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FRUITFULNESS REQUIRES SEPARATION

Genesis 11:27-32

The trip from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran was not exceedingly hard because they were able to travel northwest along the Euphrates

River. Along the river there was grass for their livestock.

However, from Haran to the land of Canaan was quite a different type of trip. They would have to leave the Euphrates River and strike out across the desert. This was a real test and was too much for Terah and his family.

Besides, God was not going to take Abraham into the land until he separated from his father. The years Abraham spent at Haran were wasted years of waiting.

Many Christians today start off like Abraham. They launch out with great enthusiasm to follow the Lord, perhaps as a result of a crisis experience, but then later grind to a standstill in their Christian walk. Has this happened to you?

Remember, the key issue for Abraham was separation. It is the same for us. This age of materialism has gripped even the Christians. We cannot expect God to lead us into fruitfulness unless we become separated from the things of the world.

Each Christian must make the decision for himself, even as Abraham had to make the decision for himself. Once we break from the things of the world, we will see that the treasures of God far more than take the place of the things of this world.

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17).

SEPARATION OFTEN PRODUCES CONFLICT

Genesis 12:4-9

Abraham finally left Haran and forsook everything.

Speaking of Abraham and those who were with him, Hebrews 11:15,16 says, "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."

Abraham's separation from Haran was complete.

Once Abraham was in the land, he did not stop to possess it but merely passed through it. He did not stop because God did not order him to stop.

Genesis 12:6 says, "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land."

As to Abraham's inheritance in the land, Acts 7:5 says that "he [God] gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child."

At this time, therefore, Abraham was not occupying the land but merely passing through it. The Scriptures comment that "the Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen. 12:6). The Canaanites posed a problem and were the source of future conflict.

Our separation is similar. God calls for an all-out separation, which often results in conflict. There will be persecution and problems, but we must remember the words of Jesus: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

A TENT AND ALTAR LIFE

Genesis 12:7-9

The tent symbolized Abraham's dependence on God. Hebrews 11:9,10 says of Abraham that "by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles [tents] with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Every child of God is a pilgrim in this world and is to have his eyes fixed on his home in heaven.

The altar that Abraham built indicated his dependence on God and his worship of God. Note the order. First, the believer is to take his place as a stranger and pilgrim on earth; then comes true acceptance and worship.

This is not referring to an acceptance as far as salvation is concerned, which comes by faith in Christ Jesus. This is acceptance in the realm of being a child true to God.

In what we commonly call "The Lord's Prayer," we say, "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:9,10). This has to do with the altar--not a literal altar such as Abraham built but our relationship to, and worship of, God.

We want His name to be holy, which means that we are not seeking a holy place for ourselves. We want His kingdom to come; that is, we want Him to rule supreme.

To sincerely pray this means that we are not trying to build a little kingdom for ourselves. The phrase "Thy will be done" (v. 10) shows that we want God's will, not ours, to be done. This is worship. This is a vital relationship with God.

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jer. 33:3).

ALTAR NEGLECT BRINGS FAILURE

Genesis 12:9-13

After Abraham pitched his tent, built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord, the Scriptures say that "Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south" (Gen. 12:9).

Instead of staying where he had his altar--his contact with God--Abraham went farther south. He went away from the altar and made "provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14).

Have you not also found that failures arise when you neglect the altar? The altar is representative of our communion and fellowship with God. Do you have an altar?

It is common to refer to the "family altar." This means having a time when the family reads the Word of God and prays together. But do you also have an individual altar--a time alone with God for Bible reading and prayer?

You desperately need this time with God; to omit it is to invite all kinds of trials and failures into your life.

I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that 85 percent of the failures and trials that Christians have can be traced to the fact that their altar relationship with God is not right. They have moved away from the time of fellowship with Him.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105).

Friend of the World or of God?

Genesis 12:14-20

Abraham's downward steps away from God eventually led to open rebuke.

The Bible says, "Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way" (Gen. 12:18,19).

It is sad when a child of God has to be corrected by the world. All of this came about because of Abraham's lack of faith, which resulted in his going to Egypt--a symbol of the world of unbelief.

We, too, need to be careful about our friendship with the world. The Word of God says, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

Check your life. Are you a friend of the world? According to this verse, if you are a friend of the world, you are an enemy of God.

The time that the Christian spends in a backslidden state is wasted time. Abraham's time in Egypt was wasted as far as his spiritual progress was concerned.

While trying to be a friend of the world, the believer is only building with wood, hay and stubble--which someday will be consumed by the fire of judgment. The believer will receive no reward for this kind of work (see 1 Cor. 3:12-15).

"Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

Results of Backsliding (See also Backsliding)

Genesis 13:1-4

Even though Abraham returned to fellowship with God, irreparable damage had been done. When a believer backslides, he does things he will never be able to undo.

Abraham's testimony had been weakened, and damage beyond repair had been done to worldly Lot, Abraham's nephew. Lot had gone with Abraham to Egypt. The backslider never backslides alone; he always takes others with him.

Even though Abraham had backslidden and had brought about much damage, Genesis 13:3,4 tells us that he went back "to Beth-el,

unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord."

God has made provision for every backslider. Just as Abraham returned to fellowship with the Lord, you, too, can come back into fellowship with Him if you have backslidden.

First John 2:1 says, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

In the first chapter of 1 John, every believer is assured: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (v. 9).

Do not stay in the miserable place of disobedience. Come back to God and confess your sin.

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Spirit-Controlled or Carnal?

Genesis 13:5-13

In considering the lives of Abraham and Lot, we see that Abraham's life was symbolic of the Spirit-controlled Christian, whereas Lot's life was symbolic of the carnal Christian.

Unconsecrated Christians who are living according to the flesh are referred to as "carnal" in the Scriptures (see 1 Cor. 3:1,3).

It is never recorded that Lot built an altar. He was not known for his communion with God. As a result, he got into trouble, just as any believer gets into trouble when he does not take time for daily fellowship with God.

I am not referring to a time when the entire family reads the Bible and prays together. This, too, is extremely important, but I am referring particularly to your personal time alone with God.

Perhaps you say you do not have enough time because you are too busy with life's activities. Anything that takes you away from this time of fellowship with God is sin.

Regardless of how much work you have to do, you can find some time to spend with God alone. As a believer, this is your number one prerogative.

The Devil will always see to it that we have little or no time to fellowship with God. But we can--and we must--make time for such fellowship. We must put first things first.

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

Restoring a Brother

Genesis 14:10-16

What should be our attitude when a brother is taken captive by the things of this world?

Some have a distorted concept of separation. When they see a brother fall into sin, they shout it from the housetops and publish it in their magazines. This is not what Christ instructed.

Galatians 6 tells us what our attitude should be toward a fallen Christian brother. The Apostle Paul exhorted, "Brethren, if any person is overtaken in misconduct or sin of any sort, you who are spiritual [who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit] should set him right and restore and reinstate him, without any sense of superiority and with all gentleness, keeping an attentive eye on yourself, lest you should be tempted also" (v. 1, Amplified).

When Abraham realized what had happened to Lot, he became very bold. "When Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus" (Gen. 14:14,15).

God rewarded his courage because Abraham "brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people" (v. 16).

"If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one" (Gal. 6:1).

Refusing the World's Offers

Genesis 14:17-24

When the king of Sodom tempted Abraham by urging him to take the earthly goods, Abraham's attitude was the same as the Apostle Paul's.

In 2 Corinthians 4:18 Paul said, "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Because Abraham had been spiritually fortified beforehand, he was ready when the king of Sodom offered him earthly riches. There was no problem because he had already made his choice between that which is temporal and that which is eternal.

Joshua told the people of his day, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Josh. 24:15). The greatest need among present-day believers is to realize there is a choice that has to be made.

Abraham was ready, and his answer was quick, concise and final. Abraham declared God to be his God and that he was confident and determined that God alone would provide his portion.

Abraham declared unashamedly that he would trust God for his every need. He did not want to give either Satan or man the opportunity to say that he had made him rich. What a challenge to us!

"A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked" (Ps. 37:16).

The Believer's Reward

Genesis 15:1-6

God assured Abraham that He was Abraham's "exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1).

The king of Sodom had offered Abraham all the riches that Abraham and his servants had brought back, but he turned them down. Notice that the tense is not past or future, but present. Not "I was" or "I will be" but "I am"--"I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (v. 1).

We see from God's promise to be Abraham's reward that God never permits His children to lose when they honor Him and seek His glory. God never leaves His child without spiritual blessings after His child has taken a stand for the glory of God.

Although Abraham had no children at this time, his faith in the Lord is recorded in verse 6: "He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Because of Abraham's faith in God, he was able to look into the future and trust God for everything.

Ephesians 1:3 tells us that present-day believers have been blessed with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

But we, too, must set our eyes on the future. We must be those who look to their reward for glorifying God, rather than looking at the temporal satisfactions of the present.

"The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.... And in keeping of them there is great reward" (Ps. 19:9,11).

Testing Follows Triumph

Genesis 16:1-6

Ten years had passed since God had first promised Abraham descendants, and now three years had gone by since God had reassured Abraham of this same thing.

