*" had no answer, for they kept their secret still. Their lives had been saved, but now they had another burden on their minds. Another of their father's sons was disposed of - we know though that before long it would be three.

"*How long can this go on, before our father, Jacob, dies of grief?*" they wondered.

So their sacks were filled to overflowing. It would have been Joseph's own gift, and not from Pharaoh's treasury, for he would not be a corruptible minister. It was like heaping "*coals of fire*" upon (his enemy) their heads, *Romans 12:20,* but with a purpose, - to bring about their contrition.

"*Use none of it for sowing for the drought will continue*", Joseph told them. "*How does he know?*" they thought.

He, at last, advises them about the drought, and he did know of its course. The overflowing sacks would prolong their absence, but it was necessary advice, for to plant corn, would be wasteful, in Joseph's eyes, as he knew the end (of the drought) from the beginning. He sent food enough for the journey home as well, *Genesis 42:25*. Joseph's steward, who knew the story and the little trick that Joseph had planned, and supervised it all, would have emphasised to them the importance of returning with their "*little*" brother, and set them on their way. Benjamin was now twenty two years old and was the father of ten sons, *Genesis 46:21*, The *Companion Bible*, together with the time chart, "*Chronological Chart, Appendix 50*". Remarkable, that he had such a large family.

7. SURPRISE AND PUZZLE AND FEAR AGAIN

At nightfall a good way on towards the Bitter Lakes they came to a camping ground with a flat, pleasant, convenient spot beside a palm, and sheltered by a lime cliff. There was a well, and there they tethered their pack animals and asses and proceeded to make a fire on the

blackened spot where many a traveller had done before them. They thought they would rest at this "*inn*" for the night. There would be no food or fodder, but they carried their own.

Ah, it was not to be - no rest for them this night.

There are anguished cries, for on top of one shepherd's bag of corn, one son of Jacob finds the purchase price, in his linen money bag. And so it was that every man on opening his sac found his bundle of money, in his own money bag. Each must have brought his own money supply from Jacob, for his own separate purchases. Well, their hearts sank for here, again, is good luck/bad luck. This is incomprehensible, uncanny. To have their money returned makes for a good feeling, but the good is distorted with the bad feeling, that the spy suspicion still hangs over them, until they disprove it.

They ask themselves,

"*How do other families deal with suspicion?*"

"*What did we do to encourage this suspicion?*"

"*What could we have done to dispel suspicion?*"

"*Should we have paid extra?*"

"*But now we have not paid anything*",

and with their money in their hands, they worried.

Fear, that's what they feel, and Joseph had seen that fear was a good means to bring them to repentance. Again they feel God is punishing them. "*What is this, that God is doing to us?*" and remembered that they were after all children of Israel, and sons of God. A look from Reuben confirmed that he was thinking as they were.

Instinctively they thought, at first, that they should return with the money, but then, they remembered that Simeon was there - as their guarantor, a hostage. Better to keep going. They had their secret still and there was no tell tale "*Cain*" mark on them. Oh, how we seek to run away from God. We tell ourselves, and tell ourselves that all will be well, equivocating also, but it is no use.

CONCLUSION:

Instinctively also, they had to perpetuate their deceit, so they decided to keep their fear from Jacob, and tell him only what was necessary. They would be patient until the time was right to return for Simeon. By then the famine might be over, and they would be in a much better bargaining position with the feared ruler of Egypt.

CHAPTER 6

JACOB'S NINE SONS COME HOME

"**And they came unto Jacob their father … and told him all that befell them*", Genesis 42:29*.**

FOCUS:

Strange things have happened to these Cain heads in Egypt, they think they know why, but they are not sure. They cannot voice those fears to their father yet they need to return to Egypt. But Jacob holds out and refuses to let them take Benjamin. Jacob is not yet ripe for the picking, ***Genesis 42:29-38*** and ***43:1-10.***

1. SIMEON IS NOT

Jacob saw at once, as he stood at the tent door waiting their dismounting. **He saw at once that there were only nine - yes plenty of corn - but anguish, only nine**.

Simeon is not there.

Simeon is missing.

"*Have you sold my son for bread?*"

was the accusation. The little suspicion cloud was still there. And those nine took the long way round with their father hoping his terrified countenance would soften with the telling, as we all do at the confessional.

"*What!*

My son a hostage!

Blackmail*, that's what it is!*

Bondage in Egypt, that's what that man wants!

He wants to make slaves of us all!

Well we won't submit to that!"

Jacob is first angry, and then afraid.

"***Just ask God to explain, Jacob, He will tell you somehow. He did twice before when you were afraid of Esau".*** But Jacob does not hear his angel tell him to place his trust in God.

For five verses in *Genesis 42*, we have the perspicuous, well practised story told in as placatory manner as is possible, under the circumstances. But underneath they are like Jacob, afraid, especially when Jacob's bundled money reappeared from **all** the money bags in all the sacks. They all argue in their minds whether it is accident, oversight or design.

1. Jacob's business honour would be affronted by his sons obtaining the corn for nothing. He would be angry that he and his family now stood in a bad light in Egypt (from whence only the corn could come) and just when **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products** is at last beginning to gain respectability again.

2. ***A*nd what**! They were accused of being international spies!

3. Jacob would be overwhelmed that he'd lost another son - yes, maybe alive in Egypt, but now that Jacob was so discredited there, **Simeon might as well be dead.**

Any parent of recalcitrant sons (or daughters) can picture the scene, while the refraction is maintained. And these sons stubbornly maintained their silence about their private doubts of the campaign that seemed to be punishment for their Joseph sin. Confession and forgiveness and healing are no where in sight - yet. The age, or the longevity of a sin, make it harder to erase,

for memories fade and cloud over, or dilute. These sons were not teenagers, **and** the sin **was** very old.

"***Joseph is not, Simeon is not and you wish to take Benjamin?*** *All is against me*". And Jacob feels God has rejected him. Despairing and disappointed, there is no comfort from God. He feels bereaved of his children and says so. He does not yet know them to be guilty, so it is an angry reflection because of his distress.

Comment:

C. S. Lewis, remembering his lack of faith in God, talks of feeling that the door is shut, no one answers the knock and there are no lights in the window. One might as well turn away, for it does no good to linger. The longer one waits, the more emphatic and ridiculous it becomes. No one comes, for it is an empty house. The door is slammed and then bolted on the inside. It is silent, "*did anyone ever live there?*" It seemed as if they did so once, "*Shadowlands", page 13*.

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For Jacob it is the same. He also indulges in self pity. His horizontal and negative reaction forges to the fore. He is uneasy, the clouds are dark, and his heart is heavy, and his mouth is dry, no more juice, and fear flies once more in at the door. He has been hoping that all would be well, but the fear place is still warm, and so it takes up the old place again in Jacob's heart. His sons tell only the truth, albeit selective truth, but the Lord of Egypt appears to be an imperious, insolent, overbearing tyrant, who uses his power to crush poor men in need beneath his feet. Certainly the bowl of faith that is Jacob is still being crushed, no new bowl made from it yet. Jacob can only think the very worst of his sons' Egyptian experience. The very reverse is true, as Jacob later finds out. He may have a have a little flash of doubt that the rash and daring Simeon **is** innocently in prison. "*He is sure to have done something, and they have not told me*", he may think.

If he knew the other lies, he would certainly doubt their story. He did not know, and therefore was ignorant that the imprisonment was for the haughty Simeon's own good, by a wise and merciful ruler. They had no temptation to lie to their father on this occasion, so it is no evidence of renewed integrity, but Jacob still did not know.

However, we can detect a softening of the sons, at least in Reuben and Judah, for they wish to take on personal suffering rather than have a repeating of the grief that they themselves had preciously afflicted.

2. REUBEN HAS A PLAN

Reuben, anxious to convince his father to send Benjamin to Egypt with him, not with the other eight, but only with him in his hand, pledges the lives of his two sons, and says, "*Slay my two sons if I do not bring back Benjamin to you*". Death should not be made a byword, it was an unseemly offer. If it was not an invitation to murder his sons at the failure of the mission, it could have been put in a better light. "*I am responsible for only two children, my brethren have many. I can more easily be replaced. For their sakes, let Benjamin go, and I will guard him with my life, if necessary*", is a suggestion. Then the sacrifice would be Reuben and his fatherless children. Maybe it is the English text that puts it badly, picking up only the nuance, that Reuben is willing to sacrifice his sons. Maybe we are meant to think of Reuben's statement as a strong assurance that he feels that all will be well, rather than a rash promise. However, whatever, Jacob would

have found no satisfaction in the slaughter of his two grandchildren, for the sake of his next lost favourite son.

In *Genesis 46:19*, we read of four sons of Reuben, so we wonder why he says two, and which two he has in mind.

Jacob must have cringed under this suggestion. That he would decimate Israel, by avenging the life of Benjamin, on two of Reuben's sons, is unthinkable. He cannot rid himself of the thought that Reuben is irresponsible, now on the lives of Joseph and Simeon, so he could not do much better with Benjamin. Now, together with this suggestion, he sees his first born son as unreliable.

"*Benjamin shall not go*", said Jacob, and meant it. "*Joseph is dead and he alone is left to me*", he said. "*You will be the death of me*". Benjamin must have been aware of the difference Jacob made between these two sons and the other ten.

Consider:

* Was it a burden to Benjamin?

* Did this episode continue the jealousies in this family, which had long been present?

* Did he realise that the matricide, that had been his birth, threatened to bring Jacob with sorrow to his grave?

* What did Leah, if she was still alive, think about Jacob's preferences?

* Is the harping of Jacob about his partiality for Benjamin above them all, part of the punishment for the fratricide?

* Is it wise that Jacob loads down his children with his own grief?

* How often do we do the Jacob thing, (horizontal and negative) and press the panic button, showing our ugly side?

* So, how often are we glad that **our** biography is not in print?

* How often are we like this with our precious possessions?

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It is a worry that Jacob speaks so vehemently about his love for the one, and his disgust for the other ten, **while still unknowing of the deceit.** It seems Jacob's ardent affection for the remaining son of Rachel, overpowers his wisdom and grace, and uncovers the favouritism again. They did not expect the same degree of affection, but they did expect kindness. Jacob may have never have prayed for wisdom to guide his family and help his relationships. Wisdom is so necessary in this life of ours and we should daily request it. We do not read of Jacob requesting it, yet with so many wives and mothers in the family circle, this speech, rather than a wisdom speech, seems set to ignite once more the jealousy flame. So, the effects of polygamy continue to destabilise the family.

Jacob said, "*Absolutely not*", and later had to eat his words.

Comment:

If we will not give in to a child's request, or a young one's need for change, or a new and valid idea, then we do not countenance change, and it may all come to naught, the big negative. God may will it otherwise, and then we are left blowing in the wind, alone.

Seeing things only from the human view, a negative and horizontal position has no focus. When God is taken into consideration the position changes to vertical and things begin to flow naturally again. Vertical and positive growth will never falter. It is a strong force that we cannot reckon with. We had better learn that.

Charles Swindoll asks us to consider, how often do we make "*hurry up decisions*", and find ourselves sitting out on a branch, sawing off and throwing over the weak limbs of faith round about us. We are just too proud to say we have made a mistake. And again, he asks whether we are "*joy killers*", "*grace killers*", or "*creativity killers*" in his book, "*On the Job Integrity*", *pages 169-188*.

Not only do we keep making our bad judgement calls, sticking to our guns, but we promote fear and unhappiness through our family, amongst our friends, and even in our worship circles. We are reluctant even to allow the historic two step as the way forward out of history, that is, two forward and one back, we wish to turn the clock back, one forward, one back - to where we were. We are confident that enthusiasm for reform will only last for a time, and with our curmudgeon spirit, we wait out the exuberance of youth, cruelly gloating that it's only a matter of time, when their ideas will turn to dust in their mouths. It is a tabescent way to behave, not Godly productive. We are resistant, reluctant, suspicious and closed people, and certainly would not help them to bring their ideas to fruition. Sometimes we, not pausing to consider, deny change, until nothing, or nobody is left, and then we justify ourselves, "*well, we'll be more pure now*".

We need to recognise our closed negative personality, and strive to break the horizontal habit, and to think vertical, and open up to new ideas.

Maybe God put them there.

Maybe God gave us the young people to do just that.

We may pray:

"***For strength to be contagiously enthusiastic,***

To begin a new way of thinking and living.

For strength that we may open up

To life's challenges and risks,

And the changes that come, Amen".

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3. JACOB PERSISTS AND RESISTS

So the ten bide their time, and take their punishment, and greatly care for Benjamin when he is in their care. And Jacob slashes around, endlessly reinforcing his point, "*Never*". "*Never*". "*Absolutely not*".

Perhaps these sons could argue that Benjamin would be safe as he had been **sent for**, by the Lord of Egypt. **He** would not be suspected of spying. The lord had promised to dismiss him in safety, if only they could produce him.

Still Jacob had to grow ripe for the picking of his loved son. He may never have guessed how much they embellished and supplemented the truth, but because he had for a very long time, a little seed of doubt, he was cautious now.

4. ANOTHER DILEMMA

Months passed by, shrinking time to us, it seems so little, but to them measuring out, carefully, the corn, each day, and the time "*went slowly*", for Jacob willed it so. God continued to turn the screw to bring about His will. Simeon still was not. Judah watched his father slowly ripen as the corn was measured out, and when Jacob spoke again of going to Egypt for more corn, for Israel must be saved; Judah was ready with his reply:

"*That is the best thing to do, but you know that the harsh ruler told not to see his face again until we brought Benjamin with us*".

It was an imposed condition of trade for this Hebrew family, a restricted licence. Jacob knew that it would come to this, and stuck in this unhappy situation he says,

"*Wherefore dealt you so ill with me as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?*"

Deceit rears its ugly head again. We really don't want to hear this from Jacob.

"*Why did you not deceive the man,* ***why did you have to tell the truth? Could you not have lied?***"

So the brothers chime in,

"H*e asked us! He asked us about you all*!"

and excusing themselves, instead of pushing the propriety of it all, for they had **begun** to see it as a blessing, maybe not a curse after all.

The seared consciences of Jacob's sons had behaved better in Egypt than the learned response that their father had taught them. He did not see his own sin, he would not listen to their reasoned responses, he cut them off before they were finished, he finished their sentences for them, he called them rebellious, and so, of course, they sunk into rebellion. We recognise ourselves and our teenage children, and are grateful to God that He supplemented our deficient wisdom, when He saw that it was necessary.

Jacob has accepted the beast and its blood instead of his son Joseph, and does not refer to that absence or to Simeon's absence, now, but struggles for his son Benjamin. Jacob was tormented over the "*death*" of Joseph, and did not consider that God would raise his son, as faithful Abraham had done.

Consider:

* Is this God asking for the sacrifice of another son?

* Is it God asking Jacob again, for a display of faith?

* Without the gift of hindsight, would we say that it is too much for God to ask?

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How often we struggle with God for a loved one like Jacob is now. Sometimes He says "*yes*" and He "*heals*" whatever it is that troubles us, that is, He agrees that we can keep our "*Benjamin*", but sometimes we have to accept the "*no*" answer, and "*let him go*", and our heart, for a time, cracks.

5. JUDAH HAS A PLAN

Judah it is, now, his fourth son, who pledges himself, asking that Benjamin may be put in his hand. Reuben's clumsy suggestion of his two sons slain for Benjamin does not arise again.

Judah's impassioned plea is mature and more manly than Reuben's. It is persuasive, and seeks to reassure Jacob. Jacob still hesitates, for Benjamin is the only link left with his beloved Rachel.

But Judah knew that if they had gone earlier -

They would now have corn aplenty

And Simeon,

And Benjamin,

And all would have been well, as far as the famine was concerned.

"*Trust me*", Judah asked Jacob, "*I have been there. The man is not evil*".

"*Blame me*", he said*,* "*if it does not work out*". Blame is like yelling in the darkness for it to be light, it does no good. But maybe Judah thought it made Jacob feel better. And since Tamar, Judah's heart may have been touched. His wisdom may have increased and as well his faith as he recognised his unrighteousness.

The father had been a tough nut to crack,

1. *F*irst denial and delay,

2. Then blame and deceit,

3. And now tolerance and uncertainty.

4. It still was not an unwavering faith.

5. Or the abandonment of self and a returning to God, which God so badly wanted of Jacob.

6. THE REWARD FOR JUDAH

The tribe of Judah henceforth became pre eminent, and from him the Jews were named. He provided the seed line for the Lord Jesus Christ, though right now, Judah hung in the balance with his father, while his father decided.

CONCLUSION:

We feel blessed, that one of Jacob's sons has been blessed, to provide an answer to a terrible dilemma. He has caught the whisper of God.

CHAPTER 7

JACOB WRESTLES AGAIN

"***If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved", Genesis 43:14.***

FOCUS:

Jacob, in this Jabbok like experience, where he wrestled and **wrestled for the right answer**, gave in and allowed his nine sons to take Benjamin to Egypt, ***Genesis 43:11-34.*** There is still no reassurance from God. There might have been an answer to his dilemma, had he asked.

1. JACOB'S HOUSEHOLD OF FEAR

Jacob would have worried more, if he had pre knowledge of the events of ***Genesis 44***, (both chapters describe the events to be discussed now). He would have felt great joy for the events of *Genesis 45: 1-24.* But until he sees his sons once more, he is in ignorance.

We know -

He needs to send (eleven) sheaves, and eleven stars.

It is not yet time for the sun and the moon.

But there is **fear** seated beside the fireplace,

And **need** at the table,

And **hunger** in the cupboard.

Distress and stress could cause Jacob take to collapse only that God has a plan for him.

Jacob sent what he could from his meagre stores as a sweetener, like he did with Esau years before. It did not indicate ignorance or disregard, for at such a time it was a valuable gift. He sent balm (balsam) honey (probably grape honey from Hebron and still famous as an export to Egypt, as date and bee honey were plentiful in Egypt), spices (gum-tragacananth), myrrh (labdanum), nuts (pistachio nuts which favoured the dry ground of Canaan rather than Egypt. The kernel was eaten by itself, or as a flavour for savoury meats), almonds (also not grown in Egypt). This sweetener came from his storehouse and must have been very precious, unless there had been a little rain, enough rain to grow such things in limited quantities.

Trading may have ceased, so Jacob knew that the gifts would be precious in Egypt. He also knew that his sons had to bring a gift to this superior personage in Egypt.

Apart though from all this protocol, it was a gift to win favour. Jacob did not pull his sons around him and put it all in the hands of God. He would not say, "*Perhaps I was wrong, let's see what God wants us to do*". He had now a guarded faith, but was not yet abandoned to God, for he needed insurance.

He sent double the money, probably the returned money and money for more corn.

2. AT LAST JACOB PLEADS WITH GOD

He cries in anguish for ***God Almighty*** to bless his sons, ***verse 14,*** and we cry with him, for, at last, we hear the pleading to the Lord, for which we have been longing. He cries, (and we understand), for there is still no sign from God. It is probably because God has been waiting to hear the anguished cry for help.

This journey, like the others he sought reassurance for**, is** indeed blessed, before its return to him, but it is not like Bethel or Peniel for God is there, but not yet heard reassuring Jacob of peace, and a good outcome, there is only his anguished cry.

There are not a few poignant stories in these patriarchal sagas, and this is a significant one. Jacob's cry of ***"If I am bereaved, I am bereaved",*** is one of pathos, and total resignation now to God's will, for **-**

Jacob is now left with no sons.

No more **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products.**

Now Jacob's wires are down, and his heart is covered with the snows of pessimism, and his mind with the ice of cynicism. God never promised fine days with blue skies and a rose garden, but this seems more than anyone should be asked to bear. Still, it is not for us to criticise the blessings of or the cursings of God, and Jacob could do nothing but endure God's plan for him.

It is a matter of great sadness that the sons depart, not hearing the hopeful prayer for blessing that Jacob cries to "*El Shaddai*", for the almighty and all powerful, for He of unlimited strength and boundless mercy, to be with them, to have compassion on them, to be with them as He had been with their grandfathers - but with his lowly statement of resignation, a willingness to accept the worst possible scenario.

Esther later used the same type of expression *(Esther 4:16)*, "*If I perish, I perish*".

Jacob wrestles again with God,

But then is still.

Resignation now,

And depression sets in again.

3. THE DEPARTURE OF BENJAMIN - GREAT SADNESS BUT PLEASURE ALSO

Benjamin, knowing not of the deceit, watched the careful preparation of his brothers as they dutifully and meticulously carried out Jacob's suggestions for the journey.

So this eager, excited, son of death, thought of by some as "*the mother slayer*", sets out, with the nine early next morning so as to be at Gaza, the Egyptian outpost, ready for the caravan that would begin to cross the desert that day. We can imagine how Benjamin took leave of Jacob.

"*Don't worry father, everything will be right, we will return safely, you will see*", as is the confident and inexperienced youth that we know and hear so often. Benjamin had no doubt heard all about the Land of Mud and he was full of excitement and apprehension.

It was for Jacob, like

Relinquishing his dearest possession,

All that was left

Of his hard won, loved wife, Rachel.

His heart was breaking

And the pangs that stabbed his body

Bring again the shadowlands, for

Jacob is sure that God has forsaken him.

Yet immediately his mind turns

To the promises from God

That he will be blessed

And multiplied.

And so we, too,

In matters of great trial

Swing emotionally from faith to fear,

And doubt to faith again.

"*Why is light given to those in misery,*

And life to the bitter of soul,

To those who long for death

That does not come,

Who search for it,

More than for hidden treasure,

Who are filled with gladness and rejoice,

When they reach the grave?"

We have all known those who wish only for death, for life is too hard for them, *Job 3:20 -22*. This whole chapter in *Job* is one of depression, and Jacob knew it too, as Job did. The faith, fear see-saw so often ends in fear, and as it flies in the window, it settles like a pall and engulfs all around it. Fear now takes the place of Jacob's sons, for he has none, none left, but he has got fear to accompany him in his day light and night shadow hours. It may be possible to heighten faith with doubt, but it may be a dangerous thing to do. We need to turn to other strategies to strengthen faith and lessen the doubt. The lessons of Job help us all in our life and death struggles.

4. JOSEPH HEARS THE NEWS HE HAS BEEN LONGING FOR

So in due course Joseph heard that his brothers had passed through the frontier gate at Thel, once more, and with them was a twenty something young man - eager and excited by all he saw, yet heavily protected by the nine.

Joseph -

In patience,

Had trusted himself to time

And circumstance,

To bring him his loved brother.

Time carries no burden,

As the sun and its shadow

Move slowly on,

Without interference or delay.

An ever moving stream,

Moving relentlessly onward,

Neither slow nor fast,

As time does for us, still, today.

God provided the circumstance,

That pressed the now situation

Of Jacob's overwhelming sadness,

And Joseph's overflowing pleasure.

Sadness against pleasure,

Emotion against emotion,

Father against son,

Son longing for father.

5. PROTECTION NOW - NOT DESTRUCTION

The protection of the nine for Benjamin was three pronged.

***1*. The fear of the great man of Pharaoh through whom they could only receive corn and Simeon's return.**

***2*. Fear of their father Jacob, that if they failed they would be responsible for his grey hairs being brought with this final sorrow to his grave.**

***3*. Fear of failing again - they wanted to make good their sin of destroying one of Jacob's stems, by preserving this Benjamin stem.**

This terrible episode had arisen from the past, and they wanted, and needed, to relax the grip of retribution that seemed to hold them like a vice.

6. JOSEPH'S DREAM FULFILMENT AT LAST

The astonished men were invited to Joseph's house, where they found his steward, but they would not go in without some reassurances. Joseph had instructed his servant what to say to them, perhaps even in the manner of their own religion. Immediately they began to plead their case, for they thought special treatment (evil) had been accorded to them, because they had not paid for the last lot of corn, (that is, money found in sacks after the purchase). Guilt deadens enjoyment for us all, it embitters sorrow, it raises fearful apprehensions, and we need to seek

the removal of the source of the misery. For the moment their guilt was assuaged, only to return soon afterwards.

They knew that **The** old slave buying **Midianite/Ishmaelite Trading Company** was travelling to Egypt long ago, surely they wondered,

"*Is Joseph was still alive somewhere in this city, and capable of making more trouble for us?*"

They knew that God knew, that they were not responsible for the parcels of silver that were returned in their sacks, but they also knew that God knew of their deceitful sin, so they feared God was using this situation for their punishment. Balancing it all out, God was punishing them - now with **their** lives. They feared death, or slavery.

Their lives were required of them now, they reasoned - when in fact Joseph had prepared a noon day feast. "*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies*". Surely his, Joseph's cup, did run over. However, the cup was also to be a tool of retribution.

The steward heard their distress, and calmed them. "*Peace be to you*". In other words, "*Shalom*", (it was for him a learned Hebrew salutation), "*Your God*, *and your father's God, has given you treasure in your sacks, I had your money*", and they entered in to the house, greatly relieved. It may be that this steward had learned of their father's God from Simeon, who would not have been confined to a cold and cruel prison, by Joseph. Or perhaps the steward heard from Joseph, for God sent Joseph to Egypt to teach Pharaoh's senators wisdom, *Psalm 105:22*. Whatever, an Egyptian servant witnessed to them about their God. It is a foreshadowing of the time when the Jew would lose his place as God's vocal representative, and be replaced by the Gentile. "*Yes I have your money*", said the Egyptian. It all adds to the possibility of Eber witnessing to Abram way back there in Ur. They had not expected to find **vertical** perspective here in Egypt. Guilt had kept them from seeing God's hand in their lives, the grain in abundance, the money in abundance, the protection and mercy and unmerited favour in abundance, for they lived in the **horizontal** perspective. Now to add to their delight at this pronouncement and unexpected turn of events, Simeon was led before them. How well he had fared, only anxious at their long delayed return. He understood though, Jacob's reticence.

This good servant, of a good master, shared in the pleasure that the eleven had for one another. This scenario is a lesson for us in good employment practices and shows that goodness often carries along with it part of its own reward.

So they washed their feet, and were happy that their asses were fed. This is another careful and caring hospitable Hebrew/Eastern practice. Their beautiful Canaanitish gifts for Joseph were laid out on a side table in Joseph's dining room, and they noted the flowers and fruit and tableware set for the meal. Simeon had come from prison to palace, this day, and was unaware that his brother had long ago trodden the same path, from prison pit to palace.

When Joseph returned home at noon, they touched the floor with the brow of their heads. Aha ha.

<u>The eleven sheaves bow down</u> to the chief sheaf!

They were here to buy corn so there was fitness also in the dream representation

as sheaves.

They were eleven stars also, and would, by Abraham's covenant, become (much more, as the sand of the sea) **and as the stars in the heaven.**

As Joseph approached and saw them all, he ordered his servants to prepare a meal, that is, slay an animal for meat, *verse 16*. No refrigeration, no meat on hand for a feast for eleven extras, but Joseph's own slaughter house quickly dispatched and butchered an animal for beef pieces. But there were plenty of juicy dates, and figs, and grapes, grown on Joseph's estate, and apples as well, relatively new in Egypt, and unknown to the Hebrews. There were cucumbers, beans, lettuce, all dressed in oil. Joseph hunted pigeons, duck and quails, and all these dishes were served with onions and garlic, and accompanied with loaves of bread, and beer, and red and white wine, sweetened with honey. The meal would be served by about 30 servants carrying alabaster platters. Meals were eaten with fingers, with attendants providing clean water between courses for hand washing. The gifts reminded Joseph of the overwhelming gifts for Esau, at that meeting between the twins so long ago, which he observed as a young boy. His father was the giver then as well. In a flash the thought was gone, as quickly as it had come, for here was his loved little brother, his dear mother's son.

It was the sight of his brother Benjamin that gives us one of the most eloquent statements in *Scripture*, *Genesis 43:29*. Here was his only blood relation, same father, same mother.

He acknowledged Benjamin, probably speaking to him in his retained Hebrew tongue and custom, as the new brother amongst them, and blesses him, "*God be gracious unto thee, my son*". The Hebrew salutation may have evoked a question in their minds, but really events needed to be monitored so closely at this time, that the thought flashed, and was dismissed. Better to give attention to getting this meeting exactly right.

Benjamin's presence was the ransom for more corn, and to collect the brother Simeon, who had been left behind as insurance. The brothers showed no jealousy in Joseph's interest in Benjamin, however he was aware and carefully noted, that they cherished him (Benjamin).

The walls of Joseph's composure collapsed, for he was suddenly overwhelmed by it all. He had to rush to his bed chamber to compose himself. He would have remembered the loving attachments of Rachel and himself, and later her other son, to their afflicted father. He remembered all the loneliness, all the frustrations, all the outpourings of his soul, like the river pouring into the lake, and overflowing the dam. God knew of all this in Joseph's life, no one else did. God never tells, God never tells what we say to Him. In that great safe place we can pour out our hearts, and here Joseph went to release his pent up emotions. To his brothers it must have all been inexplicable, but he could not reveal himself until he had proved their true affection for Benjamin. Unresolved guilt on the part of the brothers magnified their anxiety, and suspicion pulsated and activated their apprehension once more. Another tiny question emerged, and was dismissed, "*Why are we being treated so well?*"

7. THERE IS JOY NOW AND SWEETNESS FOR THE BROTHERS

But Joseph's grief and bitter tears of the past years had now turned to joy and sweetness. As he refreshes himself he realises that he feels differently about his brothers.

On Joseph's return after washing his face, and clearing the emotion overflow, the meal begins with three groups most probably all separate, the Egyptians, the eleven brothers and Joseph alone. Abominations all around, probably though, at this stage, the eleven would have compromised themselves, and eaten with anyone. Joseph probably ordered the seating

arrangement of his brothers, from the oldest to the youngest - Joseph had no wish, nor purpose, nor need to usurp Reuben's inheritance, and Reuben would have later appreciated this, *Genesis 43:33*. The brothers marvelled that so much was known of them, that their ages and family position was known. Benjamin was served more food, five times more than the others. More in quantity, or more in variety, it is not entirely explained. There was already a plentiful supply at the table.

We may consider *H. A. Whittaker's* question in "*Joseph, the Saviour*", whether Reuben had a double portion because he was the firstborn. We really cannot tell, but it is an interesting consideration, under the circumstances, now prevailing in this family.

Five times more for the youngest, Benjamin, was not meant to offend, and was not to be regarded as a precedent, but a test for envy, or perhaps it was just an overflowing of love. Joseph knew that they would not dispute the preciousness of Benjamin, as it had taken them so much effort to get him down to Egypt.

Comment:

The Egyptians would not eat with the Hebrews for social and religious reasons. Hebrews confirmed their covenants with their God by slaying animals that were holy and sacred to the Egyptians. The Egyptians would not touch a knife that had been used by a Greek, for the food would then be polluted. They hated the Greeks. So hatred of other nationals was an acceptable abhorrence. As well there were religious observances to be followed at meal times in all nationals. Better and more convenient to eat separately. Pity that some Christians are ashamed of acknowledging God at their table, and do not follow this wise religious observance at meal times.

Joseph for his own reasons preferred to eat alone. Similar caste distinctions still exist in India, especially over who works at what jobs, and who sits with whom. Women sit at a meal last, after everyone has been served, if they sit at all.

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8. A JOYOUS SHARED MEAL

The Egyptians sat, the Hebrews reclined, though you may be sure these brothers sat up straight at this meal, at least to start with. They may have felt shamed by the man who they assumed had been reared in spiritual darkness in Egypt, yet appeared to appreciate and understand their customs.

They ate without stint and drank more than they should and were "*merry*". Hopefully they drank to exhilaration and cheerful enjoyment, not to intoxication, *verse 34*. Hopefully their own father would not have been shamed by them, if he could have seen them.

The conversation, no doubt, would have been turned to events in Canaan, and explanations of family history. Out of the abundance of their hearts, their mouths would speak, when the opportunity arose. There would be no poison, or chaff at this feast, for they were all glad.

Joseph never told them lies about his identity, for they never asked, or guessed. He just preserved his disguise until he felt it the right time. He, with integrity and forgiveness, laid on for them a banquet of grace.

Comment:

a. We have in mind our guilt, and He demonstrates His incredible generosity and mercy, and we are freed.

b. We plead our case, and He speaks kindly to us, and promises us peace.

c. We try to fend off His anger, bargaining with Him, thinking our works, and sincere efforts will pay out our debt, but He never even considers our attempts important enough to mention.

d. We are conscious of our sin, and we are forgiven.

e. We expect deserved punishment, and we are seated at His table.

f. We fear the consequences, and are served more than we can ever take in.

g. What we had in mind was earning just enough to silence our guilt, but what He had in mind was overwhelming us with such abundance that we realise we can never, ever repay.

Consider that He longs so much for us, and wants us to long for Him. He prepares His table with rich blessings even in the presence of our enemies, and fills our cup to overflowing with His goodness and mercy, til the end of our days.

It's like, "*Sit down, grace is being served*".

Of love we can say that it is the only gift that truly belongs to us, that we can give to others. Nothing else is truly ours that we can give, only **love we can give as a gift to others.**

Grace is not like love. Grace is something that we are given. **Grace is a gift given to us.** However, grace is not a gift to be despised, like, I can sin and grace will abound, or I need not do my duty and He will understand and His grace will be given to me.

Grace can never be earned, not bought, nor deserved, nor can you get it in any way, you do not have to do anything to get it, you have to be given it, but you do have to reach out and take it. So, there is, after all, and act on our behalf. We need to act that we can be offered it, and then be ready to receive it as it passes by. Maybe being able to reach out and take it, is in itself a gift. Well, maybe we need to develop this gift. Books like *Frederick Bruechner*'s "*Wishful Thinking, a Theological ABC*" can help in this area.

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CONCLUSION:

God said to Moses, "*Write a careful and detailed record of Joseph's life so that future generations can spend a lot of time with him*". Surely it was because there is so much goodness in his story, because of Joseph's faith, and wisdom, and Godly attitude, and grace, and all that would be valuable lessons for us in our lives.

CHAPTER 8

PEACE AT LAST, - BUT NO PEACE

"***Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good?" Genesis 44:4.***

FOCUS:

There is great joy amongst Jacob's sons, but there is still one more deceit to be played upon them, in order to brighten their tarnished images, ***Genesis 44:1-34***.

1. *"*WE MANAGED THAT WELL*",* THEY CONGRATULATE THEMSELVES

Now the events of *Genesis 44*, sour this exultant note that spurs the brothers on their homeward journey. They think they cannot solve the Joseph problem, but they have Simeon back, and they never lost Benjamin. They are at least eleven, and that is perhaps the best that they can ever do.

Early next morning the eleven set out on their asses with filled corn sacks. Again Joseph's steward had returned their money, but as well, Joseph's silver, overflowing cup was placed, hidden, in Benjamin's sack.

Unknowing of the Joseph's furtive instructions, these shepherd brothers could only be pleased with the outcome.

1. **They carried food for twelve houses, eleven brothers and Jacob, and set out feeling honourably discharged of the charge of espionage.**

2. **They had returned the money, that had mysteriously accompanied them home, from the original purchase of corn.**

3. **Benjamin and Simeon were in the caravan with them, (the hostage returned and the insurance debt paid) and if the next seventeen days, more or less, went well, perhaps Jacob could feel that they had redeemed their long ago sin of losing Joseph.**

4. **They knew now, *like Cain had come to know*, that they were their brother's keeper.**

Consider:

* Considering that Benjamin knew nothing of the brother's deception of Jacob, did his mind struggle to deal with the deception by Joseph?

* Did Benjamin recognise any signs of blood brotherhood?

* Was Benjamin now torn between his father Jacob, and something inexplicable in this Egyptian experience?

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Joseph's steward, accompanied by soldiers, hastened after the little band and caught up with them not far from the city (of Memphe or Zoan) not too far. Perhaps Joseph had in mind that he did not want to prolong the returning misery.

2. "BUT WHY ARE THEY PURSUING US?"

The brothers were surprised to see Joseph's steward. But now, at once, they were frightened at his accusation of theft. "*You have repaid evil for good, so that I had to come after you to retrieve my master's silver cup*". Fear again hammers on the anvil of repentance, and they move further towards the required shape.

Horrified, the brothers listen to the accusation, "*You were there, when the cup was last seen*". The brothers offer the death of the thief, and the rest of them to return as slaves for life, if the cup be found amongst them. Jacob had rashly offered Laban the same in *Genesis 31.32*. It was the old death penalty for theft, in the code under which they lived. Sure, they are, like their father

Jacob was, that nothing has been stolen. The bags were all unloaded for the search, beginning at the eldest brother's bag and continuing, with suspense, until the youngest brother's bag was reached and searched. When the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, they rent their clothes in anguish and saddled their asses for the return to Joseph's house, heavy in heart and fearful. Their money back in their sacks made it all worse, yet it tempered the "*sin*" of Benjamin, **making them all culpable.** It was a clever ploy of Joseph, to include them all, in the accusation so that they would not be too angry with Benjamin, and leave him in Egypt in disgust.

Consider:

* Did they berate Benjamin as they went?

