

Sermons on Genesis-Robert Morgan

Introduction - Robert J Morgan is the teaching pastor at [Donelson Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee](#) and is well known for expository messages that are rich in excellent illustrations of Biblical principles. These sermons are older messages preached on various passages in Romans.

IN THE BEGINNING—GOD

Genesis 1

Robert Morgan

Today we're beginning a year-long series of sermons, 52 messages in all, on the subject Ten2: 100 Bible Verses that Everyone on Earth Should Know by Heart. I've been envisioning this series for a long time. I recall many years ago being in a hotel somewhere, I believe it was overseas, and staying up late into the night searching through the Bible and looking for the top 100 Bible verses that I wanted my children to memorize. Looking back, I realize that was the beginning of my conceptualizing this series.

I can't tell you how deeply I feel about Scripture memory. It has the power to remold the mind and reshape the way we think and the way we live. It has the power to regulate our attitudes. It has the ability to equip us for our God-given tasks and ministries. I know that from personal experience. As I've mentioned before, I memorized a significant amount of Scripture in childhood because there was a gentleman who came to our public school every week and he was given classroom time to help us with Scripture memory.

That's no longer done in the public schools, so we have to make sure we are doing at home and church. And it's not just children who need to hide God's Word in their hearts; it is all of us. So this year, I'd like to lead us on a church-wide campaign to learn 100 Bible verses by heart.

Genesis 1:1

We're beginning today at a logical place—at the beginning of the Bible. Genesis 1:1 says: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Now, this was originally written in the Hebrew language, and the Hebrews did not have a word for universe. So they used the double terms, heaven and earth. But we could just as easily translate this: In the beginning, God created the universe. God is the Creator, and everything that is not God is Creation. In other words, when we talk about the creation, we are talking about everything that exists on every level in every realm that is not God Himself. In the beginning, God created everything that is not God, everything that is outside of the Being of God. In the beginning, God created the universe and whatever else may exist outside the Trinity.

This is the Bible's most foundational verse, and that's why it is the first verse on our list of one hundred. This is the lowest level of bedrock at the bottom of everything, and on which everything else stands. If this verse is true, then everything in the Bible is potentially true, and in fact is true in actuality. If this verse is false, then most everything in the Bible is false. And that's why our secular society has engaged in a full-scale, protracted, sustained war against Genesis 1:1. They can't seem to win it, but it's not for lack of trying.

This verse establishes the historical and chronological beginning of time and creation. This is the beginning of the universe, which means that the universe had a beginning. It is not eternal. It is not infinite. It is temporal. It was created ex nihilo, out of nothing. It was caused by someone or something outside of itself. That's the point of my message today—in the Beginning, God created the universe. I'm not going to deal with when that occurred; that's a whole different and involved subject. Was it 10,000 years ago or 15 billion years ago? I'm going to leave that aspect of it for another time. But my point is that the universe had a beginning, and Genesis 1:1 says—In the Beginning, God....

There are very many scientists who believe that verse with all their hearts and minds. Over the Christmas holidays, the London Daily Mail ran an article on the large numbers of scientists who accept the fact that God created the universe. The writer began the article by recalling how the Apollo 8 astronauts read from Genesis 1 on Christmas Eve 40 years ago as they circled the moon. I remember sitting there with my family looking at the grainy black-and-white pictures from outer space and hearing Jim Lovell and the others in voices tinged with static: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

But then the article went on to quote some modern scholars. Professor Sir John Polkinghorne of Cambridge University told the newspaper, "Science is great, but it's not the whole story.... I believe God reveals His nature in many ways.... The wonderful order of the world, which we scientists investigate, is a sign that there is a divine mind behind that order."

Oxford mathematics professor John Lennox said, "Science gives us...evidence. And faith is evidence-based, not based on lack of evidence.... The evidence is cumulative and of two sorts—objective evidence that comes from science, and what I see in Jesus Christ who, as Christmas reminds us, is the Word become flesh, God encoded in humanity." ("For Christmas week, we asked some eminent scientists if it's possible to reconcile reason with religious faith" by Jonathan Margolis, in the London Daily Mail, December 20, 2008, at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1098831/For-Christmas-week-asked-eminent-scientists-possible-reconcile-reason-religious-faith.html>)

The First Three Words of Genesis 1:1

Regardless of their background, religion, or philosophy, almost all scientists of the world have concluded from their research and on the basis of evidence that the first three words of the Bible are true: In the beginning. The universe is not eternal and it has not always existed. Even the brilliant and very materialistic scientist, Dr. Stephen Hawking, wrote, "The universe has not existed forever. Rather, the universe, and time itself, had a beginning in the Big Bang...."

Now, what does he mean by the term, "Big Bang"? We've all grown up reading about that term in our science books. How did scientists come to refer to the beginning point of the universe as the "Big Bang"?

The "Big Bang" was a term coined by Dr. Fred Hoyle. Dr. Hoyle was a brilliant English astronomer who was speaking on the BBC on March 28, 1949, and he used the phrase "Big Bang" to describe this point of beginning for the universe. Ironically, Dr. Hoyle was not an advocate of the Big Bang Theory, and yet he is credited for having coined the term that popularized the concept for the masses.

Dr. Hoyle spent most of his working life at the Institute of Astronomy at Cambridge University and was for many years its director. Dr. Hoyle was an atheist until his research caused him to admit that the complexities of the universe were too great for it all to have happened by chance. He was particularly struck by the set of coincidences and circumstances that would have been necessary to generate the existence of carbon in the universe, which, of course is necessary for carbon-based life forms like you and me. He was greatly shaken by this. In his book, *The Universe: Past and Present Reflections*, he wrote:

Would you not say to yourself, "Some super-calculating intellect must have designed the properties of the carbon atom; otherwise the chance of my finding such an atom through the blind forces of nature would be utterly minuscule?" Of course you would . . . A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question

He later wrote something else that was very interesting: If one proceeds directly and straightforwardly in this manner, without being deflected by a fear of incurring the wrath of scientific opinion, one arrives at the conclusion that biomaterials with their amazing measure or order must be the outcome of intelligent design. No other possibility I have been able to think of.

He compared the random emergence of even the smallest cell to the likelihood that "a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials therein."

He said that the chance of obtaining even a single functioning protein by chance combination of amino acids would be like the probability of a solar system full of blind men solving Rubik's Cube simultaneously.

In his book, *The Intelligent Universe*, Hoyle wrote, "Life as we know it is, among other things, dependant on at least 200 different enzymes. How could the blind forces of the primal sea manage to put together the correct chemical elements to build enzymes?"

He calculated that the chance of this happening was only one to the 40,000 power, which is about the same as the chance of throwing 50,000 sixes in a row with dice.

Well, this is the man who coined the phrase: "Big Bang." And what do we mean by "Big Bang"? We mean the "Big Beginning." It's just another way of saying that scientists—after all their research and theories—have come to the conclusion that at least the first three words of the Bible are true: In the beginning.... So science is in general agreement that there was a Big Beginning, only they substitute the word "Bang" for "Beginning." Let me give you some other quotes:

- As a result of the Big Bang (the tremendous explosion which marked the beginning of our Universe), the universe is expanding and most of the galaxies within it are moving away from each other—from the CalTech website.
- The Big Bang model of the universe's birth is the most widely accepted model that has ever been conceived for the scientific origin of everything—Dr. Stuart Robbins of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.
- Many once believed that the universe had no beginning or end and was truly infinite. Through the inception of the Big Bang theory, however, no longer could the universe be considered infinite. The universe was forced to take on the properties of a finite phenomenon, possessing a history and a beginning.... The scientific evidence is now overwhelming that the Universe began with a Big Bang—from professors at the University of Michigan
- The universe had a beginning. There was once nothing and now there is something—Dr. Janna Levin, Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics at Cambridge University

So when the Bible opens with the words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," it is not speaking illogically, but logically; and that verse corresponds with our most scientific observations and discoveries. This verse establishes the chronological and historical beginnings of the universe. And, after generations of research, scientific opinion have converged with the first three words of Genesis 1:1

The Fourth Word of Genesis 1:1

And that brings us to the fourth word of Genesis 1:1: In the beginning—God. Scientists are grappling with two issues that seem to point inevitably to creation. The first is origin; the universe clearly had a beginning. The second is design. The universe in general and the earth in particular seem perfectly designed and fine-tuned for life to exist. There are many quantities and constants that have to be aligned just right, and the probability of that happening is so small as to be virtually impossible.

I want to show you the trailer for one of the finest scientific films I've ever seen. It's called "The Privileged Planet," and I really wanted to show the entire film this morning; but it is sixty minutes long. So we have information in the program as to how you can order a copy for your family, but at least I do what to show you the trailer.

This is why in the quotation I gave you earlier, Dr. Fred Hoyle said that the chances of having a hostile universe that contains a life-sustaining planet that randomly produces the complexities that we see all around us is equivalent to a tornado hitting a junkyard and producing a 747.

So how do scientists explain this?

In the current (December 2008) issue of Discover Magazine, there's a fascinating article entitled: "Science's Alternative to an Intelligent Creator." The subtitle is: "Our Universe is Perfectly Tailored for Life. That May be the Work of God or the Result of Our Universe Being One of Many."

In this article, writer Tim Folger interviewed Andrei Linde, a noted physicist associated with Stanford University, about the remarkable fine-tuning that makes life possible on earth.

Folger wrote: "Everything...bears witness to an extraordinary fact about the universe: Its basic properties are uncannily suited for life. Tweak the laws of physics in just about any way and—in this universe, anyway—life as we know it would not exist."

"Consider just two possible changes. Atoms consist of protons, neutrons, and electrons. If those protons were just 0.2 percent more massive than they actually are, they would be unstable and would decay into simpler particles. Atoms wouldn't exist; neither would we. If gravity were slightly more powerful, the consequences would be nearly as grave. A beefed-up gravitational force would compress stars more tightly, making them smaller, hotter, and denser. Rather than surviving for billions of years, stars would burn through their fuel in a few million years, sputtering out long before life had a chance to evolve. There are many such examples of the universe's life-friendly properties—so many, in fact, that physicists can't dismiss them all as mere accidents."

Folger then quotes Professor Linde: "We have a lot of really, really strange coincidences, and all of these coincidences are such that they make life possible."

Some scientists call this the Anthropic Principle, a term that comes from the Greek word for human—"anthropos." The Anthropic

Principle states that the universe, solar system, and our planet earth are inexplicably and perfectly designed for human life.

Folger continues: "Physicists don't like coincidences. They like even less the notion that life is somehow central to the universe..."

In other words, Physicists don't like the idea that God created this universe as a home for human beings.

"...and yet recently discoveries are forcing them to confront that very idea. Life, it seems, is not an incidental component of the universe, burped up out of a random chemical brew on a lonely planet to endure for a few fleeting ticks of the cosmic clock. In some strange sense, it appears that we are not adapted to the universe; the universe is adapted to us."

If you don't want to allow an Intelligent Designer into the process, how do you explain it?

The article goes on: "Call it a fluke, a mystery, a miracle. Or call it the biggest problem in physics. Short of invoking a benevolent creator, many physicists see only one possible explanation: Our universe may be but one of perhaps infinitely many universes in an inconceivably vast multiverse. Most of those universes are barren, but some, like ours, have conditions suited for life."

What Folger is saying is that the only way you can explain this apart from an Intelligent Designer is to say that the universe itself is virtually infinite, endless. There are an infinite number, not just of solar systems or of galaxies, but of universes (perhaps in different realms or dimensions, each having its own system of physics). Because the number of universes is infinite, that increases the odds. It allows for the possibility that the somewhere somehow among all the infinite numbers of universes, the odds get a little better of having a planet that can sustain life.

"If there are vast numbers of other universes, all with different properties, by pure odds at least one of them ought to have the right combination of conditions to bring forth stars, planets, and living things," wrote Folger.

Folger admits that the idea is controversial. "Critics say it doesn't even qualify as a scientific theory because the existence of other universes cannot be proved or disproved."

And yet, one scientist quoted by Folger admitted, "If you don't want God, you'd better have a multiverse."

I saw a video featuring Dr. William Lane Craig, and he spoke to this very issue.

Dr. Craig explained: If you deny the hypothesis of cosmic design you're basically left with two alternatives: Either that this fine-tuning is the result of physical necessity; that is to say there is some unknown theory that would explain why these constants and quantities had to have the values they do, or else you've got to say that this just occurred by chance alone; it is the result of sheer accident.

Well, that first theory doesn't seem too plausible, because there just isn't any theory that would explain why all of these constants and quantities have the values they do; they appear just to be arbitrarily put in at the creation's initial conditions.

With respect to the second alternative—chance—again, most theorists recognize that the odds against the universe being life-permitting are just so fantastic that chance simply cannot be faced, unless you say that our universe does not represent the only role of the dice.

And so what many theorists have been driven to is multiplying our probabilistic resources by saying maybe our universe is not the only role of the dice. Maybe there are out there parallel, unseen, undetectable universes, and that our universe is just one in this cosmic crap shoot in which there is an infinite number of other worlds in which the cosmic constants and quantities vary randomly. And so by chance alone somewhere in this infinite ensemble of universes our universe would appear by chance alone, and here we are, the lucky beneficiaries and recipients of this chance hypothesis.

So that in order to rescue the chance hypothesis, physicists have been driven beyond physics to metaphysics to this extraordinary hypothesis of a world's ensemble of an infinite number of randomly ordered worlds in order to explain away this appearance of design.

I'm not a scientist, so what do I know?—but it seems that are three considerations here.

1. Envisioning a trillion new universes does not explain away the wonders of this one.

2. If there are an infinite number of universes—where did they come from? Who made them?
3. If there are a trillion other universes, it seems to me we are dealing with more complexity and design, not less—more than we can even imagine.

So it seems to me that the more we learn, the more we're brought back to the sentence of the Bible: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

The Four Truths

And if the first sentence of the Bible is true, it vastly increases the odds that the rest of the Bible is true, as well. If the fourth word of our English Bibles is true, then it only stands to reason that so is the fifth word, and the sixth, and the seventh. In other words, it stands to reason that He would have a plan, and that He would communicate that plan, and that the nature of His communication would be inspired, infallible, and wonderful. If the fourth word of the Bible is true, then everything else in the remainder of the Bible is plausible.

And if the rest of the Bible is true, then we're brought back once again to the old Gospel Story of Jesus Christ, around which the whole Bible is centered. And that's why the apostle John decided to open His Gospel—the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John—with words that he borrowed from Genesis 1:1. And what John had to say was this:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).

And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but should have everlasting life (John 3:16).

And that's why I have chosen these four verses as the four beginning verses that everyone on earth should know by heart. These verses—and the God they talk about and the Savior they describe—represent the beginning truths for anyone who needs hope and life in this world. Nothing in life makes sense outside of the framework of these four verses, but everything in life makes sense within their boundaries.

It is not illogical to believe in a Creator. It is not illogical to believe in a Savior. It is the most sensible thing in life to believe: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us, and we beheld His glory, as that of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. For God so loved the world that He gave His one-and-only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life.

STAYING STRAIGHT IN A PERVERSE WORLD

Genesis 1:26-27

Robert Morgan

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

We are in a series of five or six messages on issues relating to our modern culture. How do we as Christians interact with our society? Today I'd like to tackle a difficult and controversial subject—what the Bible says about homosexual activity between adults.

In earlier days this wouldn't have been a controversial subject, but times have changed. A generation ago, Christian activity was viewed as healthy and homosexual activity was viewed as dysfunctional. Now we're coming to a point in our society in which Christian activity is viewed as dysfunctional and homosexual activity is considered healthy and normal. I could give you about a thousand examples of that, but I'll just use one to get us started with our study.

There is a news report out of Washington State of a man who was turned down as a mentor in the Big Brothers / Big Sisters program because of his Christian moral standards. His name is Dan Pritchett, and he works for a company that makes Bible

software. He felt a responsibility to volunteer as a Big Brother. The organization gave him their standard interview, and in the course of that interview, he was asked about matters of a moral nature. He reported that he abstains from premarital sex and holds to a biblical standard of morality. For this reason, he was turned down. They didn't want him "Christianizing" the young people.

On the other hand, the Big Brothers / Big Sisters organization has been in the news lately because of its decision not to discriminate against homosexuals as mentors for children involved in the program. As a matter of fact, parents of boys needing Big Brothers are not to be told of the sexual orientation of their son's proposed mentor.

The Christians are "out" because we are abnormal, dangerous, and dysfunctional. The homosexuals are "in" because they are normal and healthy. This is a major issue of our time—perhaps the most definitive moral issue we face. So it is very, very important to know exactly what the Bible says about this.

Last week's message on the inspiration and authority of Scripture was the introduction to today's message, and today's message is based around that fact that homosexual activity is referred to in seven different passages in Scripture. I'm not interested in preaching my own opinions on this subject; my opinions are sometimes wrong. I just want to show you what God's opinion is, as recorded in His inspired, infallible, authoritative Word.

Before we get to these seven passages, let me draw your attention to the passage I read at the beginning of the message. Genesis 1 and 2 are foundational for understanding what the Bible says about human sexuality. God created the race around the model of a male and a female who were to come together in a relationship of marriage that would serve as the underpinning for society. From the very beginning God ordained for human society to be maintained and carried on by men and women who would enter into personal, loving, sexual relationships for the procreation of the race. Any sexual relationship outside of marriage between one man and one woman is consistently viewed as unholy in the Scriptures. It isn't just homosexual activities the Bible condemns. Ephesians 5 says: "But among you, there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality." What is immorality? It is any sexual relationship apart from one-man/one-woman model that God established in Genesis 1-2.

Now with that as preface, let's look at the seven passages that speak specifically to the issue of homosexuality. Because of time and because I want to at the very least show you these passages and draw some conclusions at the end, I'm not going to belabor the exegesis of these seven Scriptures. I just want you to be aware of them.

Genesis 19:1-11

In this passage there were two angels who traveled from Abraham's tent to the city of Sodom where Abraham's nephew lived, a man by the name of Lot. Genesis 18 says that the sin and immorality of Sodom was beyond redemption point, and God had determined to judge the city. So the two angels entered the city to rescue Lot and his family before judgment came.

Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. And he said, "Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way." And they said, "No, but we will spend the night in the open square." But he insisted strongly; so they turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally."

So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, and said, "Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof."

Now, I'm shocked and horrified at what Lot said, and we could easily devote a sermon to the pitiful backsliderness of Lot. But that's not the issue we're looking at today. Our point of observation today was at the corruption of the men of Sodom.

Verse 11 says the angels "struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary trying to find the door." And that very night, Lot and his family fled Sodom. The next morning the city was destroyed by the judgment fires of a holy God.

Leviticus 18:22

The next reference is in Leviticus 18:22: You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.

Leviticus 20:13

The third reference is only two chapters away, in Leviticus 20:13: If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.

These Levitical laws were given to Israel as it was being formed into a nation under a system of government called a theocracy—a society in which the government was, in a literal way, headed by Jehovah and administered through a judge or a king who was appointed by God. This was the Old Testament dispensation. These were the national laws for Israel, and we should not interpret them as if all the details of these laws are required of the church or of human government today. We don't execute those who engage in homosexual activity and we don't stone those who pick up sticks on the Sabbath. But the moral underpinnings of these laws flow from the righteous character of God, and the sexual morality that is taught here is based on timeless moral principles that correspond to the holy nature of God the Creator.

Judges 19

The third biblical passage is found in Judges 19, and it is a shocking story similar to the story of Sodom. In fact, this one is even worse. It's among the most sordid stories in the Scripture, and I'm not going to read the entire thing. Here is the short version. There was a Levite, a priest, who took for himself a live-in woman, a concubine. That was legal in those days but not acceptable in the Lord's eyes. These two were traveling in ancient Judah, and one night they came to a village named Gibeah to spend the night. An old man took them into his home, in accordance with the laws of hospitality common in those days. The old man provided fodder for their donkey. He washed their feet and gave them food from his table. Now, let's pick up the story at verse 22:

As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally." But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage."

The story goes on to say that the men, unable to have relations with the young man, raped the concubine and left her dead the next morning on the doorstep. As a result, all of Israel went to war to judge that wicked city.

Romans 1:26-27

The next time this subject occurs is in the New Testament, in Romans 1: For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving their natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

The last half of Romans 1 is a remarkable passage, because it outlines for us the exact pattern that occurs when a society begins descending into moral and spiritual ruin. I don't have time to go into detail, but what it says in essence is that there are five stages in the downward moral ruin and inward destruction of a society. First, a society rejects the reality of God as the Creator. Then it descends into idolatry. The next step is sexual immorality. The next step is the homosexualization of the culture. And the final step is total moral disintegration, leading to the death of that society. We see it in Sodom. We see it in ancient Greece and Rome. We see it throughout history, and we see it in our world today. I think we're at Stage Four in the United States today.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

The sixth passage is in 1 Corinthians 6: Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortionists will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Timothy 1:9-11

The last passage is 1 Timothy 1:9-11: Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which is committed to my trust.

So the Bible begins in Genesis 1 and 2 with a foundational passage on human sexuality in which a model is given involving one man and one woman in a monogamous relationship. Throughout its pages the Scripture condemns all other sexual activity between

human beings. And scattered through both Old and New Testaments are seven passages about homosexuality activity, all of them painting it as an immoral activity. Based on all that, I'd like to end today by drawing several conclusions.

First, it seems to me that the Bible is pretty clear in painting homosexual activity as being morally wrong.

Second, in every passage, the emphasis is on homosexual activities. From my reading and study, it seems that most homosexual activity is produced by environmental conditions. But I do think that in today's twisted world and with our faulty, fallen human genetics, people have proclivities towards all kinds of things. I think that I myself may have some predisposition toward depression, and I have to fight it all the time. Some people have a predisposition toward alcoholism or drug addiction. Some of these things may be passed on through our human, fallen, faulty genes. All of us have some besetting sin, some temptation to which we are drawn with unusual strength. I think it might be possible that some people have a genetic predisposition toward homosexuality just like some have a predisposition toward alcoholism. But temptation itself is not sin. It is only sin when we give into it.

Third, God can give freedom. Paul indicated in the passage in 1 Corinthians 6 that a number of people in the Corinthian Church had been involved in homosexuality. But they had been washed, they had been justified, they had been sanctified. Breaking free from homosexual activity requires the power of the blood of Christ, the power of the Word of God, and the power of the Indwelling Spirit. It often requires counseling with wise Christians who take a biblical approach to psychology. But I believe in the power of God to give forgiveness and freedom from every sin, bar none.

Fourth, as Christians we love people whatever their sexual behavior. Those who would persecute and abuse someone because of their views on this are evil. When I think of what happened to that University of Wyoming gay student who was tied to the fencepost and pistol-whipped in Texas, and who died five days later from his injuries, it makes my blood boil.

We are against hatred. And while we don't make any apology for taking our stand alongside the Bible—being against pre-marital sex and extra-marital sex and post-marital sexual activity and homosexual activity—we are vitally concerned about the well-being of those who engage in these activities. We don't want them to be damaged. In fact, we want to extend to them the love of Jesus Christ and point them to the abundant life that He offers. We can love someone even if we don't agree with their behavior.

Fifth, we must expect persecution because of our convictions on this subject. Tonight I'm going to preach from John 7, and I was struck by something I read in that passage this week. Jesus said, "The world hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil." We can expect Christians to be hated in our society because of our position here, for if they hated Christ they will hate us. In fact, if I were to preach this very sermon in Sweden or Canada, I'd be in danger of being sent to prison. What I have said today would be prosecuted in those countries as a so-called hate crime. Well, I can tell you I don't hate anyone. I don't have hatred in my heart. But the world hates us, and in their hatred they accuse us of hate crimes simply because we hold to a biblical morality. But the authority of Scripture, not political correctness, must determine our morality.

The president of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, Albert Mohler, wrote an article about this recently, and he said it better than I can. I'd like to quote from his article:

Christians may soon be prevented from participation in many dimensions of our cultural life. Christianity is the great resistance movement against the moral collapse of the age. Holding to the sexual morality revealed in the Bible, Christians are now a cognitive minority, for the church cannot accept the inverted morality of the postmodern age.

We are now living in a world in which the cultural elite, the courts, and the entertainment industry, are convinced that homophobia is a sin and homosexuality is fully legitimate. Those who hold to the biblical model of marriage and sex are considered to be threats to the regime of moral relativism and sexual libertinism.

Christians in this generation had better wake up fast to the realization that we must construct an alternative culture where biblical morality is prized and God's truth is obeyed. Unless the tide is turned, the likelihood is that we will lose most if not all of the critical fronts in the culture war over time. This will effectively determine the shape of the culture in which we live. But the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is called to be a culture unto itself, even as it addresses the world with the gospel.

The church may be the last refuge of moral sanity and we may be the last people on earth who understand why a homosexual man should not be allowed to mentor boys and why foster parents should not be required to have their children indoctrinated in the homosexual agenda.

This leaves the church with the inescapable responsibility of teaching the comprehensive revelation of God found in Holy Scripture and applying God's Word to every dimension of life. At the same time, love and concern for those who are threatened by these new policies require that we do everything within our power to call the culture back to its moral senses.

What the church needs at this hour is not a retreat into paranoia, but an eyes-open boldness of confrontation. That's not to suggest that they're not out to get us.

The final conclusion I'd like to draw today is this one: We are all sinners. Every one of us is a sinner by nature and a sinner by choice. Every one of us is capable of any and every sin in existence, given the right circumstances. The Bible says that the human heart—my heart and your heart—is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? We have fallen short of the glory—the perfection and the demands—of God—every one of us.

But Jesus loves us, whatever our sins, whatever our lifestyle, whatever we've done. He died on the cross to forgive our sins and He rose again to give us eternal life. We are reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, lest any one should boast.

Perhaps someone today needs to find Jesus as your Savior. Today it's my privilege to invite you to come to Him. Out of your darkness, out of your night, out of your guilt, out of your sadness, come to Him. Into His light, into His love, into His promises, into His abundant life. Will you come today?

He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will sup with him and he with Me."

GOD IN THREE PERSONS, BLESSED TRINITY – PART 2

Genesis 1:26-27

Robert Morgan

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

How many times have we gone into a hotel room, opened a drawer on the bedside table, and found a Gideon Bible there? There are millions of these Bibles in hotels, hospitals, prisons, schools, and other places around the world, and no one knows all the good they do.

There's a story in the most recent issue of the Gideon Magazine that carries the testimony of a Gideon worker in Stephenville, Texas, who visited a local motel to check on the condition of the Bibles. As he thumbed through the Bible, he saw someone had written in the back of one of them. This is what someone had written: Lord, I surrender unto Thee. I want Christ in my life. I accept Christ as my Savior and Redeemer. Lord, please take the misery out of my life and allow me to return to my family. I turn it all over to you, Lord. Please rid my body and mind of my addictions, and cast out the demons of despair. Please, Lord, save me. In Christ's name I pray, Amen. ("Testimony Written in Hotel Bible," by Charlie Finnegan of Stephenville, Texas, in "The Gideon," July, 2008, p. 4.)

That reminded me of a letter I received a couple of years ago. It was from an anonymous person who lived, I think, in Africa and it came via e-mail. It said: Many times I ask myself, is there a God who cares about human race and have answers to all the problems? I lost hope in his life and tried to kill myself three times but I failed. Can you do me a favor and help in this? Is there any hope after losing my family? Please help me.

You can't miss the pounding note of loneliness in these two messages. Loneliness is a powerful force in our world today, and it's ironic that while there are more people on earth today than ever before, there has never been so much loneliness. It's a well-known fact that loneliness is a greater problem for people who live in the city than for those who live in the country. While there are certainly more people in cities, there's a greater sense of disconnectedness among them. There are fewer people in the country, but there tends to be deeper relationships among them. But our world is increasingly becoming a vast urban planet. Perhaps that way a popular set of travel books is called "The Lonely Planet."

Where does loneliness come from? Why is loneliness such a profound threat to our well-being? Why is it so hard for us to spend extended time alone or be content without family or friends?

The answer is bound up in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The truth about the Trinity is the core reality at the center of the universe. God is not solitary. He is Trinity. He is community. He is plurality. He is not Unitarian; He is Trinitarian, or Triune, or Tri-personal. The doctrine of the Trinity says that there is one God who eternally exists in Three Persons.

There has always been, is, and always will be communion and communication within the Godhead. Our God is a God who is eternal plurality, eternal community. In Genesis 1, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were talking to one another before the world was ever made, and the reality of communion and community and communication is bound up in the very intrinsic and eternal nature of God, and therefore it is reflected in the universe that He made.

God did not say, "Let Me make human beings in My own image." He said, "Let Us make humans in our image." Who was He talking to? This was the Father talking to the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God was not talking to Himself the way we talk to ourselves, because we are not Trinity. I am one person. I have one center of consciousness. So when I talk to myself, it's just my mouth talking to my ears. I'm just thinking out loud and talking out loud. When actor Alan Alda wanted to publish a book of his opinions and experiences, he titled it *Things I Overheard While Talking to Myself*. But that is not what is happening in Genesis 1. When God said, "Let Us make the human race in our image," it was a sacred conversation at the beginning of time between the Three Members of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—where there is community.

Since God is not solitary, we are not solitary. The whole universe is created in His image with the potential of communication and communion. This even accounts for our interest in life on other planets and our fascination with UFOs. People are asking, "Are we alone in the universe or are there other life forms out there somewhere?" We crave communion and communication and community because God is a Triune God, and His very essence or nature is reflected in the universe He has made.