Whereas in Genesis 15 Abraham is seen as a man of faith, in chapter 16 we see him as a man of unbelief. He could wait no longer for God to fulfill His promise.

A lack of patience tends to foster unbelief. In chapter 15 Abraham believed the Lord; in chapter 16 he hearkened unto the voice of his wife. In chapter 15 Abraham walked after the Spirit; in chapter 16 he walked after the energy of the flesh.

What a sad inconsistency in the life of this man of God. Only Jesus Christ could say, "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29).

Abraham was tested by the suggestion of a well-meaning wife. Would he take matters out of the hand of God and act in the energy of the flesh?

This test was the trying of the patience of his faith. Would he wait on God to fulfill His word in His own time and way, or would Abraham's patience give out and the flesh take over? God wanted him to have a mature faith.

What would you have done in his situation?

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (Heb. 10:35,36).

RUNNING AHEAD OF GOD

Genesis 16:1-2

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.

Running Ahead of God

A friend went to visit the great preacher Phillips Brooks and found him pacing the floor like a caged lion. His friend asked, "What's the trouble, Dr. Brooks?" He replied, "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry but God isn't."

Abraham could have identified with those feelings. God had promised him a son, but, from a human perspective, time was running out. In fact, with Abraham nearly 86 and Sarah 76 years old, most people would have said that time had already run out. Obviously God needed help. In the Ancient Near East, it was acceptable for a barren woman to give her maid as a substitute to bear children for her, so Sarah suggested Abraham take Hagar and let her bear his child. In his hurry, Abraham ran ahead of God and the consequences are still felt in the Middle East today. The Arab nations (descended from Ishmael, the son of the maid servant) and Israel (descended from Abraham's legitimate heir, Isaac) continue to be bitter enemies.

God not only has a divine will, He also has an eternal timetable. Just as the apostle Paul reminded Christians that in "the fullness of time" God sent His Son (Gal. 4:4) and "in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6), so God has a schedule for everything in our lives as well. We certainly don't want to lag behind God's agenda, but it's equally disastrous to run ahead of it.

As you seek God's will for your life, seek His timetable as well. Don't let your impatience carry you ahead of God. To do the right thing at the wrong time makes the right thing the wrong thing.

We need to keep in step with God's time as well as His will.

Results of the Lack of Faith

Genesis 16:6-16

After Hagar fled from Sarah's presence, before Ishmael was born, the angel of the Lord said to her, "Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (Gen. 16:11,12).

The Arabs are the descendants of Ishmael, and this prophecy of international trouble is being fulfilled today.

The centuries-old conflict between the Arabs and the Jews had its beginning when Abraham tried to use the means of the flesh to produce a spiritual result.

Not only did Abraham's sin produce family and international trouble, but it also produced spiritual trouble. In the New Testament the Apostle Paul wrote of this trouble in Galatians 4:22-26.

When churches or believers leave the simplicity and liberty that is in Christ and return to the works of the flesh, there is nothing but bondage. When religious ceremonies or other activities are substituted for the work of the Holy Spirit, bondage results.

>From this incident in Genesis we see the sad results of relying on the flesh to bring about spiritual results.

"And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matt. 13:58).

God's Perfect Timing

Genesis 17:1,2

In Genesis 17:1 we are told, "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."

Thirteen years had gone by since Abraham had hearkened unto Sarah, and during this time there was no mention of God's appearing to Abraham.

In the Scriptures these 13 years are passed over as a period of spiritual barrenness. For Abraham it was what is known spiritually as a time of wood, hay and stubble.

But why all of this waiting? God had promised Abraham a son, and by this time only Ishmael had been born into his home--by a means that was not pleasing to the Lord. The reason for God's delay was so God could bring Abraham to the end of himself.

Later it was said of Abraham, "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb" (Rom. 4:19).

Before divine power is put forth, man must learn his own impotency. Not until Abraham's body was as good as dead would God fulfill His word.

Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Though to Abraham this seemed like a long delay, God was right on time. God has a perfect time for everything.

"As for God, his way is perfect" (Ps. 18:30).

Abraham's God Is Our God

Genesis 17:3-8

In Genesis 17, when God changed Abram's name to Abraham the reason is given: "For a father of many nations have I made thee" (v. 5). Notice the expression "have I made thee."

At this time no child has been born to Abraham and Sarah, yet God says He has made Abraham "a father of many nations." What God has promised, He is able to perform. What He has begun, He is able to finish. When God says it, it is as good as done.

This same principle is seen in Romans 8:30: "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

We have not yet been glorified, but God speaks of it as a finished work. Why? Because what He begins, He finishes. When it is His undertaking, He sees it through. The time element is in His hands.

We need to realize that Abraham's God is our God.

The promises made to Abraham were promises that almighty grace alone could utter and that almighty power alone could fulfill. When the almighty, all-sufficient God displays Himself, man's self must be excluded.

Abraham is set aside in the account at this point. He only listens. Sarah is not mentioned. The bondwoman and her son are, for the moment, not in view. Nothing is seen but the Almighty God in the fullness of His grace and sovereign power.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).

Flesh and Spirit in Conflict

Genesis 17:9-21

God did not refuse to bless Ishmael, but He caused Abraham to clearly understand that the covenant would be established with Isaac, who was not yet born.

Ishmael was not to be an heir with Isaac. The Scriptures build on this principle in showing that the flesh (Ishmael) cannot be heir with the Spirit (Isaac).

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul referred to Ishmael and Isaac and drew a parallel to Christians. Paul was emphasizing that the Christian is made mature through the freedom of the Spirit and not through the bondage of the Law.

He wrote: "Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free" (Gal. 4:30,31).

Paul continued the parallel in Galatians 5 when he said, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (vv. 16,17).

In this same chapter Paul also wrote: "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (vv. 24,25).

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18).

FLESH AND SPIRIT IN CONFLICT

Galatians 6: 16-23

Jacob and Esau were the sons of Isaac and Rebekah. These two sons represent the conflict of the flesh and the Spirit. Esau represents that which is natural, whereas Jacob represents that which is spiritual.

The conflict between the natural and the spiritual is present in every believer's heart. It is the conflict of the two natures.

The Scriptures say, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17).

However, believers are encouraged to realize that, because of the greatness of God, the Spirit will ultimately triumph and the flesh will be brought into subjection.

In Esau we see the profane nature that despises the riches and promises of God. In Jacob we see the desire for that which is godly, even though he used fleshly (carnal) methods to attain the benefit of the promises.

Jacob's life was one of conflict. In him we see the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. This is the key to understanding his life. Jacob's life strikingly exhibits the power of the old nature, but it also exhibits the power of God's love and grace.

In Jacob we see the utter worthlessness and depravity of the human nature, but we also see the deepest instruction as to God's purpose and infinite grace.

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25).

GOD HONORS HIS OWN

Genesis 18:1-5

Genesis 18 records how God greatly honored Abraham: "He lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant" (vv. 2,3).

The Lord Himself, together with two angels, appeared to Abraham. Think of it! The Lord did not honor the sumptuous halls and princely palaces of Egypt with His presence, but He accepted hospitality in the tent of a pilgrim and stranger.

Nor did God go to Lot, who was a believer with many worldly possessions, although later He sent two angels to him. Think of the high privilege of Abraham, the stranger and pilgrim, to host the Lord and two angels!

We, too, are privileged because of our union with Christ. After Christ's resurrection, before He ascended to heaven, He told the believers, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:18-20).

The believer has God Himself dwelling in him! No higher privilege can be known by those in this life.

"He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him" (Ps. 91:15).

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE

Genesis 18:6-15

Sarah had overheard the Lord saying she would have a son: "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (Gen. 18:12).

Sarah was surprised the Lord had detected her laugh, and she "denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh" (v. 15).

Even though Sarah found it difficult to believe, God had given His final announcement that she and Abraham would have a son.

They had waited nearly 25 years, but now was God's time. Abraham was as good as dead, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing, but what God had promised, He was able to perform.

Even though God was going to work the impossible, He was going to use human means. God also wants to work the impossible through us if we will allow Him to do so.

Christ said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). God wants to perform the impossible by using believers as His human instruments.

God asked Abraham and Sarah, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14). We, too, must respond to this question. As we face seeming impossibilities, do we think God is unable to perform what He has promised?

"For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

A FRIEND OF GOD

Genesis 18:16-21

Abraham's faith grew and developed through the spiritual exercise of testing. This is also why God permits our faith to be tested.

First Peter 1:7 says the purpose of testing is so "the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

In Genesis 18 there are some very significant statements about Abraham. The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" (vv. 17,18).

The Lord was going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but He told Abraham first. Truly, Abraham was the friend of God.

God said of Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (v. 19).

What a tremendous statement--and to think it was spoken by God Himself! God knew Abraham intimately, and He knows every detail about us.

Are we determined to do His will at any cost? Does He have first place in our lives and thinking? Do we command our children and our household after Him?

"He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye" (Deut. 32:10).

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Genesis 18:22-33

Genesis 18:23-33 records Abraham's intercessory prayer for Sodom, the city where Lot lived.