* "*Why are you a thief?*"

Laban had followed Jacob and Rachel from Haran when she had taken her father's idols.

* Would they not think that this could be the same sort of situation; an inherited propensity for stealing?

* Would they say, "*Are you a thief, like your mother was?*"

* Or did they believe Benjamin, and understand that it all a mistake, or a trick?

* Did their father's accusation of blackmail against this lord come to their minds?

* Did they think, "*Well we are not thieves, but we have many other sins for punishment, and we have to deal wisely with this*".

So, like us all, they swing from accusation, to sympathy and back again. They are vexed and anxious.

* Benjamin had been highly favoured the previous day, why repay that with low behaviour, and **steal** something; ingratitude surely?

* Well, deception was all around them; were they suffering from their delusions?

* Or were they **not** deluded, seeing a clear path of torment ahead?

****

The brothers would hardly have seen it as a test that Joseph had planned, to see whether they would react in the Dothan like way again. And Joseph's steward carried out Joseph's plan faithfully, presumably, not knowing the purpose. He did not appear to soften the penalty, *Genesis 44:10, "Ye shall be blameless"*, from demanding all of them return, to accepting only Benjamin, and returning him as the thief to Egypt.

3. JOSEPH'S SPECIAL CUP

The silver cup was usually a cup of divination, but the use of the term to the brothers may have only been to keep up the illusion of his master's Egyptian facade. We may disagree with the commentary of *Ellicott* here, that if Joseph practised divination, it was because his goodness did not raise him above the reach of the superstitions of the time. Joseph himself says to his steward, to tell the brothers, that he uses the cup for divining, indicating its value.

Consider:

* Was that just to embellish the facade?

* Or was it indeed a truism in Joseph's life?

* Is divination acceptable?

* Is there a difference between magic and holy divination?

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Comment:

To gaze into a bowl of water, that may, or may not have oil poured out on it (forming a suggestive pattern), until we are wearied, in a half stupor and devoid of intellect, and until we are reduced to a dreamlike state, may be the prerequisite for divination. Whether that can be divinely used by God is another matter. Still we would not be bold enough to question God's use of a babbling Endor witch, or Balaam's talking ass, or a friendly Eden serpent, so God could also use a bowl of Nile water if He so wished.

Laban practised divination and told Jacob *(Genesis 30:27)* that he had learned by divination that God had blessed him because Jacob had been with him. *H. A. Whittaker* in "*Joseph, the Saviour"* notes that the word for cup has a holy meaning rather than magic, *page 65*. The word is translated "*bowl*" in *Exodus* to do with the furnishings of the tabernacle, and then in *Jeremiah*, of a "*pot*". This helps, but does not conclude the point. Perhaps the word "*gabia*" refers only to shape. There is still the instruction of Joseph for the steward's word "*divineth*", *Genesis 44:5*.

In any case, stealing from a palace meant restoration thirty times over, or death, but probably slavery for life. Joseph had the power of death over all men, a wearing of, or holding the "*ankh*". Kings and queens and gods were allowed to carry this symbol, and had the power to give, or take away life from lesser mortals. The symbol, like a cross, but with a loop at the top, rather like a stick figure of the human figure, is seen in many of the death and burial rituals, or on coffins, where relatives pleaded the cause of their dead, for continued life in the afterlife. They buried them with furniture and jewels and clothes and food to help in their afterlife comfort. The fact that these objects are all still there, unused, for us to view, remind us of the futility of it all.

a. This symbol later came through these pagan practices to the Coptic Christian church, and

b. then the Christian plain cross with a hanging image of the Lord Jesus Christ, became the symbol of death for sin, and

c. then as an **empty** cross particularly, the symbol of **life and hope and the resurrection**. For the symbol of his **ascension**, the cross was bare.

It **is** the Christian cross, but now it has lost the loop at the top. It was in use long before the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ who was indeed crucified on a cross.

Servants must have carried the ankh to Joseph, at this time of sentence determination for Benjamin. Joseph was not Aton, but Adon, and worthy, therefore, in quite another sense, to wear the symbol.

At this time silver was more valued than gold, but that trend was later reversed. So the brothers had sold Joseph into slavery, and now the other favourite son of Jacob was headed for slavery at their hands. In effect the ruler is saying that, *"you took the cup as payment, the price was your*

brother, and you forgot to leave the payment". 20 pieces of silver, or a silver cup, it keeps coming back to haunt them. But this is a trick. It is not what they meant. It is not what happened.

They would long to escape, but they decided on a better, more noble course, which retrieved them from everlasting contempt in the eyes of Joseph and Jacob. However, **danger is sometimes safety, and what looks like certain death, is sometimes life.**

Danger/death,

Safety/life.

But the problem for them was which is the right path. And they chose well. God will always help us decide the path of righteousness.

4. THE HUMILIATING RETURN

The steward had suggested only Benjamin's return to Egypt but the brothers would have none of that. They will plead Benjamin's cause in Egypt. **Jealousy has left them now.** However, Joseph, initiating the test, did not know that the ten would return. He desperately hoped they would, and not send Benjamin alone to the Egyptian pit. **This was the final test of their vulnerable characters, and on this point rested the future relationship Joseph would have with his brothers. Discipline makes repentance sound and lasting - so Joseph waited.**

Well, Joseph's joy, our joy too, is overflowing, for all of them returned. Dominance over sin, when we see it, gives us great joy. Temptation flung aside, saving one's own skin ignored, doing what has to be done, has its own reward, but is a joy to others as well.

So, in Joseph's reception hall, they await their sentence. Once more as he enters they throw their foreheads to the ground. This is one more step towards their rehabilitation, with God, with Joseph and with their father. Joseph must be remembering the seven Jacob bowings to Esau, which he witnessed so long ago when they passed over Peniel. These Esau like brothers, were also present (with the exception of Benjamin) and they have reversed the situation. There will be seven bowings down, or more, here as well in this great adulation of Pharaoh's representative. If so, we are a long way from the conclusion of the matter, for we need to wait until after the burial of Jacob in the last chapter of *Genesis*.

5. JUDAH TURNS GOLD

Once upright again, it is Judah who begins to speak. **Benjamin's thoughts, or words, are not recorded**. He must have been astounded at what he now hears.

Joseph has reiterated again that he does not inhumanely want them all to stay as slaves, he only wants Benjamin. We must remember that in these famine days, many of the poor families from afar, trying to buy corn, would be bargaining for bread, with the lives of their children, consigning them to slavery. So the pressure to leave Jacob's loved one in the pit, is still there, and the screw is turned once more - third son now.

Judah is in a cleft stick. If he insists on the innocence of Benjamin, or justifies it, or excuses it, he incriminates the steward, and by implication, the servants of Joseph and Pharaoh, whose favour they needed. He dared not speak of planted evidence. He hopes to ameliorate the situation by identifying them all in the incident, in *verse 16,* "*We are thy lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup was found*", *that* is, "*appearances are strong against us all*", probably because of the money in the sacks as well, though Joseph does not use this

circumstance. Thomas said of Jesus, "*Let us also go* (to Bethany near the threatening Jerusalem), *that we may die with him*", *John 11:16*. Perhaps Judah felt, like Thomas, that life was of no more value, with the death, or imprisonment, of the special one. They did not wish to be loosed from the slave obligation that they had voluntarily taken, if the cup was found in any one of their sacks, unless their brother could be liberated as well. Judah could not say Benjamin was innocent, though he thought he was, and the punishment must then extend to many innocent persons, who were in any case guilty of a far off sin, and therefore in need of punishment, or forgiveness. However Judah is overcome by them being the instrument of an innocent occasion of sin on their brother Benjamin, and would gladly prevent it. He knows Benjamin would not be in Egypt if he had not persuaded Jacob. All this consideration brings about a remarkable speech. Judah's dismissal of Joseph's suggestion, "*Get you up in peace unto your father*" (without Benjamin), *verse 17*, is ignored, and this must please Joseph.

Judah's speech is pure pathos. His vertical perspective is in place now. It is a grand speech ending in great magnanimity. It is unsurpassed in the Old Testament as a speech of intercession. It is intercession to a higher being for the life of his brother.

***Judah is here an intercessor/mediator long before Levi was*.**

In *Hebrews 7:14,* Paul notes the mediation ability of Judah, though not in attendance, at the altar, like Levi was, for it was through Judah that the Lord Jesus Christ, our mediator, sprang, and from him that the name of "*Jew*", for his people, has prevailed down the centuries.

Judah uncovers his guilt and confesses. He confesses for them all, for he says,

"***God has found the iniquity of thy servants"***.

What joy, for Reuben's admission of guilt, *Genesis 42:22,* discussed on *page 96* of *Swindoll's* "*Joseph*", is here embellished by Judah. *Swindoll* records that *Leupold*, calls Judah's utterance "*unexcelled in the Old Testament*", *page 140*. This is because of Judah's complete reversal from the cruel intentions for Joseph in *Genesis 37*.

In their return to the city they have consigned themselves to Egypt, slavery, death, if the "*lord*" wills. Judah, not thinking horizontally of his own skin, stays vertical. He nobly offers only himself for them all. Judah's impassioned pledge to Jacob, on leaving Canaan with Benjamin, is now vindicated. He really did mean what he said to Jacob, and Jacob, if he had known, might be proud of this son. He now takes all the blame as he promised Jacob. Not only does he relieve his guilt of the statement long ago, "*lo, here comes the dreamer, let's be rid of him*", and plead for his young brother, but he pleads for his father as well. He once had not cared what his father thought. His repentance is obvious. It is the long awaited state that Joseph, and God had been waiting for, and from now on the sin, that we have so long discussed, with its acknowledgment and confession, and their repentance, and their forgiveness, at last begins to take shape. It will in the end include Jacob, and then at last it will be done with.

In this long and beautiful speech, *(verses 18-34)*, Judah retells the story with a touch of divine grace. He gives full expression to his concern for the health of Jacob, with his father's anguish over Benjamin's departure. Maybe Joseph is now fearful that Jacob's health may be in jeopardy, and that his insistence upon Benjamin's presence in Egypt, may kill his father, now at home sonless. Twelve there were, and now none, all twelve in the Land of Death.

Judah tells Joseph how indispensable Benjamin is to Jacob. The speech is not flattering to Judah, but he does not shrink from the telling. He graciously and generously and

affectionately gives himself, for the supposed sin of Benjamin, for his father's sake. He is willing to be a slave, <u>because</u> his father, Jacob, loved Benjamin better than Jacob did him (Judah), quite a turn around of the Dothan attitude.

"***My father's life is bound up in the life of the lad"*, he said, *"if he does not return with us, my father shall surely die and we will be the cause of his grey hairs brought down to the grave".***

And pleading with this Lord of Egypt he asks to take the blame, so that the bondage of Benjamin may be excused. Perhaps he now sees his own sins as a reason why Jacob had a favourite son. Judah has a family in Canaan, yet he offers his own bondage, trading his own liberty. We would not want to reduce the value of his gift by saying that Judah may not have had a wife in Canaan, and is a widower, so is not bound to return. Judah does trade his family, as well as himself, his remaining son Shelah and his twin grandsons, Pharez and Zarah. He trades his sheltered life with his father, for imprisonment or death in the Land of Mud. Another gave himself willingly for men, down the generations, one of Judah's own children. So Judah enshrines himself, and shines like gold. He is now gilded, like Joseph was.

Joseph, recognising the guilt, the outpouring of Judah and the will to be faithful and good, in earnest service, sees the finger of God pointing now to reconciliation, and pardon of the brothers with expressions of love. They had been brought back to Dothan, convicted of sin, and repentance was there as well. They were ready to make compelling confessions. They were now different men. Their geographical and horizontal latitude was no longer a concern, for their spiritual attitude had now been activated, and their vertical connections to God were now being strengthened. This gracious speech would have clinched in Joseph's mind the idea of bringing them all to Egypt. The sting of the injustices had long gone from Joseph, for after all each time he called his son, Manasseh, he would have reinforced the fact that he had covenanted with God to "*forget*" what his brothers had done to him. From now on, even after the death of their father, Joseph reassures them that he does not hold them accountable.

What more forcible illustration is it possible for God to give to all of his children, to all succeeding generations that trouble, far from being evidence of desertion, is a means God employs with his children to lay a solid foundation for future happiness? Trouble, trouble had brewed and bubbled. Troubled the ten had been for twenty years, under the cloud of suspicion, and now at last with all admitted, the sun shone through, and the cloud lifted.

Comment:

Some scholars have a problem with the Spirit of God taking time to record so much detail in *Genesis 44,* but surely it is a lesson in the mundane and trivial, for **all** of our lives are important in the record that God holds.

It is agreed, that long conversations are recorded in these chapters, which are remarkable for detail. It is, as has been said, for some purpose. As well, it may be that perhaps the narrator to Moses is different from that of the earlier events, and so the style, just as worthy and important, has changed.

If we do not accept this method of writing the inspired *Scripture*, it is difficult to explain the seemingly unbalanced narrative.

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6. THE BROTHERS' CONFESSION

Which brings us to the confession and we are searching for what we know was there.

Judah did not confess it all for he only said his father's **opinion** about the wild animal taking his first loved son. The confession is not here, and it is not recorded in *Genesis 45*. He knows not though, that this is the man to whom he **should** confess, for he thinks of him as a Prime Minister of Egypt, who he has asked to bend down his ear, for the impassioned plea.

Yet we cannot proceed without asserting that it must have happened when Joseph drew them around him, and he revealed himself, and they kissed and hugged. "*His brethren talked with him*", *verse 15*. This poignant moment is not revealed in detail and we must assume that in it all, so much was thought and said that would not be recorded. Joseph would have remembered the hugs (neck falling) and kisses between his father and his brother Esau. The confession of Cain is not recorded, nor the confession of Esau for us to read, but through certain clues, we are able to assume it. The brothers would have had uppermost in their minds, not the Esau/Jacob scene which they also witnessed, with the exception of Benjamin, but how their sin was to be dealt with by this brother. So the confession must have been there. The story could otherwise not been told, without the outpouring of guilt and Joseph's acknowledgment and forgiveness. We hear the forgiveness, so the confession of guilt must have been there.

However, there cannot be an eucatastrophe until Jacob is included in the confession, and he also registers forgiveness.

It is no good being sorry in secret, like their sin was secret, with lies still feeding the story. The truth must out - all of it - to all concerned, for the cleansing to occur. This is a big lesson in forgiveness for us all.

The "*deaths*" of Dinah, Rachel and Joseph had almost been too much for Jacob, and with God offering no explanation for the voids in his life, he had been without hope. His omission to plead with God for his release is telling, especially when his two previous pleadings, at Bethel and Peniel, had brought him relief. A word from God, or the secret revealed, would have ended the grief over Joseph, but it would have ended the chastisement as well "*whereof we are all partakers*". The only way for Jacob to understand his house was a pack of cards, and that God was in control, was for God to knock it down. Jacob was brought to his knees through deceit and suspicion, and he needs raising up again. He, and his sons, were all ripe for the picking of confession and forgiveness, and a changed direction in life.

CONCLUSION:

Now with the imminent return of Jacob's eleven sons he, too, will hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Until now he has lived with fear, his constant companion.

CHAPTER 9

JACOB'S DETERMINATION WILL NOW BE CHALLENGED

"***So he sent his brethren away, and they departed", Genesis 45:24.***

FOCUS:

After Joseph revealed himself and made peace with his brothers he sent them home once more, this time with great hopes that they would all soon come to him bringing their father, Jacob, to Egypt, ***Genesis 45:18.***

The *Bible* compilers have chosen to begin *chapter 45*, with the wondrous revelation of Joseph, to his brothers. It is known as a remarkable event by many artists, who have sought to record it - the 18th century valuable Gobelin tapestry, for one, now hanging in the Great Hall of Sydney University. The eleven are now not tarnished and the twelve children of Israel gather around one another in a wondrous embrace, ***Genesis 45:1-24***.

1. A GREAT REVELATION

Joseph now knows that the brothers would save Benjamin, and so were different than their former selves. So he prepares for the revelation by sending all who those who are Egyptian out of the room.

This may have been, because this was such a private matter. On the other hand, maybe the servants would not be so forgiving about what had befallen their lord, and secrecy was important. By now Joseph wept, "N*o tears of bitterness"*, only sweet flowing joy, and with all the loud weeping twelve, all his household, and all Egypt heard, and knew of his brothers (but not necessarily the sin). There may become a time, when ill treatment of an "*Egyptian"*, could be called into account, so perhaps it was unwise to let it all be known.

Joseph said to his brothers,

"***I am Joseph", "*AAA-NEE YO-SAPHE*".**

He spoke to them for the first time in Hebrew. And here is another of those moments in this story that words cannot describe, and with a lump in our throat we pause to consider the implication for these eleven.

He had probably been known to them by his Egyptian name, Zaphnath-paaneah. But, in their astonishment, and their revived guilt the brothers could not answer his next question, ***"doth my father ye*t *live?"***

They felt they had seen a ghost. Shame and terror and self reproach overtook them. They were now all vulnerable to this great man for retribution. Joseph was 39 years old. Now, they are worried what the great man will do to them.

All Jacob's known sons are now together here in Egypt. If the worst comes to the worst, Jacob will never know what happened to them.

Joseph **had** heard of his father through the solicitude of Judah's speech *(verses 18-34)* and his wish to substitute for Benjamin, on account of Jacob's grief. But we often wish good news repeated, and, for example, never weary of the story of the raising of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. So he asks about Jacob.

Only Benjamin was without guilt, and the other emotions associated with that, for he had never known, other than that a wild animal had taken this brother. He had, though, borne the collective guilt, by implication, and the punishing reception in Egypt, and Joseph, knowing, would want to relieve him of that. So he then said, ***"I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt".***

It was -

Tears for lost years,

Tears of reconciliation,

Tears of thanksgiving for life unscathed,

Tears of hope for the future.

This is a *Biblical* example of the healing power of tears, for all men of all time.

From the fast falling eventide,

And out of the deepest darkness,

With no one to help,

Help came to the helpless.

A presence every passing hour,

A guide and stay,

Through cloud and sunshine,

Triumphant still.

No foe to fear,

With thee at hand to bless,

For thou didst,

"Abide with me".

We now hope that all of them feel and pray these sentiments, not only Joseph, who understood so well.

So now they are twelve once more. Dumbfounded they are. Joseph's drawing of them close, at the stunned silence, was a wise course. It is recommended today in times of great stress or trauma. The Hebrew (for this response) indicates an intimate setting for the family response.

2. THE UNBURDENING OF GUILT

Joseph then, in three verses,

Takes away their guilt,

He releases them from the sin.

He overshadows the terrible contrasts

Which have washed this family of God.

When they tried to rehearse their wrongs,

He graciously said,

"***We are not going there",***

"***For God,***

It was who organised it all".

That was then, this is now.

"***God is glorified in it all".***

Charles Swindoll remembers a one line sermon, "*Greatness is revealed mainly in our attitudes*", and he quotes former USA President *Thomas Jefferson,* "*When the heart is right, the feet are swift*". Precisely!

Consider:

* Are you moving towards people, or away from them?

* Are you engaged in the business of healing, or hurting?

* Are you bringing joy, or squelching it?

* Can you see God in your location, though you may want it different?

* Can you see God in your situation, though you want to run from it?

* Can you peer through the evil, and see God at work?

Joseph could answer, *"Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes"*.

* You want to be great as well?

Well, all of this had made Joseph great, and full of grace.

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3. GOODNESS PREVAILS AGAIN IN JACOB'S FAMILY

In the presence of this faith filled life, and with graciousness all around them, these brothers made amends. This is where the confession must have taken place, with an offer that they will do the same for Jacob.

The love,

And the hate,

The blessings,

And the cursings,

The heavenly family,

The fraternal strife,

The maternal strife,

And the paternal strife,

And with it the paternal grief,

And the guilt,

And the prideful,

And the penitent,

And the fall,

And the struggle to rise,

The ungodly,

And the Godly,

From balancing out all their adult lives,

They are at last to be at peace.

This song of mankind (even for us) is crystallised,

And then nullified in this saviour's words,

"*Do not grieve, for God sent me before you to preserve life. Through me you will be saved*".

Joseph's speech is the *Old Testament* foreshadowing and counterpart of *Romans 8:28,* "*We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him*". He said it again after his father's death, when his brothers test him again to see if he is vengeful yet. We can say, "*We know*", but we must really believe it. One needs to keep in mind the big picture, as Joseph did, and then it is certainly true.

The brothers did not confound the dream expert, or his dreams, by selling him into slavery, they really made possible the dream fulfilment, and now, at last twenty years later, they are made to see the advantage of that.

There is no difficulty here with the reconciliation, for the wronged one is so effusive with his expressions of forgiveness. They **feel** forgiven, though it is not the end of their doubts, which surface later in their dealings with Joseph, that is, at the death of Jacob, when it almost breaks Joseph's heart that their vengeance fear is there still. It's as if guilt clings to the side of the boat, clawing for a stranglehold, long after grace has come on board and begun to steer. We need to say, "*Push off guilt, it is enough*".

They were all in different degrees responsible for the sin and therefore able to accuse each other. It would be helpful if they could forgive one another, and even themselves. But we never really forgive ourselves.

Joseph reassures them,

"*I have saved you in two years of famine, - and for the next five, when there will be no corn harvested, (*nor "*earing*", an old English word for "*ploughing*"), *you'll be saved by a great deliverance. God has blessed me here enormously for I have become a father to Pharaoh*".

This is a term used for almost one thousand years till Joseph's time, for chief ministers or viziers of oriental kings, "*head of court*", and a name of honour.

There are three names of honour here,

Father to Pharaoh,

Lord of all his house,

and in *verse 8***,**

A ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Seven years would be enough time for any nation, especially a sojourning one, to dwindle away during famine, so the "*nation*", is to be saved by immigration, *verse 7*. Joseph confidentially alludes to them as a "*remnant*"; for he knows that they will live to produce a great people.

Of course there were endless questions to be asked and the conversation was quite different to the guarded comments of their earlier dealings with this man. There is no need for an interpreter now, "*I am speaking to you*", *verse 12.* Now the conversation overran with thankfulness for the providence of God, and with the joy at having found each other again. There is at last, no hostility, and fear, but fellowship and friendship, the first for over 20 years. They are avoiding, mutual recriminations, and fault finding and equivocation.

They are now Cain heads in Cain like reformation. As they knew of Joseph's sale into Egypt, the surprise of the ten would not be as great as that of their father, who thought him dead. So they knew they had to take great care with Jacob.

4. THE GRAND PLAN

"*Hurry home to my father and tell him that I am alive and that I am a ruler over all Egypt, by God's arrangement. Bring your wives and children and your children's children, your servants and your flocks and herds and come and live in Egypt in Goshen, where you will be near me and where I can nourish you, and keep you from poverty for the rest of the famine*".

Other tribes and nations that "*come down*" would be in poverty and servitude to Egypt. Nepotism called for here.

"*You see, look at Benjamin and look at me again. You can tell that we are from the same mother and father. We are from the same stem. I am your brother Joseph. Go and tell my father all of this.*"

Joseph fell on Benjamin - he was 22 years old, and a father many times over - and they kissed and hugged one another. Then he kissed all the brothers, and wept more with them, "*Like a flooded wadi*" they all were, but he did not want them to be grieved any more. Then they all sat down, and had a good talk, and it is here that the details of the guilt, the confession, the repentance and forgiveness must have taken place. The cleansing is at last almost over, (except for the telling to Jacob). Heartfelt it all is, hearts are always feeling hopeless, or hopeful, we don't remain for long neutral, feeling neither one nor the other, and now it is for them hopeful, weeping floods of hopeful tears.

Joseph is anxious that Jacob understands the new situation. As they all are, he is worried about Jacob. They decide that Benjamin would be the best one to explain the whole story to him. Perhaps that is one of the main reasons why Benjamin had been required in Egypt.

Joseph would probably have liked to keep Benjamin, but his depriving of himself, would give greater pleasure to his father, on the sons' return.

There is the command to Isaac *(Genesis 26:2)* when there was famine in the land, "*Go not down into Egypt*", which prefaced the great promises to Isaac (of Abraham). Jacob had the same promises, yet he was now to be asked to "*sojourn in Egypt*". Joseph must have known the difficulties his brothers would have with Jacob, though with the changed circumstances he hoped he would understand quickly. They were to be invited "*gerim*" guests, and that made the

difference. That was a point not to be missed, so as to support claims that may be needed to be made in the future.

5. PREPARATION FOR THE TWO JOURNEYS

It was a splendid testimony to Joseph's good standing in Egypt that Pharaoh sent an endorsing message to Jacob to come at once and bring all the family and animals. He adds that they are to leave their possessions in Canaan for all that could be had in Egypt - the best of goods in Egypt. Joseph may not have been so generous to his family, for enough nepotism had already been displayed to the Egyptians, if Pharaoh had not commanded it.

Perhaps Pharaoh noting Joseph's wisdom, thought that wisdom ran in the family, and that he would be multiplying it, in asking for them all to come. But that thought takes away from the appreciativity and generosity of Pharaoh, and gives him a less than noble motive.

So Joseph gave them provisions for the journey and new clothes for each brother, (remember, they had rent their clothes at the theft accusation, before their return to the palace). Benjamin was given five sets of clothes and 300 shekels of silver. Clothes and money again, a deja vu feeling, a coat and silver were involved all those years ago. Then, years ago, they took the coat, and as well received money from the sale of Joseph.

Stripped/sold,

Clothes and money,

But Joseph,

In his compassion,

Does it the other way.

Charity/gift

Clothes and money

To the offending Cain heads,

Now like Cain,

Forgiven.

Consider:

* When did Joseph forgive them?

* Did he ever lay this sin to their charge?

****

The fashion of clothes does not much change in eastern countries, and it is still a custom to testify love to friends, and others, by presents of garments. They are not useless gifts, and, with care, last much longer than a season. With Benjamin's gift, Joseph testified publicly his high regard for the other son of his mother. He paid his brothers a compliment, in that he showed his confidence in them to see to the safety of this great treasure (Benjamin) of his father. He had been undone by **his** coat of divers colours, but Joseph now believed that there was a revolution in their temper, and he knew that they would never, in any circumstance, bring again on

themselves the guilt of which they were now ashamed. So he gave Benjamin more than one **“coat of diverse colours”.**

Hard necessity compelled these brothers to accept the generosity of the one who they formerly despised, and his sweet reasoning persuaded them to comply. What a tremendous lesson in goodness to all when entertaining, like as if they may, or may not be angels, for we know not to whom we might, one day, owe great obligation. They had been entertained by a messenger from God.

There were ten asses loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female asses loaded with corn and bread and meat for the two journeys, there and back. There were Egyptian wagons to convey the family to Egypt - wagons like this, with two wheels and oxen, were unknown in Canaan. Horses were now introduced into Egypt, but may have had restricted uses, for example, chariots only, light and swift. There were two reasons for this wonderful procession. Joseph knew that Jacob needed clear proof of his existence, and he also wanted his family to travel through all the surrounding peoples and to arrive in Egypt in style - not like the Semitic nomads pictured in “*Treasures from Bible Times*”, by *Alan Millard, pages 58* and *59,* where a tomb decoration shows black haired, and bearded Asiatics, dressed in multicoloured printed, one-shouldered gowns, (they are bringing galena for black eye paint for the darker skinned Egyptians) and they are walking with a few asses and only their little children ride the ass saddle basket.

Imagine the curiosity this train from Joseph and Pharaoh was to arouse as it wound its way back to Jacob. Joseph made these preparations for he wanted the crowd of over seventy souls, to look like the invited guests they were. The conveyances, the clothes the travel accoutrements, were not to be their own, they were to be Egyptian. So the long train set off to join the trade caravan with which they would ride through the desert.

Then the last “*goodbyes”* were said and Joseph then asked them not to quarrel over -

Who was to blame,

Who was to tell Jacob,

Or how to explain away the guilt.

Human nature stays pretty much the same, and we recognise ourselves in all centuries in between. It’s hard to improve on depravity. These brothers were richer and more blessed now with worldly goods, and, “*who knows how they will behave now*”, worried Joseph. Benjamin suddenly had more than they did, and Joseph could only insure against their ill will by specifically asking them.

Joseph had heard them quarrelling, not only long ago, but recently. It was a lesson in anticipation that parents often miss, for even if the children hate to hear the parental reminder, but it is then in their heads when the temptation comes. Maybe it comes easiest to those parents, who are always ready for the worst in life, and spoil the happy anticipations of the future with dark forebodings. Less of that, for them, and more of “*anticipation*” for the others, might be a better way.

Any of us, all of us, hear siblings arguing - neither wishing to take guilt, nobody taking responsibility or consequences. It’s a mature concept to accept responsibility for mischief, as

Judah had done in seeking Jacob's blessing on the journey, and Joseph was not sure whether his other brothers had moved on to that maturity.

In any case all of their arguing would not change the fact that it was really all God's work, not theirs, for God was in the business of missioning using Joseph. They had not been very skilled at it, and God had found a unique way to have His will done on the earth.

And off they went, returning to Canaan. The journey took a shorter time than previously for they had the wagons to help. No walking at all this time.

They flew from today in fear, and met their yesterday.

They were driven by doubt, and fell into the arms of hope.

They came to beg of a stranger, and found themselves feasted by a brother.

Their Cain/Esau like murderous intent had evolved through their own recognition of sin, to a blessing for them.

It is safe to assume that God has been in all of this wondrous plan of the life of Joseph. There is not much time and chance in this story.

These brothers did it **wrong** when they learned **wrong.** Joseph did it **RIGHT** when he learned it **WRONG**. The modelling to Joseph by his brothers had been appalling, yet he was shining and golden.

CONCLUSION:

Don't let any of us think that we can use the excuse of bad modelling for our sins. They may be reasons, never excuses. If one person can get it right after so much wrong then the case rests. If only we can stop blaming influences outside of us and begin to see our own weaknesses and sins as anti Christ, then we'll reduce our potential for damage, and we will be golden too. It doesn't hurt to think of reasons why our behaviour has dulled, but to overcome, in the face of impelling circumstances, is really golden.

CHAPTER_10

THE DREADFUL SUSPENSE TURNS TO JOY

"***And they told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt", Genesis 45:26.***

FOCUS:

Jacob, at this time, back in Hebron, was at the culmination of his sorrow **- with no sons**. He wondered if he really did deserve this for his conduct to his father and his brother so long ago. Surely that deception, which had pursued him for so long, had caused him enough sorrow to atone for the sin. But he is to find great joy, ***Genesis 45:25-28***.

1. JACOB'S EQUIVOCATION

1. **He'd been tried and tested in the furnace and he thought cleansed, purified and strengthened.**

2. **Now he was fearfully suspicious and it seemed his hope was deferred.**

3. **It was the greatest suspense of his life - not knowing the end.**

4. **Here again, like Joseph, like us, is fear/faith.**

5. **His nervous wait might still bring joy and blessing, surely it will not be dashed again.**

6. **Surely his house of cards is down, and it is only God who will save him.**

Dark foreboding and nervous anxiety, without reason, is the lot of parents when we worry over much about our loved ones, watching them leave the house in joy and anticipation, and mentally seeing them return on a stretcher. "*You worry too much*", they say, but we know from the statistics and life's experience, that it does happen. So even if the object of our anxiety is not one of God's children, we can still lay the burden of anxiousness on Him, and pray "*as the Lord wills*". It does not remove the anxiety, or the foreboding, but it gives relief when the fear/faith balance evens up a bit. It probably did for Joseph, and he fell into faithfulness, but for Jacob he mainly fell into faithlessness. "*Lord, remind me that nothing is going to happen to me today, which you and I together cannot handle*". We can self encourage.

2. JACOB'S DETERMINATION - NOW WHAT TO DO?

Sorrow and sighing and sadness flew away for Jacob, and joy again was released, for there stood the eleven, that is, the nine, and the one, and the loved one. Simeon and Benjamin were there - and there is more news? "*Well, what can it be?*"

Jacob's heart stood still.

His heart ceased to beat for a second,

He drew in his breath and held it,

And then again his heart thumped in unbelief

And in weakness he was chilled

With a renewed sense of the Joseph loss,

Until he heard all their words,

And saw the wagons of Egypt.

Then *Jacob*'s fainting,

Turned to *Israel*'s strength,

And he remembered Abraham's promises

And the covenant,

And saw that the furnace of sorrow

Had forged a golden chain,

To link them all together again.

We understand Jacob's faint, and that his spirit was revived *(verse 27)*. Our hearts are spilling over for the thought of this mighty scene, with the talking, and the laughing, and the hugging,

and the neck falling, and the kissing, and the wondering, and the doubting, and the tears - and then the faithfulness. If **our** hearts are full and overflowing at this point, we can hardly imagine how Jacob must have felt. Perhaps he had a mild coronary.

The son raised from the dead. Even Jesus' disciples had doubted his aliveness after the crucifixion. All Jacob's prayers, even when he thought his son was dead, had now been answered. He could not have prayed, over those long years, for Joseph by name, believing him in the grave, so we wonder what Jacob's prayers would have been. We hesitate to think that he did not pray at all.

Jacob had resolutely left Laban after a great struggle and with a Godly purpose he'd settled in Canaan in response to God's promises to him, and his father, and his grandfather. He had faced Esau, and at last Isaac again, to do God's will. He stood at his tent door, at one minute resolute that that's where God wanted him to be. He'd borne the disappointments of his sons and the damage at Shechem. He'd borne the death of Rachel and Joseph. He'd shared the shame of Judah over Tamar. He'd given into the famine and sent his loved ones to the Land of Mud and Death, for food. He'd even let Benjamin go too, all in the name of God, who was working out His blessings, making the family numerous, here in Canaan. It had all been in the best years of his life, and he hoped to rest at peace here in Canaan. He expected a peaceful departure in death, to be buried at Machpelah.

But, no, not that, he was not to be allowed **even** that, for standing before him were the wagons of Pharaoh, and the plenty of Egypt beckoned him.

Doubt?

No - banish the doubt.

The parched land around about him **whispered farewell** and his long **lost son called** from an alien land. But **conflict**, for a moment, rose in his mind, a sort of **uncertainty**. He was no longer the naysayer, but yea, well, yea, that's altogether too frightening.

His sons were home, he had corn aplenty, and God wanted him here,

"*Didn't He - didn't He?*"

"***Did you say Joseph is alive?"***

His mind could hardly grasp it.

"*But Abraham went to Egypt, and he found himself in great danger. Isaac had been forbidden to go. Egypt was a heathen land, full of idolatry and decadence and gross forms of human behaviour*", he thinks.

But here was Pharaoh's wagons and Pharaoh's invitation.

"***Joseph, Joseph? What do you say? How is Joseph in Egypt?"***

This is incredulity, hopeful incredulity.

All this flashed in his mind, and with his spluttered questions, he began, at last, to clearly understand. No "*absolutely not*" this time, the evidence of God's will was overwhelming. So with the thought of Joseph he resolutely stated, "*I will go*". He yea says the move to Egypt.

It was a momentous resolution, considering his previous solidarity, his sorrow, his earthly pain. It had all absorbed him (it does us sometimes). He was growing in strength without knowing it, but here was relief, at last. "*All* (dark and light) *things work together for good, to them who love God*", *Romans 8:28.* Out of his dungeon, out of his locked door, he found his dazzling Damascus road.

Jacob began to climb clear of his wrong beginnings, for out of the ruin of the deceit, and the indignity, and disappointment, and disillusionment, which had burnt down to coal and ashes in his mouth, something rose, like a phoenix, peace and faith and hope. There was a smile in his mind's eye, and he was at last thinking vertically.

He realised that there had been -

Progress in the pauses

Joy in the valleys

Music in the malady

Beauty with the beast

And flight,

Where he thought all was still.

When his dreams began to fade,

God shone a clear light,

And he was ready to go down into Egypt.

Jacob,

Whose throat was full up with sorrow,

So that he could swallow no more,

Had torn his heart.

He'd lain horizontal,

And nursed his clicky, arthritic hip.

Now he cleared his mindset,

And bowed his head.

He became positive and vertical.

He asked God for guidance,

And lifted up his eyes,

And so he,

With them all,

Stretched out his neck like a migrating swan,

and turned towards Egypt.

Jacob moved the family business, **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products** to Egypt, for everyone came.

It is interesting to note, at this time, the name changes Jacob/Israel in the *Scriptures,* in *Genesis 45:28,* for "*Israel said, I will go and see him before I die"* and in *Genesis 46:5* these sons of Jacob, or **Jacob and Sons**, become ***"the sons of Israel".*** Perhaps there will be a company name change in Egypt.