There is eternal communion, community, and communication among the members of the Trinity, and that is an immutable attribute of the Almighty. So when God the Father said to God the Son and God the Spirit, "Let Us make human beings in our image," we were created with a need for communion, communication, and community. We have an inborn need for friends and for love and for one another.

We are the way we are made because God is the way He is, and the stamp of His Triune nature is imprinted on all the creation. So if we want to have happiness and harmony in our relationships, it's incredibly helpful to know something about the doctrine of the Trinity.

Last week, I began this series with three principles about the Trinity.

1. The Trinity is the most unique aspect of Christian truth

Dr. Henry Morris wrote that the teaching of the Trinity is "undoubtedly the most distinctive doctrine of the Christian faith." ("The Wonderful Truth of the Trinity," by Henry Morris at <http://www.irc.org/article/2494>.)

In his lectures on the Trinity, William Lane Craig said, "The doctrine of the Trinity stands at the very heart of the Christian faith. If I were to ask the class, how many people would say that God is a person, would you raise your hand? Well, technically it is incorrect to say that God is a person. According to Christian belief, God is personal, but not a person. He is tri-personal. This distinguishes Christianity from Judaism and Islam, which are Unitarian; they believe God is one person. The Christian faith is Trinitarian—we believe God is three." (Transcribed from William Lane Craig's podcasts on the Trinity.)

2. The Trinity is easy to state

Second, the truth about the trinity is easy to state. With theological and biblical accuracy, we can state this doctrine like this: We believe that there is one God who eternally exists in Three Persons. We don't believe that we have one God who merely reveals or manifests Himself in three different forms or modes. We have one God who eternally exists in Three persons. The theologian Wayne Grudem states it this way: "God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God." (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 226.)

3. The Trinity is Impossible to Understand

It transcends the limitations of our human intellect, which is as it should be if God is God.

4. The Trinity Is Revealed Progressively in Scripture

Now, let's go on to the fourth aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is a truth that is progressively revealed in the Scriptures; it unfolds gradually. As you read through the Bible, it becomes slowly but increasingly clear.

Now, in one sense, of course, that's true for all doctrine. If all we had was the first chapter of Genesis, we'd understand very little about God and redemption and salvation and angels and demons and eternity. But as book after book was added to the Bible under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we were given more and more information. And this information builds on itself. It isn't contradictory but complimentary, and as we read through the Bible, Genesis to Revelation, we have a progressive unfolding of truth. This is especially true for the doctrine of the Trinity. Let me give you a point "A" and a point "B" about this.

A. The doctrine of the Trinity is implicit—that is, it is implied—in the Old Testament, but it is not stated explicitly or plainly. We have glimmers of it even in the very first verse of the Bible.

(1) Look at Genesis 1:1: In the Beginning God created the heavens and the earth. There is something fascinating about this verse in the original Hebrew. The word used here is the Hebrew word Elohim. "In the beginning, Elohim created the heavens and the earth." In the Hebrew, the word "Elohim" is a masculine plural noun. The verb "created" is a singular verb. We have a plural noun attached to a singular verb. When I was a student at Columbia Bible College, I remember my professor saying that you could actually translate Genesis 1:1 kind of like this: "The Gods, He created." Now, the plural form of Elohim was the way the Hebrew writers described the multifaceted grandeur and majesty of God, but it seems to me there's also a hint of the plurality of God.

(2) We can also notice the "Us" passages. Genesis 1:26 says: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. After Adam and Even sinned in chapter 3, the Lord said, The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:22). Look at chapter 11, the story of the Tower of Babel. The Lord said, If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language, so they will not understand each other. I can even show you an example from the prophet Isaiah: Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

(3) We also have interesting triads in the Old Testament—three-fold formulas that seem to hint at the Trinitarian nature of God. I'll give you two examples. The first is in the passage I just quoted, from Isaiah 6: In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory."

Notice the three-fold cry of worship—Holy, Holy, Holy. That's a Trinitarian cry. In fact, our famous hymn by that name—Holy, Holy, Holy—was written by an Anglican vicar named Reginald Heber in 1826 for his church to sing on Trinity Sunday.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Another great example is the Aaronic Benediction of Numbers 6: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.

The Lord, the Lord, the Lord... Holy, Holy, Holy...

(4) And then there's a fourth and more obvious way in which indications and implications of the Trinity are seen in the Old Testament. We have Old Testament passages about the Almighty God, and we have Old Testament passages about the Messiah who is the Lord, and then we have Old Testament passages about the Holy Spirit—and these three persons all seem to be God, yet they are distinct from one another.

We have God the Father who is a very present Personality throughout the Old Testament. He is Jehovah, Yahweh, the God of the Covenant, the Lord God Almighty. We see God the Son in several ways. There are hundreds of prophetic descriptions of Him, but there are also special appearances of Him in the Old Testament which we call Christophanies. Sometimes in these passages He is called the Angel of the Lord, which means, literally, the Messenger of Yahweh.

And then we have God the Holy Spirit, who is referred to constantly in the Old Testament, even as early as Genesis 1, when the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.

Let me give you one place in the Old Testament where I believe we can see all three members of the Trinity in one passage. In Isaiah 61, we have a great Messianic passage—a prophecy and prediction about the coming Savior. It is a passage that Jesus Himself quoted in the synagogue of Nazareth as applying to Himself. It says: The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

You see there in verse 1, there are clear references to the Three Distinct Persons of the Trinity. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me.

- The Spirit is the Holy Spirit
- The Sovereign Lord is God the Father
- The word "Me" is referring to the Messiah, God the Son

Now, again, this is implicit. We're looking backward at this through the fuller teachings of the New Testament; but when we look at these Old Testament references through the eyes of the New Testament, we're able to detect a progressive, consistent, unfolding reality regarding the nature of the Triune God.

B. In the New Testament, this doctrine is more fully revealed and becomes much more explicit. There are very many passages in which we see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit side-by-side. And these three persons are distinguished from one another. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and Spirit is not the Father; and yet all three are recognized as God, but there is only one God.

Last week, I mentioned the baptism of Christ in Matthew 3. God the Son was baptized. God the Spirit descended on Him like a dove. God the Father spoke from heaven and said, "This is My beloved Son." And as we also said last week, we have the Trinity mentioned together in a formulaic way in the Great Commission, where Jesus told us to baptize in the name (singular) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In my regular devotional Bible reading this week, I've been in the Upper Room passages of John 13-17. Look at what Jesus said in John 14:15: And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.

You see, when you read a passage like that it shows just how foolish modalism is. Modalism, if you remember from last week, is the view that God does not really exist in Three Persons but just takes on three different roles—just like I am a husband, a father, and a pastor. But what if I came home one day and said to my wife, Katrina: "I think that Robert the husband is going to ask Robert the pastor to send Robert the father to buy Christmas gifts for our daughters."

This was not just Jesus speaking nonsense—talking to Himself about Himself as though He were playing different roles in some sort of schizophrenic stage play. He was God the Son about to finish His work on earth, and so He prayed to God the Father, and asked that God the Spirit be sent to empower the church on the day of Pentecost.

One of my favorite Trinitarian verses in the entire Bible is 1 Peter 1:1-2. Now, if you have turned to 1 Peter, notice how close it is to the end of the Bible. We're coming to the final books and chapters of the Bible; and by now the truths and doctrines and theologies that were planted in seed form in the early parts of the Bible have become fully developed. They have unfolded nicely and consistently. So notice here at the beginning of 1 Peter how all three Members of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are described as working together and being involved in our Christian experience. This is the way Peter opens his first letter: Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling of His blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

We have a Trinitarian salvation. We have a Trinitarian Christian experience. You and I cannot live the Christian life apart from the involvement of every member of the Trinity in our hearts and experiences. It's not just that we believe in the Trinity; our very lives would be impossible without the constant involvement of the Trinity. We have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, set aside and born again by the Spirit, and sprinkled by the blood of God the Son whom we are to obey as Lord and Savior in all things.

There are many other passages in the Bible. In fact, you run into Trinitarian passages and Trinitarian verses everywhere you turn in Scripture. But my point is that this is a truth and a doctrine that unfolds progressively in the Bible. We see glimmerings of it in the book of Genesis, but by the time we get to the Gospels we see it more clearly, and by the time we get to the latter books of the Bible, it is explained more thoroughly.

And it is absolutely essential for our well-being, which brings me back to the whole idea of loneliness. If you have every felt lonely in your life or if you are struggling with loneliness right now, it is because you are made in the image of God—and God is community, God is plurality. God is not solitary. He is a God who, within His very essence as Trinity, is a God of community, communion, and communication. There was only one moment in the entire history of the universe—only one moment in the entire sweep of eternity—when the communication lines within the Trinity were shut down. Only one time when the communion was broken within the Godhead—and that was on the cross when Jesus took upon Himself the sins that had separated us from God, and as a result He was separated from God Himself and He cried in a scream of anguish that has reverberated through history: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” But that moment is the exception that proves the rule. We are made to have meaningful fellowship with other people and we are made to have meaning fellowship with God.

I'd like to end by showing you two very profound Bible verses that I think will help anyone here who is battling loneliness.

- In John 16:32, just an hour or two before His disciples fled from Him and He was arrested by the Romans, He said this in the Upper Room address: A time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to His own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for My Father is with Me. This is a remarkable example of the community that exists within the Trinity. Jesus said, “My friends will fail Me, but the eternal communion I have with the Father will be enough for Me.”
- Now, compare that with what the Apostle Paul said about 30 years later when he was arrested, imprisoned in Rome, and when all his friends deserted him. In 2 Timothy 4:16-17, he wrote: At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength.

Because God is a God of fellowship, we are created with a need for the same. And we need fellowship with one another, but when foes assail us and friends forsake us, we have a Triune God who comes and stands at our side and gives us strength.

The simplest explanation that I've ever heard for the Trinity comes from Charles Colson in his book (co-authored with Harold Fickett), entitled *The Faith: Given Once for All*. Chapter 7 of his book is about the doctrine of the Trinity, and the title of that chapter is—God Above, God Beside, God Within.

We have a Father who is God above us. We have a Savior who is God beside us. We have a Spirit who is God within us. And, as Colson points out, “The Trinity...answers the deepest needs of the human heart, offering a depth of spirituality unknown in any other religion.” (Charles Colson and Harold Fickett, *The Faith: Given Once, For All* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 104.)

From the depths of the eternal Trinity we can say: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.

What's Wrong With Living Together?

Genesis 2

Robert Morgan

When I was a boy we would often vacation at Myrtle Beach in South Carolina, and some of my happiest childhood memories are of those vacations. But I remember on one occasion my father being very upset. I'd been playing in the ocean for an hour or so, and suddenly I saw him running through the waves with an expression of both concern and relief. He pointed to the shoreline and told me to look how far down the beach I was--about a quarter of a mile from our umbrella. While I'd been body surfing and splashing around, the tide and undertow had carried me down the coastline and I hadn't even realized it.

The tide and undertow of our popular culture is carrying many of us far from our moorings, and it's so subtle that we don't even realize it. We are a nation that is spiritually and morally adrift, and every day we're drifting further and further from God. And the tide is so powerful that even many Christians are being carried out to sea.

That's why we're in a brief series of messages entitled "What's Wrong?" So far, we've look at:

- What's Wrong with Religion?
- What's Wrong with Worshipping at the Lake?
- What's Wrong with Entertainment?
- What's Wrong with Gambling?

Today I'd like to speak on the subject "What's Wrong with Living Together?" There is a study that has just been released in Great Britain, based on official statistics, that showed that in 1998 267,303 couples were married in England in 1998. More than two-thirds of them lived together prior to marriage.

Here in America, the figure is closer to fifty percent. Those who live together tend to have the attitude that says, "We don't need a piece of paper to prove that we love each other." And so they just move in together. What's wrong with that? I'd like to give you four reasons today, and I can give you the first one without even opening the Bible: It doesn't work.

It Doesn't Work

There's a new book out entitled *The Case for Marriage* by a University of Chicago sociologist named Linda Waite, which compiles research demonstrating the inadvisability of cohabiting before marriage. She wrote her book because she suggests that the general public and even some experts do not realize the profound impact that the growing numbers of live-ins will have on the American family. But she says that living together typically undermines marriage. "Cohabiting changes attitudes to a more individualistic, less relationship-oriented viewpoint," she says. "Live-ins become less committed to marriage and that affects the quality of their married life later." She finds that live-ins are less happy than marrieds, less sexually faithful, and less financially well-off. Cohabiting and being married are not the same, she says.

"Marriage forms a new unit," says Dr. Waite. "Cohabiting is more like roommates with sex."

Psychology Today reported the findings of Yale University sociologist Neil Bennett that cohabiting women were 80% more likely to separate or divorce than women who had not lived with their spouses before marriage. The National Survey of Families and Households indicates that "unions begun by cohabitation are almost twice as likely to dissolve within ten years compared to all first marriages." In a Canadian study at the University of Western Ontario, sociologists found a direct relationship between cohabitation and divorce when investigating over 8,000 men and women. It was determined that living in a non-marital union "has a direct negative impact on subsequent marital stability," perhaps because living in such a union "undermines the legitimacy of formal marriage" and so "reduces commitment of marriage."

Another study by researchers Alfred DeMars and Gerald Leslie found that those who live together prior to marriage scored lower on tests rating satisfaction with their marriages than couples who did not cohabit.

Another study of 2,746 women in the National Survey of Family Growth conducted jointly by the University of Maryland and the Nation Center for Health Statistics found that premarital sex is not healthy for subsequent marriages. The study found that non-virgin brides increase their odds of divorce by 60 percent.

This is one of the reasons controversial talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger speaks up so adamantly against "shacking up," as she puts it. She lists cohabiting as one of the "Ten Stupid Things Women Do To Mess Up Their Lives," in her book of the same name.

The U.S. Justice Department found that women are 62 times more likely to be assaulted by a live-in boyfriend than by a husband. I found that statistic a little hard to believe, but a study by Washington State University found that aggression is at least twice as common among coinhabitants than it is among married partners.

And yet another study, this one by the University of New Hampshire, found that overall rates for severe violence was nearly five times as high for coinhabitants when compared with marrieds.

A British study found that child abuse was 20 times more common in cases where the mother was cohabiting with a man other than her husband.

That's why there is a new movement in the United States called the "Marriage Movement" that is trying to reverse what it calls the "culture of divorce." More than 100 top researchers and organizations are working together to try to revitalize the image of marriage in America, and some of America's best social scientists are warning that if marriage is not once again viewed with honor and reverence, our society will rapidly deteriorate. They're having some success with state legislatures.

Florida has become the first state to mandate the teaching of marriage skills in high school. Louisiana and Arizona have revised their covenant marriage laws, and Oklahoma now uses leftover welfare funds to support marriage initiatives.

Now, all of that I can tell you without even opening my Bible. But when I do open my Bible, do you know what I find? That the God of Scripture has been right all along, His counsel has been wise and timeless, and His instructions can never be improved upon. For example, today I'd just like for us to analyze one verse of Scripture on this subject--Hebrews 13:4

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

"Marriage"

Let's take a moment and just study through this verse word-for-word. The first word is "marriage." The dictionary defines marriage as "an institution whereby men and women are joined in a special kind of social and legal dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a home."

I prefer just saying that marriage is a special relationship between a man and women in which they are recognized as being husband and wife by both God and their fellow citizens. Different cultures have different types of ceremonies to establish marriages.

Our modern wedding ceremony is a good deal different than the way it was done in Bible times. You may remember from the Christmas story that in Bible times that had a period of betrothal that was much more binding than our modern engagement, and the procedures were different. But virtually every culture has a way of taking a man and a woman and setting them aside as husband and wife for the establishing of a home.

It is a Biblical concept, and it has its beginnings in the Garden of Eden in this passage in Genesis 2.

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man."

So at the dawn of human history, at the creation, God made a man and allowed him to experience loneliness, allowed him to feel incomplete and unfulfilled. He brought him all the animals of the field and all the birds of the air, but none of them could satisfy the physical and emotional needs programmed into Adam by the Divine wisdom. So the Lord created--not an animal, not a child, not a son or a daughter or another man--but a woman--someone like Adam, yet different. Someone like Adam, but opposite. And God brought the man and the woman together and performed the first wedding ceremony with these words in verse 24:

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

With these words, God performed the first wedding in human history. Why do I think Adam and Eve were actually married? They had no rings to exchange. They had no candles to light. We don't even read of their exchanging vows. But with those words in verse 24, God instituted a ceremony that left them in a state of matrimony. How do I know that?

By a careful reading of the passage. Before the wedding ceremony of verse 24, what was Eve called? She was called a "woman." Verse 22 says: "Then the Lord God made a woman..." Verse 23 says, "She shall be called woman."

But in verse 25, what is Eve called? It says, "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."

So something happened between verse 23 and verse 25 that changed Eve into a wife and Adam into a husband. What was it? There was a marriage that took place. And we have a one-verse description of that marriage which provides the Scriptural undergirding for every wedding and every marriage since then: For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

This verse is quoted repeatedly in the Bible as being the core Scriptural definition of marriage. And the writer to the Hebrews said: "Marriage should be honored."

Honored

Let's look at that word "honored." It is the Greek word *Ti'mos*, and it literally means, "considered valuable, priceless, of great worth." It is used very seldom in the Bible, but I can show you a handful of references in which we see this word occurring.

In 1 Peter 1:7 we read, "These (trials) have come so that your faith--more precious than gold...." The word "precious" used here to describe our faith is a translation of this Greek word *Ti'mos*.

In the same chapter we come to verses 18-19 which say: "It is not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ..." The word "precious" here, used to describe the infinite value and worth of the blood of Christ, is the same word used in Hebrews to describe marriage: "*Ti'mos*."

In 2 Peter 1:4 we're told that God's promises to us are exceedingly great and precious.

In the book of Revelation, we're told that the Holy City of New Jerusalem is bedecked by an infinite number of jewels and precious stones.

What things are precious in God's sight? The blood of Christ is precious. The faith of His children is precious. The promises that He gives to us is precious. The great and glorious heavenly home of His children is precious. And marriage--the institute He designed and created at the beginning of human history--is precious. God desires it to be honored by all.

This tells us who are already married that we must never take our marriages for granted. I read an article recently in USA today that claimed that researchers can now predict with 87% accuracy which newly-weds will divorce and which will stay together for a lifetime. This is based on research coming out of the University of Washington in Seattle. And they based their predictions on observing how the couple talks to each other. Those couples who spoke sweet nothings to each other, who expressed fondness and love to one another, who took time to listen to each other--those marriages lasted. The couple who were always snapping at each other and seemed cynical and unable to say good things about each other--those couples were the ones that often didn't last.

The Bible says that marriage is precious in God's eyes, and that means the husband is precious and the wife is precious, and we've got to work on preserving and developing and deepening it.

Kept Pure

Hebrews 13:4 goes on to say: Marriage should be honored (considered precious) by all, and the marriage bed kept pure...

The phrase "marriage bed" is based on a Greek word that sometimes means a literal bed, but often is a synonym for sexual life. This tells us that within marriage, sex is pure and holy and good. Outside of marriage, it isn't. And there's a warning given: Marriage

should be honored (considered precious) by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Reasons 2-4

Now, based on all this, let me give you three more reasons why living together is wrong. We've already said: It doesn't work.

Reason number two is that living together discounts the commands and decrees of God. Suppose that I went down into my basement to plunder around for something, and discovered that someone had planted a time bomb padlocked to my water pipes, and that it was set to go off in one minute. I didn't have time to evacuate the house. But I could whip out my cell phone and call 911. In an instant an expert from the bomb squad would be on the phone, and I'd say, "Do I clip the red wire or the black wire?" He would say, "Whatever you do, don't touch the black wire. Clip the red one."

What do you think I would do? I would be a fool to do anything other than what he told me because He is the expert. I may not always understand everything about God's laws and principles and divine commands. But He's the expert. He designed marriage, and no one will ever be able to improve on the original concept.

Third, living together disregards the vows and covenants that solidify home life. Here's the way one person put it: Cohabitation involves "no public commitment, no pledge for the future, no official pronouncement of love and responsibility. Theirs is essentially a private arrangement based on an emotional bond. The commitment of living together is simply a month-to-month rental agreement. Marriage, on the other hand, is much more than a love partnership. It is a public event that involves legal and societal responsibilities. It brings together not just two people but also two families and two communities. It is not just for the here and now; it is, most newlyweds hope, 'till death do us part.'"

Jessie Bernard in his book "The Future of Marriage" states: "One fundamental fact underlies the conception of marriage itself. Some kind of commitment must be involved.... Merely fly-by-night, touch-and-go relationships do not qualify. People who marry 'till death do us part' have a quite different level of commitment, therefore a quite different level of security, thus a quite different level of freedom..." than those whose relationship is just "so long as love doth last."

People who live together base their relationship on convenience or on compatibility, rather than on commitment. And trying to have a marriage without commitment is like building a house without nails. It tends to collapse in storms.

Finally, reason number four: Living together discards the greatest lesson God wants us to learn from marriage--how He loves His church. The older I get, the more I appreciate the traditional marriage ceremony from the Book of Common Prayer:

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church: which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined.

God intends marriage to signify that mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His church. And the Bible says that husbands should therefore love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Whenever the world looks at our marriages, they should see a little, private, precious example of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His holy people.

Now, what does all this mean to us?

If you're sexually active outside of marriage, I urge you in Christ's stead to make a decision to change your behavior. Maybe you can't stay pure on your own, but Christ can give you victory in this area. Ephesians 5:5 says, "But among you there must not be even a hit of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity."

Second, if you're living together outside of marriage with a member of the opposite sex, make up your minds to separate and to seek God's will about marriage.

Third, if you're feeling guilty about indiscretions and sins and situations of the past, remember 1 John 1:7: The blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. And 1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, His is faithful and just to forgive us of all sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We can't go back and change the past, but God washes away the guilt of our past and helps us to start right where we are, living for Him in peace and victory.

Romans 12:2 says, in the Phillips translation: Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands, and moves toward the goal of true maturity.

Whatever your state or status in life, let Christ be your Lord. The riptides of this world are pulling at us. The currents of the popular culture are powerful, and the undertow is dangerous. But resist them, standing steadfast in the faith, and let Christ be your Lord. And you can say...

His oath, His covenant, His blood

Support me in the whelming flood;

When all around my soul gives way,

He then is all my hope and stay.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand:

All other ground is sinking sand.

First Adam, Second Adam

Genesis 2, 1 Corinthians 15

Robert Morgan

"The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being " Genesis 2:7

The other week, when the Vanderbilt's mens' basketball team was playing at South Carolina, the game came down to the last 4.3 seconds. South Carolina shot and missed, and Vandy got the rebound. Down court, Drew Maddux was wide open, and he called for the basketball. His teammate threw it to him, right on target, but somehow the ball went right through Maddux's hands, out of bounds. And Vanderbilt's upset of South Carolina went out the window.

Afterwards Drew Maddux sat along in the corner of the dressing room, disconsolate. A friend drew along side of him and suggested it wasn't the end of the world.

Maddux replied, "It almost is."

I think all of us know how he felt, for we have all had hurts and disappointments that made it feel almost like the end of the world. Why is there so much pain, so many problems, in life? We can trace it all back to Adam and Eve, back to the Garden of Eden, back to the original rebellion against God that occurred there. When Adam sinned against God, in a very real sense it was the end of the world.

But not quite. The Lord had an alternate plan, a scheme of redemption. He had a second Adam. And that is what I would like to talk about today. We are in a series of messages entitled First Impressions--Glimpses of Jesus in Genesis. In the first part of this series, we discussed the three major prophecies about the coming Messiah found in the first book of the Bible. These are not full-blown, well-developed prophetic passages. Those will come later in the Old Testament. But the three passages in Genesis are seed-like predictions, small, compact, but containing all the elements that will later bear fruit. In Genesis 3:15, the Lord said to Satan: I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will bruise his heel. In Genesis 12:3, God gives Abraham 7 promises and the seventh promise is repeated seven times in the Bible as referring to Christ: In you and in your seed will all the nations of the world be blessed. And in Genesis 49:10, the dying patriarch Jacob tells Judah, The scepter will not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until Shiloh, the Man of Peace, comes. And the obedience of the nations is his.

But now today I would like to begin on a second theme, for the book of Genesis not only gives us predictions of the coming Christ in verbal, prophetic form. It also gives us what are sometimes called types. We have a word in English that explains it very well, the word prototype. A prototype is a model of something which is coming. God placed in the Old Testament many, many types of Jesus Christ, and a number of them appear in Genesis.

The first is Adam himself. I would like to show you a New Testament verse that confirms this for us, Romans 5:14: Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam who was a pattern of the one to come.

The word pattern is the Greek word tupos--type. Adam was a type of the one who was to come, namely Jesus Christ. Adam was a type of Christ. And in 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus is called the last Adam. So that brings up a good question. How is Adam a type of Christ? How does he serve as a prototype for the Redeemer? Or, to put it differently, what can we learn about Jesus Christ by studying Adam? Well, there are two areas for us to consider.

Comparisons

First, there are some fascinating comparisons. I'll mention four of them.

One: Both men entered the world differently than other mortals. Adam was personally designed and created by the hand of God, who formed him of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living soul. After 100 years of trying, the evolutionists still have not developed a hypothesis that makes more sense than that one. I read a review the other day in the Wall Street Journal of a new book entitled, God: The Evidence by Patrick Glynn. Mr. Glynn graduated from Harvard and now teaches at George Washington University. He was a philosophical atheist, but now he says that the scientific discoveries of the last 25 years, especially in the physical sciences, have refuted the idea of a "random universe" in favor of the view that there was an intelligent, guiding hand at work in bringing human life onto a prepared earth. Almost unnoticed by the media, there is a powerful movement within the scientific community that is pointing many scientists back toward God as the Creator. Adam entered the world as a fully-grown, personally-made, perfect human being. And Jesus Christ, too, entered the world in a way different from all other mortals. He was born of a virgin. God prepared a body of Adam, and Jesus Christ likewise said, "A body thou hast prepared for me."

Two: Both men were sinless. Have you ever gone for a walk on a snowy day, the world covered with a fresh blanket of blinding

white snow, the sun bouncing against it with powerful force. It can almost put your eyes out. That's why many people wear sunglasses when they go skiing. Jesus and Adam were both utterly, blindingly pure--no blemish, no shadow, no guilt of any kind.

Three: Both men were tempted by the devil. Satan came to Adam and Eve, tempting them to disobey the one command God had given them. And in the Gospels, Satan came to Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, tempting him on the mountain.

Four: Both men became the head of a race. Adam became the head of the human race, and Jesus Christ became the head of the race of the redeemed, his children, his church.

Contrasts

Those are the comparisons between the two men, but even more striking are the contrasts. There are four of them, and they are given to us in two chapters of the New Testament: Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. Look, for example, at the Romans 5 passage:

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man--Adam--and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned--for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam...

What is Paul trying to say? Sin is, in its essence, the breaking of God's commands. God gave Adam a command, Thou shalt not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam broke that command, and in so doing he became a sinner. Many years passed and later, during the time of Moses, God gave the human race Ten Commands, the Ten Commandments, and when we break them, that is sin. But between Adam and Moses, even though the command to Adam was no longer in effect and even though the Ten Commandments had not yet appeared, people continued to sin. Their hearts turned away from God, and therefore, Paul says, continuing in verse 14...

/...death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as did Adam, who was a pattern (typus) of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

This passage is giving us four dramatic contrasts between the first Adam and the last Adam.

One: Adam committed an act of disobedience, but Christ committed an act of supreme obedience. Look at the phrases in verse 19: the disobedience of the one man... the obedience of the one man.

Two: Adam's act of disobedience brought condemnation to many, but Christ's act of obedience brought justification to many. For just as through the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man many will be made righteous.

We were all in the loins of Adam when he sinned, and therefore when he sinned, we all sinned in him. Verse 12 puts it this way: Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. When did we all sin? We all sinned when Adam sinned. The entire human race fell into sin, and we are all sinners because by the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners. But likewise, we are all justified in Jesus Christ. When he died on the cross for us, his blood covers all who believe in him, and we are made righteous in him.

To put it simply: In the first Adam, many were made sinners. In the second Adam, many were made righteous.

Three: In Adam we inherit a sinful nature, but in Christ we inherit a new nature. There is an interesting story in the autobiography of St. Augustine. As a young man Augustine was degenerate. He had no faith in God. He spurned his mother's counsel. He committed immorality freely. He fathered a child out of wedlock. He became a teacher of paganism. But later, as a Christian, he said that there was one thing in his youth that proved his sinfulness to him more than anything else. He and some buddies had robbed an old man of his pears. They had crept into his orchard and stripped his tree. Not because we were hungry, Augustine said. Not because we needed them. Just for the sheer joy of stealing.

Augustine's story reminds me of something that Charles Colson wrote. Colson was known as President Nixon's hatchet man. He found himself in the very center of the biggest political upheaval of this century. He broke many laws and went to prison for several years. But now, if you ask Charles Colson which of his Watergate deeds causes him the greatest remorse, he would answer, "None." His greatest regret comes from something that happened many years before, when Colson was serving in the Marines.

He said, "I was a new Marine lieutenant, proud and tough. My spit-shined shoes reflected the sun like two mirrors... My battalion landed on Vieques Island, a tiny satellite of Puerto Rico. Most of the mountainous land was a Navy protectorate used for landing and target practice, but on one end a clan of poverty-stricken souls endured an earsplitting shelling to eke out a living selling cold drinks to invading Marines."

Colson and his Marines had been instructed to buy nothing from the peddlers, but no one obeyed it. In his second day in the field, he was leading his platoon of 40 grimy, sweating riflemen up and over a craggy ridge when he spotted an old man leading a scrawny

donkey that nearly collapsed under the load of two huge, ice-filled canvas sacks full of juice and soft drinks. The old man had wandered onto government land, as the peddlers often did, looking for customers.