Abraham asked the Lord if the city could be spared if 50 righteous people could be found (v. 24). The Lord answered, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes" (v. 26).

Abraham apparently realized how difficult it would be to find 50 righteous people in Sodom, so he asked the Lord if He would spare the city if He could find 40 righteous people. The Lord agreed to spare the city if 40 righteous people could be found.

Then Abraham lowered the figure to 30 and then to 20. Finally, Abraham said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but

this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake" (v. 32).

Abraham knew the responsibility of intercessory prayer. Are you aware of this responsibility? Ours is the responsibility of authoritative prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. It is a spiritual warfare against principalities and powers in high places (Eph. 6:12).

This principle is nowhere better seen than in Matthew 12:29 where Jesus Himself said, "How can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house."

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

THE DISOBEDIENT SERVANT

Genesis 20:1-7

The key to Abraham's backsliding appears in verse 1 of Genesis 20: "Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar."

He journeyed from Hebron, the place of fellowship, and from Mamre, the place of fatness. Why would he leave these places after such wonderful fellowship with the Lord, during which he received the promise of a son to be born the following year?

Why would Abraham leave these places and journey to the south country, toward Egypt--a symbol of the world?

It is not difficult to understand why. Even the best of men still have the old nature remaining in them. There is no eradication of this old nature when we are born again.

Instead, the Scriptures make it very clear that we have to constantly cope with the old nature. Galatians 5:16 says, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

Abraham went away from his altar into the south country. Perhaps he reasoned that he could surely raise up another altar there, even though it was a place of wickedness.

It is sad indeed that a man of such caliber should fall. This was not the fall of a young, inexperienced believer. It was the lapse of a mature, well-experienced disciple of God.

This is something for us to seriously ponder.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

THE GOD OF THE OVERCOMER

Genesis 20:8-18

When Abraham was guilty of a repeated sin regarding Sarah, he was rebuked by an unbeliever, Abimelech (Gen. 20:9,10).

It is tragic when a believer who is out of fellowship has to be rebuked by an unbeliever. Certainly this is to the believer's shame.

However, this brought Abraham to the root of the problem, and he confessed the sin that he had conceived when he left Ur of the Chaldees (v. 13).

God knew that Abraham would confess his sin, as is evident from what God told Abimelech in the dream: "Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live" (v. 7).

God vindicated Abraham, His friend. God not only forgave Abraham, but He also made Abimelech a debtor to Abraham's prayers, for "Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife" (vv. 17,18).

God enabled Abraham to overcome. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is also the God of the overcomer.

Revelation 21:7 records the promise: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." What God was to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He will be to you, too, because He is the God of the overcomer.

"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5)

LIVING BY FAITH Romans 4:9-16

Romans 4:16 refers to Abraham as "the father of us all." It is logical to ask, "How can this be?" Inasmuch as Abraham separated himself unto God, he is the father of all those who are separated.

There are two aspects of separation indicated by the words "from" and "unto." The believer is to be separated from the world unto God.

The command for present-day believers to have such separation is recorded in 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

The two aspects of separation are seen in verse 17 of this passage: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." What a wonderful promise!

Because Abraham was such a spiritual giant in the walk of faith, he is also called "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:11). We are not his physical descendants, but we are his spiritual descendants.

We are the children of Abraham in the sense that we walk by faith even as he walked. Galatians 3:29 says, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

We are the children of Abraham in the sense that we live by faith in the promises of God even as Abraham lived.

"But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

CONSTANT GRACE Galatians 5:16-26

There are also many contrasts in the life of Abraham.

By faith he left his country; in unbelief he stopped short at Haran. By faith he entered the land; in unbelief he forsook it for Egypt.

By faith he returned to the land to sojourn; in unbelief he took Hagar to bear a child rather than waiting on God. By faith he rescued Lot; in unbelief he lied to Abimelech.

In Abraham we see the conflict of the two natures. The sin nature was constantly in conflict with the nature he had received from God.

This conflict of present-day believers is described in Galatians 5:16,17: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

Verses 24 and 25 of this same chapter tell us, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

Like Abraham, we are frequently inconsistent. But God is calling so He might lead us through to triumph. The Lord referred to Himself as the God of Abraham, not because Abraham was always consistent, but because he allowed God to bring him through to victory.

God did not abandon His man, and in His mercy He will not abandon us. Grace is always at hand.

"God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8).

GOD LOVES ORDINARY PEOPLE

Genesis 21:1-7

The birth of Isaac was the second great step toward the fulfillment of God's purpose. The first was the selection of Abraham to be the father of the chosen nation.

Isaac's birth marked a crisis in connection with the history of the chosen line of Christ. Even though Ishmael had been born 13 years

earlier, God made it clear to Abraham that "in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21:12).

This was the crisis concerning the line of Christ. God had promised Abraham a son, but none had been given.

Abraham had gone in to Hagar, Sarah's handmaid, and a son had resulted from their union--but not the son of God's choice. But at this time in Genesis, God provided the son He had promised.

Isaac led a quiet, peaceful life. He was the ordinary son of a great father, and he was the ordinary father of a great son. Thus, God calls Himself the God of Isaac. The God of Isaac is the God of ordinary people--those involved in the routine of daily living.

Isaac's life was not filled with glory and spectacular events. Yet he had a very meaningful life. He filled his place in life with complete contentment, not looking for the spectacular.

Therefore, a study of Isaac's life will greatly benefit us because most of us are ordinary people desiring to please God in the routine of daily living.

"For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

LESSONS FROM ISAAC'S BIRTH Romans 8:31-39

From the account of Isaac's birth there are many important lessons we should learn. Five are extremely significant.

First, God is in no hurry to work out His plans. He is never too late; He is always on time. Man frets and worries and is always in a hurry to work out his plans.

Second, God is almighty. Nothing can hinder or thwart the outworking of God's purpose. Abraham was old and Sarah was barren, but these obstacles presented no difficulty to God.

Third, God is faithful. He promised Sarah a son. From the standpoint of human reasoning, it seemed like a foolish promise. However, the promise of God was sure because He is always faithful in keeping His promises.

Because God's word is absolutely sure, in times of doubt and discouragement we need to come to the Word of God to check our spiritual lives and to remind ourselves of His faithfulness.

Although we may not be able to understand how God can fulfill His promises to us, our attitude should be: If God says it, that settles it.

Fourth, faith is tested so it might be proven to be genuine. A faith that cannot endure trial is really no faith at all.

Fifth, God has a set time for everything. It is important that we learn this lesson well. God has an appointed time for accomplishing His will. Nothing is left to chance.

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born" (Eccles. 3:1,2).

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES Luke 1:26-38

Isaac was the child of promise. There were progressive promises made to Abraham, and at first there was some doubting on his part.

But in the New Testament, when God recounted Abraham's life, He completely passed over the fact that Abraham doubted at first (see Heb. 11:11). So also, our sins are blotted out once they have come under the blood of Jesus Christ.

Isaac was a child of miracle because Sarah's womb was "dead." In describing Abraham, the Apostle Paul said, "Being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither the deadness of Sarah's womb" (Rom. 4:19).

At first Sarah did not think there was any possibility she could bear a child, but God asked, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14).

This reminds us of the virgin birth of Christ. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would have a son and that she should call His name Jesus, Mary asked, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34).

Gabriel assured Mary, "With God nothing shall be impossible" (v. 37). Then Mary responded, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (v. 38). Let us also count on the fact that God is able to do what He has promised.

"Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant" (I Kings 8:56).

GOING ON TO MATURITY

Genesis 21:8; 1 Samuel 1:22-28

The Scriptures say that after Isaac was born, he "grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned" (Gen. 21:8).

During Old Testament times, weaning referred to the time in a child's life when he was old enough to be entrusted to strangers. This took place between three and five years of age--and sometimes older.

Samuel is a biblical example. The Scriptures say that when Hannah "had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young" (1 Sam. 1:24).

Growth is also important to the Christian. The Bible instructs believers: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2).

While the milk of the Word is needed for young Christians, older Christians should be feeding on the meat of the Word.

When Isaac had matured enough to be weaned, Abraham made a great feast "the same day that Isaac was weaned" (Gen. 21:8). This significant time in a child's life was celebrated with a feast.

So also, it is a time of much rejoicing when a believer passes from the "milk stage" into the "meat stage" in his walk with the Lord. It is at this time that the believer leaves his dependence on others and depends on the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

"I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation" (Ps. 119:99).

CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE

Genesis 21:9-21

After the birth of Isaac, the true nature of Ishmael was revealed. Nothing of his life is known before Isaac's birth.

Even this points out a significant truth for the believer. It is not until a person receives the new nature, through receiving Christ as Saviour, that he discovers the real character of his old nature.

The discovery is a painful one and even causes some to doubt their salvation as they see the struggle taking place in their lives. However, the very fact that there is conflict is proof of salvation.

There is no conflict when there is only the old nature. But when the new nature comes in to control the life, the old nature sets up an intense conflict.

Paul referred to this conflict when he said, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17).