The fortunes of Jacob seem restored *(Psalm 85:1)*. Ah, but that captivity (from which they will be restored, in *Deuteronomy 30:3*, *NIV* verse comment) has not even yet begun and the misfortunes have yet to run their course. What a blessing that Jacob can not see round the corner, for the holocausts ahead, many of them will be far worse. The Amazing Technicolour Coat sorrow pales in insignificance, when compared to what is to come. There **will** be a great song unto the Lord, and a glorious triumph, when the horse and his rider will be thrown into the sea, but before then, there will be great torment, and harm, and danger, and light turned into darkness, and a trembling and fearful journeying from the Egypt, to which Jacob turns his face. We remember the words about weeping in a blind cage, and darkness seemingly an endless state. For Jacob's family it was so. They had endured one blind cage (of their own making), but a far greater one was to emerge, under a new Pharaoh who knew them not.

Rudyard Kipling in "*The Conundrum of the Workshops*", 1890, has a poem about the perceived advantages of being able to have all knowledge.

"*Now if we could win to the Eden tree*

Where the four great rivers flow,

And the wreath of Eve is red on the turf,

As she left it long ago,

And if we could come where the sentry slept,

And softly scurry through,

By the favour of God,

We might know as much as our father Adam knew."

Consider:

* Adam before the fall?

* Do we want to have all knowledge?

* Why?

* Is the taint of sin, too much for us to bear?

****

3. JACOB DEALS WITH THE BROTHERS' GUILT

Now for the confession!

After Jacob had grasped the significance of travelling to Egypt, and the great joy of understanding that Joseph was, indeed alive, the brothers, with great courage, had to finish the terrible task that they had set themselves. It could not be a conclusion without the confession, and the healing could not begin. We need to pause in our story, to imagine Jacob's reaction, to their confession.

Consider:

* How many days did Jacob swing from turmoil to peace?

* Was it any use to be angry?

* How long before Jacob could say, "*Well, never mind now, I forgive you, and I love you*".

****

The painful sound of tears, like pieces falling off his broken heart, was now no more, and his heart began to mend. This battered heart had battled on for years in a precarious state, until a great jolt had electrified it at the mention of Joseph. The coronary began to heal, as the stress was lifted from his shoulders.

Joseph's brothers, at the point of Jacob's absolution of them, would seem to be totally healed. These brothers had existed with selective forgetting. In dysfunctional families, abuse is sometimes never recalled without emotion, or recalled with self blame, "*I was such an awful child, and I deserved it*". The true situation is pushed too far back in memory and mind, to be recognised for its true worth. The impact is so emphatically expunged from right perception and judgment that it is eventually removed from conscious memory and dysfunction festers along. Better to pause, remedy and heal.

Abominable behaviour has to be acknowledged. If leaders of families or communities, or nations give false or incomplete historical information, people are short changed. A distorted idea, or equivocation about one's history with misinformation, is harmful, and only prolongs the wickedness. People have a right to know their history, even if it is bad, it gives people a chance to apologise, to compensate, to rectify and learn by their mistakes. Elders should never say, "*Leave it to God's judgement, it is too hard for us to sort out, or solve*".

The brothers had to acknowledge the pain that they had caused Jacob and Joseph, in such a conscious collaborative effort. The incident had drowned in their minds and Jacob's suspicion was the only reminder. When Joseph confronted them, the guilt surfaced and they began the healing process. The power of the repressed secret was finally broken when they confessed to Jacob. Cain like, and Esau like, they realised their need for forgiveness for their murderous intent upon their loved brother. Confrontation does not change what has been done, but it can stop the repetition of the process. The perpetrator gains a sense of relief (from guilt), and can repent.

4. RECONCILIATION EACH TO THE OTHER

We cannot force people to change, to confess, to forgive, to apologise, to be loving and kind. God gave free will to all His creation. That is the ultimate in letting go, for God, for He does not force anyone to become a believer, to follow the "*Christ like*" way. He let Adam and Eve go their own way. He allowed that, though sad He is to see people go their own way. We cannot force people to pay for the evil they do, however much we would like to. God will, in His time. If people change to a Christlike way they cannot live their lives over, and must live, albeit by His grace, with the consequences of lives they have led. There are no excuses for not working through the

unfair assignments in life, either for a repented sinner, or for the receiver of the unrepented acts. It is part of our accountability to God, and God will judge our behaviour according to the circumstance.

Recovery for a dysfunctional family is never easy. For the ten sons of Jacob to heal this family, after twenty years of carrying a selective secret, would have been almost impossible without the intervention of God. God is there, for all those who want to do it right when they have done it wrong. His strength, His power, His care, guidance and healing hand is there for us if we but ask. The ten may not have asked, but the healing was necessary for the plan of God.

Support groups for dysfunctioning families or family members, is a known value. Anyone can begin a support group in the community, for a dysfunction inside it. Problems need to be confronted, learned about, educated for, addressed, and prayed for. When problems arise and people ask for advice and help, to sweep it under the carpet is unhealthy, unhelpful and even sinful. If healing is to occur, *(Galatians 6)*, we need not a place of suffering, that will encourage the dysfunction into succeeding generations, but a place of nurture and growth and loving care and understanding. Psychological weights can entangle us all, we are all affected at one time or another, in one way or another and we all need to improve our own behaviour patterns to improve the effectiveness of our gifts for Him.

CONCLUSION:

Now Jacob had a huge support group to help him move down to Egypt. There must have been an enormous amount of love and care, and with the forgiveness, came renewed vigour to do things better, to support one another, and, hopefully, to walk with God. The children of Israel were about to begin their first march, and so the preparation began.

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Section 1 - Jacob and Joseph - The Patriach and the Prime Minister

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CHAPTER 1 - JACOB IS CARRIED INTO EGYPT

CHAPTER 2 - THE GREAT REUNION

CHAPTER 3 - JACOB'S MEETING WITH PHARAOH

CHAPTER 4 - JOSEPH - A POWERFUL AND MIGHTY RULER

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CHAPTER 6 - PREPARATION FOR THE GREAT TREK OUT OF ISRAEL

CHAPTER 7 - THE BLESSINGS OF JACOB ON HIS SONS

CHAPTER 8 - DEATH

CHAPTER 9 - FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND THE FUNERAL

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Jacob and Joseph are at last reunited in Egypt, but the family is far away from the Land of Promise. They will remain here for 215 years. Joseph introduces his family to Jacob and the joy for these two is immense, and that covers all the sorrow. God has blessed it all.

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CHAPTER 1

JACOB IS CARRIED INTO EGYPT

"... and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him", Genesis 46:5.

FOCUS:

The family tomb of Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebekah, had been bought by Abraham at the death of Sarah, and was the only piece of real estate that Jacob owned - a field and a cave, and perhaps some land at Shechem. He would leave that and also his dearly loved Rachel in the earth near Ephrath for what - the tombs of Egypt, the Land of Tombs, ***Genesis 46:1-27.***

1. WHY EGYPT?

Ringing in Jacob's ears, as they packed up, would be the old slavery promise to Abraham of *Genesis 15:13.* It seems unreasonable to Jacob to go to Egypt, if that is how they were going to end up, but he had the evidence of the wagons, and the call of his son beckoning. There were sacred places here in Canaan that Jacob would mourn, but with much consideration and anguish of soul, Jacob made the decision to go to his son in Egypt, if that is indeed what God now wanted him to do. So with the seventy souls, he turned his back, ***Genesis 46,*** and went down into the Land of Mud.

2. THE WONDROUS PROCESSION BEGINS

The venerable Jacob may have been carried in an Egyptian litter, used for solemn service (like the upper classes in Egypt). They had a woven reed back rest, the sides were adorned with fine

markings and rich hangings with bronze carrying poles. It could be carried by boys, or on the backs of animals with cross poles. The words "*take your father*", or "*get your father*", may imply that Jacob was to be carried to Egypt. The Egyptian wagons (used in the flat country in Egypt) may not have been comfortable transport in Canaan. However, in *Genesis 45:5* Jacob is "*carried*" by his sons into Egypt in the wagons.

This procession impressed, as Pharaoh surely meant it to, all the people of Canaan, especially the families of those left behinds who mourned the loss of their daughters and grandchildren. Still who would deny such a grand opportunity, and with tears and crying they waved away their loved ones into the Land of Mud.

3. WHERE IS GOD IN ALL THIS?

Jacob determines to consult God before finally taking such an important step, and travels to Beersheba, to speak with Him. He has already packed up and the caravan is on the road. He has already agreed to go to Egypt, but there was still time to change his mind. It appears to Jacob, forcibly now, that it would be unthinkable to go without consulting God, for it might seem that he was weary of waiting for God to fulfil His promises, or that he was weary of his discouragements. He, now like Abraham in the matter of son dispossession, would have rather died without seeing Joseph, than see him without the warrant of God, whom he loved more than anyone, or anything. A good conscience towards God was too important to him now.

Here Abraham had planted a grove and called on God *(Genesis 33)*. From here it was that Jacob had left the family to go to Haran *(Genesis 28:10)*. Here the King of Gerar, and his captain, confessed that Isaac was blessed of the Lord and felt that it would be dangerous to be an enemy of one so favoured by God *(Genesis 26: 26-31)*.

This significant spot lay on the route from Hebron to Egypt, and Jacob did not take his family there because they had left Hebron, but because he wanted them to witness the solemn service that he would perform to God. He was now a seasoned old man, and wisdom now lay embedded in his character. He wanted his family to see the Godly drive he had. They could have gone on ahead, but he wanted them to see that he was not ashamed, nor afraid that his religion was different from what went on round about the family. It was not to show his good works, not boasting, but to shine his light, to witness to YHWH's almighty name and purpose and glory. It was truly a mission statement, for there were Egyptians there to help with the wagons, and the people who lived round about curiously watching this great procession, and as well his own family who needed so urgently to remember the mission mandate. He was now emboldened about God, he had learned some very hard lessons, but now he was ready to walk with God.

It was now imperative for Jacob to know if God would go with him to Egypt, so he waited for God to speak. And He did speak once more to Jacob "*in visions in the night*". It is also imperative for us "*to know*" that God is with us in the big decisions in *our* lives. Not only do we accept the big decisions that God helps us make, for comfort or ease, but because God is there, as well. It is all of no use if God is not there.

The journey seemed such an easy thing to accomplish, with the transport standing ready, and all the packing done, but with cool deliberation, Jacob needed reassurance from God as to the legality of the journey, for the safety of the journey, and for the allegiance to the great King, of whom they had always been afraid. His independent princely Canaan status would not hold a candle to anyone in Egypt. He could not expect to be a lord down there. It was such a dominant international power, with great learning. Maybe he would not have the independence there that

God required for the establishment of His people. There was the matter of Israel's monotheistic lifestyle adapting to an environment of a polytheistic lifestyle, with all the temptations that would bring. It has latterly been noted by scholars that Egypt did develop a religion based on the worship of YHWH, from Shem and Ham. How far along the track that was at the time of Joseph, is a matter still of conjecture. We know of their worship of animals, and how that developed from leaving sacrifices to YHWH, which the animals devoured, and so those animals became substituted for YHWH. The City of Cats, per Bastet, comes to mind with this line of thought.

It is a matter of interest that in the third century AD Christianity was the major religion in Egypt.

1. Well, if Jacob goes with his family there will be no Israelites left in the Promised Land.

2. And him an old man making such a move, so far, at his age.

3. But perhaps he was not now so old, as he had been. Perhaps his attitude was quite different. His pessimism and his cynicism and his depression seem to have lifted,

4. And no wonder, **for God had spoken.**

It seems as if he, Jacob, is to be the instrument to lead the family,

out of the promised land,

into this land of affliction,

not for a visit to see his son,

but a migration for hundreds of years.

It was a pilgrimage,

that he had no desire for,

it was required of him, but he went

because of Joseph's status with Pharaoh,

and God wanted him to go.

"*Didn't He?*. "***Didn't He?***".

And Jacob still has a sliver of uncertainty.

So Jacob, who has not had a (recorded) word from God for many years, throughout all his troubles, came to Beersheba, with all his family, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father, Isaac. Some may think it strange that God sometimes withholds contact, or at other times consoles without measure. We cannot use **our** measuring stick of equality, and it would be unwise to suppose that the ways of God are unequal. We do know that

- God's people are not always equally fit for receiving comfort, nor do they equally need His care in the day of tribulation, nor are they equally entitled to it.

- He has good reasons for distributing His compassion how He wills.

- He is not bound to tell us how He makes His decisions, nor does He often see fit to do so.

4. THE NAMES - JACOB/ISRAEL

God calls Jacob by two names in the one verse, "*Israel*", to remind him of his destiny, and "*Jacob*" to remind him of his roots. God speaks expressively and kindly, like when he called "*Samuel, Samuel*", "*there is something important to be said*". But Samuel *was* listening, "*Here am I*". "*Speak Lord for Thy servant heareth*". And here in Beersheba, God said, "*Jacob, Jacob*", and Jacob said, "*Here am I*".

Jacob, Abraham-like now, would have sacrificed the reunion with his son, if God had asked. Together with a good conscience towards God, self denial was more pleasant now to Jacob, than disobedience. God was his father's Friend and his God, and Jacob would not forsake Him. God knew that, and prefaced His permission with that known honour and trust and fidelity, *(verse 3)*.

And God called to him "*Jacob, Jacob*" and identified Himself. This is the last recorded revelation to Jacob and the last recorded revelation to anyone until the "*burning bush*" to Moses.

Jacob is told to have no fear, and is promised, in *Genesis 46:3*,4,

- Peace in Egypt, with great prosperity.

- A numerous family,

- A return to the Promised Land after a long stay.

(There is nothing here about the pain they will suffer, only reassurance for Jacob)

However, Jacob **must** have been remembering that frightening prophecy, of *Genesis 15:13*, when Abram was told by God, "*Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them: and they shall afflict them* (as slaves) *four hundred years*". Jacob knew now that if one "*went down into the pit of Egypt*", one had "*to come back out of the pit of Egypt*", to be truly the child of God and serve Him. So Jacob will only feel at ease, if he can ensure his bones, and those of his sons, are brought back to be buried in this land.

Probably until now, the patriarchs had thought that the seed would multiply in Canaan, but God can diminish, even extinguish, or increase nations at His pleasure, where ever He desires. A famine, or a flood, or an earthquake, or a fireball, He can use anything to diminish peoples. Perhaps Jacob felt Canaan was so wicked, and after all, perhaps Egypt **might be** a better place for God's people to grow, and it was so, for a time. The more they were oppressed the more they multiplied and grew. But there was the promise of a return. He knew God could accomplish that, and in the meantime here was a promise of the right hand of fellowship with God to hold them in safety.

It was the duty of the nearest blood relative (Gentiles and Jews) to close the eyes of the deceased and so Jacob is also promised **that Joseph will be at his side to close his eyes at his death.** The rest he would leave with God to accomplish.

The fear figure, that had flown in and out of the window, and whose place by the hearth was ever warm in Joseph's absence, flew out again like a departing arrow never to return, ever, ever again, to sit with Jacob. Need and hunger had been removed from his table and his cupboard, and God had at last blessed him in bread and basket **and** with spiritual peace, and Jacob was at last, in Abigail's words, "*bound in the bundle of life with the Lord*", *1 Samuel 25:29*.

Comment:

Only those of us who grow into the twilight years and who are beginning to consider their own death, would appreciate, as Jacob did, such a comforting promise from God. It means that God understands our fear of the unknown in death, when to Him it is only a process. Yet the manner of our lives and our deaths **are** important to Him. He has reminded us that He notices even the falling of every winged creature, for He wants to emphasis how important we are to him.

So Jacob was comforted. It is an implication that Joseph and he would always now be together. In no less way are we supported in the trials of life. This momentous promise for Jacob, is ours too, if we will but see it so. The knowledge of salvation, and the promise of His care, the fellowship of the Father and the Son, is all joy to fill **our** cups, as well. The darkness of solitude, affliction, fear or temptation is all diminished by the light of His promise, but it's often hard for us to see the light, for we are in such darkness. When Jacob saw his son's blood stained coat, he hastily concluded that his son was dead. He did not resign himself to God's providential care to work out the situation for him. He resigned himself to grief, and said "*I will go down to my grave mourning for my son*". That didn't happen. Abraham, himself, would have killed his son for God, believing that God would provide a way. Jacob, at that time, never thought that God could save him from his son's death.

When the consolations of God seem small, or we think them insignificant or insufficient, or not even existing, it may be that God withdraws His undervalued blessing. Then, by withdrawn or diffused blessings, we can see them as valuable after all. We would not wish to be in that situation, for it may have been the situation for Jacob - that is, under valued blessings withdrawn, for a time.

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It is not here suggested that a withdrawn blessing was the underlying factor in the "*death*" of Joseph - it could just have been an accompanying factor.

Consider:

* Was the God loved, developing Joseph the consolation for Jacob at Rachel's death?

* Did Jacob treasure it for its true intrinsic value?

* Is this withdrawn consolation, now restored to Jacob?

* How is this new Joseph now a multi blessing for Jacob?

* How would Jacob now feel about his doubt, and inward looking grief at Joseph "*death*"?

The new discovery of God's grace would be overwhelming.

* How would this affect Jacob and the family?

****

Jacob was learning, as we do, that God leaves clues for us all. Life is like a big treasure hunt, it is not easy, but then it is not without its joys. The joys need searching for, but then, he did not think that any of the maps had pointed to Egypt. He had forgotten the clue of *Genesis 15:13* that had pointed to a "*land of affliction*", though he would have carried with him the trunk that contained the historical toldoths, where it would have been noted.

5. WHAT GOODS DID JACOB TAKE WITH HIM?

Jacob, certainly would have some treasures that he had brought from Haran, God's covenants "written" down, those records of God's dealings with Abraham and Isaac, and records of divine interventions in his own life, the family history of them all, Lot, Ishmael, Esau, written down, **toldoths** they were called. In with these, would have been the priestly garment, handy for his planned pause at Beersheba. Jacob would have felt anxious about this trunk and would have kept it near, and supervised it himself, much as we do our precious documents when we travel.

Jacob had needed support for his heart's desire at this time. He had with him not only his family, but his family treasures, and the toldoths, perhaps some that Abraham had brought from Ur. He may also have had the history clay tablets that had been passed down from Noah to Shem, carefully wrapped in precious silk, and the "*dialogue*" deed document for the Cave of Machpelah, and something to indicate his claim on the piece of land in Shechem, that he later gave to Joseph, so that Joseph could be buried there. Esau had not needed land at the death of his father, Isaac, having bought and established other compounds of his own far away, so the land deeds had remained with Jacob. Esau had probably taken goods as his inheritance. These purchased lands had not been the inheritance that God had promised Abraham and Isaac, for they were only small parcels of inheritances for Jacob and his sons.

Jacob left his worldly goods, the unnecessary possessions in Canaan. However he did take his cattle, which would have included his sheep. He may not have had many animals left, considering the drought, although the careful Laban husbandry, that Jacob had learned from his father, and in Haran, from his father in law, would have served him well, and been used for the maximum benefit, as they were already two years into the famine.

Pharaoh had sent a message that Jacob did not need to bring any of his stuff, but Jacob chose to bring some cattle and goods. Perhaps like Abraham, with the King of Sodom, *Genesis 14:23*, he did not want the King of Egypt to make him rich, so that he may not have too much obligation to him.

It is a wise course, that we be not too independent and mean spirited, nor to snatch everything that is offered, but a provident care of what is our own, may keep us from temptation into contemptible behaviour, either one way or the other. We need to be diligent and careful so as not to be a burden, and share with those who, of necessity, need to be so. It is easier to be creative, and generous if your attitude to having little is not one of resentment. So perhaps Jacob wanted a little independence, so that he could be generous as well, if the need arose.

6. THE FAMILY FIRM - NOW QUITE NUMEROUS

The **inspired** Stephen in *Acts 7:14*, quotes the Septuagint, with seventy five kindred souls coming down into Egypt, rather than the Hebrew text of seventy of *Genesis 46*.

We have two possibilities,

- The Hebrew text has an "*error of transcription*", somewhere between the Septuagint translation of "*75*", about the first century BC, and Jerome's inclusion of "*70*", from the Hebrew text used for the Vulgate, in the 4th century AD (for our *AV Bible*). *(Genesis 43:26*, all the souls were 66, add Jacob and Joseph and his two sons, another 4, makes 70), and

- Some try to reconcile the difference by adding a son and a grandson of Manasseh, and two sons and a grandson of Ephraim, (from an editorial update in *Numbers 26:37*). This alternative is perhaps a tenuous way of reconciling minute difficulties, and *Exodus 1:5* seems to obviate this.

The list of sons (with their sons, though Dan only had one), are listed in order of Jacob's wives, Leah, then Zilpah (Leah's handmaid), then Rachel, then Bilhah, (Rachel's handmaid), not in birth order. Dinah is mentioned, as Leah's daughter, and Serah, (or Sarah), Asher's daughter. There are interesting commutations to be made if one counts up the family that would have gone down. Each son had a household, *verse 18*, 11 households, and Jacob's household, that is, 12 altogether. Er and Onan, Judah's sons had died in Canaan, as noted, and should not be counted. Ephraim and Manasseh were in Egypt with Joseph and should not be counted. Also, note, the women (wives, etc.) don't come into the reckoning of numbers, yet would have to have been reckoned with for food, transport, etc. The Canaanite and purposeful Tamar with Pharez and Zarah, sons of Judah, would count as two of Judah's contingent, because she was not counted. But Dinah **was** counted in, as Jacob's daughter. Jewish tradition represents Shaul as being the son of Dinah by a Canaanitish father, Shechem, adopted by Simeon to save his sister's honour, rather than Simeon's son by a Canaanitish woman, *verse 10*. In either case he was of half Canaanitish blood. Reuben also married a Canaanite and had four sons. So leaving Canaan saved the family from the evil consequences of the growing Canaanitish influence of the grandchildren (no longer "*children*") within the family group. It would be difficult to remove these children from their mothers' cultural heritage, and other family relatives, who lived in Canaan, close by them. Abraham and Isaac had foreseen the grief of these consequences, and circumvented their sons from marrying into the Canaanites. Tamar and Dinah were probably friends, suffering the same deprived circumstance, unless they were bitter enemies, one despising the other, for the trick upon the family honour. Perhaps Tamar still suffered the murderess stigma, even in this family.

The genealogies are very precise (not in spelling) and being preserved would have been useful on the Israelites' return to Canaan many years later. The discrepancies in *Genesis 46*, and *Numbers 26* do not confound us, for they can be explained away as scribal additions for unknown reasons.

Ellicott's commentary has a very interesting genealogical table of the Israelites to help sort out the numbers.

The numbers showed a slow start, with Abraham 160 and Isaac 60, when Jacob was born, but Jacob's children had made up for that, and perhaps that is the valuable tithe that Jacob rendered to God, as he had promised, on his return from Haran. So even with all the terrible dysfunction, there was a meaningful purpose in the very extension of the family. Without the sojourn in Egypt, for nourishment and education, this huge family could never have grown as quickly, or as soundly as it did. It is remarkable that the population of the world has an equal number of men and women, and some point to that as a decisive proof that God rules the world.

The mention of Er and Onan, Judah's lawfully begotten sons, show that even in youth it is not wise to flaunt God's law, for time is not in one's own hands, to do as one would wish. These two sons, then, were not acceptable tithes, or pledges, or blessings for God, and so God discarded them in death before this journey.

The next illegitimate twin sons of Judah have a valued place, which teaches us another lesson, right here, in the beginning of God's loved people. God gives men, even young men, choices, and if they take the wrong path then He will find another way to build His purpose. Birth circumstances, in God's plan, have no relevance, and only concerns the parents, and those who may think ill, or not.

The sons of Jacob, of Leah, where not born in Canaan, and they did not die in this promised land either. While they lived there they were not permanent, in the sense that they lived in tents. They had no claims, and really were itinerant, but still responsible workers, contributing to the economy of the land of Canaan through Jacob's business. Leah herself must have felt a great blessing in the multitude of children of whom she was "*mother*".

All of the sons of the bondwomen were valued as equals with the children of the two wives, and were not cast out, as Hagar and Ishmael were in Abraham's family. It seems the wishes of God had changed on the matter of differences between bond and free peoples. They were valued peoples as were the wives of those sons who married out, and the mixture made these children of Israel a multicultural blend. Perhaps the ideals of separateness were not as important as the family multiplied and were more powerful.

Rachel became the mother of fourteen grand children, and of three tribes of Israel, Judah and then Ephraim and Manasseh, who both replaced Joseph. They were sons of her sorrow, for she never lived to see them. Her son Joseph is enumerated here with the Hebrew family, rather than the Egyptian House into which his two sons were born, which indicates Joseph's predilection for his father's house. Benjamin went down into Egypt with ten sons, still his father's favourite.

It appears that only one daughter, Dinah, and one grand daughter, Serah, (or Sarah), were part of this family to be transported. The lack of females in this family would have tempted the males to find partners among the Canaanites, as some did, but others went to Esau's family, or to the descendants of Abraham, by the children of the concubines. No one went back to Haran as the family had done for two previous generations.

7. THE JOURNEY IS NOW FULL OF HOPE

The land (cave and field and land) would be there on Jacob's return (his bones) and the family's return to dwell there many years hence. As well as the assorted Egyptian wagons, nine ox carts and carrying chariots, some would have preferred to walk as pilgrims did, and with them their animals. There were splay footed camels, bony mules, white and grey asses decorated with glass beads and embroidered saddle cloths. The men wore garments of woven wool - heavy desert cloaks with head cloths held in place by a felt ring on top.

The women wore their hair in black braids, their nails reddened with henna, silver and bronze bracelets on their wrists, their foreheads hung with coins, or ornaments, as some bejewelled eastern ladies do today. They, as well as their infants, were swaddled in soft wrappings, cloaks with braided borders, and with shawls over their heads. The detailed scenes depicted in tombs in Egypt, show the historical events of migration of Semitic peoples, (see the description in *Speaker's Commentary.*)

The women and children were placed in wagons, and so this tiny comment, is seen as heartening, when Canaanitish women were not valued for their nurturing, and wifely roles, but were used for carrying and fetching. But Jacob was now at his best, as far as modelling the true patriarchal role. It will always be found that when true Christianity is best understood, women will be treated with true respect.

Maybe he was tough minded, but tender hearted in persuading all the families to go into Egypt. He had certainly learned that one should never give up on anybody, and so he may have had to do some bargaining to persuade them. His early modelling of the bad may have come into the question, with these grown sons of his said, "*you never did so, when you were our age*". To admit

it would have been generous, for he would rather them think of him as kind and caring and integrous, as he had been in the later part of his life. He was as "*perfect*" as he could be, as his name implied that he should be, but he had striven for excellence, which is a better way. That would be the path to follow. In any case his name was now changed, and the consequences far more reaching.

And we must presume that the sons came willingly with Jacob, to Egypt, with their families, 12 households, many with grown grandsons. The authority seems to be in Jacob's hands, and they are willing to allow the venerable man, to hold the bond between them, and for them to take all the trouble of the great and complicated journey. So the firm was not split up, they just moved the whole firm of **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products** down into Egypt, except for the old equipment, for they would find better stuff down there. That firm, from being nomadic in its beginnings, then became quite sedentary.

And Jacob is not afraid, for God had spoken to him in the visions of the night and the old spiritual presence was with him again. **Bethel, Peniel and now Beersheba were for him all places of eternal hope**. Beersheba gave Jacob peace and transformed him from misery and told him of the ever abiding Presence. So it is now for Jacob till the end of his days. Jacob with his arthritic hip and his ever present limp from the old hip/angel injury to remind him of his nearness to God, moves on, en famille, over to the coast and across the desert to Egypt.

We have traversed this desert now six times since we went with Joseph from Dothan. His great grandfather, Abraham, had traversed it twice. Jacob traversed it once, some have travelled it five times now, and two have travelled it three times. For Jacob it was the first time and his coming out would be in death. The Egyptians called this ancient route between Canaan and Egypt, the **Ways of Horus.**

This was a **desert of sorrow and happiness, disappointment and expectation, anxiety as well, but now, for Jacob, there was trust.**

Besides forts the Egyptians provided cisterns and reservoirs for the much needed water along the way. It seems there might have been a canal, a precursor to the Suez Canal.

There were the signposts, and the desert springs, the spy towers, and the rest places, set up and kept in repair by the businessmen who made it their duty. There were payments to be made and safe crossings conducted until they reached the bronze gates of the fortress, Thel.

8. JACOB PASSES THE KINGS' GATE

We are reassured that there were no hitches here at the stronghold, for not only was this large caravan ushered through, with great pomp, and circumstance, and much bowing, but they travelled in carts from the storehouse of Pharaoh. They had passes, and visas for a short stay, papers with official seals, and passports. It was as if the gates and walls and gratings and towers were invisible. They were invited in, invited to pasture and settle in this now Promised Land, and any difficulties were quickly dealt with. It was, for them, a land of hospitality and comfort and thoughtfulness.

Some may have laughed at the gipsy lot entering in. However, the jealousy thorns would have talked behind hand about the relatives of the upstart, who thought he knew how to mange everything, including the Pharaoh. "*There will be trouble in the end, with this lot, mark our words!*" But God was with them, and that was the important thing in the Land of Mud.

The Jacob people passed through,

across the drawbridge,

with their carts,

and wagons,

and luggage,

and driving their trotting flocks,

and crying babies,

and hungry children,

and scatty teenagers,

and mothers trying to control,

and fathers directing,

and great grandfather

seated upon the best wagon,

and everyone with their eyes

and ears

and noses

wide open at all

the new sights and sounds and smells,

- and they walked

onto the eastern bank of the Nile,

a little north of Memphe,

into the land of Goshen,

Kosen,

Kesem,

Gosem,

Gosen,

(any name is correct).

In Genesis 47:11 it was called **the land of Rameses**, (which it was **later** called, under the name of the then king), or **Pihom,** or **Pithom** *(Exodus 1:11),* **the region of Zoan** *(Psalm 78:12* and *43)***,** or **Tanis**. These latter names are editorial updates by Moses. It was a land of bulrushes, papyrus and shrubs.

CONCLUSION:

Just past the gates of Thel, Jacob was set down, and he sent Judah, now his elected son, leader, on ahead to ask for -

Joseph, ***"The Lord of all Egypt",*** who spoke of ***"All my glory in Egypt".***

CHAPTER 2

THE GREAT REUNION

"*... **and they came into the land of Goshen", Genesis 46:28.***

FOCUS:

Joseph had become the most enthusiastic person he knew, for not only did he want Egypt to be the breadbasket of the world, but he wanted his family there to eat at the table. Thus he as so grateful and excited to hear from Judah that his father awaited him, ***Genesis 46:28-30.***

1. JUDAH TELLS JOSEPH THAT HIS FATHER HAD ARRIVED IN GOSHEN

It was, no doubt, circumspect of Jacob, as he had learned to manage his affairs with discretion, to send his son Judah ahead, to alert the Egyptians of his near approach and arrival. Joseph no doubt was waiting in the vicinity for this great meeting with his father, with his entourage at the ready. He had quietly listened to God's message to him, for the opportunity had knocked softly, amid the evil that befell him, over twenty years ago. Now here he was, listening with a pounding heart, for the news that signalled the end of the evil, and the fruition of the opportunity that God had given him. Now God is saying "*yet*" is "*now*", when for so long Joseph had heard the little tune in his ear, "*not yet*" and "*soon*".

So Joseph hurried, in his chariot, to meet his father, and "*he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while*".

Consider:

* How often in this saga have we wept, too, and here it is again. If it brings tears to our eyes and makes a lump in our throats, how must it have been for Jacob and Joseph?

* The story of Jacob and Joseph can enrich our faith, when we consider the seemingly disconnected and perplexing areas of **our** lives. Is that helpful?

* Should we, at least, sleep in peace, each night as we close our day with God? With much effort, it **is** possible to wake speaking with God, as we left Him in the hour of falling asleep.

* Is it possible for us to be so contented with life that we can die in peace, and have the bitterness and misery of death swallowed up in gratitude and happiness?

* Does our firm and lasting hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, enable us to die not only without terror, but with joy and gladness?

* If it is possible, should we train ourselves in preparation for the moment of death so that we may die in peace?

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2. JACOB IS READY TO DIE

Jacob/Israel was now ready to die - the evidence of his eyes assured him that Joseph lived, *Genesis 46:30*, "*Let me die in peace*", that is, on the spot. It was a wonderfully fitting thing to say. He knew from God's promise that Joseph would close his eyes at his death, *Genesis 46:4*. So perhaps he thought it would be "*now*". He did not know of the seventeen years of pause in Egypt.

Jacob saw Joseph's eyes filled with tears, Rachel's eyes, really, and the tears rolling down Rachel's cheeks. Here she was again standing before him. It often is uncanny that some people look so like their relations, and we give a start to see a long lost loved one again, as Jacob did at this time. Jacob would have remembered with love and regret the eyes that he had last seen, just prior to the birth of Benjamin.

"*This man is not my young son*", and Jacob would purse his lips and steel his head, trying to prevent the images that came flying into his brain. We always think of people, how they were when we last saw them, it is impossible to age a person in our mind's eye, though a computer can do it. He must have felt that he could hardly trust himself, his eyes, his feelings, and his stopped heart, with his emotions all in his mouth. His own crumpled and tearful stare, was not lost on Joseph, whose heart had stopped also. The dried up juice of lost son and lost father was now hydrated again. This old and stately man comes to the cutting edge, not with cap in hand, asking for asylum from the coming famine, but answering a request from this son, "*come, live with me here in Egypt*", with the son, the mighty oak, beneath whose branches lay the comforting and secure shade for the future famine. He it is who will provide a sort of asylum, but Jacob does not think of it that way, and wisely Joseph does not press the point.

So, both of them, on the edge of this new family saga, clasp one another, with tears rolling down their cheeks. These tears are the first splashes of joy for a very long time, and are mingling on the pressed cheeks. At last we can savour joy as well for them, and our tears well up in happiness.

This has been such a momentous reunion between father and lost son that it stands out as unique in *Scripture*. There are others that we can compare to this, like Jacob and Esau, or those who went back to rebuild the Temple under Nehemiah, the Prodigal Son, and others. But the greatest reunion of all will be the reunion of the saints when our Lord Jesus Christ returns to set up his Kingdom on earth, and those, who are resurrected, will recognise Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. *1 Thessalonians 4:13-18,* tell us about the trump of God that will raise the dead, and together with them, we which are alive, will meet the Lord and will always be there with him - the great reunion.

It will not matter then, about the way we were, as we, Jacob like, remember and think about our deceits,

the twisted occasions,

and the evil thereof,

our failings,

and our faithlessness

and our distrustings,

but what will matter is the way we **grew,** and the way we **are** at the great reunion. Not where we have come from, but where we are now, and where we are now going.

3. BOWING AND INTRODUCTIONS ONCE MORE

But there was the family to be introduced and Jacob was anxious that the family would successfully blend into Egypt. So he and Joseph sat in the doorway of the beautiful refreshment tent that Joseph had prepared for them, and as the family passed by, Jacob introduced them all. He recollected another occasion when he had introduced his family. He was much younger then. He first introduced his family to his brother Esau - anxiety was present then too, and much bowing, seven times did Jacob bow to Esau. Jacob's ten eldest sons had witnessed that reunion, and now it repeats itself, but their young sibling is the revered one. And it is another bowing down to Joseph occasion, this time many more than eleven sheaves. Now there were, as well, grandchildren from Shechem, Moab, Midian and all round about Canaan. But, of course, it was the sheaves, and the sun and the moon and the eleven stars, that did the bowing down, just as the double dream had said they would. The beautiful "*Namaste*", or doubled handed clasp salutation greeting, that we still see in India today, would have been in use here - "*Greetings of love and respect*".

Joseph, 39 years old now, of course, needed to introduce the daughter of the priest of On, his wife, and his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. These two sons are the oak seedlings struggling to flourish in the shadow of the mighty oak, and, as we hear so much of them later, we know that they did survive their introduction and integration into this family of Israelites. Jacob would be justly proud of these two previously unknown and bilingual grandchildren, related to Abraham.

Tamar, tall and dark, would have looked at the blessing dispenser, glittering in the sun, and thought behind her suppliant hands, "*I am in the line of descent, no matter how much a friend of Pharaoh you are*".

Consider:

* Was Tamar anxious for Judah and her sons that this lost, now found son, and his two sons, would supplant her children?

* Would Judah now be in the shadows, when he only so recently had become the blessed prominent one, on whom Jacob relied and the one who had so recently redeemed his other brother from this Land of Mud ?

* Are there more shafts of pain for Tamar, or will she see some flashes of joy now as well?

****

Jacob was content with this Joseph, "*resurrected*" sacrifice, Isaac like, son of his, and drew his eleven other sons about him to hear the instructions of Joseph, for their existence in Goshen.

Joseph was the indisputable leader now, he provided a mantle of safety for his family with the panoply of state, and they were all content.

4. THE GOSHEN HOME

Joseph explains about the life they will lead in Goshen and what they are to say to Pharaoh when they come before him.

He will ask questions about their trade and they are to say that they are *"keepers of livestock"* as the word *"shepherd"* was an abomination to the Egyptians - *"for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians"* is probably a narrator's comment, *Genesis 46:34*.