The Marines were terribly hot and thirsty, and the old man's donkey was packed with ice-cold soft drinks. The men picked up their pace, thinking that their lieutenant would allow them to buy something to drink. Colson, however, had a different idea. He ordered his troops to halt. "Sergeant," he said, "take this man prisoner. He is trespassing on government property."

The sergeant hesitated. "Go ahead," Colson barked. The sergeant shook his head, swung about, and pointed his rifle at the old man. Colson then commanded, "Confiscate the contraband." With glee, the Marines tore into the old man's soft drinks, draining every bottle and tossing them all away. Then Colson released his prisoner and watched him, shoulders hunched, as he rode off on his donkey.

"Technically," Colson later said, "I had observed military law. Yet I had not given a fleeting thought to the fact that those satchels of juice might have represented the old man's life savings or that my order could mean an entire family might go hungry for months."

Colson soon forgot about the incident, but years later, as he was sitting in jail reading the Confessions of St. Augustine, it suddenly returned forcibly to his mind. And he suddenly realized what Augustine realized, that in each of us there is a sinful nature. We do not have a sinful nature because we commit sins, we commit sins because we have a sinful nature which we inherited from Adam.

In Adam we inherit a sinful nature, but in Christ we inherit a new nature. The Bible says, "If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away; behold, all things become new." That doesn't mean that we suddenly begin living perfect lives, but it does mean that the Holy Spirit begins helping us to grow more and more like the New Adam and less and less like the old Adam.

That's what sanctification is--the process of becoming saints. The process of becoming more and more Christlike. Paul said, And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

So Adam committed an act of disobedience, but Christ committed an act of supreme obedience. Adam's act of disobedience brought condemnation to many, but Christ's act of obedience brought justification to many. In Adam we inherit a sinful nature, but in Christ we inherit a new nature. And four: In the first Adam we have despair and death; in the new Adam we have hope and eternal life. It is not only in Romans 5, but in 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul contrasts the old Adam and the new one. This is the "Resurrection Chapter" of the Bible. Look at 1 Corinthians 15:45ff:

/So it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being", the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man (Adam), so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven (Christ).

In other words, all of us are in the image and likeness of Adam, human beings with flesh and bones, human beings who grow old and perish and die. But those of us who are in Jesus Christ, the second Adam, will also be transformed into the image of his resurrection body. Just as we have borne the image of the first Adam, so we shall bear the image of the second Adam. Paul goes on to say:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

When Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he still had a three-dimensional, flesh-and-bone body. But it had been transformed and glorified and fitted for eternal life. When the trumpet sounds, we who know him shall also be thus resurrected.

I read the other day of a woman in Russia during the days of the Soviet Union who received back the body of her husband. He had been killed in prison because of his Christianity. She was now a widow with four small children. When she received his corpse, she could see the marks left by the manacles on his hands. His feet had been burned. The lower part of his stomach had knife marks on it. The whole body was full of wounds from a horrible beating. But when the funeral was held, a great crowd of believers staged a public demonstration and on their signs and placards were these words: For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

That's the attitude of the Christian: He shall raise me from the dust: Jesus is my hope and trust.

The question that remains is this one: Are you living in the old Adam, or in the new one? Both entered the world in a unique way; both were sinless; both were tempted by the devil; both became the head of a race of people. But the old Adam committed an act of disobedience that infected the entire human race sin and death. The new Adam committed an act of obedience that provides hope and eternal life in Christ. Have you come to him? Have you found him as your Savior? He gives hope and life to all who place their faith in him.

A BRIDE FOR HER HUSBAND

GENESIS 2; EPHESIANS 5:25-32

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh (Genesis 2:18-24).

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:25-32).

She was very tired, and she had the house to herself, her husband, Colonel Archibald Gracie, being on a trip. But she couldn't sleep. An oppressive fear came over her, for she suddenly felt that her husband was in peril. She began to pray, and with great earnestness she prayed through the night, seeking release from her prayer vigil, seeking assurance. But none came until five o'clock in the morning. At that point, a deep sense of peace and well-being came over her, and she fell asleep.

The date was April 14, 1912. Her husband, Colonel Archibald Gracie, was sailing from Europe to America—aboard the Titanic. The ship on its maiden voyage had struck an iceberg, and Colonel Gracie was among the terrified passengers who had given up all hope of being saved. He did all he could to save the women and children, and then as the ship slipped beneath the waters he cried out to his wife, "Goodbye, my darling." And he was sucked beneath the sea. Instinctive he began to swim upward through the ice-cold water, crying in his heart, "Goodbye, my darling, until we meet again." Suddenly he came to the surface and found himself near an overturned lifeboat. Along with several others, he climbed aboard. He finally found himself cold and terrified, but out of danger, at about five o'clock in the morning, the very time that peace had come to his praying wife.

There is, in good, growing Christian marriages, a bond of friendship and love that transcends physical dimensions. There is, in good, growing Christian marriages, a spiritual dynamic that only Christ can impart, a cord that only Christ can weave. We see it in the very first human marriage, for when God brought together Adam and Eve, he said, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

One of the reasons God wants us to have spiritually dynamic marriages is because they witness to the very special relationship between Jesus Christ and his bride, the church. Nowhere is this better seen than in the relationship between Adam and Eve.

We are in a series of messages entitled First Impressions: Glimpses of Jesus in Genesis. The old Bible teacher M. R. DeHaan once said, "The primary purpose of Genesis is to introduce us to the Lord Jesus." And so, we are taking that approach in this series. Our first three messages dealt with the three fountainheads of Messianic prophecy found in Genesis: Genesis 3:15, Genesis 12:3, and Genesis 49:10. Now we are dealing with Jesus Christ as seen in the types (or the prototypes of him) given in Genesis. Last time, we looked at Adam. Romans 5:14 says that Adam was a type, a tupos, a pattern of him who was to come, meaning Jesus Christ. Both Adam and Jesus came into the world differently than any other man. Both were sinless and pure. Both were tempted by the devil. Both became the heads of races. But the first Adam committed an act of disobedience, resulting in condemnation for the world. The second Adam committed an act of obedience resulting in justification for the world.

But the parallels between the first and second Adam go even deeper, and today I would like share with you six points of amazing comparison by which God was teaching us about Christ and his church. The passage in Ephesians that we read speaks of the church as being a bride to the Lord Jesus Christ, just as a woman might be to a man in human marriage. There is a correspondence or a parallel there. When Jesus spoke about his second coming, he used the figure of speech of a bridegroom coming back for his bride. John the Baptist referred to himself as the best man or the friend of the bridegroom who had come to announce his arrival. And the book of Revelation speaks several times of the church as being the bride of Christ.

So here is our question. Are there any parallels between God's preparing a bride for the first Adam, and God's preparing a bride for the second Adam? Yes. There are five.

A Deep Sleep

First, there was a deep sleep. Genesis 2:21 says, "So the Lord God caused the man (Adam) to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping" God performed this remarkable surgery. Now, this is a very important verse in medical history. If you had grown ill in mid-19th century Scotland, you would have wanted to search out Sir James Young Simpson, the most respected doctor in Edinburgh. He became Senior President of the Royal Medical Society at the astonishing age of 24. As time passed, he racked up one honor after another until he became the most far-famed doctor of his day.

Simpson was a compassionate doctor, and he was deeply troubled at the suffering and pain involved in surgery. At that time, there were no anesthetics. If someone needed a leg amputated, it was only possible by strapping the patient to the table and cutting through bone and tissue with no painkiller. Troubled by this, Simpson periodically gathered together in his home, usually on Monday evenings, a group of doctors. They would take various chemicals, powers, crystals, and so forth, place them over a burner, and inhale the fumes. Nothing seemed to work. And then one night, a guest produced a substance he had purchased in Paris. It was called chloroform. They put it over the flames, and presently one after another, the doctors slipped from their chairs, under the table, unconscious.

Simpson pioneered the use of chloroform in surgery. But he had tremendous opposition, and if you can believe it, much of the opposition was philosophical and theological. People said that pain was a God-given ingredient in life and we should not try to circumvent it.

But Sir James Young Simpson was a dedicated Christian and a great student of the Bible. He was very disturbed that some insisted that pain was ordained by God and that any artificial means to alleviate it was outside his will. So he plunged into this Bible, seeking answers. In his Bible reading, on just the first or second page, he came to this story and to this verse, that God caused a deep sleep to fall over Adam before the flesh was opened. He studied the passage very carefully and wrote a paper for the journal of medicine of Edinburgh. It was titled, "Answer to the Religious Objections Advanced Against the Employment of Anesthetic Agents in Midwifery and Surgery."

And a new age of medicine had begun.

One of the things Sir James discovered is that the Hebrew word used here for sleep is not the normal word that typically occurs in the Old Testament when it refers to someone falling asleep. It is a word that implies a deep state of total insensibility and complete unconsciousness, more like a coma.

Henry Morris says in his commentary on Genesis, "It seems almost as though Adam 'died' when as yet there was no death in the world, in order that he might obtain a bride to share his life." Can you see the symbolic significance of that? But there's more.

A Wounded Side

There is a wounded side. Genesis 2:21 says, "So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was still sleeping he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh."

Here again, let me quote from Henry Morris' commentary on Genesis. He writes, "It is very likely that the word 'rib' is a poor translation. The Hebrew word appears 35 times in the OT and this is the only time it was translated 'rib.' Most of the time it is simply translated 'side.'" In other words, God cut open Adam's side and somehow from the bone and blood and flesh, he created a bride so that Adam could literally say, "This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."

One commentator that I consulted said this: "I believe that in the creation of Eve, Adam gave his literal blood. God opened his side and this implies a wound and blood-shedding."

I hardly need to point out John 19:34: One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save from wrath and make me pure.

Genesis 2:22 says that from Adam's side God made a woman. The Hebrew word is not translated here as well as it should be. It occurs scores of times in the Old Testament, but only twice is it translated "made." In all the other places, it is translated "built." God built a wife. In a literal sense, we can say that Eve was the only really well-built woman in history. And the Bible says that God is building his church from the wounded side of the second Adam.

A Reciprocal Relationship

There is more. In the story of Adam and Eve, you have a deep sleep, a wounded side, and, third, a reciprocal relationship. They were made for each other. In Genesis 2:18, The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." But then, as the passage unfolds, God brought all the animals one by one to Adam. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place of the flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

And God placed them in a relationship called marriage, and in this relationship, we are told in the Bible, that the man and the woman have slightly different needs. While both husband and wife in a marriage need love and respect and affection and a sense of self-worth, there is a special sense in which the man needs his wife's respect and a wife needs her husband's affection. Ephesians 5 has been greatly attacked over the years for say, "Wives, submit to your husbands and husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church." But if you really want to correctly interpret what the Lord is saying about marriage, you have to remember the last verse of the chapter. We read it earlier, but here it is again: Each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

One of the most widely-read books in recent years on the subject of marriage is John Gray's *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. In a nutshell, this book says that there are certain gender differences between men and women. Both men and women are motivated by love. But Martians (men) typically feel loved when they are needed. Venusians feel love when they are cared for. A man needs his wife's respect, and a wife needs her husband's affection—just as Romans 5 says.

And just as we see in the relationship between Christ and his bride. He is the head of his body, the church. He is to be respected and obeyed and revered. But we, his bride, need to feel his love. Many times, I have shared the testimony of Agnes Frazier, her story about her devotions after her husband Emmett died. They had enjoyed their morning devotions together for over 50 years. Now, the morning after his passing, she didn't think she could sit at the breakfast table and read the Bible. But she did, and the text she came to was Isaiah 54:4 and 5—You will...remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer... She smiled and said, "Thank you, Lord." We are the bride of Christ. We give him our respect, or obedience, our adoration; and he gives us his everlasting, free-flowing love.

A Mutual Mission

Fourth, there is a mutual mission. God didn't place Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden just to lay on their backs and gaze into the clouds and eat grapes and pomegranates. Look at Genesis 1:28: God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground..."

Adam was to reign over the earth with Eve as his partner and helpmeet. And on this earth in this dispensation, Jesus Christ is building his kingdom, and we are his partner and his helpmeet. We aren't here just to build fine houses and easy lives for ourselves. We are here to extend and strengthen the Kingdom for Christ and his glory. He said, "All authority has been given to me on earth and in heaven. Therefore, go and make disciples. And remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

I was deeply moved the other day by something that I read in an old, undated book of missionary stories that I found on the back shelf of a dusty, used book shop in London. The author told of a loathsome leper, old and dying, who came to the leprosarium operated by the Methodists in China. Someone had told him that he would find room there, and he had come there to die. He was in the final stages of the disease, clad in nothing more than a bit of burlap tied around him by a string. He had not a relative in the world. But in the leprosarium he settled down in the room given him and began talking with the Chinese chaplain. After hearing the Gospel, he was asked if he wanted to become a Christian. "No," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because," the poor man replied, "you say your Jesus died for me. He gave himself for me. I have nothing to give him in return for a gift like that."

"Oh, he wants no gift except yourself."

"But how could he possibly want an ill-smelling, rotten old leper like me? It can not be!"

But eventually the old leper was convinced, and he humbly asked Jesus Christ to come into his life as Savior and Lord. Then what did he do? He started limping from patient to patient, telling the good news, urging them, too, to become part of the Bride of Christ.

But he had less than two years to live. Soon both of his feet dropped off, both of his eyes decayed from his head, and his life ebbed away. As he was dying, the chaplain came to his bedside for a final conversation. The old man felt badly that he had been converted so late in life. He worried that he had not done more. And when the chaplain leaned over to speak with him, the old fellow said this: "When I reach Father's house, will Jesus blame me for not getting any more, or will he remember that I was just a rotten old leper? I only got fourteen."

What did he mean? He meant that during his two years, he had won only fourteen souls for Christ. Fourteen souls! He only had twenty-four months, but he had been about his mission, side-by-side with the Bridegroom, doing what he could where he was.

Dangerous Enemy

But the devil wants to divert us, and that brings us to the final parallel—a dangerous enemy. Adam's bride faced a dangerous enemy, the very same which is today faced by the bride of the second Adam. You cannot miss the parallel if you read it as stated in 2 Corinthians 11. The apostle Paul is very concerned with problems in the church at Corinth. They have been very careless morally and spiritually, and listen to the words Paul used in warning them:

/I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (Christ wants his bride, his church, you and me to be pure and spotless and faithful to him). But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

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Here, Eve is put side-by-side with the church, the one being the bride of the first Adam and the other being the bride of the second Adam. Eve is a type of the church. And the primary point the Lord here makes has to do with how vulnerable we are. How easily the devil can lead us astray. How cunningly he seeks to draw us away from Jesus Christ.

I wonder if he has been successful with you. Has the devil drawn away your heart from Jesus Christ? Have you been led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ? Or are you about your Master's business? Then it's time to make some decisions. Time to return. Time to repent. Time to rediscover your first love.

And who is our first love?

Well, who is it that entered this world differently than any other man? He was sinless? He was tempted of the devil, and later became the head of a great race of humanity? He fell into a deep sleep? From whose wounded side came a Bride to be a helpmeet?

'Tis the Lord, the King of Glory

The Bible begins by giving us Adam and Eve as a prototype of Christ and his church. It gives us Song of Solomon, telling us how tenderly God loves us even as a husband loves his bride. Jesus told us he will return for us soon, as a bridegroom returning for his bride. Husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loves the church. The book of Revelation describes the return of Christ as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. And the Bible ends with this final invitation:

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

The Serpent And The Savior

Genesis 3

Robert Morgan

When I was a teenager, a friend and I went hiking along the abandoned railroad tracks of Doe River Gorge in Northeast Tennessee. As we walked along a particular stretch, we were distracted by all the beauty of the mountains and cliffs and river. But gradually I became aware of a buzzing sound that grew louder and louder. I thought it was an insect, but it grew so loud that I stopped and held out my hand to signal for my friend to stop. "What is that noise?" I asked him. And then we saw it. A rattlesnake, coiled in the middle of the tracks, ready to strike, and just a few feet in front of us. Two more steps, and his fangs would have been in my leg.

The Bible teaches that the devil is a viper, a deadly snake, coiled, and always just a step or two away from us. I'm quite sure if the cover of life could be lifted so that we could see its inner workings, we would be amazed at the level of Satanic involvement. In one story of in the Bible, for example, there was a man named Job who had many flocks and herds. One day a warring tribe of barbarians swept down from the mountains and killed Job's herdsman and seized all his oxen and donkeys. Almost simultaneously, some sort of natural disaster like a fire from heaven struck his sheep fields, killing his herds and his shepherds. At the same time another tribe formed three raiding parties and swept down on his camels, capturing them and putting the employees to the sword. Suddenly another report came that a powerful whirlwind had blown in from the desert, striking the house where his children were feasting. The house collapsed and all the children died. Shortly afterward, Job himself contracted a loathsome, painful skin disease that afflicted him head to toe, disfiguring his features and making him the most miserable man on earth.

Who was behind the barbarian invasions? Who was behind the fire from heaven? Who was behind the wind from the desert? Who was responsible for all the deaths of Job's children and employees? Who caused Job's skin to erupt in boils?

Job didn't know. The cover wasn't lifted and he wasn't allowed to see the serpent's hiss, but the Bible tells us that behind the strange weather patterns, the threatening barbarian invasions, the illnesses and destruction and discouragement was Satan.

Jesus warned Peter, "Satan is going to sift you like wheat."

Peter said that the devil is like a roaring lion, prowling around, looking for someone to desire.

Paul talked about the schemes of the devil. And when Paul became ill, he called his illness a messenger of Satan. He told the Thessalonian church that he had made every effort to visit them, but that Satan had prevented him. When we go to bed angry and become embittered, he said, we are giving Satan a foothold in our lives. When we fall into some sort of sin, we have been taken in one of the devil's traps, Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:26. When some of his friends fell away from his teaching, he said that they had turned away to follow Satan.

Satan is responsible for more of our problems and dilemmas and temptations that we realize. But of all his nefarious tricks, which one is the oldest. Well, let's look at the first reference to Satan in the Bible—Genesis 3:1.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made.

Who is this serpent? Where did he come from? Is the devil really, literally a snake? Well, according to Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, God, in creating the angels, made one of them, Lucifer, brilliant and beautiful above all the rest. He was the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. He was the Prime Minister of heaven. But the Bible just says that wickedness was found in him. Lucifer grew proud and rebellious against God. He sought to displace God, and as a result he was thrown out of heaven along with the angels who had joined his rebellion. Being kicked out of heaven, he came to earth to continue his rebellion here.

Interestingly, both Satan and the demons seem to be spiritual beings who have the ability of possessing animal and human bodies. We have many incidents in the Bible of demons possessing men and women. And the Gospels also tell us of one occasion in which demons enter into a herd of swine.

But on three occasions in the Bible, we are told of the devil himself, Satan, Lucifer, seizing, entering, and possessing a body. We are told at the end of time that the Antichrist will be Satan-possessed. We are told that on the night Jesus was betrayed, Satan entered into Judas. And here in Genesis 3, it seems that Satan came down to the Garden of Eden and possessed the body of a serpent. Apparently at that time the serpent was an upright animal of some sort, perhaps very beautiful and intelligent. But Satan, possessed

him and used his body to approach Eve and to tempt her to doubt God's words.

What temptation did the devil employ? What was his original dirty trick? It was to plant a seed of doubt in her mind. Look again at verses 1-2:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say...?"

Recently while I was conducting a retreat for college students, a young man came to me confessing that he struggled with doubts about the truthfulness of Christianity. He said, "I read my Bible every day, but as I read it I keep asking myself, 'Is this really true, or is it all a hoax?' I pray every day, but while I'm praying it is as though someone is whispering in my ear saying, 'No one is listening to your prayers. The Bible is just a book of legends and fairy tales.'"

Well, someone was whispering in his ear. Satan's first words in the Bible were, "Did God really say...?"

We all here that whisper from time to time. If there really is a God and if he loves me, why is this happening to me? Why has this disaster overtaken me?

Satan has used his weapon of doubt to tempt people of every generation since Adam and Eve, and today more than ever the world is full of scoffers, skeptics, and unbelievers. And even devoted Christians are sometimes plagued by whispers of doubt.

But, of course, Satan has never devised a temptation for which the Lord God did not have an antidote. God does not expect us to believe the contents of the Bible on sheer blind leaps of faith into the dark. He has provided supporting data, evidence, and proof. He has given us proof that demonstrates Christianity true beyond all reasonable doubt.

And among the proofs, among the areas of evidence for the genuine truthfulness of the Bible is fulfilled Messianic prophecy. Hundreds and thousands of years before Christ appeared, every detail of his birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection predicted given in advance. And it begins in Genesis. It begins here in the chapter, at the very dawn of history, while Adam and Eve are yet inhabiting the Garden of Eden. We do not even get out of the Garden of Eden before God has begun laying the groundwork of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament.

In Luke 24, Jesus appears incognito to two of his followers as they walk along the road toward Emmaus. They are downcast and confused, for their Savior has been crucified, and now his body is missing. But Jesus said, "Everything, every detail, has been predicted in advance. Oh, slow of heart to understand and believe what the Hebrew Scriptures have prophesied." Then Luke 24 says, "Beginning with Moses and the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

Beginning with Moses. That is, beginning with the writings of Moses, namely: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. So we could paraphrase Luke 24:27 to say: Beginning in the book of Genesis, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

I don't know of anything that has ever interested me or thrilled me any more than to study the subject of Jesus as he appears in the book of Genesis. Genesis is full of Jesus, for it is in the first book of the Bible, written perhaps 1600 years before Christ appeared, that God gives us our first impressions of the coming Savior.

And where does it all begin? It begins right here in our passage today. Tempted by Satan, Adam and Eve both disobeyed God, and suddenly the disease of sin sullied the human heart. Death entered the human race. Adam and Eve, separated from the holy God by their disobedience, were fallen creatures, dying, and destined to perish. The Lord said to Adam and Eve, "What is this that you have done?" And Eve replied, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, but you will strike his heel."

In verse 14, the Lord cursed the serpent and condemning serpents to a life of crawling on their bellies and eating dust.

And then the Lord spoke these words to the serpent, one of the most important verses in the Bible, God's declaration of War against Satan and the first promise of the Bible—Genesis 3:15: And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, but you will strike his heel."

One commentary I studied said that these words amounted to God's whole program for the human race in embryo state. It is the fountainhead of all the Messianic streams which would over the centuries swell to become a mighty river. It is the mother prophecy which gives birth to all the rest.

The Jewish commentators of old always recognized this as being Messianic. The Jerusalem Targum and the Targum of Jonathan say that this promise will be fulfilled in the days of King Messiah. The Mishnah speaks of the heel of the Messiah as indicating the nearness of Christ's advent. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament translated this verse in such a way as to underscore its Messianic implications. And most conservative Christian scholars through the years have seen this as a verse of powerful significance.

What does it say?

The first part of the verse says that there will be perpetual antagonism between Satan and the human race: I will put enmity (hostility) between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers...

Satan thought that in his rebellion against God he had gained an ally. Adam and Eve were the climaxing crown of God's creation, his pride and joy, the ones made in his own image. Satan thought he had now won their allegiance. But the Lord says I will put it within the hearts of human beings to always instinctively dislike you, the devil, even as they instinctively dislike snakes.

But now the last part of verse 15: He...

Who is "He..."? He is the offspring of woman, the seed of woman. In Isaiah 7:14 the promise is expanded: Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel. Matthew 1 says: This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together she was found to be with child through the Holy Ghost. Galatians 4:4 says: But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law.

The pronoun "HE" in Genesis 3:15 is the first direct reference in the Bible to Jesus Christ. What will he do? Speaking to the serpent, the Lord said: He will crush your head.

When my friend and I ran into our rattlesnake on the railroad tracks in East Tennessee, we decided we'd like to have it for a pet, so we held our hands so it could sniff us like a dog and so we could make friends with it. No, of course not. Nor did we try to pick it up and play with it, or count the rattlers in its tail. We found nearby heavy rocks and aimed at its head. It took us awhile, but we finally managed to crush its head. Only then were we safe.

Hebrews 2:14 is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. It says: Since the children have flesh and blood—that is, because you and I are human beings, having flesh and blood—he too (Jesus Christ) shared in (our) humanity, so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

By his death of Calvary's rugged cross, Jesus Christ destroyed him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil.

1 John 3:8 says, The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

But we aren't finished with Genesis 3:15, for there is a final incredible word. In the process of crushing Satan's head, the Savior will be wounded. He will crush your head, but you will strike his heel.

The Messiah will come to defeat the devil, to crush his head, to destroy death. But in the process, he will be struck and hurt and wounded. Where? In the heel.

In June of 1968, just after the Six-Day War of 1967, Jewish authorities wanted to erect new homes in recently acquired property. It was just northeast of Jerusalem. But as the workers were excavating for the buildings, they unexpectedly broke through the rocky soil into several large caverns that turned out to be ancient burial chambers. It was a cemetery used by the Jews during the time of Jesus Christ. There were several skeletons, and one them of a young man, somewhere in age between 24 and 28. He had been crucified by the Romans, just as Jesus was. Thousands of Jews were crucified by the Romans, but this skeleton was the first authenticated physical evidence of crucifixion in biblical times. We even know the young man's name. The inscription on the vault revealed it as "Yehohanan, the son of Hagakol." He was about five foot six, graceful in build and he had suffered no traumatic injury prior to his crucifixion. But his death had been excruciating. His arms had been tied to the crossbeam, and perhaps his wrists were nailed fast to it. The evidence for that is uncertain. His legs had been broken. But the interesting thing is this. For many centuries, Christian artists painted Jesus with his arms outstretched but with his feet crossing and a single large nail driven through his ankles. But Yehohanan's corpse told a different story and shows us just how the Romans executed their victims. The legs had been positioned so as to straddle the upright beam, and each foot was attached to the cross with a separate nail driven through the heel bone.

In my office I have a picture of it—a thick iron nail embedded in the bone of the heel.

He will crush your head, but you will strike his heel.

The devil wants to destroy you. He attacks us in frightening ways and whispers doubts in our ears. But beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, beginning with the book of Genesis, and beginning with Genesis 3:15—even while yet in the Garden of Eden—God gives us the first of over 300 Old Testament predictions about the coming Messiah.

He will be the seed of woman, born in the fullness of time, who will be struck in the heel and suffer, but who, in the process, will crush the serpent's head. So is the devil after you. His body may still be twitching, but his head is already crushed.

And though this world with devils filled

Should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God hath willed,

His truth to triumph through us.

Dost ask who that may be?

Christ Jesus, it is He—

Lord Sabaoth His name,

From age to age the same,

And he must win the battle.

The Lamb Of God

Genesis 3:21

The other day I had the opportunity to share my faith in Jesus Christ with a man on the airplane. He was curious, and he wanted to know why Christianity is better than any of the world's other religions. How do you know that the Bible is really inspired Scripture? That it's really the Word of God? Well, I love questions like that, because there are so many good, solid pieces of evidence for the uniqueness and reliability of Scripture.

Today I would just like for you to consider one of them. Think about this: Even though the Bible was written over a period of 1500-1600 years, it all meshes together perfectly, every part and parcel of it revolving around one theme and one person: Jesus Christ. Even Genesis—the first book of the Bible, written 1500 years before Christ was born—even Genesis is all about Jesus Christ. Can you imagine my writing a book about someone who might live 1,500 years from now, in the year A.D. 3500? But that is exactly what Moses did in writing Genesis. Jesus said, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me." Luke said, "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scripture concerning himself."

Our current series of messages is First Impressions: Glimpses of Jesus in Genesis. So far we've looked at the three primary prophecies about Christ found in Genesis, and we are now studying some of the "types" of Christ found there. A "type" is a person, object or event in the Old Testament that prefigures some aspect of Jesus' life and ministry. Adam, for example, is a very unique type of Christ, as we have already seen. Now today I want to show you another. Look at this short, little verse:

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them (Genesis 3:21).

When God first placed Adam and Eve in the Garden they were so innocent and sinless and pure that even clothing was not needed. They were naked and not ashamed. But as soon as they sinned against God, they became self-conscious. Their thoughts flew to lust, and they became aware that the children they bore through their sexual union would be infected with a sinful nature. And so they made for themselves garments of fig leaves.

But by their own efforts, they could never cover up or wash away the guilt and shame that they felt. And so the Lord killed an innocent animal—I believe it was a sheep, a lamb—and made garments for them from the skin of that animal. Arthur Pink, in his book on Genesis, says that this is the first Gospel sermon, preached by God, not in words but in symbol and action.

From this one simple verse, we can learn four things about salvation. First, it is of God. We can never save ourselves, never cover up our own guilt, never expunge our own shame. It is something that God alone must do, for it is against God alone that we have sinned. Second, salvation is accomplished by the death of an innocent substitute. Third, salvation is accomplished by the shedding of blood. Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." And fourth, salvation is accomplished by the slaying of a spotless lamb.

You see, when God made the universe, he built certain laws in it that flow from his own nature. There are, for example, mathematical laws. There was an interesting article this week in the New York Times. The opening paragraph said: At the top of the list of science's unanswered questions, like what is consciousness and how did life begin, is the deepest mystery of all: Why does the universe appear to follow mathematical laws? According to the Big Bang theory, matter, energy, space, and time were created during the primeval explosion. Instantly, it seems, everything began unfolding according to a mathematical plan. But where did the mathematics come from?

