

Genesis

Revisited

Dedication

Dedicated to my son, Peter, with fond recollection of many philosophical conversations.

Copyright notice

The original contents of this book are copyright © (2014) John Nicholas Everett of Leicestershire.

Acknowledgement with grateful thanks is made of the World English Bible (<http://ebible.org/web/>) whose text has been incorporated as permitted. The American English spellings have been retained throughout.

The Wikipedia online encyclopedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page) has been used for various short citations.

Introduction

The trouble with communication is that we have to use words.

It is obvious that words need to be translated from one language to another, and this gets doubly difficult if the original language is no longer a currently spoken language.

Within these pages I am going to try to understand the opening chapters of Genesis in the light of modern science. I am even going to do a risky thing. I am going to try to retell those stories as if they were a communication intended for the 21st century, and not the several millenia ago when they were first read.

This will not be a translation, nor even a paraphrase, simply a retelling using the benefit of modern knowledge. It will sound awkward and will have lost all the familiarity of the original, which had a lot of poetry built into it. If it has any merit it will be because it might be a better understanding in 21st century terms of what the original communication intended.

This treatment will only be applied to the early chapters. When we move from them to what are obviously family chronicles, these will be presented with comments, using a modern translation. The overall intention is to give the reader the chance to view the whole book of Genesis, hopefully with a good appreciation of its value to us today.

This is not a scholarly work. I am not qualified to deliver that. But I have read widely, both of

scientific books and those written by defenders of a 'creationist' viewpoint. My chief premise is that there is a lot for us to learn from the book of Genesis, whatever our starting point, and this is what I hope to explore.

There are no footnotes detailing sources. Where there are statements of opinion, they are simply my own. Supporting citations will be incorporated in the text itself, with the hope that this will make the whole narrative flow more easily.

The English Bible translation used is the World English Bible, a widely published modern translation that has been made available in the public domain. The only modification will be to omit chapter and verse numbers, and the footnotes, for improved readability. Chapter divisions and verse numbers were never part of the original, in any case. A different font will indicate this incorporated text.

What is a myth?

We call the opening chapters of Genesis myths quite rightly, because we cannot regard them as literal history, and it can be argued that they were never intended to be seen as such. This is the first step we must make so as to understand them better. The problem arises because they were included in a book called the Bible, and many Christians thought that this meant they were inerrant. Actually the Bible is a collection of many types of writing: genealogies, court chronicles (with the inevitable spin such things have), poetry, proverbs, prophetic utterances and visions, biography, history, and letters. Each type needs to be read in the context of what type it is. Poetry is bound to have imagery, for instance. A myth can be a 'true' myth, in the sense that its meaning is true. And these Genesis myths were a communication given in terms of the potential understanding of those who would first read them. Our task is to interpret them in the light of all the other communications from the same source. A myth is a story with a meaning; it is the meaning we must attempt to fathom out.

In recent times we have begun to discover how old the universe is, how old the planet we live on is, how long ago there is evidence of the first beings we might call human, and how much evidence there is that life on earth has evolved. We bring all this knowledge with us, and must not discard it, or - worse - create a false dichotomy between religion and science. Both should be seen as the means of enlightening the other.

The myths of Genesis are no less a source of truth because they talk of creation in six 'days', and if you do lots of sums on the genealogies in Genesis you can arrive at a ridiculous date for creation as 4004 B.C., as famously Bishop Ussher did in the seventeenth century. This was a mistake on several levels. The genealogies of the Bible are not necessarily complete, and the word translated 'day' in Genesis chapter 1 can just as easily be translated as age, epoch, or era.

God's name

With any ancient text, when dealing with names, there are two main options: one can either preserve the original name (transposing the alphabet letters if need be) or one can attempt simply to translate. Adam, for instance, is either a name or the Hebrew word meaning man. The word 'God' can mean so many things to so many people; from a bearded old gentleman sitting on a throne upwards. It will mean something different to an atheist, an agnostic, a Christian, or a member of a non-monotheistic religion. When we speak of God we cannot avoid being anthropomorphic in our visualisation, of carrying some human qualities and attributes into our mental picture, which are totally contradictory of a being not limited by time, place, or shape.

To side-step this problem I shall initially use the original Hebrew word, as a name without translation, in my retelling, and also the passive voice extensively in the creation myth so as to avoid repeating an unfamiliar word.

So what was the original name given for 'God' in the texts we are looking at? And what is a 'name' even? If a name is a description we need to start with this passage in Exodus chapter 3. Moses has been given the task of leading his captive people out of Egypt by God, and so asks what name he should use to identify God to the people.

Moses said to God, "Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and tell them, 'The God of your

fathers has sent me to you;' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What should I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," and he said, "You shall tell the children of Israel this: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God said moreover to Moses, "You shall tell the children of Israel this, 'Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations.

The description of God is simply 'I AM'. In other words to describe God in any other way would be to diminish Him, to limit His attributes to those included in any more specific name. It was for this reason that the Jewish nation gave up saying God's name. It was simply too holy to be said. The most frequent word used instead was a tetragrammaton, a four letter word, with the letters YHWH. As religiously observant Jews are forbidden to say or write the Tetragrammaton in full, when reading the Torah they use the word Adonai, which means 'lord'. The word YHWH itself is derived from 'to be'. English translations have often used 'the LORD' (with capitals to show a special usage), or else a mistaken rendering 'Jehovah' (King James Version), or the probably more accurate and now widely accepted 'Yahweh', as here in the World English Bible.

The other Hebrew word used for 'God' is 'Elohim'. It is the plural of El, though usually followed by a singular verb or adjective. To understand this better we may consider this commentary: "The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to those, You want to know my name? I am called according to my actions. When I judge the creatures I am Elohim, and when I have mercy with My world, I am named YHWH (Yahweh)."

A further insight which may help us appreciate

who 'Yahweh' is comes in the fourth gospel, where Jesus uses a phrase 'I am ... ' several times. One particularly notable instance comes in this passage:

Jesus answered, "...Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. He saw it, and was glad." The Jews therefore said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM." [John 8:54-58]

We can see how significant this saying was because the immediate reaction was to treat this as blasphemy, and there was an unsuccessful attempt to hand out instant retribution by stoning, but Jesus managed to escape.

So it is clear that when the Bible uses the name 'Yahweh' it is indicating that the eternal 'I AM' is manifesting His presence on this planet in such a way as to be interactive with people. It is in this context that we can understand the passages we are going to look at soon, where the 'I AM' converses with Adam, Eve, and others.

Cosmic origins (1)

Genesis begins with these words:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The word 'beginning' suggests time. This is how time began. Before there had not been time. Time itself is not an easy concept, and modern thinkers can spend a lot of energy trying to explain it. But it is a useful word, nonetheless.

Apart from the word I am not going to use the next two nouns in this sentence are 'heaven' and 'earth'. And this is where we need to look at the broader picture, because both words are often used in the books that follow Genesis. We need to interpret both in this wider context.

Heaven is used in three ways in the Bible: the atmosphere (where the birds of the heaven fly), space (where the stars of heaven are), and there is the phrase 'the third heaven' used by a writer in the first century AD as being somewhere he went 'whether in the body or out of it, I do not know' and saw things he could not find words to describe.

When people pray that God's will be done 'on earth as it is in heaven' they are thinking of two realms: the physical, the cosmos as we know it, and where God is in a manner non-physical, or spiritual. The contrasts can be restated as the material and the non-material, the seen and the unseen, the physical and the spiritual. So they are contrasted, and they are

linked too: we are apparently promised a 'new heaven and a new earth' as the final cure of the spoilt universe we live in.

So our first sentence is simply saying:

"Time began when Elohim willed the material and the non-material into being."

The key part of the message here is that both modes of being, the physical and the spiritual, were brought into being. This is where we need to be critical of some scientists who propose that the only things that can possibly exist are those things that can be examined scientifically, measured by physical observation. This act of faith is theological rather than scientific, as, being purely negative, it does not allow either validation or refutation. One is tempted to call it the science delusion.

And the further message of the first sentence of Genesis is that they were not an accident: they were willed into being. This implies a being with a will, and this seems to me a possible way to avoid the use of a word that may create images in the mind of an old man on a throne. This is the real dichotomy. Is everything there is a result of a chain of accidents, or the outcome of a will that it be so? The materialist believes (as an act of faith) the first option. Those who have experienced the spiritual dimension in their lives believe (also as an act of faith) otherwise.

How easy is the 'it is all a sequence of pure accidents' theory? Well some mathematicians have calculated the chances of getting the universe we have got by accident as one chance in 10 to the power 55 (1 followed by 55 noughts). Here are some of the dependencies even for there to be the possibility of life on our planet: if the strong nuclear force were just a few percent stronger, the sun would have burnt up all

its hydrogen fuel in less than a second; our earth is just the right distance from our sun to allow water to exist in liquid form, which is vital for life to exist; our sun is one of very few suns that have a relatively stable heat production, essential for life; and the origin of the complex DNA code of life, which is acknowledged to be the best of more than a billion possible codes, so the chances of this arising purely by accident are astronomical. There are many more dependencies than those just listed, and if any single one were missing this planet could not sustain life.

The mathematical dimension of the 'it is all a sequence of pure accidents' is just one aspect of the difficulties that those who follow this hypothesis face. There is an even more fundamental problem. For the total atheist there is the question: how could something (which has a measurable beginning) come from nothing?

Cosmic origins (2)

The next verse says:

The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep and God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters.

Taking 'the earth' as shorthand for the material universe we can see that there is a clear indication that the beginning of time was also the beginning of a progression from 'formless' to shaped. This is extremely important, in the attempt which is being made here to align scientific observation with a revelation of purpose.

To believe that the Genesis stories are actually useful does not make anyone need to contradict what scientific cosmologists are pretty sure about. The creation myth contains no dates, and there is no need to interpret 'days' as periods of time. So we can read this myth as having reference only to progression and purpose, and not to any particular span of time.

There are three elements in the verse just quoted. Lack of form, darkness, and water. The issue of darkness, the absence of light, is dealt with next. And it is assumed by biologists that water is an essential to the life of flora and fauna.

That these three elements should be presented as the initial building blocks of the material universe is an insight that, given the antiquity of this pre-scientific myth, should at least make us begin to sit up and take notice. How could something that is certainly

older than the speculations of the classical Greek philosophers like Aristotle be so insightful?

We note also the antithesis between 'the Spirit of God' and the material 'earth'. The spiritual, by definition the unseen, brings shape to the physical, the seen. Another insight that is significant.

So here is a proposed restating of the meaning of verse 2:

"Initially everything material, especially the liquid, was at a primitive stage of development, with no light even, and the spiritual was set to mold the physical."

Light

The next passage is:

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw the light, and saw that it was good. God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light "day", and the darkness he called "night". There was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Ask a physicist what light is and you will get a lot of humming and hating. It can be thought of as a wave, and as particles. It is a sort of energy: if you light a candle you get light and heat as a result. For greater clarity here is the Wikipedia definition:

"Visible light (commonly referred to simply as light) is electromagnetic radiation that is visible to the human eye, and is responsible for the sense of sight. Visible light is usually defined as having a wavelength in the range of 400 nanometres (nm), or 400×10^{-9} m, to 700 nanometres - between the infrared, with longer wavelengths and the ultraviolet, with shorter wavelengths. ... In common with all types of EMR, visible light is emitted and absorbed in tiny 'packets' called photons, and exhibits properties of both waves and particles. This property is referred to as the wave-particle duality. The study of light, known as optics, is an important research area in modern physics."

The definition brings into focus electricity, magnetism, and radiation. These are the very foundation of our modern understanding of what everything material is made of, in atomic terms.

I find it amazing that a myth of such great antiquity could have had the insight to express the very elements that make up all matter as the first stage of the progression of the material universe. So here is a 21st century restatement of the quoted verses:

"The first stage of the progression of the material universe was the bringing into existence of light as electricity, magnetism, and radiation. This was given independent existence, in contrast to the absence of light; it was just the right beginning."

Space

The next stage is, in the original, as follows:

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

The word here translated as expanse appears in other English translations as 'firmament' in the King James Version, as 'open space' in the New Life Version, as 'expanse' in the Darby Version, and as 'dome' in several other versions. The Orthodox Jewish Bible translation indicates the difficulty this key Hebrew word presents by including it with three possible options: "raki'a (expanse, dome, firmament)".

To me the concept of space and the expanse of space are the most useful. In the 21st century we have some idea of the vastness of space, and so again we find this primitive myth spot on in identifying that as soon as the building blocks of matter are willed into existence the next step is to focus on the vastness of the space that matter may exist in.

Hence my 21st century version suggests:

"The next stage was that the vastness of space was made possible."

Life

The next stage is described as follows:

God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together to one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. God called the dry land "earth", and the gathering together of the waters he called "seas". God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let the earth yield grass, herbs yielding seeds, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with their seeds in it, on the earth"; and it was so. The earth yielded grass, herbs yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit, with their seeds in it, after their kind; and God saw that it was good.

So far, regarding the physical cosmos, we have matter and space. Now we come to biological life, the environment needed to support it, and the process by which it could replicate itself. Self-replicating life forms are what scientists tell us came first, and so does the insight of this wonderful myth. We could not have animal life as we know it without the flora coming first. Photosynthesis is the process by which plants produce oxygen, and this oxygen is vital to the whole range of animal life. Oxygen has to come first, hence flora before fauna, which would hardly be obvious in a pre-scientific mind.

Without necessarily implying that planet earth is the only place in the universe where life forms exist, we are now clearly focused on what happened on the planet we occupy.

In 21st century terms we have been told:

"The environment necessary for life came next, with land and water as the main components. All sorts of flora emerged on dry land, each with its own inbuilt system of self-replication."

Seasons

Plant life on this planet of ours depends on day and night, and seasons of growth followed by seasons of dying back. Plant life has emerged here fully adapted to these patterns, so their explanation comes next:

God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs to mark seasons, days, and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth"; and it was so. God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light to the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good.

We understand now pretty well what goes on in the solar system: the elliptical orbit of our planet round the sun, rotating round its own axis at an angle to the path of its solar orbit. This is how we get days and nights, summer and winter. Trees respond to day and night. To quote Wikipedia: 'As part of the carbon cycle, plants, algae, and cyanobacteria use light energy to photosynthesize carbohydrate from carbon dioxide and water, with oxygen produced as a waste product. However, photosynthesis cannot occur in darkness and at night some carbon dioxide is produced by plants during respiration.' Acting as an enormous

'carbon sink', trees soak up carbon dioxide from the air, producing life-giving oxygen in return. In fact, a medium-sized tree generates the same amount of oxygen as each one of us needs to breathe.

Many plants have the annual sequence, as every gardener knows, of springtime growth and autumnal dying back. And some marine organisms benefit from the regular covering and uncovering of sea water provided by the tides. So our myth, having introduced plant life, needed to explain this vital component of their cycles.

It is a fascinating 'coincidence' that the moon and the sun appear to be exactly the same size. If you see the sun through enough mist to make it possible to give it your attention, it appears to be just like a full moon. The reason? The sun is 400 times larger than the moon, and its distance from the earth is 400 times more than the distance of the moon.

So we can offer:

"To provide the daily and annual variations that are essential to the respiration and cyclic nature of plant life, the sun and moon were arranged to give night and day, and the pattern of seasons."

Sea and Air

But there was not only plant life on dry land, but also aquatic life in the sea, and life in the sky. So we read next:

God said, "Let the waters abound with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the sky." God created the large sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed, after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind. God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

It is astounding to me that this ancient myth is once again spot on in saying that biological life began underwater. And this kind of life also needed to be self-replicating. And there were self-replicating life forms in the atmosphere too. Is it stretching the interpretation too far to think of 'winged birds' as implying insects as well as feathered birds? I am going to take that leap as a 21st century person:

"Animal life began in the sea, living beings that could self-replicate, and then there were the first living beings that could use the air too."

Land Animals

We next read:

God said, "Let the earth produce living creatures after their kind, livestock, creeping things, and animals of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. God made the animals of the earth after their kind, and the livestock after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind. God saw that it was good.

One does not need to say much as we are now in very straightforward territory. So a slightly more modern retelling would be:

"The progression of biological development reached its last stage with the emergence of all kinds of living beings on dry land."

Mankind

The culmination of this final stage gets a whole lot of important detail: the emergence of homo sapiens.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them. God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." God said, "Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree, which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food. To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food;" and it was so.

When evolutionary biologists were first thinking about primates, they coined the term 'hominids' to describe remains that had the skeletal appearance of being similar to modern humans. There is still some discussion about various proposed near-human remains, and of course more discoveries may generate more discussion. This is not the place to go

into details, and the starting point for the layman would be the phrase 'human evolution' in Wikipedia and other similar sources. The key thing is that today there is a species which is called 'homo sapiens' which is both similar to and distinct from other primates.

What does the Genesis myth tell us about 'homo sapiens'? This is the question that matters, and for many this is what makes the Genesis myth so revealing.

Humans are uniquely possessed of one attribute: they are like God. Their wisdom (sapiens is Latin for wise) makes it possible for them to dominate all other species. Our myth tells us that this is not only a power held but a responsibility given. Their emergence was with a purpose. They are the ecological managers of the planet they live on.

So I suggest this modern retelling:

"Finally humans were given the divine attribute of wisdom, and the responsibility to manage and care for the planet earth and all its living beings. They were given male and female sexuality so that they could populate the whole planet and all the vegetation was to be their sustenance, as it was for the other dry land animals."

Finished

The final section of this myth is:

The heavens, the earth, and all their vast array were finished. On the seventh day God finished his work which he had done; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, because he rested in it from all his work of creation which he had done. This is the history of the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens.

We have assumed that for 21st century readers six literal 24 hour days is not a possible concept, given the knowledge we have of how old the universe is, and so have talked of six stages. We also want to avoid the anthropomorphic idea that God was tired and needed to rest.

But here we also meet a reflection on the way our seven day week is organised, so that one day can be designated as a day of rest. Our rendering of these verses needs to reflect this. Hence:

"Now the universe had become complete. After six stages of development there was a seventh stage where no new interventions occurred, a cessation of development. Thus in any week a seventh day can reflect this pattern of work and rest.

All this has been the account of how the whole universe, physical and non-physical, came into being."