Moses, in recording this story, would have thought that the Hyksos kings might have appreciated the shepherds, even sympathised with them. They might have even preferred them to the contentious Egyptians, who did not appreciate shepherds. The shepherds, unshaven and ill dressed peasants, looked after the Egyptian sheep herds and Goshen provided a buffer zone for marauders from the east. The shepherds were nomadic and not usually property owners. It was best to keep them and their wandering herds away from the landowners and agriculturalists in the south. Wanderers, and wandering animals, destroyed property, and the Egyptians disliked that. They were not thought of as scrupulous, but rather as rough and rude, and not educated.

Existing monuments indicate the southern Egyptian contempt for shepherds. They are depicted as wearing poor quality wool clothes. The Egyptians considered themselves noble born, and the shepherds as barbarous and despicable.

A big firm they were, **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products,** and certainly the land of Goshen suited that. In fact they became **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds and Pastoralists**, with sheep and cattle, as the firm grew and prospered and their life was more settled and they could develop pasture lands. Perhaps the firm was now **Israel and Sons**.

1. However, for the Israelites, Goshen, on the far north of Egypt was the very best place to be, for God had promised that they would increase in number, "*with great substance*", *Genesis 15:14*. There was **ample room here for expansion,** and so they did, with the help of those they proselytised. They multiplied out of sight, out of mind, until they were too numerous to ignore, for they were no longer "*out of sight*" of the Egyptians, and became an itch on their minds.

2. If they continued the established practice of **offering animal sacrifices,** they would not here, so far north, offend the animal worshippers in Egypt. This sacrificing of animals must have been a continual source of complaint by the Egyptians.

3. The pastureland was good and became better, for it was "*the abode of happiness*", the best of all the land under Rameses. They could build huts but Joseph exhorted them to live like they did in Canaan. They could easily **trade** at nearby per Sopd and per Bastet, whatever Jacob might think of the wicked city of cats.

4. But they could also trade with those coming down into Egypt from other lands.

5. Joseph knew that God wanted to keep his people isolated lest they lose their identity. A **separate community** was essential. Goshen suited that ideal.

6. For **health reasons**, for the sake of the continuation of Israel, isolation would also prove to be a good thing.

7. Joseph might also have been worried that a Pharaoh would arise who knew him not. They would therefore need to be in the very best place, for a **quick escape** back to Abraham's Promised Land. Goshen suited that as well.

Also, it was an advantage that the Pharaoh who knew Joseph did not regard the Israelites and their possessions, as his own. We know from ample evidence, that a later Pharaoh did regard them all, and all that they had, **as his own**.

They were, until now, nomads, but with this settled existence for so long, they became agriculturalists, that is "*diggers of the earth*", though still of tenuous existence in a land not their own, and of low estate, and despised by the upper classes of Egypt.

This was the beginning of the tenuous possession of land and property that has bedevilled the Jews over the centuries. They were to be God's pilgrims until Abraham promises from God were fulfilled, when He would take them back to Canaan, that is not landowners, but tenuous.

5. THE ISRAELITES AS TENUOUS PILGRIMS IN THIS LAND

So they were to be as tenuous in Egypt as they were in Canaan.

Comment:

Even when they were forced out of Goshen and near to entering the Promised Land, *Numbers 11:5*, they hankered after the Egyptian "*fish, the cucumbers, the melons and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick*", and from then on down in history their land tenure, or their business interests have caused them to avoid the hooks that were seeking their jaws. Those hooks did eventually drag them back to God's Promised Land, where they remain still in their denial of Him, not a living witness, but a mute witness, to His glory and His name, and to His purpose. Even in their dispersions, all over the world, say in places like China, they could have witnessed to God's purpose, and fulfilled the mission mandate given to Abraham, but they failed in that also, and so God later activated Christian missionaries to preach in His name. At first, these missionaries, under William Carey in the 18th century, suffered great cost, for of these, mainly college educated young people, one of every two died, of hundreds who went "*out*", in these foreign parts, within two years. But still they persisted, so that today most of these outposts have now heard God's Word. In two decades in 1775, 19 out of 20 missionaries who went into Africa did not survive more than two years. Now there are very few world languages remaining to be researched, so that a *Bible* can be produced in the indigenous tongue. God is using many of His faithful ones to mission mandate the whole world. Some believe that, when that target is reached, *Matthew 28:19* and *20,* our Lord Jesus Christ will, at last, return.

It is interesting to note that the missionaries found tiny pockets of faith, in places like India and China, where God had called men to His name, and they had responded without a preacher (as recorded by William Carey). How glad these faithful ones were to have a preacher, when they had felt alone for almost two millennia. Remember China and India had been populated from the time before Abraham.

"*Why did you not come before*", the believers in China asked, when the missionaries arrived, "*for it is 1700 years since you first found the Christ one?*"

We, also, should be like wise and tenuous pilgrims, and cannot, should not, really own anything. It is all God's treasure. His land is ours only to "*rent*", and bad tenants we have been to so damage the earth. The Jews, like us, have found this principle hard to understand, but their continuous history, when their stability and security has been destroyed, and they have been uprooted and displaced, has not taught them to rely on God. They mostly find it difficult to understand that Israel is His land, until He gives it to those who recognise His son. So, in their unbelief they call it their own, and continue in their sinful disregard for Him, evicting others out of His land.

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6. JOSEPH'S RESPONSIBILITIES

This new situation was not without its difficulties, with one huge family setting up house in this new and different land. The responsibility for Joseph was enormous, for not only did he have the

whole of the population of Egypt to feed, but, as well, the responsibility of his newly settling huge family. Joseph nourished them all, *verse 12*. There were disadvantages, but all in all, it was a wonderful provision. Ah, serendipity, Jacob's joyful resignation, at last, a peaceful life.

So, Joseph arrayed in all his worldly splendour, with his neck ornaments like a rainbow, and his beautiful gown like the brightness of heaven, climbed into his chariot, pulled by prancing steeds in their feather decorated harness. With a glitter and flash, and a shimmer of colour, Joseph raced away with the runners in front and beside the chariot, "*Abrek*", "*Abrek*", and his fan bearers behind. He raced away to see Pharaoh to fix it all up for his family. Nepotism it was, for all to see, because everyone knew. Still he was in a good position to dispense favours. He need not have asked Pharaoh, but like the good employee that he was, he did.

CONCLUSION:

Jealousy - we hope it did not its head again, we hope it was equanimity all around. There may be some in this family who still feel disaffected, like Tamar. She is mindful of her ill gotten sons, and her expectations might have been dashed with the new family relationship with this favourite son, and obviously superior person, Joseph, and his family.

CHAPTER 3

JACOB'S MEETING WITH PHARAOH

"***And Jacob blessed Pharaoh", Genesis 47:10.***

FOCUS:

Pharaoh, in the course of time, came down to where Joseph's family were. This meeting is described in ***Genesis 46:31-34, 47:1-12***.

1. JOSEPH INTRODUCES HIS FAMILY TO PHARAOH

The presence of Asiatics in Egypt has been well documented by archaeological work in the Nile Delta, especially in recent excavations at Tell el Maskhuta and Tell ed-Dab'a, where a 3,200 year old panel has been found. As usual, the people are all in profile. Some of these peoples may have chosen to join Jacob's tribe here, and maybe accepting circumcision, if they were not already by their own rites, would have become proselytes and counted as true Israelites, thus swelling the numbers, to help a necessary revolt, later on in history.

The five brothers who were to meet Pharaoh, were probably chosen by Joseph, but we are left to wonder which ones, perhaps the five oldest, all of them Leah's sons, though she bore him six sons altogether.

In order to heighten the festal presentation occasion, the five brethren were presented to Pharaoh before Jacob was. This would probably have been the first time any of them had appeared before such a personage.

The struggle for precedence is always present among groups of people, and power mostly rears its ugly head, but perhaps there was no strutting for prominence here, as they really felt that they were under Joseph's authority in this place. For ceremonial occasions best is always last. Always the true honour goes to the last, who is best presented, so Jacob was willingly given best/last place.

Besides, Jacob's sons had certain business matters to discuss and settle, while the presentation of Jacob was a graceful formality. So they went first. They had to ask for the land of Goshen. It was a courtesy, even though they knew it was theirs. Land in Egypt was hereditarily passed on, so it was fortuitous that Pharaoh owned Goshen.

Pharaoh was stumped for something to say to Jacob, yet the discussion with Jacob's sons was easier, having been much better planned and with more sense, being arranged beforehand by Pharaoh's minister, as is usual, even now, in matters of state.

2. JACOB'S SONS BEFORE PHARAOH

These sons of Jacob were ushered in before Pharaoh's presence and before Joseph who stood beside him. They duly brought their foreheads into contact with the pavement of the hall - another bowing down - they must have known all the protocol by now, and were bowing down automatically. They mumbled an adulation that was appropriate, having been drilled by Joseph on what to say.

Our curiosity for this utterance is dulled by the fact it may be better, for us that we don't know. In any case, it would be an introductory flourish in an unknown tongue, and Pharaoh would have answered, that he was glad to welcome before his throne, the relations of this (his) faithful man of gold who feeds the world.

"*What is your occupation?*" Sure enough, Pharaoh enquires of them, as Joseph had predicted.

They forgot what they had to say about "*livestock keepers*", and they said that they were *"shepherds*", *verse 3*. Jacob, standing by, yet flexible, allowed them their individuality. Maybe it didn't matter too much after all, or perhaps this a trivial, or unreal point, and just a mix up in translation between *Genesis 46:34* and *47:3*. It is not mentioned in any of many consulted commentaries, but it is noted by *Charles Swindoll*, in "*Joseph*". Not only were they explicit about their occupation, but they also said that they had only come temporarily, to "*sojourn*", and they asked for a short stay.

Joseph had already asked them to speak carefully and in the face of Egypt's race prejudice, *Genesis 46:34*, but they answered with dignity that they "*were shepherds*". It is not clear whether there was a real abhorrence to shepherds, because of some historical circumstance, say with an invading army, or whether it was just a self perpetuating class distinction.

Not only were they shepherds, but as well their father was a Syrian Bedouin chief. They were brawny cattle dealers with no settled dwelling place. They lived in tents and would have been despised by the lofty Egyptians. Pharaoh would probably understand their discomfort at stating this, if he was not pure Egyptian himself - being one of the Hyksos. They added that their family had ever been occupied as animal pastoralists, and they understood every sort of cattle breeding. **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds, Sheep and Sheep Products**, a big family firm they had been, but they did not boast here, they had suffered enough humility in Egypt, not to know how to behave. They had come from Canaan where there was a famine because of the drought; there was no food for their flocks, or themselves. Their request was that they might dwell in the land of Goshen, where they had halted and pitched their tents. It was to be a sojourn, until the famine was over, not forever. Little did they know.

If they sensed any distaste that the Egyptians felt for them, they would have been pleased with the welcoming speech of Pharaoh, reinforced with a request that Pharaoh's own flocks be cared

for by any enterprising Israelite, if that could be arranged. This Pharaoh had broken the yoke of the petty sovereigns and so the lords, the priests, embalmers, and the magicians had reduced powers. With this circumstance Pharaoh's own power had increased, as had Joseph's power. They had brought large numbers of people near the food reserves, and the people waited patiently in servitude for the end of the famine to get Pharaoh's seed for the next crop to be produced on Pharaoh's land. So the tax would continue after the drought broke. It was a firm control measure for the Egyptian subjects. Ancient documents supporting these new arrangements are now available.

Some people are critical of Joseph, that he did not seek high office for his brothers, at least those who were capable, such as Judah, but surely this was the best way to keep them segregated, and established in their worship, away from the gods of Egypt.

It is interesting to note that Pharaoh did not give partial benefit to any of the sons, who he may have thought more able than others. For Joseph's sake, he remained impartial, and sought no benefit for himself. A good Pharaoh, he was, under God's hand, at this time.

3. JACOB'S PRESENTATION

Then it was time for the very old and feeble father to meet this young and grateful boy, appointed heir to this momentous crown, striving to distil justice and equity within a religious ambience. They were both dreamers of dreams - and Joseph too. Not the Martin Luther King sort of dream - "*I have a dream*" - in the sense of a great desire, but sleep dreams, all Heaven sent.

Their dreams were sent by God and needed interpretation. Jacob looked at the young man sitting beneath the brocaded baldachin and blessed him. He would have stretched out his right hand to Pharaoh (not both, as when he spoke to God) and Pharaoh would have been impressed with this wise, experienced and fatherly old man, who under God's grace at this time, and in this position, was a worthy of old, and also worthy of his (Pharaoh's) favour.

"*May the Lord bless you, King over Egypt*" - a blessing for Pharaoh from Jacob. This Hebrew salutation always conveyed a divine intent and prayer, but we need not be concerned, Jacob's life was full with the Lord by this stage, and he would think nothing of blessing Pharaoh for caring for his son. In fact he blessed Pharaoh twice, also at the conclusion of his audience.

Pharaoh could only ask,

"*How old are you little grandfather?*"

It may have been useful for Pharaoh to know Jacob's age, or it may have been only a courtesy question, to allow Jacob to verify his veneration, with even the king. Jacob was 130 years old. Pharaoh was impressed, for the Egyptian limit was 120 years old.

This pastoral chieftain from another age and culture, solemnly and courageously replied, about his pilgrimage,

"*One hundred and thirty years - few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the years of my fathers in the day of their pilgrimage*".

Pharaoh's question had given Jacob a chance to answer solemnly, stating the positives/negatives, the verticals/horizontals, the blessings/cursings in a measured speech, like the prophet he was. He forth told of his days, and his heritage, and clothed himself with an

awesome veneer, so that Pharaoh was melancholic, remembering his own father and his destiny, which predisposed him to die young. He'd probably sensitised himself to that.

So Jacob's great age probably impressed Pharaoh. Jacob sees his life, not as brilliant and successfully victorious, but he sees his deceptions, to secure what he believed to be rightly his. He sees pilgrimage, where verdure is scarce, and desert sand hardships are aplenty - few and evil.

The Jews speak about the nine afflictions of Jacob:

***1*. Persecution by Esau,**

***2*. Injustice of Laban,**

***3*. Injury result of the wrestling incident,**

***4*. Victimisation of Dinah,**

***5*. Loss of Rachel,**

***6*. Incest of Reuben,**

***7*. Loss of Joseph,**

***8*. Simeon's imprisonment,**

***9*. Benjamin in Egypt.**

It was a speech of an old man

in the manner of the Hebrew poet

that he was,

and there was bound to be more added,

more of the blessings,

and more of the cursings,

more of the verticals,

and more of the horizontals,

more of those remaining,

and more of those rejected,

more of that which was left behind,

and more of those who were left behind,

more of those loved,

and those lost,

and those now found,

- even if not understood,

or audible to the king,

Jacob could hardly have contained himself, though Joseph stood by to prompt, or shush. Pharaoh, however, behaved with great reverence and compliance, even though an interpreter would have been necessary, and misunderstandings could easily have occurred. Jacob did not give ground to the regal presence, nor was he compromising his heritage at this majestic and formal occasion.

Consider:

Courage is not the absence of fear, but the concealing of it -

* So was Jacob speaking out like the elderly often do?

* The young and fearful need courage - not the old. Why?

* The young mostly have the knack of concealing fear, why do we need to conceal fear?

Jacob blessed Pharaoh again, and with his integrity intact walked out. His labouring arthritic gait would have reminded him of his angel's presence for this great occasion as well (for he did not, physically, let go, on that other occasion either).

* Whose angel was present now, Jacob's or Joseph's?

* Maybe the angel was one and the same?

And so it was now, that God's presence was with Jacob, and God cared for him in Egypt.

****

So Goshen it was (it still is the most fertile and productive part of Egypt, and it still is the gateway from the north east/west). Here was the separation for Israel, and the room to multiply, which had hitherto been denied them. Canaan could not/did not give them enough room for their (God's) needs. Interestingly, the updated name "*Rameses*" is in *Genesis 47:11*. Yet it was not Rameses till much later. This is an editorial update by Moses, not the place name that Jacob and Joseph knew. We don't know Moses' reason for doing this. Nor do we know what place name Jacob and Joseph and Pharaoh used.

4. JACOB'S AFFLICTIONS

The nine afflictions of Jacob are described here in more detail. He regarded them as woes, and felt he had more than his share. Perhaps he was right.

1. Jacob's youth time with Isaac and Rebekah haunted him, as he remembered his disagreement with his twin **Esau**, and the ensuing murder intent. He felt **persecuted** then, and the persecutions of him would continue through his life.

2. If Jacob "*gained wealth in Haran*" it had been by great industry and personal toil, aggravated by **Laban's injustice**.

3. On his return journey, there was the **double terror** of Laban's pursuit behind**,** and Esau's anticipated menacing attitude in front. God had reassured him from his terror, but as a consequence of meeting God "*face to face*" he lay ill at Succoth, for a time, a waiting time, until time healed his **sprained hip injury**, or at least until he could walk again.

4. His entry into the Promised Land had been made miserable by his **victimised** daughter, **Dinah's dishonour**, **and** the fierce **conduct of his sons**

5. When his home was in sight he **lost** his beloved **Rachel**. **Death's sting** was upon him now, as well as dishonour.

6. **Reuben's incest** had **insulted** him - laying with his father's concubine - and together with the dishonour and the sting and the suspected deceit, he felt **mocked** by all around him, **despised** and **depressed** and **quite apart from God.**

7 He was compelled to remain a distance from his father because Isaac was chief and paramount, but then the ten long years between Isaac's death and the descent into Egypt had been years of mourning for Rachel, and then for Isaac, but particularly for **Joseph**, **with a suspected deceit clothed, in another sting of death.**

8. Then **Simeon** was not, sent to the Land of Mud for food, and kept there, **imprisoned**, a hostage, one of the sons of the promise, a hostage in Egypt, he was **affronted** that the integrity of his whole family, was so doubted by the Prince of Egypt.

9. and then **Benjamin** was not, **taken to Egypt** by his brothers for food and to release Simeon, **all of them gone, nothing for him left**, no sons of Leah, and none of Rachel, either.

Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe!

These are nine afflictions, or woes.

All this had made his days evil.

The days were few only in comparison with those of his father and grandfather.

"***The continuity of faith at the end of his life did not bring chaos or uncertainly or insecurity, as his lack of it had done when he faltered. It now brought composure in truth and 17 years of good - (as far as we know)".*** So *Ellicott* sums up Jacob's evil days, and their far reaching effect on his relationship to God in faith.

5. JACOB'S BLESSINGS

"*And mine has been the fate of those,*

... To whom the good earth and air

... Are banned and barr'd

- forbidden fare".

This Cain like depression that exists in the poem of *Byron*, "*The Prisoner of Chillon*", directed elsewhere, would have been appropriate for Jacob till now, but for him, now in Egypt, it seemed he'd turned the corner and found, not forbidden fare, but blessings in abundance - in the land of Mud and Death.

"*Dear mother earth, who day by day*

Uunfoldest blessings on our way,

The flowers and fruit that in thee grow,

Let them His glory also show:

O praise Him, Alleluia".

These are the words of a twelfth century hymn.

The hymn talks of all God's blessings and the words repeat again the blessings that came to Joseph, and now to his father Jacob and family in this land of Goshen, even abundant material blessings as well, for the years of famine and consequential worry had taken their toll, but the famine effects were now a thing of the past.

The angels guarding Jacob and his family, whom he had seen infrequently in his life, had always been with him. Some, who deny our angelic access, might feel that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had an advantage over us with angelic communication and instruction. We really need not feel so deprived. We should think more about the angels who watch (over) us - God's representatives, all seeing. Then the thought of our own individual "*angel*" might temper our behaviour.

The angels of the Lord had encamped around Jacob, for he did fear the Lord *(Psalm 34:7)*. Guarding and guiding angels are not only for "*little ones*" as in *Matthew 18:10,* but for us all.

Those angels, that appeared

- Unto **Abraham** at the great tree of Moreh, and on the great plains of Mamre,

- To **Isaac,** to tell him not to go down into Egypt when he dwelt at Gerar,

- And to **Jacob**, at Bethel climbing up and down on the dream ladder, at the Jabbok, at Bethel again, and at Beersheba, had guarded him till now.

David's *Psalm 28* could have been Jacob's cry for mercy and deliverance, for God did save and bless his people. "*Be not silent to me, lest if thou be silent to me, I go down into the pit*". And none of us like the pit.

6. FOOD FOR ALL IN EGYPT

We are glad, that as Dan only had one child, the word "*family*" really means "*household*". The Israelites were then apportioned food, not according to their offspring, but according to their dependents. Paintings in Egyptian tombs, from the second millennium BC, depict leeks and a cos like lettuce in irrigated gardens laid out in chequerboard design, their plants being watered from jars. Grapes and melons are trained over fences nearby. The Israelites missed the great abundance of this land of Egypt, when they left Egypt, and sinned in their longing for it all. But just now, it was all theirs.

It was a great generosity of Pharaoh to give them the fertile Goshen, for if he had given them a less fertile land, he would have received great taxes from this land from others, who he might have overcharged the normal rate, considering there was such abundance. Greater profit would have allowed him to better ingratiate himself with his people. The tax really was no hardship for Jacob and his sons, even with Pharaoh's terms of a fifth part for the famine tax, after seed and cattle had been supplied by the state. Turkey successfully applied the same terms for Palestine, at the turn of the 20th century.

God **did** keep Israel safe and healthy in Goshen. There has been a small pox epidemic noted in the Hittites, in the 14th century BC. The isolated Israelites would have missed out on such plagues, which, decimated and weakened other nations - certainly such plagues would have weakened Canaan's fighting spirit for the incoming Israelites, if God had so ordained it.

Joseph, so long ago, carefree and close by his family, went into the dark time, and then endured an underground period of enclosure. He was numbered among the dead, and unnamed. He now finds once more that he and his family are going ahead, that they are all out of the pit. He is not in Goshen with them, but they are close by again, at last.

This is the song of home - albeit in a strange land. Here is the old patriarchal life - they are all changed and worth knowing. Jacob, now, no longer needs to give special care to Joseph. The brothers had given up their jealousy, and Joseph had his rightful place.

CONCLUSION:

They flew from the famine in panic,

and met their yesterday.

And their yesterday,

became their saviour for to morrow.

Truly,

for their son and brother had made Egypt

the breadbasket of the world!

The arrow of fear flew out the window,

for it had regularly sat at the hearth.

And with fear,

in flew need,

that had silently eaten at the table with them.

Hunger withdrew from the cupboard,

and safety and security and peace came in,

for now they ate at the Egyptian table of plenty.

And at last,

the Canaan dysfunction began to heal.

CHAPTER 4

JOSEPH - A POWERFUL AND MIGHTY RULER

"***And the famine was very sore", Genesis 47:13.***

FOCUS:

There are fourteen verses that deal with the circumstances of the rule of Joseph in ***Genesis 47:13-26,*** and we may here consider some of the Joseph critics.

1. JOSEPH JUSTIFIED, NOT AN EXPLOITER

It has been argued, that Joseph made hard bargains with the Egyptians. Only the priests had a portion of land to live on, and were allowed to live there with state assistance. The priests, fortuitously, were subject to the king, not to Joseph, though Joseph himself, may have been enrolled in their lists as also subject to Pharaoh. Joseph has been reproached for exploitation and harshness, and moral condemnation has been the accusation against him - a harsh judgment. *Thomas Mann* justifies Joseph's position amongst his detractors, on *page 188* of "*Joseph and His Brothers, Joseph the Provider*".

Provider and Lord of Bread,

a sort of Nile Deity,

a preserver, and

a life giver

were his titles.

Joseph operated on two planes balancing between life and death and spheres of influence, betwixt and between the wealthy and the poor, for soon "*there was no bread in the land, for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt, and all the land of Canaan, fainted*", is reported in *Genesis 47:13*. He coolly exploited the wealthy and fed the poor bringing them inside the cities where the grain distribution was keenly supervised. It was a fairness for all. He built up walls as thick as possible to shore up the population against the famine. The hoarded grain in the host of bins that had been built around the cities, was proof of his enlightenment and his wisdom and his foresight, and as Pharaoh's treasury filled he demonstrated shrewdly his commitment and loyalty to Pharaoh. He needed loyalty in return from Pharaoh to succour his family, to "*nourish*" them, *verse 12*. The end justifying the means again, but there is no harm here, and Joseph is careful to measure out evenly and honestly, with God's purpose in mind.

The case is built up. In *Genesis 47:14,* we see that in the course of the lean years, Joseph gathered up all the money in the country to the treasury, then he took the people's cattle in pawn and their lands, finally driving them away from hearth and home, and sending them to work as servants of the state. Sounds harsh, but that's how it is in many states. Famine would be worse, and towards the common good for so many Egyptians and surrounding countries, they needed to work hard, very hard, just to keep their head above the tide of hunger that threatened to engulf them.

In *Genesis 47:17* "*fed*", means "*led*". "*He led them with bread for all their cattle for that year*". Moses means here - "*protect or pasture, gentle care of helpless creatures*". The word must have been deliberately chosen, for it is an odd expression to use. It cannot therefore mean that Joseph is an extortionary, as some would have it. Certainly the big land owners were brought to their knees and were bound by state laws to change their ways. To take their cattle as payment for food may have ensured that **all** of them were brought to their knees, even the rich, as well as the poor. And to remove them to the cities, removed them from what was once theirs, and so reduced their longing for what had been an easy lifestyle, of control of man and beast and land. It also made a ready made labour force for the development of the industries, arts, and any other activities, for which Egypt became famous after the famine. We cannot tell how the poor recovered their position, after the famine, but Joseph would have had that in mind, surely. He knew about the dignity of people, for he learned that in his prison/pit days. The traditional methods and uncompromising ways were thus changed (like the environmental laws change

land and health practices today). There must have been some behind hand laughter among the poor, who had hitherto always seem helpless, as they got poorer, and the rich got richer. At least the irrigation methods of the landowners would have to improve.

Comment:

At Faiyyum, in Egypt there is an oasis. The fertility of this oasis, is a canal which carries water, from the River Nile into the oasis. The name of the canal is Bar Yosef, or Joseph's Canal. It had its origin in the time of the 12th Dynasty or Middle Kingdom, before Christ. It may have been built by Joseph or it may have been named after him, because he was a great reformer. There was already a canal from the Nile to the Red Sea - the precursor to the Suez Canal, as we know it now.

Storage of water problems are ill managed today, in many areas. India is an appalling waster of water, where the poor have a necessity to steal the taps for their value, yet in the great cities, water may be turned on for only a few hours a day, and is, as well, of poor quality. The rich have bores of their own, the poor can hardly afford to buy their water needs, from the water trucks that roam the streets looking for customers. To see the huge population, with the inequity it breeds, is to understand that not much can be solved, without the coming of the Saviour.

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2. TAXES AND REFORM

At the end of the drought with these reforms in Egypt, this state owned land might have been better managed, with a more even distribution, with more responsible landowners.

Some of the landowners had great titles bestowed on them. They were proud and arrogant and ruthless and corrupt. They employed selfish, self interest and injurious land practices, and became thorns in the state crown. Joseph exploited the crisis situation with a ruthless policy of education and remodelling to preserve the land. In our own country, Australia, we see the government trying to introduce management reforms. They also appear, to some, harsh and ruthless, and cause some people anxiety. The huge fines for allowing waste into the drainage systems are now beginning to bite, and the manufacturers are much more careful. $100,000 fine for allowing a Pepsi spill into a drain is too much to contemplate, both in money and reputation, and so responsible waste management practices and care are employed.

"*Joseph made it a law*" - no doubt the law was made by the king, on the advice of his counsellors, but the honour of it goes to Joseph. What a grand story that shows power motivating great goodness. Great leaders provide innovation and mix it with creativity, and use their courage to put up a workable solution. They are often criticised, and in fact that is considered an inescapable by product of good leaders. But dealing with criticism is all part of the policy, and with everything else it leads in the end to the solution. Space to be creative is essential, free from suspicion, and Pharaoh gave Joseph just that.

Joseph nourished his father and his brethren and their households, but never took advantage of the position he held. He had come along way from his Potiphar days, but his integrity was still intact. Joseph had to live with Joseph, but he also had to live with God. He had character, and submitted to authority with loyal accountability. Integrity is tough stuff, it is demonstrated best when no one is about, when there is only you. It is fairness, and wholeness and completeness, nothing to hide, and therefore nothing to fear. It never tries to love God and the world, at the same time, it is never duplicitous. Some people do lose their integrity, and then they compound

the loss, adding to God's diminishing confidence, by thinking that no one knows. Integrous and spiritual people are gems in the crown of God.

There are grace killers, joy killers, and creativity killers, and there are thousands of other killer phrases they use. Innovative ideas, in say, worship, mean leaving the old familiar paths, without disturbing the message, and as hard as it sounds, it is possible. God's creative plans for us included plenty of firsts. In return He wants us to grow past the comfortable rut. He wants us to be concerned with the big picture, not

- how do I make a living? But

- how do I make a life? Not

- how do I spend my time? But

- how will I spend eternity? Not

- how do I get on with this person or that? But

- how can I be a saint?

Joseph's leadership model of integrity and creativity and innovation is there for us. May we follow.

3. A FIFTH PART OF EVERYTHING FOR TAX

Joseph continued the levy of a fifth part, the tax which had amassed the huge store of grain now available for the hungry. The tax was made permanent - however the people were no more slaves than we are. They were not free, as we are not free, and indeed Jesus asks us to pay (to the state what we owe).

To ask for twenty out of a hundred in tax, kept exploitation at bay. Four fifths remained their own, yet in the harsh famine they were kept alive by the state. "*Thou hast saved our lives, let us find grace in the sight of the lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants*" rings down through the centuries as a cry of gratitude, and a model of tax reform. Certainly Joseph's own family in Goshen would have paid the tax, without hardship. Jacob would not have questioned the wise provision of a fifth, but may have criticised its direction when it kept the pagan priests and their temples in order. He would have recognised and understood though, Joseph's allegiance to the state, and to Pharaoh.

To take the landowners off the land, into the cities to be fed, kept in their minds the fact that Pharaoh owned their land now. It had probably come about that the rich had bought, or overtaken all the lands of the poor, in their anxiety to shore up for themselves. When they returned, their inheritance rights and their ability to sell remained the same, but their advantage over the poor, would have been corrected. It would have been useless to give a present of corn to replant, if the lands of the poor no longer existed. It was a unique concept of property rights and one they had to get used to. Today, this method is used by the Grameen Bank, a bank for the poor, in Bangladesh. "*Banking for the Poor*", "*Co operative Banking*", non exploiting banks, non profit making banks are helping those in the huge third world poverty trap. Poor people, women mostly, must buy goods, perhaps on credit, with a small interest, and then pay back as their industry flourishes. Gifts, or donations are unacceptable to both sides, and this proves a much more acceptable method, (to escape the poverty trap).

The people of Egypt, under Joseph's banking system, were pleased with this economic result. It was an astonishing mixture of socialisation and freehold occupancy by the individual.

The Hebrews, for over two centuries, were custodians of Goshen but gladly abandoned it when God beckoned. We need to be ready for the expected beckoning, to abandon all that we have. Surely we feel the same when we say it's all God's land, His treasure, and that we are only it's custodians for the short time we spend on the earth.

4. JUSTIFIED - YES!

All this time, after the famine, and towards restructure and while the economy improved Joseph still governed. Jacob would have noted though that the reform did not extend to the landed possession of the temples. *Verse 22* shows us the initiative of Pharaoh who, in expediency, allowed the priests to remain on the land. Joseph may have felt inclined to raise the temples in favour of his own God - but wisdom prevailed and he allowed the old to continue, rather than unsettle the people and antagonise them towards the inhabitants of Goshen. It's hardly worth discussion that for all this "*end, justified the means*". After all even with Joseph in government, they **were** visitors in the land - and Joseph wanted them welcomed. The gods and their priests had been discredited over the drought and subsequent famine, over the matter of Pharaoh's dreams. They had not predicted the drought, nor prevented it, nor did they have any contingency plan. Neither had Joseph prevented it, but with his contingency wisdom, the wondrous Hebrew had been their saving grace. It would be foolhardy to further press discredit upon the priests in the people's eyes.

All the main points, in the story of this chapter, *Genesis 47,* are confirmed by the ancient historians Herodotus, Diodorus, Stabo, and the monuments, for they "*completely bare out the testimony of the author of Genesis, as to the condition of land tenure, and its origin in an exercise, of the sovereign's authority*", *Speaker's Commentary.*

There had been festering trouble in the south east, even to the torching of some of the Egyptian cities in that area, at this time. Pharaoh's tendency for pacifism had not solved the difficulties with the Bedouins. Some of the eastern and northern provinces were in a state of ferment, because they had heard that Pharaoh had a new chief. The descriptions of the state of affairs had brought disrespect, and so defection, and betrayal were gaining ground. A drought, and its consequential famine, is a good sword to set the people on a different tack, as were property requisition and tax reforms. It all helped to set the gathering frenzy to rest, and that was just what Pharaoh needed and wanted.

5. GOD'S MIRACULOUS PROVISION

God has wondrous ways to subdue nations, that don't call for us to lift a sword for Him. Contrary to some people's expectations, we may never be called upon to "*slash the enemies of the Lord*" in His Name. Non violent He has taught us to be, and be that, we shall be, or displease Him. A lust for power, and confrontation, and violence, will do us no good.

To get grain from Egypt, the Canaanites had eventually to send their youths as hostages. That was a hardship, though better than Joseph's hardship, for Asiatic princes were given care and pensions under Egypt during the famine. Of Milkili, king of the city of Ashdod it was hard that his wife and children were sent to Egypt, but it ensured his family and his progeny lived, and his (hitherto unreliable) love for Pharaoh. In the end they were returned. And that is just what

happens even today when loved ones are wisely sent off in adverse times. Our own country, Australia, has been host to such people.

The expeditious plan of Joseph does not need justifying from any writer. All we need to do is to understand that Joseph was not cruel, but good, and shrewd and skilful and God guided. The people were pleased with the outcome, the justice and generosity and wisdom of Joseph, and the Pharaoh, in consenting and endorsing it all, must have been pleased as well.

What a wonderful Godly servant he was.

***1*. Among the flocks of the Hebrews were the flocks of Pharaoh.**

***2*. That certainly would ensure good supplementary fodder was always at hand.**

***3*. As well, these royal flocks would be of the best stock available in the world.**

***4*. Clever breeding would ensure good (Israelite) stock. Jacob had taught his family the lessons he'd learned from Isaac, and then again what he had learned with bitter experience in Haran.**

***5*. The shepherds of the royal flock would be well fed too, to carry on this royal work every day.**

Interestingly, the Israelites measured time from sunset to sunset (and the Babylonians). The Egyptians measured time from dawn to dawn. We measure ours (with timepieces) from midnight to midnight.

CONCLUSION:

Joseph was a worthy servant of God, but he was also a just and valuable servant of Pharaoh. He fulfilled the promise he made to Pharaoh at the time of his gilding, when Pharaoh put the ring on his finger. He led the great Land of Mud away from the effects of the great drought, and in the great provision for the famine, they not only adequately fed themselves but they became great beneficiaries**,** and a mighty influence, to those nations round about them. For that they will have their reward, *Isaiah 19:18-25***.**

CHAPTER 5

ISRAEL CLOSE TO DEATH

"***And the time drew near that Israel must die; and he called his son Joseph", Genesis 47:29*.**

FOCUS:

It is only death that can arrest the flow of time (apart from when a character is preserved in "*amber*" by the "*left behinds*"). So it is imperative to recognise in our story that, not only is Jacob getting older, but also his sons, ***Genesis 47:27-31*.**

1. WAXING AND WANING IN EGYPT

These sons are not perennially youthful as they sometimes seem to be. They live on unaware of the calamity that is to come upon their people. In the 7th century BC, the depressed prophet Jeremiah sees all the blessings brought to naught, and then only a remnant remains. So many of the prophets speak about the future deliverance from this land of mud into which they have so

comfortably settled. Their own patriarchal fathers, **the first prophets**, including Joseph, knew, and had told them of the coming fruitfulness, in, what was now, the land of Canaan. But they settled in the mud, and were content, until the "*rod of his wrath*" had to be laid upon them, for they were "*the little children*" who kept not "*themselves from idols*". *1 John 5:21* may have been among the last words written in our *Bible*, (for *Biblical* order is not determined by authorship date, but rather by book or letter size). If we think about it, we may find that we may not be much better.

"*Without holiness no one will see the Lord*", *Hebrews 12:14*. They become the anti Christ, and refrain from holy deeds for His sake. We need to make time to be holy. We should recall the words of Jeremiah's lamentation about bitter herbs, teeth broken on the gravel of grief, trampled in the dust, prosperity forgotten and souls downcast - if we avoid holiness - for that was the lot of the Jews who forgot to be holy.