It came from God. He is a God of order and intelligence and design. When he created the universe, he built into it certain mathematical laws. In the same way, he built into it certain spiritual laws. And here are four of them. We have all sinned against God and we are all filled with guilt and shame. We can never overcome this by our own efforts. But we know these four things: 1. Salvation is of God. 2. It is accomplished by the death of an innocent substitute. 3. It is accomplished by the shedding of blood. 4. It is accomplished by the slaying of a lamb.

Why do I think the animal was a lamb? Turn to the next chapter, Genesis 4, and here we see the kind of animal required for such a sacrifice.

/Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions of some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.

From the dawning of human history, God was preaching the Gospel to us all, telling us that salvation is of the Lord, that it requires the sacrifice of an innocent substitute, that it requires the shedding of blood, and that it requires a spotless lamb. He had evidently given instructions to Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel about all this, but Cain wasn't willing to come to God in the prescribed way, through this means. He wanted to bring the fruit of his own hands. He wanted to come by his own efforts, just as his parents had tried to cover themselves by their own crafting of fig leaves. But we can never come to God just by our own efforts, our own works, our own fruits. The Bible tells us to beware the way of Cain. Salvation is of God. It requires the death of an innocent victim. It requires the shedding of blood. And it requires the slaying of a spotless lamb.

Turn on over to Genesis 8: After going to such lengths to save the various species of animals during the flood, the first thing Noah did after disembarking the ark is to kill some of them. Does that make sense? Well, here again we see the Gospel being preached in

symbolic form. Genesis 8:20ff says:

/Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of the clean animals and clean birds he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood."

There is a quaint commentary on this by the old Bible scholar Henry Law: "The altar has many uses; but this is the main one—it is the victim's dying bed. Hence Jesus, when he comes to die, must have such a bed. Now, let faith go back to Calvary..."

Press on through Genesis. In chapter 15, we have Abraham offering a similar sacrifice. And then in Genesis 22, we have a chapter filled to overflowing with Messianic allusions and implications. God demands that Abraham offer Isaac as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah, the Mountain of the Lord. This mountain is later identified in Scripture as Mt. Zion. In all likelihood, it is the very mountain on which Jesus Christ will later be crucified. There, in Genesis 22, Abraham prepares to slay his son, but at the last moment, God stays his hand.

/Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and scarified it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

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What will be provided? God alone will provide salvation on that mountain. He will provide an innocent substitute. He will require the shedding of blood. On that mountain, he is going to provide a spotless lamb.

All of this is the Gospel in symbolic form, all of it in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, written 1500 years before Christ was born in Bethlehem.

I don't have time to trace this entire theme through the Scripture in detail. But consider this: In Exodus 12, as the Lord is redeeming and delivering Israel from slavery, he told Moses: Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household... The community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you.

In Leviticus, we're told what kind of lamb is acceptable. Some twenty times, the Lord told the priests that the lamb must be spotless and without blemish. When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the Lord... it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable (22:21).

It fell within the ministry of Isaiah to begin applying these principles to a great coming redeemer. In Isaiah 53, we read: He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. Up to this point, the sacrificial lamb has always been an animal, but now Isaiah shows us that the Lamb of God is a person, one who will be "pierced for our transgressions... crushed for our iniquities..." for "all we, like sheep, have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Then we turn to John's Gospel and notice the dramatic and surprising way John the Baptist introduces the Messiah. He doesn't say, "Behold the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." He doesn't say, "Here now at last after all these centuries is the Messiah." He doesn't say, "Here is the God-Man, the divine made human." He says something totally unexpected: Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).

Those words—that verse, John 1:29, is one of the most powerful pronouncements in the Bible. Charles Spurgeon, the great British preacher, was to speak in a vast hall in England known as the Agricultural Hall. He arrived early to test the acoustics. Standing on the platform, he lifted his voice and shouted this verse, "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Unknown to him, there was a worker, high in the rafters of the building, who heard that verse and that very day was converted to Christ.

I read the other day about a preacher and writer in England named George Cutting who was bicycling through a certain village. He suddenly felt compelled to shout out this verse, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Then he felt he should shout it again. Six months later, Cutting was visiting in that area, doing evangelistic work house to house. He came to one cottage and asked the woman if she was saved. "Oh, yes!" she said. "Six months ago. I was in great distress about the salvation of my soul. I pleaded for God's help. Then a voice cried, 'Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.' I asked God to repeat what he had said, and the voice came again." That very day she was converted to Christ.

In the book of Genesis, God tells us that salvation is from him. That it requires the death of a perfect substitute. That it requires the shedding of blood. That it requires a spotless lamb. That message is repeated and reinforced throughout the Old Testament, and then suddenly Jesus Christ appears, heralded by John the Baptist's announcement: Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

In Acts 8, the connections are made even clearer as Philip witnesses to the Ethiopian: The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth." The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Peter punches the point home in his epistle: For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were

redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God (1 Peter 1:18-21).

And finally we see this theme reach a crescendo the book of Revelation: Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by four living creatures and the elders. Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, with ten thousands times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev. 5).

The Bible ends with these words: I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev 21-22).

The Lamb is keeping a book, and in it are the names of all those who come to God by faith in him. There is no other way. There is a thread that progressively unrolls throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, pulling all the books together around one master-theme: God loves us, we disobeyed him, and he redeemed us through the blood of the Lamb.

Adam and Eve and Abel show us the necessity of the Lamb. Abraham showed us the provision of the Lamb. Exodus showed us the slaying of the Lamb. Leviticus showed us the character of the Lamb. Isaiah showed us the personality of the Lamb. John the Baptist identified the Lamb. Peter described the enthronement of the Lamb, and Revelation tells us about the Lamb's endless reign, and the eternal life of those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

I recently read about a man who said, "When I was five years old, before seat belts and air bags, my family was driving home at night on a two-lane country road. I was sitting on my mother's lap when another car, driven by a drunk driver, swerved into our lane and hit us head-on. I don't have any memory of the collision. I do recall the fear and confusion I felt as I saw myself literally covered with blood from head to toe.

"Then I learned," he continued, "that the blood wasn't mine at all, but my mother's. In that split second when the two headlights glared into her eyes, she instinctively pulled me closer to her chest and curled her body around mine. It was her body that slammed against the dashboard, her head that shattered the windshield. She took the impact of the collision so that I wouldn't have to. It took extensive surgery for my mother to recover from her injuries."

In a similar way, Jesus Christ took the impact for our sin, and his blood now permanently covers our lives. We have all broken his laws and sinned against him, and sin always results in death. But God built a handful of critical spiritual laws into the universe just as surely as he built into it mathematical laws. He wants to save us from our sin and guilt. But we can never save ourselves. Salvation is all of God. It requires the death of a perfect substitute. It requires the shedding of blood, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. It requires the slaying of a lamb—and that lamb is identified as Jesus Christ himself.

Our part is just to receive what he has done for us. Our part is just to let him clothe us with salvation the way he clothed Adam and Eve with the coats of skin. We do that by coming and kneeling and asking Jesus Christ to be our Savior, trusting in his grace to save us. Our part is just to say something like this:

Just as I am without one plea;

But that thy blood was shed for me,

And that thou bidst me come to thee,

O Lamb of God, I come. I come.

CHRIST, THE ARK

GENESIS 6

Robert Morgan

We are currently in a series of Sunday morning sermons entitled "First Impressions: Glimpses of Jesus in Genesis." The Bible says that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that pretty well sums it all up. I read the other day about a young man in Indonesia who married his girlfriend, but he had lots of problems and troubles in his marriage. He was a businessman, but he developed a severe addiction to gambling, and it ruined his life. He finally lost so much money that he decided to commit suicide. He hanged himself just before Christmas, but his brother-in-law found him hanging and cut the rope. When his body fell to the floor, he began to breathe again. His family was so frightened they called a policeman, and the young man was placed in custody. They took from him his belt and shoestrings, and placed him in a protective cell. But he had managed to hide a razor blade in the pocket of his trousers. That night, he took out the razor blade and put his left wrist on the table. He was just about to cut the vein when, at that very moment, his attention was drawn to a small book on the table. It was a Gideon New Testament. Out of curiosity, he opened it and his eyes fell on the verse in 1 Corinthians 6 that says, "Know ye not that you are the temple of God?" The young man began

shaking uncontrollably, and he fell down on his knees and cried, "Oh, God, forgive me! Have mercy on me!" He kept saying those words over and over, until the police called for a minister who led him to faith in Jesus Christ. His life was permanently changed. The next year he entered a Bible College in East Java, and he went on to become an evangelical pastor in Indonesia.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that's the message we find whether we turn to Moses or to Matthew, to the Old Testament or to the New Testament. God designed the plan of salvation from before the creation of the world, and so even when we turn to Genesis, there we find the Lord Jesus Christ.

In fact, as we have seen over the past several weeks, even before Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, there were at least three presentations made to them of the Gospel. First, Adam himself was a type or pattern of Christ—a sinless man who entered the world in a unique way, who was tempted by the devil, who became the head of a great race of people, who was put into a deep sleep, and from whose wounded side came a bride designed by God. Second, the Gospel was announced in Genesis 3:15: And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel. And third, as we saw last week, the death of Jesus Christ was prefigured by the slaying of an innocent animal to provide a covering for the shame and guilt of Adam and Eve.

Now, as we continue looking at the portraits of Christ in Genesis we come to the Ark of Noah, and I have three Scriptures I would like to read you:

This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle, and upper decks. I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them." Noah did everything just as God commanded him (Genesis 6:9-22).

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. This is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:36-39)

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised. Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:3-7)

There may be many, many ways in which the Ark of Noah typified or prefigured the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I don't want to overdo it. Some people, I think, have read a little too much into the text. For example, I normally enjoy reading the comments of the British Christian W. G. Heslop, but I think he goes a little too far in his comparisons between Noah's Ark and Jesus Christ. This is what he says:

The ark was typical of our Lord Jesus Christ. The wood sets forth the humanity of Christ, wood being obtained from a tree which has been cut down, sawed, hammered, and nailed to provide an ark to save the human race alive. Thus the wood of the ark foreshadows our Lord Jesus Christ, as the living tree of righteousness cut down to provide a place of safety for the human race. The ark was pitched inside and outside with pitch and this sets forth the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The window which was around the top of the ark teaches us to look up and unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. The door or opening in the side of the ark foreshadows the wounded side of Christ. The three stories in the ark set forth the tripartite nature of our Lord Jesus Christ—spirit, soul, and body. The waters from beneath were first broken up. This sets forth the fact that all Hell was enraged against Christ, the Ark. The windows of heaven were then opened and this sets forth the sufferings of Christ (who) bore the wrath of an offended Deity. The lashing by the waves on every side of the ark foreshadow the sufferings of Christ as endured by him from the scourgings, beatings, and smittings of man. Just as all inside the ark were saved and all outside the ark perished, so it is today.

Well, Heslop maybe over-interpreted a little bit, but he is not altogether wrong. In my message today I would like to suggest that Jesus Christ is foreshadowed by Noah's Ark in at least three ways. I'd like to show it to you today using three simple words: Doom, Door, and Done.

Doom

First, there is coming doom, a doomsday, a day of wrath, a day of judgment. This is seldom preached about or talked about today, but Jesus warned, "As it was in the day so of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark."

Jesus was saying that despite Noah's repeated warnings of imminent judgment, life went on as usual. For example, imagine a young couple who had spent months planning their wedding. They had spent a vast amount of money, and here they came, trembling with excitement. All their friends gathered. The groom stood before the altar, the bridal march was played, the bride waltzed down the aisle, they said their vows. There was no commitment to God in their lives, no guidance by him, no sense of devotion to Bible study or prayer, no fear of God, no holiness. But there was physical and emotional magnetism, and so, in the flush of the moment, they said their vows and marched out of the church. But as they headed out on their honeymoon, a drop of rain fell on their heads. Then another one, then another. That night, instead of enjoying their marriage bed, they were clawing on the sides of the ark, trying to save themselves from the cold, black waters. But it was too late.

And Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be at the coming of the Son of Man." The Bible warns, "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment. Every day in this city, people go about their daily lives, getting up in the morning, going to school, going to work, listening to the news, watching the television, indulging in their habits, going through the motions of life with no thought for the warnings of the Bible. But Peter said, First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised. Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'" But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Door

There is a coming doomsday, but there is also an open doorway. There is one place of safety from judgment. And for 120 years, Noah stood beside the unfinished ark, preaching and pleading and warning his friends and neighbors to flee from the wrath to come. Any man or woman or child who would, could have entered the ark. The door was open to all. Inside that ark there was safety, there was deliverance, there was salvation. Heslop is right in this, when he wrote, "Inside the ark all were safe; outside the ark, all perished."

The Bible says, "There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved"—only Christ. Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father but through me."

Not the labors of my hands Can fulfill Thy laws demands;

Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,

All for sin could not atone; Thou must save and Thou alone.

I've been reading this week a story by Mrs. Howard Taylor about a man in China named Hsi. He grew up thinking very seriously about life and about death. He grew up feeling that there must be some answer to the ultimate despair of life. He was a brilliant lawyer and professor, very influential and powerful in his city. But as he studied Confucianism, he found it primarily a system of ethics. As he investigated Taoism, he found it primarily a philosophy. As he dabbled with Buddhism, he found it little more than idolatry. None of it satisfied his soul, and to relieve his depression, he turned to opium. Soon he was a hard-core addict. His influence and his reputation grew tarnished, and soon he spent his hours, day after day, in a darkened room, smoking opium. Years passed, and he became a complete wreck, never leaving his bed nor the deadening haze of opium.

And then one day he heard that a stranger had come to his city with a new message. At first, he was very resistant, but one day he was induced to visit the missionary. He walked into the room, his eyes cast down, refusing to look into the missionary's face. He only wanted to finish his errand and leave. But then he looked up into the face of missionary David Hill. There was something about that face, the strength of it, the clearness in the eyes, that suddenly removed all doubt and fear, and Professor Hsi began to investigate the claims of the Bible. And Professor Hsi went on to become one of the most influential and powerful Christian evangelists in China during his lifetime. He found in Jesus Christ the one and only answer to death, hell, and judgment, and to the despair and darkness that passes over the human soul like shadows in the night.

M. R. DeHaan said, "There was only one ark. God did not make a fleet of ships and say, 'You have your choice.' There are religions without number, but only one way of salvation."

I wonder how many people here today are aboard the wrong ship. Here is the old rugged ark. It doesn't look very elegant. It's plain and old-fashioned and wooden. Your friends might laugh at you if you get on it. They want you to come aboard their ship with them. It's big and sleek and modern and elegant. Come with us, they say, aboard the Titanic. And you have to make a decision. Are you going to sail toward judgment aboard the Titanic or are you going to board the ark that will take you all the way to heaven?

You're standing outside the only door to safety, the only way, the only name given under heaven. And you're going about your life as though there were no judgment, no coming flood? There is coming judgment, there is one door to safety. Jesus Christ is our ark, and we enter by faith.

Done

The third word is done. Everything necessary for our salvation has already been done by Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. Some years ago, a preacher with the unlikely name of Ebenezer Wooton was conducting a crusade, and after the last service a young man came up to him and said, "Rev. Wooton, what can I do to be saved?" Wooton said, "Nothing. It's too late."

"Oh, no," said the young man. "Is it really too late for me to do something?"

"Yes," said the preacher, "everything that needed to be done was done 2000 years ago when Jesus Christ died on the cross. Jesus

died for our sins, and he said 'It is finished.' There is nothing you can do now except to receive what he has already accomplished. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

I'd like to show you a very interesting word in the Bible, and we came across it earlier in our Scripture reading. Genesis 6:14 says, "So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out." The word "pitch" is the Hebrew word "Kopher" which means to cover with a tar-like substance to keep out the water. It refers to some sort of water-proofing material. But now let me quote you another verse: Leviticus 17:11 says, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

Sin is atoned for by the blood of the lamb. The word atonement here is "Kopher." It is the very same word that is translated "to cover with pitch" in Genesis 6:14.

The basic idea is the same. When Noah and his family entered the ark, the rain beat against the sides of the craft. The water swirled around it. The waves and tides rose and fell, lashing the boat. But it was sealed with pitch, and waterproof. Those inside were safe. Not so much as a drop seeped through.

When we enter Jesus Christ, we come to a place of absolute safety. We are hidden with Christ in God. Not a drop of sin or hell or judgment can touch us. And it is all of grace. Genesis 6:8 says that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (KJV). This is the first time that the word "grace" appears in the Bible. The word means God's goodness to us when we were out of "wriggle room." You know, many times we get ourselves into some mess or another, but we scrap and scrape and scheme and manage to wriggle out of it. But the Bible teaches that it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment. There's no way we can escape. No works we can do. No price we can pay. No plea we can make. But God himself has within himself the love and power to snatch us out of danger, to deliver us, to justify us, to save us. We are saved by grace through faith.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear

And grace my fears relieved.

How precious did that grace appear

The hour I first believed.

Towers, Terror and Triumph

Genesis 11; Revelation 18; Luke 13; Proverbs 18:10

Robert Morgan

This has been a week that no one in America—no one in the world—can ever erase or expunge from our memories. The horrifying moments of terror that struck our nation unfolded before us on television like something from a disaster movie, only worse. Commercial jetliners were high-jacked and turned into deadly missiles. Who can ever forget the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, the attack on the Pentagon, the thousands who have died. It is a week that will live in infamy.

My sister visited the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center earlier this year, and she spoke of how they gave the illusion of sturdy permanence and invincibility. Gazing up at them, she marveled at what mankind was capable of building, and now we're marveling at what mankind is capable to destroying.

When I was a boy, we visited New York City and ascended to the top of the Empire State Building, which at that time was the tallest building in the world. Later we returned and went to the top of the World Trade Center. Later, while in Chicago for school, we rode the elevators to the top of the Sears Tower, which took its turn as the tallest building in the world. I've been to the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and of the CN Tower in Toronto, the world's tallest free standing structure. Now the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur hold the distinction of being the tallest building in the world, and I'd like to visit there one day. Like everyone else, I'm fascinated by towers and skyscrapers.

It was also true in biblical times, and today I'd like to speak of four different towers in the Bible.

The Tower of Babel

In Genesis, chapter 11, we read of mankind's first attempt to rise above the level of the earth in the building of a tower.

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

We know from the previous chapter that the postdiluvian mastermind behind this project was a man who was violently anti-god in his attitude and beliefs. His name was Nimrod, which mean "Rebel." He is perhaps the first great prototype for the coming antichrist, and he is the founder of the empire of Babylon in what is now known as Iraq. In the story here in Genesis 11, the building of this Tower of Babel represented an act of rebellion against God. There is no mention of God in this passage. The people didn't consult God. They didn't seek God's will. They determined to build a tower for themselves—to make a name for themselves—a tower that would to reach to the heavens. Many commentators believe this building was intended as a pagan temple in which Nimrod was going to

institute pagan religious practices—a ziggurat. In saying that these city builders wanted to make a name for themselves, the writer of Genesis is implying that they were attempting to find significance and immortality in their own achievements. But it ended in confusion and came to naught.

The Towers of Babylon

Now let's move from the front of the Bible to the back of the Bible. In Revelation 18, we have a description of the great city of the End Times, the city of the Antichrist, the city code-named Babylon, the city whose foundations in history Nimrod laid—a city with towers and buildings and skyscrapers such as the world has undoubtedly never before seen. This is the conclusion of the empire begun by Nimrod in Genesis 11. A few weeks ago we looked at this passage during our Sunday night studies in Revelation, and its images have stayed with me. Revelation, chapter 18, describes the last great capital city in history, a city that will serve as the worldwide headquarters for the evil empire of the Antichrist. It may actually be the city of Babylon, rebuilt on the Plain of Shinar.

I could not help but think of this passage as I watched the televised scene from across New York Harbor at the skyline of New York City, as the lower boroughs of Manhattan disappeared in the ash and smoke of its own destruction. Look at verse 9:

When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!"

Verse 17 says: In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin! Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, their sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads and with weeping and mourning cry out: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!'

Doesn't that sound like what we witnessed last Tuesday? As I watched the television coverage, I felt we were just seeing a preview of the terror of this approaching moment of apocalypse just before our Lord returns to earth when the towers and buildings and spires of last great city in world history will collapse amid the smoke of her own destruction.

The Tower of Siloam

But now I want to show you another passage which is extraordinarily relevant to our situation today. During the life and ministry of Jesus, two tragedies rocked the secluded little world of Israel. The first tragedy was political in nature. Pontius Pilate had unleashed his soldiers against a group of worshipers in Galilee. The second tragedy was akin to the one we have faced this week. A tall building, a tower as it was called, collapsed with significant loss of life. Not as great as this week's fatalities, of course, but for that day and age, it was very significant and it stunned the people. Jesus commented on these tragedies, and He didn't exactly say what we would expect Him to say.

Suppose a television crew had come to our church to interview me about this week's tragedy. I suppose I would have offered my prayers and sympathy and tried to say words of comfort into the camera. Jesus was far more blunt and truthful. Look at this passage in Luke 13:

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

The people of our Lord's day felt that if something terrible happened to someone, it undoubtedly happened because they had sinned in some terrible or extreme way. Jesus refuted that. Death and destruction, tragedy and heartache, He said, are the results of sin. And we're all sinners, and left to ourselves, we're all going to perish. When a tragedy befalls those around it, it is a wake-up call for us to consider the brevity and uncertainty of life, and to direct our own hearts to Jesus Christ who alone can give us abundant life and eternal life.

Over five thousand people died this week in these terrible attacks, but out of all of us who remain, how many are going to be alive five months from now? Five years from now? Fifty years from now? A hundred years from now? Every member of every generation perishes. It might be in a terrorist attack, or it might be from an accident, or from a disease. But we're all going to die.

But those who repent and turn from their sins and take Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. What does it mean to repent? It doesn't mean just to feel sorry for the way you've lived. Judas Iscariot felt sorry for having betrayed Christ; he felt remorse and he felt regret. But he didn't really repent. To repent means to feel sorry enough to do something about it. It means to confess your sins before God. It means to stop living the way you're living. Stop doing the things you're doing. Stop saying the things you're saying. It involves changing your mind, changing your behavior, changing your attitude.

You say, "I can't change." You can with God's help. I remember reading about the conversion of the radio evangelist Michael Guido. His mother came to Christ first, and she started praying for her husband, who was a heavy drinker. When he found out she had been saved, he became so angry that he threatened to divorce her and even to beat her if she went back to church. She went anyway, taking the children with her. One by one the children, too, became Christians. On the Sunday they were going to be baptized, the old man drank heavily, then threatened them and beat the children. Then he locked the doors from the inside, put the keys in his pocket,

and fell asleep. As he slept, they slipped the keys from his pocket, ran out of the house, and walked to the church.

Michael later said that when they reached the corner of 23rd and Broadway, the shafts of sunlight fell on his mother's face, and he could see she was in deep pain. She had a weak heart, and he worried about her. "Ma," he said, "with your heart trouble, the doctor said the least excitement could bring an attack. When we get home, Pa will beat us all unmercifully. Do we have to go through with this? Can't we be secret Christians? Can't we be silent believers? Do we have to go all the way?"

"Children," replied the mother, "we are going all the way or not at all." Michael Guido later said that he never forget that lesson—the importance of going all the way with Jesus.

And I wonder if someone here needs to come to Christ, to repent of your sins, and to go all the way with Him. He said, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

The Tower of Jehovah

But that brings me to the fourth tower I'd like to show you, and it's in Proverbs 18:10: The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it, and are safe. One of the most heart-tearing things I heard this week was the tape recording of a woman named Melissa Hughes who was high in the World Trade Center, on the 101st floor of the North Tower. She called her husband—they had just celebrated their first wedding anniversary—and you could hear the fear in her voice as she left this message on their voice mail. She said, "I'm up in this tower, and we've been hit by a plane—or a bomb has gone off. I don't know if I can get out. There's a lot of smoke, and I just want you to know I love you always."

No doubt when she went to work that morning, the lobby of that great building was gleaming. No doubt the elevators were zipping smoothly from floor to floor. No doubt her office on the 101st floor was plush and comfortable. No doubt the view was incredible. But five minutes later, none of that mattered. It wasn't a safe place; it was a place of terror and death.

One newspaper printed an article about the impact this week's events are having on young people, on those too young to remember World War II, the Korean War, or the assassination of President Kennedy. Some sociologists call them the "pampered generation." But now, all that has changed. One high school counselor in Fairfax, Virginia, just outside of Washington, said, "This is like an emotional assault. It has shaken a lot of these kids to the foundation."

And one young person, a college freshman, says that she and her friends are worried about retaliation, the possibility of war, the possibility of a draft. "Everyone is feeling kind of vulnerable," she said.

Without the Lord Jesus Christ, we are all vulnerable, and there are no safe places. The strongest and most powerful and permanent structures that human beings build are never really safe. There is no security in any tower built on earth. There's no security in building your own towers. No security in the tower of fame, or in the tower of wealth, or in the tower of popularity, nor in the tower of beauty.

There's no place on earth where we are truly safe from sudden death and destruction—except in the towering cross of Jesus Christ. There's an old hymn that says:

In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;

The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are safe. Today I want to invite you to run into it. To run to the Lord. To run to the cross. It's the only place of safety and of eternal security in times like these.

How do you run to the Lord? You come and kneel and pray: "Dear Lord, I know I'm a sinner and I know I'm perishing. I know there is no safety in this world. But I also believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross and overcame death in order to give me eternal life. I repent of my sins and receive Him today as my Lord and Savior. From this day on, my security is in Him. From this day on, He is my strong tower."

At a time like this, I urge you to come to Christ.

Sin City

Genesis 11-19

Robert Morgan

The city of Sodom is first mentioned in Genesis 10:19, many years before the story of Abraham unfolds. Sodom was one of the oldest cities in the world, and it became one of the most decadent. It was the original Sin City. It comes to the forefront during the story of Abraham, his nephew Lot, and what happened to their family. Let's begin in Genesis 12. In this chapter, God spoke to a man named Abraham who lived in the city of Ur of the Chaldees and promised to make him the channel through which redemption would come to the world. The Lord said to Abraham, "Go to the land I will show you.... I will make you into a great nation."

Genesis 12:4 says: So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Now, Lot's father, who had been Abraham's brother, was dead, and we get the idea that Lot looked up to his Uncle Abraham as if to a dad. Uncle and nephew were very close. Lot went with Abraham and Sarah almost as if he were a son. In the course of time, Abraham and Lot both did very well and prospered in the land of Canaan. They became quite wealthy with many flocks and herds and large numbers of servants. But that led to problems. Look at Genesis 13:5:

Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at this time.

So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the sea. The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.

Now notice verse 13: Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

The Lord notices when a society or a city slides into the morass of sinfulness. We almost get the idea there is some kind of invisible measuring stick, and the Lord notices when the tide of evil in a certain culture reaches dangerous levels. It's interesting to think there is a measuring stick of immorality and when a society reaches a certain point it crosses a red line on the yardstick of God.

Well, the story continues in Genesis 18, when three strangers show up at Abraham's tent. Look at verse 1: The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

At first Abraham didn't seem to realize the three strangers were supernatural. Two were angels and the third was a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord. The strangers visited with Abraham and the Lord reassured him he would become a great nation. The Lord confirmed His promises to Abraham. But for our purposes today the most interesting conversation occurred at the end of the visit. Genesis 18:16 says: When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and

powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him."

Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

Now, of course the Lord is omniscient. He knew exactly what was going on; but He was speaking in human terms and expressing a sort of amazement that things were as bad as they were.

The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord.

In the passage that follows, Abraham interceded for Sodom. He said to the Lord, "Will you spare Sodom if there are fifty righteous people there?" The Lord said, "If there are fifty righteous people there, I will spare the city."

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Later in this series of sermons, I want to devote an entire sermon to the fascinating proposition that if there is even a small percentage of believers in any society—maybe even just one percent—ten people out of a thousand—it can make out outsized impact on the culture and perhaps even save that society from judgment. But in Sodom, there were not even ten people left who weren't totally depraved of all goodness and decency.

So we come to Ge 19:

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to

meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. “My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.”

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This tells us something about how powerful are angels, and how involved they are in matters of judgment. As the story unfolds, when the sun came up the next morning, the two angels hurried Lot and his family out of the city of Sodom. They practically had to drag them out of the city kicking and screaming. Genesis 19:23 says:

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Now the interesting thing is that from this point on the Bible keeps referring back to Sodom as a preview or antecedent of the judgment coming upon the entire world. It’s referred to that way – listen to this: In Genesis; Deuteronomy; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Lamentations; Ezekiel; Amos; Zephaniah; Matthew; Luke; Romans; 2 Peter; Jude; and Revelation. The story of Lot and of Sodom shows up again and again in the Bible, referenced by many Biblical writers. We can’t possibly look up all those passages this morning, but I would like to show you two of them in the New Testament.

GRIEVE OVER A FALLEN CULTURE BUT DON’T YIELD TO IT

GENESIS 11-19, LK 17:26-30, 2PE 2:6-9

Robert Morgan

We’ve begun a series of messages entitled “Running to Bamboo: Finding Strength and Stability in a Shifting Culture,” and these messages are based on the premise that the Bible is the world’s best handbook for living a godly life in decadent times. We’re taking eleven biblical characters who found themselves surrounded by their culture and using them as object lessons to show us what to do in ours. When we’re done, we’ll have a list of eleven principles to guide us. We looked at two of these principles last week, so let me review.