This is the condition that results when a person receives Christ as Saviour. He receives a new nature, which is in opposition to the old nature. There is conflict between the spirit of liberty and the spirit of bondage.

Even as in the case of Ishmael and Isaac, where one had to be expelled, the believer cannot yield to both natures but must choose the one he will obey.

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (John 5:4).

THE BASIS OF UNITY

Genesis 21:11; Ephesians 2:11-16

The Scriptures say that when Sarah demanded that Ishmael be expelled from the household, "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son" (Gen. 21:11). The word "grievous" means "bad" or "evil."

Abraham viewed the conflict between his two sons as something evil. No doubt he was also grieved over the necessity of having to send Ishmael away. Perhaps Abraham thought that Ishmael and Isaac would someday be able to live together in harmony.

This is the way many believers view the conflict between their old and new natures. They mistakenly think that the old nature will improve with time and they will have less conflict.

There are also those who think that believers and unbelievers can dwell in harmony and even cooperate in promoting the same organization. This is what the proponents of the ecumenical movement are trying to tell us today.

They stress organizational unity and peace, but they do not emphasize salvation by faith in Christ, which is the only thing that can bring about spiritual unity and lasting peace.

"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30).

PARTING WITH THE DESIRES OF THE FLESH

Genesis 21:12; Romans 6:6-14

Although the situation was grievous to Abraham, God said to him, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21:12).

Abraham was to depend on what God had done for him and had given him in the person of Isaac. This had to do primarily with Isaac's being the covenant heir and being in the lineage of Christ.

Abraham was grieved about having to part with Ishmael, so God emphasized to him again that "in Isaac shall thy seed be called."

Present-day believers also find it exceedingly difficult to part with the desires of the flesh. The struggle is intense, but to cling to the flesh only results in bondage.

God has provided a way for the believer to be free from bondage to the flesh. Paul explained it when he said, "Knowing this, that our old man is [was] crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6).

Verse 11 of this same chapter says, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

We need to recognize what has been done for us, count it as a fact, appropriate its benefits and continually live for God.

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

THE NECESSITY OF TESTING

Genesis 22:1-8

The offering of Isaac is recorded in Genesis 22. This chapter sees father and son together in this great test. That they were "together" is one of the keys to this chapter.

Verse 6 says, "And they went both of them together." Verse 8 also emphasizes: "So they went both of them together."

It is significant that the first record of Isaac's active participation in life had to do with his being willing to offer his life. He willingly surrendered to the will of his father and to the will of Almighty God.

Testing and discipline are necessary for the believer because they prove whether or not his spiritual experiences have really become a part of his life and character. The tests that Abraham had successfully passed prepared him for the greatest test of his life—the offering of Isaac.

God's testing of an individual is evidence that He has confidence in that individual. God never tests a person who hasn't the capacity to pass the test.

God never tested Lot to the degree He tested Abraham, because Lot never reached a spiritual plane that was high enough to

warrant God's testing in his life.

Sodom tempted Lot, but it was no temptation to Abraham. By his life Abraham proved he loved God more than the things of Sodom.

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

TESTING HAS A PURPOSE

Genesis 22:1,2; 1 Peter 1:3-7

God wanted Abraham to prove that he loved Him more than the things of this life and more than any other person. For this test God chose the person who was the dearest object of Abraham's life--Isaac.

God may sometimes test you this way also. Although the test may be severe and may involve the dearest person or thing in your life, you will be a better person for God as a result of the test.

The offering of human sacrifices was a common practice of the heathen in Abraham's time. However, there is no other incident where God tested a believer in this particular way.

Human sacrifices were strongly condemned by God in the Old Testament. His people, Israel, were to totally abstain from this heathen practice. But with Abraham, God chose this test to prove whom Abraham loved most. God knew what he would do.

When God promised him a son, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. But, having received the promised son, there was the danger that Abraham would give more of his attention to the gift than to the Giver.

He knew that out of Isaac would come the descendants God had promised. Abraham was in danger of concentrating on the fulfillment of God's promise to the exclusion of God Himself, who had made the promise.

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

THE RESPONSE OF FAITH

Genesis 22:3; Galatians 1: 11-17

Even though Abraham could not understand why God would command him to offer his son, he was not slow in responding.

Genesis 22:3 says, "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him."

In Abraham's response there was no reluctance, no hesitation, no doubt, no staggering, no unbelief. Abraham did not delay. He did not endeavor to reason things out or spend time consulting with other people about the matter.

So also, when the Apostle Paul was called to preach the Gospel, he said, "Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:16). This is important. There are occasions when no time should be taken to counsel with men.

God found ready faith in Abraham. Faith triumphed over natural affections, over reason, over self-will. God's grace found a ready outlet through which it could manifest itself.

Might our faith be as Abraham's faith. As we yield our lives to the Lord, He will work in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Then we will be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (4:13).

"For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

TRUSTING IN SPITE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

Genesis 22:4-5; Hebrews 11:17-19

Genesis 22:4-5 says, "Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."

In these verses there are three things in particular that reveal the tremendous faith of Abraham.

First, he told the young men who were with him, "Abide ye here." Once Abraham saw the mountain that God was going to send him to, he wanted to be sure that nothing or no one would hinder what he had undertaken.

Second, Abraham told the young men, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship." Thus Abraham gave up all of his desires and ascribed everything to God. It was a true act of worship when Abraham was willing to give up everything for God.

Third, Abraham told the young men, "I and the lad will. . . come again to you." His faith was in the God of the resurrection. He believed that God would bring his son back to life.

Can we trust God when we are totally unable to see how He is going to work out His will? Abraham demonstrated that he could.

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

A SUBMISSIVE FAITH

Genesis 22:7-9; Colossians 2:6-7

Isaac probably knew that he was the sacrifice. He could have resisted because he was no longer a child; he was probably between 17 and 25 years of age. Physically, all the advantages were his. His father was old; he was young.

Here the Word of God introduces us to the submissive trait that seems to have been the strong factor in Isaac's life. He was characterized more by submissiveness than by aggressiveness.

Abraham was the one with an aggressive faith, but Isaac had a submissive faith--willing to be what God wanted him to be. Even when he was offered as a sacrifice, Isaac submitted himself to his father because God had so willed it.

Isaac's submission was a picture of Christ's submission to the Father. Jesus Christ was the sacrifice for the sins of the world so that the holy standards of the Heavenly Father might be satisfied.

Concerning Christ, 1 John 2:2 tells us that "he is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

Jesus was submissive to the Heavenly Father's will. The purpose of the Father and the Son was one. God the Father willed the sacrifice to be made, and the Son willed to be the sacrifice.

The life of the Lord Jesus Christ is summed up in the statement "I come ... to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). What a wonderful God we have!

"Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13).

ACTION PROVES FAITH

Genesis 22:9-12

This was the triumph of both Abraham and Isaac. Faith was now a proven fact. God said, "Now I know that thou fearest God" (Gen. 22:12). Abraham had passed the supreme test, and God's voice broke into the awful silence and said, "Now I know."

Faith is always proved by action. In his epistle James said, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (2:21,22).

Along with these statements, Romans 4:2,3 needs to be taken into consideration: "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

It is common to hear people say, "You must have faith." But faith itself is as rare as a true gem. The kind of faith that causes a man to launch out into the deep from the shore of present circumstances is practically missing.

Where is our faith today? Perhaps you ask, What is faith? When taken in its most basic meaning, faith is believing what God says and then acting upon it. If we do not act upon what God says, this is an evidence that we really do not believe.

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17).

PASSING THE TEST

Genesis 22:13-19

Abraham had proven he was willing to sacrifice everything--even his son of promise. He evidenced that his greatest need was to know God.

This reminds us of the Apostle Paul's statement: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10).

Genesis 22:16 records God's words: "By myself have I sworn." Because there is no one greater, God can swear by no one greater than Himself.

God told Abraham that He would bless him and multiply his seed as the stars of heaven (spiritual seed) and as the sand on the seashore (earthly seed) and that his seed would possess the gate of his enemies.

The time is coming when the nation of Israel will possess the gate of her enemies--both her religious and earthly enemies.

Abraham experienced the truth of the principle stated in Romans 8:31,32: "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Abraham had graduated. His days of probation and testing were over. His diploma was inscribed with the words "Abraham, the friend of God and the father of the faithful."

"Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet. 4:16).

GOD HONORS QUIET DEDICATION

Genesis 24:63; Psalm 119:9-16

Have you ever considered yourself so small in the sight of God that you thought He would never do for you what He has done for men like Abraham, Isaac or Jacob? I am sure you have.

In our study of the life of Isaac, we find a man who was very common, like most of us. Yet God chose to call Himself "the God of Isaac."

In contrasting Isaac's character with that of his father and that of his son, we see that Isaac experienced fewer of Abraham's triumphs of faith and fewer of Jacob's failures.

Of the three patriarchs--Abraham, Isaac and Jacob--the only one who never left the land of Canaan was Isaac. He was born in the land of Canaan, and he died there without ever going outside the boundaries of the land.