Retelling the whole myth

So here is the whole of the modern retelling as one single narrative:

Time began when Elohim willed the material and the non-material into being. Initially everything material, especially the liquid, was at a primitive stage of development, with no light even, and the spiritual was set to mold the physical. The first stage of the progression of the material universe was the bringing into existence of light as electricity, magnetism, and radiation. This was given independent existence, in contrast to the absence of light; it was just the right beginning. The next stage was that the vastness of space was made possible. The environment necessary for life came next, with land and water as the main components. All sorts of flora emerged on dry land, each with its own inbuilt system of self-replication. To provide the daily and annual variations that are essential to the respiration and cyclic nature of plant life, the sun and moon were arranged to give night and day, and the pattern of seasons. Animal life began in the sea, living beings that could self-replicate, and then there were the first living beings that could use the air too. The progression of biological development reached its last stage with the emergence of all kinds of living beings on dry land. Finally humans were given the divine attribute of wisdom, and the responsibility to manage and care for the

planet earth and all its living beings. They were given male and female sexuality so that they could populate the whole planet and all the vegetation was to be their sustenance, as it was for the other dry land animals. Now the universe had become complete. After six stages of development there was a seventh stage where no new interventions occurred, a cessation of development. Thus in any week a seventh day can reflect this pattern of work and rest. All this has been the account of how the whole universe, physical and non-physical, came into being.

Bearing in mind the antiquity of the original writing down of this account - and who knows for how long it may have existed as an oral recitation? - it is worth contrasting this with other creation myths. I do not intend to cite any at this point, but will do so later. It will be seen how much better the Genesis myth, as retold in modern language, fits with modern scientific understanding of the history so far of the observable universe than any other creation myth ever told.

Family Chronicles

It is important at this stage that we dig into the literary nature of the book Genesis. It is essentially a compilation of what in Hebrew is 'elleh toledot': sections, each ending in the phrase which may be translated 'these are the generations of ...'. This phrase is really the title of the passage, to use title in its modern sense, so we need to adjust to the fact that the title of each section comes at the end of the passage, not the beginning, as we are used to. This is why the conventional chapter and verse divisions (a very much later addition) give the wrong impression.

The next section after 'the generations of the heavens and the earth' is 'the generations of Adam'; this begins at Genesis 2:4b and ends at Genesis 5:1a. All the rest of the book Genesis is a compilation of similar sections, each ending in 'these are the generations of ...' till we finally get to 'these are the generations of Jacob' (Genesis 37:2a), after which we dive into the detailed story of his son Joseph, which takes us to the end of the book.

So after the family chronicle of Adam we get the family chronicle of Noah in Gen. 5:1b to 6:9a. This is almost entirely an archive of names (who was father of whom) and at the end only just mentions God's plan to remedy the wickedness of that region with a flood, from which Noah and his family would be saved.

It is in the family chronicle of one of Noah's sons, Shem, from Gen. 6:9b to 11:10a, that we get the detailed account of this flood, and some other events that followed it, including the multiplication of

languages.

Then we have the chronicle that begins with Shem and is called 'the generations of Terah'. Terah was Abraham's father. This is a short archive of names, from Gen. 11:10b to 11:27a.

The family chronicle of Abraham begins at 11:27b and go on in much detail till 25:19a where it is described as 'the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son.'

The family chronicle of Isaac's son Jacob (25:19b to 37:2a) is another long narrative, and incorporates within it the family archive of Esau, Isaac's brother (36:1-43). After this chronicle we have the story of one of Jacob's sons, Joseph, which begins from Gen. 37:2b and continues to the end of the book.

So long as each of these family chronicles is read as such it is clear why there seem to be odd recapitulations. Often a new family chronicle begins by mentioning the birth of the person who has already been included in the previous chronicle. Noah's family chronicle, for instance, begins with Adam:

In the day that God created man, he made him in God's likeness. He created them male and female, and blessed them. On the day they were created, he named them "Adam". [Gen. 5:1b]

The chronicle then picks up the family of Seth and continues on from there, even though we have already met Seth in the family chronicle of Adam. It is only if we appreciate that these were originally separate accounts, independent of each other, that this can make sense. Genesis, in its present form, has been edited to bring all these original archives together, with no concern for repetitious recapitulations.

Adam's Family Chronicle

So we move now to the story of Adam and his family. It is difficult now to use the word myth in the same way as we have used it thus far. There are mythological elements: special trees, and talking snakes. But there is also simple narrative intended to be understood as family history: births, deaths, and so on. So let us think of it as the literary form 'legend', and let us interpret it as such.

The family history of Adam (Genesis 2:4b - Genesis 5:1a) needs to be seen as a single document, possibly oral originally, and finally by editorial process integrated into the book that forms the first part of the Jewish Torah.

It really is important to be familiar with the whole passage, and to read it in its entirety. So here it is, without the usual chapter and verse numbers:

No plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain on the earth. There was not a man to till the ground, but a mist went up from the earth, and watered the whole surface of the ground. Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Yahweh God planted a garden eastward, in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground Yahweh God made every tree to grow that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden

and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it was parted, and became the source of four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon: it flows through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good. Bdelium and onyx stone are also there. The name of the second river is Gihon. It is the same river that flows through the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Hiddekel. This is the one which flows in front of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates. Yahweh God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it. Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die."

Yahweh God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground Yahweh God formed every animal of the field, and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature became its name. The man gave names to all livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every animal of the field; but for man there was not found a helper comparable to him. Yahweh God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. As the man slept, he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Yahweh God made a woman from the rib which he had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they

were not ashamed.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any animal of the field which Yahweh God had made. He said to the woman, "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, but not the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden. God has said, 'You shall not eat of it. You shall not touch it, lest you die.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You won't really die, for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took some of its fruit, and ate; and she gave some to her husband with her, and he ate it, too. Their eyes were opened, and they both knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together, and made coverings for themselves.

They heard Yahweh God's voice walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh God among the trees of the garden. Yahweh God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" The man said, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Yahweh God said to the woman, "What have you done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Yahweh God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed above all livestock, and above every animal of the field. You shall go on

your belly and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."

To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you will bear children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

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

The man called his wife Eve because she would be the mother of all the living. Yahweh God made coats of animal skins for Adam and for his wife, and clothed them. Yahweh God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand, and also take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever-" Therefore Yahweh God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

The man knew Eve his wife. She conceived, and gave birth to Cain, and said, "I have gotten a man with Yahweh's help." Again she gave birth, to Cain's brother Abel. Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

As time passed, Cain brought an offering to Yahweh from the fruit of the ground. Abel also

brought some of the firstborn of his flock and of its fat. Yahweh respected Abel and his offering, but he didn't respect Cain and his offering. Cain was very angry, and the expression on his face fell. Yahweh said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why has the expression of your face fallen? If you do well, won't it be lifted up? If you don't do well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it." Cain said to Abel, his brother, "Let's go into the field." While they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him.

Yahweh said to Cain, "Where is Abel, your brother?" He said, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Yahweh said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground. Now you are cursed because of the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. From now on, when you till the ground, it won't yield its strength to you. You will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth."

Cain said to Yahweh, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me out today from the surface of the ground. I will be hidden from your face, and I will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth. Whoever finds me will kill me." Yahweh said to him, "Therefore whoever slays Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." Yahweh appointed a sign for Cain, so that anyone finding him would not strike him.

Cain left Yahweh's presence, and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain knew his wife. She conceived, and gave birth to Enoch. He built a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad. Irad became the father of Mehujael. Mehujael became the father of Methushael. Methushael became the father of Lamech. Lamech took two wives: the name of the

first one was Adah, and the name of the second one was Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal, who was the father of all who handle the harp and pipe. Zillah also gave birth to Tubal Cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron. Tubal Cain's sister was Naamah.

Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice. You wives of Lamech, listen to my speech, for I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for bruising me. If Cain will be avenged seven times, truly Lamech seventy-seven times."

Adam knew his wife again. She gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, saying, "for God has given me another child instead of Abel, for Cain killed him." A son was also born to Seth, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on Yahweh's name.

This is the book of the generations of Adam.

Human Origins

The first assumption one may make about this account of the family of Adam is that it was composed hundreds of years after the first events, and that it is extremely likely that it was an oral recitation long before it was fixed as a written document.

So it is the recollection, passed from generation to generation, of a family that saw itself as the first of their kind. They were special. There was no other family like them. They were the family of 'man'. Adam is the Hebrew for man, and Eve is the Hebrew for living.

So what did this family believe about their first ancestor? This is what I am going to try to express in modern terms.

Here again is the first section:

No plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain on the earth. There was not a man to till the ground, but a mist went up from the earth, and watered the whole surface of the ground. Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

The key sentence is the last one here: *Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

It is worth noting that the Hebrew for man

(adam) sounds like and may be related to the Hebrew for ground (*adamah*). The word for breath in the Bible may also be translated 'spirit' (Greek *pneuma* from which we get pneumatic). So the Adam legend is telling us that the message being passed down from generation to generation is that they are descended from someone special into whom the Lord had breathed His spirit.

In the 21st century we can best understand the source from which the first man was made, *adamah*, as indicating simply that which was already there. Was this an advanced hominid primate? Was the fashioning of the first *homo sapiens* simply the infusion of God's spirit, so that he became something uniquely possessed of a soul, with the capacity to relate to the spiritual cosmos?

An interesting comment on this verse comes in Job 32:8, *But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding*. The Bible understands that what happened with the in-breathing of God's spirit into the first man was the gift of understanding. This is a vital concept.

When one examines all that is written about human evolution for many the focus seems to be on physical similarities: man shares with the primates opposable thumbs, upright walking, the capacity to use tools, and many other similarities. But what amazes me are the huge intellectual differences: language and writing, and all the modern technology by which the physical book or reading device which you are using to read this, not to mention the house you live in, the car you drive, and all the other components of modern human existence. All this because of the intellectual difference. The Adam legend tells us that this was a divine gift. I find this somewhat less intellectually challenging than a sequence of evolutionary accidents.

Here is a possible retelling in modern terms, deliberately moving from the third person to the first to emphasise that this is a family recollection:

We humans were made special by the eternal 'I AM' through the gift of His spirit, which is what marks us out as different from other animals, as we have a soul.

Symbolic trees

Continuing with the Adam legend we next read:

Yahweh God planted a garden eastward, in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground Yahweh God made every tree to grow that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it was parted, and became the source of four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon: it flows through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and onyx stone are also there. The name of the second river is Gihon. It is the same river that flows through the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Hiddekel. This is the one which flows in front of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates. Yahweh God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it. Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die."

This passage raises lots of questions in one's mind, but it is worthwhile to note that all the archaeological evidence of the very early history of *homo sapiens* is that he was a hunter-gatherer; he subsisted on the food that grew naturally,

supplemented by meat obtained by hunting. Was there ever a time when just gathering was enough to sustain life? The Adam legend suggests that there was.

The locality of the especially fertile area called Eden, based on the names of the rivers, is clearly Mesopotamia, and it is obvious as we read further through these early family chronicles that this is, broadly speaking, the right geographical area. Abraham was called to move westward to the land bordering the Mediterranean we now call Palestine, and was then called Canaan.

Now we must address the trees in this passage. Were there literally two trees? I am not sure that it matters, because what we must focus on is the meaning behind them.

The 'tree of life' gets mentioned again in the last book of the Bible, where we read in connection with the new order, the new heaven and the new earth, and the new Jerusalem:

One of the seven angels ... carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ... He showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruits, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. [Revelation 21:9-22:2]

Commentators on this Genesis reference to the tree of life, including Augustine of Hippo and John Calvin, were prepared to consider an allegorical or symbolic interpretation. The best understanding may simply be that there was a means for early man to use gathered food to keep in perfect health.

I am sure that the other tree was symbolic:

You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.

The Bible is very clear about death, and it is death that is the key concept here. This simple symbolic message is saying just one thing: sin causes death. Paul describes death as the 'wages', the natural outcome, of doing evil. And we can understand 'having knowledge of' as meaning participating in.

Here is a possible retelling:

At the very beginning our first ancestors lived in a wonderfully fertile part of Mesopotamia. The food we had kept us perfectly healthy. But we were warned that if we participated in evil we would lose that health and die.

Language and Marriage

The next section reads:

Yahweh God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground Yahweh God formed every animal of the field, and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature became its name. The man gave names to all livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every animal of the field; but for man there was not found a helper comparable to him. Yahweh God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. As the man slept, he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Yahweh God made a woman from the rib which he had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they were not ashamed.

There are two topics here: language and marriage.

We have noted already that the Bible links the receiving of God's spirit with intellectual ability. It is obvious that the principal difference between mankind and other primates, and the failure of other types of

hominids to survive at all, has to do with the intellect. And the possession of language is crucial to the transference of skills from one generation to the next. So it is fascinating that the first recorded acts of Adam were to create the names of those living beings he saw around him. He found he had been given language. It is also worth noting that the earliest archaeological evidence for the writing down of words and numbers comes from the cuneiform markings on clay tablets found in Mesopotamia. The earliest discoveries are usually dated at around 3200 B.C.. Language is key to intellectual progress, and the development of writing from cuneiform markings to the alphabets we are familiar with today is a fascinating study.

The Adam legend next introduces marriage as the cornerstone of human society. We may understand the forming of Eve from Adam's rib as symbolic, but the message is clear: marriage is divinely instituted. The Bible is clear on this, and the most obvious endorsement of this is that when defining morality (in what we usually call the Ten Commandments) the preservation of the family is paramount: parents must be honoured; adultery is forbidden.

I am going to preserve one sentence effectively unchanged in the proposed retelling of this passage:

We were given the gift of language and marriage. That is why a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will come together physically as a single unit.

The Fall

The next passage is usually referred to as the Fall, and is much more lengthy and detailed than anything we have read so far:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any animal of the field which Yahweh God had made. He said to the woman, "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, but not the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden. God has said, 'You shall not eat of it. You shall not touch it, lest you die.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You won't really die, for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took some of its fruit, and ate; and she gave some to her husband with her, and he ate it, too. Their eyes were opened, and they both knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together, and made coverings for themselves.

This segment of the Adam legend introduces angels for the first time, and concludes with a powerful angelic being keeping Adam and Eve from having any more access to the tree of life. It has been customary for Biblical commentators to identify the serpent with Satan, the chief of the fallen angels, so we must

address this topic, at least in headline terms.

The Bible presents us with the teaching that God made two types of beings: the physical and the spiritual. The spiritual beings are usually called angels, which in both Hebrew and Greek simply means messenger. There are different degrees of angels, and they are depicted as having the power to appear as if physical, sometimes as obviously non-human, shining brightly, and sometimes as human enough to be mistaken for an ordinary visitor.

The Bible also gives us hints, though never with much detail, of a group of rebel angels who fought against loyal angels and were expelled from heaven. Their leader is given various names: Satan, or Lucifer, which means light-bearer and so hints at an original splendour before the rebellion. Satan is depicted as an Accuser (Greek *diabolos*) and a Tempter. He is also described as the 'father of lies'.

That Satan should appear as a talking snake is obviously the mythical element of the legend, and need not be taken as literal history. The teaching behind the myth is what matters, and the nature of the outcome (fruit eating) is also symbolic of we know not what.

So I suggest a completely demythologised rendering:

Our first ancestors were tempted by a powerful spiritual force to do something they knew was forbidden, and they succumbed to the temptation. This made them aware of things they had not known before.

Shame and Fear

They heard Yahweh God's voice walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh God among the trees of the garden. Yahweh God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" The man said, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Yahweh God said to the woman, "What have you done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

This part of the myth has interesting insights into human nature, with the man blaming the woman, and the woman blaming the serpent. But perhaps deep down the myth is trying to explain why we usually feel that being naked in front of others is wrong, because that is the outward result of their disobedience, while the inward result is that they began to be afraid of Yahweh.

So:

They were now ashamed to be unclothed, and were now afraid of Yahweh.

Prophecies

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

Here the mythological element of the legend explains why we have a natural aversion to snakes, and then we move into what commentators regard as prophetic. The offspring of a woman will become a saviour to destroy the power of evil, though only at the cost of himself suffering. Christian commentators see this as a reference to the saving death of Christ, though obviously to the first readers of this legend that would be far from clear. The main reason why the majority of his contemporary Jews rejected Jesus of Nazareth was because they could not get their heads round the idea of their Messiah being anything other than a victorious warrior, ridding them of the Roman occupiers of their land. A suffering servant was out of the question for most of them.

So, retelling without the mythological serpent element:

Eve was told that one of her descendants would give birth to a saviour who, at a cost of suffering, would overcome the source of evil.

Pain and Toil

To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you will bear children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

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

The man called his wife Eve because she would be the mother of all the living. Yahweh God made coats of animal skins for Adam and for his wife, and clothed them. Yahweh God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand, and also take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever-" Therefore Yahweh God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

The concluding section of this segment presents the consequence of their disobedience. It answers the questions that might often have been asked by a boy or

girl of their parents: why is there pain, why is life so hard, why is everything so difficult? This is what myths do. They offer through symbolic events and entities answers to questions that in a pre-scientific age were difficult to answer. In the 21st century we can look at the hidden meanings, and reflect on the wisdom of them.

Our ancestors' disobedience explains why we have pain, especially the pain of childbirth, and toil; why the easy life of gathering from the fertile area has been denied us and we have to work hard just to stay alive.

Retelling the Garden of Eden myth

This brings us to the end of what we may call the 'Garden of Eden' myth, and as before it is useful to review the demythologised version in its entirety as a modern retelling:

At the very beginning our first ancestors lived in a wonderfully fertile part of Mesopotamia. The food we had kept us perfectly healthy. But we were warned that if we participated in evil we would lose that health and die. We were given the gift of language and marriage. That is why a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will come together physically as a single unit. Our first ancestors were tempted by a powerful spiritual force to do something they knew was forbidden, and they succumbed to the temptation. This made them aware of things they had not known before. They were now ashamed to be unclothed, and were now afraid of Yahweh. Eve was told that one of her descendants would give birth to a saviour who, at a cost of suffering, would overcome the source of evil. Our ancestors' disobedience explains why we have pain, especially the pain of childbirth, and toil; why the easy life of gathering from the fertile area has been denied us and we have to work hard just to stay alive.

Adam's Family Chronicle continued

We now move from myth and legend to family archive, with a selection of key names. Obviously this is not a complete list. Following the social mores of the time, where women were regarded as subject to men, there are only a few females named after Eve, and we can safely assume that the list is not complete even of males, since we read later (in the next archive) that Adam and Eve had other sons and daughters.

Because of the probability that this part of the family legend is based on real events, I have reached the point where I will move from retelling to commenting. Here is the rest of the Adam legend to read again, with chapter and verse indications omitted but with topic headings added (as will be from now for the rest of the book):

Cain and Abel

The man knew Eve his wife. She conceived, and gave birth to Cain, and said, "I have gotten a man with Yahweh's help." Again she gave birth, to Cain's brother Abel. Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

As time passed, Cain brought an offering to Yahweh from the fruit of the ground. Abel also brought some of the firstborn of his flock and of its fat. Yahweh respected Abel and his offering, but he didn't respect Cain and his offering. Cain was very angry, and the expression on his face fell. Yahweh said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why has the expression of your face fallen? If you do well, won't it

be lifted up? If you don't do well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it." Cain said to Abel, his brother, "Let's go into the field." While they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him.