- The first is: Remember Who is in Charge. From the example of David in Psalm 11, we learn that no matter how our society may change, our Lord does not. He is still in His holy temple; He is still on His heavenly throne.
- The second is: Replenish Yourself Daily with the Scripture. We learn this from Jeremiah 15. Jeremiah preached in Jerusalem during the last forty years prior to its destruction by Babylon. These were days of prolonged evil, and few listened to anything Jeremiah had to say. He often grew frustrated and depressed. He was isolated, marginalized, and persecuted. But he said in Jeremiah 15:16: Thy words were found and I did eat them; and they became to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart, for I am called

by Thy name, Lord God of Hosts.

Now today we're coming to third biblical principle. I want to develop it from the story of a man named Lot and what happened to his city of Sodom. As I studied for this message, two different things struck me. First, how often this subject is mentioned in the Bible; and second, how seldom it is mentioned today. Sometimes the best thing we can do in a sermon is simply to read the Bible, make a few comments, and let the Word of God speak for itself. And so today I'd like to take you through the Bible, looking at some key passages and letting the Word of God speak for itself.

Sin City (Genesis 11-19)

The city of Sodom is first mentioned in Genesis 10:19, many years before the story of Abraham unfolds. Sodom was one of the oldest cities in the world, and it became one of the most decadent. It was the original Sin City. It comes to the forefront during the story of Abraham, his nephew Lot, and what happened to their family. Let's begin in Genesis 12. In this chapter, God spoke to a man named Abraham who lived in the city of Ur of the Chaldees and promised to make him the channel through which redemption would come to the world. The Lord said to Abraham, "Go to the land I will show you.... I will make you into a great nation."

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The Days Of Lot (Luke 17:26-30)

Look at what Jesus of Nazareth had to say about this in Luke 17:26: Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

Only the presence of Lot in the city of Sodom delayed the falling of the judgment of God; and in the same way only the presence of the church—of Christians—in our nation today and in our world day is holding off the judgment of God. Your presence and mine is holding back the judgment of God on our land; and if our nation runs out of Christians it will run out of time.

There is an eschatological side to this as well. Our Lord was talking about the Second Coming in this passage in Luke 10. I think He was hinting that as soon as the church is raptured, the Great Tribulation would descend. As soon as Christians are removed from the face of the earth, caught up with angelic help at the rapture, the wrath and judgment of God will fall on the earth.

Just as it was in the days of... Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

The Running to Bamboo Principle

(2 Peter 2:6-9)

And that brings us to the final passage I want to show you – 2 Peter 2:6-9, because here in this passage – against all of the prior background and earlier verses we read – we'll discover our third Running to Bamboo principle. Peter said:

If (God) condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly...

There you have summarized everything we've read and seen so far. Here again we see that the case of Sodom and Gomorrah wasn't just an isolated Bible story. It is a case study, a case history, and an antecedent of what will happen to the ungodly. It's a preview, a harbinger.

...and if He rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

Now, based on these verses let me give you our third Running to Bamboo Principle: Grieve Over a Fallen Culture, But Don't Yield To It.

Notice those two elements in this passage. First, Lot was grieved over his culture. Peter used two different terms to describe this to us. First, he said that Lot was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless. I don't know why Lot choose to settle down in Sodom, why he was living there, why he was trying to raise his family there. I think his wife had a lot to do with it. I think if it had been up to Lot, he would have lived in tents outside of town; but his wife wanted to live in the city and raise her family there. But be that as it may, truth be told we're all trying to live and raise our families in a fallen world. But every day Lot was distressed by what he saw and heard.

And then Peter used an even stronger word—tormented. This righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul. It's bad enough to be distressed, but even worse to be tormented. Lot was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.

It is understandable and completely proper for Christians to be distressed and tormented by the fallen state of the world around us. Jesus was grieved by the unbelief of Jerusalem. In Acts 17:16, it says: While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. There's something wrong with us if we can live in an ungodly world without being distressed and grieved by the ravages of sin. When we see the foundations destroyed, when we see the suffering caused by evil, we should be distressed and tormented. This sermon series is about how we should respond as those who live godly lives in an ungodly world, and part of our response is to be grieved, distressed, troubled, and tormented in our hearts by what is happening around us.

So we grieve over a fallen culture, but we don't yield to it. One of the most remarkable things about this passage is this: Three times in this passage Peter describes Lot as a righteous man: He rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)

Now when I read about Lot in the book of Genesis, I don't come away feeling so good about him. I get the impression he was selfish, that he chose the best land for himself, and that he was drawn step by step into the heart of the most sinful society in antiquity. And when I read of some of the other things he said and did, I'm not very impressed with him. Lot certainly wasn't a perfect man. But this passage assures us three times that he was a righteous man. So we have to realize there's more to Lot than meets the eye, and there's more to the grace of God than meets the eye. And in many ways, Lot is an example for us. And just as the Lord knew how to deliver Lot from Sodom when judgment was about to fall, so the Lord knows how to rescue us from every evil work.

As I prepared this message, I came across an article about an exhibition currently being housed in the British Museum. The news report warned that readers may not want to take their small children to see the ancient artifacts on display. A little sign in front of the gallery says: "This part of the exhibition contains sexually explicit material." It's not an exhibition of modern art or the works of a contemporary sculptor. The exhibit is a set of antiquities recovered from the excavations of Pompeii, the Roman city destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in the first century. Katrina and I visited Pompeii years ago, but we had a difficult time there because of her wheelchair and we weren't able to see much. That may be just as well. Pompeii was a city engulfed in sex, sensuality, and eroticism. It was Sin City. It was like Sodom. There were brothels there to satisfy every lust. The paintings and artwork—even the logos on the storefronts—everything was vulgar and obscene. For many years, most of these pornographic images were hidden away in a secret room in a museum in Naples, for they weren't deemed appropriate for viewing. But now, of course, anything goes.

But I can't read about Sodom without thinking of Pompeii. On a hot summer's day in August of AD 79, the whole city was suddenly destroyed by fire and brimstone when nearby Mount Vesuvius erupted. A tsunami of superheated poisonous gas, lava, and pulverized rock poured down on the city at 100 miles per hour, and the whole place was buried under millions of tons of volcanic ash. The devastation was so complete that for hundreds and hundreds of years no one even knew where the city had been. The ruins were finally rediscovered in the 1700s, and underneath a thick layer of ash they found the entire city intact.

I think these things are given to us in both Scripture and in history as a warning, and we disregard it at our own peril. In times like these, how should we then live?

Remember Who is in Charge.

Stay Replenished Daily in God's Word.

And Grieve over a Fallen Culture, but Yield Not To It.

At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds (John 8:52-59).

In chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 of John's Gospel, Jesus makes some remarkable claims about himself. He claims, for example, that the entire Old Testament had been given for the express purpose of describing himself. He said, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, because Moses was writing about me" (in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

In other words, Jesus was claiming that what a man had written fifteen centuries earlier was expressly about himself. He claimed he was the object of prophecies and predictions given 1500 years before.

Then he astounded his critics even more. He claimed to have known Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, a man who had lived 2000 years earlier. "Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad. In fact, before Abraham was born, I am-I existed."

Now that brings up an interesting question. When did Abraham see Jesus' day? In what way was Abraham, whose story is told in the book of Genesis, exposed to the reality of Jesus Christ? Well, I can show you several points of intersection between Christ and Abraham in the book of Genesis. We've already looked at the prophetic glimpse that God gave Abraham about the coming Messiah in Genesis 12. Later in this series we'll look at the preincarnate appearance of God to Abraham in Genesis 18. We'll also look at the most remarkable Messianic chapter in Genesis-chapter 22-with its incredible implications about Christ.

But today I'd like to introduce you to the remarkable, mysterious story of Abraham's meeting Melchizedek in Genesis 14. Melchizedek is such an extraordinary portrait of Jesus Christ that many Bible students think that he was, in very fact, Christ himself in a preincarnate appearance. Maybe he was; I'm sympathetic to that view. But I'm more inclined to think that he was, instead, a remarkable prototype of our Lord.

To put the entire picture together, we need to look at three different passages, starting with Genesis 14. Here we have the story of the first recorded war in human history. In the fracas, Abraham's nephew Lot was kidnapped, and Abraham took 318 of his trained men and rescued him in a commando-type raid in the far north of Israel. As Abraham returned home, his route led through the town of Salem, and there he came face to face with this mysterious personage, Melchizedek, who appeared suddenly like a meteor in the biblical account. And just as suddenly, he vanished. Genesis 14 says:

When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people. After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abraham, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Here in Genesis we're just given the bare bones story, and if this is all we had it would be remarkable enough. But as it is, there are two other passages that help us interpret Genesis 14. The first is in Psalm 110:

The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make my enemies a footstool for your feet."

Here God the Father is speaking to God the Son, the Lord speaking to the Lord, assuring him of eternal sovereignty. This is a passage about the coming Messiah. The Psalmist goes on to say in verse 4:

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

Now we come to the end of the Bible, the book of Hebrews, and all of this is pulled together for us. Hebrews 7 and 8:

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness;" then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!

We could spend several Sundays studying this man Melchizedek, but in the limited time we have today I'd like to point out six parallels between Melchizedek and Messiah:

A Triple Kingdom

First, Melchizedek possessed a triple kingdom. That is, he was a king in three different ways just as Jesus Christ was, is, and will be. He was first of all King of Righteousness. This is what the name Melchizedek means in the Hebrew. So here we suddenly find, in the middle of the corrupt and pagan Canaanite civilization, a righteous man whose very name means King of Righteousness. He is also identified in Genesis 14 as King of Salem. The word Salem means Peace. Third, we know something about this place called Salem. The inhabitants of this town later added a prefix to the title: Jeru. This is the town that would later come to be better known as Jeru-Salem. Jerusalem.

So Melchizedek was a threefold king-King of Righteousness, King of Peace, King of Jerusalem. All three of these point to Jesus Christ. He is holy and righteous, the King of Righteousness. He imparts peace, saying, "Peace I give you, my peace I give unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled." And throughout all of eternity, his eternal throne will occupy the center of the New Jerusalem, the city of our Great God. He is King of Righteousness, King of Peace, King of Jerusalem.

An Exclusive Priesthood

Second, Melchizedek not only had a triple kingdom, but an exclusive priesthood. We're told here, "He was priest of God Most High." Now, a priest is different from a king. A king rules over men, but a priest stands between God and man, blessing people on behalf of God, and interceding with God on behalf of the people. It is the priest who offers the atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

There are two different divisions or orders of priesthood in the Old Testament. There was the Jewish priesthood, headed up by Aaron. Aaron was of the tribe of Levi, and in the book of Exodus God appointed the Levites as the priestly tribe of Israel. The High Priest of Israel was always of the tribe of Levi.

But Melchizedek served as a priest before Levi was ever born. This is actually the first time the Bible speaks of priests and of the priesthood. Melchizedek was a universal priest separate from Levi. And the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus Christ is our High Priest, not in the Jewish line of Levi, for Christ descended from the tribe of Judah. But Jesus is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Jesus and Melchizedek make up an exclusive branch of the priesthood.

In the Bible, the number seven is very interesting, for it seems to be the divine number of completeness. You may remember we talked about this when we studied Genesis 12. The Lord said to Abraham, "In you and in your seed will all the earth be blessed." I mentioned that that statement is repeated six more times in the Bible, making seven occurrences in all, and the seventh one, in Galatians 3, specifically says that Abraham's Seed through whom all the world would be blessed was Jesus Christ.

Well, here we have something similar. If you count them up in Psalm 110 and in Hebrews 6 and 7, we are told exactly seven times that Jesus Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. And as such Jesus is the High Priest for all the world, for Jews and Gentiles alike, for you and for me.

Offered Bread and Wine

Third, I want you to notice what Melchizedek was holding in his hands as he met Abraham. We have here, 2000 years before the Upper Room Service, the elements of the Last Supper that signified the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Genesis 14:18 says, "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine."

Later, the second Melchizedek would meet with his disciples and offer them bread and wine on the night he was betrayed. In handing them the bread, he would say, "This is my body which is broken for you." In handing them the wine he would say, "This is my blood which is shed for you." And here we have it 2000 years in advance.

His Mysterious Lineage

The fourth parallel involves Melchizedek's mysterious lineage. He seems to appear out of nowhere. Who was he and where did he come from? We aren't told. Here, in the middle of a degraded and corrupt Canaanite area, he suddenly shows up. Nothing is said about either his past or his future. Nothing about his parents, his birth, or his descendants. We don't know where he came from, and we don't know where he went.

The writer of Hebrews said that he was "without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of like, like the Son of God, he remains a priest forever."

What does this mean? It probably means that Melchizedek is without any recorded lineage or genealogy in the Bible. We know nothing about either his beginning or ending. He is mysterious, unfathomable.

And so it is with Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." The Jews exclaimed, "You are not even 50 years old." Jesus replied, "Before Abraham was born, I existed." He is ageless, yet he belongs to all of the ages.

The prophet Micah, in predicting the birthplace of the Messiah, said: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from old, even from everlasting."

A Great Blessing

Fifth, Melchizedek uttered a great blessing. He said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of the heaven and earth." The book of Hebrews said, "Without doubt, the lesser person was blessed by the greater."

In the same way, the first official word of our Lord's Gospel ministry was, Blessed, for began his inaugural sermon with the Beatitudes, saying, Blessed are.... Mark tells us that he put his hands on the little children and blessed them. At the end of his ministry, he lifted his hands and blessed his disciples while ascending back to heaven. The Bible says that all the nations of the world will be blessed through him. Ephesians 1:3 says that God has blessed us in the heavenly places with every spiritual blessing in Christ. The book of Romans says that he richly blesses all who call upon him. John 1:16 says that from the fullness of his grace

we have received one blessing after another. And at the resurrection, Jesus will say to his people, "Come, you who are blessed by my father. Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Received Tithes

Finally, here in Genesis 14 we have the first mention of tithing in the Bible. Verse 20 says that Abraham gave him a tenth of all. Melchizedek received Abraham's tithes, and this is the beginning of this subject in Scripture. From this point in human history, the Lord's people have been tithers. Later Jacob commits himself to tithing, and then Moses incorporates into the religious practices of Israel.

For Christians today, tithing is not so much a law to keep as it is a pattern to follow as a starting point for our giving to God and to his work. The book of Malachi says that, for those who tithe, God will rebuke the devourer. I had never noticed that until earlier this year when I attended a denominational meeting here in Nashville. Al Taylor was the speaker, and he referred to the Malachi 3 passage about tithing. "Bring the tithes into the storehouse and see if I will not open up the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing you will not even have room to receive. And I will rebuke the devourer among you, the one who destroys your crops."

I had never noticed that last phrase about the devourer and the destroyer. But Al Taylor told of a man in Selma, California, named Arlie Rogers. When Arlie and his brother first moved to California they worked hard and saved enough money to buy a farm in San Joaquin. They were Christians, and they had always been faithful in tithing to the Lord through their local church. Just as they were starting on their new farming venture, a terrible sandstorm blew through the valley and destroyed all their cotton. At that time, the money crop was cotton.

Arlie called his pastor to come out to the farm, and as they walked through the fields, he said to Pastor Burnham, "Everything we had was in that crop. We don't have money or credit to replant. We are completely ruined and we're going to lose the farm and everything we have worked so long to build."

But the pastor said, "No, fellows, it's really not that bad. The God we served raised his own son from the dead in three days. I know he can raise cotton." Then Pastor Burnham dropped to his knees in the dirt of the cotton field and offered this prayer: "Father, these men are tithers. You said you would rebuke the devourer for a tither. I am asking you to manifest the power of your Word and fulfill that promise right here in this cotton field. Bring this cotton back and give these men a good crop. In Jesus' name. Amen."

The pastor got up, brushed off the dust from his pants, and said, "Well, that ought to take care of it."

A few days later, the two brothers called the church in amazement. God did rebuke the devourer. The cotton was coming back. That year they had a tremendous crop.

Where did the blessed and happy habit of tithing begin? Right here, in the story of Abraham and Melchizedek.

So... tell me who the Bible is talking about here? He is the King of Righteousness, the King of Peace, and the King of Jerusalem. He is the great High Priest of the Most High God, bearing in his hands the emblems of holy communion, bread and wine. He is mysterious and unfathomable, without beginning of days or end of life. He blesses his people powerfully, and receives their tithes.

Who does it describe? It describes Jesus Christ, as prefigured by Melchizedek all the way back in the fourteenth chapter of the Bible. Now if all of Scripture, beginning with the book of Genesis, is given for the express purpose of introducing us to Jesus Christ...

...isn't it about time that you met him?

Faith Genesis 15 Robert Morgan

Like most of you, I've always been kind of intrigued with superpowers and superheroes. When I was a boy I read every Superman comic book I could find, and after school each day I'd run home to watch the half-hour, black-and-white episodes of The Adventures of Superman, starring George Reeves. Sometimes I'd tie a towel around my neck and pretend it was a cape and go running around like Superman. That was over a half-century ago, but in a few weeks we're going to have tons and tons of youngsters at our Trunk or Treat event dressed up like superheroes. The appeal of superpowers transcends generations and is a powerful concept in our culture.

And yet, the actors who have played Superman on television and in the movies haven't fared to well. The aforementioned George Reeves, who was a hero to kids like me in the 1950s, died of a gunshot wound at age 45 under mysterious circumstances. To this day, we don't know if he committed suicide or was murdered. He died just a few days before his wedding.

A generation later, Christopher Reeve, who was the most famous Superman to date, broke his neck in a equestrian accident.

Another actor, Lee Quigley, who played Superman as a baby, died at age 14 from abusing solvents.

And in terms of their careers, the Superman actors haven't fared so well. Many of them were so typecast by the role that it ended

their careers. On the Internet, this is called the Superman curse.

Well, we all want to be stronger than we are. We may not need superpowers, but there are times when we need supernatural strength in life. We're in a sermon series right now on how to have superhuman inner strength, for that's something the Bible promises. We're to go from strength to strength, as we read in Psalm 84. When God gives us supernatural strength, it's all blessing. There is no curse in that. But how does that happen? How does He strengthen us with power in our inner being? How do we have daily strength for daily needs, and how do we tap into God's own power and strength for daily living? Well, it is connected with our faith. Notice how the Bible puts this in the passage we're coming to today—Romans 4:20: Yet he [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised.

1. Saving Faith

This is a passage that has its primary application in saving faith. Whenever we dip into the book of Romans, it gives us a chance to remind ourselves of the wonderful theme of this tremendous book. Romans is the greatest explanation in the Bible or in theology or any human literature of what it means to reconnect with the God who created us. The first three chapters of Romans describes how messed up we are, how fallen we are, how hopeless we are. Because of our very sin natures, we are estranged from God. The first three chapters of Romans tells us, in effect, that we

are like a person who has fallen into a deep, deep hole, a hole that descends miles and miles beneath the surface of the earth. We've fallen into this bottomless pit, and we can never climb out. With great effort we may lift ourselves an inch or two, maybe a foot. We may be able to climb up the walls a few yards, but then we fall back. We can never ever see the sunlight. We are trapped and perishing in our own sins.

But then Romans chapter 3 says that when we were hopeless God reached His hand down to us, and it is a nail-pierced hand. Look at Ro 3:20-25: Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law [by their own efforts]; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.

We are justified by God's grace through the simple and normal process of faith, of trusting Him to help us.

Now, in chapter 4 the apostle Paul goes on to tell us that this is exactly how God worked even in the Old Testament and even before Christ died on the cross. In fact, the man whom God selected to provide the channel of redemption for the world—the founder of the Jewish race—Abraham himself—was saved by grace through faith 2000 years before Jesus died on the cross, just as we are saved by grace through faith 2000 years after Christ died on the cross.

Look at Romans 4:1: What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter. If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but [not really] not before God. What does the Scripture [the Old Testament, the book of Genesis] say? "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

This is a reference to Genesis 15 and the story of the Abrahamic Covenant. God said to Abraham, "Do not be afraid... I am your shield and your very great reward." God indicated that Abraham would have children and grandchildren and a line of descendancy that would eventually bring redemption into the world. But Abraham was a hundred years old and his wife Sarah was very aged, so he asked the Lord how it could be. And God took Abraham outside at night and told him to look up at the twinkling stars. "So shall your offspring be," said the Lord. And Genesis 15:6 says, "Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness."

In other words, Abraham was declared righteous in God's sight at that very moment on the basis of faith alone. This was before the Law was given. This was before the Jewish sign of the covenant was given. This was before Calvary. But God had promised a line of redemption, Abraham believed it, and on the basis of faith he was declared righteous.

People in the Old Testament were saved by faith in what God was going to do on the cross; and people in the New Testament were saved by faith in what God did on the cross. But in every epoch and era, among every tribe and tongue, since the fall of man, there has only been one means of reconnecting with our Creator—by grace through faith.

That is saving faith. This is a message for someone hearing my voice or reading these words. You can never make it to heaven by you own efforts. But you can place your full faith in what Christ did when He died for you and rose again. Look at how it's described later in the passage.

Ro 4:16: Therefore the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not

only to those who are of the law [the Jews] but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He [Abraham] is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that are not.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations...

Ro 4:19: Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised. This is why it was credited to him as righteousness. The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

I do not know how to state the message of the Gospel any more clearly. If you have never placed your full faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness, salvation, justification, and eternal life, now is the time to do it. Today is the day.

2. Sustaining Faith

But there's another application to these verses. Just as we need faith for eternal salvation, we need faith for daily living. When we are saved by grace through faith, that is our entrance into a life that is based on the principle of faith. When we trust Christ as our Savior we are entering a faith-based life. Just as we depend on God's promise of salvation to take us to heaven, we begin depending on all His other promises to sustain us on our journey there. The Bible says that faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). The Bible says that we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

And there are two very interesting phrases in the passage I've just read. They are contrasting phrases that describe two different kinds of people. Let me show you. Look at verses 19 and 20. Look at these two descriptors:

- Without weakening in his faith – Ro 4:19
- [He] was strengthened in his faith – Ro 4:20

As Christians, we can be weak in our faith or we can be strong in our faith. And when we are weak in our faith, we are weak in every other way. We're weak in our inner resolve. We're weak in our ability to handle stresses and strains. We're weak in our emotions and attitudes. We're weak in our witness and testimony. But when we are strong in our faith, we are strong in all those areas.

So how do we go through life as Christians without weakening in our faith but by being strengthened in our faith?

Well, this passage gives us the answers.

A. Faith is Trusting God

First, faith is trusting God. Our faith is only as good as the object in which it's placed. This is the most basic rule of faith I've ever discovered. Earlier this summer, I was hiking along an old set of abandoned narrow-gauge railroad tracks in the mountains near our family home in East Tennessee. I came to a bridge over a gorge. This was an old railroad bridge. The wood was rotten and the metal was rusted. It wasn't safe to walk across, much less to drive a train across. If I were an engineer on an old steam locomotive taking a train along that old abandoned track, I could have all the faith in the world. I could have said, "I believe that bridge will hold up this train." But the train wouldn't have survived the passage. On the other hand, if I were driving a train across a brand new and very sturdy bridge, I might have a very weak faith and I might even be nervous; but the train would make it just fine. The important thing about faith isn't the size of the faith but it's object.

Well, when it comes to life, what or who is the object of our faith? Our faith is in God, and look at how Paul describes Him in verse 17: ...the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

Here two aspects of God's power are described. First, He gives life to the dead. There is no other rational explanation of life in this universe. Where did life come from? It didn't just spark into being out of non-existence. It didn't just come about because of a strange, random, purposeless, accidental set of electrical or chemical reactions. It came from the eternal living God. And the God who created life can re-create life; that is, He can raise the dead, with Exhibit A being the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave on Easter Sunday. If God can do that, He is worth

trusting. He is worthy of our faith.

Second, God is the one who calls into being things that were not. This is creation. God can create from nothing. He can create ex nihilo. I had an amazing conversation this week with a Chinese gentleman who now lives in Canada. His name is Xinwei Lin. He grew up in southeast China and was educated in biology, in neuroendocrine science. He completed his PhD in 1991 and became a

university professor in China. He came to the United States in 1993 and moved to Canada to do post-doctorate work in biomedical science. He was very involved in researching and teaching evolutionary theories. But he and his wife met a group of Christians, and in the course of time Xinwei was wonderfully saved. He and his wife were baptized on the same day. Xinwei went on to seminary and completed his studies there and today he is senior pastor of a Chinese-speaking church in Canada.

Well, of course I had to ask him, “What about evolution? What happened to your evolutionary beliefs?”

And Xinwei gave me one of the most brilliant and fascinating answers I’ve ever heard. He said, “I was saved with the heart, not with the head.” In other words, he came to Christ because of needs of the heart. It’s wasn’t primarily a matter of intellectual arguments. “But,” he said, “once I became a Christian, everything made sense intellectually. I looked at the same scientific facts, I looked at the same evidence, I looked at the same research, and they made perfect sense within a creation-paradigm.”

He gave me an example. He had been very involved in research on goldfish, because goldfish have a remarkable brain system that, in some ways, resembles that of humans. If you are evolutionist, you say, “Aha! Goldfish and humans descended from the same evolutionary line.” But if are a creationist, you say, “Aha! God used a similar design.”

Similarities do not imply descendancy. A glider may resemble an eagle, but that doesn’t mean they share a common line of organic descent. And this brilliant scientist, when he became a Christian, instantly recognized that everything he knew about science fit perfectly into the framework of a Creationist worldview.

We have a God who raises the dead and who brings into being things that are not. Our faith isn’t in our faith. Our faith is in our God.

B. Faith Means Trusting God Via His Promises Second, faith is trusting God via His promises. God communicates His intentions and plans and blessings to us by way of His promises. His first set of promises has to do with our eternal life, our salvation and forgiveness of sins—all the aspects related to justification. But those promises are only the gateways into an entire life that is sustained in every way by the promises of God. Notice how the word “promise” occurs in this passage:

It was not through the law that Abraham and His

offspring received the promise... - verse 14

The promise comes by faith – verse 16

He [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith, and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded God had the power to do what He had promised – verses 20-21

That final phrase is the best definition of faith I’ve ever found in the Bible. Faith is being fully persuaded that God has the power to do what He has promised.

That means that as we go through life and we hit rough times, we need to focus our minds on specific promises that God gives us. There have been many nights when I would have been unable to sleep had I not forcibly focused my mind on certain promises that God had given me in His Word.

This week, I have the privilege of teaching a couple of classes alongside a man who is a very virtual legend in Christian academic circles, Dr. Ted Rendall. He and his wife Hester are two of the most delightful people I’ve ever met. Dr. Rendall is a brilliant man, and he has a photographic memory and is a speed-reader. He reads one complete book every day, and he’s been doing that all his life. He has a personal library of 32,000 volumes, and he can tell you pretty much what those books say. But he told me of something very difficult that had once happened to him. Dr. Rendall was born and raised in Scotland, in Edinburgh. He moved to Canada as a young man, and shortly after coming here he received word that his father had drowned at sea. The news came in the form of a telegram from his brother. Dr. Ted’s father had been employed aboard a merchant ship, sailing between Dundee and Edinburgh with a load of sand. The vessel was caught in a storm and somehow the coverings or the hatches must have blown off in the storm. The rain was so torrential it soaked the sand and the ship sank. There were two lifeboats and some of the men were able to get on the lifeboats, but in the violence of the storm one of the lifeboats also overturned, resulting in more loss of life and a double tragedy. When news came, Ted was devastated. He was so far away. There was nothing he could do. There were no goodbyes. He was away from family and friends, and he had to carry on through his grief. “But,” he said, “God sustained me. He gave me sustaining grace through a specific verse of Scripture – Psalm 71:16.” I looked it up. It said: “I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.”

That’s what it means to be strengthened in faith, and that leads to my find word.

C. Faith Means Trusting God Via His Promises for Every
Phase of Life

There's an old hymn that says: "O, for a faith that will not shrink, though pressed by every foe; / That will not tremble on the brink of any earthly woe."

We trust God through the agency of His promises, and His promises cover every age and stage of life. The subsequent words in Romans makes this clear. Romans 4 merges into chapter 5 with a "therefore." It says:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

In other words, we place saving faith in Christ and we gain access to a life in which all our needs are met by the promises of God, which we claim according to the same faith-principle that saved us. And those promises sustain us even when things go badly.

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

This is the life of faith. There is saving faith; and after we're saved there is sustaining faith. We walk by faith. We live by faith. Faith is trusting God. It is trusting God via the promises He has given. It is trusting Him via His promises for every situation in life.

So let's not waver through unbelief regarding the promises of God, but let's be strengthened in faith, giving glory to God and being fully persuaded that God has the power to do all that He has promised.

ABRAHAM'S VISITORS

Genesis 18:1-5

Robert Morgan

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way-now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say" (Genesis 18:1-5).

Today and next Sunday we are coming to the final installments of our series of messages entitled First Impressions: Glimpses of Jesus in Genesis. The first three messages in this series were devoted to the three primary prophecies about Christ in the book of Genesis. The next several messages had to do with types (biblical prototypes) of Christ found in Genesis, such as the ark of Noah, Melchizedek, and the Lamb that was slain. Now in these final two messages, I'd like to show you something very interesting in the Bible. From time to time in the Old Testament, the Lord God Himself makes a personal, physical appearance. Not necessarily in a vision or a dream, but in the flesh, so to speak.

For example, one day Joshua looked up and saw a powerful warrior. He fell on his face and worshipped this strange and powerful warrior, who told him to take off his shoes for he was on holy ground. The warrior was called the "Captain of the Hosts of the Lord"-Commander of the Lord's Army.

One day in the book of Judges Manoah and his wife were going about minding their own business when suddenly, looking up, they saw someone called the "Angel of the Lord." This brilliant and unusual angel predicted the couple would have a son named Samson. When Manoah asked this angel, "What is your name?" the angel replied, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding." As the angel ascended to heaven in a flame, Manoah cried, "We are doomed! We have seen God!"