This was quite different from Abraham and Jacob. Perhaps this was because God realized Isaac had a weakness so great that if he had left the land, he might not have returned.

Genesis 24:63 helps us to understand the kind of man Isaac was: "Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide." Thus, we see that Isaac was a quiet and retiring man.

He did not have the active, aggressive disposition of his eminent father, but he was deeply concerned about his relationship with God. He was gentle, retiring and unresisting in his relationship with God.

Are we, too, concerned about our relationship with God?

"But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet. 3:4).

missing Genesis 25:1-8 Our Highest Goal

TWO CHILDREN BECOME TWO NATIONS

Genesis 25:21-26

Jacob was a miracle child. Abraham and Sarah had waited 25 years for Isaac to be born, and Isaac and Rebekah waited 20 years

for the birth of Jacob.

Genesis 25:21,22 says, "Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the Lord."

Rebekah did not know she was going to give birth to twins, and she could not understand what the trouble was. God allowed this to happen to her so He could reveal His plan for the children she would bear.

God explained to Rebekah, "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (v. 23).

Those nations would be in conflict, just as the two babies were in conflict in her womb. Because the firstborn was hairy, he was called "Esau," which means "hairy." The second son was named "Jacob," which means "supplanter."

When Jacob came out of the womb, he took hold of Esau's heel. This was symbolic of his life, for Jacob went through life taking advantage of others--tripping them up so he could get ahead.

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

DESPISING GOD'S PROVISIONS

Genesis 25:34; Hebrews 12:14-17

After Esau had sold the birthright to Jacob and had finished eating and drinking, he "rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright" (Gen. 25:34).

The word "despise" means "to look down on with contempt or aversion." It also means "to regard as negligible, worthless or distasteful." The Scriptures refer to others besides Esau who despised God's provisions for them.

The Israelites were promised the land of Canaan, but God's Word says, "Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word: but murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD. Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness" (Pa. 106:24-26).

The Israelites were more concerned about the things of the flesh than about the things of the Spirit.

What are you doing with the privileges you have as a result of being united with Christ? Do you regard as nothing and treat with contempt the blessings you have because you are a joint-heir with Christ?

Part of the responsibility of this birthright is our ministry--taking the Gospel to all the world. It is our responsibility because we are in Christ--it is not an optional ministry.

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4).

DON'T RELY ON THE FLESH

Genesis 26:1-6

Genesis 26 tells us of an important test that Isaac experienced: "There was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar" (v. 1).

Isaac forsook the place where he was living--the place of his fellowship with God. He went to Gerar and left behind the place of the altar.

Isaac was headed toward Egypt--and possibly that is where he would have gone--but he stopped enroute at a place called Gerar. This city was in the land of Canaan, although it was well on the way toward Egypt.

Because those who went to Egypt usually did so as a reliance on the flesh, Egypt became a symbol of the world. Those who live independently of God and rely on natural resources are spiritually in Egypt.

God was not going to allow Isaac to go into Egypt. His position on the outer fringes of the land certainly evidenced an advanced position of backsliding within the range of very dangerous influences.

This was a test for Isaac, and he failed it utterly. However, God remained true to His time-honored principle of not testing a believer beyond what he is able to bear but making a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).

God knew how much Isaac could stand, and He knows how much we can stand.

"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17).

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Genesis 26:7-11

Had Isaac not gone to Abimelech, he would not have had to lie about his wife. He lied about his wife just as his father, Abraham, had lied about his wife, Sarah. Isaac left his communion with God and ended up by sinning against the Lord.

There are two important lessons we need to learn from Isaac's imitating his father's example.

First, it is much easier for children to imitate the weaknesses or vices of their parents than to excel in their virtues. It is easier because it is natural.

Second, while Abraham and Isaac were men of vastly different temperaments, each succumbed to the same temptation. When famine arose, they fled for help. While they were in the land of the enemy, they both became afraid and lied about their wives.

This proves that natural man is under the control of the same adamic nature in which there is no good thing. The Apostle Paul recognized this and said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18).

Abraham and Isaac both had the adamic nature, even as we do, and they yielded to temptation in similar situations. They had to realize that unless they applied the grace of God, they would inevitably fall into sin. This should also serve as a warning to us.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

BACKSLIDDEN BUT BLESSED

Genesis 26:12-14

How is it possible for God to bless a person who is out of fellowship with Him? God had permitted Isaac to go to Gerar to be tested. Isaac was yet too weak in the faith to be severely tested.

God told Isaac, "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father" (Gen. 26:3).

God's blessing was upon Isaac even though Isaac was out of the center of His will. God often brings His children back to Himself by showering unexcelled goodness upon them.

Romans 2:4 emphasizes this as a principle of God's working when it says, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

God allows these things to happen for a purpose. Since Isaac was not able to endure ultimate testing, God permitted him to go as far as Gerar where He was able to teach him some valuable lessons.

Isaac was blessed of God and prospered, but this does not mean that every person who prospers is blessed of God. There are many in our day who are prosperous, yet they believe and live contrary to the teaching of the Word of God.

Many leaders of false cults have been prosperous, but this is no indication they have been blessed of God. In Isaac's case, however, his prosperity did result from the blessing of God.

"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7).

BLESSING AND PRESENCE

Genesis 26:14-16

Many people confuse the blessing of the Lord with the presence of the Lord. How often we measure a person or his work by the

outward appearance, rather than seeking to understand the inner essence of the person himself.

"The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). John 7:24 reminds us: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

It is possible for a man to become very great and have many possessions and yet not have the full joy of the Lord's presence. Isaac was such a man.

In Genesis 26:3, when God told Isaac, "I will be with thee, and will bless thee," this was the same as saying, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). This was the presence of God.

Many times we are more concerned about the blessings of God than we are about the presence of God. Where do you stand in your relationship with the Lord?

People often say, "God is good to me," by which they mean that they have experienced good health or prosperity. What a person possesses is not always a safe measure of his dedication to the Lord.

"My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (Ex. 33:14).

Heading Home

Genesis 26:17-20

After Abimelech's command, the Bible says that "Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there" (Gen. 26:17). Isaac left Abimelech, but he did not go very far.

The Bible again refers to Isaac's digging wells when it says, "Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them" (v. 18).

Isaac had to redig the wells his father had dug, but even this was used of God because the trouble that came to Isaac kept forcing him to move closer to his home and to the place of the altar. At Gerar, he was only partway home and had pitched his tent where he should not have done so.

Isaac was a weakling in this respect, but probably no weaker than most of us.

Perhaps God has been speaking to you and you wonder why you have troubles. Maybe you have suffered a financial loss and you find it very difficult to understand.

Is God speaking to you in an effort to bring you back to Himself? You need to face these matters squarely and be honest with God as He deals with you.

"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Ps. 119:67).

NOT INSISTING ON RIGHTS

Genesis 26:21,22

Isaac sought for satisfaction without a complete return, so he dug wells. However, there could be no real spiritual satisfaction until he completely returned to the Lord. God was forcing Isaac back to his homeland by permitting the Philistines to close up the wells he reopened.

However, even in this, Isaac showed a very lovely trait in his life. He did not insist on his own rights. He simply moved to another place.

First Peter 2:19,20 says, "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God."

The Philistines were treating Isaac wrongfully, but he did not insist on his own rights.

God rewarded Isaac for not insisting on his own rights. God patiently worked with Isaac until He had him in the place He desired him to be.

In 1 Peter 3:8,9 believers are exhorted: "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as

brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing."

That is, we are to do good toward those who do us evil. God richly blesses the Christian who does this.

"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:10).

RESTORED FELLOWSHIP

Genesis 26:23,24

After Isaac dug the well at Rehoboth, the Bible says that "he went up from thence to Beer-sheba" (Gen. 26:23). The name "Beer-sheba" means "the well of the oath [covenant]."

Isaac's father, Abraham, had earlier made a covenant with Abimelech and gave him seven ewe lambs as a witness that he had dug the well (21:28-31).

Isaac made things right with the Lord at this well of the covenant--he had had enough of the wrangling of the world. Isaac went back to his life of the altar. How long does it take us to get back to the altar after we have backslidden?

When we have left the place of fellowship with God, we need to return to the first works as Christ told the Church of Ephesus: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev. 2:5).

Let us not fool ourselves when we are out of fellowship with God. Our need is to return to fellowship with God, and the way back is Calvary itself.

The Word of God promises that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

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THREE ABSOLUTES

Genesis 26:25; Romans 12:1,2

If we want the power of God in our lives, we must observe the absolutes of God. There are three absolutes in particular that we must heed in order to have spiritual power.

First, we must recognize that all power belongs to God. In this age, it is God the Holy Spirit who is responsible to direct the work of God. Thus, we must recognize the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit to direct all spiritual work.

Second, we must recognize the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in delegating this power to anyone He chooses. It is the Holy Spirit's responsibility to give spiritual gifts to people as He desires so the work of God will be carried out.

The third absolute we must recognize in order to have spiritual power in our lives is that of absolute commitment to the Holy Spirit.

Just as Isaac had to go back to the place God intended him to be, present-day believers must live according to the absolutes of God and be in the place He wants them to be if they are to have spiritual power.