2. JACOB GROWING OLD

Jacob lived another seventeen years nurtured, honoured and cherished by his family. The firm **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds and Pastoralists** prospered and grew. Joseph grew old too (56 now) though his Rachel eyes remained the same (as we know they would, for eyes don't go grey). But the apples of his eyes, his two sons, are not curly headed children at the age of seven or eight at the scene of their blessing, by their ailing grandfather. It is seventeen years later.

The intervening years had not brought Joseph into the family fold. He was not part of the patriarchal family. His regime was rather kyriarchy - master/servant, lord/serfs, ruler/slave. That was the social structure of Egyptian life. For Joseph, now climbing the mountains, from his depth of despair (underground), the splashes of joy would be more commonplace, as he made his frequent visits down to Goshen.

Comment:

We cannot impart to our children more spirituality than we have ourselves, but sometimes life's circumstances endow them with great spirituality. It was so for Joseph.

Conversely when our children take a detour and cause emotional injury (to parents) we must not be immobilised by guilt.

Self pity increases the misery, cursing the darkness. Churning, burning, yearning and suffering do not help us **to adapt and change, to learn and turn.**

The only way, is to light a little candle, and, as you adapt, it will burn brighter. You cannot change some things, but you can learn to adapt to them. That shaft of pain can bend a little with the wind and the bending will soon be acceptable. Then that tiny splash of joy becomes a light, and will change your life, and the lives of all those round you.

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Jacob might have provided a candle light for Joseph "*to come home to*", and a place at the table, whenever he could come. Distance did grow between them but in continuing his work, set apart, lifted up and withdrawn, he was severed from the tribe. They carried on without him. Jacob knew it, and Joseph knew it at the beginning, when they met, each with a retinue behind them - seventy for Jacob (family), maybe seventy for Joseph (officials). There would be mutual reserve for one another's roles, submission and acceptance by both of them. Again we are concerned whether distance encouraged distaste and jealousy to rear its ugly head again. There

would be talk among the family, about their misdeed and, yes, they had prostrated themselves, as the dreamer had predicted they would. But that was a little price to pay - what wonderful security they now had.

There is a lesson here in sticking to one's point of view, even when it has been shown to be untenable. It is a gracious act to recant from a wrong opinion, or point of view, to pursue a different path, saying that "*we will never bow down to you*" or "*the world is flat*", or "*we will never do it that way, while I have breath in my body*", or "*I will never forgive him*" or "*I am right*", despite the evidence. It dispels bitterness and eventual isolation, for that is the path to which insistence can lead. Those who insist that they have never been wrong, can paint themselves into a corner, until there is only one person that they agree with, and their social contact and sharpening of wits is confined to the company of one. So, we really hope that the old equivocations never arose about the former opinions of these brothers.

Rachel was dead, Joseph could not live with the family, Benjamin was no threat, and consequently the blessings were now all inherited mostly by the rejected Leah family. Surely it was all worth this present life.

Indeed it was, for they all thought of their own skins. Their own skins now depended on them changing their opinions. Life is like that - our own point of view is paramount, but we will equivocate for our life's sake.

3. THE CALL OF DEATH

However the call went out to Joseph. "*If I have found favour in thy sight….*" There **is** a distance between father and son. When Joseph came to Jacob, he put his hand under Jacob's lame thigh, where the angel of the Lord had touched him, on that day so long ago, and swore to deal faithfully and truly with Jacob's wish that his body might be taken to Machpelah to rest with his fathers. With Rachel's eyes looking at him, Jacob would be again tempted to be carried to her tomb near Bethlehem. But he does not succumb, and so Machpelah remains the preferred burial place for Jacob.

The luxury of heart and emotion and remembrances (heart strings), gave way to the important destiny/duty of family matters - and Jacob asks for Machpelah. He knows that the angel of death is paused nearby. He now is so very close to God, he worships and waits. Here the translation of the verse, about bedhead or staff is confusing, for the two words are very similar, but for our purposes it is adequate to say that Joseph swore the oath, to keep to Jacob's bequest, and bowed, indicating his intention, leaning upon his staff (of patriarchal authority used for solemn injunctions), and Israel bowed himself before the bedhead, sinking back in relief, content and happy in his son's promise, and giving thanks to God for the peace of his approaching end.

CONCLUSION:

We have just witnessed another scene of pure pathos and great dignity, and for the record in front of us, we are grateful that we can enter into the poignant moment, with the Divine sanctity that surrounds it.

CHAPTER 6

PREPARATION FOR THE GREAT TREK OUT OF EGYPT

"***It came to pass that one told Joseph, 'Behold thy father is sick'", Genesis 48:1*.**

FOCUS:

A little time later Jacob fell ill and Joseph was called to his bedside again***,*** and consequently the blessings of Joseph, and his sons are recounted in ***Genesis 48*.**

1. JOSEPH'S SONS

Joseph took his sons Manasseh and Ephraim. These two boys were the products of the highest culture in the land - manicured, curled, perfumed, with mother of pearl toenails and corseted waists. Coloured ribbons flowed down from their aprons on both sides. They were twenty something, and consumed with melancholy, angst, rage, joy, impetuosity and all the mixed emotions that stand out today amongst our own young people - emotions don't change, remembering how it was, is painful for many of us. They were different from their northerly cousins living in the low lands, yet their maturing emotions gave them trouble as well - like all teenagers down the centuries. It would be interesting to know how their descendants moved back amongst the Israelites in response to that candle light, and became part of the mixed multitude that moved out of Egypt so many years later. Among the best sellers are books that detail to us how people search for their (often unknown) roots and predictions, and are happy to denounce all other faiths to return to what has haunted them. Later on someone in this "*Egyptian*" family **did** feel a need to go back to their roots, for they came out of Egypt, with their relatives.

Well, these two boys stood behind their father in the bouncing car, steadying themselves as they drove the horses north. We can imagine what these immature boys were thinking, when they considered this tribe of relatives so far north - **in Goshen**. We know how immature unappreciative teenage children would tend to think of eccentric relations, with peculiar customs, who live in tenuous circumstances so far away. It may have been some time before they got to prefer them to their royal friends back in On, or No.

Jacob's dim eyes could not see them at first and their presentation to him was solemn.

"*Who are these?*" he said, and immediately began to talk of his experiences at the old Luz, the older name for Bethel, *(Genesis 28:19)*, and the blessings he received there. With the blessings of fruitfulness in mind Jacob turned to Manasseh and Ephraim stating that they were as much part of the blessings as Reuben and Simeon (Jacob elevating them a generation) although they were born in Egypt.

Generations are like steps, some up, some down, but all connected. Now Reuben and Simeon are replaced by Joseph and his sons, because of their sins and thus Joseph receives a double portion confirming his right to be the firstborn. However, we will see, that it is even more than that.

Jacob's lapse into a syllogism about Rachel, indicates again his special love for her, and her grave near Bethlehem. It seems he still entertains the wistful longing for her, and her burial grave place, as we all do over our losses in death, but he still adheres in his mind, to the wisdom of his bones lying in Machpelah.

Perhaps he is anxious that these three, and Benjamin's lot also, would make a little shrine in Bethlehem and he wouldn't want that - he only wants memories of love lost, making his longing wistful, longing for what might have been. We know about "*longing*". Every one of us would have

experienced "*longings*", wishings for someone, or something, or for some change in our circumstance. Wistfulness is not necessarily destructive, only if it becomes overwhelming. "*If only*" can be used positively to reinforce changes in behaviour. If we have "*been unwise*", we can resolve to "*be more wise*", and begin by asking God daily for the "*wise and understanding heart*", which He gave to Solomon, *1 Kings 3:12*, when he implored Him for discernment. Solomon placed the restriction "*for judgement*" on his wisdom, and it may be that the particular wisdom he received did not much extend to all areas of his life, whereas we can ask for a much broader gift of grace.

2. JACOB BLESSES HIS EGYPTIAN GRANDCHILDREN

So Manasseh and Ephraim are brought to him for hugs and kisses. Jacob then proceeds to bless them, and blesses them oppositely to the way Joseph had presented them. "*What!*" Here is another unexpected younger then older blessing. Jacob's right hand did not stretch out to Manasseh, and his left hand stretch out to Ephraim, but he crossed his arms. Joseph tried to correct it, but Jacob insisted, and so blessed the younger Ephraim with his right hand, the first, with the double portion, birthright blessing. There is no howling here from the 56 year old Joseph, like the howling of Esau, at 77 years, when Isaac made the cross over blessing of Jacob. Joseph might have expected it, for Jacob continually uses the name Ephraim first. Ephraim being second born certainly was the one that made Joseph think he was "*multiplying*", for Ephraim's name means "*double fruitfulness*". Joseph would not know the number of his children with only a first born child. One only begins to multiply with subsequent births.

"***Not so, my father, for this Manasseh is the firstborn",***

"***I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall grow and become a people and be great, but truly his younger brother shall be greater and his seed shall become a multitude of nations".***

And so it was - for the Ephraimites were the most powerful tribe in the north, and the title "*Ephraim*" was often used to refer to the northern kingdom as a whole. Ezekiel, in *chapter 37:19*, sees the two sticks Ephraim and Judah joined together, if only they will keep the covenant, but it did not work out as Ezekiel had hoped it would. Here Ezekiel uses the term, "*the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim*". Later the name, Ephraim, is omitted from the *Revelation 7* record of the sealing of the tribes, but Joseph is substituted instead, perhaps to emphasise Joseph's worthiness, rather than Ephraim's, who had defaulted and so provoked God. It is intriguing to consider what Asenath would feel about her sons' inheritance and also how much the boys would understand this event. This intimate occasion between the three generations would give Joseph cause to explain to his sons the import of the blessing. It may have been the beginning of their fuller and more mature understanding.

The boys themselves may not have seen what had happened, as they were bowed, and sitting at Joseph's knees, in the attitude symbolic of adoption. They would have heard Joseph's exclamation though. It would not, in any case, seem too significant to them, for as is the way of youth, historical settings and momentous occasions mean so little, when there is so much they long for in the future. It is age that brings backward looking, and memory, and history to the fore. The cross blessing did mean a lot to Esau, because the twins were much older, and their lives and interests were so different from each other. The jealousy seed had long grown into a strong sapling there, and so flourished into a troublesome plant.

Comment:

The young are so busy with their lives, that there is little time, or inclination for contemplation. It is only the middle aged who looks back in wonder at the opportunities - some lost, some gained, and gaze with gratitude at the armfuls of unexpected life experiences granted to them. It is the old who look back and question, "*Why didn't I show more interest, and ask, and listen, (about my history)?*" But impossible as it is to put wise, history searching heads on young shoulders, we have to be content with what we have got.

In the matter of the culture of the dying it might be more possible to involve the young, thus inuring them to such events as they did in Jacob's death, instead of insulating them from such events, which is what we have been inclined to do.

We have already discussed how Jacob's family history, or toldoth, was being preserved. These boys would have access to that, when they were ready, and so the history did not die with the forebear. To record the history, is a means of the old connecting with the young, even after death has brought about the separation.

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The lame old man, Jacob, twin brother of the hairy, older Esau, was repeating a pattern that his father Isaac had set. Both these blessing givers were blind and feeble, though Isaac lived on much longer. But the later blessing giver could see with great clarity down into the future. The acceptance by Joseph of this act, for what he no doubt thought was God's will, illustrates the fact that Joseph was willing to grant any soothing act of kindness to his father, unlike he had heard of Jacob, with **his** father.

Consider:

* Was the inspiration for the younger older blessing higher than Jacob's (that is God's) inspiration?

* Or was it an elderly person's mistake?

* Did Jacob wish to carry on the family eccentricity?

* To change the traditional method shocked Esau, did it shock Joseph?

* Had Joseph heard of the previous instance?

* What lesson was in it for them?

* For us?

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Comment:

- We can only count our blessings while they are blessings, for they might pass from us, especially if we do not value them.

- Nothing can be sure in our mind until it has come to pass.

- It is challenging to accept God's predilection, not ours.

- We propose, God disposes.

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With the double blessing it seemed Joseph was receiving an acknowledgment of memorable services to his family. This occasion is mentioned in *Hebrews 11*. It is this instance that the writer to the Hebrews recalled and recorded, about this man of faith - Jacob, "*By Faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff*". The longer blessing speech is not mentioned, only this occasion, and it was a little before the death blessing incident. It should be noted that **Joseph therefore received a triple blessing - one son doubly blessed more than the other.** It is a moving acknowledgment also

- That no man can of himself shape his own life,

- That he can ask of God, but it is God who decides.

Jacob sought from God this blessing for Joseph's sons - and God did grant this blessing. He formally received these two Egyptian boys into the family of Israel to share with them, the family blessings. Gentileness (that is, Egyptianness) was not a disqualification, as the Ephesians were later told when the mystery (of gentile acceptability) was explained. Also "*Jesus went no more openly among the Jews but went thence … to a city called Ephraim*", *John 11: 54* - to be with his disciples, when the Jews (led by the high priest, Caiaphas) rejected him.

These two, blessed boys, passed their lives as Egyptian nobility, and they probably had no interest, at this time, in the fiction (to them), that they were the descendants of Jacob and Leah, inheriting the land of promise. Rachel was their grandmother, but somehow their inheritance was through Leah. They might have thought that was "*crazy*", but then again, they might have thought it rather "*cool*". Or maybe they never thought about it much at all, for at 20 something, who thought about all this - how long would it be before they could return to the gazelle hunting, or, ostrich hunting, from which Joseph had diverted them, might be more on their minds.

It would be more correctly their children, or even their grandchildren, (at least some of them), who would change from the Egyptian culture, to the Israelitish way of things, moving eventually to Canaan. This cultural change right now was impossible, when the family of Joseph lived so close to the King's court. However, the blessing was for numerous offspring which would be a great nation, and that God would be with them and eventually take them back into the Land of Canaan. Jacob set Ephraim before Manasseh, for he would become more powerful,

Jacob also told Joseph, he would also return to Canaan, but there are no details about how or when this would happen. As Joseph died in Egypt, it is a prophesy about his bones returning to Canaan. Those bones, preserved as they were, may have been dead in their bound state and uprightly stored coffin, but they became a beacon to light the path back to Canaan, in the dark days that were yet unknown, and lay ahead for these children of Israel.

Now it was done,

a double blessing, (triple really),

and Joseph is assured of the birthright.

Honour indeed, but due honour.

Jacob must have puzzled over Joseph's end, but would no doubt know now, that anything was possible with God in charge.

3. THE RECORD OF JACOB'S DYING REQUEST AND BLESSINGS

The use of writing appears to have been known before any of the books of Moses were written. We are highly entertained and edified by these stories of the venerable patriarchs, but **they left *us* no recorded history.** Perhaps Moses had been told the details of this story, or had the written records of what the patriarchs said, and what God had said to them, (as Job longed for, *Job 19:23-24),* for certainly this story, is mostly the words of Jacob. It is part of his **toldoth**, and if it was written down it would also have been wrapped in precious silk, and carried out of Egypt a long time in the future. This section of *Genesis* is called "*The Book of the Prophecies of Jacob"*. It was the latter days Jacob wished to speak about, relating latter days to the times when Israel went into the Promised Land. His blessings became the prophesied and true history of his children.

4. THE TESTAMENTS OF THE TWELVE PATRIARCH TEXTS

Comment:

In AD 1611, a Church Council decided which books would be included in our Authorised Version of the *Bible*. They included the section of books known as *The Apocrypha*, as well as what we have today. The Archbishop of Canterbury forbade the selling of Bibles without the Apocrypha on penalty of one year's imprisonment, but by 1626 that had lapsed, and from 1644 that section was not to be included in the Church of England services, and was removed from the Protestant *Bible*. The section is still in *The Jerusalem Bible* and other Catholic *Bibles* to this day. There has been a considerable amount of discussion over the centuries, from the second century when men first began to make collections of what they took to be inspired books, and from then different collections were made. It has been a long and tortuous and argumentative path, and the cause of considerable angst, about what did actually maintain the authority of God's *Scripture* alone. Suffice it to say that **we** trust that we have as our text that which adequately tells us what God requires for our salvation and His purpose for His saints. "*The Canon of Scripture*", by *F. F. Bruce*, is a valuable book in the study of how we got our Bible, if we wish to make a detailed examination of the subject.

Now, in a recently published book, compiling the discarded "*Lost Books of the Bible*", there is a section "*The Forgotten books of Eden"*, written in the second century BC. Amongst them is a chapter "*The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*", *pages 224-266,* books written by a rare and gifted Pharisee, recording the history of each of Jacob's sons, as if each of the patriarchs was telling it himself. The stories are unvarnished and include brutally frank admissions of deeds of guilt, as well as goodness. This valuable research also indicates how fervent the Messianic hope and expectation was in the century before our Lord Jesus Christ. It is thought that many of the moral and ethical and spiritual questions that are discussed in the *New Testament*, have been influenced by the records in these books, and that the *Sermon on the Mount*, particularly, has borrowed phrases from these testaments, that is, saying, that the Lord Jesus Christ, or the gospel authors, may have known them well, and that God has allowed them to use the writings, in His inspired word. The influence upon Paul's writing is so intense, that it is thought that he may have carried with him a copy of *The Testaments*. It would not be beyond Paul to quote *The Testaments* as he quotes from secular poetry in his writings.

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5. MOSES' RECORD

It must be said, that Moses entered the prophecies of Jacob into the annals of Israelitish history, before those days were accomplished in the Promised Land, and before the prophecies were fulfilled, for he died before the entering in.

No matter how many handed down tales, or records were used in the *Genesis* composition, this is an amazing and excellent case, for the inspired record.

It also needs to be said, that these events happened as were foretold by Jacob, long after the deaths of the sons, to whom these prophesies were made.

This then also makes the compiler an inspired intermediary, between the prophetic hour, and the fulfilment, thus adding weight to that inspired work.

6. THE EXPECTATIONS OF JACOB'S SONS

Each son, however, would have been concerned about what was being prophesied about his children, and what was to happen to his descendants. We sometimes find it hard to understand prophesies about the future, but we are under as much obligation as these sons were, to listen and understand.

Jacob still held his life in his own hands and judged that it was time to hold his dying ceremony. He knew the limits of his strength. His dying words were for them all. His years of peaceful decay were at an end - he confronted his mortality.

He makes his final request - "*Gather yourselves together that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last (or latter) days" (Genesis 49:1-2).* In the manner of emphasis of the Hebrew poets "*Gather - hear ye sons of Jacob - hearken unto Israel your father*", that is*,* "*To listen*", emphasising the listening, and as they had been commanded, they assembled. The servants' cry was obeyed in haste, and they gathered in the curtained tent. The brothers greeted Joseph as a royal personage, except Benjamin who would have probably embraced him as a dearly loved brother. Joseph was now 56, and Benjamin was 39. Blended families in our day have no less trouble in making these relationships work. The ten here would be anxious. It wouldn't be the first time Jacob had told them what he thought of them, but it would be the last. He did indeed make a very long speech, absolutely remarkable, for a man as old as he was. His fantastic memory helped God enrich this blessing scene.

And this is probably how it was.

They knew his sharp tongue, a tyrant he was over their past sins, he usually spared them nothing. They set their teeth to endure what would probably come, and felt awkward.

They were to sit on the chests around the room, and so they eyed the wall hangings in the antechamber, to calm themselves, as they filed into this crowded tent of death.

Tamar, with her twin sons, stood in the antechamber, her striking black cloaked figure outlined against the tapestries, with the flickering light from the lamps. She was anxious for her sons. She knew that Reuben, Simeon and Levi had all blotted their record, and she considered they had more blot than Judah had.

Tamar knew Jacob was partial to her and her sons. Judah's sin with her would probably be mentioned, she expected that indignity, but the sin did bring her into the line of succession. These twins were as much part of Judah, as Judah's two sons, who had died (her former husbands).

Tamar was anxious to find out, whether all this waiting and longing and wanting had been worth while. Her shadowed figure waited in the glow.

Perhaps the glow of blessings being given here now, would bring Tamar some splashes of joy as well.

Jacob's tent has been described in the text about his life in Hebron, before Joseph went down into Egypt. It would not be much different here in Goshen, except that it would be more permanent, with perhaps some little mud brick reinforcement. Perhaps it was even the same bed, or bedhead, that Jacob had considered precious enough to bring with him, even though Pharaoh asked him to leave his things behind.

Jacob lay propped up on his cushions under a sheepskin rug. The waxed pallor of the skin on his cheeks, had a little glow from the charcoal burner in the basin nearby. The white band he often wore round his forehead, when he sacrificed or believed himself in the presence of God, was in place. He believed that God would help him with this immense task. His white locks ran down to his white patriarchal beard. He remained perfectly still, but sought his sons with his eyes, without turning his head, as they came near to his bedside. They were fearful for what they might hear. The sons bowed down their foreheads to the ground, and then settled on the chests around the tented room, and became silent. When the breath of clear, exalted prophecy from Jacob began, (for he was a prophet, as his fathers were before him), they opened their ears and fixed their eyes on his ashen lips.

Although there is none, we could compose an excellent introduction to the blessing speech, with the help of *Thomas Mann*, noting the following points:

1. Welcome to the bed of death - sons, hosts, sand, stars.

2. There is wisdom, truth, judgement, forthtelling at the last hour for you all.

3. Praise for readiness.

4. Commendation to my ring of sons.

5. For everyone a blessing.

6. Blessed altogether, and one by one.

7. Blessed be my strength, my death, my eternity.

CONCLUSION:

And so the culmination and high pinnacle of Jacob's life has now been reached. We hold ourselves erect and still, in the presence of this great patriarch, for whom we feel enormous reverence. He has now reached the perfectness described in his name, and we want this, his last family function, to be well, and a great blessing. We know that God will be with him as the great prophecies for the children of Israel, fall from his lips. We praise God for His perseverance with Jacob and petition that He may persevere also with us.

CHAPTER 7

THE BLESSINGS OF JACOB ON HIS SONS

"***Hear ye sons of Jacob: and hearken unto Israel your father", Genesis 49:2.***

FOCUS:

God must have guided Jacob's decisions on how he would manage his last words to his sons, for he wants to function well. The dysfunction that has threatened God's family, and the discipline that Jacob has given them, is now spelled out and recorded for us all. It is a long presentation in one chapter by Jacob to his sons, on his death bed, in ***Genesis 49***.

1. THE BLESSING CONTEXT

The blessings do not come to the sons in birth order, perhaps it was as they were gathered round the bed. The later blessings on the tribes, (with the notable exception of Simeon), by Moses, is pronounced in a different order again, *Deuteronomy 33*, and certainly a different order in *Revelation 7:5-8*.

Jacob's blessings begin with his four eldest sons, by Leah. It may be that there was some merit in the order of the first four, by seniority. The first blessing is the one most grievous, the one that pains Jacob most grievously. It is set against his personal and emotional self. The other sinful sons did not so offend. Perhaps to begin with the eldest son, Reuben, not only deals with the birthright problem and removes that, but deals with his own personal problem first as well. The grief that the firstborn of his sons is not so well blessed, and others more blessed, and differently blessed, must have been on his mind, and in his thoughts for years and years. The least spoken of receive their blessing last. Perhaps God helped Jacob in the order he spoke, as well as the blessings themselves.

We are drawn into a settling of the family dysfunction, in an intimate setting. The tapestry of life with its unrelated and perplexing events, was nevertheless God's purpose for this family, and that purpose endured for so long, misunderstood by them all. Here it is, at last, drawn together, and they are enlightened. There is the whip lash for some, and with that a shaft of pain, but the joy splash for others.

2. MOSES' RECORD OF THE BLESSINGS

For the privilege of this record we are indebted to Moses, whose faithful and inspired recording has come down to us over the millennia. The very fact that the predictions of Jacob about his sons and their families, did fall true, is a testament to that recording, as faithful and inspired.

(We will ignore those who claim that the recording was not made by Moses, but at a much later date, when it was easy to record the history, rather than the prophecy).

And Jacob's recorded speech begins with Reuben.

The paraphrasing of the blessings is assisted by *Thomas Mann*, in "*Joseph and His Brothers, Joseph the Provider*", *pages 427* to *439,* and by the various commentators like *Speaker's, Ellicott, Matthew Henry, Companion Bible, NIV Study Bible.*

3. REUBEN IS NAMED FIRST IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

Reuben knelt at the bed, and bowed himself over it. He wondered how it would be said of him, though he knew what would be said.

Thus begins *verse 2-27*, the longest poem in *Genesis*, a spirit influenced prophetic hymn - see the *NIV Study Bible* setting for form and structure.

"***Eldest son,***

beginning of strength,

product of my manhood,

right of the firstborn,

pre eminent, nearest of all

to the sacrificing and kingship.

Dignity and power could have been yours".

Then Jacob would remember, how Reuben was begotten, alas, by a trick, begotten with the wrong one on a night of veiled secrets where there was no love or affection, only lust. We are drawn right back to the horrible disappointment of the conception night, begotten in delusion. Ah, for the sadness of that wedding night so long ago. But, he remembers, not only the delusion, but his shame over Reuben's lust for Bilhah, as well.

"***Alas, you shalt not be the head,***

you shalt have no pre eminence,

for you went up,

and defiled your father's bed,

or bared and mocked your father's shame,

and committed lust, and sin,

with one of your mother's servants,

my concubine.

Unstable as water you are".

Indeed Reuben's descendants were characterised by indecision. There will be no right, no priesthood and no kingly leadership. The curse is within the blessing.

"***Beyond the salt sea you will live,***

near the land of Moab

- polluted, polluter, desecrator.

You were my strength and manhood.

Farewell Reuben".

The Law of Moses later forbad the disinheriting of the firstborn, *Deuteronomy 31:15-17*, for reasons of favouritism. We are not sure when this disinheritance have been considered unlawful, but it does not apply in this case.

The disinheriting of Reuben, brings to Jacob's mind his own heritage of the birthright from Esau. Jacob's purchase of it was unjustified, but his earnest desire for it, was a sign of wisdom, that Esau did not possess. Reuben's forfeit of the dignity and power of the birthright came about through his most abominable lust. He had not enjoyed the privilege of the birthright, or been assured of the right to possess it, and easily gave it up, unthinkingly. But Esau seemed more certain of its possession, and willingly gave it away. Manasseh did not forfeit the birthright, for it was given to Ephraim.

It is not clear whether it is the instability, or the impetuosity of water, that is meant here. Water in small quantities is unstable, like men who walk after their own lusts, and follow the impulses of their own mind, "*weak as water*". Water that has been walled up, and let go, is like unrestrained licentiousness, a great force for corruption. It matters not really, for Reuben. His wickedness was a weakness that had a great power to corrupt. He never saw in the moment of pleasure, the lasting disgrace for his father. The privileges and honour annexed to the birthright were not for him. We may consider that the injuries done to Jacob over his lifetime, by these sons of his, some redeemable, some justified, are not as great as this one.

Some of the men of Reuben did find favour with God, *1 Chronicles 5,* but none of them ever attained glory, and it seems that there was ever a reminder about the forfeited birthright, *verse 1*. It does not mean that Jacob loved him less, it means that unlike Eli, he had to punish his child, Reuben, and this was the consequence for that moment of pleasure. Perhaps Reuben accepted his punishment, glad that it was not more severe, perhaps he magnified the mercy, which punished him less than his iniquities deserved. He may have been banished, like Ishmael was, for the accident of his birth, but Jacob saved him from that. He tried to do a kindness to Joseph, when the others acted otherwise, but that was not accepted as atonement for the sin. Some of us may even think, that we also can compensate for vices by presenting virtues. Not so.

We cannot consider that Jacob, (that is, God, no less), in these blessings, is unjust in the treatment of Reuben. We need to consider and understand the disgrace that fleshly impurities can bring upon the members of our Lord's body, for, contrary to some people's protestations, what we do, how we act, **does** have an implication for others.

4. SIMEON AND LEVI ARE NAMED SECOND AND THIRD IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

These two bent and bowed before the death bed together.

"***Your anger was fierce,***

and your wrath was cruel,

I will divide you in Jacob

and scatter you in Israel.

I love it not that you have been

instruments of cruelty.

With anger you have slain men,

and digged down their walls.

Harsh and inhuman you were

with the Shechemites,

and with Joseph".

(both incidents condemned them in Jacob's eyes)

"***We are not united with such as you,***

neither my soul, nor my honour

wish to be assembled with you.

You will be accursed too,

within the blessing.

You will be divided and scattered,

so that you cannot commit evil again.

Farewell Simeon and Levi".

These next two sons of Jacob were guilty of a greater sin than Reuben's sin against his father. These sins did not wound Jacob in a vulnerable part of his emotion, like Reuben's did, but they gave him no less pain, and exposed him to greater mischief from his neighbours. His merciful Father protected him, and the family was preserved from the enraged Canaanites. God did scatter them, but not amongst the nations around them, who knew not God. These men may have thought that this was indeed a blessing, for they expected worse. God did not overlook the sins in that preservation, but He did preserve them for the greater purpose. Once again Jacob , brought the consequences of sin to the fore in the minds of his sinful sons - these brethren in wickedness - but there is no evidence that he did not love them - it does not mean that paternal love for them ceased.

They listened not to the voice of God that had been the family guide - yet they were circumcised in the flesh, to remind them of the family commitment, and the mandate to mission to those peoples around about. Forsaking all that, they worked together to promote the greater evil.

Adam was no less guilty than Eve of being persuaded by her to eat of the tree, than she was in her eating. Indeed **the seducer is encouraged in sin by the seduced, and so they must take equal share in the sin**. Evil men make one another worse, and so their instruments of cruelty and iniquity, multiply the effect that would have been if they had acted singly. **In not forgiving the offence for which they sought retribution, they themselves cannot have their trespasses forgiven.** Whether we believe that the Shechem prince could repair the damage that he had done, or not, on face value, his offer to try to put things right, was rejected, and trickery prevailed.

The fifth petition about forgiveness, in the Lord's Prayer did not have as much integrity in this household of Jacob, as it did in our Lord's time.

Jacob recognised that his glory or "*honour*" was at stake, if he did not punish his children, and this is the last consequence that he lays upon them for their sin. It was so, for God, when He at last punished in full, the Jewish nation for their sins against Him. His "*honour*" had to be assuaged among the surrounding nations. Forgiveness was no longer possible, and He rejected

them as His living witness, as His prophets, like Ezekiel, realised. In the discipline of children this example of punishment and consequences is remarkable. We may view it as a useful tool, if we so wish.

We complain that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, and associated us with that guilt, but we do not complain of his guilt in the sin of his son Cain, for Adam disassociated himself from that sin. Jacob is no less venerable for his discipline of his offending children, unlike Eli, who was condemned for allowing the sins of his sons to continue in their wickedness. On the contrary Jacob deserves praise for his indignation and discipline, tempered with his paternal love. He did not cease from proclaiming his detestation of the incident, and left the world a dying testimony of how he felt until the end of his days. Their deceit against the men of Shechem, burned in Jacob's mind for all these years, and the fact that they killed so many innocent men, women and little ones, shows us all, the danger of allowing ourselves to act under the impulse of rage, for at that time we are really not our own master, we are out of control. Whatever control is left to one in anger, only serves to make more mischief.

This is not the anger of Moses for YHWH, over the idolatrous rejection of the Israelites, nor of Jesus Christ at the moneychangers' table, or Phinehas piercing the hearts of Zimri and Cosbi, but more like Moses' anger at the waters of Meribah, for which **"sin"** he was debarred from the pleasant land. If Moses' anger sin merited this, how much more, Simeon's and Levi's anger sin. They viewed it as righteous anger, which it was not, it was rather a punishment they meted out, vengeance, which alone belongs to God. God did not accept it as righteous anger, as He did not accept Moses' Meribah outburst, and after all He knows. It is better to empty our heart of vengeance, for it takes up space better suited to higher things belonging to righteousness.

Simeon and Levi might have been grateful that Jacob did not curse their persons, only their execrable anger, so that they could continue with their remorse, imploring mercy from their Heavenly Father, to the bitter end. This ensured that they could have no pride in their deed, and that they needed to consider their ill tempers, for the rest of their days.

The insufficient land that was given to the tribe of Simeon, and the troubles that pursued them, with the migrations away from family support, to gain residence and subsistence in far off settlements, would have been a reminder to all the generations of the danger of bad temper, see *1 Chronicles 4*. But yet again, maybe they never saw the lesson, let alone heeded it.

Simeon's record is erased in *Scripture* - no brave act or deed, not one judge, prophet or leader is recorded, only inglorious silence passed over these people. **The fruits of victory (at Shechem) had turned to ashes in their mouths.** God was not there at Shechem.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression***)

Simeon's descendants were later absorbed into the territory of Judah *(Joshua 19:1)* and Levi's descendants were dispersed through the land living in 48 towns and in the surrounding pastures *(Joshua 14:4)*. However, later Levi's curse turned to blessing, because of their loyalty to Moses (*Exodus 32:26-28)*. It was from this tribe that God had already chosen Moses and Aaron to lead the people out of Egypt. So God, through Moses, appointed the Levites to attend to His worship. This then turned to the highest praise, as the Levites cared for the spiritual needs of the people. Of course, much later again, the spiritual leaders failed to turn the people from their idolatrous ways, and the tribe of Levi was once more cursed. The blessings that they enjoyed as priests, may have made them feel their blessing was a happy one, but they were dependent on

the justice and generosity and stability of the other tribes, and when **they** were in revolt against God, and punished for their wickedness, the security of the Levites tottered in uncertainty.

The Levites were then exposed to great danger

- Of losing what had been bequeathed to them, and what they had contracted with God to provide.

- Of being drawn along into the courses of defection, which would have cost the Levites their living, if they wished to expose the other tribes.

- Or cost the Levites their living, if they entered into the other tribal wickednesses.

The other tribes, in their wickedness, failed in the very worship ceremonies that kept the Levites in contract with God.

"*Condemned if they did, condemned if they didn't*" - there were great dilemmas for the Levites, always aggravated by the times of uncertainty. But God did look after them in the later times of the dispersion, when they were stripped of their privileges, and they found a welcome in the territory of Benjamin and Judah, however the Simeonites at this time went with the rest of Israel, and not the tribe of Judah.

Levi, at this time, would have seen the uncertainties for his race, but he would not have seen the glories that they would bestow on the Israelites, in keeping them close to their Creator, in their worshipful ceremonies. This whole tribe was devoted to the services of religion by the time the Israelites came out of Egypt. God made the dispersion of the Levites a blessing, so that they could say, "*The Lord is the portion of our inheritance and of our cup, he maintaineth our lot*", *Psalm 16:5*.

It remains to speak of the honesty of the recording of Moses who exposed the sin and punishment and consequence of the fathers of his tribe, to the reproach of the rest of the world. This is evidence indeed that Moses was inspired by God in his recording of this great family history. There would be no little excuse in this particular story, (so close a relation), for a blur, or a concealment, but Moses records no remorse on the part of these two relations of his, particularly Levi, who he leaves now, with a severe censure by Jacob. Moses' own blessings on the tribes, in *Deuteronomy 33* makes no mention of Simeon - the only brother not mentioned. However he appears in the *Revelation 7* record of the tribes of the children of Israel. For Moses however, the children of that father, seem to have been too like their father. However, his benediction on Levi, is quite different. "*They have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant … they shall teach Israel the law …", Deuteronomy 33:8, 9*, and he leaves them with the Urim and the Thummim. So they might feel, "*it is better to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord*", and to seek atonement for the sins of their brothers.

5. JUDAH IS NAMED FOURTH IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

Judah had always been called a lion, and now Jacob's dying words played on the lion like epithet, and showed him up explicitly, as lion like. He, it was, who received the sceptre and became the lawgiver and to him the people will gather together.

"***Donkey tethered to a vine,***

Colt tethered to the choice branches,

Washed garments in wine,

Robes in the blood of grapes

Teeth whiter than milk",

verses 11 and *12*.

"***You are the one, Judah!"***

This means that after all, Judah is to have the main blessing, which is, excluding the Joseph blessings and birthright. The great decision has troubled Jacob for so long, since the Shechem and Bilhah incident. The blessing and birthright decision had been easier since the "*resurrection*" of Joseph, who was always Jacob's choice, but Jacob still wanted, or was compelled by God, to make a preferential blessing on Judah. Some commentators assume that Judah has the birthright in this blessing also, see the *Matthew Henry* and *Thomas Scott* commentaries.

Judah is certainly blessed with leadership and dominion over his brothers, but not over Joseph. His descendants, however, historically, are strengthened over Joseph's descendants, the Ephraim and Manasseh tribes. However, towards the end of the history of Israel, the "*sticks*" that Ezekiel wants to join and strengthen in a renewal of the covenant, are Ephraim and Judah, but then it is Judah who prevails to the time of the *New Testament*.

Tamar, Tamar, where is Tamar,

Oh Tamar we hope you heard, you were hiding in the tent folds, we hope you were still listening. We can see her. She screws up her face, and clenches her whole body, and moves her fists in unison, and heaves out great sighs, and thanks to God who made it all possible for her.

"***Yes. Yes. My twins will be blessed at last - indeed, I am fulfilled".***

Aha, a blinding flash of joy for Tamar.