Now this same mysterious and powerful individual whose name is beyond understanding, whose name is the Commander of the Army of the Lord, whose name is the Angel of the Lord, this same one came to see Abraham one day, accompanied by two angels. Abraham seemed perplexed, for these three men appeared from nowhere, and yet it took Abraham a while to catch on. At first, he just viewed them as mysterious, nomadic strangers who had crept up on him. He didn't seem to realize that he was looking at the Almighty God of Eternity and two of his angels. It says: The Lord appeared to Abraham... Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby...

Christ's Manifestation

Notice how plainly the text puts it: The Lord appeared to Abraham... Abraham saw three men.... It is only as the text unfolds that we learn that two of these men are angels and the other one is the Lord himself. Now the Bible teaches that there is one God who eternally exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father is invisible, always has been, and always will be. The Bible teaches that no one has seen God the Father at any time. And nowhere in the Bible did anyone ever see the Holy Spirit except in symbolic form such as a dove or a flame of fire, because being Spirit, he, too, is invisible. But several verses in the New

Testament that tell us which member of the Holy Trinity reveals or manifests God to mankind:

John 1:18 says, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared (revealed) him."

John 6:46 - "No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father."

1 Timothy 6:16 says, "God...dwells in unapproachable light whom no man has seen or can see."

Colossians 1:15 says that he-Jesus Christ-is the image of the invisible God.

For 2000 years, church theologians have understood that when God appeared in human form in the Old Testament, it was a manifestation of God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. Dr. Raymond Scott in his book on this subject, wrote: "It is a well-known fact that the Old Testament predicts the coming of the Messiah. But what is not common knowledge among Christians is that Jesus Christ actually appeared on this earth on numerous occasions prior to his incarnation."

Now, let me be a little speculative and simplistic. If there had been a portrait artist there by the trees of Mamre that day who had drawn the face of the mysterious traveler who darkened Abraham's tent, and 2000 years later, if another portrait painter had drawn the face of Jesus of Nazareth breaking bread beside the sea, I believe the two pictures would have been identical.

There was an important difference, of course. In the Old Testament the Son of God simply appeared in the form of a man, but in the New Testament he actually became a man, being born of the virgin Mary. Nevertheless, I believe-to put it plainly-that it was God the Son (later be called Jesus Christ) who talked with Abraham near the trees of Mamre that day 4000 years ago. If you want a glimpse of Jesus in Genesis, you can look at prophecies about him, you can look at prototypes of him, but you can also see him in concrete, personal form as he makes special pre-incarnate, pre-Bethlehem appearances in order to convey special truth at special times.

If that is true, what was so important in Genesis 18 that it required a special appearance of God Himself on Planet Earth? Why did he come on this occasion?

Christ's Mission

Well, he had a two-fold message-an announcement and a pronouncement. First, the Lord had a tremendous announcement to make. Abraham and Sarah, though they were old and past child-bearing, would be given a son who would serve as the next link in the lineage of a coming Messiah through whom all the world would be blessed. Here we have another repetition of the Genesis 12 promise that we studied several weeks ago.

Then the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son... Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son... Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him..."

In other words, Abraham and Sarah would have a child, a son of promise, who would comprise the next link in the line of the Messiah, the Promised Seed through whom all the world would be blessed. This was, in subtle form, the promise and provision for a redeemer for all the world. From the very beginning, God has been in the process of redemption.

When I was a boy I saved up my money and purchased a little transistor radio with an earplug. Night after night after the lights were out, I'd lay in the dark, twisting the dial and listening to faraway stations. I was fascinated by the fact that there in my little bedroom in the Tennessee mountains I could hear people talking live in the great cities of America, throughout the South and Midwest, and up and down the Eastern Seaboard. One of the stations was WLW in Cincinnati. I didn't realize it at the time, but WLW was a pacesetter in radio evangelism, because they aired the program of one of America's best known radio evangelists, a man by the name of E. Howard Cadle. Cadle grew up in a home in which his mother was a Christian, but his father was an alcoholic. By age 12, Cadle was emulating his father, drinking and out of control. Soon he was in the grip of sex, gambling, and the Midwest crime syndicate.

"Always remember, Son," his worried mother often said, "that at eight o'clock every night I'll be kneeling beside your bed, asking God to protect my precious boy." But her prayers didn't seem to slow him until one evening on rampage he pulled a gun on a man and squeezed the trigger. The weapon never fired and someone quickly knocked it away. Cadle noticed that it was exactly eight o'clock.

Presently his health broke, and the doctor told him he had only six months to live. Dragging himself home, penniless and pitiful, he collapsed in his mother's arms, saying, "Mother, I've broken your heart. I'd like to be saved, but I've sinned too much."

The old woman opened her Bible and read Isaiah 1:18- "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow." That windswept morning, March 14, 1914, E. Howard Cadle started life anew. With Christ now in his heart, he turned his con skills into honest pursuits and started making money hand over fist, giving 75 percent of it to the Lord's work. He helped finance Gipsy Smith's crusades in which thousands were converted. Then he began preaching on Cincinnati's powerful WLW, becoming one of America's most popular radio evangelists, saying: Until He calls me, I shall preach the same Gospel that caused my sainted mother to pray for me. And when I have gone to the last city and preached my last sermon, I want to sit at His feet and say, "Thank You, Jesus, for saving me that dark and stormy day from a drunkard's and a gambler's Hell."

This is what God longs to do for every man and woman, to give them a future and a hope, to extend forgiveness. And to provide such redemption, a redeemer was prepared. And so here in Genesis 18, God was putting together the lineage of the Messiah who would become a blessing to all the nations of the world.

But the Pre-incarnate Lord also had another purpose in visiting Abraham on that hot and cloudless day. It as a pronouncement of judgment on all those who reject him and his message. Look at verse 16ff:

When the men got up to leave they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him..." Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know." The men (the two angels) turned away and went toward Sodom...

And Genesis 19:24 gives us the outcome: "Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah-from the Lord out of the heavens. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities-and also the vegetation in the land." Apparently these cities had become so corrupt, so filled with immorality and perversion, that they passed redemption point. In other words, they were so full of so much evil that it was impossible for any child within their walls to grow up healthy and holy. They were like incurable, cancerous masses of evil, ready to metastasize, poised to spread their disease to all the world.

I've been reading a new book by biblical archaeologist Dr. J. Randall Price which deals with Sodom and Gomorrah. Price tells of excavations at a Dead Sea site called Bab edh-Dhra, an ancient city with a wall surrounding the city that was 23 feet thick. Within the walls was an interior city of mud-brick houses along the northwest side and a Canaanite temple with a semicircular altar. The interesting thing about this archaeological site is the evidence of extensive destruction by fire. The townsite was covered by a layer of ash many feet in thickness. The city cemetery also revealed ash deposits, charred posts and roof beams, and bricks that had been subjected to intense heat. There is clear evidence in some of the buildings that the fire started on the roofs and burned downward. Furthermore all around the city there still are unusual salt formations and the smell of sulfur. Archaeologist Price says that everything about this city-its dating and its location and the thick layers of ash-points to its being biblical Sodom.

Nearby are the ruins of three other cities from the same time period which also show signs of having been suddenly destroyed by fire, and displaying the same sort of ash deposits. At one of them, a site today called Numeira, a heavily fortified city, there is one layer of ash seven feet thick. Beneath the ash layer excavators found remains in almost perfect condition, especially in houses whose walls had been sealed by ash. Price says:

At every one of these sites, the ash deposits had caused the soil to have the consistence of spongy charcoal, making it unfeasible for people to resettle in them after the destructions. The account of the destruction of these Cities of the Plain records that four of these cities were destroyed, but one-Zoar-was spared at Lot's request. However, it is also recorded that though Lot fled to Zoar he was afraid to live there, choosing rather to live in the caves in the mountains outside the city. It seems that because of the general destruction of the region, Zoar itself was also abandoned. This would then correlate the archaeological evidence with the biblical account.

We cannot prove definitively that these constitute the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah, but the evidence does seem to correlate strongly. Now, if you study the subject of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah throughout the Scriptures, its remarkable how often the Bible writers go back and refer to this event.

Deuteronomy 29 warns the children of Israel that unbridled sin in their nation will make them like Sodom and Gomorrah: "The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in fierce anger."

Isaiah 1:9-10 says: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."

Isaiah 3:9 warns those who "parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it." Think of our entertainment industry-what a description! "Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves."

Jeremiah 23:14 says, "Among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me, the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah."

Amos 4:11 says: "I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah."

Zephaniah 2:9 says: "Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah."

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for you" (Matthew 10:15; 11:24).

Peter said, "(God) condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly...."

Jude wrote, "Sodom and Gomorrah and their surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."

In other words, the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a miniature preview of the judgment coming upon all the world. No wonder the pre-incarnate Son of God appeared to Abraham that day. He was coming to announce another link in the lineage of the coming Redeemer, but he was also coming to pronounce judgment on those who rejected his redemption. And the Bible warns that unless we repent, we will all likewise perish.

While studying law in Adams, New York, a man named Charles Finney purchased a Bible and, for two or three years, weighed its message. One fall morning in 1821, walking to his office, he suddenly detoured to a nearby forest and ventured into the woods. There between fallen trees, he tried to pray. At first, he was troubled that someone might see him. But he persisted until the peace of

Christ filled his heart. In the days following, almost everyone Finney met was stricken with conviction of sin and converted. A revival swept through Adams, and soon Finney found himself preparing for the ministry.

One of his more unusual sermons was preached some time later in a village near Evans Mills, New York. During the service, Finney, who seldom prepared his sermons in advance, asked God to give him a text. Suddenly he remembered the story of Sodom, city of Lot. Genesis 19:14 rushed to mind: "Get up, get out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city!"

In his sermon, Finney painted the condition of Sodom before God destroyed it. I had not spoken in this strain more than a quarter hour when an awful solemnity seemed to settle upon them; the congregation began to fall from their seats in every direction, and cried for mercy. If I had had a sword in each hand, I could not have cut them down as fast as they fell. Every one prayed who was able to speak at all.

Only afterward Finney learned the village where he preached was known as Sodom, and the man who had invited him was called Lot. Well, I want to tell you that we are living in Sodom and Gomorrah today. Our culture is in moral collapse, and we are engulfed in sexual and homosexual immorality everywhere we turn. It is getting worse every day. But the Son of God is here, he is manifested, he has come. And he has an announcement of redemption and a pronouncement of judgment-and we have a choice. Everyone of us has a choice. And today I'm going to ask you to make a decision to follow Jesus, to flee from the wrath to come, and to find in him a hiding place. For Isaiah said he has come to abundantly pardon, and Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly."

Mount Moriah and the Master

Genesis 22

Robert Morgan

Recently on a speaking engagement in California, I was picked up by a fine-looking man who took me out to lunch then to my hotel. He was a member of the church staff. Over lunch, he opened his wallet and showed me a picture of a pathetic-looking wretched man. His long hair was matted and dirty. His face pocked and hollow. His eyes glazed over. His body scrawny and wasted. It was the very picture of a squandered, dissipated life. "Do you know who this is?" he asked. "Do you recognize him?"

I didn't. He said, "It's me. This is my 'before' picture. I keep it here in my billfold to remind me of what I was like before I met Jesus Christ as my Savior."

It was a dramatic demonstration of the fact that if any man be in Christ he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. That's why the Bible is so eager to present to us the most powerful person in all of history, Jesus Christ. From the very first chapters of Genesis, we begin to come face-to-face with the Savior. And that is what our current series of messages is all about: First Impressions-Glimpses of Jesus in Genesis. Today we are coming to the most power-packed chapter in the entire book of Genesis as it relates to Jesus Christ. I would like to beg your indulgence to read an extended portion of the 22nd chapter of Genesis, and as we read it please watch with me for four different portrayals here of Jesus Christ in both picture and prophecy. This is one of the most Messianic chapters of the Old Testament. As far as I'm concerned, it is almost up there with Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 as it relates of telling us about Jesus Christ. Let's read it together:

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." Early the next morning, Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and the wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Abraham looked up and there in the thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place, The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous

as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

Jesus Christ would not be born for another 2000 years, and yet as I mentioned, there are at least four portrayals of him here in prophecy and picture. I'll mention two of them briefly, then we'll focus on the other two.

An Angel

Here is the first. This may surprise you, but I believe that Jesus Christ himself was physically present on that Mount Moriah. How? Through his voice that twice spoke to Abraham. Verse 11 says, "But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!'" And verse 15: "The angel of the Lord called to Abraham the second time..." Who is this angel of the Lord who shows up at odd and important moments throughout the Old Testament? We'll study this more fully in a couple of weeks, but for now let me just share something that a professor of mine once said. Dr. Raymond Scott did a thorough study of the Angel of the Lord and wrote a book about it. He said that the Angel of the Lord was in fact a visible appearance of God himself in human form. According to the Scripture, the only Member of the Triune Godhead who was seen by human beings is the Son. God the Father is forever invisible. God the Holy Spirit is bodiless spirit. Throughout the Bible, it is God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, who manifests God to us. He is the visible image of the invisible God. In the New Testament he actually became a man, but in the Old Testament he sometimes appeared in the form of a man.

"The Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament and the incarnate Christ of the New Testament are one and the same person," wrote Dr. Scott. And here he is, speaking on this mountain, in Genesis 22.

A Prophecy

Second, we have a profound word of prophecy here about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is one we've already looked at and which occurs seven times in the Bible. In verse 18, the angel of the Lord says again, "Through your offspring-your seed-all the nations on earth will be blessed." And in Galatians 3, Paul said: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say, 'and to seeds' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed' meaning one person, who is Christ."

A Son

But now we come to the third and the central portrait of Jesus Christ in this chapter. I presented some of this material last year in another context, but I would like to repeat it today for emphasis. The young man, Isaac, it seems to me, is one of the most remarkable prototypes of Jesus Christ found anywhere in the Bible. Everything about Isaac in this passage points to his being a type of Christ. Everything about him reminds us of the Lord Jesus, and those who carefully study Genesis 22 find a remarkable series of parallels between Isaac and Immanuel. Let me briefly share 10 of them with you:

(1) Both Isaac and Jesus were sons of promise. The angel had announced to Abraham that he and Sarah would bear a son. And likewise, the birth of Jesus Christ was announced beforehand by an angel to Mary and Joseph. Even the very names of these boys were before conception.

(2) Both Isaac and Jesus were born miraculously, Isaac to an aged couple well past the child-bearing years, and Jesus to a virgin. In both cases, God tinkered (if I may use that word) with a woman's womb to cause a supernatural conception.

(3) Both Isaac and Jesus were called the only begotten sons of their fathers, and...

(4) Both Isaac and Jesus had fathers who were willing to sacrifice their only begotten sons on a hill far away. Where was Mount Moriah? Well, 2 Chronicles 3:1 says, "Then Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah..." According to the Bible, Abraham was standing on a mountain in the vicinity of Jerusalem. It's interesting that in the Muslim tradition, the Dome of the Rock, built on the site of the Jewish Temple is built around the rock which, in Islamic tradition, was the rock on which Abraham sacrificed Isaac. I believe that the range of mountains where Abraham built his altar would later become the very spot where Christ would die for the sins of the world. Why? Because of four phrases here in Genesis 22:

- Verse 2 says, "Sacrifice him on one of the mountains I will tell you about." God specified the very mountain. Not just any mountain would do, but only the very one chosen by God.
- Verse 3 says that Abraham went to the mountain God had told him about.
- Verse 9 talks about the mountain God had specified to Abraham.
- Verse 14 calls it the Mountain of the Lord- "So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

(5) Both Isaac and Jesus carried the wood up the hill on their own backs - the wood on which they were to be sacrificed.

(6) Both were to be offered as a burnt offering for sin, and...

(7) Both obediently, willingly, submissively allowed themselves to be placed to die on the wood they had carried on their backs to the top of the mountain. Both became obedient unto death.

(8) Both Isaac and Jesus were dead for three days. In Jesus' case, it was a literal death. In Isaac's case, it was figurative, but it was a figure the biblical writers didn't want us to miss. Genesis 22:3 says, "Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance." During those three days, Abraham had grieved for his son as one lost. Hebrews 11:17 says, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice." Is that right? Did Abraham offer Isaac as a sacrifice? Well, he didn't literally plunge the knife into the young man, but yes

he offered him as a sacrifice in his heart. The Hebrews 11 passage goes on to say, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking he did receive Isaac back from the dead."

(9) That leads to the ninth parallel. When did Abraham receive Isaac back from the dead? On the third day. Both Isaac and Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, and...

(10) Both, being raised up, were given a bride selected by their fathers through whom all the world would be blessed.

To sum it up? What biblical figure fits this description? He was a son of promise, and both his birth and his name were announced in advance. He was conceived miraculously in his mother's womb. He was the only begotten son, and his father was willing to sacrifice him as a burnt offering on a hill far away. He carried the wood on which he was to be sacrificed up the hill on his own back, and he went willingly and submissively. He was dead for three days, then rose from the dead. Being raised up, he took a bride selected by his father and through whom all the world would be blessed.

The Lamb

It all points to Christ, and to make sure we don't miss the significance, the figure or the type suddenly changes. When Isaac asks in verse 7, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb?" Abraham answered with the words, "Jehovah-Jireh" - "God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering."

Isaac, despite the many parallels there are between Christ and himself, could never be a burnt offering for sin, for he was a sinner himself. The atonement requires the sacrifice of an innocent victim, a lamb with spot or blemish. And so there is a fourth portrayal of Jesus Christ in this passage: The ram, the male lamb in the thicket, the lamb of God, the lamb that prefigures the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we have another chapter in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, that presents to us Jesus, that shows us Calvary, that prepares us for meeting and knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Angel of the Lord. He is the Seed of Abraham through whom all the world will be blessed. He is the son of Abraham, offered as a burnt offering for sin and raised to life again. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Many years ago in England there was an infidel named Joseph Hart who spent the best years of his life denouncing Christianity and attacking the Bible. He was a great and gifted writer, and he wrote many booklets and pamphlets against the Lord Jesus. He attended church regularly, but only to find fault and to gather more ammunition to use in his fight. He was so single-minded in his hatred of Christianity that he became obnoxious.

One Sunday afternoon at the age of 45, he wandered into a Moravian chapel to make fun of the faith of Christians, and to find fault with them. The sermon that day was from Revelation 3:10: "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on earth." The preacher's message was so powerful that it gripped Joseph Hart. "I was hardly got home," he wrote of the tremendous change that suddenly came over him when he "flung myself on my knees before God." He said that he felt a heavy weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

He never wrote another pamphlet against religion. Instead, he began writing Christian hymns. Then he started preaching in an old frame building in London, and when he died eight years later, 20,000 people attended his funeral at Bunhill Fields.

No one is beyond hope. The Lord Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He is the Angel, the Seed, the Son, the Lamb. He wants to touch and change your life today. And I would like to invite you to the Lord Jesus in the words of Joseph Hart's best known hymn...

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, lover, and power.

Preview Of Christ

Genesis 22:1-5

Robert Morgan

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here am I," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you..." (Genesis 22:1-5).

In the days of the Scottish Covenanters, John Dick, a lawyer's son, graduated from Edinburgh University intending to become a minister of the Gospel. He didn't make it, for he was among the Presbyterians deemed outlaws during the reign of King Charles II. He lived a fugitive's life till betrayed by a poor woman who later lost her mind over the incident.

John was brought before the Committee of Public Affairs on August 29, 1683, found guilty of treason, and sentenced to die by hanging. The Canongate tollbooth contained two large upper cells, and John, tossed into one of them, found there two dozen other religious prisoners. The men joined hearts in prayer, asking God's help as they planned a mass escape. News seeped out, and Presbyterians all over Edinburgh prayed for a successful breakout. On the appointed night, the men begin sawing painstakingly through the iron bars of their glassless window.

The first bar was cut about nine o'clock, but to the horror of all, before any of them could catch it, it fell down into the narrow street near the sentry. They held their breath and watched and prayed, but no alarm sounded. They continued their furtive work; then one by one, the men dropped from the window and disappeared into the night. The next morning, confusion erupted through official Edinburgh. Police, city fathers, guards and sentries were questioned; but none of the prisoners was ever recaptured.

Except John Dick. He enjoyed but six months of freedom, using the time to write his 58-page "Testimony to the Doctrine, Worship, Discipline, and Government of the Church of Scotland and the Covenanted Work of Reformation in the Three Kingdoms" which, despite its unwieldy title, circulated widely. Then, his book finished, he was captured; and on the scaffold he sang Psalm 2, read Ezekiel 9, and preached his last sermon, saying: "Remember when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son? Isaac said, 'Here is the wood, and the fire, but where is the sacrifice?'" John Dick turned and gazed upon the gallows. "Now blessed be the Lord," he said, "here is the sacrifice." With that his body dangled from the rope and his soul ascended to God.

John Dick quoted from an Old Testament text he had been studying - Genesis 22, the story of Abraham offering Isaac as a sacrifice. He related himself intimately to the story, but perhaps no more so than we should all. Genesis 22 gives us a profound, visceral understanding of the essence of worship. This is, in fact, the first time in the English Bible that the word "worship" occurs. Genesis 22:5 says: He (Abraham) said, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Some of the older expositors often have spoke of what they called the "Law of First Mention." According to this observation, the first time something is mentioned in the Bible sets the tone for the way it is handled throughout Scripture. I think that proves true at least in this instance, and I'd like to draw two lessons for us about worship from this first occurrence of the word in the Bible.

1. God Prescribes The Order Of Worship

First, God prescribes the order of worship. Over the past twenty years, the subject of worship has become faddish among evangelicals. I recently read a book on worship that said that worship was "Number One!" "Prioritize worship above all else," said the author. "It is clearly the most important thing God's people should do... above all else." The author was reflecting a common attitude. Theologian Karl Barth wrote, "Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life." A. W. Tozer wrote, "Worship is man's whole reason for existence. That is why we are born and that is why we are born again from above."

Well, far be it from me to dispute A. W. Tozer on the subject of worship. But in all honesty, I'm a little of a contrarian on this subject. What if someone asked you, "Why are we here? What is our greatest priority? What is the most important thing in the world? Of all the things God told us to do, which is the most important? The greatest?" How would you answer?

A questioner once pushed his way through the crowd and asked Jesus Christ that very question. What is the greatest commandment? The Lord's answer is recorded in Matthew 22 and Mark 12: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first and greatest commandment.

Now, love and worship are admittedly closely related, but they are not indistinguishable. They are not exact synonyms. Many people in the Bible worshipped idols they did not love. And Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, but I don't think he wants us to worship them.

When you look at Genesis 22, you find that Abraham uttered those three words, "We will worship," having first decided that his love for Jehovah was greater than anything else, even than his love for Isaac. A study of Abraham's life shows that he faced four great crises and each of them involved the surrender of something that was very dear to him. The first was when he was called to leave his native land, his family and friends. The second was when he separated from his beloved nephew Lot. The third was when he abandoned his dreams for his son Ishmael. And here in Genesis 22, we have a fourth test of Abraham's love for Jehovah. Notice the way the Lord states it:

Some time later, God tested Abraham (that is, he tested Abraham's love and devotion). He said to him, "Abraham!" "He I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son...

He repeats it: Your only son...

He qualifies it some more: Isaac...

He adds three poignant little words that tells us what this test was all about: whom you love...

...and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.

We humans easily fall in love with things. We fall in love with each other. We fall in love with dreams and ambitions and hopes. We fall in love with possessions. As John put it, we fall in love with the world and with the things that are in the world. And the Lord is always testing us to see if we love our children or our girlfriend or boyfriend or dreams or careers more than we love him.

Is there anything you love more than you love God? Anything you aren't willing to surrender or sacrifice to him? God sometimes tests us to see if our love for him is all supreme. And when Abraham says in verse 5, "We will worship," the worship he talked about resulted as an outflowing of his love.

So I suggest that while love and worship are very closely related, they are not indistinguishable. They are two different words, not exact synonyms. And the latter flows from the former. Within the context of an all-supreme love for the Lord, meaningful worship occurs. And that is the correct order of things. It's also interesting to notice the kind of worship that seemed to be occurring here. So far as we can tell, there was no singing, no preaching, no clapping, none of the usual things that we typically associate with worship. But the attitude and essence of worship is here. What is it? Worship seems to be this: Approaching God out of love, in reverence, and with obedience.

2. God Provides The Object Of Worship

The second lesson in this passage is that God not only prescribes the order of worship, he provides the object of worship. The person of Jesus Christ is found in Genesis in three forms. There are prophecies about him, Messianic predictions. There are Christophanies, special appearances of God as one in human form that many theologians take to be special pre-incarnate appearances of the Second Person of the Trinity. Third, there are types, special objects or events that serve as prototypes of the coming Messiah.

Everything about Isaac in this passage points to his being a type of Christ. Everything about him reminds us of the Lord Jesus, and those who carefully study Genesis 22 find a remarkable series of parallels between Isaac and Immanuel. Let me briefly share 10 of them with you:

- (1) Both Isaac and Jesus were sons of promise. Angels had announced their births in advance, and had even specified their names before conception.
- (2) Both Isaac and Jesus were born miraculously, Isaac to an aged couple well past the child-bearing years, and Jesus to a virgin. In both cases, God tinkered (if I may use that word) with a woman's womb to cause a supernatural conception.
- (3) Both Isaac and Jesus were called the only begotten sons of their fathers, and...
- (4) Both Isaac and Jesus had fathers who were willing to sacrifice their only begotten sons on a hill far away. Many Bible students, in fact, believe that Mount Moriah is actually the mountain later known as Golgotha or Calvary. It is called here in Genesis 22, The mountain of the Lord.
- (5) Both Isaac and Jesus carried the wood up the hill on their own backs - the wood on which they were to be sacrificed.
- (6) Both were to be offered as a burnt offering for sin, and...
- (7) Both obediently, willingly, submissively allowed themselves to be placed to die on the wood they had carried on their backs to the top of the mountain. Both became obedient unto death.
- (8) Both Isaac and Jesus were dead for three days. In Jesus' case, it was a literal death. In Isaac's case, it was figurative, but it was a figure the biblical writers didn't want us to miss. Genesis 22:3 says, "Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance." During those three days, Abraham had grieved for his son as one lost. Hebrews 11:17 says, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice." Is that right? Did Abraham offer Isaac as a sacrifice? Well, he didn't literally plunge the knife into the young man, but yes he offered him as a sacrifice in his heart. The Hebrews 11 passage goes on to say, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking he did receive Isaac back from the dead."
- (9) That leads to the seventh parallel. When did Abraham receive Isaac back from the dead? On the third day. Both Isaac and Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, and...
- (10) Both, being raised up, were given a bride selected by their fathers through whom all the world would be blessed.

To sum it up? What biblical figure fits this description? He was a son of promise, and both his birth and his name were announced in advance. He was conceived miraculously in his mother's womb. He was the only begotten son, and his father was willing to sacrifice him as a burnt offering on a hill far away. He carried the wood on which he was to be sacrificed up the hill on his own back, and he went willingly and submissively. He was dead for three days, then rose from the dead. Being raised up, he took a bride selected by his father and through whom all the world would be blessed.

It all points to Christ, and to make sure we don't miss the significance, the figure or the type suddenly changes. When Isaac asks in verse 7, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb?" Abraham answered with the words, "Jehovah-Jireh" - "God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering." And so he did, the ram in the thicket, the lamb of God, the lamb that prefigures the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain," sang the angels in heaven, "to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise."

God prescribes the order of worship - it flows out of our supreme love for him. And he provides the object of worship - the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

And out of all this comes a promise: Verses 15ff: The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

The promise is this: A life of blessing and usefulness that will touch all the earth flows from the lives of those who love the Lord their

God with all their heart and who worship God through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a present far too small:
Love so amazing, so divine,

Things I've Been Thinking About - Camels

Genesis 24

Robert Morgan

We're in a series of messages on miscellaneous topics. I'm calling the series, "Things I've Been Thinking About," and among the things I've been thinking about are camels. I think camels are one of the funniest animals God created. You can look into the face of any camel God made and what do you see? Somehow they seem to be wise and foolish and amused and grumpy and interested and apathetic—all in one glance. And it's not just their faces—they look funny all over. Some have one hump and some have two. God created them to be perfectly suited for desert travel. Camels have been called the "Ships of the Desert." I don't have time or the expertise to describe how brilliantly God designed the camel, but I'll just give you a couple of examples.

- Do you know why camels have humps? People used to think they were filled with water, but that's not true. Those humps are actually where they store the fat they need to survive. If it were layered all over them, it would make them too hot. So camels have very little fat over most of their bodies; it's stored in their humps. It provides the energy they need while keeping them cooler in the desert.
- But while they have very little fat over their bodies, they do have very thick coats; and these coats are like insulation blankets that protect them from the intense heat of the desert during the day and the intense cold during the night.
- Their long legs also keep their bodies farther from the heat that rises up from the desert floor.
- Their feet are very wide and flat, enabling them to walk on sand without sinking.
- Camels also have a special kind of nostril. When they exhale, their nostrils trap water vapor as they exhale and allow the moisture to be recycled and reabsorbed into their bodies. They also have the capacity of completely closing their nostrils in a sand storm.
- They also have very unusual mechanisms in and around their eyes including very long eyelashes and three eyelids, which allows them to deal with sand storms and blowing sand.
- All in all, camels are more efficiently designed than any desert patrol vehicle used by our military.