Notice particularly that when Isaac returned to the place where God wanted him, he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord.

He experienced the joy of God's presence, and immediate progress took place in his spiritual life. He dug a well, and no one bothered him as they had earlier.

"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Cor. 12:7).

GOD EXALTS THE TOTALLY COMMITTED

Genesis 26:30-33

When we are abused by the unbelieving world, we need to remember the words of Psalm 37:5,6: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday."

God will vindicate us if we are totally committed to Him and trust Him for everything. Our need is to entrust ourselves completely to Him by committing all of our ways to Him.

Because Isaac dared to live the separated life, God poured out His blessing on him. Isaac was not offensive to the unbelievers, but he did that which was right in the sight of God.

As a result, God blessed Isaac, and the well his servants had dug produced water.

I urge you to seriously consider the benefits of not insisting on your own rights. As a believer, you have friends and neighbors who are closely watching you.

Are you the quarrelsome type who is driving them farther from the Lord? Even if they are saying things about you that are not true, why not suffer for the Lord's sake?

Do not try to reach them by compromising your standards, but rather live a life that is separated unto God, and He will mightily use you in reaching others for Christ.

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet. 5:6).

IMPATIENT TO WAIT ON GOD

Genesis 27:1-17

One faithless act leads to another. Having schemed to secure the birthright, Jacob deceived his father in order to secure the blessing, which was a vital part of the birthright.

Jacob needed not only the birthright from Esau but also the blessing from his father. One was of no value without the other.

Although Esau was the favorite son of his father, Jacob was the favorite son of his mother.

Isaac was making plans to pass the blessing on to his favorite son, but Rebekah was not about to have Jacob left out--especially since God had indicated the blessing was to be Jacob's. Rebekah devised a counterplot.

Rebekah's sin was that she lacked faith in God's ability. She felt she had to help God accomplish His will.

While the intended goal was legitimate, the means she used to accomplish it were not honoring to God. She thought God must be frustrated concerning His plan and, therefore, needed her help.

Some people say, "The Lord helps those who help themselves." This is not true. The truth is that God helps those who come to the end of themselves.

What we need is patience to wait on God. He is able to do everything He has said He will do, and He will always do it on time.

"Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land" (Ps. 37:34)

DECEIVED BY A KISS

Genesis 27:18-29

One lie always leads to another lie. Jacob kept adding sins to his previous ones. First, he impersonated his brother. Second, he lied to his father when he said, "I am Esau."

Finally, he even went so far as to bring the name of the Lord into his deceit, for he said, "Because the LORD thy God brought it to me" (Gen. 27:20).

Jacob most probably did not anticipate all of his father's questions; therefore, he had to have quick answers, which caused him to get into deeper and deeper trouble with his lies.

Jacob must have thought the scheme had worked. No doubt Rebekah was carefully listening to what was going on and also thought the plan had worked! The flesh prides itself on its achievements. But there were to be many sad results from the works of the flesh.

A kiss was part of Jacob's deception of Isaac, even as a kiss was part of Judas's betrayal of Christ. Isaac was deceived, and he pronounced the blessing on Jacob, but it was a long time before the blessing was fulfilled in Jacob's life.

Because he had to reap what he had sown before he was ready to receive the benefits, 30 years passed before Jacob realized the benefits of the blessing.

How much we blame the Lord for things that are nothing but acts of the flesh--the reaping of what we have sown. How tragic it is when we blame the Lord for the works of the flesh.

"He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight" (Ps. 101:7).

THE EFFECTS OF SELFISHNESS

Genesis 27:30-37

Isaac is suddenly awakened to his failure to heed God's plan.

When Isaac learned that the last son to appear to him was actually Esau, he "trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed" (Gen. 27:33).

The key to Isaac's faith is that after he realized what he had done, he emphasized that the blessing would remain Jacob's--"and he shall be blessed."

Although we can never thwart God's plan, we can reap bitter results by sowing to the flesh. God's Word says that "he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8).

Although Isaac did not upset the plan of God, he reaped serious results from what he had sown. Jacob had to flee from home as a result of his conniving. Rebekah never saw Jacob again because she died before he returned.

Even though Isaac lived another 43 years after the incident of the blessing, nothing else is recorded about him except his death. After sending Jacob away, Isaac disappeared from the biblical scene.

About 30 years later Jacob saw his father again, but his mother had already died. The entire family was affected because they had sown to the flesh. They had sought their selfish desires rather than seeking to please God.

"In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves" (2 Ti 3:1,2).

BAD ATTITUDE BRINGS SPIRITUAL LOSS

Genesis 27:30-40

Esau was bitter toward his brother because he had taken advantage of him twice. Desperate to have something, Esau asked his father, "Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?" (Gen. 27:36).

Isaac answered, "Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?" (v. 37).

Esau became more desperate and said to his father, "'Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father.' And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept" (v. 38).

Esau did not weep because he was concerned about spiritual values but because he could not change his father's mind.

Hebrews 12:17 says of Esau, "For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it [the blessing] carefully with tears."

Esau was not repenting of his sin. He was trying to get his father to repent, or change his mind, of having given the blessing to Jacob.

Esau was as much to blame for the loss of the birthright as Jacob was in securing it through deceit and cleverness. Had it not been for Esau's attitude toward his birthright, it would not have been so easy for Jacob to take it from him.

Let us be careful about our attitude toward spiritual truths.

"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Heb. 12:15).

SOWING AND REAPING

2 Samuel 12:1-10

David's harshness and lack of pity were due to his being out of touch with God. No wonder he failed to remember the judgment prescribed by the Law. At this point the Holy Spirit gave Nathan boldness to say to David, "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 12:7).

Through Nathan, the Lord reminded David of His sovereign choice of David, of His protection of him through the years of Saul's bitter enmity, of his elevation to the throne and of the abundance of God's provision for him.

In spite of God's mercies, David had despised God's commandment. God hid nothing from His servant. David was forced to face his sin.

Nathan's message to David not only reminded him of God's tender mercy, love, abundant gifts and honor but also warned David that, because he had sinned, he would reap a harvest of sorrow.

"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife" (v. 10).

The Lord made it very plain in the New Testament that believers cannot escape reaping the kind of harvest they sow. We cannot hide our sin; we will not get away with it. The secrets of the night are not hidden from God.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

BRINGING OUT THE BEST

Genesis 28:1-5

After Rebekah's plea to Isaac that Jacob not be allowed to marry a Hittite woman, Jacob was sent away with Isaac's blessing.

Isaac probably did not know that Esau had sworn to kill Jacob after Isaac's death. However, Isaac lived several years after this time, and nothing ever came of Esau's treacherous plot.

Rebekah and Isaac had one plan for Jacob, but God had quite another. God's ways are higher than our ways.

While people are prone to point out another person's failures, God is concerned about bringing out what is best in him. God is able to discern the true yearning of the heart and to bring about its realization.

Basically, Jacob's desires were for the things of God--he wanted spiritual blessing. God knew this, and He worked to bring out the best in Jacob, even though Jacob often ran ahead and used carnal methods to attain spiritual blessing.

Having blessed him, "Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padan-aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother" (Gen. 28:5).

Jacob had some great surprises in store for him. While he believed God and had a deep-seated faith, he knew little about the ways of God for his life. Jacob had a restless faith, and it was very difficult for him to wait on God to work out His will.

"Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Ps. 37:4).

GOD KNOWS US THOROUGHLY

Genesis 28:10-17

As Jacob lay under the stars while away from home that first night, he was alone with his own thoughts. No doubt he reflected on all that had happened.

Perhaps he asked himself, Was it really worthwhile? Will I ever return to claim the birthright and blessing for which I schemed and that I successfully obtained?

This seems to be when Jacob experienced true conversion. One can know truth about God, as Jacob knew the truth, but not be identified with it.

I, too, was reared in a godly home and knew much truth about God. I had learned the catechism and had been baptized, but it was not until five years later that I understood the truth of regeneration and received Christ as my Saviour.

Jacob suddenly realized that God knew all about him. God knew about his meanness, crookedness and scheming. But God also knew that deep within his heart he was longing for spiritual realities; therefore, He undertook to mold Jacob's life to the praise of His glory.

God knew every detail about Jacob's life, and He knows every detail about your life.

He knows the good things, and He knows the ugly things. He knows when you are putting on a front--acting like you are something that you are really not. He knows whether or not you are genuine--how much of what you say is really the truth.

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).

NOTHING BY CHANCE

Genesis 29:1-12

His experiences at Bethel began a new life for Jacob. After he had established a memorial to God, "Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east" (Gen. 29:1).

The phrase "Jacob went on his journey" is literally "Jacob lifted up his feet." Jacob probably traveled quickly--as if walking on clouds.

Remember the day you received Christ as Saviour? Or the day when you met God in a special way? Perhaps you made a great decision or had a great victory. Didn't it seem as if you were walking on a cloud?

No doubt that is how Jacob felt with his new outlook. The revelation of God's presence and the assurance of blessing brought light and encouragement to his heart.