Leah almost prophesied this when she gave this son of hers this name, Judah. It signifies "*praise*", and in that name she expressed praise to God for His mercies. So Jacob makes use of the name meaning, in his blessing, in the opening salutation.

Judah's fornication had been a great source of aggravation to Jacob, but unlike Reuben, there is mercy. It must have been Judah's attitude to his sin, which had diluted Jacob's aggravation, when he exposed his shameful impure incest, to the scrutiny of others. If his partner had not been a relation, but a socially acceptable prostitute, he would have exposed the preserving bloodline. Our equivocation can project Judah into an act of family protection, which is an unnecessary path to take. Judah himself did not equivocate over his sin, and perhaps that is why Jacob is generous about it.

Judah was the tortured one, ever lusting, and expecting that he is unworthy in his own mind. Lust, we know, lasts until the last breath, but Judah conscious of the sin in him, struggled against it. He never went into Tamar again after the incest incident, and perhaps he willed himself to become chaste. "*Chaste*" means "*free from sexual activity*", whereas in the 11th century celibacy was the Catholic ruling for priests. "C*elibacy*" means "*free from the marriage tie*", (so that inheritance laws would not affect the property of the church).

Here, in this great blessing, Jacob recognises the sinner but not the sin - he knows the sin had bowed Judah, and he knows the struggle that held Judah aloft from the sin. Jacob had himself

sinned in the beginning, but he knows with struggle that a life can end noble, and full of self sacrifice - a blessed life.

So we conclude

- That this is no excuse for incest, rather a reason that God *"allowed"* it, or *"turned His face away",*

- That is, that God had to accommodate himself to the sin of Judah, or *"covered it",* so that His purpose could continue,

- And that the Lord will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

- We will not accuse God of partiality (for He does not lay on any man more than is just, nor take away opportunity for reform),

- But God will give to some men more than they can expect.

The oil of promise poured over Judah's head and onto his shoulders. Jacob expended himself into a roar in blessing Judah, and perhaps Jacob himself wondered if he had the energy left for all of those sons still left.

This was no hasty mention as the blessings of some of the sons were. We are left to wonder, why the lion metaphor, and the blood lust that the lion has for his prey, is praised here, and yet cruelty in Simeon and Levi is admonished. Perhaps there are missing circumstances, or unknown aspects to consider. Perhaps Judah's attitude, or intensity for God's purpose and wanting to be part of God's will, with a knowledge and confidence in the future, are all bound up in this bundle of metaphors, rather than actual blood lust. So that it was not blood lust that made him a mighty warrior.

For

"***Judah will be/was a whelp from lions,***

a king of beasts.

He ravened, he purred, he mewed,

he roared, he withdrew and crouched

and stretched.

No one will dare to rouse him!

The symbol of sovereignty, strength and courage".

Comment:

We are reminded of the prediction of those who follow the Muslim faith that, in Paradise, the Jew will have his right hand stuck to the left side of his neck - a complete indignity, whereas *verse 8,* says ***"thy hand shall be on the neck of thine enemies",*** The tribe of Judah and that of Ephraim (reckoned as the elder son of Joseph) became by far the most important, and conspired in the future history of the nation and contributed above all other tribes to render the seed of Jacob the wonderful nation they became. It is a great pity that these descendants did not keep covenant with God, who found it necessary to retreat from bestowing His blessing on them.

It is interesting to note, in *1 Chronicles 4:17-18*, that a descendant of Judah, Mered, married a daughter of Pharaoh, thus linking the royal line of Egypt with Israel.

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"***Seed"*** *(Genesis 3:15)*,

"***Shiloh"*** *(49:10*),

"***Sceptre"*** *(49:10)*,

"***Shepherd"*** *(49:24)*,

"***Stone"*** *(49:24)* and

"***Star"*** *(Numbers 24:17)*.

All six, are Pentateuch titles of the coming Messiah, *Companion Bible*.

Four of them are contained in Judah's blessing and indicate to him, and to us, the great import that Jacob, and God places on him.

Tamar would have thrilled to hear the reference to Shiloh - that from Judah would come the great Shiloh king with the sceptre (fulfilled first in David, and then in our Lord Jesus Christ). She heard, with great pride, that Judah would not have favour pass from him, that he would not die, till he was old with greatness and with immense promise. From him should come one, on whom all people will depend, and he will bring peace. And so it was that One did come with a donkey/colt into the city, lovely above all mankind, and he washed his garments in wine. So it is with gratitude that she realises that she herself is the forebear of the promised Saviour, *Matthew 1:13,* and in *Ruth 4:12* she is acknowledged with Pharez in the house of the Godly. She is remembered, for she treasured God's mercy and the Hope that she had in Him. She is comforted in the rejection that Judah has had for her, over the years, in her Leah like isolation, which in atoning for his sin, atones for her as well.

"***Judah you are the one,***

the leader of us all,

your hand will kill your enemies,

we will praise you,

for you are our anointed one".

Judah's reputation among the Canaanites, was one of admiration for their intrepid bravery, and this renown endured through succeeding generations, from the men like the brave Caleb, who withstood the giants in the land, to the exploits of King David, who raised the Kingdom of Israel to great power and glory, that made his name in distant lands. Valiant exploits, as well as acts of great charity, are remembered of him to this day. Although their bravery and confidence, was like that of a lion, it was God who saw fit to bless their endeavours, on behalf of the Children of Israel. Not only so, but through Judah, through David, the Lord Jesus Christ will make the full accomplishment in the future, as he performs marvellous things in God's Name, *Isaiah 31:4, 5*. Judah was to have the distinguishing glory and honour of giving a saviour to the world, and of spreading the light of the Gentiles through that saviour. Indeed the garments of those who also did so, were washed in the wine of God's provision. So, we can make here a connection with

those who were related to the Son of Judah, by baptism, in the blood of his sacrifice, and who regularly partake of the wine in remembrance of that.

God made the covenant of royalty with David (a covenant, or contract of integrity, a ceremony performed with salt, *2 Chronicles 13:5*), and gave David a light to shine in Jerusalem. In the blessing for Judah from Moses, *Deuteronomy 33:7,* he prays to the Lord, "*and be thou an help to him from his enemies*", and so it was. It is this throne that the YHWH gave to the Lord Jesus Christ, "*that he may rule over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*".

Salvation to all the men of the world was on offer, and it was to this end that this tribe and their descendants were preserved. Many times that special care had to come from God, for there was no other way out.

The reference to "*red eyes*" may be a reproach for how some will view, and disuse, their abundance, or perhaps it is a warning to use their wealth for the good of all men. Their teeth will be white with the milk of blessing that will flow to them. There will be blessings far greater than the wine and milk of Canaan for us all, if we will be His children.

We leave it to God to judge what portion of good things is fit for us, always remembering that wealth is a blessing often abused, and used for ill purpose. As Judah's land was so fruitful, and other portions were not, there may be room for envy, or excuse, when failure to thrive is considered. God does allow for lesser talents or blessings, but not for the lesser strivings to improve the talent.

Judah must have felt that his repentance had born fruit, and Tamar must have felt great joy that the angst of her childlessness, and that her remedy for that childlessness, had found forgiveness at last. Her **reason** for her sin of prostitution was accepted, rather than that it was an accepted **excuse**. **There is no doubt that this blessing was the distinguished, and most exceptional blessing. The mingling and melting of Judah's blessing and the promise of Shiloh surprised them all.**

Some things we need to remember

1. That it was not the birthright - Joseph had the double blessing, but they had dominion and leadership over the other tribes.

2. And that this tribe led the spearhead to crucify our Lord, when he came, and they were, at that time, like any sinners, "*anti Christ*",

3. And that these were the people, (Judaizers), who made the life of the new Christ ones (Christians) so difficult,

4. And that so much of *The New Testament* is written against their teachings and their sayings, their attitudes, and way of life.

But not for now - there is great joy, all verticals. Judah himself must have felt "*blessed out*" and stepped back.

6. ZEBULUN IS NAMED FIFTH IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

Zebulun came forward and put his head under the hand of Jacob. "*Dwelling and habitation*" was his name meaning, and that is what Jacob spoke of. He did

"***dwell in the haven of the sea,***

... for a haven of ships".

Their trading ability led them to reach the sea, though they were land locked by Asher and Manasseh. In their land, they were only 15 kilometres from the sea, but their sea faring fared well, and the treasure of the ships, and the abundance of the sea led them in their business like ventures, and they did live from these blessings. Their descendants must have been disappointed when their whole northerly sea faring enterprise was overtaken by the Phoenicians.

These blessings especially for Zebulun and Asher, indicate, (roughly), where about their lots would be.

Consider:

* If the tribes of Israel received their lot by lot, how then could Jacob prophesy concerning the allotted lots?

* How would Moses know, when he committed this to writing, that it would be verified?

* If it is by faith, then why use lots to distribute the tribes?

* Could they have used another way?

* Who decided to use lots, their leaders, or God?

* If it was God's supervising hand, would all the tribes have been satisfied with their lot?

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7. ISSACHAR IS NAMED SIXTH IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

Issachar came next. He is the ninth son of Jacob, and the fifth of Leah. Not a word is said in *Scripture* about the individual, Issachar, after the mention of his birth.

Yes, he'd always been a beast of burden and was happy, lying in rest between the saddle bags, for work that was good and pleasant.

"***A strong ass***

crouching down between two burdens...

He bowed his shoulders to bear".

He was happy to serve. He was strong and lent his bones as a beast of burden should. He preferred to pay tribute to the Canaanites than engage in a struggle to expel them.

He "*suffered*" blows in patience, but his love of peace did not extend the cause of our Lord, and their spiritual welfare "*suffered*" as well. Our Lord Jesus Christ asks us to "*suffer*" for his sake, turn the other cheek, but there is a difference between "*suffering*" for "*Christ's sake*", and sloth, for the sake of laziness. They were "*immersed in sloth and folly*" and few of them "*stood ready, with joy*", to welcome God into their lives.

Perhaps devoting themselves to husbandry, Issachar did not see the temptations that some of the others endured. However there is the record of the Princes of Issachar, who behaved nobly in the war with Jabin, the King of Canaan, and stood with Barak and Deborah, *Judges 5:15*, to

fight the battle for God, and of Israel. Some limited numbers had knowledge of the times, "*to know what Israel ought to do"* in the troublesome times of David, *1 Chronicles 12:32,* and in this passage is a rare and precious compliment to, at least, two hundred of the tribe.

Consider:

* Did others feel it was prudent to do nothing to support David, thus declining to act?

* Or is this an example of their "*anything for peace*" attitude?

* Because this group was wiser, was more expected of them?

* Leaders, or people who act on ideas for the common good, are often targets of derision, so is it easier and better to be discreet and immobile?

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8. DAN IS NAMED SEVENTH IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

Dan was next.

"***He guided the scales,***

and judged with wisdom".

But Dan was subtle of mind and had a tongue, like a wise and biting adder. So they were the serpent tribe - hard to see in the sand, and the Dan tribe was quick as a knave to take advantage,

"***to bite the horses' heels so that***

the rider fell backwards at his feet".

Treachery became his byword, *(Judges 18:26-27*) and courage his facility *(Judges 14:16)* - Samson single handedly held back the Philistines. Dan had Judah's courage, but not his confidence, and had to resort to "*snaky*" behaviour, serpent like, to achieve his mean. Sudden and unexpected attacks destroyed their enemies.

However, Dan was the tribe that was beguiled by idolatry and is omitted in the *Revelation 7* list of tribes *(Judges 18:30)*, although he is in Moses' list of *Deuteronomy 33*.

Jacob plainly declares that this fifth son, and eldest son of the bondwoman, Bilhah, shall **inherit**, unlike Ishmael, who was sent away from Abraham's house, with no **covenantal inheritance.**

It is not clear whose deliverance that Jacob prayed for in *verse 18*, either his own, or Dan's deliverance. Perhaps it is a brief prayer - a turning to God - a pause in blessings. Jacob's mind might have turned to Eden and sin in general. It could be a profession of faith by Jacob. It could also be a prediction of the need for salvation for Dan. It is unclear. Whatever it is, salvation never came for Dan, for he never sought it.

Dan stepped back and Gad moved into his position.

9. GAD WAS NAMED EIGHTH IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

Gad heard of his overcoming by troops, but is buoyed to hear that he will eventually be sustained, and be successful.

"***A troop shall overcome him,***

but he will overcome at the last".

The Gadites had rich pastures, for they were allotted the land that they really desired, on the side of the River Jordan, but they bordered on some of those nations that were deadly enemies of Israel. They and the Reubenites were vulnerable to the Ammonites, who practised child sacrifices to Moloch, and to the Moabites who taunted them. The *NIV Study Bible*, notes that a Moabitish Stone, Mesha Stele, 9th century BC has an inscription about the Moabites gaining control again of the Medeba area from the Israelites *(2 Kings 1:1*). The Ammonites and the Moabites were the descendants of the daughters of Lot, who had an incestuous relationship with their father, *Genesis 19:30-38*.

Too often they provoked God to sell them into the hands of their cruel enemies, "*overcome by troops*". But when they turned from their evil ways, their enemies flew before them, "*and they overcame*". These words must have been a great hope for them in their dire straits, when they groaned at the oppressions of their enemies. They could say, "*Our father Jacob, inspired by God, promised us deliverance and victory, and nothing promised by the Lord shall fail*".

However He has not promised to turn a blind eye to continual backsliding, and can change His mind, or more precisely, the time of blessing, so that later on the warranted blessing can come. God is in anguish over the people of Gad, *Jeremiah 49:1*, and laments that the Ammonite king has taken over Gad. His prediction of Gad heirs in control again seems to have occurred much later on. So the "*at last*" is a long time coming.

That's all for Gad.

10. ASHER WAS NAMED NINTH IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

Asher moves forward to hear that he will plough the lowland where the waving golden corn in Canaan's pleasant land will yield bread, oil, ointments and dainties for a king. Their land was so pleasant and fruitful, that he had little need of anything from his neighbours. It is not unfair, in God's eyes, that some should have more than others, but it is the use to which they are put that God looks on.

"***Out of Asher his bread shall be fat,***

and he shall yield royal dainties".

Bodily pleasures did enrich him as he languished beside the sea from Mount Carmel to Lebanon. Zebulun exploited their sea shore more than the Asherites themselves did. What a beautiful coastline they had, 200 kilometres. They didn't really appreciate it, they were not seafaring people, and by the time of David, the Phoenicians had moved in, making Tyre such a successful maritime enterprise for themselves.

The Asher border came to Zidon and it was from here that the Princess Jezebel came, bringing her strange gods with her, which were the destruction of her husband's house and many thousands in Israel. Zidon was often a snare to Israel, and Israel never taught her the ways of the Lord. Perhaps it was the very characteristic of languishing beside the sea that kept them from caring very much about proclaiming their heritage. Their mission mandate was never activated, and so they lost it.

11. NAPHTALI WAS NAMED TENTH IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

Naphtali too, will tend the fields - of Gennesarith, for fruits. They bordered the Sea of Kinnereth - the north hill country of the Sea of Galilee, *Joshua 19:32-38*.

"***Naphtali is a hind let loose,***

he giveth goodly words".

They would be like leaping goats - full of "*glib words*", or "*kind words*". The words are capable of either interpretation. Either way, they had a certain celebrity in action and movement, like a hind, and were able thereby to perform great feats - and be affable and courteous, and of a pleasing character. They had an independent spirit fostered by their remote position.

Another translation offers,

"*Naphtali is a flourishing oak, (or turpentine tree), which produceth branches of glory*", meaning prosperous and stately, with spreading branches. That it could be referred to as "*prosperous*", may refer to the fact that Naphtali came out of Egypt with fifty three thousand and four hundred people, from Naphtali and his four sons, who went down into Egypt with Jacob, 215 years before. They decreased considerably in the land, but the most luxuriant trees have winters as well as summers, and prosperous families, or nations, are not necessarily in continual expansion. Their visible prosperity was dashed by the Godly storms, when Israel revolted, but the tree will have a chance to flourish again in the time of His coming, when they **may** repent.

12. JOSEPH WAS NAMED ELEVENTH IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

Then Joseph's turn comes. Here the poetic and symbolic words, of *Genesis 49:22-26*, fall like honey into the imagination, to be interpreted as best our imaginings will allow.

Jacob speaks about Joseph -

"***Joseph is a fruitful bough,***

even a fruitful bough by a well,

whose branches run over the wall".

Joseph had the birthright, and the double blessing, and was the best loved of his father, and yet the father, in this blessing context, did not give Joseph the royal blessings - that fell to Judah. Yet Joseph is in the royal mode now, as Jacob views him. It seems that the Spirit of God is working so well in Jacob, that he does not give blessings as he would have preferred, nor entirely on his own predilection, as his heart would have led him.

Here are other important endorsing points

- That Jacob is pronouncing blessings under God's hand.

- That Moses is giving an inspired account, because neither Jacob nor Moses would have naturally given Joseph a lesser blessing.

- That it is only that God sees into the future, and decides that Joseph's family will not be capable of ultimately leading the people in His cause, and Moses faithfully records that.

In the previous chapter, *Genesis 48:22*, there is a blessing out of context with these blessings here. Perhaps this is the endorsement of the birthright for Joseph. It is a blessing "*above thy*

brethren", and follows the double portion blessing birthright, really a three times blessing for Joseph, when Jacob blesses Joseph's two sons.

Joseph's family, according to the blessing, **was** fruitful in Egypt and later in the Promised Land, Ephraim more so, than any other tribe, but Judah. In fact the blessing of land now extended from Lebanon to Egypt, and was theirs by the promise of God. It was a wonderful proof of affection for his sons, but especially for this favourite son, to whom he owed so much.

Some take these verses to point forward to the tribe's success - the warlike Ephraimites fulfilled the blessing of womb and breast with fertility among men and animals. Joshua came from the tribe of Ephraim and they were supreme. Later, with dishonesty and deceit and idolatry, they provoked the prophets to decry them. The iniquity of all Israel is signified in Ephraim - the deceiver, Jacob. *Hosea, chapters 11, 12* and *13* are sad epithets. *Psalm 78* gives the history of it all, how they became a reproach to their neighbours, who heaped on them derision and scorn, and in the following *Psalm 80:8,* we can find reference to this vine and vineyard that God made, and how He led the vine out of Egypt, and the later destruction thereof - "*quicken us, O Lord, and we will call upon your name, turn us again, O Lord God of hosts and we shall be saved*". It is probably the reason why John in the *Revelation 7* naming of the tribes, (in no significant order) reverts to the name of a Joseph tribe, omitting Ephraim.

If Jeroboam, a descendant of Joseph, by Ephraim, had walked in the ways of the Lord, his house could have been as successful as the House of David. But it was not to be. God did not forget his promises, but Ephraim did, and provoked Him

May that time soon come, when the remnant, after the final holocaust, will turn back to the covenant.

The longing of Jacob for Rachel, lost,

the appreciation of Joseph, lost and gained,

the snatch and piercing by the archers.

The grief of father and son,

both for one another, unknowing,

at the parting.

The son, strong and straight,

cared for by God

with the everlasting hands,

are all shafts of pain, and flashes of joy in Jacob's mind.

Comment:

None of us can forget, though we do forgive. In addition we wrestle with consequences for ever after. So often these bad memory signals, like shafts of pain, spoil the flashes of joy. It is impossible to forget the negative occasions. Those memories may cloud and dilute, but it seems that memory is our travel bag, as the wheels of life clickety clack away over the years, and only sometimes we can change the contents. It is like forgiveness. There is no forgetting, just an understanding of the sin, now that forgiveness has been asked for and granted. God

remembers our sins, as well, for He recorded in *Scripture* the sins of those He forgave. The "*remember no more",* is a metaphor for "*not accounting*" the sin anymore. This is how men can be deemed "*perfect",* "*righteous*" and "*just*".

****

In the blessing here, Joseph receives the land that used to be Amorite land, which Jacob, sometime in his career had taken for himself, with his sword and his bow. Some commentators think this was the Shechem incident of Simeon and Levi. That land would hardly lie idle, while Jacob was away so long, when the history of its wresting was so bloody, but it may still have been considered Jacob's land. The Hebron cave he owned by deed, and the cave was occupied. Wherever it is, this Amorite land, and whether it was gained by deed, or unsavoury means, Jacob promises its reversion to Joseph, as his heir. The portion of land for Joseph was not a lot, it was a gift of a grateful and loving father. "*Art thou greater",* said the woman of Samaria to Jesus, "*than our father Jacob who gave us this well, and drank thereof himself, and his children and his cattle?*" The Israelites did set a high value on this land, as long as the Commonwealth of Israel existed. However, this particular blessing showed that Joseph was cherished, and so his pleasure was not diminished at the blessings being showered on his sons. The land was Joseph's burying place, *Exodus 13:9, Joshua 24:32*.

Of course, Joseph's vine, Ephraim, would extend (over the wall) and expand their territory but it had hung over the wall, and been snatched to Egypt once before.

In *verses 25* and *26* there is a full and wonderful blessing on Joseph's head. He had been blessed by God, and blessed by the people of Egypt. It's hard to combine these two blessings, God and Egyptians, they hardly ever combine for praise, except of course in the prophesied end time *(Isaiah 19:24)* when Israel and Egypt together with Assyria will share equally in the blessing. *Ezekiel 29, 30, 31, 32* are all prophecies against Egypt because of her inactivity over the Babylonian destruction of Israel. The strength and depth and width of this blessing (here in *Genesis 49)* is full, and rich, and in the name of God - who gave, and took, and gave (Joseph) again. High esteem here for Joseph from Jacob - all very understandable.

Consider:

* Has Joseph a tiny seed of discomfort, at Jacob's mention of all this?

* Is he discontented with his connection with these brothers, especially as Jacob is dying?

* Or do the blessings of the ancient mountains and hills, and the heavens and the deep, seem rocklike and firm?

* Or do the others, the ten Cain heads as they used to be, have a nervousness that this well blessed one will take too much authority over them, and remove their secure tenure in Goshen, at their father's death?

****

The blessings of Jacob for Joseph would have held out to this prosperous Egyptian family, a beckoning light, to help them in what God saw as darkness, and what they themselves may have seen as brilliance. We may be sure that it would have given little pleasure to Joseph to have received an inheritance in Egypt, but maybe he was worried about his children, and would be grateful for this beacon. The everlasting hills or mountains, are not necessarily physical boundaries, but heights of glory with God. The patriarchs sometimes made their sacrifices on

the hills, it was where they walked with God, they were asked to look to the hills, and to the Hill of Calvary, we look, and then beyond from "*whence cometh our aid*". This verse is telling us that God is ruler of nature, as well as history, even of the deep, and of reproduction, *verse 25*. He is a successful rival of the gods in pagan myths. The "*Mighty One*" and the "*Almighty*" is used of God, in connection with His covenants with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, *Genesis 17:1*. These were the blessings to flow onto Joseph's head. He became "*the shepherd and stone*" of the family. He did not return to his father's house, his father's house came to him in Egypt. Jacob never sought honour, but he must have been proud of the honour poured upon Joseph's head, and had a delicious pleasure in it. He was a happy saint who sowed in tears, and reaped in joy. "*Crowned*" Joseph was, as *verse 26* implies. The whole story of Joseph is a lesson in the fact that God does what He wants, and can find a way through all our perversity.

13. BENJAMIN WAS NAMED TWELFTH IN JACOB'S BLESSINGS

"***Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf,***

in the morning he shall devour the prey,

and in the night he shall divide the spoil".

They sound like a wolf pack, carrying on the tradition of the Simeon and Levi pack, in the Shechemite incident.

They were landlocked and seemed to be like the ravenous wolf which comes at night, famished, and, out of necessity, ferociously, they look for prey. The spoils will be divided in the morning but evening once more inflames their courage, to encounter every danger, to supply their appetite, and food for their young. It is not probable that Jacob means to compare the Benjamites unfavourably with the others, or censure them in any way, any more than he did any of the others - beasts of the earth and serpents of the dust. Jacob probably had a very indistinct view of how any of these characters would work out, as he pronounced the spirit filled blessings on his sons.

Ehud, Saul and Jonathan are all notables from Benjamin. His stance with Judah, against the other tribes, is commended. Paul (as Saul) of Benjamin, devastated the early church. Indeed it is a fitting description of Paul's work, before his conversion. Benjamin devours prey, divides up the spoil and indeed their succeeding history in Canaan, show them as so. *Judges 19:16-30* has a story repulsive to us all. There's no condemnation here, either, like Judah's blessing, as there was for Simeon and Levi, but of course, the Benjamin tribal events were far off in the future. The son himself has no ill recorded of him in this family. It appears that Benjamin is almost dismissed as a ravenous wolf. The blessing seems like an after thought, coming as it did at the end of the exhausted and heartfelt blessing for Joseph. (Jacob's blessings for Judah and Joseph had taken most of his strength.)

Benjamin never did rise to glorious heights. He was a tailender and there seems so little for him. He was never a deceiver, but he was motherless, of a father consumed with grief. We need to catch our tailenders, even though we may be old or/and tired, to give them equal share and experiences, and not overcompensation either. It is hard for them in some ways when all the family excitement has abated.

George Lawson's, "*The Life of Joseph*", has a large section on the blessings on the sons of Jacob, *pages 479* to *549*. He was a Scottish theologian of the last century, and well worth a read.

Consider:

* Did Benjamin ever find out the secret in those far off Hebron days, before Jacob did?

We hope that Benjamin in Jacob's eyes, was immune from the deceitful charges of his other brothers.

* Then what is the meaning of this swift dismissal?

* Did Jacob's thoughts turn too swiftly to Rachel, when this Rachel/like Benjamin head bowed before him - 39 years old now?

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14. THE POST BLESSING SCENE

Jacob never mentions any retribution upon his 10 sons, for their mistreatment and deceit over Joseph. Perhaps the family, once broken by jealousy, was now healed by love. Perhaps Jacob was still in anguish over his own deceit of Esau, and to bring up their deceit, was to invite dissent. *Hebrews 5:13, 14*. "*Jacob was now acquainted with righteousness*".

Jacob must have felt immense joy and relief that he could pronounce these blessings.
In *Genesis 49:29*, Jacob reminds them of the burial promise, but the reference to being gathered to the fathers, is a pleasant one and not only means "*to the cave*", but means that he considers himself to be "*at one with the faithful, awaiting the blessing of the coming One".* It is the blessing of Elijah, in his last prayer before the fire fell, which *Malachi 4:6* refers to. It is the time when fathers and sons, and inferentially, mothers and daughters, will have their hearts turned, not to one another, as it is in *Malachi,* but as the Hebrew alternately renders it, **back to God**, as in *1 Kings 18:37*.

Jacob expressly asked them all to bury him, and the explicit details, once more, show the importance of the place to him, the value of owning even such a tiny piece in the Promised Land. Jacob expected no opposition to his desire, for the deal with the sons of Heth was well known. He had lived for fifteen of his years with his grandfather, Abraham, and would lay down with him now, in **death**, and with his grandmother, Sarah, and as well his mother and father. But he knew he would **live** with the Saviour forever. There was now no horror of death for Jacob, no "*sting*" now for him, and the grave would be **his** "*victory*", not the grave's "*victory*". The writer to the Hebrews could have equally said of Jacob, as he said of Joseph, "by *faith he gave commandment concerning his bones*", *Hebrews 11:22*.

Jacob had delivered a remarkably long and excellent speech, at the very time of his death, for as he curled up to die, he must have remembered how God had constantly been with him in life, sending His angel, at crisis points in his life, and so it must be, that He would be with him in his death.

This story of the blessings is not quite finished, for we need to think of how the women in this household reacted.

It was Tamar, whose existence and place in the family was now ratified. Tamar's wish to force the right of procreation had at last been justified. She had more than likely been barren with her two husbands. Perhaps God lifted that condition at the occasion of her intercourse with Judah. In any case God had planned that the line should be preserved, at that time, she could now justifiably argue.

It is useful to note that this law of lineage was in place at that time. How it came to be in place, in this family, or how it was enforced, or whether it was just usefully used, we cannot tell.

The Code of Hammurabi, introduced by the Babylonian King, 1792-1750 BC was in place at this time, and accounts for the events just described. The Lineage Law ceased with the introduction of the Gentiles, and the Law of Christ. There was no need to preserve the Jewish lineage, and now we have many brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, and mothers. Fathers are never multiplied, making the point that our Father is only one, *Mark 10:29-30*

15. DINAH - NOT MENTIONED

Dinah, as expected, is not mentioned in the blessings. She has become a nobody, worthless, in the eyes of the Code of the day, to be cared for by family, if she had any - and, of course, we know that she did. She was dispossessed by gender, but her sins were no more or less greater than her brothers, and her cup of sorrow continued to be full. Leah's cup and her cup were never less than full. "*A child's cup might be a thimble full, but an adult's cup, (of sorrow), is a flagon*", and it is always full. We should be aware that some of our sisters might feel pessimistic like this.

Comment:

She had no inheritance, from her father, until "*the daughters*" of Manasseh, Zelophehad's five daughters, forced the change in *Numbers 27*, in an act of great courage and conviction. They improved the lot for women thereafter, in the matter of the right of inheritance in the Jewish nation - the first suffragettes. Still that was only possible for them, by law, because they had no brothers. With a deed of gift a Jewish father could grant some property to his daughter. He could postpone the gift until after his death, but he had to give a deed to his daughter, as proof. She needed to keep these documents safely until his death. Women's documents, marriage, deeds of gifts, renunciations of claims defined her relationship with men, husband, father, brother, and were very valuable for her social relationships, and existence. Men needed no such documents, to prove their identity. Theirs were impersonal learning contracts, studies, dialogue documents, land titles, toldoths about their personal family history. A man owned property by inheritance, and, of course, this affected his wife. Caleb, *Judges 1:15,* was another recorded, generous father, who dealt sympathetically with his daughters, and Job as well, *Job 42:14*, where the beautiful daughters are named, not the sons.

****

And so here, the blessings of Jacob on his sons, affected the wives and children as well. Jacob, no doubt, had them in mind as he blessed. No mention of them, does not mean that they were unconsidered in God's eyes, or ill considered. It just means that the culture of the time prevented the recording of their names. We are truly blessed from the days of our Lord, when he made all things new, and women and men were valued equally, where the Saviour's way was better than the cultural way, and they could **both** make a covenant with God, through Christ (baptism, not circumcision), "*for they are all one in Christ*", having been each made "*in the image of God*", and from then, worked complementary roles in true worship.

CONCLUSION:

This long chapter of blessings on the sons of Jacob points us to the way in which God takes charge, where He will, and can soon make a little one to become a thousand, or a small one into a strong nation, both of which happened to Israel, in this unlikely Land of Mud and Death

Digression:

"*God was not there*", says an Australian Army Chaplain, of the killing fields of Vietnam. Yet there were people who believed in God, killing in those fields. It is difficult to understand what turns men and women into such fiends. We don't know, but, of course, we know it happens. They obviously turn away from God's teaching and so say, "*He was not there*".

When we know God is everywhere, we mean that God has abandoned man to his own way of anger, lust and power when we say "*God was not there*". It is then time to stand up and bring God back into the reckoning. There are plenty of recorded historical times when men and women have done such things, and lost everything they had, including their lives. We praise them for their courage and persistence.

This argument of "*God not being there*" is the argument seized on by the unbeliever, against the believer. "*There is so much sadness and wickedness in the earth, how can you say there is a God?*" Yes, we know that unbelievers can lead a moral life, without a Moral Being. Goodness is not bestowed only on the Godly, as evil does not only fall only on the evil, or the anti Christ. So then, much more should we encourage believers into a moral life.

CHAPTER 8

DEATH!

"***And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him and kissed him", Genesis 50:1.***

FOCUS:

Joseph's grief, at his father's death, is overwhelming, as we might expect, but he takes up the wishes of his father and takes him to Machpelah, to a far off land, where he cannot ever revisit his grave***, Genesis 50:1-13.***

1. JACOB'S LAST THOUGHTS

Jacob's last thought, before his death, is for his burial place to which he had directed them many times before. He had persevered with faith, and now peers into the future. He is anxious that Canaan is so far from Egypt, and that perhaps they will not comply. Not for Jacob the pyramid and painted chambers of Egypt that we, in this age, know about, gold capped, full of religious writings, mansions of eternity, 20 million tons of rock at least - but a cell which his family had dug - a cave. But Joseph promised.

2. JACOB'S DEATH

Jacob made an end of commanding his sons and gathered his feet and sank deeper into his bed - and his life stood still. They took a feather to his mute lips, but it lay still on the parched skin. The eyes did not blink to the little blaze placed before it - they remained glazed. So now, Jacob was gathered to his fathers, in peace at last.

"*Oh father, give us the birthright, give us the blessings of the mighty God of Israel as well*", we cry.

It was Judah who would have to make the pronouncement to the family, but it was Joseph who closed his father's eyes as God had promised to Jacob that he would, all those years ago in Canaan, and he laid his forehead on his brow and kissed him and wept.

We do also, as well, for the tortured life that twisted and turned

- In Canaan,

- And Haran,

- And Canaan again,

- And Egypt.

Deceiver deceived,

faithful believer,

faithless often,

and full of fear.

He was then a beautiful glowing bowl,

full of light,

perfect at last.

The potter had finished His work, and Jacob was 147 years old.

The little grains of sand slipped through the neck of his life's hourglass until the sand mound of faith and trust came perfectly together. The pebble in his shoe, the rock in his path, had caused him to pause and reconsider, and now the record was all that was left.

Consider:

* Did they "*write*" it all down, and wrap the slate or parchment in silk?

* Who kept the record?

* Did Tamar say, "*Please give it to me, I will care for the treasure*", and kept it near, as near to her heart, as she could?

* And did Jacob's wrestling angel's whispered breath give him peace at the last,

* And was it that angel who took the account of the life of Jacob back to God for the Book of Life?

* Having died in faithful anticipation of inheriting the land, how long will it be before the promise to him is fulfilled?

* Considering there was no tangible link between the two family branches, did the angel stay with Joseph, or the brothers?

The only thing left to do now, was what happens to the dead, and that was extraordinary,

given the time and place in history.

3. EMBALMING - MOURNING - PROCESSION - FUNERAL

It was all made possible by the dignity and position of Joseph. It was an honorific expenditure of a unique kind. No king had ever been borne to the graveside as Jacob was, no man of years, or dignity, had ever had his husk carried so far (seventeen days journey), but God saw that it was so. The great embalming skills of the Egyptians, (it has been estimated that four hundred million bodies have been embalmed in Egypt) must have been employed to preserve and wrap **this** body, so that it could be carried so far. Joseph had said nothing about this. Jacob had never envisaged this lengthy embalming and funeral procession. The physicians may have embalmed on this occasion, but not usually so, *verse 2*.

Comment:

At Wadi Natrun, North West of Cairo, the Egyptians mined natron, a salty powder for preservation. This would have been used in the embalming, and there are now extensive descriptions of how this was done. Myrrh and aloe were also commonly used in embalming, as a strong perfume. It spared the deceased the indignity of fouling the air of the resting place with the stench of decomposing flesh.

****

It took seventy days before the journey began, (seventy for Egyptian mourning, of which forty were taken for the embalming). It is remarkable that the mourning for a Pharaoh was seventy two days, and for the Jews, thirty days. Perhaps Joseph's regard for his father is evident in this final event, or is this reflecting the regard Pharaoh and the Egyptians had for

Joseph. If it is the latter, then this ceremony throws more light on Joseph's authority and prestige in Egypt. Whatever the reason for the lengthy mourning period, Machpelah eventually envelopes them all, where they await the greater King's return to raise them from the dead.

4. JACOB - LOOKING BACK

When death came calling, and knocked on the heart of Jacob, it said *"Get ready, old man"*. It usually knocks, and we know not the hour of the knocking, but Jacob did know. Jacob knew of the great excitement that Joseph felt to see his father again, when he arrived in Egypt, and perhaps the nearness of Joseph had been his reason for staying put in Egypt, after the famine was over.

Consider:

* Perhaps Jacob felt it would appear ungrateful if he left again - to the Egyptians, or to Joseph, who, Jacob knew, could not leave Egypt to live in Canaan?

* or was it the expectation of retribution for the Shechemite incident, or the Amorite incident of *Genesis 48:22*?

* or perhaps God had told Jacob to stay in Egypt?

But now, Jacob, knowing death was at hand, has prepared Joseph. He had prepared him, with blessings and reassurances, for the coming parting. It is almost as if Jacob's whole life had been a preparation for this death.

* Is it so for us?

Certainly it is, as one gets older.

* Should we look at death in this way?

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It is important not to wish away the days that God gives us, in a job we may not wish to do, or in employment, or even in approaching our death days. Pre death days must be the treasured of all days, preparing, in the giving of oneself to the will of God.

Joseph watched his father prepare for his death, dwindling, growing silent, curling up and turning away. It was as if he was watching himself looking out of his father's face, for his "*death*" (Joseph's) must have seemed like that to Jacob. We receive, so that we might give and the ultimate in giving is "*letting go*", so that death may come. But "*lossness*" is not easily borne.