Yahweh said to Cain, "Where is Abel, your brother?" He said, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Yahweh said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground. Now you are cursed because of the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. From now on, when you till the ground, it won't yield its strength to you. You will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth."

Cain said to Yahweh, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me out today from the surface of the ground. I will be hidden from your face, and I will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth. Whoever finds me will kill me." Yahweh said to him, "Therefore whoever slays Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." Yahweh appointed a sign for Cain, so that anyone finding him would not strike him.

It is interesting to note Cain's concern that 'whoever finds me will kill me', which certainly implies there were hominids alive whom Cain might justly fear. This provides another reason for supposing that when Adam received the transforming in-breathing of Yahweh's spirit he was not the only being of his kind.

Cain's family line

Cain left Yahweh's presence, and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain knew his wife. She conceived, and gave birth to Enoch. He built a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad. Irad became the father of Mehujael. Mehujael became the father of

Methushael. Methushael became the father of Lamech. Lamech took two wives: the name of the first one was Adah, and the name of the second one was Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal, who was the father of all who handle the harp and pipe. Zillah also gave birth to Tubal Cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron. Tubal Cain's sister was Naamah.

Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice. You wives of Lamech, listen to my speech, for I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for bruising me. If Cain will be avenged seven times, truly Lamech seventy-seven times."

Seth's family line

Adam knew his wife again. She gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, saying, "for God has given me another child instead of Abel, for Cain killed him." A son was also born to Seth, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on Yahweh's name.

Retrospective concluding title

This is the book of the generations of Adam.

We move in this section from the direct involvement of Yahweh with individuals (once again asking awkward questions) to a more remote stage: Cain left Yahweh's presence; men began to call on Yahweh's name, implying no direct contact. Yahweh will contact men again, but much less often.

It will always be a conundrum for us to imagine Yahweh's presence. Obviously visible and audible, but with no description. Did Yahweh simply look like any

other man? We shall never know. How did people like Cain, and later Noah, Abraham, and Jacob, know that it was Yahweh they were in the presence of? We shall never know, but apparently these men did somehow, if these legends contain this sort of truth in them.

It is worth noting that the Cain and Abel episode, so familiar to us, brings to our attention what archeologists have discovered, that early man progressed from gathering to what we can call organised farming. Here is the archetypal tension between crop culture and domesticating animals for their produce. Why did Yahweh prefer an animal sacrifice to a cereal one? This is a theme throughout the religion given to the people who worshipped Yahweh. Christian commentators would stress that these sacrifices were a type, a foreshadowing, of an even greater sacrifice, yet to come.

Within the family archive of Cain we get three important highlights:

Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal, who was the father of all who handle the harp and pipe. Zillah also gave birth to Tubal Cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron.

We see here, in what archaeologists would call the correct sequence, nomadic life (those who dwell in tents and have livestock), artistic expression (the father of all who handle the harp and pipe), and finally metal working (the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron). It is quite difficult to dismiss these details, and much easier to suppose that they represent reliable memories handed down from generation to generation.

Noah's Family Chronicle

The family archive of Noah comes next, recapitulating the family lineage right back to Adam, then tracing forward via Adam's son Seth, and making no mention of Cain. The frequent mention of 'other sons and daughters' helps us understand how the descendants of Adam could have found wives who were also of Adam's line:

Recapitulation of human origins

In the day that God created man, he made him in God's likeness. He created them male and female, and blessed them. On the day they were created, he named them "Adam". Adam lived one hundred thirty years, and became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years, and he became the father of other sons and daughters. All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years, then he died.

Seth's family line

Seth lived one hundred five years, then became the father of Enosh. Seth lived after he became the father of Enosh eight hundred seven years, and became the father of other sons and daughters. All of the days of Seth were nine hundred twelve years, then he died.

Enosh lived ninety years, and became the father of Kenan. Enosh lived after he became the

father of Kenan, eight hundred fifteen years, and became the father of other sons and daughters. All of the days of Enosh were nine hundred five years, then he died.

Kenan lived seventy years, then became the father of Mahalalel. Kenan lived after he became the father of Mahalalel eight hundred forty years, and became the father of other sons and daughters and all of the days of Kenan were nine hundred ten years, then he died.

Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, then became the father of Jared. Mahalalel lived after he became the father of Jared eight hundred thirty years, and became the father of other sons and daughters. All of the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred ninety-five years, then he died.

Jared lived one hundred sixty-two years, then became the father of Enoch. Jared lived after he became the father of Enoch eight hundred years, and became the father of other sons and daughters. All of the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty-two years, then he died.

Enoch lived sixty-five years, then became the father of Methuselah. After Methuselah's birth, Enoch walked with God for three hundred years, and became the father of more sons and daughters. All the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not found, for God took him.

Methuselah lived one hundred eighty-seven years, then became the father of Lamech. Methuselah lived after he became the father of Lamech seven hundred eighty-two years, and became the father of other sons and daughters. All the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty-nine years, then he died.

Lamech lived one hundred eighty-two years, then became the father of a son. He named him Noah,

saying, "This one will comfort us in our work and in the toil of our hands, caused by the ground which Yahweh has cursed." Lamech lived after he became the father of Noah five hundred ninety-five years, and became the father of other sons and daughters. All the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy-seven years, then he died.

Noah's sons

Noah was five hundred years old, then Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The problem

When men began to multiply on the surface of the ground, and daughters were born to them, God's sons saw that men's daughters were beautiful, and they took any that they wanted for themselves as wives. Yahweh said, "My Spirit will not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; so his days will be one hundred twenty years." The Nephilim were in the earth in those days, and also after that, when God's sons came in to men's daughters and had children with them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.

Yahweh's solution

Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was continually only evil. Yahweh was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart. Yahweh said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the surface of the ground—man, along with animals, creeping things, and birds of the sky—for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in Yahweh's eyes.

Retrospective concluding title

This is the history of the generations of Noah

There is a huge challenge in how to interpret 'the sons of God' in this passage. The easiest answer is that they were the top men of the line of Seth, and that allows one to say that the 'daughters of men' they fancied were the offspring of the less worthy Cain. This line has been followed by many commentators.

But if one looks into other biblical uses of the phrase 'sons of God' one is taken down a different path. The phrase can describe angels:

Now on the day when God's sons came to present themselves before Yahweh, Satan also came among them. [Job 1:6]

Again, on the day when the God's sons came to present themselves before Yahweh, Satan came also among them to present himself before Yahweh. [Job 2:1]

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. [Job 38:7]

The idea that some wicked angels did not stay within their true spiritual form, but took human physicality, seems to be hinted at in the letter of Jude:

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

The product of this union between rebel angels taking human form and ordinary women are described as Nephilim, and the word is used again in the book of

Numbers, where they are indicated as large and powerful men.

This latter interpretation certainly has the benefit of presenting a very deep reason for the decision that the human race had become so badly corrupted that a new start needed to be made. The flood becomes a saving act of rescue rather than the spite of a vengeful deity.

The actual account of the flood comes in the next family archive, but it worthwhile at this point to recognise that the flood had a limited purpose. It was to restore a human family as the sole surviving group of a flood which was intended to eliminate the corrupted group of humans in that area. The inevitable impact on other local life forms was to have a solution, so that what we would call the collateral damage would be minimised. That Noah's flood covered the whole of the planet is neither implied here nor, of course, physically possible.

Shem's Family Chronicle

As we noted earlier the actual detailed account of the flood comes in the family chronicle of one of Noah's sons, Shem. Here it is in full, omitting the usual chapter and verse indications to make it more readable. The document itself incorporates the genealogy lists of the three sons of Noah.

Noah is given instructions

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time. Noah walked with God. Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. God saw the earth, and saw that it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

God said to Noah, "I will bring an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them and the earth. Make a ship of gopher wood. You shall make rooms in the ship, and shall seal it inside and outside with pitch. This is how you shall make it. The length of the ship shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a roof in the ship, and you shall finish it to a cubit upward. You shall set the door of the ship in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third levels. I, even I, do bring the flood of waters on this earth, to destroy all flesh having the breath of life from under the sky. Everything that is in the earth will die. But I will establish my covenant with you. You shall come into

the ship, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. Of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ship, to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, of the livestock after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every sort will come to you, to keep them alive. Take with you some of all food that is eaten, and gather it to yourself; and it will be for food for you, and for them." Thus Noah did. He did all that God commanded him.

Yahweh said to Noah, "Come with all of your household into the ship, for I have seen your righteousness before me in this generation. You shall take seven pairs of every clean animal with you, the male and his female. Of the animals that are not clean, take two, the male and his female. Also of the birds of the sky, seven and seven, male and female, to keep seed alive on the surface of all the earth. In seven days, I will cause it to rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights. I will destroy every living thing that I have made from the surface of the ground."

Noah did everything that Yahweh commanded him.

The flood begins

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came on the earth. Noah went into the ship with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, because of the floodwaters. Clean animals, unclean animals, birds, and everything that creeps on the ground went by pairs to Noah into the ship, male and female, as God commanded Noah. After the seven days, the floodwaters came on the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day

all the fountains of the great deep were burst open, and the sky's windows were opened. It rained on the earth forty days and forty nights.

In the same day Noah, and Shem, Ham, and Japheth-the sons of Noah-and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered into the ship- they, and every animal after its kind, all the livestock after their kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort. Pairs from all flesh with the breath of life in them went into the ship to Noah. Those who went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God commanded him; then Yahweh shut him in. The flood was forty days on the earth. The waters increased, and lifted up the ship, and it was lifted up above the earth. The waters rose, and increased greatly on the earth; and the ship floated on the surface of the waters. The waters rose very high on the earth. All the high mountains that were under the whole sky were covered. The waters rose fifteen cubits higher, and the mountains were covered. All flesh died that moved on the earth, including birds, livestock, animals, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All on the dry land, in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died. Every living thing was destroyed that was on the surface of the ground, including man, livestock, creeping things, and birds of the sky. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ship. The waters flooded the earth one hundred fifty days.

The flood ends

God remembered Noah, all the animals, and all the livestock that were with him in the ship; and God made a wind to pass over the earth. The waters subsided. The deep's fountains and the sky's windows

were also stopped, and the rain from the sky was restrained. The waters continually receded from the earth. After the end of one hundred fifty days the waters decreased. The ship rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on Ararat's mountains. The waters receded continually until the tenth month. In the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were visible.

At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ship which he had made, and he sent out a raven. It went back and forth, until the waters were dried up from the earth. He himself sent out a dove to see if the waters were abated from the surface of the ground, but the dove found no place to rest her foot, and she returned into the ship to him, for the waters were on the surface of the whole earth. He put out his hand, and took her, and brought her to him into the ship. He waited yet another seven days; and again he sent the dove out of the ship. The dove came back to him at evening and, behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters were abated from the earth. He waited yet another seven days, and sent out the dove; and she didn't return to him any more.

In the six hundred first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth. Noah removed the covering of the ship, and looked. He saw that the surface of the ground was dried. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

God spoke to Noah, saying, "Go out of the ship, you, your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh, including birds, livestock, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be

fruitful, and multiply on the earth."

Back on dry land

Noah went out, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives with him. Every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, whatever moves on the earth, after their families, went out of the ship. Noah built an altar to Yahweh, and took of every clean animal, and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. Yahweh smelled the pleasant aroma. Yahweh said in his heart, "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake because the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. I will never again strike every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night will not cease."

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you will be on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the sky. Everything that moves along the ground, and all the fish of the sea, are delivered into your hand. Every moving thing that lives will be food for you. As I gave you the green herb, I have given everything to you. But flesh with its life, that is, its blood, you shall not eat. I will surely require your blood of your lives; at the hand of every animal I will require it. At the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother, I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in his own image. Be fruitful and multiply. Increase abundantly in the earth, and multiply in it."

The rainbow as a sign

God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him,

saying, "As for me, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the livestock, and every animal of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ship, even every animal of the earth. I will establish my covenant with you: All flesh will not be cut off any more by the waters of the flood. There will never again be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it will be a sign of a covenant between me and the earth. When I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters will no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow will be in the cloud. I will look at it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the token of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

The sons of Noah who went out from the ship were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham is the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these, the whole earth was populated.

An unfortunate incident

Noah began to be a farmer, and planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and got drunk. He was uncovered within his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it on both their shoulders, went in backwards, and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were backwards, and they didn't

see their father's nakedness. Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his youngest son had done to him. He said, "Canaan is cursed. He will be a servant of servants to his brothers." He said, "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem. Let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth. Let him dwell in the tents of Shem. Let Canaan be his servant."

The death of Noah

Noah lived three hundred fifty years after the flood. All the days of Noah were nine hundred fifty years, and then he died.

The family lines of Noah's sons

Now this is the history of the generations of the sons of Noah and of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood. The sons of Japheth were: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. The sons of Gomer were: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. The sons of Javan were: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. Of these were the islands of the nations divided in their lands, everyone after his language, after their families, in their nations.

The sons of Ham were: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. The sons of Cush were: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah were: Sheba and Dedan. Cush became the father of Nimrod. He began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before Yahweh. Therefore it is said, "like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before Yahweh". The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land he went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and the great city Calah. Mizraim became the father of

Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, Casluhim (which the Philistines descended from), and Caphthorim. Canaan became the father of Sidon (his firstborn), Heth, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the families of the Canaanites were spread abroad. The border of the Canaanites was from Sidon-as you go toward Gerar-to Gaza-as you go toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim-to Lasha. These are the sons of Ham, after their families, according to their languages, in their lands and their nations.

Children were also born to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth. The sons of Shem were: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. The sons of Aram were: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. Arpachshad became the father of Shelah. Shelah became the father of Eber. To Eber were born two sons. The name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided. His brother's name was Joktan. Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were the sons of Joktan. Their dwelling extended from Mesha, as you go toward Sephar, the mountain of the east. These are the sons of Shem, by their families, according to their languages, lands, and nations.

These are the families of the sons of Noah, by their generations, according to their nations. The nations divided from these in the earth after the flood.

Confusion of languages

The whole earth was of one language and of one speech. As they traveled from the east, they found

a plain in the land of Shinar, and they lived there. They said to one another, "Come, let's make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top reaches to the sky, and let's make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad on the surface of the whole earth."

Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built. Yahweh said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do. Now nothing will be withheld from them, which they intend to do. Come, let's go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So Yahweh scattered them abroad from there on the surface of all the earth. They stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the language of all the earth. From there, Yahweh scattered them abroad on the surface of all the earth.

Retrospective concluding title

This is the history of the generations of Shem

The Gilgamesh Version

It is worth noting that the account just quoted is not the only local account of flooding in the Mesopotamian area. There is within the Gilgamesh Epic a very similar story, which has been found in cuneiform on tablets dated about 1700 B.C.. The story, as presented in Wikipedia, goes as follows:

Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh a secret story that begins in the old city of Shuruppak on the banks of the Euphrates River.

The "great gods" Anu, Enlil, Ninurta, Ennugi, and Ea were sworn to secrecy about their plan to cause the flood.

But the god Ea (Sumerian god Enki) repeated the plan to Utnapishtim through a reed wall in a reed house.

Ea commanded Utnapishtim to demolish his house and build a boat, regardless of the cost, to keep living beings alive.

The boat must have equal dimensions with corresponding width and length and be covered over like Apsu boats.

Utnapishtim promised to do what Ea commanded. He asked Ea what he should say to the city elders and the population.

Ea tells him to say that Enlil has rejected him and he can no longer reside in the city or set foot in Enlil's territory.

He should also say that he will go down to the Apsu "to live with my lord Ea".

*Note: 'Apsu' can refer to a fresh water marsh near the temple of Ea/Enki at the city of Eridu.[9]
Ea will provide abundant rain, a profusion of fowl and fish, and a wealthy harvest of wheat and bread. Carpenters, reed workers, and other people assembled one morning.*

[missing lines]

Five days later, Utnapishtim laid out the exterior walls of the boat of 120 cubits.

The sides of the superstructure had equal lengths of 120 cubits. He also made a drawing of the interior structure.

The boat had six decks [?] divided into seven and nine compartments.

Water plugs were driven into the middle part.

Punting poles and other necessary things were laid in.

Three times 3,600 units of raw bitumen were melted in a kiln and three times 3,600 units of oil were used in addition to two times 3,600 units of oil that were stored in the boat.

Oxen and sheep were slaughtered and ale, beer, oil, and wine were distributed to the workmen, like at a new year's festival.

When the boat was finished, the launching was very difficult. A runway of poles was used to slide the boat into the water.

Two-thirds of the boat was in the water.

Utnapishtim loaded his silver and gold into the boat. He loaded "all the living beings that I had."

His relatives and craftsmen, and "all the beasts and animals of the field" boarded the boat.

The time arrived, as stated by the god Shamash, to seal the entry door.

Early in the morning at dawn a black cloud arose from the horizon.

The weather was frightful.

Utnapishtim boarded the boat and entrusted the boat and its contents to his boatmaster Puzurammurri who sealed the entry.

The thunder god Adad rumbled in the cloud and storm gods Shullar and Hanish went over mountains and land.

Erragal pulled out the mooring poles and the dikes overflowed.

The Annunaki gods lit up the land with their lightning.

There was stunned shock at Adad's deeds which turned everything to blackness. The land was shattered like a pot.

All day long the south wind blew rapidly and the water overwhelmed the people like an attack.

No one could see his fellows. They could not recognize each other in the torrent.

The gods were frightened by the flood, and retreated up to the Anu heaven. They cowered like dogs lying by the outer wall.

Ishtar shrieked like a woman in childbirth.

The Mistress of the Gods wailed that the old days had turned to clay because "I said evil things in the Assembly of the Gods, ordering a catastrophe to destroy my people who fill the sea like fish."

The other gods were weeping with her and sat sobbing with grief, their lips burning, parched with thirst.

The flood and wind lasted six days and six nights, flattening the land.

On the seventh day, the storm was pounding [intermittently?] like a woman in labor.

The sea calmed and the whirlwind and flood stopped. All day long there was quiet. All humans had turned to clay.

The terrain was as flat as a roof top. Utnapishtim opened a window and felt fresh air on his face.

He fell to his knees and sat weeping, tears streaming down his face. He looked for coastlines at the horizon and saw a region of land.

The boat lodged firmly on mount Nimush which held the boat for several days, allowing no swaying.

On the seventh day he released a dove which flew away, but came back to him. He released a swallow, but it also came back to him.