Jacob came to a well where some men were watering sheep. When he asked if they knew Laban, they replied that they did. They assured him that Laban was well and said, "Behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep" (v. 6).

What a unique meeting! God had promised Jacob He would be with him, and this meeting with Rachel was not by chance or accident. This is the way God also works in our lives.

We may go a certain direction, but we never get out of God's sight. All that happened to Jacob was by divine appointment--there is no such thing as chance as far as God is concerned.

"Being predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).

GOD TEACHES US THROUGH OTHERS

Genesis 29:13-15

Laban invited Jacob to stay with him, and thus began 20 years of grueling discipline that eventually led to Jacob's complete transformation. Jacob had experienced an inner spiritual change, but his outward life also needed to be transformed.

During the 20 years, God subjected Jacob to hard discipline so that He could make him a worthy instrument. His life reminds us of Proverbs 13:15: "The way of transgressors is hard."

In Jacob's life we also see the truth of Galatians 6:7: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." God purposed to train Jacob by having him live with Laban.

These men were similar in many ways, but there was also a great difference between them. Jacob believed in God, whereas Laban apparently did not, as evidenced by the fact that we are later told of his idols.

However, God did not allow Laban to bring harm to Jacob. Laban would have sent Jacob away with nothing, but God was in control of the situation, and He saw to it that Jacob received proper payment for his diligent work.

Jacob must have been a hard worker, and God even blessed Laban because of Jacob. God wanted Jacob to have plenty, and He allowed Laban to have plenty also. When God undertakes for us, He always does the right thing.

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Prov. 27:17).

THE COST OF REFUSING TO WAIT

Genesis 29:16-28

Earlier, Jacob had not respected the rights of the firstborn, for he had schemed to get the birthright and the blessing away from Esau. Now, because of Laban's deceit, Jacob had to submit to the rights of the firstborn.

By being required to marry Leah, the firstborn, before he could marry Rachel, Jacob learned his lesson the hard way.

Jacob also learned the lesson about waiting on God. He had refused to wait on God's fulfillment of His promise that "the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23).

Because he refused to wait for God to fulfill this promise in His own time, Jacob had to leave home to save his life. Because Jacob had such difficulty waiting on God, He taught him, through the incident with Leah and Rachel, the importance of waiting.

He had to wait seven years for Rachel, and this in itself taught him many lessons in waiting.

Although he most likely married Rachel a week after he married Leah, he still had to work another seven years for Rachel before he could receive any wages for himself--14 years of waiting before he began to accumulate possessions for himself.

God has ways of teaching people how to wait.

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa. 40:31).

GOD FORGIVES THE ONE WHO REPENTS

Genesis 30:25-33

When Laban told Jacob to name his wages, this gave Jacob another opportunity to scheme and gain more blessings by deceit. Although Jacob schemed and plotted, God did not let him out of His sight--and even continued to bless him.

How marvelous was God's patience with His unworthy servant! God must have seen much in Jacob because of all the years He spent in disciplining him, leading him, overruling his mistakes and forgiving his sins.

When God was finally through with Jacob and had forgiven all of his sins, it is said of God, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them" (Num. 23:21).

Consider the grace of God that is revealed in this statement: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob." The verse does not say that Jacob did not sin, but God had forgiven it all and had blotted it from His mind.

What a marvelous God we have! Take time to examine your heart before God and confess any sin that is in your life. God has promised to forgive our sins when we confess them to Him (1 John 1:9).

Clear the record with God so that there is no unconfessed sin in your life. Because Christ shed His blood to pay the penalty for sin, it is possible for God to blot out your sin.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

GOD KNOWS THE HEART

Exodus 9:22-35

Against the backdrop of this awful judgment is a verse that reveals God's protection of His own: "Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail" (Ex. 9:26).

Goshen was part of Egypt, but God controlled the circumstances so that the Israelites were untouched by the judgment that Egypt experienced.

Notice what Pharaoh's response was to this awful judgment: Although Pharaoh seemed to be conscious of his wickedness before God, it was only a feigned confession made in order to escape judgment.

Moses was not fooled by Pharaoh's false confession. God had given Moses insight so he knew what was in Pharaoh's heart and was not fooled in any way.

This reveals how hardened Pharaoh really was; it did not bother him even to fake a confession of sin to God. But God knows what

is in each person's heart, and He was not deceived for one minute.

God had showered His mercies on Pharaoh, but Pharaoh had refused to respond positively in any way. So in the remaining plagues God further hardened Pharaoh's heart so as to fulfill His plan of total revelation of Himself as absolutely sovereign.

"Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Ps. 44:21).

A COVENANT OF SEPARATION

Genesis 31:43-49

This passage of Scripture is often used as a covenant of fellowship or a benediction. However, the context clearly indicates that it was not a covenant of fellowship but a covenant of separation.

Laban said to Jacob, "This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm" (Gen. 31:52).

This was the end result when two powerful schemers clashed with each other. They could not trust each other; so they had to make a covenant and set up a pillar of stones to mark the spot over which neither of them would cross for the purpose of harming the other.

Each was really saying, "I cannot trust you out of my sight. The Lord must watch between us if we and our goods are to be safe from each other." Visiting between the families was not prohibited, but Jacob and Laban agreed never to cross the line for the purpose of harming the other.

How sad it is when there is deep-seated conflict between two individuals. May we live Christlike lives so we will not need to take such measures against our fellowman.

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18).

AT THE END OF SELF

Genesis 32:1-8

As Jacob prepared to meet Esau, it was evident that he still had not grasped what it meant to really live by faith in God. Jacob still projected his own plans--he sent messengers to Esau and told them what to say: "Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau" (Gen. 32:4).

How interesting that Jacob used the word "lord" in referring to Esau. After 20 years with Laban, Jacob had a different language.

Before he had fled from his home, Jacob had lorded it over Esau and had taken away his birthright and blessing. But he now recognized Esau as lord.

Jacob told his messengers to tell Esau, "I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight" (v. 5). They reported, "We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him" (v. 6).

Time had only intensified the hatred. Esau must have strutted with pride when he went to show his great power to Jacob.

He had been beaten by Jacob's cunning, but he would let Jacob know that he now had the power to humble him. Esau's attitude was "I'll show him who's the better of us."

Jacob was in real trouble. What was he going to do? How often God has to bring us up against a wall of calamity before He can truly deal with our souls.

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5,6).

PRAYING WITH PROPER MOTIVES

Genesis 32:9-12

Because of Jacob's imperfect faith, he offered a prayer of panic and then resorted to his carnal planning.

In fact, Jacob began to plan even before he prayed. He took time out of his planning to pray, then immediately returned to his own

schemes. He didn't seem to really trust God but only asked God to sanctify his plans.

As Jacob prayed, he said, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children" (Gen. 32:11).

What was the motive for Jacob's petition? At first, it might seem selfish, but verse 12 indicates that Jacob was seeking the glory of God.

Jacob was claiming God's promises when he said, "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude" (v. 12).

We also need to check our motives when we are praying for the salvation of our loved ones. Are we praying for them only because they are loved ones, or are we truly concerned about the glory of God?

Our chief concern should always be the glory of God. Whatever we do, we should "do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Jacob still had fear, but it was an unnecessary fear. God had promised to bring him back to the land and to make his descendants as the sand of the sea.

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:3, NASB).

GOD'S PLAN OR OURS?

Genesis 32:13-21

Genesis 32:13 tells how Jacob returned to his scheming immediately after praying: "And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother."

Instead of trusting in God alone, Jacob plotted how he could appease Esau by giving of his possessions. Jacob substituted appeasement for deception. This perhaps shows some improvement, but his motives were still fleshly and debased in view of all the promises God had given him.

Because Jacob did not trust the Lord as he should have, he continued to carry the burden himself. Jacob leaned on his own plan more than on God's sure word of promise. This is a vivid illustration of the works of the flesh.

The flesh is always in conflict with the Spirit. Galatians 5:17 says, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

When we are in the habit of thinking that we provide for ourselves, it is hard to trust God completely. We feel that somehow we have to help God if our needs are to be met. Instead of fitting into God's plan, we expect Him to bless our plans.

"For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me" (Ps. 31:3).

ALONE WITH GOD

Genesis 32:22-26

Some battles must be fought alone. There are times when no one can help us. This was just such a time in Jacob's life.

Jacob's trouble was himself--his self-will, self-purpose, self-defense, self-desire and self-righteousness. Jacob's self-life had to be dealt with, and God chose to do so while Jacob was alone.

Jacob needed to learn that even though he was weak physically, he could be strong spiritually.

It took more than spiritual wrestling to convince Jacob of his need. God had been dealing with him spiritually for more than 20 years, but Jacob had failed to learn.

God now struggled with Jacob physically because it was something Jacob could comprehend. Jacob's spiritual level of discernment was not mature enough for God to deal with him on a spiritual basis alone.

Sometimes God also has to deal with us on a physical level because this is the only thing that some of us really understand. It may involve the loss of wealth, health or family, but whatever it is, the loss is intended to draw us closer to the Lord.