Deceit was the instrument of Jacob's punishment and misery and shame, lasting most of his life.

Birthright,

goat skins,

blessings,

wives,

animals,

idols,

circumcisions,

blood stained striped coat,

low road, not high road,

son's sexual mocking,

son's prostitution,

sons going,

fewer returning

cups,

money.

Tricks all of them,

by him, and on him.

God's approbation was not given to the means by which Jacob used to gain the promises, but to the fact that he really did value the promises of God. Though the promises brought little comfort to him in his life, he earnestly strove for them.

Comment:

Constitutional deceivers, like Jacob, find it difficult to accept the fact that by double dealing and deceiving they themselves are their own victims. Rebekah, his mother, had originally said,

"*Upon me be thy curse*", but it didn't work out as easily as that. Jacob learned that God would not prosper him, or help him, when **he** lived deceitfully, but if he lived in righteousness, faithfully praying and building a holy character, he would be righteous, and so it was.

We often fail to appreciate the fellowship we have with Jacob's weaknesses. We falsely declare him to be "*righteous*", "*perfect*" all his life. We miss so much if we do. He came to be what his name meant, through his struggle with sin. If we concentrate on strengths, with devastatingly high expectations of one another, we miss out on learning the big lesson that Godly strength is made perfect in weakness. We need to acknowledge both Jacob's, and our own weaknesses, and live in righteousness, so that we, too, can strive for excellence, and can be accounted, and so called "*righteous*" and "*perfect*".

Jacob's vision lay dormant,

and fell and revived in Haran,

fell and revived again in Canaan,

but it broke out radiantly in Egypt,

where,

rejoicing in the vast growth of his house,

he looked forward with faith,

self, wholly forgotten,

in a vision for the future.

He looked through the mist of his approaching death and prophesied, by God's spirit, the glory of his nation in the Promised Land, *Genesis 49:28*. He was not the first prophet, but the blessing scene certainly fulfils the prophetic mode.

It was 70 years from Bethel, when Jacob was 77 years old - his lowest spiritual point. Plagued by the memory and guilt of his deceit, equivocation was high on his emotional response when God appeared to him, *Hosea 12:3-4*.

He had taken his brother by the heel,

he had held the angel

and the angel had put his thigh out of joint.

He had wept,

he had fallen into a deep depression,

and emptied himself in grief.

Eventually, there was a faint invitation,

and God came into that void.

Jacob found that God was with him,

and at last he was strengthened.

His dreams were exhausting (sometimes ours are too, and it takes us a few hours to recover from the stress). Jacob's dreams, though, were real contests with God. He'd had our life allotted span up to the first deceit, and then another lifespan since that first deceit. He may have reasoned that as God had promised to be with him, he'd have no hitches, nothing to endure, no heavy clouds, he never thought that he'd ever say "*everything is against me".* But God **was** with him. It is all true in the ultimate, in the end, but the process by which God causes a man to reach that state may result in unpleasant, and apparently untoward experiences. Man may not be able to shape his history, but he can work on the material handed to him.

The first half of the second 70 years were spent in dealing with decimated flocks, cheated wages, fear of Laban, fear of meeting Esau. The second half of the 70 years were spent in grief over the acts of his children - yet here they were all together, saved from certain death. The bad times had taught him lessons, though he found it difficult to be grateful. As Jacob emptied himself, God came in. **The useless regretting embittered the new, and Jacob learned that emptying was a better way. Pray God will fill us, when we empty ourselves for Him.**

In *Job 33:28-30,* Job's soul was promised redemption from the pit, that he would be "*enlightened with the light of the living*". So it was for Jacob also. Job tried to argue that suffering was a penalty or trial, but both Job and Jacob learned of its blessings. God foresaw that in Jacob.

5. JACOB - LOOKING FORWARD

Jacob looked forward, and lived by faith, never seeing the promises fulfilled in his lifetime. He appreciated God steadying him when his faith wavered, *Genesis 49:15*, for he knew God shepherded him, (he knew about shepherds), and that God "*fed me all my life long*", also he took comfort from God's visible encounters with him, "*angels*" in *verse 16*.

Comment:

It is important to enlarge our vision, and strengthen our faith, but when we have no visible Godly encounters, and we feel that His promises to us are not fulfilled, we need to be innovative in our relationship to God, so that we can also feel that we are shepherded, and that His will and purpose is at work in us. Sometimes the evil that befalls us can be a difficulty, through which we are made perfect in our weakness.

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Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph all died in faith, not having received the land inheritance promise and so provide us with examples of hope for the resurrection.

So this patriarchal era closes with hope, as it also opened with hope.

Jacob planned for the future and, against disappointment and difficulty, he ploughed on until he succeeded. He managed his history rather well, considering that he wrestled God most of his life. He could have managed his life differently. People may say that you cannot change the basis of character, but you can add new qualities and ensure that the damaging ones have little vent. The memory of the stormy years enhanced the later peaceful times and soothed his "*few and evil days*" outburst, of 17 years ago at Pharaoh's court.

6. LOOKING BACK FOR SOME OF US AND SLIPPING AWAY

It is worth noting that right up to the end of his long life Jacob was lucid and able to prophesy. It is not so for all of us, and is dependant on how our dying will be. We cannot change it and must

endure it. Perhaps towards the end, **those about us** have to endure it. It is the mother slipping away from, what the daughter perceives as reality, into memories. Jacob did not slip into total abandon of the present but would have had the sharpening of memories that we begin to experience as we grow older, which may have guided his blessings, apart from the obvious Spirit filled message.

This text, on the ageing process, is quoted in the Sarah's Death section of "*Kith and Kin*", Book 1. Here, in this book, we have another memorable death scene, where the discussion on ageing may be of some value.

Comment:

Perhaps because people know that the future is so short, they like to fill the space with memories. With little to look forward to, we look back. There is then "*a commemorating imagination*" which seems to come alive, flickering at first and then breaking into light. It begins to have a life of its own, something that we are powerless to avoid. Perhaps we don't even want to avoid it. Even in our everyday life, the heightened encounters with memoria grow, as if it happened yesterday. The regurgitated memories of people and places, and instances and circumstances, which jump into our mind's eye, uninvited and unannounced, are the foundation of the character of the old. They come like flat pages, not necessarily connected. They are things that happened, without the dimension of the course of time, and are without pattern and meaning, until we deal with them in our minds. The images that flash into our minds which demand attention, and our efforts to deal with them, make us chew and swallow. At night when we cannot sleep properly, the flashes of errors and misfortunes and misdeeds, sprinkled with the salt of remorse, keep us endlessly awake, and together with the worries of tomorrow, force us into fitful sleep, which is little use to us. The sleep deprivation matters not too much though, for our highly organised retirement days fade with age, and "*sitting in the sun*" might be our only possibility.

James Hillman's recent research in "*The Force of Character: A Study in the Meaning of Ageing*", leads us away from despair with what is happening, into something that is much more comforting. He thinks that a life unreviewed, or never chewed over and swallowed, is a life lost, and then there is no understanding of events of our life.

However, the patterns of life become more discernible as we age, and there is more understanding of our walk through, or review of, the failures and the successes of our lifetime experiences. When we are younger events happen, when we are older those events assume proportion and key onto the pattern that we set ourselves.

Hillman recommends that it is too difficult to extract from memories the lessons of life, before we are sixty years old. "*Inflated subjectivity*", not character, has too much of a hold before then, we are too concerned with the "*I*". For mature modesty, and reticence, and honesty, about the whole picture is what is necessary for character. We are "*more eloquently and wisely equipped and empowered*" to review our failures and successes and make conclusions, after we have reached the age of sixty. There is, then, a full litany of dates, and jobs, and trips, and illnesses, and family personages and things that made us cry, and things that made us smile. Up until then, we only enjoy a biography of empty life patterns, the timetables of life, filling up diaries and log books. That's a reason, among others, why we call those senior years "*prime time*".

"*The pickling of the past*", as *Hillman* puts it, is what some people find so annoying and irritating in the old. Their rooms, (actual brick and mortar rooms, as well as their memory brain rooms)

become "*period museums*", and nothing, even endless persuasion and correcting can change them, and not even the determined moths can get at the long term memory, once it is set in concrete. It is as if comfort and warmth finds its way into the cold storage vaults of the mind.

In older age, the images become more pleasant. Arduous struggles, envious rivalries, even betrayals and the poisonous jealousy thorns that hurt us so much, come back within a new frame, and present with a new valence, and often a new context. They don't hurt then so much. The musing about these memories may even make them amusing, and smiling and laughter after all is the best medicine. The long illness, the wrong marriage, the lost child, the soured friendship, the wrong career path, all those slings and arrows of outrage and anger and desperation and despair, lose their fire and forget their aim.

It seems that the dark and unhappy days of the past seem to lighten up and not matter so much, in our eventide recollections. Perhaps God is giving us a subtle hint that in letting go of the weights that we have been carrying, we can more easily let go, and let Him take our breath and character back to Himself, who first gave it. This is a premonition of death, as a place of rest until the call of the king to come to his Kingdom. It is as if there is a euphoric tone, something golden in these years, now coating many of our worst experiences, so that we feel that there is little left to forgive, and that, after all, we made too much of it all. At the end of the three score years and ten, in our seventies, those whom we have found most difficult to forgive, will not have their deed remembered, because in old age they do not need to be forgiven. Their deeds have simply been forgotten. May we be able to recognise that forgetting, that knack or skill of the old person's mind, may actually be the truest form of forgiveness and a blessing for the aged.

In the chronicle of the long lived patriarchs we can assume that the ageing processes happened with the same pattern, so the relevance of the foregoing brings us an understanding of them as well as ourselves.

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Jacob died with his lucidity in tact, but with his memories filling the spaces that the future had left blank. It was God who helped him prophesy the end of his sons, and so it came to pass, as he said. And the forgiving was there, just as *Hillman's* research says it is. Jacob being perfect, and having made peace, "*leaves his breath*" to return to God, accompanying as well, his full character record returning to God, in heaven, to that *Book of Life.* It is all in faith that he will live again to inherit that land, *Hebrews 11*. His steadfast faith rests in the knowledge that Joseph will bury his bones in the Land of Promise. The difficult forgivings have left Jacob's character now, and that is where we would like to be, when our record returns heavenwards. We had our time, we did what we could. That's what we offer in the end, ourselves, that is, the life force He gave us, and the character we built into it, that's what we offer back to God. When we are just blood and bones and muscles and sinew and skin in the ground, the most important part of us has gone heavenwards.

It was the end of the old firm, **Jacob and Sons - Shepherds and Pastoralists**, or **Israel and Sons**, that had prospered well in Goshen. We crave also for an ideal and "*perfect*" life, striving always for excellence, and pray for that, always understanding that evils will befall us.

John Donne, a poet and preacher of seventeenth century England wrote about death -

"*All mankinde is of one Author, and is one volume; when one Man dies, one Chapter is not torne out of the booke, but translated into a better language; and every Chapter must be translated.*

God emploies several translators: some peeces are translated by age, some by sicknesse, some by warre, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation: and his hand shall binde up all our scattered leaves againe, for that Libraries where every booke shall lie open to one another".

So Jacob's "*peece*" was "*translated by age*" into "*a better language*", and embossed "*by God's hand*" in gold, and He bound his "*scattered leaves againe*", and stored them away in that library "*where every booke lies open*", which God keeps for us all, at the end of our days, towards the time when His son will return and set up His kingdom. That will then be a place of blessing for all the "*peeces*".

John Ellerton later composed a funeral hymn,

"*Father, in thy gracious keeping,*

We now leave thy servant sleeping".

CONCLUSION:

And Jacob is indeed God's servant, sleeping in His care.

CHAPTER 9

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND THE FUNERAL

"***And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father", Genesis 50:14.***

FOCUS:

It seems that from all the dysfunction in these patriarchal stories not very much was learned about family relationships. It began for Jacob's family in Haran and continues in the *Biblical* record until after his death. For again the relationship falters, the brothers are anxious and Joseph weeps, ***Genesis 50:14-21.***

1. FATHERS AND SONS

Jacob's relationship with his sons falters from the moment he conceived Reuben with Leah, and bred as well as a little son, resentment into his relationship with the child's mother. The relationship between fathers and sons has an enormous amount of significance in Jacob's family and it was not often recorded that Jacob got it right.

(See end chapter note for ***Digression 1***)

Relationships are meant to work well and especially godly ones. The nature of God's relationship with Jacob should have meant that he was close to God, and welcomed God's advice and help in maintaining a good relationship with his sons. Alas, that was not how it worked out for Jacob.

2. HEADSHIP - SOURCE

Leah was an emotionally abused wife, the headship she sought from Jacob, was not what she would have preferred, and she had to make the best of what she was offered. Her sons did not have a good role model, but we hope, as the life of Jacob improved, and he became closer to God, his sons would appreciate the wisdom that seemed now to rule his life.

Comment:

We need to carefully consider the role of headship for men within the family group, for after all that is the role that fathers will model to their sons. We all need that role to be well modelled, so that women and daughters are not victimised. It is not a Godly model to sanction victimisation dressed up in cloaks of male prime status and authority, over all women and children, in the guise of headship.

"***Headship"*** *d*oes not mean "*chief*" or "*rule*", "*control, boss, authority and power*" in the Greek, in the context of *Paul's* letter*, 1 Corinthians 11*. Here the Greek word takes its meaning ***"source",*** as we use the context to interpret the correct meaning. *F. F. Bruce*, one of the great Greek classical scholars of the twentieth century, in his exposition of "*1 and 2 Corinthians"* makes this clear in his expose of the passage, *I Corinthians 11:2-16, pages 102-106*.

It is speaking about *"source",* saying that - **God made woman from man in Eden,** *Genesis 2:22*.

For later, continuing, in *verse 12***,** Paul repeats the concept and adds another, still speaking of "*source*".

In Eden, **woman did come from man,** at the creation (that is, from Adam's side), the first woman.

And then antithetically, Paul takes up the contemporary point of view, that since Eden, **man has come from woman** (that is, in childbirth) that is, since Creation it is a reversed order, and all men come from woman.

So in this context the meaning implied by Paul, it must be allowed, is "*source*".

Then Paul concludes about the real source, "*but all things are of God*".

In the verses at issue, *verse 3* and *verse 12*, "*headship"* should be understood as "*source*". Godly headship, *(Ephesians 5:23)*, in a marriage, with complementary roles, *verse 11*. In a family, mutually worked out "*headship"* is a beautiful concept, for it should be source of goodness, and Godly leadership, but only in the one family, each with its own head, and that head is not head in anyone else's family. If men followed the Godly headship model then wives and daughters would never be victimised.

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(See end chapter note for ***Digression 2***)

In the life of Jacob and his sons, the family dysfunction began with the deceit on his wedding night, and the consequences that followed in his multiplying wives and children, who lived in antagonistic rebellion to one another. However, family dysfunction is not confined to those with multiple partners and many children. It is endemic in "*normal*" or "*ordinary*" families, and "*nuclear*" or "*extended*" families. It is highly dependent on good headship within the family for which the father has prime responsibility, with submission still practised by both, as in *Ephesians 5:21*. True Godly principles are what are required and we all need to learn them.

3. JOSEPH WITHOUT HIS FATHER ONCE MORE

Joseph had now lost the joy of contact with his father, at his death, through whom he had the joy of knowing Isaac and Abraham. But the truths he had heard from his father's lips, had long been

engraved on his heart, so that his father, in this sense, continued to speak to him. His grief would be tinged with consolation for what had passed between them in the seventeen years. The grief of the other brothers may have been tinged with shame, for the painful and tormenting passions they had caused their father. Yet we would hope that their hearts were made better, for the satisfaction and pleasure from the sins, which lasted for a moment, cannot be compared to the lasting pain of natural consequences. Death is easier to contemplate, if it is not mingled with remorse, so we hope it was not so for those former ten Cain heads.

4. THE FUNERAL PROCESSION

"*I will come again*" promised Joseph to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh did wonder. It is clear Pharaoh's suspicion is present, but whether he asked Joseph to promise, it is not clear. Perhaps Joseph understood Pharaoh's anxiety, and was quick to relieve it. It is understandable that Joseph felt he had enough credibility with Pharaoh to ask him to let him go to Canaan to bury his father. He had to banish any suspicion of disloyalty, or disrespect to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and hope for their respect for his wish to perform this solemn oath that he made to his father.

But he would have also understood the Pharaoh's anxiety, for Joseph was his right hand, the manager of his affairs, the Governor of Egypt. Pharaoh would have readily combined favour and foresight in providing a very large retinue to accompany the family.

It looked like an Egyptian escort, but it was also an insurance against the return of the irreplaceable. Pharaoh had lost one of his daughters (the second of six) at age nine, of anaemia. He was no stranger to fits of melancholy. Now Joseph was asking for leave for more than the seventy days of mourning - his right hand man, the apple of his eye. The journey would take at least another forty days. Joseph did not ask in person, being in mourning, unshaved, as was the mourning custom, and unsuited to the royal presence.

Pharaoh commanded that this procession should be one of the biggest that ever went out of Egypt and, in equal pomp, returned again. There had been another procession, when Jacob came down into Egypt, but this one was much more impressive. It was a great progress. But it had to have a highly Egyptian flavour so that the Egyptians themselves and all the nations on the way would realise the provider was on a journey *("to bury his father")* and would return, otherwise there might be unrest and disorder. The little children and women of Jacob's family had to remain in Egypt, perhaps as a sort of hostage, or insurance, like Simeon had been. However, accompanying all the male relatives were the servants and elders of all the land of Egypt as well as a great retinue of soldiers. Insurance, indeed.

There was insurance on the other side also, for the people of the land of Canaan would not rise up against such an obviously treasured one from Egypt, no matter what they said privately behind their hands, for the burial place was not that far from the family's Shechem disgrace, which the indigenous people had probably not forgotten. Criticism is either forgotten, or enlarged and exaggerated over time, so safety may have turned out to be of paramount concern for the family. So Pharaoh not only provided a return insurance for himself, but a safety insurance for the patriarchal family.

Some suggest that Joseph went to excess in this funeral procession, but the matter of Pharaoh's insurances for safety and return, must have been of paramount concern, and so no expense was spared, for these reasons. And it was a melancholy Pharaoh who waited out those more than 41 days.

The procession of Jacob's body and his family is not recorded for us in detail. However, we know from other sources what it was like. They were flanked, on all sides, by Egyptians, who were also out in front and behind *(Genesis 50:7-9)*. Invitations were, of course, commands, sent out by runners from the privy councillor. It was a burdensome honour, for they would need to be away from their duties for at least 41 days. But still they came on the day appointed. It fell to a captain of the troops, a "*charioteer of the king*", to organise the confusion of wagons and litters, riding animals, and beasts of burden.

A host of soldiers came first, with trumpeters and drummers, then Nubian bowmen, then Libyans, armed with sickle shaped swords, and Egyptian lance bearers. Then followed the pride of Pharaoh's court - palace officials and privy councillors. These elegant servants formed the advance guard of the catafalque which was taken into the procession, together with the family, when they reached Goshen. It was a man shaped wooden coffin (for lightness) with gems and gold, and decorated with a gold mask and beard. It lay on a bier which rested on a gilded sledge and this was placed on a car with draped wheels, drawn by twelve oxen.

Behind the enveloped and appreciative family, came the administrative bureaucracy of all Egypt, of the Viziers of Upper and Lower Egypt, heads, inspectors, stewards, wardens and overseers. Military standards came next, followed by an enormous number of wagons with baggage, and luggage, and tents, and forage, and food, and utensils, all with mules and drivers.

What a large company it was, and how it startled those who watched its progress. They would stand and stare at such a sight, not comprehending the magnitude of this Godly journey, for great and majestic *we* know it really was, not because Pharaoh made it so.

The procession meandered the long way round, rather than on the military highway, to deflect anxiety. It was also an easier route for such a large company - not so steep. It was rather a silent procession, not like a crashing, loud, fearsome military procession. They camped in the Canaanitish land, Goren Atad, having passed through Moab and Ammon, where respect from Esau's family would have been expected and, no doubt, forthcoming.

It had been only a threshing floor, but now it was a thriving market. The people were amazed to see and hear the wailing for seven days, renewed lamentation and mourning every day, shrill and bitter. The inhabitants were much impressed, which was the intention, of course. "*Abel Mizraim*" they called it, "*a grievous mourning place*" for the Egyptians - "*The Wailing Meadow of Egypt*".

The procession crossed the Jordan River from this encampment and came to Kirjath Arba, in Hebron. The natural cave there had been enlarged by man to form several chambers. It probably had only one door and whether they entered by the cave door, or broke the enlarged masonry, we don't know, of course. Each chamber would have had a stone slab closure. The brothers would have paled with fear and trepidation as they opened their revered burial cave. The Egyptians watching would have turned up their noses at such a paltry, homemade resting place. But all Israel went pale. It would be interesting to know how they laid the coffin, supine or upstanding, like in Egypt.

If bones could be surprised, these bones would have been shocked to see this newcomer in his foreign garb and coffin. They themselves were probably buried with no such pomp, and certainly no such preparation. They would have been placed in the crouched attitude, the foetal position - the burial custom of ancient Canaan. Egyptian influence accompanied Jacob's body.

However, the bones in the cave were indifferent, having not been disturbed for 27 years, and Jacob was laid in an open chamber which was quickly sealed with stone and mortar. So his shell was left alone at last in peace. It was not disturbed again as far as we know, for many years, for Joseph's body went to Shechem. There is a small chamber for the Tomb of Joseph at the Machpelah sight where the Arabs revere it, along with other cenotaphs in six rooms, to the three Patriarchs and their wives. But the Jews revere the Tomb of Joseph at the Shechem site, at Nablus, and that is the burial site according to *Joshua 24:32*.

The unbelievers would like to say of Machpelah, "*it's all a hoax*", but the grave/cave Machpelah is well known today, as part of a temple wall enclosure. In the Herodian period structures began to be erected over it, and that practice has persevered.

5. THE BROTHERS ANXIOUS AGAIN

In *Genesis 50:15-21*, the brothers said "*our father commanded us before he died to ask you for forgiveness for the evil that we did to you*".

This may be a statement out of context, for it might have been after Jacob's death, as it says, that is, **before** the funeral, when they sent a messenger to Joseph and asked him to keep on forgiving them, just as he had, when Jacob was alive. The context really does not matter.

However, if it was after the funeral, the funeral may have made a certain impression on them, and when they saw Jacob walled away, it encouraged them to be anxious, and they felt afraid once more. It was evident that Joseph was well above them in station, and his status, which they had seen in evidence on the funeral journey, might have caused them to feel he was remote. "*Now the relationship **will** change*", they thought, without the link of the common father.

This is another clue, that the family was not well blended, but it must have been almost impossible to be well blended, with Joseph in such royal circumstances.

Of course, Joseph did forgive them, but the suggestion must have pained him, and he wept that they still did not understand the strength of God's will in the matter.

Consider:

* Was this a strategy to save them from what they perceived as coming punishment, at last?

* Or did they just need reassurance?

* Why did Joseph weep?

* Is Joseph's high minded answer appropriate in the circumstances?

* What can we learn from Joseph's attitude to those who injured him?

* How did Joseph further demonstrate his loving care for his brothers?

* Did they believe him?

* Had he not been reassuring enough, that they thought his vengeance had just lain quiet all these years?

* Considering that it is convenient that the dead do not rise up to call us liars, is that worth considering also, that they deceitfully used their dead father's endorsement for the question?

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Joseph's reassurance contains the same words as in *Genesis 30:2*, when Jacob angrily reproached Rachel for her complaint about her barrenness. "*Am in the place of God?*" But here Joseph, understanding their anxiety, spoke kindly to these faltering brothers of his and promised to nourish them always, in a beautiful and reassuring manner, *Genesis 50:21*. Joseph wept again and reminded them, as he had earlier in *Genesis 45:2*, that they were all "*players in the game*" ordained by God to save the people from certain death. For this cause he'd lived 93 years in Egypt (he died at the ideal Egyptian age of 110 years). "*You meant evil, but God brought good out of it".* He wants them to understand the onward march of events, all governed by God.

However, Joseph does not release them from the evil, but places them in God's care for judgment. That does not mean that reparation does not have to be made, for later in *The Law of Moses,* the sin and the guilt offering specifically taught that. We can think of reparation that they could make to him, to this man who appeared to have everything. We hope they could respond in some way. He wanted them to believe him, that's all. And in their believing. Joseph would have seen how their faith had worked "*perfection*" in them as well.

He gave them his full confidence later, at least those who still lived, and they must have loved him then in return, as well, for he gave them the charge to bury his bones in Canaan. He did not ask his sons or his grandsons to embalm him and keep his body until it was time for the march out of Egypt. He asked his brothers to embalm him, *Genesis 50:24,25*.

We know that God would have provided other Tamars who would care for his embalmed body all those years.

Well, these brothers prostrated themselves once more before him. It was the last recorded time. "*Forgive us our trespasses*", they said.

***Genesis 50:18* is the final bowing down, perhaps seven times now, like their father had bowed to Esau. It is a final fulfilment of the dream.**

Consider:

* Does our forgiveness of people fade? (Joseph's did not).

* Are people afraid of our retribution after they are forgiven?

* Is forgiving and forgetting all that is necessary, when repentance has been declared, or should we do more, say in reparation?

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It is not forgiveness if it waxes and wanes, even if we say that it is.

It is forgiveness if we accept apology and reparation, and when the memory will not fade, we can let the hurt go.

Left beside a dead child's body at a World War 2 concentration camp, is a fitting prayer. Stephen's last words and prayer, at his stoning death, is rather the same, *Acts 7:60,* "*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*".

"**Oh Lord, remember not only the men and women of goodwill, but also those of ill will.**

But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted upon us.

Remember the fruits we have bought, thanks to this suffering.

Remember our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity and the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this.

And when they come to judgement let all the fruits which we have borne, be their forgiveness".

Quoted in **-** "*Forgiveness and Other Acts of Love*" by *Stephanie Dowrick*

May we rise above our suffering (as Joseph did with his brothers), above those who have done us ill, and remember the Godly lessons we have learned, and the fruits that we have bought, during the ill that came upon us, and may those fruits be their forgiveness.

There is an interesting fable in the *Talmud* that weaves a story of Esau's death at the burial of Jacob. Esau arrives at the cave with his sons, and challenges Joseph to the rights to use Machpelah. Esau claims ownership of the field, and Joseph denies that right, saying he has the documents of sale, whereon is Esau's signature, for Esau sold it to Jacob, at Isaac's death. Esau asks then to view the document. Joseph remembers that it is back in Egypt and sends his brother, Naphtali, to go quickly and bring back the deeds for the cave, and the deeds for the sold birthright. Meanwhile Esau stopped the funeral from proceeding. The next day, there was a fight between the two factions. Hushim, the dumb son of Dan, was guarding the coffin of his grandfather and did not understand what the conflict had been about. When he asked, by sign, to be told what was holding up the proceedings, he became very angry, and ran into the fray, and, with one blow, beheaded Esau. Joseph's party, who had lost no men, then prevailed over the Esau party, who had suffered, as well, the loss of forty men. Then the defeated children of Esau witnessed the internment of Jacob over seven days. Then they carried Esau's body to Mount Seir to be buried, but his head was buried in Hebron where he fell. There are many mythological, but intriguing stories in the Talmud.

6. BACK IN EGYPT

Now that the burial was over, the procession had to wind its way back to Egypt. Many hours there were, for thinking and sitting around campfires, and mulling over it all. The grace that Joseph had for them, the grace he lived by, loved by, was led by, shone through, and now in his finest hour, he is in charge of them all, and guards and guides them back to Egypt.

Right up to the end Joseph cares for them, and reminds them of all that is theirs. And suddenly his death now is upon us, *verses 24* to *26* and in his last instructions Joseph made representation to the family about **his** burial, so that **his** future would be linked with that of Israel. The brothers embalmed Joseph's body in Egypt so that when they left, under the Pharaoh who "*knew not Joseph*", the Israelites took his body with them. He had promised them that, when the great trial came, God would care for them and show them a way of escape. He commanded them to take his body with them, and so it was.

He passes from life leaving rich memories with them all, those now grown children who had come down into grain filled Egypt, with their fathers and grandfather. They saw that Joseph believed that God was in everything, and that shored him up against bitterness or vengeance. He left them with a model of a life of pristine integrity and grace filled forgiveness that brought them all peace.

7. JOSEPH UNITES *GENESIS* AND *EXODUS*

The next chapter in the Scripture begins *Exodus*.

H. A. Whittaker calls Joseph "*the Jesus of Genesis*", for he was "*a forgiving saviour*". *Genesis* is fundamental to understanding the rest of the *Bible*. It is the life of Joseph that unites *Genesis* and *Exodus* together. It is Moses and Joshua who fulfil the request to take Joseph's body with them to Canaan. In all that time (144 years) it stood upright, waiting, for they knew it had to go back to Canaan one day. It was a constant reminder that Egypt was not their home and that there was a better place prepared for them.

There are two ways in which a workman (or woman) regards his work - his own, or, his master's. If it is his own, to leave it in his prime, is catastrophic. If it is his Master's work, then putting up well worn tools, and acknowledging others can carry on, is a worthy thing. So it is with the will of God. Work is given (by God) not because the world needs it, but because the workmen need it. Men make work, but work makes men. An office, a workshop, a factory a kitchen, a home, a worshipful place is not a place for making work, but for making men for God's sake.

God cares less for winning causes than for winning men. Men retire, not because the cause is won and the work is done, (this world is never perfect), but because there are other men to step into their shoes, to grow also in education, in discipline, unselfishness and grace. Each man needs to be called to the field. If one man did all the work then that would be the world's loss. So it is that God withdraws men when their work is fullest and their work most ripe - to fill the vacancy with growing men. Thus many may be enriched with the loss of one. When our thoughts are heavy with questions of the mysterious ways of God, reason is kept from reeling out of order if we remember the loss of one, is opportunity for another.

So, it is hard for us to believe that there was no other "*Joseph*" after his death, who slipped into his shoes and "*held the fort*" until Moses was called some 104 years later (when he was 40 years old). At a time when the whole current of thought ran in a different direction, and men were vivifying the powers of nature, and turning them into gods, and there were many of those, it was essential that there was a witness to the notion of one great Ruler, to the Oneness of God, there in Goshen. If there were such faithful men then, they are not recorded here in Genesis or Exodus.

It was essential for the Jewish race to have the five great fathers of this story - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and Judah, as a protest against the idolatry that had developed amongst the peoples of the earth, and to find in them the greatest possible encouragement, to all who should prove loyal to the God of these fathers. They were the Patriarchal Fathers, and with the exodus out of Egypt, the great Abrahamic Epoch, that is, the first of five, which make up the Old Testament 2,000 years, came to an end. It fulfilled the first great mission mandate, and through the testimony and witness of these special people of God, many were brought nigh to Him.

Would that their children had fulfilled the charge that God laid with the fathers, but the descendants of these patriarchs eventually corrupted the base that had been laid down, and lost their special relationship with God, and the last epoch ended in a dispersion and Diaspora.

Rabbi Brasch, retired Sydney rabbi, was heard to say, "*The Jews are not God's chosen people, they are a people chosen by God to teach God's word*", *January, 1999.* Indeed. Well then, by their ungodly fruits they are not known as God's teachers, but a silent or mute witness that He

keeps His word. They do not fulfil the mission mandate. They "*are not*" His "*sheep*", for they "*do not hear*" His "*voice*", *John 10:26-27*.

CONCLUSION:

As we have had such a detailed and intimate connection with Jacob and his children, over this long section of their history, it pains us to hear of the forthcoming children's rejection of God, and their rejection of His promises and the covenant that He had set up with them, His people, and to hear them say that the prophecies have all been fulfilled. If these five patriarchs of theirs, died without receiving the inheritance, believing that they would be resurrected, it is impossible for the present children to believe, as they proclaim, that there is nothing for them after death, and that this life is all God has promised. Yet they **do** believe as a secular nation that there is nothing for them after death. Certainly as dying unbelievers there **is** nothing for them.

Digression 1:

The importance of father/son relationships have not been researched, as far as we know, until fairly recently. They may have waxed and waned over these millenniums (it's nearly 4 millenniums since Jacob). But we do know that fathers finally lost their treasured position in the family, when the Industrial Revolution came and they had to leave home to go to work. People had worked together in family groups, in the communities, up until then.

Most of our communities call for fathers to "*leave home*" and fulfil their duty of employment. Australian psychologist/author *Steve Biddulph*'s propositions and suggestions in "R*aising Boys*" encourage better father/son relationships, so that boys can see good models and so grow in strength to be better support in the family structure, when it is their time to head a family. Certainly we can see fathers taking better loving care in our worshipping families, and we are grateful for that - it does, in the end, make for more positive families, and that spills over into better overall management.

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Digression 2:

Some of us feel envy for what we missed out on. Some have looked at the example of headship in other families with envy for what they lost, when the headship in their own family was not Godly, like "*I wish I had a family like yours".*

Some of us would like to erase the memory of the persistent stern look on the faces of our elders, who did not get the headship principle right. It is useless to deny the memories of many of the razor strap with its hard buckle, the rod, the cane, the clip on the ear, all of which were mistaken interpretations of the *Proverbs* "*rods*" which hurt, and did sometimes kill the child, and certainly often made children deaf, as well as other physical damage, when applied around the head. They are not the God recommended "*rods of discipline*", which were care and comfort "*shepherding rods*". We now know that, even in some outwardly worshipping families, it was unrelenting punishment, with no kind word or deed. The sinner was "*unloved, even by God*", we heard.

But "*headship*" for some, means all male prime status and domination in worshipping and domestic relationships. This is then often expressed in a physical attitude of abuse to women and children. This is usually required to be reinforced by women, who are silent on the issue, or

who say, "*that is how it was for us, and that is how it should be now for you*", and so they reinforce the imbalance of men's perceived control and power. Even sexual abuse, often accompanying the physical abuse, is often excused, for males are "*less culpable than females, because they are made that way*". To proceed along this path is to sanction victimisation. It has been a church tradition, since the "*pseudepigrapha*" or "*falsely inscribed*" writings**, not** of Adam, Moses, Enoch, Ezra, Jeremiah, Solomon and others, as claimed. They are made up of apocalypses, histories, Psalters, and wisdom texts, and are a group of Jewish writings of the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD, which did not make it into the canonical Hebrew *Bible.* Two of these texts recount the lives of the first couple, and ascribe to Adam and Eve such things that are not in the *Genesis* text, and the story has been greatly altered. Eve is turned into a sexual temptress, the ancestress of witchery, the root of evil, and the cause of The Fall, all of which are false claims. Artists and images and considerations of women being first wicked, and therefore temptresses are not scripturally based, but they did form the traditions of the church, and secular culture and do, even to this very day. Rather than an inner temptation, sin is disguised as the devil, and in hand with Eve, manages to cause the downfall of man, "*Eve", Bible Review Magazine, August 1999*. Fortunately "*the devil*" is now beginning to be interpreted as man's "*inner temptation*". "*In Christ*" women received a great bounty, but men of these traditions were very anxious to blame Eve, and consequently all women for their sins, and so women's lives soon became untenable, yet again. It is a privilege to live in an age, when women are recognised with men as having complementary roles.

The physical punishment by husbands and fathers, believing headship means superior control, with unlimited power and physical strength, has been an anathema to many victims, (for the "*sin*" for which the punishment was delivered is forgotten). It only ceased, (for boys), when the punished grew more physically strong and therefore became a threat to the punisher. For some women it never ceased, until, and only if, they ever rebelled.

It is difficult to understand why the scriptural verses for discipline for children are taken so literally, when they are obviously figurative, and when that same figure is used for adults, and is **not** taken literally. It seems that headship (the "*powerness*") of some men in the eyes of their peers was measured by their strength to deliver physical punishment (that is abuse) on their children, and, in some cases, on their wives. Even the punished accepted it, or did not question the parents' (or teacher's) right, because it was the norm at home (and at school). We are thankful that those days are mostly gone, and that better Godly discipline is being learned by parents.

Now we are encouraged that love is unconditional, it is the sin which God hates, not the sinner. There are enlightened new ways of dealing with unacceptable behaviour, and we need to learn about them. The suiciding, depressed sinner has become a too frequent occurrence, and we need to reassure, especially our young people, that there **is** light at the end of the tunnel, and that God does love them, and is beckoning them to the safety of His loving care. It is too late for some, but the lessons to be learned from those who take their own lives, is powerful, and not to be ignored.

Section 2 - Afterwards, Conclusions and Addenda

CHAPTER 1

AFTERWARDS

"***So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old", Genesis 50:26.***

FOCUS:

The little fields and houses in the Delta of the Nile**,** nourished and nurtured these people of God, and Joseph, supervised, under God, their nurturing until his death, late in *Genesis 50*, when he was 110 years old. He was buried in Shechem, in the piece of ground that Jacob had given him, ***Genesis 50:22-25.***

1. THE END OF THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY

The old family firm was finished now, and the only real estate they possessed was a little plot, in the Promised Land, in Canaan, apart from the field that housed the burial cave. That Patriarchal Sepulchre was the only land stake they owned for the next nearly four centuries, from its purchase. This great formative period of Israel's history laid the basis for the great national drama, The Great Trek, and is unfolded in *Exodus*, the next *Bible* narrative.