He released a raven which was able to eat and scratch, and did not circle back to the boat.

He then sent his livestock out in various directions.

He sacrificed a sheep and offered incense at a mountainous ziggurat where he placed 14 sacrificial vessels and poured reeds, cedar, and myrtle into the fire.

The gods smelled the sweet odor of the sacrificial animal and gathered like flies over the sacrifice.

Then the great goddess arrived, lifted up her flies (beads), and said

"Ye gods, as surely as I shall not forget this lapis lazuli [amulet] around my neck, I shall be mindful of these days and never forget them! The gods may come to the sacrificial offering. But Enlil may not come, because he brought about the flood and annihilated my people without considering [the consequences]."

When Enlil arrived, he saw the boat and became furious at the Igigi gods. He said "Where did a living being escape? No man was to survive the annihilation!"

Ninurta spoke to Enlil saying "Who else but Ea could do such a thing? It is Ea who knew all of our plans."

Ea spoke to Enlil saying "It was you, the Sage of the Gods. How could you bring about a flood without consideration?"

Ea then accuses Enlil of sending a disproportionate punishment, and reminds him of the need for

compassion.

Ea denies leaking the god's secret plan to Atrahasis (= Utnapishtim), admitting only sending him a dream and deflecting Enlil's attention to the flood hero.

He then boards a boat and grasping Utnapishtim's hand, helps him and his wife aboard where they kneel. Standing between Utnapishtim and his wife, he touches their foreheads and blesses them. "Formerly Utnapishtim was a human being, but now he and his wife have become gods like us. Let Utnapishtim reside far away, at the mouth of the rivers."

Utnapishtim and his wife are transported and settled at the "mouth of the rivers".

Many similarities and many differences, obviously. The important thing is that the followers of Yahweh are not the only people whose memories contain a destructive flood, divinely originated, and a divinely inspired family of survivors. Similar flood myths are common amongst many ethnic groups.

This raises the obvious question: how much historical accuracy is contained in the Genesis Flood account, and how much myth and legend?

It is also right to ask whether the account we have in Genesis requires us to suppose that the whole planet was inundated, or merely all the local area that Noah and his family were aware of. When we use the phrase 'the whole world' we do not necessarily mean literally everything, but only that of which we are aware.

Common sense makes it difficult to suppose that llamas from South America, bison from North America, reindeer from Norway, and kangaroos from Australia, were all able to make their way to Mesopotamia. But if 'all the local animals' is what the account intends when it says 'all', we can begin to

imagine at least some possibilities.

Let us look at the internal evidence, remembering that the unit of length used in the account is the cubit. This is the length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, in more modern terms 18" or 450cm. We are told that the depth of water when the rain ceased was 15 cubits, in other words just under 7 metres. Such a depth would have given the impression that the whole Sumerian plain was certainly covered, including all the highest points (mounds perhaps rather than mountains) that Noah had ever been aware of. It is very easy to measure the depth of water when afloat: a long enough thin rope with a good weight on the end is all you need, as any yachtsman will tell you.

So the account itself proclaims a local flood, with everything that Noah ever knew about affected. It is after all the account written (or remembered) within the knowledge base of Noah's family. What they thought of as mountains may simply have been the highest local points that Noah had ever seen. This removes the problem that if the whole world's highest points had been covered, where on earth could the water actually subside to?

It is also an account with lots of very precise details: the size and shape of the boat, the number of days things lasted for, the exact date within Noah's life, and so on. It is clearly intended to be read as an accurate narrative, with all this detail recorded.

Concerning the size and shape of the boat Noah was told to build, in a location where the only possibility of its being useful was if there were an inundation to make it float, the ratio of length, breadth, and draught, are very realistic. This is not the case with the Gilgamesh boat, which is represented as a cube in shape. It is said that Danish barges called *fleuten* have been built to exactly the same ratio of

length, breadth and draught, and have proved very stable and excellent for carrying capacity. The boat's design was massively improved by having the internal bracing of three tiers of compartments. In summary, the boat design that Noah and his sons were given is realistic in every way.

The Rainbow

What are we to make of the rainbow?

Rainbows occur when reflection and refraction of direct sunlight takes place through water droplets in the air. So how could this have been a sign if rainbows had always been occurring naturally? Some commentators have suggested an answer which addresses a number of issues. They suggest that prior to the flood the planet had around it a canopy of cloud. This cloud would mean that all sunlight would arrive diffused, so no rainbows. This proposed canopy of cloud would also be the source of all the water that fell as rainfall in such copious, and never to be repeated, quantities. With the elimination of this original cloud canopy the first rainbow would be an assurance that such a flood neither could, nor would, ever happen again.

This potential answer to the rainbow question also addresses the longevity issue of these early patriarchs. How could men and women live for several hundreds of years? Old age is not all that easy to account for medically, since our bodies have natural self-repairing reactions to physical damage. But it is known that radiation from direct sunshine is a component of ageing. If there had only been diffused sunlight before the flood that might be an important factor in the longevity enjoyed by these ante-diluvian people.

So one by-product of the removal of the cloud canopy would be increased radiation, and with it a reduction of life expectancy. Which is what we read of

in the closing sections of the Seth family history, in the event associated with the tower building at Babel.

With the tower building in Babel, which is usually identified as the later Babylon, we have (possibly) a mythological answer to the question: why are there so many different languages, some so dissimilar that they cannot easily be traced to a common origin? The answer given in the Seth family chronicle is that it was an act of Yahweh, to protect the people of that day from their own ambitious scheming. Ancient languages are interestingly very complex. If you look at the inflected written languages that are about as old as we have evidence for, Sanscrit, classical Greek, and Latin, the oldest is far more complex in terms of conjugations, declensions, tenses, and so on, than its younger companion Greek, which itself has more moods, tenses, and cases than the even younger Latin. Evolution of language tends towards simplification rather than increased complexity, which we see even in English, which drops options like the now archaic 'thee' and 'thou' and many similar current omissions from the language of the 15th and 16th century. So the fundamental question about the complexity and differentiation of language was a natural one to need answering.

Terah's Family Chronicle

The next family archive is that of Terah, which begins the genealogical list from Shem. Terah is significant as being the father of Abraham (Abram originally of course):

Shem was one hundred years old when he became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood. Shem lived five hundred years after he became the father of Arpachshad, and became the father of more sons and daughters. Arpachshad lived thirty-five years and became the father of Shelah. Arpachshad lived four hundred three years after he became the father of Shelah, and became the father of more sons and daughters. Shelah lived thirty years, and became the father of Eber. Shelah lived four hundred three years after he became the father of Eber, and became the father of more sons and daughters. Eber lived thirty-four years, and became the father of Peleg. Eber lived four hundred thirty years after he became the father of Peleg, and became the father of more sons and daughters. Peleg lived thirty years, and became the father of Reu. Peleg lived two hundred nine years after he became the father of Reu, and became the father of more sons and daughters. Reu lived thirty-two years, and became the father of Serug. Reu lived two hundred seven years after he became the father of Serug, and became the father of more sons and daughters. Serug lived thirty years, and became the father of Nahor. Serug lived two hundred years after he became the

father of Nahor, and became the father of more sons and daughters. Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah. Nahor lived one hundred nineteen years after he became the father of Terah, and became the father of more sons and daughters. Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Retrospective concluding title

Now this is the history of the generations of Terah.

Perhaps the only point of note in this list is that we are already seeing a gradual decline in the number of years these named patriarchs are living. Seth made it to several hundreds, but we are down to not much over one hundred by the time we get to the end of this list.

Abraham's Family Chronicle

The family chronicle of Abraham covers about fifteen chapters and can be said to end with the appended title of Genesis 25:19a (the generations of his son Isaac) and it has a short summary of Isaac's brother Ishmael's family just before the end too. This is too long a passage for easy reading, so we will take it in segments. It is also not appropriate to offer an extensive commentary, but rather, with only occasional comments, to let the narrative speak for itself.

But first, to set the scene, we need to think about why Abraham is so important. Here is a comment from a letter written in the first century A.D.:

By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out to the place which he was to receive for an inheritance. He went out, not knowing where he went. By faith, he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for the city which has the foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith, even Sarah herself received power to conceive, and she bore a child when she was past age, since she counted him faithful who had promised. Therefore as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as innumerable as the sand which is by the sea shore, were fathered by one man, and him as good as dead. [Hebrews 11:8-11]

Abraham is important to the Jewish nation as the recipient of a special status with Yahweh, a covenant, which passed to his descendants through his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. The land Abraham went to on Yahweh's instruction was always seen as the Promised Land, and even today the arguments about the recently created country of Israel hark back to these ancient promises.

Abraham is not only the forefather of all Jewish people, he is important in Islam too. He is recognised as a prophet, and is seen as a model of obedience to God, being mentioned often in the Quran.

Here is the detailed account from Genesis up to the birth of Ishmael, Abraham's first son, whose mother, Hagar, was a servant in the household:

Abram's early life in Ur and Haran

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran became the father of Lot. Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldees. Abram and Nahor married wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran who was also the father of Iscah. Sarai was barren. She had no child. Terah took Abram his son, Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife. They went from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan. They came to Haran and lived there. The days of Terah were two hundred five years. Terah died in Haran.

Abram must leave

Now Yahweh said to Abram, "Leave your country, and your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make of

you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

This promise that "All the families of the earth will be blessed through you" is one that is so important in our understanding of the purposes of Yahweh that we must just pause to take it in.

The promised land

So Abram went, as Yahweh had told him. Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they went to go into the land of Canaan. They entered into the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time, Canaanites were in the land. Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your offspring." He built an altar there to Yahweh, who had appeared to him. He left from there to go to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to Yahweh and called on Yahweh's name. Abram traveled, still going on toward the South.

The famine

There was a famine in the land. Abram went down into Egypt to live as a foreigner there, for the famine was severe in the land. When he had come near to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "See

now, I know that you are a beautiful woman to look at. It will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife.' They will kill me, but they will save you alive. Please say that you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that my soul may live because of you."

When Abram had come into Egypt, Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. The princes of Pharaoh saw her, and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. He dealt well with Abram for her sake. He had sheep, cattle, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. Yahweh afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this that you have done to me? Why didn't you tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now therefore, see your wife, take her, and go your way." Pharaoh commanded men concerning him, and they escorted him away with his wife and all that he had.

Leaving Egypt

Abram went up out of Egypt-he, his wife, all that he had, and Lot with him-into the South. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. He went on his journeys from the South even to Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first. There Abram called on Yahweh's name. Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks, herds, and tents. The land was not able to bear them, that they might live together; for their substance was great, so that they could not live together. There was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites lived in the land at

that time. Abram said to Lot, "Please, let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are relatives. Isn't the whole land before you? Please separate yourself from me. If you go to the left hand, then I will go to the right. Or if you go to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well-watered everywhere, before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of Yahweh, like the land of Egypt, as you go to Zoar. So Lot chose the Plain of the Jordan for himself. Lot traveled east, and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram lived in the land of Canaan, and Lot lived in the cities of the plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinners against Yahweh.

Yahweh's promises

Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot was separated from him, "Now, lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land which you see, I will give to you, and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring may also be counted. Arise, walk through the land in its length and in its width; for I will give it to you."

Abram moved his tent, and came and lived by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to Yahweh.

Local conflicts

In the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar,

Arioch, king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goiim, they made war with Bera, king of Sodom, and with Birsha, king of Gomorrah, Shinab, king of Admah, and Shemeber, king of Zeboim, and the king of Bela (also called Zoar). All these joined together in the valley of Siddim (also called the Salt Sea). They served Chedorlaomer for twelve years, and in the thirteenth year, they rebelled. In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer came, and the kings who were with him, and struck the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in Shaveh Kiriathaim, and the Horites in their Mount Seir, to El Paran, which is by the wilderness. They returned, and came to En Mishpat (also called Kadesh), and struck all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that lived in Hazazon Tamar. The king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboim, and the king of Bela (also called Zoar) went out; and they set the battle in array against them in the valley of Siddim; against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings against the five. Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and some fell there, and those who remained fled to the hills. They took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their food, and went their way. They took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who lived in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

One who had escaped came and told Abram, the Hebrew. At that time, he lived by the oaks of Mamre, the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner; and they were allies of Abram. When Abram heard that his relative was taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued as far as Dan. He divided

himself against them by night, he and his servants, and struck them, and pursued them to Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative, Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the other people.

The king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him, and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand." Abram gave him a tenth of all. The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people, and take the goods for yourself." Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted up my hand to Yahweh, God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread nor a sandal strap nor anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will accept nothing from you except that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them take their portion."

Children wanted

After these things Yahweh's word came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Don't be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." Abram said, "Lord Yahweh, what will you give me, since I go childless, and he who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" Abram said, "Behold, to me you have given no children: and, behold, one born in my house is my heir." Behold, Yahweh's word came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir, but he who will come out of your own body will be your

heir." Yahweh brought him outside, and said, "Look now toward the sky, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." He said to Abram, "So will your offspring be." He believed in Yahweh, who credited it to him for righteousness.

It is worth noting this key statement, that Abraham 'believed in Yahweh, who credited it to him for righteousness.' Paul was later to make much of this simple sentence, in emphasising that faith is paramount in being in a right relationship with God.

The covenant confirmed

He said to Abram, "I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it." He said, "Lord Yahweh, how will I know that I will inherit it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these, and divided them in the middle, and laid each half opposite the other; but he didn't divide the birds. The birds of prey came down on the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. Now terror and great darkness fell on him. He said to Abram, "Know for sure that your offspring will live as foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them. They will afflict them four hundred years. I will also judge that nation, whom they will serve. Afterward they will come out with great wealth, but you will go to your fathers in peace. You will be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation they will come here again, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full." It came to pass that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace, and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. In that day Yahweh made a

covenant with Abram, saying, "I have given this land to your offspring, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

Sarai and Hagar

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had a servant, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. Sarai said to Abram, "See now, Yahweh has restrained me from bearing. Please go in to my servant. It may be that I will obtain children by her." Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife. He went in to Hagar, and she conceived. When she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. Sarai said to Abram, "This wrong is your fault. I gave my servant into your bosom, and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes. Yahweh judge between me and you."

But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your hand. Do to her whatever is good in your eyes." Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her face. Yahweh's angel found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain on the way to Shur. He said, "Hagar, Sarai's servant, where did you come from? Where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the face of my mistress Sarai." Yahweh's angel said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hands." Yahweh's angel said to her, "I will greatly multiply your offspring, that they will not be counted for multitude." Yahweh's angel said to her, "Behold, you

are with child, and will bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because Yahweh has heard your affliction. He will be like a wild donkey among men. His hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him. He will live opposite all of his brothers." She called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees," for she said, "Have I even stayed alive after seeing him?" Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi. Behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered. Hagar bore a son for Abram. Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

The birth of Ishmael is accompanied by the prediction of enmity between the descendants of Ishmael and those of his half-brother to come, Isaac. Islamic traditions consider Ishmael to be the ancestor of several prominent Arab tribes and the forefather of Muhammad. The Jews count themselves as descended from Isaac, through Jacob. History, even of contemporary times, has shown that this prediction of enmity can be taken seriously.

The next section takes us to the birth of the son who was to inherit the main covenant status Yahweh had given to his father. Here we read more about the special covenant, the physical sign received by those within it, and how Abram was given the name we are familiar with, which means 'father of many nations'.

The promised son

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty. Walk before me, and be blameless. I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."

Abram fell on his face. God talked with him,

saying, "As for me, behold, my covenant is with you. You will be the father of a multitude of nations. Your name will no more be called Abram, but your name will be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you. Kings will come out of you. I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your offspring after you. I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are traveling, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession. I will be their God."

We need to pause again to note the significance of the new name Abram was given, meaning 'father of a multitude of nations'. There are many who have seen in Abraham not just a literal antecedent, through physical descent, but a spiritual prototype. Paul was to make much of this in his letters, even though he also rejoiced in being a physical descendant of Abraham.

The sign of the covenant

God said to Abraham, "As for you, you will keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin. It will be a token of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old will be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he who is born in the house, or bought with money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. He who is born in your house, and he who is bought with your money, must be circumcised. My covenant will be in your flesh for an everlasting

covenant. *The uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant."*

Sarah promised a son

God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but her name will be Sarah. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. Yes, I will bless her, and she will be a mother of nations. Kings of peoples will come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to him who is one hundred years old? Will Sarah, who is ninety years old, give birth?" Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!"

God said, "No, but Sarah, your wife, will bear you a son. You shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this set time next year."

When he finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house, and all who were bought with his money; every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the same day, as God had said to him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. Ishmael, his son, was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. In the same day both Abraham and Ishmael, his son, were circumcised. All

the men of his house, those born in the house, and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Three men

Yahweh appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and saw that three men stood opposite him. When he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, "My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please don't go away from your servant. Now let a little water be fetched, wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. I will get a morsel of bread so you can refresh your heart. After that you may go your way, now that you have come to your servant."

They said, "Very well, do as you have said." Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly prepare three seahs of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and fetched a tender and good calf, and gave it to the servant. He hurried to dress it. He took butter, milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them. He stood by them under the tree, and they ate. They asked him, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" He said, "See, in the tent." He said, "I will certainly return to you at about this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." Sarah heard in the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age. Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old will I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

Yahweh said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Will I really bear a child, yet I am old?' Is anything too hard for Yahweh? At the set time

I will return to you, when the season comes round, and Sarah will have a son." Then Sarah denied it, saying, "I didn't laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."

Sodom and Gomorrah

The men rose up from there, and looked toward Sodom. Abraham went with them to see them on their way. Yahweh said, "Will I hide from Abraham what I do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him? For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of Yahweh, to do righteousness and justice; to the end that Yahweh may bring on Abraham that which he has spoken of him." Yahweh said, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether their deeds are as bad as the reports which have come to me. If not, I will know."

The men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, but Abraham stood yet before Yahweh. Abraham came near, and said, "Will you consume the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous within the city? Will you consume and not spare the place for the fifty righteous who are in it? Be it far from you to do things like that, to kill the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be like the wicked. May that be far from you. Shouldn't the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Yahweh said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place for their sake." Abraham answered, "See now, I have taken it on myself to speak to the Lord, although I am dust and ashes. What if there will lack five of the

fifty righteous? Will you destroy all the city for lack of five?" He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." He spoke to him yet again, and said, "What if there are forty found there?" He said, "I will not do it for the forty's sake." He said, "Oh don't let the Lord be angry, and I will speak. What if there are thirty found there?" He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." He said, "See now, I have taken it on myself to speak to the Lord. What if there are twenty found there?" He said, "I will not destroy it for the twenty's sake." He said, "Oh don't let the Lord be angry, and I will speak just once more. What if ten are found there?" He said, "I will not destroy it for the ten's sake." Yahweh went his way, as soon as he had finished communing with Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

The two angels came to Sodom at evening. Lot sat in the gate of Sodom. Lot saw them, and rose up to meet them. He bowed himself with his face to the earth, and he said, "See now, my lords, please turn aside into your servant's house, stay all night, wash your feet, and you can rise up early, and go on your way." They said, "No, but we will stay in the street all night." He urged them greatly, and they came in with him, and entered into his house. He made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter. They called to Lot, and said to him, "Where are the men who came in to you this night? Bring them out to us, that we may have sex with them."