This is the creative genius of God; it is evidence of an Intelligent Designer. Well, camels walk across the pages of Scripture from the days of Abraham to the time of Christ. There are 59 references to camels in the Bible, and a number of those references are in the book of Genesis. For example, turn with me to Genesis 24, the chapter in which Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac. Abraham wanted his servant to find a bride for his son from his native land of Mesopotamia, and so he sent him off of this delicate and important mission.

Genesis 24:10 says: Then the servant left, taking with him ten of his master's camels loaded with all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor. He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water.

And the story goes on to describe how the woman Rebekah came out with her jar, and she gave the servant water and also gave water for his camels. Look at verse 19:

After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll water your camels too, until they have had enough to drink." So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels.

In the course of time, the Lord made it clear to everyone that Rebekah was the right woman for Isaac, and so verse 61 says: Then Rebekah and her attendants got ready and mounted the camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left. Now Isaac came back from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?"

And, to make a long story short, Isaac and Rebekah lived happily ever after. The point I want to make is to notice how often these camels are mentioned; and it's not just in this story. It's throughout the book of Genesis.

Well, a few weeks ago a series of stories came out in the newspapers and magazines and on television and all over the Internet. All

of them were claiming that the references to camels in the book of Genesis disproved the book of Genesis. All these articles and reports were claiming that references to camels in the book of Genesis was an anachronism. An anachronism is something that is not in its proper historical or chronological timeframe.

Suppose I want to write a history or biography or maybe a novel about Caesar Augustus, and in that book I tell how he fired a cannon and the cannonball flew through the air and demolished the door of the fortress. Well, any good historian would know that cannons weren't around in Roman days. They were invented in the 1400s. So that would be an anachronism. I probably wouldn't make a mistake like that because we have Wikipedia now, and I can look it up. But in Old Testament days—say, the time of David—they didn't have Wikipedia. King David really had no way of knowing the details of ancient culture, and so it would be easy to make mistakes. So if the book of Genesis had been written in the days of David, it would probably have been filled with anachronisms. There would undoubtedly be lots of errors. Well, unfortunately for the critics, there are not lots of these kinds of errors. In fact, the book of Genesis is remarkably accurate to its times. But now, a few weeks ago, a group of critics were just howling they had found an anachronism—proof the book of Genesis is not authentic to its times. And it had to do with camels.

These articles all came from the same source. Two Hebrew archaeologists were excavating an ancient copper mine on the border between Israel and Jordan. They found some old bones—camel bones. They tested them, and they dated to about the time of David. So these professors—they are both as liberal as can be—did something truly remarkable. They extrapolated a sensational story from their experiment. They claimed that their discovery proved that camels were not domesticated in the Middle East until approximately the time of David. So, they said, any mention of camels in the book of Genesis are spurious, or inaccurate, or a mistake.

The media jumped all over this. I want to read you a few of the headlines.

- The New York Times had this headline on the front page: Camels Had No Business in Genesis. The article said the references to camels provide “telling evidence that the Bible was written or edited long after the events it narrates and is not always reliable as verifiable history.” The article claimed that the book of Genesis was written at very late date and the unknown writer or editors of Genesis mistakenly superimposed camels back into the story.

- Yahoo News carried the story under the headline: “Appearance of Camels in Genesis Called Sign of Authors’ Distance from History.” The article said, “Biblical scholars have long been aware many of the stories and accounts in the sacred book were not written by eyewitnesses, and according to new research, further evidence of that historical distance has appeared in the form of a humpbacked camel. New research using radioactive-carbon dating techniques shows the animals weren’t domesticated until hundreds of years after the events documented in the book of Genesis.”

- National Geographic also carried the story and said, “While there are conflicting theories about when the Bible was composed, the recent research suggests it was written much later than the events it describes. This supports earlier studies that have challenged the Bible’s veracity (or truthfulness) as a historical document.”

- CNN carried the news under the headline: “Will Camel Discovery Break the Bible’s Back?” In very round numbers, the story said that Abraham lived about 2000 B.C., but radiocarbon dating has proved that camels were not domesticated in the Middle East until about 1000 BC. Thus, the book of Genesis is fabricated and flawed, and this one discovery has the potential of breaking the Bible’s back.

- Another headline said: “Study of Camel Bones Suggests the Bible May be Wrong”

- Another: “Camel Archaeology Contradicts the Bible”

- It didn't take long for this sensationalism to seep into the popular culture. I probably shouldn't admit this, but one night a few weeks ago my wife and I were watching an episode of the television program The Big Bang Theory. The lead character is Sheldon Cooper, who is a brilliant scientist and an atheist, and his mother is characterized as a crazy fundamentalist Christian. In the episode I saw, Sheldon was on his way to see his mother and he was thinking of telling her that everyone now knows Genesis isn't true because its references to camels are a historical anachronism.

These things are very troubling to me because they become a compelling narrative in a secular society that doesn't like the Bible to begin with. Stories like this are reported with such authority. The archaeologists speak with so much certainty. The media reports it with so much self-reliance. And there are teenagers, there are college kids,

there are nominal Christians, there are seekers, there are skeptics, who are influenced by all this. This is one of dozens of similar stories that have showed up in the past couple of years that truly erode our perception in the accuracy of the Bible. And you can be sure of one thing. This fall, when Christian students enroll in classes in Western Civilization or some other course at the university, some professor is going to say, “Surely you don't believe in the literal truth of Genesis do you? Why, just this year, archaeologists in

Israel drove another nail into the coffin. The book of Genesis refers to camels when we can now prove that camels weren't domesticated until much later. Even fictional Sheldon Cooper knows that."

Well, let me tell you the real story.

First, this controversy isn't new. These claims about camels have been made for the past hundred years. This so-called news was simply the latest version of an old attack. Scholars have been debating the role of camels in the book of Genesis for a long, long time. What happened earlier this year is simply this: Two liberal archaeologists, who don't believe anything about the Bible anyway, just conducted an experiment on a few old bones found in some ancient copper mines, held a press conference or issued a press release, and pretended to say something new. They got some publicity. They probably got some new funding. The media jumped all over it as though it were a sensational new discovery.

The media ran these sensational headlines, but let me tell you what the media did not do. They did not interview any solid scholars or conduct any research. They certainly didn't talk to any conservative sources.

I can tell you that the claims of these two liberal archaeologists have been long nullified by solid scholarship. There is evidence—tangible evidence, considerable evidence—to indicate camels were, in fact, domesticated in the days of Abraham.

There is a man named Dr. K. A. Kitchen, who is Professor Emeritus of Egyptology at the University of Liverpool in England. He is considered the world's leading expert on the Egyptian Third Intermediate Period. He has written over 250 books and articles, and The Times of London has called him "the very architect of Egyptian chronology." He is respected by Christians and by non-Christians, by liberals and by conservatives. Virtually no one can argue with his brilliance, his knowledge, or his credentials.

One of his books is entitled On The Reliability of the Old Testament. It's a scholarly book and not the easiest book to read, but it's a fabulous book. It was published over ten years ago. It's used in college and universities and seminaries all over the world.

Kitchen points out that while camels are mentioned in Genesis, they are not mentioned that often. They are listed as the last and the least of Abraham's possessions, and they were used in the book of Genesis solely for long-distance travel across the desert. And when we study our historical sources, that is exactly what we find. Camels do not seem to have been as numerous in ancient times as some other domesticated animals (we wouldn't expect them to be), but they were present in the culture and seem to have been used in the period of Genesis for long-distance travel in arid areas. From the early second millennium (the time of the patriarchs) we have the following:

- A camel skull, excavated in Egypt
- A piece of pottery, discovered in Egypt, shaped like a camel
- A figurine, discovered in Babylonia, of a kneeling camel.
- A camel jaw
- A cylinder seal featuring a camel
- References to camels in a ancient Sumerian document

From the late second millennium, we have:

- A figure of a kneeling camel loaded with two jars
- Pictures of camels painted on shards of pottery
- A broken figure of a camel
- Camels are also mentioned in a list of domesticated animals from Ugarit, dating to the old Babylonian period corresponding to the age of the patriarchs.
- Camel bones have been discovered in the ruins of an ancient household in Syria and dating to long before the time of Abraham.
- Furthermore, a Sumerian text from the time of Abraham has been discovered in an ancient city in southeastern Iraq that clearly implies the domestication of camels by its allusions to camels' milk.
- We even have a three-feet long portion of a rope braided out of camel's hair, found in the 1920s and dating from before the day of Abraham.

And, according to Kitchen, there are traces of camels from even earlier. Dr. Kitchen sums it up this way: "There are other traces of camels much earlier, e.g., in Egypt and Arabia in the third millennium, and also in our overall period. But the examples just given should suffice to indicate the true situation: the camel was for long a marginal beast in most of the historical ancient Near East (including Egypt), but it was not wholly unknown or anachronistic before or during (the time of the patriarchs). And there the matter should, on the tangible evidence, rest."

So here is the true story. Camels were not as numerous in the days of Abraham as, say, sheep or goats; and they were primarily used for desert travel. But we have convincing and tangible evidence camels were in use in the areas between Egypt and Babylonia in biblical days and in the days of the book of Genesis. And the sensationalizing of the story of a few bones found in one old copper

mine is intellectually dishonest and disingenuous. The fact is, what we know about camels in archaeology makes it much more likely that Genesis is a trustworthy historical document that presents the story of a culture true to its time.

I'm sure you've never heard a sermon about camels before, and

I know what some of you are thinking—I brought my neighbor to church today and the pastor preached for a half-hour about camels. But, of course, my message isn't really about camels. It's about the authenticity and dependability and trustworthiness and authority of the Bible—the Word of God. So let me end with these four observations.

1. Criticism of the Bible is Louder Than Ever

This is driven, in part, by the new fundamentalist atheism. To me, atheism is the least tenable of the philosophies. To believe in atheism, you have to prove a negative, you have to prove it universally, and you have to prove it permanently. This cannot be rationally or logically done. Atheism is more of a moral and emotional choice than an intellectual and reasoned conclusion. But this new militant atheism is the driving force behind much of today's scholarship and behind much of today's media. That's why we have stories that grab the headlines that represent sensational attacks against the Bible. Remember The Da Vinci Code? Remember the headlines about the Gospel of Judas? Did you see the recently headlines about the wife of Jesus? All kinds of stories show up, but if you look behind the headlines there's nothing there that threatens the truth of the Bible. In fact, the more I look into the attacks the more I find convincing truth of the Bible's reliability. And that leads me to my second observation.

2. The Credibility of the Bible is stronger than ever

3. Curiosity in the Bible is Greater than Ever

People are hungry for truth, and while it troubles me to read the kinds of stories I've alluded to, it does provide an occasion to present the countering facts. So with that in mind, I want to announce today that we're planning a conference this fall, on Veterans' Day weekend, November 7-9. It's particularly for our students—we hope to have hundreds of them here—but it's really for all of us. It's called Grounded, and we're bringing in Sean McDowell. When I was a student, I was greatly helped by a book written by Sean's father, Josh McDowell. It was entitled Evidence that Demands a Verdict. It helped me answer some of the questions I had about the reliability of the Christian faith. Now Sean McDowell has picked up the cause. He's very gifted at connecting with young people about the hard evidence and logical nature of a biblical worldview. He's an assistant professor of apologetics at Biola University, and he also serves as Head of the Bible Depart at Capistrano Valley Christian Schools where he works extensively with high school students. He is listed as among the top 100 apologists in the world, and we're very excited about his being with us. He'll be speaking to our students and to whoever else wants to come over the weekend, and then he's going to stay over and preach for us on Sunday morning, November 9.

This is not just a one-time event. It's the first in a series of events we want to sponsor under this title, Grounded. We want our students and our members to be grounded in confidence of the truthfulness of the Bible. Nothing upsets me more than to hear about the way Christian students are intellectually attacked in the colleges and universities of our nation. Nothing distresses me more than when the liberal media picks up stories from liberal professors and carries them without checking all the facts. But I don't mind the questions, because we have good answers.

4. Confidence in the Bible is Deeper Than Ever

Because the Bible has been proven right about camels in Genesis, I can trust what it says about the providence of God in the book of Romans. Because of its accuracy in small things, I can trust it in big things. This is a book we can trust. We'd be in sad shape if we couldn't trust it, but we can trust it; and we can trust its divine author; and we can trust its great hero and protagonist and subject—our Lord Jesus

Christ. So let me close with this passage in 2 Timothy 4:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.

Jacob's Ladder: Gate of Heaven

Genesis 28:10-22

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised to you."

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel though the city used to be called Luz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth (Genesis 28:10-22).

Every one of us has minds that never sleep, and at night we toss and turn and dream-sometimes sweet dreams, sometimes nightmares. Sometimes we remember our dreams; often we don't. But if we were to take time this morning to share our recent dreams, they would say a lot about us, for our dreams somehow represent the workings of our subconscious minds, and the Lord may occasionally use our dreams to impress us with various important truths.

John Fletcher was a close friend of evangelist John Wesley and one of the great leaders in the early Methodist movement. How did he come to Christ? He knew the Gospel, but he shied away from it until one night he had a terrifying dream of judgment and hell, of standing before God without the hope of Christ. And that nightmare spurred him gave his life to the Lord.

In the history of modern Christian missions, the name A. B. Simpson is well-known, for he established two different missionary societies which later came to be known as the Christian and Missionary Alliance, along with a Bible and missionary training school in Nyack, New York. Part of his burden stemmed from a dream he had. He wrote, It seemed to me that I was sitting in a vast auditorium, and millions of people were there sitting around me. All the Christians in the world seemed to be there, and on the platform was a great multitude of faces and forms. They seemed to be mostly Chinese. They were not speaking, but in mute anguish were wringing their hands, and their faces wore an expression that I can never forget. I had not been thinking or speaking of the Chinese or the heathen world, but as I awoke with that vision on my mind, I did tremble with the Holy Spirit and I threw myself on my knees, and every fiber of my being answered, "Yes, Lord, I will go."

Does God really speak to us in dreams? Not in the sense of giving us new information or special revelation. We have the Bible now, the completed Word of God, and everything we need to know is in this book. We must not add to it or subtract from it. So in the sense of receiving some prophetic word or some extrabiblical communication from God, I don't believe in it. But I do believe that God can use his Word as it works in our subconscious minds, even as we dream, to help us better realize what he wants us to know.

But in Bible times, before the Word of God was fully given and completed, the Lord sometimes spoke to men and women directly and personally in dreams and visions and mental images. It was a form of direct, divine revelation. And one of the most interesting was a dream experienced by Jacob as he slept in the desert with his head resting on a stone. The story is in Genesis 28. Let's just work our way through this passage and see what we can learn.

Verse 10 gives us the background. Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Jacob here is the very picture of you and me without Jesus Christ in our lives. The story behind Jacob's flight to Haran is a sad one. He had lied to his father and stolen his brother's blessing. His heart overflowed with deception and dishonesty. His home was fractured, and he was running for his life from his twin brother who wanted to kill him. He was alone and lonely, and the blackness of night overtook him.

Recently I read the suicide note of a 21-year old woman who took her own life on the Fourth of July. She wrote, "This is my Independence Day-from life. Love and holidays are not for me. I'm tired and no one wants me."

When Kurt Cobain killed himself, he left a note saying, "I feel guilty beyond words."

The Bible teaches that all of us are guilty beyond words. All of us are tired and unwanted. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no not one. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have all turned aside unto our own ways. Jacob was a picture of all of us-tired and unwanted and guilty beyond words. He was a picture of the entire human race without hope and without Christ in the world.

And in this deplorable shape, the darkness overtook him. Read on: When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, and its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

There above it stood the Lord...

High above us stands the Lord, for the Bible teaches that he is high and lifted up. What is he like? What kind of person is God? Well, among other things he is infinite and eternal, and only those who dwell with him have eternal life. The Bible says that God has placed eternity in our hearts. Something within us tells us that we are made for eternity. There is more to life than our brief and fleeting threescore and ten, but God is high and holy and in heaven. We are down here below, in this moral and finite world of sin and sorrow.

This is the vivid picture of Genesis 28. We see a guilty, tired wayfarer down below, sleeping in the dust and sand of earth. High above, we see the infinite God of all creation, the eternal King, pavilioned in the splendor of the heavens. But between them is a vast gulf. What can bridge the gulf? How can we ascend across it? How can we meet God? How can we walk with him and stand in his bright and lovely presence and know him and live with him forever?

There is a ladder, and there is a stairway. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

Now, this is the only time this Hebrew word occurs in the Bible. The King James Version calls it a ladder, and most of the newer translations call it a stairway which I think is more in keeping with what Jacob saw—a huge staircase, terrifyingly tall, reaching so high into the sky that it touches the highest heaven. And it was filled with angels coming and going, ascending and descending.

What is the meaning of this staircase? Well, it obviously means that a staircase exists between earth and heaven. There is a pathway, a gateway, a stairway leading to God. In fact, Jacob himself calls it "the gate of heaven" in verse 17.

And this is what all the world is looking for. Do you remember those imbeciles in Los Angeles who killed themselves last year in a mass suicide because they thought they had found Heaven's Gate? All the world is looking for the gate of heaven, but where is it? Or what is it? Or who is it?

Well, Jacob's ladder wasn't a literal stairway, for he saw it only as a vision or a dream. It represented something. This is one of the most perfect and beautiful symbols or pictures in the Bible, and very easy to understand. I would like for us to compare two verses, one in Genesis and the other in John. By placing these two verses side by side, the full picture comes suddenly into focus.

Genesis 28:12—He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

John 1:51—I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

There is no doubt that Jesus was here identifying himself with Jacob's dream at Bethel. He was saying, in effect, "I am Jacob's Ladder. I am the stairway to heaven. I am the pathway upward to God. I am the bridge that spans the gulf. I am the way to God, to heaven, and to eternal life." Jesus is Jacob's Ladder.

1 Timothy 2: 5 says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men."

Recently I read that illustrates this very well. It was the testimony of a Romanian gentleman named Richard Wurmbrand, who suffered for Christ for many years in Communist prisons. In his book *Tortured for Christ* he tells of his own conversion, how he came to Christ. He said that he was brought up in a Jewish family in which no religion was recognized, and in childhood he received no Christian training. By age 14, he was a confirmed, convinced atheist. He read many atheistic books, and he felt the Bible was the most dangerous volume in the world.

And yet, he felt something missing in his own life. He was an atheist, but atheism did not give peace to his heart. One day, he decided to try praying something, just to see what would happen. He prayed aloud, saying, "God, I know surely that You do not exist. But if perchance you exist, which I contest, it is not my duty to believe in you; it is your duty to reveal yourself to me."

Unknown to him at the same time in a village high in the mountains of Romania, there was a carpenter, a Christian, who also offered an interesting prayer to God: "My God, I have served you on earth and I wish that I should not die before I bring a Jew to Christ, because Jesus was from the Jewish people. But I am poor, old and sick. I cannot go around and seek a Jew. In my village there are none. Bring Thou a Jew into my village and I will do my best to bring him to Christ."

So here were two men, living far apart, unknown to each other, yet both offered an unusual prayer. A young Jewish atheist praying to know if God exists, and an old Christian carpenter praying for the privilege of leading a Jew to the Lord.

Richard Wurmbrand later said, "Something irresistible drew me to that village. I had nothing to do there. Romania has twelve thousand villages. But I went to that village. Seeing I was a Jew, the carpenter courted me as never a beautiful girl had been courted. He saw in me the answer to his prayer and gave me the Bible to read. I had read the Bible out of cultural interest many times before. But the Bible he gave me was another kind of Bible. As he told me afterward, he prayed for hours together with his wife for my conversion. The Bible he gave me was written not so much in words, but in flames of love fired by his prayers. I could scarcely read it. I could only weep over it, comparing my bad life with the life of Jesus; my impurity, my hatred with his love."

And as he read that Bible, Richard Wurmbrand met God through Jesus Christ and spent the rest of his life advancing the Gospel he had previously sought to destroy. He found the gate of heaven.

You can find it, too. The ladder of Jacob is the cross of Jesus Christ. Through his death and resurrection, he opened for us the way to eternal life. The Bible says that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but should have everlasting life.

Perhaps today you're like Jacob, tired and lonely and overtaken with darkness. But this morning stretching out before you is a

stairway to heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, both God and man, who died and rose again open for us heaven's gate. Wouldn't you like to be able to say, in the words of that old Negro spiritual:

We are climbing Jacob's ladder,
We are climbing Jacob's ladder,
We are climbing Jacob's ladder,
Soldiers of the Cross.
Every rung goes higher, higher
Every rung goes higher, higher
Every rung goes higher, higher
Soldiers of the Cross.
Sinner, do you love my Jesus?
Sinner, do you love my Jesus?
Sinner, do you love my Jesus?
Soldiers of the Cross.
If you love him, why not serve him?
If you love him, why not serve him?
If you love him, why not serve him?
Soldiers of the Cross.

Wrestling Jacob

Genesis 32

Robert Morgan

You just couldn't trust this guy; he was always disappointing you. The first time you saw him, he impressed you, for he was rugged and handsome and smart. And he was tender and sensitive with women, and even a good cook. Moreover, he was a wealthy man, heir to a fortune. His smile could melt icebergs, and it recurrently flickered and detonated across his well-formed face. His eyes conveyed both warmth and sincerity, and he made you think he'd do anything in the world for you.

But he wouldn't. It was all facade, all an act. Beneath the tan, the tenderness, and the smile lurked the heart of a snake. He dreamed of ways of deceiving his own father and stealing from his twin brother. His very name, Jacob, meant "Deception." He broke promises like a hiker breaking twigs in a forest. You just couldn't trust him.

That is, until the Lord got hold of him. And the Lord got hold of him quite literally. He leaped on him physically, yanked him to the ground, and wrestled with him throughout the night.

As Wesley put it:

Oh, come thou traveler yet unknown
Whom still I hold but cannot see.
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with thee.
With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

Moses put it this way: Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Gen. 32:24-26).

Today we're coming to the end of our series of messages entitled First Impressions: Glimpses of Jesus in Genesis. As we wrap up our study, it's a good time to review what we've learned, and our most basic truth is this: The entire Bible, Genesis to Revelation, spins around the person of Jesus Christ like a great wheel of 66 spokes around a hub. Jesus told the skeptics who didn't believe in him that they should search the Old Testament Scriptures. "If you believed Moses," he said, "you would believe me, for he wrote about me."

So even in Genesis, written 1600 years before Christ and describing events that occurred 2000 years before Christ... even in this opening book of the Bible, we see Jesus Christ on virtually every page. During the last several weeks, I've delineated three major ways in which Christ is presented in Genesis. Can you remember them? First, we see him in the prophecies about him in Genesis. There are three—Genesis 3:15, Genesis 12:3, and Genesis 49:10. Second, Jesus is seen in the prototypes, and we discussed several of them: Adam, the Lamb of God, the Ark of Noah, Melchizedek, Isaac, and Jacob's Ladder. Third, we see Jesus in Genesis

not only through prophecies describing him and types prefiguring him, but also in special, pre-incarnate appearances that he actually made.

In the New Testament, Jesus literally became a man at Bethlehem, but in the Old Testament he would sometimes appear in human form. There are many of these appearances in Genesis, but in this series we're only taking time to look at two of them—last week at Abraham's mysterious guests, and this week at Jacob's Wrestler in Genesis 32.

Here is the full story. In this chapter, Jacob was returning to Palestine with his family and flocks. He was nervous, because, as I implied, he had previously deceived and betrayed his twin brother Esau, and Esau had tried to kill him. Many years have now passed, but Jacob didn't know if Esau had forgiven him. He suspected the bitterness still lingered, and as journeyed back home, he sent messengers to find out.

When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape" (Gen. 32:6-8).

Then Jacob, who had never been a religious man, decided he had better pray about things. Some people only pray when they are in trouble, and that seems to have been Jacob's pattern. Notice how he addressed God. He didn't say, "O my God," but...

"O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted'" (vss 9-12).

Jacob proceeded to make some preparations as nightfall stole over the desert. Now we have one of the most unusual scenes in all of Scripture:

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he replied.

"Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip (vss 22-31).

This bizarre incident almost seems like it doesn't belong in the Bible. If you accept the fact that this wrestler was the Lord Jesus Christ himself in a special pre-Bethlehem, preincarnate appearance, then it seems even more peculiar. Have you ever in your wildest imaginations pictured Jesus Christ leaping out of the darkness, jerking a man to the ground, then rolling around all night long in a knock-down, drag-out, free-for-all, exchanging head locks and arm twists and take downs?

Well, actually, this is something the Lord Jesus does quite frequently. He has wrestled me to the ground a few times. He has had me in a headlock before. He's had me pinned to the ground. And as I read this passage I identified pretty strongly with Jacob. There are three stages to this wrestling march in Genesis 32, and it illustrates perfectly how the Lord often works with us.

Jacob Wrestled With God—And Lost

First, Jacob wrestled with God—and lost. Now the two combatants seemed fairly evenly matched. I suppose the Lord allowed it that way so as to wear Jacob down. I suppose it is also possible that the Lord laid aside his supernatural, infinite, glorious might to wrestle in the simple human strength that he would later possess as a human being. You may remember that in the Gospels, Jesus grew tired and weary. He grew hungry and thirsty. He felt asleep from exhaustion on the raging sea. He was not a superman, he was quite ordinary as far as his humanity was concerned. Well, here it says that the two men wrestled until daybreak, and the heavenly wrestler was not able to prevail—until he touched the socket of Jacob's hip and put his hip out of joint.

He immobilized him. He touched him with pain. He conquered him.

Some of you may be struggling with God, but you can't win. You're saying, "I might go to church and I'll try to live a good life, but I'm not going to get very serious about this Christianity thing. I have an agenda for my life, I have my dreams and goals and habits. And I'm not going to turn them over to Christ. I'm going to live the way I want to live." You're struggling with God. You're wrestling with the Almighty. And you can't win, and sometimes the Lord has to hurt us to help us.

Jacob Clung To God—And Won

Jacob wrestled with God—and lost. But then, in his pain and defeat and perplexity, he clung to God and won. Genesis 32 says: When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

And what did Jacob do? He could no longer wrestle. His fight was gone because the pain was shooting through him like liquid fire. He could only cling to the one who had caused his pain. He could only clasp the one who had subdued him, and beg for blessing. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Then the man said,

"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and men, and have overcome." Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

When the Lord finally subdues our stubborn self-centered, willful pride and humbles us, we begin to recognize him as he is, and it makes us want to cling to him for blessing. Then what?

Jacob Limped From God—And Served

Then we limp from God to serve. Verse 30ff says: So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

But Jacob was a different man. He was limping, but he had never walked taller. He was in pain, but he had never been happier. His stubborn, self-destructive pride had been broken, and he was now free to serve God in true humility. This was the turning point of his life.

The other night I read the story of a man very much like Jacob. It was such a disturbing story, that I couldn't go to sleep until I had finished it, and then I couldn't go to sleep because I had finished it. It was the story of Howard Rutledge. Howard had grown up attending Sunday School in a Southern Baptist church in Tulsa, but he dropped out of church in his late teens. Then he married and joined the Navy. Now he seldom had time for church. He was too busy. He had more important things to do.

He was sent to Vietnam where he became a flight leader on a carrier in the Gulf of Tonkin. He flew 200 missions successfully, but one day he was sent to destroy a strategic bridge deep into North Vietnam, and his plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire. He bailed out and was immediately captured and stripped naked and imprisoned. For the next seven years he suffered indescribably.

During those long periods of enforced reflection, it became so much easier to separate the important from the trivial, the worthwhile from the waste. For example, in the past, I usually worked or played hard on Sundays and had no time for church. For years Phyllis encouraged me to join the family at church. She never nagged or scolded—she just kept hoping. But I was too busy, too preoccupied, to spend one or two short hours a week thinking about the really important things.

Now the sights and sounds and smells of death were all around me. My hunger for spiritual food soon outdid my hunger for a steak. Now I wanted to know about that part of me that will never die. Now I wanted to talk about God and Christ and the church. But in Heartbreak Hotel there was no pastor, no Sunday School teacher, no Bible, no hymnbook, no community of believers to guide and sustain me. I had completely neglected the spiritual dimension of my life. It took prison to show me how empty life is without God, and so I had to go back in my memory to those Sunday School days in the Nogals Avenue Baptist Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma. If I couldn't have a Bible and hymnbook, I would try to rebuild them in my mind.

I tried desperately to recall snatches of Scripture, sermons, the gospel choruses from childhood, and the hymns we sang in church. The first three dozen songs were relatively easy. Every day I'd try to recall another verse or a new song.

Most of my fellow prisoners were struggling like me to rediscover faith, to reconstruct workable value systems. Harry Jenkins lived in a cell nearby during much of my captivity. Often we would use those priceless seconds of communication in a day to help one another recall Scripture verses and stories.

How I struggled to recall those Scriptures and hymns! I had spent my first 18 years in a Southern Baptist Sunday School, and I was amazed at how much I could recall; regrettably, I had not seen then the importance of memorizing verses from the Bible or learning Gospel songs. Now, when I needed them, it was too late. I never dreamed I would spend almost seven years in a prison in North Vietnam or that thinking about one memorized verse could have made a whole day bearable. One portion of a verse I did remember was, "Thy word have I hid in my heart." How often I wished I had really worked to hide God's Word in my heart. I put my mind to work. Every day I planned to accomplish certain tasks. I woke early, did my physical exercises, cleaned up as best I could, then began a period of devotional prayer and meditation. I would pray, hum hymns silently, quote Scripture, and think about what the verses meant to me.

All this talk of Scripture and hymns may seem boring to some, but it was the way we conquered our enemy and overcame the power of death around us.