The Jewish people have been known as "*the people of the air*", for they have no roots and grow, so to speak, "*in the air*". There have been times in their lives when they have settled, or been allowed to settle in the Promised Land, but for their own wickedness, they have had the soil taken away, and have been blown in the wind to some other place.

While they were in this host country, Egypt, these bones of Joseph cried out for burial in the earth, and encouraged them to long for the Promised Land as a nation, their first putting down of roots. For now we leave them in Goshen, "*only until after the famine*". Their impermanence did change to a more permanent base, but it was always known by those who knew the covenants that Egypt was impermanent, *Genesis 15:13*. They could have easily worked out how long they had left in Egypt. Even if the cynics might say that Moses wrote this after the *Genesis* time and could have contrived it all, there is the matter of the oral traditions being passed on, for they had the prophecy of God to Abraham in *Genesis 15:13*. That is how the Israelites learned of their impermanent stay in Egypt of 400 years.

So this story without end must end.

However it is a never ending story in that God is still looking, among this mute witness of His, to find faithfulness in individuals who will, with the saints, from among the Gentiles, "*enter in*". The Jews, at the time of the end, will be given an opportunity to be saved, not only because of their conversion by water and the spirit, *John 3:5,* (those who are left after the coming final holocaust), when they recognise the Lord Jesus Christ whom they have pierced, but because of God's love for these faithful patriarchs, to whom He made the Promises.

From their fall is come salvation unto the Gentiles - riches for the Gentiles *(Romans 11:11-12)*. So to us is given an opportunity to share God's glory in the end as well. That fall *(2 Kings 17:17-20, NIV Study Bible)*, began with God's gracious and mighty act in redeeming Israel from Egypt, where we now leave them. The violation of their basic covenantal obligations to Him we partake of, with them, as we violate our own, in sin.

The absence, to date, of archaeological evidence for, say, the position of Joseph in Egypt, is not confirmation of Joseph as a figment of someone's imagination. We will patiently wait for the evidence. Discourses in this century of former centuries BC - of palaces, temple and Israelitish houses in Egypt - do not prove our faith. Archaeology does not prove anything, it embellishes truths.

2. CAPTIVITY

For we know that Joseph was in Egypt, that he was a freed, redeemed slave, that he had belonged to the community of the imprisoned, where his spirit was never chained, where the experience of the moment carried the past and the future, where each day lived, brought resonance and depth, and helped assuage the grip of fear.

Terry Waite described, in an *Amnesty International Newsletter*, 1997 that suffering in prison (for him - Lebanon) does not necessarily destroy, "*as long as each life is lived as Christ asked us to*". We have as yet no experience like Joseph's imprisonment. He desired nothing, he swallowed his own bitterness, and other people's misery, as he turned around to see what he could do for them. His life in Egypt has many parallels with the story of Esther; both God given saviours for Israel.

The similarities of people in captivity, with their special life management skills are portrayed for us in *Genesis, Exodus* and *Esther* and *Daniel* and many other *Bible* sources. There are stories which have remarkable similarities, and some point to the similar stories, as weaknesses in the texts, rather than use of literary styles, such as the Midrash. We need to see differences as paradoxical, not as discrepancies which can undermine our faith. "*Same but different*" is a useful tool.

The rise of Israel, and then their captors' efforts to bring about their submission was often thwarted by women *(Exodus 1:17* and *2:10)*. Women **do** hold up "*half the sky*". **So it is that ordinary men and women can change the course of history too.**

Joseph was an obedient slave, a patient prisoner, a confident prime minister and a saintly believer. He was a grand man, with a vision, always looking forward. It was a bold thing to believe that Egypt would not swallow his people, in its waves upon the nations, but that the independent river would flow eventually to its God appointed home. The slaves would be released, and Joseph, in his death, inspired and encouraged this philosophy. He did not allow anyone to trample on his dreams or his passion about his family and he kept his boldness for God.

There are now, in this text, two long sections as comments on the practice of SLAVERY and POLYGAMY. They are not digressions but are considered to be the two factors that enslaved this family to dysfunction, yet were the very means of establishing a large patriarchal family for the children of Israel, and for their safety from the dangers that pursued them.

And herein lays the paradox to be considered.

3. SLAVERY

In our time, we've heard of the work of Nelson Mandella who led by example, when the courage of others failed, who raised hopes when doubts arose, who **insisted** on being treated with dignity, whose expertise in conciliation overcame division, and eventually brought the ANC to power in South Africa, within forty years of the first demand. Of course there were

imperfections, but his efforts brought the blacks from slavery, in that country. He had a vision, like Ghandi had a vision, and Martin Luther had a vision, a burning desire. That's how it would have been for Joseph with God's plan to save Israel in Egypt. He had a vision, but his vision was inspired by God, and so bound to succeed.

Slavery has been one of the curses of humanity, and *Genesis 9:25*, has been used to condone the use of one man for the benefit of another. It is only in our time that the church has ceased from that argument, at the insistence of those unbelievers who were tired of the injustices of those who should have known better. God never meant demeaning roles for some, and empowering roles for others.

The claim that the church has been counterculture, that is, maintaining a critical detachment from a society to better proclaim the gospel, has not always held true. In some regimes it has been too selective, thus promoting the evil. For example, Indonesian church leaders, not numerous, but educated, and with economic clout, are now being criticised, (1998), for collusion with the Soeharto regime, with whom they enjoyed a cosy relationship then, during the 32 years of repression.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 1998, in South Africa, found the same, where, among other things, the church had provided chaplains for the military, often in uniform, thereby endorsing the military's harsh attitude on apartheid. Courageous positions were taken, but the commission reports that, contrary to their own deepest principles of belief and Godly traditions, "*many faith communities mirrored apartheid society, giving the lie to their profession of loyalty to God*" and His service. Those beliefs and Godly traditions are meant to transcend social division.

Kyriarchy was not God's ideal. But it was often the stance of the church.

Certainly we are redeemed slaves from sin, by the Lord Jesus Christ's blood, not by the silver and gold of the world, *1 Peter 1:18-19*, but to use the analogy, is not to approve of the substance. The *NIV Study Bible* on *1 Peter 2:18*, suggests that the verses on slavery may apply to employees, or household servants. Nowhere does the *New Testament* condone slavery, only giving rules (like divorce), for the practices of the day. However the *New Testament* **contains the principles** that eventually uprooted slavery.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, in 1994, on his return to Russia said, "*Slave mentality is still among the Russians who have given up in despair*". He felt that their new found freedom left them perplexed and unable to cope. The Russian State had cared for everything and they had never been taught to cope. "*The trouble is that evil cuts through the heart of everyone of us, and who of us is willing to cut out a piece of his heart?*" *Solzhenitsyn* praised God for his prison, for it was there that God became real in his life, and on the rotting straw, he felt the first stirrings of goodness, which he had thought he had before. He now knew that he had not cut out a part of his heart, then.

Sometimes God puts us alongside those who suffer as we do, and perhaps it is in slavery, or prison, that one finds those who have also suffered unjustly for His sake. Imprisoned and indigenous missioners, say in China, have often regarded their prison situation as a new mission field, to the despair of the authorities who mean it as a punishment.

Solzhenitsyn did not feel that he was "*on hold*" from God, for like Joseph, in his long years in prison, he felt God was there with him. So "*bless you my prison*", he said, about his prison, described in "*The Gulag Archipelago*".

It is the same for the person who left the prayer beside the dead child in Ravensbruck, "*Remember, Oh Lord, the fruits we have brought, thanks to our suffering, caused by those of ill will*".

Gandhi felt that prayer was not so much an "*asking of God*", but a "*longing for the Father*", and so it is in intense times of stress, enough to say, "*God be with me*". And for Joseph he was, in the slavery and in the prison.

It is evil that makes us want power over other people. There is no power in slavery or prison for one is at the mercy of the outside others, who desire the power.

It is interesting that in the racial unrest in America the black people are blaming the Jews, (and are being called anti Semitic), who's wealth enabled them to be the slave owners, transporting the blacks from Africa to become the slaves in the American South. Also, they were the owners of the crowded tenements of the American cities to which they migrated when they obtained their freedom. Whether this is true, or a widely inaccurate claim, it indicates that minority groups are not necessarily united in purpose, and legitimate claims can be made for the Jews' oppression of others, especially in overtaking their own land, where God has yet to give the inheritance.

4. POLYGAMY

Polygamy in many instances was degraded into slavery but, even in its very highest form, caused dissension and jealousy and disproportionate love in families where the neglect of those deprived, found it hard to forgive the injustices.

Alfred Tennyson, mourns the loss of love,

"*And he that shuts Love out, in turn shall be*

Shut out from Love, and on her threshold lie,

Howling in outer darkness. Not for this

Was common clay ta'en from the common earth

Moulded by God, and temper'd with the tears

Of angels to the perfect shape of man".

The "*perfect shape of man*" includes woman moulded from his side, so the fault lies in the breaking of that mould and the unevenness of the love.

Even handedness is impossible, where God's *Genesis* law of two becoming one flesh, is abandoned. Three, four, or more, cannot become one flesh.

God's ideal is seen in the provision for the High Priest to marry only one wife, a virgin *(Leviticus 21:13-14)*. So the man and the woman, both in the image of God, become united, and mirror Christ and his church. The provision in the law for a king *(Deuteronomy 17:17)* spoke of the foolishness of taking many wives. *Nehemiah 13:26* speaks of the foolishness of King Solomon over his many wives. The story is detailed for us in *1 Kings 11*. Polygamy among other things

crippled Solomon's steps as it did Abraham and Jacob. Abraham had to send away his concubines and their children to save the dissension in his household. Slowly the ideal of *Genesis* was broken down, due to circumstances, and things were tolerated that were at first rejected. And God himself had to accommodated Himself to this degeneration.

In *Leviticus 18:18* there is a law that forbade the bigamy of jointly living sisters (as Leah and Rachel were). Not only did these marriages become polygamous, within the faith, but later there were marriages with proselytes. Then eventually there were foreign marriages, the ill advised "*strange wives*", of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah,* where mothers spoke their own tongue to their children, *Nehemiah 13:24.* The Hebrew cultural heritage was in danger of being obscured by these practices, and certainly the worship of YHWH. It is obvious that men "*drank*" from the many "*cisterns*" that they collected. There was no law against multiplying wives, so there was no sin, but the consequences followed, and they paid a penalty. It all degenerated into the demeaning of women, but even in the beginning of patriarchal life, Lot had offered his daughters for prostitution, *Genesis 19.8*. The terrible story of the putting away of the strange wives in *Ezra 10*, must have been a great time of stress for those women and children, and not *their* crime.

Love is a generous, expanding, limitless thing, not jealous. But if it is love, that is expressed sexually, that is best nurtured *"as one".* Then between them, they are partners, not only sexual, but spiritual as well, complementary to one another. They then cannot be divided by another, (mistress, concubine, second wife), not only for joys and sorrows, but for stimulation in thoughts and aspirations, and endeavours for a better world. Equal in civil and religious life and relationship to God, (be it, that one is the *"head"*), the two lives can be united towards the Kingdom.

Polygamy, or multiple wives, divides all that. Complementing one another, they cannot be.

A comment in the *Logos* magazine, February 1993, urges us not to go beyond God's evident teaching, on one man and one woman, and explains away *Robert Roberts'* accepting point of view, on the matter of polygamy, that "*the ancients lived under a different order of things*", as a comment on the patriarchal epoch, which did not function, "*as it was in the beginning*", and was changed again at the advent of Christ. This is again, reason, not excuse.

Susan Dowell's research piece about the effects of the devaluing of women in the time **since** the death of Christ - "*They Two Shall Be One - Monogamy in History and Religion*"*,* is worthwhile in understanding the reasons for mankind's reversal to the old way once more.

Australians, after the prevailing climate of conservatism, are now building fragmenting households and blending families as part of the millennium madness that seems to typify our Australian unstable family life, says the sociologist and commentator *Hugh Mackay*. Australians seem to be in a "*more regulatory mood, apparently, about violence, than about sexual experimentation and family instability*". What a pity - we would condemn both as being socially harmful. May we keep our worshipping monogamous families more stable.

There are some clues about why polygamy developed as an acceptable family structure. In times of post war trauma, when men are scarce and/or nations need to be built up, it is logical, and some would say reasonable, to build a population with the practice of polygamy, whatever we think morally. Then people might equivocatingly excuse it.

Over 100 years ago, a little group of Australians were looking for Utopia. The failed shearers' strike of 1891 led 600 disappointed people to travel to Paraguay with a renewed hope.

Paraguay, after 20 years of the "*War of the Triple Alliance*" in which 80 per cent of the men had been slain, needed workers and potential fathers and welcomed the new immigrants, granting them land. Well known Christadelphian Maud Pogson travelled, as a two year old, on the ship "*Royal Tar*" with an older relative, Dan Pogson (see *October 1995 Shield Magazine, page 6)*. Mary Gilmore and Henry Lawson, from the Australian literary scene, were also prominent Australian participants in the scheme.

There were only 14,000 old and mutilated, and young Paraguayan boy children left in the country, so the 150,000 women had to resign themselves to almost two generations of polygamous society. Polygamy became culturally acceptable there as a necessity for repopulation.

Alas, the idea of adding fresh blood to the Paraguay nation failed because the Australian men, most of them single, had signed the "*colour line*" and would not inter marry. Australia itself had a "*White Australia Policy",* and so the Australians were used to colour bars. They mostly returned to Australia, including Maud Pogson*,* who told the colourful tale. So the Paraguay nation was disappointed at the outcome of this venture. There is still a small Australian contingent in that country.

It is interesting to note, that there is no record of Joseph marrying any other wife, or of his having any other children. He did not pretend to be any better or wiser than his father, but he would have known the difficulties of polygamous marriages.

Although the practice of polygamy was underway by now, Goshen provided a secure healthy atmosphere which built a nation to God's satisfaction from one large family for 64 years after Joseph's death until Moses was born. (That is less than the time it took to build a nation in the Paraguayan story). 600,000 men beside women and children left Egypt under Moses, when Moses was 80 years old.

We need to remember that there are other ways to build up a nation and make it secure. Man's imagination is limited, God's is not.

5. EGYPT, THE HOST OF GOD'S PEOPLE - WHERE WE LEAVE THEM - AND NOW

Apart from Babylon, which emerged as a force much later, Egypt was the brightest and best at that time. They had an enviable education system, military might and limitless wealth. Accompanying it all, of course, (after Joseph), was a rotten and corrupt society, worse than any on the face of the earth at that time. And that was the Egypt which was host country to the Israelites.

Egyptians were well schooled in arithmetic, using decimal scales of notations, geometry, and trigonometry, being great land measurers. Astronomy and archaeology were also studied in Egypt. They had a proficiency in medical science, dentistry, anatomy, chemistry, metallurgy - gold, copper, iron and bronze were all used. Music, with many instruments soothed their souls. Moses was well educated according to high Egyptian standards of education.

Two millennia ago (almost) Egypt supported a university at Clonmacnoise in Ireland. The University of Alexandria in Egypt, over 5 extraordinary centuries, supported Ireland's scholastic fame. *Seamus Heaney* (the Nobel literature prize winner for 1995) being Irish himself, wrote an article about Clonmacnoise. It had 6 to 7 thousand students at a time. Irish schools were endowed by the rich, and were free to all.

When the Vikings, with the great movements of people, brought the dark ages to Europe, this university flourished. Knowledge elsewhere was restricted, and people fell into the long winter night of darkness. In AD 548 many of the tutors of Clonmacnoise had their education in Alexandria in Egypt.

In 300 AD, the great library in Alexandria was burnt down, by the Barbarians. It held the greatest collection of scrolls "*worldwide*", for since the third century BC, the Greek ruler, Ptolemy, had helped build up the Egyptian collection by assembling as many scrolls as he could, or copying borrowed scrolls. Today, Australians are contributing towards restocking and rebuilding a new crescent shaped library, to replace that library, to be opened in the year 2,000. But, it can never be the same without those precious historical scroll records. Also in Alexandria, in about 200 BC, nobody is exactly sure, the Hebrews, commissioned by the Ptolemies, translated their *Scriptures*, beginning with the first five books, (of our *Bible*), into the Greek of the *Septuagint*.

God used this renowned education system for His own ends - beginning with His servant Joseph, and the settling of His people in Egypt. Joseph used the system, and refined it, and although he remained a Hebrew, he never abandoned, or neglected the service of Pharaoh, and thus supported the cause of the great Egyptian empire at the time. Joseph believed that the more conscientious he was to his duties, the more blessed his family would be, and that his diligence would enable God, eventually, to bring to pass the great dreams and promises that He had given to his people.

Later another Godly servant, Moses, was born in Egypt, and he lived and was educated in the royal palace. In time, the promises of restitution to the Promised Land came to pass, when God helped Moses to lead His great and mighty people from Egypt into Canaan, where the bones of their fathers await their inheritance when God wills that it will be so. Egypt's sphere of influence with the children of Israel has reached a long way down the ages. For the gift of the *Septuagint* we have the Egyptians to thank for hosting the Hebrew scholars who translated that text, in that Alexandrian library.

However Egypt, fell into decline, when God felt its use as a bread basket, or punishment instrument had passed. Now in our time, with 96% desert, and a population of 67 million people, (85% of that Muslim), Egypt finds it very difficult to survive. In 1989, they

- Received 200 million US dollars in loans,

- Had 2.6 billion dollars debt,

- Received 27,000 tons of white flour as a gift from the Americans.

- 2 million babies were born,

- The budget deficit was 50 billion dollars.

Egypt is not the force it once was, and needs help to survive now.

God promised once to smite and then heal Egypt, *Isaiah 19:22, 24, 25,* and perhaps it will be a blessing with Israel and Assyria, once more.

6. THE LEGACY OF JOSEPH

Under God's guiding hand, and with tremendous effort, this spectacular character, Joseph, son of Jacob, had set the stage, for the great and long trek out of Egypt. He did not wish for an

Egyptian monument, or pyramid, which would have been considered appropriate for a man of his position. So his death state, and the manner of his burial, in its impermanency, reminded the Israelites of **their** impermanency, and honoured his God, to the Egyptians. Although dead, his mute witness to the Israelites stood through the testing times, and gave the Israelites courage, until they took him with them under Moses, all those years later, back to Shechem, *Joshua 24:32*, after the 40 years in the wilderness. We remember that someone had to care for the bones of Joseph, over the years before he was carried to Canaan. They would be mummified, and placed in a light wooden coffin, for portability, and probably stood upright, in the manner of Egyptian burial at the time, maybe in a special tomb, or cave, but probably following the Egyptian custom for people of limited means, in the family home. It would be no mean guardian, but someone very responsible and special, who lovingly cared for these bones. They were a reminder to them that God had a special place for them, and it was not here in Egypt, ***Genesis 50:24***. "*God will surely visit you to save you*". His death was not his destruction, for his body cried out to his kinsmen, and the messages of God, were there represented in his mummified form. (Probably the bones of his brothers, went as well, each with the tribe to whom they belonged, back to Canaan), ***Genesis 50:25.*** Joseph would have known that there may not be an accommodating Pharaoh, to allow them to take his body home to Canaan, at his death, as he had done with Jacob's body. He would not have thought that it was an expedient thing for them to ask for, or do, when his prestige had died with him, so his instructions for his bones' later return, were very explicit.

CONCLUSION:

The oath that Joseph asked of his brothers about his bones, helped the hoped for conclusion, and would have a tendency to turn their thoughts, from the sadness of his death, to their later deliverance, reminding them to keep faithful. Joseph knew that this was a necessary part of their sojourn, and so he devised this remarkable way to ensure this.

CHAPTER 2

CONCLUSIONS - FOR US

"***And they embalmed him, and put him in a coffin in Egypt", Genesis 50:26.***

FOCUS:

The *Genesis* patriarchal story began with a note of hope, and now ends with the death and embalming of Joseph, and so closes the formative period of Israel's history. This brings to fruition the promises to the fathers and the hopes they had, ***Genesis 50:26.***

1. *GENESIS* LEADING INTO *EXODUS*

Now in *Exodus* the great national drama begins to unfold. The Israeli contemporary novelist, *David Grossman* has written an introduction on the book of "*Exodus*", and this was reviewed by *David Malouf*, in a *Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday Literary Supplement*, 20th March, 1999. "*Grossman finds layered significance in the text, for it is the history of an emerging consciousness: of the Jewish 'penchant for the abstract', the ability to 'use a dream to rise above real affliction' but also 'a taste for wandering tempered by an intense longing for a promised land'- a place in time, in the future, where existence will be merged with identity. One of the questions he asks himself, is whether Jews are a people of place or time, and he finds in this, in*

their refusal to be defined 'within borders' in a world that is 'all definitions and borders' the sense of discomfort they cause others, or fierce hostility. In their forty years in the desert they were offered the privilege, as he puts it, of 'redefining and redeeming themselves'; by accepting chronological time, they created the notion of history, of identity as fate - and saddled the rest of us with the same fearful responsibility. … The value of his reflections for us is the way they open the text to general questions about the human condition; to what it means to believe your story has significance; to the responsibility of time, identity, history, and obedience to a humanising code; most of all, to accept the difficult privilege of reinventing and redeeming ourselves".

The lessons from *Exodus* are the lessons learned in this *Genesis* story as well, and our fortified spirit remains to redeem **ourselves** and reinvent **ourselves** as well.

2. SAVED - AND THEN LOST

Worship and life for the Jewish race were vitally connected to encourage men in their looking forward with hopeful expectation, and to carry out the twin expectation of missioning about God and His name and His purpose. Men could not serve God if their lives were not spent in harmony with Him. Great divine blessings would then flow to them, and all nations would be blessed as the promises foretold. Sadly the lesson was not learned well, and Israel went off to idolatry.

Their time in Egypt, where they eventually became victims, their crucible of Egyptian slavery time, was a lengthy preparation for the "*cocoon*" stage of the wilderness. Abraham's and Jacob's and Joseph's dreams prefigured the dreams of the nation. Other tribes moved around looking for sustenance, but the children of Israel moved around with a great longing, and still do, with their talent to be sustained by dreams, which has inspired them through the terrible torments that came upon them. This helped to perpetuate their existence, so that today their nation is characterised by a great sense of endurance. They are the stuff that dreams are made of, and the Promised Land is their longing, though they know not the true purpose. Throughout their tenure in the land, when Egypt was far behind them, and they were "*hatched*" from the wilderness, champions were raised up to rally the scattered forces, but light and darkness had a struggle on the Hebrew nation as a whole, and darkness descended and won out. God's people were out of line when the plumbline test was applied to them: they were found crooked *(Amos 7:7-9)*. They knew God was angry with them and advised each other not to pray, or use His name, for it was too late *(Amos 6:10)*, and they were scattered. Their return to the land, puzzles the thinkers among them, for some still call it the Promised Land as if it still is not theirs, and that because of that, they are not yet like other nations, who can realise their potential. We know, as well, that it is not theirs to inherit, that it is God's land, until He gives it to the blessed ones. The nation seems, to them, inevitably tainted by the "*curse of the eternal".* It has a hope of growth, without ever reaching a sense of fulfilment, and with no credible sense of identity, and never able to define its borders. It has an inability to grasp the nettle and to become of age. The nation is still vulnerable to tragedy, but the nation covers that with the sense of vitality that few other nations display.

If the patriarchs and the prophets had not been raised up, the world would have been submerged in idolatry and immorality, and evil would have totally polluted the earth. No one would have been left to testify to God. As it turned out, God, with only a Jewish remnant, invited the peoples or gentiles in. "*We see clearly that the Hebrew nation was not a development from within, but a seed from heaven, developed and matured by the grace of God*", and the patriarchal family "*was not a poetical paradise without a tempter, and without sin; it was a battlefield where good and evil were in perpetual conflict*", from "*Heroes of Israel*" - *William*

Blaikie, page 25. What a pity that seed never resisted the sin and evil and never took on the great potential, of which it was capable. The "*curse of the eternal*" is upon them still, and will never leave them, until they know Him. The memory shards remain to chide them, but they do not listen. God's purpose with that nation remains, and so they are in the crucible still. **The seeds of sweet success still now turn to a bitter harvest.**

3. TEXTS AND SOURCES

Texts and sources have been discussed several times in this "*Kith and Kin*" text, but this concluding section may be helpful as well.

In the black tents of Mamre and later in the small white houses of the Delta, it was by word of mouth that these great stories were told, in the effort to conserve the nation. Some were mindful to "*note them down",* and so these precious toldoths were kept in safe keeping with the mummified bones. The ancestral guidelines of history saw that the traditions were fixed in the minds of the people long before it was fully written down by the man Moses, through whom the Hebrew history entered into its second great epoch or phase.

It is not inconceivable, that Moses could have also used the library at the trade centre city of Ebla in North Syria, (discovered in 1967), where clay tablets were stored by a wealthy king, in chambers beneath his palace - thousands of great historical records of that area from 3000 BC were kept there.

To some people it is important to consider the texts, and how they were arrived at. In the Pentateuch, it may be interesting to note how much Moses heard and recorded, how much was recorded for him already, and how other parts may have been priestly points of view, which he edited and included, but it is important to view that what is left for us, in the final text, is God's record for us. God has used multiple sources and writers and editors, to provide us with a complete revelation, and what is necessary for us. Its present unity is built up of inspired parts, by many inspired people.

How they were inspired is unknown to us, and it may be that we believe that the word fell into the minds of the writers to be written down for our learning. However, it is also possible that the inspired word came by the aforementioned methods. It does not really matter. We do know that the collection that is now in our *Canon* is the result of many tortuous and grand proclamations by many church fathers over the two millenniums. The historical research on these pronouncements, and the process of how we got our *Bible,* is now readily available, (and discussed earlier in this text).

In our time, we need to distinguish what is permanently valid, and what is time bound, in these theological, moral questions. Ancient Mediterranean and modern Western values are different and we need to understand the differences, for we would not impinge on people some of the rules for first century worship, which are not applicable today, such as the avoidance of gold jewellery, or braided hair.

4. DYSFUNCTION - AND SIN - AND THE WAY OF ESCAPE

Dysfunction seems to be on every side, in this world of ours, as it was in the *Genesis* story. Humanity **does** misbehave itself and evil speaks out, even when we don't intend it. We need to deal with our feelings of conscience over the evil we do, for it cripples us too, as it did Jacob's family. A seething silence is not creative, but neither are boiling rows. Constructive family management is vital. All families are dysfunctional at one time or another, no family is ideal - we

are ambitious for material things, we enjoy gaining something at another's expense, we are impatient for uncertain issues to be resolved, we like to achieve things by our **own** efforts. It seems when we know God wants to bless us (as He promised them), we cannot respond adequately to Him (as they could not).

We need to clean up our house, or it will be destroyed. If our house is in danger of destruction, we need to remember that, beside the Tree of Disobedience, the Tree of Life did grow. New life belongs to God. He offers that to us. "*My child*", He says, "*Begin again*". He really wants a temple from us. We must think about the temple God has asked us to build now.

We need help from one another. Cut asunder we are less effective, but cemented together as worshipping communities we can work together in love for His sake, even if we are both sides right. The conflict of right and right is a tragedy of history. We need to learn to accept each other.

These dysfunctioning families of God were God loved, because they knew of that dysfunction. They were trying to put things aright. They really wanted well function, as we do ourselves. Jacob himself acknowledged the sins, in the blessings on his sons. Jacob being an instrument of Providence, recognised a greater instrument under God, in his son Joseph.

Dysfunctioning families and dysfunctioning worshipping communities are acceptable to God as long as they are working towards well function.

Viewed from our end we may see our deepest trouble as our best experience.

Our corrections are for His sake, and we are saved *"for Christ's sake",* like Lot was saved for Abraham's sake.

5. SIN

Adversity is no evidence of iniquity, nor prosperity of righteousness, as Job found, and the seeming imbalance of it is, to us, illogical. The imbalance is the effect of sin, which came with the first transgression. Sin spills over into the lives of all of us, and we become anti Christ when we sin. So that's where we need to begin, that first sin, our first sin.

For sin is its own reward. *"God gave them up ... to a reprobate mind ... and uncleanness and vile affections", Romans 1*.

- Before the sin, there was covenant mutuality and solidarity where man and woman lived together in harmony and joint partnership with God, doing His express will.

- That was broken, when together, in their partnership, they rebelled against God, and that harmony, with mutuality and solidarity, all with God, was torn away.

- It will end where God intends it to end, in harmony again, with full restoration of the covenant mutuality and solidarity of man and woman in joint partnership with our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His absolute will, expressed in the beginning.

- He will heal us, then, if we are worthy of His attention.

- If this is indeed His will and purpose for us, surely the role for us now is quite clear. To the best of our endeavour we must emulate that now.

6. THE WAY OF ESCAPE

For,

With his own blood he bought us,

And for our life he died.

So, that, in the end,

The night of weeping,

Will be the morn of song,

When with the vision glorious,

Our longing eyes are blessed,

And with the Christ victorious

We will be at rest.

We need to believe and trust -

Believe in the sun,

Even when it is not shining,

In love, when feeling is not,

In God when He is silent.

We need to believe that justice **will** role down like a mighty stream, and that righteousness **will** flow like a mighty river.

With these allusions to *Psalm 23* we can pray:

"***My Lord, I have no idea of the road ahead, I know not where or when it will end. I hope I am following Your will, but I can only trust that I am. I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You, and I hope that I have that desire in all that I do. I know that if I do this You will shepherd me, and bring me to green pastures, and beside still pools, along the righteous path, though I may not realise it. Therefore I will trust You always to comfort and lead me with Your rod and staff, though I seem lost and in the shadow of death. So I will not fear. Even with my enemies present You may prepare me a meal. There are wonderful blessings, and goodness and mercy, all the days of my life, if only I will use them. There is oil for anointing and an overflowing cup in Your house forever. So Lord, You and I together can help me walk aright".***

I shall not live until I see God, and when I see Him I shall never die. So –

Lord remember me, when you come into your Kingdom, remember me, when you come into your Kingdom.

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TIME/AGE CHART OF THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY

This Time/Age chart is compiled from Chronikon Hebraikon, compiled by John Thomas, and Companion Bible. The opinions vary on the actual dates of these histories, and especially the different dynasty Egyptian dates are uncertain. Another helpful source is "Contemporary Age Reference Chart of Early Biblical Characters", compiled by Dennis Arthur, Brisbane, 1989.

Therefore the use of ages seems a better way to understand the passing of time, though it is not infallible. After all, pinpointing the actual time in history is not as important here, as

understanding the relationships between the characters, in this Hebrew family dynasty. We can also find ages confusing, with uncertainty as well, for it is well to note, Sarah's age is the only woman's age mentioned in Scripture.

Abraham, is probably 50 - leaves Ur with Sarah and his family.

Abraham, 75 - and Sarah leave Haran, leaving his father's family there.

Abraham, now 76 - and Sarah sojourn in Egypt for 8 years - first "*say you are my sister*" incident.

Abraham, 84 - returns from Egypt.

Abraham, 85 - marries Hagar.

Abraham, 86 - Ishmael born.

Abraham, 99 - Sarah 89, their names are changed from Abram and Sarai - covenant of circumcision: Abraham and Ishmael and all born in the house, and all slaves – promised baby for Sarah.

Abraham, 100 - Sarah 90, second "*say you are my sister*" incident in Gerar.

Abraham, 100 - Sarah 90, Isaac born.

Abraham, 120/30 - Isaac 20/30 (age unclear) near-sacrifice incident.

Abraham, 137 - Sarah 127 dies - Isaac 37.

Abraham, 140 - Isaac 40 marries Rebekah - Abraham takes, or has taken Keturah.

Abraham, 160 - Isaac 60 and Rebekah have twins, Jacob and Esau.

Abraham, 175 - dies - Ishmael 89 - Isaac 75 - Jacob and Esau 15 - Esau sells his birthright to Jacob.

Isaac, in Gerar - the third "*say you are my sister*" incident.

Isaac, 100, - Esau 40 marries two Hittite women.

Isaac, 123, - Ishmael 137 dies - Jacob and Esau 63.

Isaac, 137 - Jacob and Esau 77, deceitful/blessing incident.

Isaac, 151 - Jacob 91 - Joseph born in Haran to Rachel, Zebulun and Dinah (twins?) to Leah.

Jacob, and Esau 98 - meet when Jacob and family return from Haran.

Jacob, and Esau, 104 - Dinah 14 raped.

Jacob, 108 - Rachel dies - Benjamin born, Reuben forfeits (rightfully) the birthright to Joseph.

Jacob, 109, - Joseph 18, sold into Egypt.

Jacob, 110, - Isaac 170, meet at Hebron (some think this is their first meeting since the deceitful/blessing incident for none in between is recorded - 33 years).

Joseph, 28, - in Egypt interprets the butler's dream.

Isaac, 180, - dies - Jacob 120 - Joseph 29 (in Egypt).

Jacob, 121, - Joseph 30 interprets Pharaoh's dream.

Jacob, 129, Joseph 38 manages the famine food distribution,

Joseph's brothers plead for food.

Jacob, 130, - goes down into Egypt to Joseph with family.

Jacob, 147, - dies after 17 years in Egypt - Joseph 56 - Benjamin 39.

Joseph, 110, - dies in Egypt.

Moses, born 64 years after Joseph's death.

MULTI GENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION

S**arah/Rebekah/Rachel** - all childless for many years.

Sarah/Rebekah - both schemed to fulfil God's promise.

Abraham/Isaac - both denied wives in "*say you are my sister*" incidents.

Isaac/Jacob - both particularly attached to their mothers.

Isaac/Jacob - both went to former family home for marriage.

Abraham/Isaac - both made treaties with Abimilech and Phicol.

Rebekah/Laban - both acted deceitfully - one for, one against Jacob.

Sarah/Rebekah/Tamar - all put in a negative position, where the promised seed line could have been disrupted. The record tells us how the first two were protected by God. Tamar went specifically to seek that seed line.

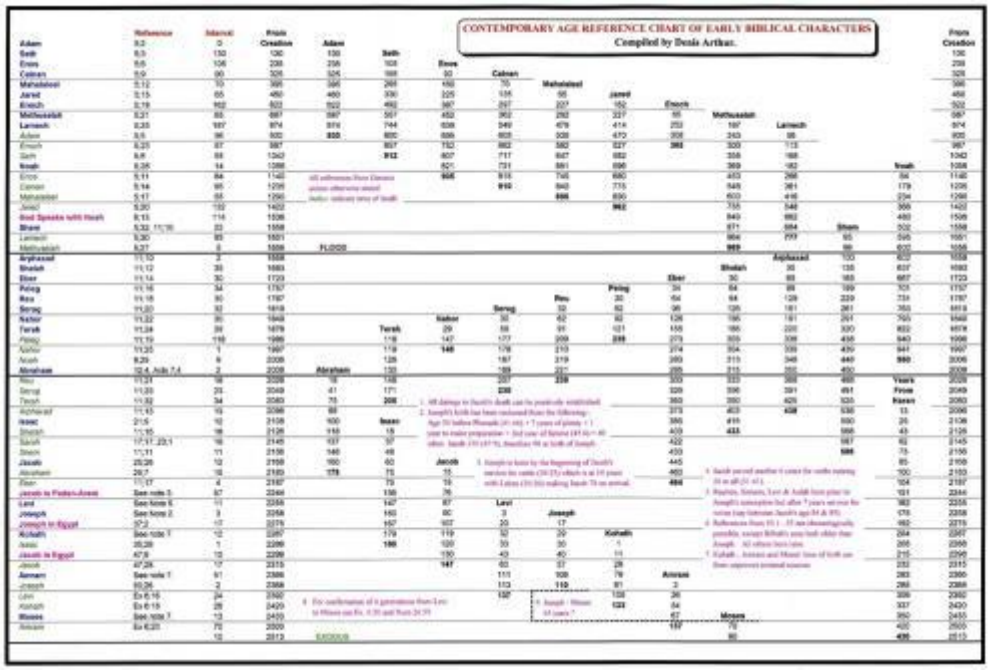
Jacob/His sons - both used goat skins for deception.

Jacob/Laban - both tried out-performing the other.

Rachel/Leah - both had a compulsion to earn the right to love.

On-going abuse - among siblings on Joseph - by Reuben on the concubine - on Tamar, murder, treachery, physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

So much of the abuse in all of these families was perpetrated by the ungodly motive of power. However, in the end, valleys will be exalted and mountains shall be made low, the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, **for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.** May the day that the prophet Isaiah envisaged, soon come.



CONTEMPORARY AGE REFERENCE CHART OF EARLY BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

Compiled by Denis Arthur.