Lot went out to them to the door, and shut the door after him. He said, "Please, my brothers, don't act so wickedly. See now, I have two virgin daughters. Please let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them what seems good to you. Only

don't do anything to these men, because they have come under the shadow of my roof." They said, "Stand back!" Then they said, "This one fellow came in to live as a foreigner, and he appoints himself a judge. Now will we deal worse with you, than with them!" They pressed hard on the man Lot, and came near to break the door. But the men reached out their hand, and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door. They struck the men who were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves to find the door. The men said to Lot, "Do you have anybody else here? Sons-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whoever you have in the city, bring them out of the place: for we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown so great before Yahweh that Yahweh has sent us to destroy it."

Lot went out, and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters, and said, "Get up! Get out of this place, for Yahweh will destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be joking. When the morning came, then the angels hurried Lot, saying, "Get up! Take your wife, and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the iniquity of the city." But he lingered; and the men grabbed his hand, his wife's hand, and his two daughters' hands, Yahweh being merciful to him; and they took him out, and set him outside of the city. It came to pass, when they had taken them out, that he said, "Escape for your life! Don't look behind you, and don't stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be consumed!"

Lot said to them, "Oh, not so, my lord. See now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have magnified your loving kindness, which you have shown to me in saving my life. I can't escape to the mountain, lest evil overtake me, and I die. See

now, this city is near to flee to, and it is a little one. Oh let me escape there (isn't it a little one?), and my soul will live." He said to him, "Behold, I have granted your request concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there, for I can't do anything until you get there." Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and on Gomorrah sulfur and fire from Yahweh out of the sky. He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew on the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt. Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Yahweh. He looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and looked, and saw that the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace. When God destroyed the cities of the plain, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the middle of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot lived.

This element within the Abraham chronicle is taken sufficiently seriously by Jesus that he used it (along with the flood) as an example of indifference among people who have no idea that they are ignoring important warning signs of impending judgments.

As it was in the days of Noah, even so will it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ship, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise, even as it was in the days of Lot: they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but in the

day that Lot went out from Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from the sky, and destroyed them all. It will be the same way in the day that the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who will be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away. Let him who is in the field likewise not turn back. Remember Lot's wife! [Luke 17:26-33]

That Jesus took both narratives as literal history is worth noting.

Lot's family

Lot went up out of Zoar, and lived in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he was afraid to live in Zoar. He lived in a cave with his two daughters. The firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in to us in the way of all the earth. Come, let's make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve our father's family line." They made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father. He didn't know when she lay down, nor when she arose. It came to pass on the next day, that the firstborn said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father. Let us make him drink wine again, tonight. You go in, and lie with him, that we may preserve our father's family line." They made their father drink wine that night also. The younger went and lay with him. He didn't know when she lay down, nor when she got up. Thus both of Lot's daughters were with child by their father. The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son, and called his name Ben Ammi. He is the father of the children of Ammon to this day.

Sarah and Abimelech

Abraham traveled from there toward the land of the South, and lived between Kadesh and Shur. He lived as a foreigner in Gerar. Abraham said about Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken. For she is a man's wife." Now Abimelech had not come near her. He said, "Lord, will you kill even a righteous nation? Didn't he tell me, 'She is my sister?' She, even she herself, said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this."

God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also withheld you from sinning against me. Therefore I didn't allow you to touch her. Now therefore, restore the man's wife. For he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live. If you don't restore her, know for sure that you will die, you, and all who are yours."

Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ear. The men were very scared. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done!" Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you have done this thing?"

Abraham said, "Because I thought, 'Surely the fear of God is not in this place. They will kill me for my wife's sake.' Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. When God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her,

'This is your kindness which you shall show to me. Everywhere that we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'

Abimelech took sheep and cattle, male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored Sarah, his wife, to him. Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you. Dwell where it pleases you." To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. Behold, it is for you a covering of the eyes to all that are with you. In front of all you are vindicated."

Abraham prayed to God. God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his female servants, and they bore children. For Yahweh had closed up tight all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Sarah has a son

Yahweh visited Sarah as he had said, and Yahweh did to Sarah as he had spoken. Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. Abraham circumcised his son, Isaac, when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was one hundred years old when his son, Isaac, was born to him. Sarah said, "God has made me laugh. Everyone who hears will laugh with me." She said, "Who would have said to Abraham, that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

The rest of the chronicle of Abraham is focused on the son, Isaac, who is to inherit the main blessings of Yahweh.

Isaac and Ishmael

The child grew, and was weaned. Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this servant and her son! For the son of this servant will not be heir with my son, Isaac." The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight on account of his son. God said to Abraham, "Don't let it be grievous in your sight because of the boy, and because of your servant. In all that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice. For your offspring will be accounted as from Isaac. I will also make a nation of the son of the servant, because he is your child." Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder; and gave her the child, and sent her away. She departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. The water in the bottle was spent, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. She went and sat down opposite him, a good way off, about a bow shot away. For she said, "Don't let me see the death of the child." She sat over against him, and lifted up her voice, and wept. God heard the voice of the boy.

The angel of God called to Hagar out of the sky, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Don't be afraid. For God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Get up, lift up the boy, and hold him in your hand. For I will make him a great nation."

God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went, filled the bottle with water, and gave the boy drink. God was with the boy, and he grew. He lived in the wilderness, and became, as he grew up, an archer. He lived in the wilderness of Paran. His mother took a wife for him out of the land of Egypt.

Abraham and Abimelech

At that time, Abimelech and Phicol the captain of his army spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do. Now, therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son. But according to the kindness that I have done to you, you shall do to me, and to the land in which you have lived as a foreigner." Abraham said, "I will swear." Abraham complained to Abimelech because of a water well, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this thing. You didn't tell me, and I didn't hear of it until today."

Abraham took sheep and cattle, and gave them to Abimelech. Those two made a covenant. Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves mean?" He said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand, that it may be a witness to me, that I have dug this well." Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because they both swore there. So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Abimelech rose up with Phicol, the captain of his army, and they returned into the land of the Philistines. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and called there on the name of Yahweh, the Everlasting God. Abraham lived as a foreigner in the land of the Philistines many days.

Abraham's faith tested

After these things, God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" He said, "Here I am." He said, "Now take your son, your only son, whom you love, even Isaac, and go into the land of Moriah.

Offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will tell you of."

Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place far off. Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go yonder. We will worship, and come back to you." Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. He took in his hand the fire and the knife. They both went together. Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, "My father?" He said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they both went together. They came to the place which God had told him of. Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, on the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to kill his son.

Yahweh's angel called to him out of the sky, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" He said, "Here I am."

He said, "Don't lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and saw that behind him was a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering instead of his son. Abraham called the name of that place Yahweh Will Provide. As it is said to this day, "On Yahweh's

mountain, it will be provided."

Yahweh's angel called to Abraham a second time out of the sky, and said, "I have sworn by myself, says Yahweh, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, that I will bless you greatly, and I will multiply your offspring greatly like the stars of the heavens, and like the sand which is on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the gate of his enemies. All the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring, because you have obeyed my voice."

So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beersheba. Abraham lived at Beersheba.

Milcah's children

After these things, Abraham was told, "Behold, Milcah, she also has borne children to your brother Nahor: Uz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

Death of Sarah

Sarah lived one hundred twenty-seven years. This was the length of Sarah's life. Sarah died in Kiriath Arba (also called Hebron), in the land of Canaan. Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spoke to the children of Heth, saying, "I am a stranger and a foreigner living with you. Give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."

The children of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, "Hear us, my lord. You are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the best of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb. Bury your dead."

Abraham rose up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth. He talked with them, saying, "If you agree that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he has, which is in the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me among you for a possession of a burying-place."

Now Ephron was sitting in the middle of the children of Heth. Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the children of Heth, even of all who went in at the gate of his city, saying, "No, my lord, hear me. I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of the children of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead."

Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land. He spoke to Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, "But if you will, please hear me. I will give the price of the field. Take it from me, and I will bury my dead there." Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, "My lord, listen to me. What is a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver between me and you? Therefore bury your dead." Abraham listened to Ephron. Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver which he had named in the audience of the children of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the current merchants' standard.

So the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all of its borders, were deeded to

Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre (that is, Hebron), in the land of Canaan. The field, and the cave that is in it, were deeded to Abraham for a possession of a burying place by the children of Heth.

Abraham finds a wife for Isaac

Abraham was old, and well stricken in age. Yahweh had blessed Abraham in all things. Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please put your hand under my thigh. I will make you swear by Yahweh, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live. But you shall go to my country, and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

The servant said to him, "What if the woman isn't willing to follow me to this land? Must I bring your son again to the land you came from?" Abraham said to him, "Beware that you don't bring my son there again. Yahweh, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house, and from the land of my birth, who spoke to me, and who swore to me, saying, 'I will give this land to your offspring. He will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. If the woman isn't willing to follow you, then you shall be clear from this oath to me. Only you shall not bring my son there again.'"

The servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter. The servant took ten camels, of his master's camels, and departed, having a variety of good things of his master's with him. He arose, and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. He made

the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time that women go out to draw water. He said, "Yahweh, the God of my master Abraham, please give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring of water. The daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Let it happen, that the young lady to whom I will say, 'Please let down your pitcher, that I may drink,' and she will say, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink,'-let her be the one you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher on her shoulder. The young lady was very beautiful to look at, a virgin. No man had known her. She went down to the spring, filled her pitcher, and came up. The servant ran to meet her, and said, "Please give me a drink, a little water from your pitcher."

She said, "Drink, my lord." She hurried, and let down her pitcher on her hand, and gave him drink. When she had done giving him drink, she said, "I will also draw for your camels, until they have done drinking." She hurried, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again to the well to draw, and drew for all his camels.

The man looked steadfastly at her, remaining silent, to know whether Yahweh had made his journey prosperous or not. As the camels had done drinking, the man took a golden ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold, and said, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me. Is there room in your father's house for us to lodge in?" She said to him, "I am the

daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." She said moreover to him, "We have both straw and feed enough, and room to lodge in."

The man bowed his head, and worshiped Yahweh. He said, "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his loving kindness and his truth toward my master. As for me, Yahweh has led me on the way to the house of my master's relatives."

The young lady ran, and told her mother's house about these words. Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban. Laban ran out to the man, to the spring. When he saw the ring, and the bracelets on his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, "This is what the man said to me," he came to the man. Behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. He said, "Come in, you blessed of Yahweh. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house, and room for the camels."

The man came into the house, and he unloaded the camels. He gave straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. Food was set before him to eat, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told my message." He said, "Speak on."

He said, "I am Abraham's servant. Yahweh has blessed my master greatly. He has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, and camels and donkeys. Sarah, my master's wife, bore a son to my master when she was old. He has given all that he has to him. My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live, but you shall go to my father's house, and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son.' I asked my master, 'What if the woman will not follow me?' He said to me, 'Yahweh,

before whom I walk, will send his angel with you, and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my relatives, and of my father's house. Then will you be clear from my oath, when you come to my relatives. If they don't give her to you, you shall be clear from my oath.' I came today to the spring, and said, 'Yahweh, the God of my master Abraham, if now you do prosper my way which I go- behold, I am standing by this spring of water. Let it happen, that the maiden who comes out to draw, to whom I will say, "Please give me a little water from your pitcher to drink," and she will tell me, "Drink, and I will also draw for your camels,"-let her be the woman whom Yahweh has appointed for my master's son.' Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her pitcher on her shoulder. She went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' She hurried and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink.' So I drank, and she also gave the camels a drink. I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her hands. I bowed my head, and worshiped Yahweh, and blessed Yahweh, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter for his son. Now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me. If not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left."

Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The thing proceeds from Yahweh. We can't speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before you. Take her, and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as Yahweh has spoken." When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself down to the earth to Yahweh. The servant brought out jewels of silver, and

jewels of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious things to her brother and her mother. They ate and drank, he and the men who were with him, and stayed all night. They rose up in the morning, and he said, "Send me away to my master."

Her brother and her mother said, "Let the young lady stay with us a few days, at least ten. After that she will go." He said to them, "Don't hinder me, since Yahweh has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master." They said, "We will call the young lady, and ask her." They called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go."

They sent away Rebekah, their sister, with her nurse, Abraham's servant, and his men. They blessed Rebekah, and said to her, "Our sister, may you be the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and let your offspring possess the gate of those who hate them."

Rebekah arose with her ladies. They rode on the camels, and followed the man. The servant took Rebekah, and went his way. Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Roi, for he lived in the land of the South. Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the evening. He lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, there were camels coming. Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel. She said to the servant, "Who is the man who is walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." She took her veil, and covered herself. The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife. He loved her. Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

The death of Abraham

Abraham took another wife, and her name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan became the father of Sheba, and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. The sons of Midian were: Ephah, Ephher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac, but to the sons of Abraham's concubines, Abraham gave gifts. He sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, to the east country. These are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred seventy-five years. Abraham gave up his spirit, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased of the children of Heth. Abraham was buried there with Sarah, his wife. After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac, his son. Isaac lived by Beer Lahai Roi.

Ishmael's family line

Now this is the history of the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to the order of their birth: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth, then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their villages, and by their encampments: twelve princes, according to their nations. These are the years of the life of

Ishmael: one hundred thirty-seven years. He gave up his spirit and died, and was gathered to his people. They lived from Havilah to Shur that is before Egypt, as you go toward Assyria. He lived opposite all his relatives.

Retrospective concluding title

This is the history of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son.

Jacob's Family Chronicle

In the chronicle we have just completed we find a division between two half-brothers, Ishmael and Isaac, and in the next chronicle, that of Jacob, we find a similar division, this time between the two twins, Esau and Jacob. Here is a tale worthy of any Hollywood epic, a tale a duplicity, cunning, greed, and hatred. There is also the gradual deepening of understanding about how Yahweh is creating a people with a special relationship with him. He is now the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a phrase which we will find over and over again in the books of the Bible. And all this in spite of the obvious character defects of the man, and his scheming mother, which are not minimised in the account at all.

As with all the other family chronicles, we begin the genealogy a generation or more back.

Birth of twins

Abraham became the father of Isaac. Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Paddan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian, to be his wife. Isaac entreated Yahweh for his wife, because she was barren. Yahweh was entreated by him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her. She said, "If it is so, why do I live?" She went to inquire of Yahweh. Yahweh said to her, "Two nations are in your womb. Two peoples will be separated from your body. The one people will be stronger than the other people. The elder will serve

the younger."

When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red all over, like a hairy garment. They named him Esau. After that, his brother came out, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel. He was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

Esau trades his birthright

The boys grew. Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field. Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Now Isaac loved Esau, because he ate his venison. Rebekah loved Jacob. Jacob boiled stew. Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom.

Jacob said, "First, sell me your birthright."

Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die. What good is the birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me first." He swore to him. He sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils. He ate and drank, rose up, and went his way. So Esau despised his birthright.

The promised land

There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, to Gerar. Yahweh appeared to him, and said, "Don't go down into Egypt. Live in the land I will tell you about. Live in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you. For I will give to you, and to your offspring, all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of the sky, and will give all these lands to

your offspring. In your offspring will all the nations of the earth be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my requirements, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

Isaac lived in Gerar. The men of the place asked him about his wife. He said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say, "My wife", lest, he thought, "the men of the place might kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to look at." When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was caressing Rebekah, his wife. Abimelech called Isaac, and said, "Behold, surely she is your wife. Why did you say, 'She is my sister?'"

Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die because of her.'" Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us!" Abimelech commanded all the people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife will surely be put to death."

Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year one hundred times what he planted. Yahweh blessed him. The man grew great, and grew more and more until he became very great. He had possessions of flocks, possessions of herds, and a great household. The Philistines envied him. Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped, and filled with earth. Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go from us, for you are much mightier than we."

Isaac departed from there, encamped in the valley of Gerar, and lived there. Isaac dug again the wells of water, which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father. For the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham. He called their

names after the names by which his father had called them. Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. The herdsmen of Gerar argued with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." He called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. They dug another well, and they argued over that, also. He called its name Sitnah. He left that place, and dug another well. They didn't argue over that one. He called it Rehoboth. He said, "For now Yahweh has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land."

He went up from there to Beersheba. Yahweh appeared to him the same night, and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Don't be afraid, for I am with you, and will bless you, and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake."

He built an altar there, and called on Yahweh's name, and pitched his tent there. There Isaac's servants dug a well.

Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath his friend, and Phicol the captain of his army. Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me, and have sent me away from you?"

They said, "We saw plainly that Yahweh was with you. We said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, even between us and you, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, as we have not touched you, and as we have done to you nothing but good, and have sent you away in peace.' You are now the blessed of Yahweh."

He made them a feast, and they ate and drank. They rose up some time in the morning, and swore to one another. Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. The same day, Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have

found water." He called it Shibah. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

When Esau was forty years old, he took as wife Judith, the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite. They grieved Isaac's and Rebekah's spirits.

Isaac tricked by Rebekah and Jacob

When Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his elder son, and said to him, "My son?" He said to him, "Here I am."

He said, "See now, I am old. I don't know the day of my death. Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and take me venison. Make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat, and that my soul may bless you before I die."

Rebekah heard when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, "Behold, I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, 'Bring me venison, and make me savory food, that I may eat, and bless you before Yahweh before my death.' Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command you. Go now to the flock, and get me from there two good young goats. I will make them savory food for your father, such as he loves. You shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death."

Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. What if my father touches me? I will seem to him as a deceiver, and I would bring a curse on myself, and not a blessing."

His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son. Only obey my voice, and go get them for

me." He went, and got them, and brought them to his mother. His mother made savory food, such as his father loved. Rebekah took the good clothes of Esau, her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob, her younger son. She put the skins of the young goats on his hands, and on the smooth of his neck. She gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

He came to his father, and said, "My father?" He said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done what you asked me to do. Please arise, sit and eat of my venison, that your soul may bless me." Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He said, "Because Yahweh your God gave me success." Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." Jacob went near to Isaac his father. He felt him, and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." He didn't recognize him, because his hands were hairy, like his brother, Esau's hands. So he blessed him. He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He said, "I am." He said, "Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless you." He brought it near to him, and he ate. He brought him wine, and he drank. His father Isaac said to him, "Come near now, and kiss me, my son." He came near, and kissed him. He smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him, and said, "Behold, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which Yahweh has blessed. God give you of the dew of the sky, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and new wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers. Let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be

everyone who curses you. Blessed be everyone who blesses you."