And then, Howard was subjected to torture in a room dubbed the Outhouse. It was so hot in there that it was hard to breath. It was a simple torture. He was shackled in a painful position and left immobilized. The room was full of mosquitoes and rats and lizards that tormented him. He had to relieve himself in his clothing. He suffered severe dysentery, and he grew weaker and weaker. For 28 days he sat in his own filth, unable to move, covered with insects. He said:

After 28 days of torture, I could remember I had children but not how many. I said Phyllis's name over and over again so I would not forget. I prayed for strength. It was on that 28th night I made God a promise. If I survived this ordeal, the first Sunday back in freedom I would take Phyllis and my family to their church and at the close of the service confess my faith in Christ and join the church. This wasn't a deal with God to get me through that last miserable night. It was a promise made after months of thought. It took prison and hours of painful reflection to realize how much I needed God and the community of believers.

Howard was finally released in 1973 and reunited with his family. On his flight to freedom as he returned to San Diego he rehearsed what he was going to say to Phyllis.

First, I would tell her of my resolution made that torturous night in the Outhouse, when I promised God that the first Sunday of my return I would take my family to church. I had gone away a church dropout. I was returning transformed.

Second, I was determined to begin applying God's Word in our family's life together, even in the smallest things.

Third, I can't remember ever praying with Phyllis during our entire married life. In fact, the more involved I got in my career the less

we ever really talked with each other, let alone God. This had to change, and prayer seemed the perfect way to start. So I resolved to end each day with Phyllis, talking over the day's activities and thanking God for the love we felt from each other and from him. And Howard ended his book saying that while things would be getting back to normal in the Rutledge household, things would never be the same.

This is very often the way the Lord has to deal with his proud, self-sufficient, stubborn creatures. He wants to turn Jacobs into Israels. He wants to turn sinners into more than conquerors. He wants to transform us into his image.

And so we wrestle with him only to lose. We cling to him only to win. We limp from him only to serve.

Where are you in that process?

Saintly George Matheson once wrote:

Make me a captive, Lord,

And then I shall be free.

Force me to render up the sword,

And I shall conqueror be.

I sink in life's alarms,

When by myself I stand.

Imprison me within thy arms

And strong shall be my stand.

ADVERSITY INTO ADVANTAGE

Genesis 37, 39, 50

Robert Morgan

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them (Genesis 50:18-21, NIV).

One day a couple of months ago as I pondered this series of sermons, I asked our sound technician, Wade Kilgore, a question. "Wade, can you think of anything in your life that was very bad, but it turned out good?"

"You mean like the time the police burst into my house when I was ten?" he replied. That piqued my interest. "My dad was a drug dealer," he explained, "and my mother was an alcoholic. One night, the police rushed into our house, arrested my dad, and he later went to prison. My mom and little sister started screaming, and I knew I had to be strong; so as calmly as I could, I went into the back room and called my grandparents. They came and took my sister and me home with them, and they ended up raising us."

"What good came from that?" I asked.

"Well, one night shortly afterward, my grandparents dropped me off at a nearby church that was having Vacation Bible School, and that evening I asked Jesus to be my Savior. A man in the church took an interest in me, and he would pick me up and take me to church. Pretty soon the church asked me to give a devotional thought every Sunday, but I had to stand on a stool behind the pulpit to do it. The man who brought me to church every Sunday also ran the sound board during the worship service, and he let me help him. By age eleven, I was running the sound by myself. In that little church it amounted to little more than turning on the power at the beginning of the service and turning it off at the end. But I loved doing it. I've been doing it ever since. Here in Nashville, I work during the week for recording companies and sound studios, but it's what I do at church for the Lord that I most enjoy. This is the career and ministry God gave me, and none of it would have happened had it not been for that terrible night when I was ten."

Then he added, "Did I mention that Romans 8:28 is my Life Verse? All the bad things that happened to me during my childhood and teenager years have really turned out for my good. I can see it now."

Genesis 50:20 is the Old Testament counterpart to Romans 8:28. It was spoken by Prime Minister Joseph of Egypt after a lifetime of personal disasters and bitter disappointments. The Bible devotes the final section of its first book (Genesis 37-50) to telling us this story. Why so much space? First, the Lord wanted us to know the critical elements of the early history of the Jewish people so

that we could trace the lineage of the Messiah. Second, the Lord gives us Joseph as an early case study of the overruling power of Divine Providence for those who love God and who are called according to His purpose. Genesis 37-50 shows us that God can use the darker threads of life to weave together a beautiful tapestry.

God is so good to do this, and to do it so early in the Bible. It takes time to trace the providential care of God's sovereign oversight of our lives. In the middle of a crisis or difficulty, nothing makes sense. We have to look back at things from the perspective of elapsed time, like a motorist who finally makes it to the top of the mountain and then, from the overlooking bluff, can make sense of the twists and turns in the road. It takes weeks, or months, or years. With Joseph, his life was an ongoing nightmare from the time he was seventeen until he was thirty, and it wasn't until many years later that the purposes of God became reasonably clear. It was not until the very last chapter of Genesis that he said, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

But God collapsed his story like a telescope into about a dozen chapters of Scripture so that we can sit down in fifteen or twenty minutes and read his life's story from beginning to end. We can learn the life-lessons about the truth of Romans 8:28 in this abbreviated and inspired biography. God deliberately placed at the beginning of Scripture a vivid story of His providential control over the life of His children to show us the wondrous truth which would later be articulated in Romans 8:28.

We can sum up Joseph's story using four words.

The Pasture

The story begins in Genesis 37:2-4: "Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him."

On the face of it, Joseph lived an idyllic life. He was seventeen. He had the coolest clothes of anybody around. He had the love and support of his dad. He had a good job, and his job gave him lots of time for solitude and kept him out of the mainstream of stress and tension. All of this is symbolized by his multi-colored or richly ornamented coat.

Sometimes in life, everything seems to be wonderful. We can rise from bed each day and sing, "Oh, what a beautiful morning! Oh, what a beautiful day! I have a wonderful feeling everything's going my way." We thank God for tranquil and happy periods of life. Isn't it wonderful when we have such times? It's like a little foretaste of heaven and of eternity.

And yet things are never really idyllic on this earth. There were already stress fractures occurring around Joseph's life. For one thing, his father was showing favoritism and creating a very destructive situation in the home. Second, there were extremely bad blended-family issues here, with deep-seated antipathy between the step-siblings.

None of us come from perfect environments. I loved my parents very dearly, and still do. But they were not perfect, nor have I been a perfect dad. Far from it. Every family has faults and failures, and those faults and failures can stay with us a long time. Can God use them for good? Can the Lord bring gladness and wholeness out of dysfunction? Well, the answer is "Yes!"—and that's one of the lessons Joseph can teach us.

But there was another problem, and it was Joseph himself. He appeared to be a little cocky and immature, and that didn't make things any better. As we'll see, he was handsome and well-built, and he seemed to know it. He was ambitious, and he seemed to show it. He tattled on his brothers, flaunted his multi-colored coat, and openly bragged about his dreams of grandeur. Look at verse 5ff (NIV): "Joseph had a dream and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, 'Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.' His brothers said to him, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said."

Can God take our youthful immaturities and mistakes and turn them for our good later in life? Yes, the story of Joseph tells us that God can bring good out of parental failure, family dysfunction, and youthful immaturity—when we learn to love Him and respond to His call on our lives. When we take our situations, whatever they are, and place them under the redemptive blood of Christ, the sovereign workings of God's providence are activated in our situations so as to work all things together for good. For in coming years, Joseph would say: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

The Pit

The next step for Joseph, however, was the pit. He went from the pasture to the pit. As we continue reading Genesis 37, we see that one day Jacob called for Joseph and sent him to check on his brothers, who were herding the flocks in an area some distance away. His brothers harbored deep animosity and jealousy toward the teenager, and the undercurrents of anger ran very deeply in that family.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing—and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. So when the Medianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekles of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt” (Genesis 37:23-28, NIV).

The brothers got the shekles and Joseph got the shackles. One of the most interesting things about this story in Genesis 37 is that Joseph’s reaction is not given. What did he say? What did he do? How did he feel? Did he say, “Oh, dear! This isn’t good, but God will use it for good in my life? I shouldn’t be too upset; in fact, I’m going to rejoice because God is in control”?

That would have been the most mature perspective, but we don’t often respond that way the first time we’re faced with a crisis. In Joseph’s case, he was terrified and terrorized. He begged and cried and pleaded and wept. How do we know? There is not a single word in verse 37 that tells us this. In Genesis 37, we’re only given the externals of Joseph’s situation, not the internals of his responses. But we have one verse later on that tells us of his immediate reaction. Years later, when these treacherous brothers themselves face staggering issues, here is what they said: “They said to one another, ‘Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen’” (Genesis 42:21, NIV). The Living Bible says, “We saw his terror and anguish and heard his pleadings.”

Terror. Distress. Anguish. Pleadings. One moment he was the favored son of a wealthy family, the teenager with great dreams and idyllic ambitions, dressed in a multi-colored coat of honor, stationed in the pastures of Palestine watching his flock. The next moment, he was stripped of his clothing, stripped of his family, stripped of his father’s love, stripped of his ambitious dreams, thrown into a pit, and destined for either death or slavery.

One of the most frightening things about life is how quickly it can all change, in an instant, in a moment. When I was growing up, a family lived across the street from us. One day the father and mother were at a Christian campground, having a picnic, laughing and enjoying the company. Then came the sudden news that their oldest son, a teenager, had drowned in Watauga Lake. Never again as long as she lived could that woman visit that camping ground. The memories of that horrible moment were too great, and her life was never again the same.

Life is so uncertain and fragile that it would be easy to live in utter fear and anxiety all the time, for life is so tentative and the future is so unknown. But though Joseph’s brothers meant it for evil, God intended it for good. This turn of events took Joseph unawares, but God wasn’t surprised by it, and He was determined to work all things together for good in Joseph’s life. In fact, these events which seemed to be devastating were actually the tools God would use to protect Joseph’s family, preserve the Jewish people, and safeguard the Messianic line.

When we give ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, we can rest in His overruling providential ordering of all the events of our lives. The world and the devil may strip us for a time of our comforts, our dreams, our necessary supplies, our seeming well-being. But they cannot pry us from the invisible hand of God’s sovereign care.

Arriving in Egypt, Joseph was taken to the slave market. Psalm 105:18 says, “They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons” (NIV). He was undoubtedly prodded and poked and inspected by the traffickers in human flesh, and because he was so well-built, handsome, and intelligent, he was purchased by an Egyptian official named Potiphar, and he became his steward.

At this point we begin to notice a very interesting phrase that occurs several times in the account of Joseph in these chapters of Genesis. If you read the story of Joseph carefully, you cannot miss it. The Bible says, “But the Lord was with Joseph... But the Lord was with Joseph....”

Genesis 39:2-4 says, “The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned” (NIV).

But just when it appeared that Joseph's string of heartaches was lessening and his situation was stabilizing, another storm burst upon his vulnerable life:

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused... And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

The Prison

Joseph decided it was better to lose his cloak than his character; but I wonder how he felt to be falsely accused of attempted rape and sent to prison. I read in the newspaper that just last week, a man named Brandon Moon testified before a Texas State Senate Committee about his experience. He was convicted of rape and spent seventeen years in prison before DNA evidence exonerated him. It's hard to conceive of what that is like, but that is exactly what happened to Joseph.

Well, many years passed as Joseph languished in prison. But look at what it says in Genesis 39: "But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; He showed him kindness and granted him favor.... The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did" (vv. 20, 23, NIV).

That doesn't mean that he didn't have on-going problems and disappointments. In chapter 40, two new inmates are thrown into the prison. One is the Pharaoh's cupbearer, and the other is the royal baker. Both have strange dreams which Joseph interpreted. The outcome wasn't so good for the baker, but the cupbearer was restored to his position of authority in response to Joseph's predictions. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him before the powers that be, but the cupbearer, being restored to power, put the terrors of his incarceration behind him and forgot all about Joseph. And two full years passed.

This wasn't a quick set of difficulties for Joseph. It was an ongoing nightmare that lasted from the age of seventeen to the age of thirty. The entire decade of his twenties was spent in miserable captivity, a foreign slave in the incarceration of slavery and imprisonment.

But God was not inactive. He wasn't sleeping. He didn't forget. He was watching o'er his own. And in the fullness of God's timing, one night Pharaoh had a nightmare, and it was so vivid he sensed it was a dream from God. He just didn't know how to interpret it. As Pharaoh described his disturbing dream, the royal cupbearer suddenly remembered how Joseph had interpreted his own prison dream, and he suggested Pharaoh call for him. That's when we have the next change of locale for Joseph:

"So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires" (Genesis 41:14-16, NIV).

The Palace

To make a long story short, Joseph correctly interpreted Pharaoh's dream and in the process he made a powerful impression on the king of Egypt. He was instantly elevated to the office of Prime Minister and within hours, the slave boy and prisoner became the most powerful official of the land. That involved another change of wardrobe. He exchanged his prison rags for royal robes. Look at Genesis 41:41ff (NIV):

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second in-command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.... Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt.

It was under the wise administration of Joseph that Egypt was saved from famine, that the Hebrew people were saved from

starvation, that his father's house was spared from drought, that the Jewish people were placed in an incubator where they would multiply into a great nation, and that the Messianic seed was preserved and protected as it made its way through the generations toward the ultimate birth of the Savior of the world.

In his book on the providence of God, R. C. Sproul points out how all of human and divine history was changed by the simple gesture of Jacob giving Joseph a Technicolor coat. He pointed out that if there had been no coat, there would not have been as much envy and jealousy among the brothers. There would have therefore been no selling of Joseph to the Midianite traders. There would have been no journey to Egypt. No Potiphar. No Potiphar's wife. No prison. No meeting with the cupbearer and baker. No meeting with Pharaoh. And Joseph would never have become Prime Minister. If Joseph had never become Prime Minister, the Jews would never have settled in the land of Goshen. There would have been no imprisonment of the tribes of Israel. No Moses. No Exodus.

Without the Exodus, there would have been no Law given at Mount Sinai, no subsequent history of redemption, no unfolding of the history of Jesus Christ as we know it. And we could go on and on and on, even to our own day and to the unfolding events happening today in Israel and in the Middle East as we anticipate our Lord's return.[1]

Of course, God never leaves Himself without the necessary ways and means of accomplishing His eternal decrees. But it does show us that even the smallest details of our lives—all the inconveniences, all the trials and tribulations, all the suffering and struggles—are woven into the tapestry of His providence for our lives and for human history.

In other words, Joseph went from the pasture to the pit, from the pit to the prison, and from the prison to the palace—and every step along the way God was with Him, causing all things to work together for good under the omnipotent hand and omniscient mind of His Sovereignty.

The words Sovereign and Sovereignty are great terms in the Bible. They occur 305 times in the New International Version. The prefix sov means "over," and the stem reign means to rule from the throne. When we speak of God's sovereignty, we mean that He rules and reigns from His throne, and He rules and He reigns over all.

A young man came to me yesterday and said, "I've been reading about the subject of the sovereignty of God, and it has changed my life. It is the most liberating and empowering truth I've ever found in my Bible study."

I've been reading the studies of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Romans 8, and I've been amazed at how bold he is in presenting a certain truth. He wrote about how inappropriate it is for Christians to be in despair or to sink in depression. He said, "Any Christian who is unhappy because of suffering, or who is guilty of any of the things I have mentioned under my negative headings, is found in such a condition for one reason only, namely, that he has not been thinking clearly.... (He) has not grasped the doctrines...."[2]

Most people today have little use for theology and doctrine, but there is not a more comforting, bracing, or beneficial thing in all the world than discovering the doctrines and the truths of the Sovereignty of God, ruling and overruling the lives of His children, as a part of our inheritance and blessing in Christ Jesus our Lord. The devil may mean it for evil, but God intends it for good; for all things work together for good to those who know the Lord and who are called according to His purposes.

Praise ye the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth,
Shelters thee under His wings, yes, so gently sustaineth!
Hast thou not see how thy desires e'er have been
Granted in what He ordaineth?
(Joachim Neander)

1 R. C. Sproul, *The Invisible Hand* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 1996/2003) p. 95.

2 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The Final Perseverance of the Saints—Exposition of Chapters 8:17-39* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 24.

When I was a boy, I would sometimes burrow under the covers and listen on my little transistor radio to the old Bible teacher, M. R. DeHaan, who years ago started a radio program called the Radio Bible Class. His voice was rough and unrefined like sandpaper, but he spoke with unusual power. He finally grew old and ill, but as he neared death he tried with all his strength to finish a final series of lessons on the Radio Bible Class. He called it Portraits of Christ in Genesis. He said that he had originally wanted to preach a series of studies entitled Portraits of Christ in the Bible. But while collecting material, he realized it was a hopeless undertaking. So he limited it to Portraits of Christ in the Old Testament. But again he soon realized that it was too massive an undertaking. So he narrowed it to Portraits of Christ in the Pentateuch (the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible). But after completing the first chapter, decided that it was enough to simply present the portraits of Christ found in the first book of the Bible alone, the book of Genesis. DeHaan said, "If we search long enough we shall find upon every page of Scripture, standing somewhere in the shadow, the outline of the central Person of the Book—the Lord Jesus Christ."

Well, we don't have to search very long to find him in the book of Genesis, and thus we are now ourselves in a series of studies entitled First Impressions—Glimpses of Jesus in Genesis. Today we are coming to our third message, and what we have said so far is this: The book of Genesis contains three prophecies regarding a coming redeemer. These are not full-blown, well-developed predictions. They are hints, seeds, inklings of things to come, promises in embryo. But from them springs up and grows the entire body of Old Testament Messianic prophecy.

The first one is Genesis 3:15, given to the serpent, Lucifer in the Garden of Eden. The Lord said to him, "I will put a hostile attitude between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. And he, the Seed of Woman, the Son of the Virgin, will crush your head, and in the process you will strike his heel." And so Jesus Christ came, crushing the head of the devil. He destroyed him, though in the process he himself was struck on the heel.

The second major prediction about the coming Christ is found in Genesis 12. That chapter begins with God giving Abraham seven promises, the last one being this: And in you will all the nations of the earth be blessed. That seventh promise is repeated six more times in the Bible, and so the seventh promise is found seven times in all in the Bible. In Genesis 12: And in you will all the nations of the earth be blessed. In Genesis 18: And in you will all the nations of the earth be blessed. In Genesis 22: And in your seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed. In Genesis 26, the same promise is repeated to Isaac: In you and your seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed. In Genesis 28, the same promise is given to Jacob in a dream as he sleeps, his head resting on a rock. In Galatians 3, Paul says that this sentence, found originally in Genesis 12, is a prediction of the coming Christ, the seed or offspring of Abraham in whom all the world is blessed. And Peter also said in Acts 3 that Jesus is the one through whom all the world is blessed. And how does he bless us? By turning each of us from our wicked ways.

Now there is one last great prophecy in Genesis about the coming of the Messiah, and it is found in Genesis 49:

Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs [KJV: until Shiloh come] and the obedience of the nations is his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk (vss. 8-12).

This prediction is given about 1800 years before Christ, but already the lineage of the Messiah is being established—he will come through the tribe of Judah. Think of it like this. If you asked me my address I would tell you that I am at 2723 Pennington Bend, Nashville, Tennessee in the United States of America. If, then, you wanted to visit me, you would immediately eliminate all the other countries of the world and focus on the United States. Of all the states in the United States, forty-nine of them would be eliminated and one, Tennessee, would be chosen. Of all the cities in Tennessee, all but Nashville would be eliminated. Of all the streets in Nashville, all but Pennington Bend would be eliminated. Of all the houses on Pennington Bend, all of them would be rejected except 2723. And of all the people living in my house, all of them would be rejected except me. I would be located by my name and address.

The Old Testament tells us how to locate Jesus Christ in history. We are told that he would be of Adam, through Seth, through Noah, through Shem, through Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob, through Judah, through Jesse, through David, through Solomon.

Of all the sons of Adam, all were eliminated and Seth was chosen. Of all the descendants of Seth, all were eliminated but Noah was chosen. Of the three sons of Noah, two were eliminated and Shem was chosen. Of the descendants of Shem, all were rejected except Abraham who was chosen. Of the two sons of Abraham, Ishmael was rejected and Isaac was chosen. Of the two sons of Isaac, Esau was rejected and Jacob was chosen. Of the twelve sons of Jacob, eleven were rejected and one—Judah—was chosen. Of all the families of Judah, only the family of Jesse was chosen. Of the sons of Jesse, all were rejected but the boy David. Of the sons of David, all were rejected except the line of Solomon.

As incredible as it seems, the Old Testament is not primarily the story of the human race or of the Jewish race. It is the story of the one family from whom the Messiah is going to come.

Here in Genesis 49, we are told that the Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah. These are the words of man Jacob, an old man and ready to die. He gathers his twelve sons about him (who will become the twelve tribes of Israel), and he makes certain

predictions or prophecies about them, one by one. You would have thought that the greatest blessings and prophecies would be on the firstborn son, Reuben, in keeping with the times. But Reuben in passed over, and we are told that the greatest blessings will flow through the tribe of Judah.

The Leader

There are three things about this passage to notice. In verse 8, the tribe of Judah is described as being the leader. Jesus descended from the tribe of Judah, and this verse seems especially suggestive for in it Jacob predicts that three groups of people will one day bow down before Judah: Your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. Your brothers, your enemies, and your father's sons.

That reminds us of the three classes of people who will one day acknowledge the supremacy of Christ: his brothers according to the flesh, the Jews; the Gentiles who will line up against him in the latter days; and his father's children, the church. The Seed of the tribe of Judah is the Leader.

The Lion

Second, in verse 9, Judah is likened to a lion: You are a lion's cub, O Judah; your return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him.

Almost certainly John the Apostle, exiled on the Island of Patmos, had this passage in mind when he described Jesus Christ as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

The Lord

But now within this context, we come to the key text. Verse ten is a major passage in Genesis relating to the coming of the Messiah. It tells us that the Seed of Judah is not only the Leader and the Lion. He is the Lord. Look at the verse carefully: The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs [margin: until Shiloh comes] and the obedience of the nations is his.

What does it mean when it says, "The scepter will not depart from Judah..."? A scepter is a staff or baton, usually gold and perhaps encrusted with precious stones, that is a symbol of authority. If you visit the Tower of London and see the exhibition of the crown jewels of the monarchy, there is a scepter there. It was handed to Queen Elizabeth when she was enthroned as a symbol of her authority. So when it says, "The scepter will not depart from Judah...until..." it means that Judah is going to become the chief of the tribes of Israel until a certain thing happens.

Let's read on: The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet... What does that mean? It means basically the same thing. Archaeologists have found monumental carvings of ancient Persian kings. The king in such a carving is often sitting on his throne, with a long ruler's staff placed between his feet and resting on his shoulder or held in his hand. So Jacob is making a prediction here. He is saying that among the twelve sons or the twelve tribes that will make up the nation of Israel, one of them—the tribe of Judah—will rise to a position of prominence and be the dominant tribe until something happens. Or, to be more specific, until someone comes.

Until he comes to whom it belongs. To whom what belongs? The scepter. The ruler's staff. Someone is coming, and all the power and the authority belong to him. He will be leader and ruler and Lord, and in his hands will rest the scepter and the ruler's staff. The tribe of Judah will be the leading tribe until it produces this one, this Messiah, this leader, and then the tribe of Judah will disappear from prominence.

All of which is exactly what happened. For many years after Jacob made this prediction, no leading tribe emerged. Moses came from the tribe of Levi. Joshua came from the tribe of Ephraim. Gideon came from the tribe of Manasseh. Samson came from the tribe of Dan. Samuel came from Ephraim and Saul from Benjamin. But then, 640 years after Jacob's prophecy, David, the son of Jesse, became king. What tribe was he from? The tribe of Judah. And from that point on, Judah was the dominant tribe. Eventually the northern ten tribes were defeated by Assyria, and only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin survived. And they collectively became known as the tribe of Judah.

And Matthew and Luke tell us that from this tribe, from the house and lineage of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David, a child was born to whom the scepter and the ruler's staff belonged. And then, seventy years after the birth of Christ, the Roman Empire overthrew the nation of Israel, burning down the temple, destroying all the precious genealogical tables of the Jews. The ancient tribes all lost their identities. The tribe of Judah, in effect, ceased to exist.

The scepter and the ruler's staff resided with the tribe of Judah until he came to whom it belonged.

Now, there is a second reading to this verse. The King James Versions says: The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come. The word "Shiloh" means "Rest" or "Peace" or "Giver of Rest and Peace." So if this rendering is correct, it adds another dimension. The scepter and the ruler's staff will remain in the tribe of Judah until the one comes who gives us rest and peace.

In either case, this is a remarkable prediction—that the Messiah could come, not from the line of the firstborn Reuben, but from the line of Judah, and that Judah would be the dominate tribe among the twelve right up until the one comes who along has the right to hold the scepter, who along gives rest and peace.

The Obedience of the Nations

And there is a final phrase in verse 10: And the obedience of the nations is his. In what way is the obedience of the nations his? In

three ways.

First, the obedience of the nations is his in a providential sense. Jesus Christ makes all the nations obey him through the almighty hand of his providence. What he doesn't rule, he overrules. As we have said on Sunday nights as it relates to Daniel, history is his story, and his invisible hand directs the affairs of the nations even when they don't realize it. He is ordering the affairs of this world toward his appointed ends.

Here's an example. King Philip II of Spain wanted to destroy the evangelical faith of justification by grace through faith. He wanted to obliterate the Protestant cause, and to do that he knew that he had to topple England's Queen Elizabeth, who supported the Protestants. In 1586, he conspired to assassinate her. When that failed, he readied his navy, the largest and strongest on earth, to invade her land. It was a critical hour for Protestantism. Elizabeth's defeat would have meant ultimate disaster for Protestants in England and everywhere in Europe.

Philip said he was trusting God to send him favorable weather. On May 30, 1588, he fell to his knees before his "Invincible Armada," prayed for victory, and watched it disappear over the horizon.

But providence sided with the English. The Spanish Armada was quickly hurled in every direction by a violent storm. The beleaguered fleet regrouped, pressed on, and was spotted by the British on July 19. Winds turned against the Armada, slowing its progress. When the battle was joined on July 21, weather again aided the English. Heavy winds favored their smaller, more manageable ships. The English outmaneuvered the Spanish, and at just the right moments the weather shifted, always in England's favor.

By July 31, the Duke of Parma had informed Philip of likely defeat: "God knows how grieved I am at this news at a time when I hoped to send Your Majesty congratulations. I will only say that this must come from the hand of God."

Philip's defeated and tattered ships, limping back to Spain, were caught in yet another deadly squall. Less than half the vessels and a third of the troops survived the storms and battles. Because of the way the winds were blowing, the evangelical church was saved. Who directs the course of the nations? Who sends the winds? Who moves the hearts of kings like channels of water? Who rules in the affairs of men? The one before whom every knee shall bow. The one whom every tongue shall confess.

Second, the obedience of the nations belongs to Christ in an ultimate sense, in that those who resist him and reject him will one day be forced to submit. The rebellious nations will perish. Listen to these words about the Second Coming of Christ, found in Revelation 19:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood [remember the imagery in Genesis 49?], and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter.

Here at the end of the last book of the Bible we have the same imagery we see at the end of the first book of the Bible. A coming Messiah, a robe stained with blood, a scepter, and the obedience of the nations will ultimately be his and his alone.

Third, the obedience of the nations is his in an evangelistic sense. From every nation and tribe and tongue, Jesus Christ is calling out those who belong to him. Many years ago, I came across a story that greatly interested me, and then I lost it. I've been searching for it for a long time, and only last week did I finally rediscover it in a book entitled *The Holy Spirit in Missions* by A. J. Gordon. There was a missionary named Barnabas Shaw who went to South Africa to preach the Gospel, but in Capetown he was forbidden to share the message of Christ. He didn't know what to do or where to go, so he bought a team of oxen and a wagon. He put his possessions in the wagon, and then he and his wife sat on the driver's seat. They started into the interior, not knowing where they were going. They just let the oxen lead the way. Day after day they traveled on, trying to find some place to settle where they could preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On and on they went, for 300 miles. Nearly a month later, as they camped on night, they discovered a group of people camping near them. It was a tribe of Hottentots. Barnabas Shaw introduced himself and began to talk with them, and to his astonishment he learned that this tribe of pagan Africans had left their village and land to travel to Capetown in search of a missionary to teach them "The Great Word" as they expressed it.

"Had either party started a half-day earlier or later," Gordon wrote, "they would not have met; but as it was, they met just in the nick of time." They Lord Jesus Christ is looking for people all over the world who will obey him, who will pronounce him Lord of their lives. He is still looking for people in the heart of South Africa and in Central Africa, in Chad and Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast and Nigeria.

He is looking for people in Asia, in China and Mongolia and India and Pakistan and Afghanistan.

He is looking for people in the vast expanses of the former Soviet Union, in the Ukraine and Lithuania and Belarus and Moldova. He is looking for people all across Europe and South America and North America. He is looking for people here in the United States and in Tennessee and in Nashville. He is looking for people on your street and in your school or in your office or in your factory.

He is looking for you.

The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. And he is calling out for himself those from among the nations of this world who will love him and follow him with all their hearts.

Jesus said, "Moses wrote about me."

And what did Moses say? He said that the seed of woman would crush the serpent's head. He said that the seed of Abraham would

be a blessing to all the world. He said that the scepter would not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his legs, until Shiloh comes, the Prince of Peace. And the obedience of the nations belongs to him. He is not legend, liar, or lunatic. He is Leader, Lion, and Lord.