As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had just gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. He also made savory food, and brought it to his father. He said to his father, "Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that your soul may bless me."

The trick exposed

Isaac his father said to him, "Who are you?" He said, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who, then, is he who has taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before you came, and have blessed him? Yes, he will be blessed."

When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, my father." He said, "Your brother came with deceit, and has taken away your blessing." He said, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright. See, now he has taken away my blessing." He said, "Haven't you reserved a blessing for me?"

Isaac answered Esau, "Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants. I have sustained him with grain and new wine. What then will I do for you, my son?"

Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, my father." Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

Isaac his father answered him, "Behold, of the fatness of the earth will be your dwelling, and of the dew of the sky from above. By your sword will you live, and you will serve your brother. It will happen,

when you will break loose, that you shall shake his yoke from off your neck."

Esau and Jacob

Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him. Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand. Then I will kill my brother Jacob."

The words of Esau, her elder son, were told to Rebekah. She sent and called Jacob, her younger son, and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban, my brother, in Haran. Stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury turns away; until your brother's anger turn away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send, and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?"

Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these, of the daughters of the land, what good will my life do me?"

Isaac called Jacob, blessed him, and commanded him, "You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father. Take a wife from there from the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, that you may be a company of peoples, and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you, and to your offspring with you, that you may inherit the land where you travel, which God gave to Abraham." Isaac sent Jacob away. He went to Paddan Aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, Rebekah's brother, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan Aram, to take him a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a command, saying, "You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan," and that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Paddan Aram. Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan didn't please Isaac, his father. Esau went to Ishmael, and took, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife.

The covenant promised repeated

Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place, and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. He took one of the stones of the place, and put it under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep. He dreamed. Behold, a stairway set upon the earth, and its top reached to heaven. Behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Behold, Yahweh stood above it, and said, "I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon you lie, to you will I give it, and to your offspring. Your offspring will be as the dust of the earth, and you will spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. In you and in your offspring will all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you, and will keep you, wherever you go, and will bring you again into this land. For I will not leave you, until I have done that which I have spoken of to you."

Jacob awakened out of his sleep, and he said, "Surely Yahweh is in this place, and I didn't know it." He was afraid, and said, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other than God's house, and this is the gate of heaven."

Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil on its top. He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Jacob vowed a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and clothing to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, and Yahweh will be my God, then this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, will be God's house. Of all that you will give me I will surely give a tenth to you."

Jacob and Laban's family

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the children of the east. He looked, and behold, a well in the field, and, behold, three flocks of sheep lying there by it. For out of that well they watered the flocks. The stone on the well's mouth was large. There all the flocks were gathered. They rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again on the well's mouth in its place. Jacob said to them, "My relatives, where are you from?" They said, "We are from Haran."

He said to them, "Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him."

He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well. See, Rachel, his daughter, is coming with the sheep."

He said, "Behold, it is still the middle of the day, not time to gather the livestock together. Water the sheep, and go and feed them."

They said, "We can't, until all the flocks are gathered together, and they roll the stone from the well's mouth. Then we water the sheep."

While he was yet speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she kept them. When

Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son. She ran and told her father.

When Laban heard the news of Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet Jacob, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things. Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." He lived with him for a month. Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my brother, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what will your wages be?"

Laban had two daughters. The name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and attractive. Jacob loved Rachel. He said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter."

Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you, than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me."

Jacob served seven years for Rachel. They seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had for her.

Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her."

Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. In the evening, he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him. He went in to her. Laban gave Zilpah his servant to his daughter Leah for a servant. In the morning, behold, it was Leah. He said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Didn't I serve with you for Rachel? Why then

have you deceived me?"

Laban said, "It is not done so in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfill the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you will serve with me yet seven other years."

Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week. He gave him Rachel his daughter as wife. Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah, his servant, to be her servant. He went in also to Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

Yahweh saw that Leah was hated, and he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived, and bore a son, and she named him Reuben. For she said, "Because Yahweh has looked at my affliction. For now my husband will love me." She conceived again, and bore a son, and said, "Because Yahweh has heard that I am hated, he has therefore given me this son also." She named him Simeon. She conceived again, and bore a son. Said, "Now this time will my husband be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi. She conceived again, and bore a son. She said, "This time will I praise Yahweh." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I will die."

Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in God's place, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

She said, "Behold, my maid Bilhah. Go in to her, that she may bear on my knees, and I also may obtain children by her." She gave him Bilhah her servant as wife, and Jacob went in to her. Bilhah conceived, and bore Jacob a son. Rachel said, "God

has judged me, and has also heard my voice, and has given me a son." Therefore called she his name Dan. Bilhah, Rachel's servant, conceived again, and bore Jacob a second son. Rachel said, "I have wrestled with my sister with mighty wrestlings, and have prevailed." She named him Naphtali.

When Leah saw that she had finished bearing, she took Zilpah, her servant, and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Zilpah, Leah's servant, bore Jacob a son. Leah said, "How fortunate!" She named him Gad. Zilpah, Leah's servant, bore Jacob a second son. Leah said, "Happy am I, for the daughters will call me happy." She named him Asher.

Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother, Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

She said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes, also?" Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes."

Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, "You must come in to me; for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." He lay with her that night. God listened to Leah, and she conceived, and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah said, "God has given me my hire, because I gave my servant to my husband." She named him Issachar. Leah conceived again, and bore a sixth son to Jacob. Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good dowry. Now my husband will live with me, because I have borne him six sons." She named him Zebulun. Afterwards, she bore a daughter, and named her Dinah.

Joseph born and Jacob agrees to stay

God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her, and opened her womb. She conceived, bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach." She named him Joseph, saying, "May Yahweh add another son to me."

When Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place, and to my country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service with which I have served you."

Laban said to him, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, stay here, for I have divined that Yahweh has blessed me for your sake." He said, "Appoint me your wages, and I will give it."

He said to him, "You know how I have served you, and how your livestock have fared with me. For it was little which you had before I came, and it has increased to a multitude. Yahweh has blessed you wherever I turned. Now when will I provide for my own house also?"

He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me, I will again feed your flock and keep it. I will pass through all your flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted one, and every black one among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats. This will be my hire. So my righteousness will answer for me hereafter, when you come concerning my hire that is before you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and black among the sheep, that might be with me, will be considered stolen."

Laban said, "Behold, let it be according to your word."

That day, he removed the male goats that were

streaked and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons. He set three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

Jacob took to himself rods of fresh poplar, almond, plane tree, peeled white streaks in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods. He set the rods which he had peeled opposite the flocks in the gutters in the watering-troughs where the flocks came to drink. They conceived when they came to drink. The flocks conceived before the rods, and the flocks produced streaked, speckled, and spotted. Jacob separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the streaked and all the black in the flock of Laban: and he put his own droves apart, and didn't put them into Laban's flock. Whenever the stronger of the flock conceived, Jacob laid the rods in front of the eyes of the flock in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods; but when the flock were feeble, he didn't put them in. So the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. The man increased exceedingly, and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

He heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's. From that which was our father's, has he gotten all this wealth." Jacob saw the expression on Laban's face, and, behold, it was not toward him as before. Yahweh said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers, and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

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

of my strength. Your father has deceived me, and changed my wages ten times, but God didn't allow him to hurt me. If he said this, 'The speckled will be your wages,' then all the flock bore speckled. If he said this, 'The streaked will be your wages,' then all the flock bore streaked. Thus God has taken away your father's livestock, and given them to me. During mating season, I lifted up my eyes, and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which leaped on the flock were streaked, speckled, and grizzled. The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Now lift up your eyes, and behold, all the male goats which leap on the flock are streaked, speckled, and grizzled, for I have seen all that Laban does to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you vowed a vow to me. Now arise, get out from this land, and return to the land of your birth.'"

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

Jacob departs

Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives on the camels, and he took away all his livestock, and all his possessions which he had gathered, including the livestock which he had gained in Paddan Aram, to go to Isaac his father, to the land of Canaan. Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep: and Rachel stole the teraphim that were her father's.

Jacob deceived Laban the Syrian, in that he didn't tell him that he was running away. So he fled with all that he had. He rose up, passed over the

River, and set his face toward the mountain of Gilead.

Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled. He took his relatives with him, and pursued him seven days' journey. He overtook him in the mountain of Gilead. God came to Laban, the Syrian, in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Be careful that you don't speak to Jacob either good or bad."

Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountain, and Laban with his relatives encamped in the mountain of Gilead. Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, that you have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee secretly, and deceive me, and didn't tell me, that I might have sent you away with mirth and with songs, with tambourine and with harp; and didn't allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Now have you done foolishly. It is in the power of my hand to hurt you, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful that you don't speak to Jacob either good or bad.' Now, you want to be gone, because you greatly longed for your father's house, but why have you stolen my gods?"

Jacob answered Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Lest you should take your daughters from me by force.' Anyone you find your gods with shall not live. Before our relatives, discern what is yours with me, and take it." For Jacob didn't know that Rachel had stolen them.

Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two female servants; but he didn't find them. He went out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. Now Rachel had taken the teraphim, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. Laban felt around all the tent, but didn't find them. She said to her father, "Don't let my lord be

angry that I can't rise up before you; for I'm having my period." He searched, but didn't find the teraphim.

Jacob was angry, and argued with Laban. Jacob answered Laban, "What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? Now that you have felt around in all my stuff, what have you found of all your household stuff? Set it here before my relatives and your relatives, that they may judge between us two.

"These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not cast their young, and I haven't eaten the rams of your flocks. That which was torn of animals, I didn't bring to you. I bore its loss. Of my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. This was my situation: in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep fled from my eyes. These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night."

Laban answered Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine: and what can I do today to these my daughters, or to their children whom they have borne? Now come, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be for a witness between me and you."

Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. Jacob said to his relatives, "Gather stones." They took stones, and made a heap. They ate there by the heap. Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it

Galeed. Laban said, "This heap is witness between me and you today." Therefore it was named Galeed and Mizpah, for he said, "Yahweh watch between me and you, when we are absent one from another. If you afflict my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, no man is with us; behold, God is witness between me and you." Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap, and see the pillar, which I have set between me and you. May this heap be a witness, and the pillar be a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." Then Jacob swore by the fear of his father, Isaac. Jacob offered a sacrifice in the mountain, and called his relatives to eat bread. They ate bread, and stayed all night in the mountain. Early in the morning, Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them. Laban departed and returned to his place.

Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When he saw them, Jacob said, "This is God's army." He called the name of that place Mahanaim.

Meeting Esau again

Jacob sent messengers in front of him to Esau, his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. He commanded them, saying, "This is what you shall tell my lord, Esau: 'This is what your servant, Jacob, says. I have lived as a foreigner with Laban, and stayed until now. I have cattle, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.'" The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau. Not only that, but he comes to meet you, and four hundred men with him." Then

Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two companies; and he said, "If Esau comes to the one company, and strikes it, then the company which is left will escape." Jacob said, "God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, Yahweh, who said to me, 'Return to your country, and to your relatives, and I will do you good,' I am not worthy of the least of all the loving kindnesses, and of all the truth, which you have shown to your servant; for with just my staff I crossed over this Jordan; and now I have become two companies. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he come and strike me, and the mothers with the children. You said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which can't be counted because there are so many.'"

He stayed there that night, and took from that which he had with him, a present for Esau, his brother: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milk camels and their colts, forty cows, ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals. He delivered them into the hands of his servants, every herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass over before me, and put a space between herd and herd." He commanded the foremost, saying, "When Esau, my brother, meets you, and asks you, saying, 'Whose are you? Where are you going? Whose are these before you?' Then you shall say, 'They are your servant, Jacob's. It is a present sent to my lord, Esau. Behold, he also is behind us.'" He commanded also the second, and the third, and all that followed the herds, saying, "This is how you shall speak to Esau, when you find him. You shall say, 'Not only that, but behold, your servant, Jacob, is behind us.'" For, he said, "I will

appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face. Perhaps he will accept me."

So the present passed over before him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp.

Jacob has a wrestling match

He rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of the Jabbok. He took them, and sent them over the stream, and sent over that which he had. Jacob was left alone, and wrestled with a man there until the breaking of the day. When he saw that he didn't prevail against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled. The man said, "Let me go, for the day breaks." Jacob said, "I won't let you go, unless you bless me."

He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob". He said, "Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have fought with God and with men, and have prevailed."

This is the point where we find out how Jacob received his alternative name, as one who fought with God.

Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." He said, "Why is it that you ask what my name is?" He blessed him there.

Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for, he said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." The sun rose on him as he passed over Peniel, and he limped because of his thigh. Therefore the children of Israel don't eat the sinew of the hip, which is on the hollow of the thigh, to this day, because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the

sinew of the hip.

The brothers meet

Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau was coming, and with him four hundred men. He divided the children between Leah, Rachel, and the two servants. He put the servants and their children in front, Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph at the rear. He himself passed over in front of them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

Esau ran to meet him, embraced him, fell on his neck, kissed him, and they wept. He lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, "Who are these with you?" He said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." Then the servants came near with their children, and they bowed themselves. Leah also and her children came near, and bowed themselves. After them, Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed themselves.

Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company which I met?" Jacob said, "To find favor in the sight of my lord."

Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; let that which you have be yours."

Jacob said, "Please, no, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present at my hand, because I have seen your face, as one sees the face of God, and you were pleased with me. Please take the gift that I brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." He urged him, and he took it.

Esau said, "Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before you."

Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are tender, and that the flocks and herds

with me have their young, and if they overdrive them one day, all the flocks will die. Please let my lord pass over before his servant, and I will lead on gently, according to the pace of the livestock that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord to Seir."

Esau said, "Let me now leave with you some of the folk who are with me." He said, "Why? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord."

So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. Jacob traveled to Succoth, built himself a house, and made shelters for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

Jacob came in peace to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan Aram; and encamped before the city. He bought the parcel of ground where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. He erected an altar there, and called it El Elohe Israel.

We need to talk about Dinah

Dinah, the daughter of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her. He took her, lay with her, and humbled her. His soul joined to Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young lady, and spoke kindly to the young lady. Shechem spoke to his father, Hamor, saying, "Get me this young lady as a wife."

Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah, his daughter; and his sons were with his livestock in the field. Jacob held his peace until they came. Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to talk with him. The sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it. The men were grieved, and they were very angry, because he had done folly in Israel in

lying with Jacob's daughter; a thing ought not to be done. Hamor talked with them, saying, "The soul of my son, Shechem, longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. You shall dwell with us, and the land will be before you. Live and trade in it, and get possessions in it."

Shechem said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you will tell me I will give. Ask me a great amount for a dowry, and I will give whatever you ask of me, but give me the young lady as a wife."

The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father with deceit, and spoke, because he had defiled Dinah their sister, and said to them, "We can't do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised; for that is a reproach to us. Only on this condition will we consent to you. If you will be as we are, that every male of you be circumcised; then will we give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. But if you will not listen to us, to be circumcised, then we will take our sister, and we will be gone."

Their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son. The young man didn't wait to do this thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter, and he was honored above all the house of his father. Hamor and Shechem, his son, came to the gate of their city, and talked with the men of their city, saying, "These men are peaceful with us. Therefore let them live in the land and trade in it. For behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters. Only on this condition will the men consent to us to live with us, to become one people, if

every male among us is circumcised, as they are circumcised. Won't their livestock and their possessions and all their animals be ours? Only let us give our consent to them, and they will dwell with us."

All who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor, and to Shechem his son; and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city. On the third day, when they were sore, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword, came upon the unsuspecting city, and killed all the males.

They killed Hamor and Shechem, his son, with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. Jacob's sons came on the dead, and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their flocks, their herds, their donkeys, that which was in the city, that which was in the field, and all their wealth. They took captive all their little ones and their wives, and took as plunder everything that was in the house. Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me, to make me odious to the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites. I am few in number. They will gather themselves together against me and strike me, and I will be destroyed, I and my house." They said, "Should he deal with our sister as with a prostitute?"

The altar at Bethel

God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and live there. Make there an altar to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."

Then Jacob said to his household, and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, change your

garments. *Let us arise, and go up to Bethel. I will make there an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me on the way which I went.*"

They gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem. They traveled, and a terror of God was on the cities that were around them, and they didn't pursue the sons of Jacob. So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. He built an altar there, and called the place El Beth El; because there God was revealed to him, when he fled from the face of his brother. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; and its name was called Allon Bacuth.

The covenant confirmed

God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan Aram, and blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Jacob. Your name shall not be Jacob any more, but your name will be Israel." He named him Israel. God said to him, "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations will be from you, and kings will come out of your body. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and to your offspring after you will I give the land."

This is a key moment, when the special covenant relationship given first to Abraham and then to Isaac is now confirmed as belonging to Jacob and his descendants too.

Benjamin born

God went up from him in the place where he spoke with him. Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he spoke with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it. Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him "Bethel".

They traveled from Bethel. There was still some distance to come to Ephrath, and Rachel travailed. She had hard labor. When she was in hard labor, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid, for now you will have another son."

As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Benoni, but his father named him Benjamin.

Death of Rachel

Rachel died, and was buried on the way to Ephrath (also called Bethlehem). Jacob set up a pillar on her grave. The same is the Pillar of Rachel's grave to this day. Israel traveled, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Eder. While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Israel heard of it.

The list of Jacob's sons

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. The sons of Bilhah (Rachel's servant): Dan and Naphtali. The sons of Zilpah (Leah's servant): Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram. Jacob came to Isaac his father, to Mamre, to Kiriath Arba (which is Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac lived as foreigners.

Death of Isaac

The days of Isaac were one hundred eighty years. Isaac gave up the spirit, and died, and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. Esau and Jacob, his sons, buried him.

Esau's family line

Now this is the history of the generations of Esau (that is, Edom). Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon, the Hittite; and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon, the Hivite; and Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebaioth. Adah bore to Esau Eliphaz. Basemath bore Reuel. Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These are the sons of Esau, who were born to him in the land of Canaan. Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, with his livestock, all his animals, and all his possessions, which he had gathered in the land of Canaan, and went into a land away from his brother Jacob. For their substance was too great for them to dwell together, and the land of their travels couldn't bear them because of their livestock. Esau lived in the hill country of Seir. Esau is Edom.

This is the history of the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir: these are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, the son of Adah, the wife of Esau; and Reuel, the son of Basemath, the wife of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz. Timna was concubine to Eliphaz, Esau's son; and she bore to Eliphaz Amalek. These are the sons of Adah, Esau's wife. These are the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife. These were the sons of

Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon, Esau's wife: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Kenaz, chief Korah, chief Gatam, chief Amalek: these are the chiefs who came of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Adah. These are the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: chief Nahath, chief Zerah, chief Shammah, chief Mizzah: these are the chiefs who came of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife. These are the sons of Oholibamah, Esau's wife: chief Jeush, chief Jalam, chief Korah: these are the chiefs who came of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau's wife. These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their chiefs.

These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. These are the chiefs who came of the Horites, the children of Seir in the land of Edom. The children of Lotan were Hori and Heman. Lotan's sister was Timna. These are the children of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. These are the children of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah. This is Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness, as he fed the donkeys of Zibeon his father. These are the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. These are the children of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. These are the children of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. These are the children of Dishan: Uz and Aran. These are the chiefs who came of the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah, chief Dishon, chief Ezer, and chief Dishan: these are the chiefs who came of the Horites, according to their chiefs in the land of Seir.

These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the children of Israel. Bela, the son of Beor, reigned in Edom. The name of his city was Dinhabah. Bela died, and Jobab, the son of Zerah of Bozrah, reigned in his place. Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. Husham died, and Hadad, the son of Bedad, who struck Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his place. The name of his city was Avith. Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place. Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth by the river, reigned in his place. Shaul died, and Baal Hanan, the son of Achbor reigned in his place. Baal Hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his place. The name of his city was Pau. His wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab.

These are the names of the chiefs who came from Esau, according to their families, after their places, and by their names: chief Timna, chief Alvah, chief Jetheth, chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon, chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar, chief Magdiel, and chief Iram. These are the chiefs of Edom, according to their habitations in the land of their possession. This is Esau, the father of the Edomites.

Retrospective concluding title

Jacob lived in the land of his father's travels, in the land of Canaan. This is the history of the generations of Jacob.

Joseph's Story

The final family chronicle in the book of Genesis is that of Joseph. If Jacob's story may be described as suitable for a Hollywood epic, what can we say about Joseph? Fit for a musical?

Joseph is the favourite son

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. Joseph brought an evil report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colors. His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they hated him, and couldn't speak peaceably to him.

Joseph the dreamer

Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brothers, and they hated him all the more. He said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and behold, your sheaves came around, and bowed down to my sheaf."

His brothers said to him, "Will you indeed reign over us? Or will you indeed have dominion over us?" They hated him all the more for his dreams and for his words. He dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brothers, and said, "Behold, I have

dreamed yet another dream: and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me." He told it to his father and to his brothers. His father rebuked him, and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Will I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves down to you to the earth?" His brothers envied him, but his father kept this saying in mind.

His brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. Israel said to Joseph, "Aren't your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." He said to him, "Here I am."

He said to him, "Go now, see whether it is well with your brothers, and well with the flock; and bring me word again." So he sent him out of the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. A certain man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field. The man asked him, "What are you looking for?"

He said, "I am looking for my brothers. Tell me, please, where they are feeding the flock."

The man said, "They have left here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" Joseph went after his brothers, and found them in Dothan. They saw him afar off, and before he came near to them, they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, "Behold, this dreamer comes. Come now therefore, and let's kill him, and cast him into one of the pits, and we will say, 'An evil animal has devoured him.' We will see what will become of his dreams."

Joseph sold into slavery

Reuben heard it, and delivered him out of their hand, and said, "Let's not take his life." Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"-that he

might deliver him out of their hand, to restore him to his father. When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped Joseph of his coat, the coat of many colors that was on him; and they took him, and threw him into the pit. The pit was empty. There was no water in it.

They sat down to eat bread, and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing spices and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, and let's sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not let our hand be on him; for he is our brother, our flesh." His brothers listened to him. Midianites who were merchants passed by, and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. They brought Joseph into Egypt.

Joseph's disappearance explained to Jacob

Reuben returned to the pit; and saw that Joseph wasn't in the pit; and he tore his clothes. He returned to his brothers, and said, "The child is no more; and I, where will I go?" They took Joseph's coat, and killed a male goat, and dipped the coat in the blood. They took the coat of many colors, and they brought it to their father, and said, "We have found this. Examine it, now, whether it is your son's coat or not."

He recognized it, and said, "It is my son's coat. An evil animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces." Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. He said, "For I will go down to Sheol to my son

mourning." His father wept for him. The Midianites sold him into Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard.

Judah's family

At that time, Judah went down from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her, and went in to her. She conceived, and bore a son; and he named him Er. She conceived again, and bore a son; and she named him Onan. She yet again bore a son, and named him Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bore him. Judah took a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in Yahweh's sight. Yahweh killed him. Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." Onan knew that the offspring wouldn't be his; and when he went in to his brother's wife, he spilled it on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother. The thing which he did was evil in Yahweh's sight, and he killed him also. Then Judah said to Tamar, his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house, until Shelah, my son, is grown up"; for he said, "Lest he also die, like his brothers." Tamar went and lived in her father's house.

After many days, Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died. Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheep shearers to Timnah, he and his friend Hirah, the Adullamite. Tamar was told, "Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." She took off of her the garments of her widowhood, and covered herself with her veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gate of Enaim, which

is by the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she wasn't given to him as a wife. When Judah saw her, he thought that she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. He turned to her by the way, and said, "Please come, let me come in to you," for he didn't know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"

He said, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." She said, "Will you give me a pledge, until you send it?"

He said, "What pledge will I give you?" She said, "Your signet and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand." He gave them to her, and came in to her, and she conceived by him. She arose, and went away, and put off her veil from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood. Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend, the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, but he didn't find her. Then he asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the prostitute, that was at Enaim by the road?" They said, "There has been no prostitute here."

He returned to Judah, and said, "I haven't found her; and also the men of the place said, 'There has been no prostitute here.'" Judah said, "Let her keep it, lest we be shamed. Behold, I sent this young goat, and you haven't found her."

About three months later, Judah was told, "Tamar, your daughter-in-law, has played the prostitute. Moreover, behold, she is with child by prostitution." Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." When she was brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "By the man, whose these are, I am with child." She also said, "Please discern whose are these-the signet, and the cords, and the staff."

Judah acknowledged them, and said, "She is more righteous than I, because I didn't give her to Shelah, my son." He knew her again no more. In the time of her travail, behold, twins were in her womb. When she travailed, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, "This came out first." As he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out, and she said, "Why have you made a breach for yourself?" Therefore his name was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out, that had the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

Joseph serves Potiphar in Egypt

Joseph was brought down to Egypt. Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the hand of the Ishmaelites that had brought him down there. Yahweh was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man. He was in the house of his master the Egyptian. His master saw that Yahweh was with him, and that Yahweh made all that he did prosper in his hand. Joseph found favor in his sight. He ministered to him, and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. From the time that he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, Yahweh blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake. Yahweh's blessing was on all that he had, in the house and in the field. He left all that he had in Joseph's hand. He didn't concern himself with anything, except for the food which he ate.

Joseph ends up in prison

Joseph was well-built and handsome. After these things, his master's wife set her eyes on Joseph; and she said, "Lie with me."

But he refused, and said to his master's wife, "Behold, my master doesn't know what is with me in the house, and he has put all that he has into my hand. No one is greater in this house than I am, and he has not kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

As she spoke to Joseph day by day, he didn't listen to her, to lie by her, or to be with her. About this time, he went into the house to do his work, and there were none of the men of the house inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" He left his garment in her hand, and ran outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had run outside, she called to the men of her house, and spoke to them, saying, "Behold, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice. When he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment by me, and ran outside." She laid up his garment by her, until his master came home. She spoke to him according to these words, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought to us, came in to me to mock me, and as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment by me, and ran outside."

When his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your servant did to me," his wrath was kindled. Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound, and he was there in custody. But Yahweh was with Joseph, and showed kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. The keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever they did there, he was responsible for it. The keeper of the prison didn't look after anything that was under his hand, because

Yahweh was with him; and that which he did, Yahweh made it prosper.

The dream interpreter

After these things, the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cup bearer and the chief baker. He put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound. The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he took care of them. They stayed in prison many days. They both dreamed a dream, each man his dream, in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the cup bearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were bound in the prison. Joseph came in to them in the morning, and saw them, and saw that they were sad. He asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, saying, "Why do you look so sad today?"

They said to him, "We have dreamed a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it." Joseph said to them, "Don't interpretations belong to God? Please tell it to me."

The chief cup bearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream, behold, a vine was in front of me, and in the vine were three branches. It was as though it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters produced ripe grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand."

Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. Within three more days, Pharaoh will lift up your head, and restore you to your office. You will give Pharaoh's cup into his hand, the way you did when you were his cup bearer."

But remember me when it will be well with you, and please show kindness to me, and make mention of me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For indeed, I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon."

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, "I also was in my dream, and behold, three baskets of white bread were on my head. In the uppermost basket there were all kinds of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head."

Joseph answered, "This is its interpretation. The three baskets are three days. Within three more days, Pharaoh will lift up your head from off you, and will hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from off you." On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and he lifted up the head of the chief cup bearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief cup bearer to his position again, and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand; but he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief cup bearer didn't remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Joseph and Pharaoh

At the end of two full years, Pharaoh dreamed: and behold, he stood by the river. Behold, there came up out of the river seven cattle, sleek and fat, and they fed in the marsh grass. Behold, seven other cattle came up after them out of the river, ugly and thin, and stood by the other cattle on the brink of the river. The ugly and thin cattle ate up the seven sleek and fat cattle. So Pharaoh awoke. He slept and dreamed a second time: and behold, seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, healthy and good.

Behold, seven heads of grain, thin and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. In the morning, his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all of Egypt's magicians and wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

Then the chief cup bearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, "I remember my faults today. Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, with the chief baker. We dreamed a dream in one night, he and I. We dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. There was with us there a young man, a Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard, and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams. To each man according to his dream he interpreted. As he interpreted to us, so it was. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him."

Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon. He shaved himself, changed his clothing, and came in to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It isn't in me. God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, "In my dream, behold, I stood on the brink of the river: and behold, there came up out of the river seven cattle, fat and sleek. They fed in the marsh grass, and behold, seven other cattle came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for ugliness. The thin and ugly cattle ate up the first seven fat cattle, and when they had eaten them up, it

couldn't be known that they had eaten them, but they were still ugly, as at the beginning. So I awoke. I saw in my dream, and behold, seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, full and good: and behold, seven heads of grain, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven good heads of grain. I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me."

Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dream of Pharaoh is one. What God is about to do he has declared to Pharaoh. The seven good cattle are seven years; and the seven good heads of grain are seven years. The dream is one. The seven thin and ugly cattle that came up after them are seven years, and also the seven empty heads of grain blasted with the east wind; they will be seven years of famine. That is the thing which I spoke to Pharaoh. What God is about to do he has shown to Pharaoh. Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. There will arise after them seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land, and the plenty will not be known in the land by reason of that famine which follows; for it will be very grievous. The dream was doubled to Pharaoh, because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

"Now therefore let Pharaoh look for a discreet and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint overseers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt's produce in the seven plenteous years. Let them gather all the food of these good years that come, and lay up grain under the hand of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. The food will be for a store to the land against the seven years

of famine, which will be in the land of Egypt; that the land not perish through the famine."

Joseph the government official

The thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Because God has shown you all of this, there is no one so discreet and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and according to your word will all my people be ruled. Only in the throne I will be greater than you." Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck, and he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had. They cried before him, "Bow the knee!" He set him over all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without you shall no man lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt." Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-Paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On as a wife. Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. In the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. He gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was around every city, he laid up in the same. Joseph laid up grain as the sand of the sea, very much, until he stopped counting, for it was without number. To Joseph were born two sons before the year of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of

Potiphara priest of On, bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, "For", he said, "God has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." The name of the second, he called Ephraim: "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

The seven years of plenty, that were in the land of Egypt, came to an end. The seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread, and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do." The famine was over all the surface of the earth. Joseph opened all the store houses, and sold to the Egyptians. The famine was severe in the land of Egypt. All countries came into Egypt, to Joseph, to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all the earth.

Jacob's sons come to Egypt for food

Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" He said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there, and buy for us from there, so that we may live, and not die." Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob didn't send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers; for he said, "Lest perhaps harm happen to him." The sons of Israel came to buy among those who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan. Joseph was the governor over the land. It was he who sold to all the people of the land. Joseph's brothers came, and bowed themselves down to him with their faces to the earth. Joseph saw his brothers, and he recognized them, but acted like a stranger to them, and spoke roughly with them. He said to them,

"Where did you come from?" They said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food."

Joseph's dealings with his brothers

Joseph recognized his brothers, but they didn't recognize him. Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed about them, and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land."

They said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. We are all one man's sons; we are honest men. Your servants are not spies."

He said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land!"

They said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is today with our father, and one is no more."

Joseph said to them, "It is like I told you, saying, 'You are spies!' By this you shall be tested. By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go out from here, unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him get your brother, and you shall be bound, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you, or else by the life of Pharaoh surely you are spies." He put them all together into custody for three days.

Joseph said to them the third day, "Do this, and live, for I fear God. If you are honest men, then let one of your brothers be bound in your prison; but you go, carry grain for the famine of your houses. Bring your youngest brother to me; so will your words be verified, and you won't die." They did so. They said to one another, "We are certainly guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us, and we wouldn't listen.

Therefore this distress has come upon us." Reuben answered them, saying, "Didn't I tell you, saying, 'Don't sin against the child,' and you wouldn't listen? Therefore also, behold, his blood is required." They didn't know that Joseph understood them; for there was an interpreter between them. He turned himself away from them, and wept. Then he returned to them, and spoke to them, and took Simeon from among them, and bound him before their eyes. Then Joseph gave a command to fill their bags with grain, and to restore each man's money into his sack, and to give them food for the way. So it was done to them.

They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed from there. As one of them opened his sack to give his donkey food in the lodging place, he saw his money. Behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. He said to his brothers, "My money is restored! Behold, it is in my sack!" Their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?" They came to Jacob their father, to the land of Canaan, and told him all that had happened to them, saying, "The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly with us, and took us for spies of the country. We said to him, 'We are honest men. We are no spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is today with our father in the land of Canaan.' The man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your houses, and go your way. Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I will know that you are not spies, but that you are honest men. So I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.'"

As they emptied their sacks, behold, each man's bundle of money was in his sack. When they and their father saw their bundles of money, they

were afraid. Jacob, their father, said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children! Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin away. All these things are against me."

Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons, if I don't bring him to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him to you again."

He said, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he only is left. If harm happens to him along the way in which you go, then you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

The famine was severe in the land. When they had eaten up the grain which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little more food."

Judah spoke to him, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.' If you'll send our brother with us, we'll go down and buy you food, but if you'll not send him, we'll not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'"

Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly, telling the man that you had another brother?"

They said, "The man asked directly concerning ourselves, and concerning our relatives, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' We just answered his questions. Is there any way we could know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'"

Judah said to Israel, his father, "Send the boy with me, and we'll get up and go, so that we may live, and not die, both we, and you, and also our little ones. I'll be collateral for him. From my hand will you require him. If I don't bring him to you, and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever, for if

we hadn't delayed, surely we would have returned a second time by now."

Their father, Israel, said to them, "If it must be so, then do this. Take from the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry down a present for the man, a little balm, a little honey, spices and myrrh, nuts, and almonds; and take double money in your hand, and take back the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. Take your brother also, get up, and return to the man. May God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

The men took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin; and got up, went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and butcher an animal, and prepare; for the men will dine with me at noon."

The man did as Joseph commanded, and the man brought the men to Joseph's house. The men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house; and they said, "Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time, we're brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, attack us, and seize us as slaves, along with our donkeys." They came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they spoke to him at the door of the house, and said, "Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food. When we came to the lodging place, we opened our sacks, and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. We have brought it back in our hand. We have brought down other money in our hand to buy food. We don't know who put our money in our sacks."

He said, "Peace be to you. Don't be afraid. Your God, and the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks. I received your money." He brought Simeon out to them. The man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet. He gave their donkeys fodder. They prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there.

Joseph asks about his father

When Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves down to him to the earth. He asked them of their welfare, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he yet alive?"

They said, "Your servant, our father, is well. He is still alive." They bowed down humbly. He lifted up his eyes, and saw Benjamin, his brother, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?" He said, "God be gracious to you, my son." Joseph hurried, for his heart yearned over his brother; and he sought a place to weep. He entered into his room, and wept there. He washed his face, and came out. He controlled himself, and said, "Serve the meal."

They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians, that ate with him, by themselves, because the Egyptians don't eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. They sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth, and the men marveled one with another. He sent portions to them from before him, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. They drank, and were merry with him.

He commanded the steward of his house, saying, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in his sack's mouth. Put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest, with his grain money." He did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. When they had gone out of the city, and were not yet far off, Joseph said to his steward, "Up, follow after the men. When you overtake them, ask them, 'Why have you rewarded evil for good? Isn't this that from which my lord drinks, and by which he indeed divines? You have done evil in so doing.'" He overtook them, and he spoke these words to them.

They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! Behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought again to you out of the land of Canaan. How then should we steal silver or gold out of your lord's house? With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves."

He said, "Now also let it be according to your words: he with whom it is found will be my slave; and you will be blameless."

Then they hurried, and each man took his sack down to the ground, and each man opened his sack. He searched, beginning with the oldest, and ending at the youngest. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey, and returned to the city.

Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he was still there. They fell on the ground before him. Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Don't you know that such a man as I can indeed divine?"

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

He said, "Far be it from me that I should do so. The man in whose hand the cup is found, he will be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."

Then Judah came near to him, and said, "Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and don't let your anger burn against your servant; for you are even as Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father, or a brother?' We said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother; and his father loves him.' You said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' We said to my lord, 'The boy can't leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' You said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will see my face no more.' When we came up to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. Our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food.' We said, 'We can't go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down: for we may not see the man's face, unless our youngest brother is with us.' Your servant, my father, said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons: and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn in pieces"; and I haven't seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.' Now therefore when I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us; since his life is bound up in the boy's

life; it will happen, when he sees that the boy is no more, that he will die. Your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant, our father, with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became collateral for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I don't bring him to you, then I will bear the blame to my father forever.' Now therefore, please let your servant stay instead of the boy, my lord's slave; and let the boy go up with his brothers. For how will I go up to my father, if the boy isn't with me?-lest I see the evil that will come on my father."

Then Joseph couldn't control himself before all those who stood before him, and he cried, "Cause everyone to go out from me!" No one else stood with him, while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He wept aloud. The Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard.

Joseph reveals himself

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Does my father still live?" His brothers couldn't answer him; for they were terrified at his presence. Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." They came near. "He said, I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Now don't be grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are yet five years, in which there will be no plowing and no harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to save you alive by a great deliverance. So now it wasn't you who sent me here, but God, and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry, and go up to my father, and tell him, 'This is what your son Joseph says, "God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come

down to me. Don't wait. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you will be near to me, you, your children, your children's children, your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will nourish you; for there are yet five years of famine; lest you come to poverty, you, and your household, and all that you have." Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. You shall hurry and bring my father down here." He fell on his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers, and wept on them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Jacob's family moves to Egypt

The report of it was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, "Joseph's brothers have come." It pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this. Load your animals, and go, travel to the land of Canaan. Take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land.' Now you are commanded: do this. Take wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. Also, don't concern yourselves about your belongings, for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours."

The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way. He gave each one of them changes of clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of clothing. He sent the following to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and

provision for his father by the way. So he sent his brothers away, and they departed. He said to them, "See that you don't quarrel on the way."

They went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan, to Jacob their father. They told him, saying, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." His heart fainted, for he didn't believe them. They told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them. When he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob, their father, revived. Israel said, "It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

Israel traveled with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father, Isaac. God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob!" He said, "Here I am."

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

Jacob rose up from Beersheba, and the sons of Israel carried Jacob, their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. They took their livestock, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt-Jacob, and all his offspring with him, his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters, and he brought all his offspring with him into Egypt.

Jacob's family names

These are the names of the children of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn. The sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. The sons of Simeon: Jemuel,

Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah; but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Iob, and Shimron. The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram, with his daughter Dinah. All the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty-three. The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and Serah their sister. The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah, his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob, even sixteen souls. The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin. To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. The sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob: all the souls were fourteen. The son of Dan: Hushim. The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel, his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob: all the souls were seven. All the souls who came with Jacob into Egypt, who were his direct offspring, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were sixty-six. The sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two souls. All the souls of the house of Jacob, who came into Egypt, were seventy.

A family reunion

He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to show the way before him to Goshen, and they came into the

land of Goshen. Joseph prepared his chariot, and went up to meet Israel, his father, in Goshen. He presented himself to him, and fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive."

Joseph said to his brothers, and to his father's house, "I will go up, and speak with Pharaoh, and will tell him, 'My brothers, and my father's house, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. These men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock, and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have.' It will happen, when Pharaoh summons you, and will say, 'What is your occupation?' that you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we, and our fathers:' that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."

Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, and said, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks, their herds, and all that they own, have come out of the land of Canaan; and behold, they are in the land of Goshen." From among his brothers he took five men, and presented them to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" They said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, both we, and our fathers." They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to live as foreigners in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks. For the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen."

Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Make your father and your brothers dwell in the best of the land. Let them dwell in the land of Goshen. If you know any able men

among them, then put them in charge of my livestock."

Joseph brought in Jacob, his father, and set him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the days of the years of your life?"

Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred thirty years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.

Joseph placed his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. Joseph nourished his father, his brothers, and all of his father's household, with bread, according to their families.

There was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine. Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. When the money was all spent in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, "Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For our money fails."

Joseph said, "Give me your livestock; and I will give you food for your livestock, if your money is gone."

They brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, and for the flocks, and for the herds, and for the donkeys: and he fed them with bread in exchange for

all their livestock for that year. When that year was ended, they came to him the second year, and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord how our money is all spent, and the herds of livestock are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands. Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants to Pharaoh. Give us seed, that we may live, and not die, and that the land won't be desolate."

Joseph in command

So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every man of the Egyptians sold his field, because the famine was severe on them, and the land became Pharaoh's. As for the people, he moved them to the cities from one end of the border of Egypt even to the other end of it. Only he didn't buy the land of the priests, for the priests had a portion from Pharaoh, and ate their portion which Pharaoh gave them. That is why they didn't sell their land. Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh. Behold, here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. It will happen at the harvests, that you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four parts will be your own, for seed of the field, for your food, for them of your households, and for food for your little ones."

They said, "You have saved our lives! Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants."

Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth. Only the land of the priests alone didn't become Pharaoh's.

Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; and they got themselves possessions therein,

and were fruitful, and multiplied exceedingly. Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred forty-seven years. The time came near that Israel must die, and he called his son Joseph, and said to him, "If now I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please don't bury me in Egypt, but when I sleep with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying place." He said, "I will do as you have said."

He said, "Swear to me," and he swore to him. Israel bowed himself on the bed's head.

Jacob on his deathbed

After these things, someone said to Joseph, "Behold, your father is sick." He took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Someone told Jacob, and said, "Behold, your son Joseph comes to you," and Israel strengthened himself, and sat on the bed. Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.' Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you into Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh, even as Reuben and Simeon, will be mine. Your issue, whom you become the father of after them, will be yours. They will be called after the name of their brothers in their inheritance. As for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to come to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (also called Bethlehem)."

Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, "Who are

these?"

Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." He said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them." Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he couldn't see. He brought them near to him; and he kissed them, and embraced them. Israel said to Joseph, "I didn't think I would see your face, and behold, God has let me see your offspring also." Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near to him. Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. He blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac. Let them grow into a multitude upon the earth."

When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him. He held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father; for this is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."

His father refused, and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also will become a people, and he also will be great. However, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his offspring will become a multitude of nations." He blessed them that day, saying, "In you will Israel bless, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh'" He set Ephraim

before Manasseh. Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you, and bring you again to the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow."

Jacob called to his sons, and said: "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which will happen to you in the days to come.

Assemble yourselves, and hear, you sons of Jacob. Listen to Israel, your father.

"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength; excelling in dignity, and excelling in power.

Boiling over like water, you shall not excel; because you went up to your father's bed, then defiled it. He went up to my couch.

"Simeon and Levi are brothers. Their swords are weapons of violence.

My soul, don't come into their council. My glory, don't be united to their assembly; for in their anger they killed men. In their self-will they hamstringed cattle.

Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

"Judah, your brothers will praise you. Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's sons will bow down before you.

Judah is a lion's cub. From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he crouched as a lion, as a lioness. Who will rouse him up?

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs. To him will the obedience of the peoples be.

Binding his foal to the vine, his donkey's colt to

*the choice vine; he has washed his garments in wine,
his robes in the blood of grapes.*

*His eyes will be red with wine, his teeth white
with milk.*

*"Zebulun will dwell at the haven of the sea. He
will be for a haven of ships. His border will be on
Sidon. "Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down
between the saddlebags.*

*He saw a resting place, that it was good, the
land, that it was pleasant. He bows his shoulder to
the burden, and becomes a servant doing forced
labor.*

*"Dan will judge his people, as one of the tribes
of Israel. Dan will be a serpent on the trail, an adder
in the path, That bites the horse's heels, so that his
rider falls backward.*

I have waited for your salvation, Yahweh.

*"A troop will press on Gad, but he will press on
their heel.*

*"Asher's food will be rich. He will produce
royal dainties. "Naphtali is a doe set free, who bears
beautiful fawns.*

*"Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a
spring. His branches run over the wall.*

*The archers have severely grieved him, shot at
him, and persecute him:*

*But his bow remained strong. The arms of his
hands were made strong, by the hands of the Mighty
One of Jacob, (from there is the shepherd, the stone of
Israel),*

*even by the God of your father, who will help
you; by the Almighty, who will bless you, with
blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that
lies below, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb.*

*The blessings of your father have prevailed
above the blessings of your ancestors, above the
boundaries of the ancient hills. They will be on the*

head of Joseph, on the crown of the head of him who is separated from his brothers.

"Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. In the morning he will devour the prey. At evening he will divide the plunder."

Burial instructions

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them and blessed them. He blessed everyone according to his blessing. He instructed them, and said to them, "I am to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah, his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah, his wife, and there I buried Leah: the field and the cave that is therein, which was purchased from the children of Heth." When Jacob finished charging his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the spirit, and was gathered to his people.

Joseph fell on his father's face, wept on him, and kissed him. Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father; and the physicians embalmed Israel. Forty days were fulfilled for him, for that is how many the days it takes to embalm. The Egyptians wept for him for seventy days.

When the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the house of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 'My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am dying. Bury me in my grave which I have dug for myself in the land of Canaan." Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my

father, and I will come again."

Pharaoh said, "Go up, and bury your father, just like he made you swear."

Jacob buried in the Promised Land

Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, all the elders of the land of Egypt, All the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. There went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It was a very great company. They came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, and there they lamented with a very great and severe lamentation. He mourned for his father seven days. When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians." Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan. His sons did to him just as he commanded them, for his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field, for a possession of a burial site, from Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre. Joseph returned into Egypt-he, and his brothers, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us, and will fully pay us back for all the evil which we did to him." They sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father commanded before he died, saying, 'You shall tell Joseph, "Now please forgive the disobedience of your brothers, and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" Now, please forgive the disobedience of the servants of the God of your

father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also went and fell down before his face; and they said, "Behold, we are your servants." Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is today, to save many people alive. Now therefore don't be afraid. I will nourish you and your little ones." He comforted them, and spoke kindly to them.

The death of Joseph

Joseph lived in Egypt, he, and his father's house. Joseph lived one hundred ten years. Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third generation. The children also of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am dying, but God will surely visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." So Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old, and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

If we seek a purpose behind all this drama, it is simple. It explains how the sons of Jacob, the clan we can now call Israelites, came to be living in Egypt, and not the Promised Land. The next book in the Bible, Exodus, provides a straightforward continuation: the Israelites have grown numerous and powerful; a new Pharaoh is in power who has forgotten about Joseph; so the Israelites are to be enslaved; therefore Yahweh needs to raise up a leader who will lead the people of the covenant to the land of the covenant.

Creation Myths

Let us now address a fundamental question: how valuable to us in the 21st century is the book of Genesis?

Only if we correctly understand what the book is can we end up with a positive answer.

For those who begin with the premise that, since it is part of the inerrant 'word of God', we must treat it as pure revelation, the question just posed will seem unnecessary. But I am not addressing such people. I am addressing those who have no *a priori* position. And included in those who have an *a priori* position are those who have already dismissed, on supposed scientific grounds, the whole thing as a lot of nonsense. There are those who think that it is not possible that there be a creator; science is finding out so much, and what science cannot examine and measure cannot even exist. Such people have put themselves in the position that there can be nothing to convince them otherwise. There is not much you can say to such people

So the folk I am addressing are those somewhere in between these two extreme groups of the absolute believers and the absolute unbelievers.

Let us first think about creation myths. There are very few ethnic groups that do not have a creation myth. The diversity of content is great but there are similarities too. Here are a few examples.

Greek creation mythology can be summarised as follows: in the beginning was Chaos. Then came Earth which produced Sky. Covering Earth each night,

Sky fathered children upon her. Earth was personified as Gaia and sky was Ouranos. Their children included the Titan parents of most of the Olympian gods and goddesses. And so on down through various demi-gods to ordinary humans.

In Norse mythology, there was originally a chasm, Ginnungagap, bounded on either side by fire and ice. When fire and ice met, they combined to form a giant, named Ymir, and a cow, named Audhumbla, to nourish Ymir. She survived by licking the salty ice blocks. From her licking emerged Bur, the grandfather of the Aesir. The Norse gods are divided into two major groups, the Aesir and Vanir, in addition to the giants who came first.

The Rig Veda from India has it that before the divine pair of Earth and Sky, who created the gods, was another god, Tvastr, the "first fashioner". He created Earth and Sky, as a dwelling place, and many other things. Tvastr was a universal impregnator who made other things reproduce.

The Egyptians, being very conscious of how important the annual overflow of the river Nile was to them, have Nu as the god who was the source of everything. The sun, Ra, was also a creator god, who created other gods, looking for a mate.

Various Chinese ideas of creation exist, but a common denominator has it that the yin and yang, the dark and the light, are the creative power, which sustains all life and being. Yin and yang are not to be seen as gods or deities in any sense. They are the natural forces behind nature and even the gods, such as P'an Ku, are creations of the yin and yang.

The names of all the creator gods are different across the whole range of creation myths, and nearly all creation myths outside of Genesis end up with lots of lesser gods all being involved in creative acts. What they nearly all have in common also is an explanation

(although these differ) of the conflict between good and evil. This is a vast subject and well worthy of detailed study, but too big for us to go beyond this very cursory introduction. The key thing is that creation myths are addressing the same set of questions.

Who or what is the source of everything?

What is the relationship between this prime source and us humans?

Why is there evil in the world?

What about all these lesser non-human powers?

It is difficult to find a creation myth which does not have these questions explicitly or implicitly answered. Some answers are very much more elaborate than others, needless to say.

By way of contrast, the belief that only the material - only what can be measured physically - exists is a scientific myth which fails to answer these questions in any useful way. Science can tell us how fast the universe is expanding from its original starting point, it can measure lots of things, it can find traces of previous ice ages, it can map galaxies, and so on. These are the questions it can answer, and the scientific method is the best way to answer such questions. No wise person will look for any other method of resolving them. But there are some valid questions which the scientific method cannot answer. If these questions matter, then the Genesis answers matter too. They may well be the best answers we are ever going to get.

Dark Powers

In the previous chapter we referred to 'lesser non-human powers' and the materialist will say there is no such thing. In contrast the common human experience throughout all of history is of what we may call the numinous: that there really are forces we cannot comprehend; we had better keep on the right side of them, or else we will suffer sickness, our crops will fail, there will be no rainfall, or too much of it, and so on. Thus the vast multitude of religions has developed and we can chart their similarities and their differences.

Within these religions there have arisen priests and shamans to exploit the possibilities of human fear of these powers for their own benefit. Idols are worshipped in temples, and the priests and monks who run the temples gain all their sustenance and wealth from the devotees. It is easy to dismiss all this in the 21st century, and especially all the exploitative priestcraft nearest to home of medieval Europe.

However to say that all this 'religion' is pure fiction may be a step too far.

Consider this comment by Paul:

Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. [Ephesians 6:12]

Paul had met with forces of evil in many guises,

and the Ephesians he was writing to lived where there was a massive cult of the Roman Emperor who demanded worship as a god. What Paul would have said would have been a denial that the Roman Emperor was worthy of worship, but he would also have recognised a real power behind the cult, real 'spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places'. It is quite reasonable that this would have been his comment on all the older gods of the Graeco-Roman world, Jupiter and Mars and suchlike. That these were the false gods in whose names the 'spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places' were seeking to divert men and women away from the true 'I AM' into paths of dark idolatry.

We meet the 'spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places' in Genesis too: in the tempter, in the 'sons of God' who came down to take on physical form and mate with the 'daughters of men', in the false gods encountered by the patriarchs.

So the many 'gods' of the religions of the world over the whole span of human history we may easily, in our scientific age, regard as so much nonsense to be quickly rejected now. Religion, with its exploitative priestcraft, is a very easy target for exposing as so much tomfoolery. But it would be wrong to suppose that there was no disguised reality behind it; such religions may well have been the façade, the visible expression, for a type of spiritual warfare against the source of all truth. Lies, yes, but told by whom?

The Word of God

When one reads any book in the collection of books we call the Bible it is inevitable that we have behind our reading some idea of the authority the book has. Is not the Bible the 'word of God'?

One view is that the whole Bible is the inerrant word of God. This is quite common amongst small protestant denominations, and it must first be noted that among those who hold this view there are many disagreements about what the Bible actually teaches. The trouble is that if you think of the Bible as containing many 'proof texts' you are left with choices. Different proof texts produce different answers; not about the essentials of doctrine perhaps, but certainly about topics such as church administration. The ordination of women is a good example, as is infant or believers' baptism.

Many exclusive sects were founded on a precise collection of proof texts, each having the common attribute of declaring that they, and they alone, are the 'true' church.

So even believing that the Bible is the inerrant word of God does not guarantee a positive outcome.

The Bible is a compilation around the central theme of God's creation, of humans having a special part of that creation, of there needing to be a healing process for the spoilt creation, and how this healing has been and will be delivered. There are family chronicles, pure narrative history, prophetic utterances of messages from God, a moral code, a set of instructions for worship which may or may not have

been superseded, and finally the drama of one claiming to be God incarnate and offering an indwelling of God's spirit.

The Bible's description of itself is that scripture is *theopneustos*, literally 'God-breathed'. It claims that God has spoken, once through the prophets, now through a Son. But it has been recorded by human beings, with all the capacity we humans have for honest mistakes. So it is not wrong to treat any part of the Bible that is historical narrative with the same scrutiny as we would the writings of Heroditus or Tacitus or Gibbon. The letters of apostles were viewed by the early church as definitive, inasmuch as these men had been given a greater authority than any other they knew. There were several accounts of the life of Jesus, some obviously compiled with ulterior motives; so only four were recognised as having apostolic authority.

My view is that we have no better guide to the dealings of God with mankind than the books of the Bible. Some are simply of historic interest, but all are important. We will need to be intelligent to understand which parts are pure poetry, which parts are symbolic, which parts have been superseded, and which parts are pure revelation of as much truth about things eternal as we are capable of receiving. We are to love God 'with all our mind'.

Paul addresses this problem of how the truth about God has such different receptions. His preaching of God's salvation being offered through a crucified and risen saviour had been rejected by different groups of people as foolishness, or worse. But it had been received by some. What could account for this difference? Here is his answer:

Now the natural man doesn't receive the things of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he

can't know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual discerns all things. [1 Corinthians 2:14-15]

In other words, we can only discern the truth from any part of God's revelation if we have the assistance of God's Spirit.

This spiritual discerning can happen when we read some part of God's word. There develops in our mind the conviction that this bit is really true. I have experienced this since I first, as a committed atheist, read the Gospel of John in order to qualify for a debate with a clergyman at my university. To my huge surprise I found myself drawn to the carpenter's son, and had to admit defeat. Since then I have been able to listen to 'the voice' and - I hope - learn more and more about my place in the plan of the one and only 'I AM'.

Genesis sets the scene. The cosmos has a purpose, we humans have a purpose, and after the invasion of evil God began the healing process by choosing a single man, then a single family, then a particular place, from which to build a whole nation who would receive the blessings of Yahweh, and exhibit the right way to live to everyone else. This nation was to be the source of healing for the whole of mankind. Without the foundation laid in Genesis, we would never be able to understand the totality of God's plan. It is only the beginning, but an essential beginning.

About the Author

John Everett read Classics and Theology at Cambridge University. He taught Religious Education to Ordinary and Advanced Level at a time when when the syllabus was the four gospels for the former and the whole New Testament for the latter. He has published 'Behold The Man: the Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ' (Edward Arnold, London, 1969), which is now available, revised, as a Kindle book online. He is married with three daughters, a son, and three grandchildren. He also maintains a website 'johneverettbooks.co.uk', where all his books are available to buy or download.