If we cannot be led spiritually, the Lord will communicate with us in a language we can understand. Let us become so sensitive to the Lord's leading that He will be able to deal with us purely on a spiritual basis.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret. and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:6).

IS ALL ON THE ALTAR?

Genesis 32:27-32

The first key to God's victory in Jacob's life is that Jacob was left alone with God. The second key is that Jacob had to be brought to the end of himself.

His own strength had to be broken. He had come to the end of his own resources. All confidence in his flesh had to be brought to an end, and this was done when his opponent crippled him. Then he realized his utter weakness.

Jacob could no longer fight his brother, Esau, in his own strength, for his thigh was dislocated. Four hundred men were coming with Esau, and Jacob was completely powerless to do anything.

Previously, he had resisted relying completely on the Lord, but now he had to because of his helplessness. He had to depend on God.

What all must God do to us to bring us to the end of ourselves? What must He do to us individually, organizationally, nationally and internationally to bring us to the end of ourselves? We struggle, strive, fight and resist, but we must realize that surrender to God is the only answer.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

FEAR FOLLOWS GREAT EXPERIENCE

Genesis 33:1-11

Jacob had just experienced a wonderful night with God that resulted in his becoming the new man, Israel. But when he saw the danger--Esau and his 400 men--fear gripped his heart.

Great experiences do not guarantee constant faithfulness. Jacob's experience at Peniel was a stepping-stone to greater living, but it did not guarantee faithfulness on his part.

He had made significant progress during his 20 years with Laban, but he was not yet all that God intended him to be.

Even Paul wrote: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13,14).

Experiences that result from crises are like open doors that make it possible for us to enter a new aspect of our Christian walk. Thus, Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

We are to daily take our position in Christ and follow Him. Galatians 5:16 assures us that when we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

When we commit ourselves to following Him, the Holy Spirit controls our lives, and God lives His life through us.

"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

TOO TIMID TO TESTIFY

Genesis 33:12-20

When Jacob and Esau met, Esau said, "Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee" (Gen. 33:12). Esau offered to protect Jacob and those with him. Esau could easily have done this because 400 men were with him.

God had clearly instructed Jacob that he was to return to his father and to Bethel. Jacob knew this, but he failed to tell Esau he was following God's plan. Instead, Jacob led Esau to believe that he would follow him slowly and meet him in Seir.

This was Jacob's second major step in backsliding after Peniel. Because of weakness and fear he lied to Esau. Jacob was afraid of

what Esau might do, so he resorted to deceit. He feared Esau's temper more than God's disfavor.

Consider what Esau must have thought later when Jacob did not come as he had said he would. This supposedly spiritual leader lied to his brother because he did not have the courage to tell him he was following God.

Words that are not supported by actions turn many people away from the Gospel. This is one reason the present-day church has lost rapport with the world.

We are not direct in making our position with God known, and because of half-truths and timidity we are not winning people to the Lord as we should.

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).

A STEP AT A TIME

Genesis 34:1-7

After Shechem had defiled Dinah, "his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel. And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife" (Gen. 34:3,4).

Shechem tried to remedy the situation by offering marriage. Observe that Satan, who brought about the fall of man, suggested a remedy of mixed marriage--a believer with an unbeliever.

Verses 8-12 of this chapter tell how Hamor presented the case for further coexistence with Jacob and his people. Hamor said, "Make ye marriages with us, and give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you" (v. 9).

Jacob had not come to this serious situation in one great fall. By a series of steps he had come to this deplorable situation.

First, he compromised. God had told him to go to Bethel, which involved a separation from the world. Second, he obeyed only partially. Jacob had gone only as far as Shechem--there was not total separation.

Third, this situation caused their only daughter to be tempted to investigate the world around her. Fourth, she was defiled by Shechem, the son of Hamor.

Fifth, the Hivites offered to intermarry and coexist with Jacob's family. Sixth, all of this led to further sin within Jacob's own family. Which way are our steps leading us?

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:14,15).

IN SPITE OF SIN, GRACE

Genesis 34:27-36:3

God allowed Jacob to go to the depths of sin. Worldliness completely overwhelmed him. He could not have gone any lower, and his family could not have gone any lower.

Their reputation among the people around them was destroyed. They were guilty of murder because of their desire to right a wrong against their family.

Even though Jacob had fallen to the depths of sin, God never stopped working with him. God did not leave Jacob alone until he was back in the center of His will.

God commanded him, "Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother" (Gen. 35:1).

Even though Jacob often turned his back on God, God was never unfaithful to Jacob.

It is wonderful to know that the God of Jacob is our God also. How long-suffering and merciful God is to His own!

With Jeremiah, every believer can say, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22,23).

"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

BETHEL AT LAST!

Genesis 35:4-12

God protected Jacob, and he arrived safely at his destination. Bethel at last!

The princeliness of Jacob was restored. God called him Israel instead of Jacob. Ten years earlier God had changed Jacob's name to Israel, but Jacob had not appropriated his position.

From this time forward Jacob did not backslide to his old life of scheming and deception. He applied faith and appropriated the provisions of God. As a result, in Hebrews 11 his name is mentioned in the gallery of people of faith, along with Abraham and Isaac (vv. 17-21).

When Jacob returned to Bethel, his communion and prayer life were reestablished. Genesis 35:13 says, "And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him."

After Jacob had made things right in his life, he was able to commune freely with God.

Have you also experienced the spiritual dryness that comes from a lack of communion with God? Are there things in your life that need to be confessed to God?

If so, apply 1 John 1:9, and as you appropriate His forgiveness and cleansing, you will again know the sweetness and blessing that comes from talking and communing with God. How wonderful it is to be on good speaking terms with our God!

"Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God" (1 Chron. 22:19).

A MARRIAGE PARTNER DIES

Genesis 35:16-20

Rachel named the child "Ben-oni," which means "son of my sorrow." However, Jacob named the child "Benjamin," which means "son of the right hand."

Rachel's death was one of Jacob's deepest sorrows. She died sorrowing, but he triumphed in faith and called the child "son of the right hand."

Jacob took a victorious stand for God in spite of the fact that the most precious person in his life had been taken.

Rachel's death and burial broke Jacob's main link with his past carnal life at Haran. He had gone there to get a wife and had been guilty of many carnal actions.

"And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day" (Gen. 35:20). Jacob established a pillar in remembrance of the one who had been so very precious to him.

Because Jacob had returned to Bethel and had been fully restored to fellowship with God, he was now able to fulfill the second part of God's command: "Return . . . to thy kindred" (31:3).

Thus, Jacob was on his way to his father, Isaac, who lived in Mamre. That is where Jacob was going when Rachel died in childbirth along the way.

"Blessed be God . . . , who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1:3,4).

A FATHER DIES

Genesis 35:27-29

Finally, Jacob arrived at his father's home in Mamre: "Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned" (Gen. 35:27). Jacob had not seen his father for at least 30 years. What a reunion they must have had!

During the next 13 years Jacob cared for his father. Then we are told, "The days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years. And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him" (vv. 28,29).

The death of Isaac meant Jacob's separation from the past generation. The responsibility of the family was now entirely his.

He had deceived Esau out of the birthright and had stolen the blessing many years earlier, but now the birthright was his by divine appointment--and so was the responsibility.

In the account of Isaac's death, it is precious to see that Esau and Jacob had apparently been reconciled: "His sons Esau and Jacob buried him" (v. 29). Death is often a great reconciler.

Esau had said years earlier, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob" (27:41). But Isaac did not die as soon as was expected, and by the time he did, Esau and Jacob were seemingly reconciled.

May we who are Christians be sure we use the occasion of a death of a loved one as a time of reconciliation with family members rather than a time of division.

"He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isa. 25:8).

THE BLESSING OF DIFFICULTIES

Genesis 35:28,29

In review of Isaac's life of 180 years, there are some special lessons we should learn. It was not easy for Isaac to follow in the footsteps of his great father.

In a sense, Isaac's life was made too easy because he occupied his father's position without having had his father's experiences. He passed into his inheritance without having passed through the various means of discipline that Abraham experienced.

There is the expression "Practice makes perfect." In an even more real sense it can be said, "Experience makes perfect." The suffering we experience in our lives brings about personal discipline.

Jeremiah wrote: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (Lam. 3:27).

Our youth today are experiencing what Isaac experienced. They find themselves living in an advanced age with advanced positions in life without having passed through the experiences of those who made these things possible.

Although the younger generation does not need to experience everything we did, some extremely difficult experiences are essential for the kind of maturity God wants to produce. This is the blessing of difficulties!

"But we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (Rom. 5:3).

INFLUENCE DURING FORMATIVE YEARS

Genesis 37:1-4

After the record of Joseph's birth in Genesis 30:23,24, very little is said of him until he was 17 years of age. Genesis 37 begins the detailed record of his life.

In addition to the children of Bilhah and Zilpah, the children of Leah were also Joseph's early companions.

The half brothers of Joseph were unfit companions for spiritual encouragement. They had naturally been affected by the life they had witnessed in Haran and the conflict they had seen between their father, Jacob, and Laban.

They were also affected by the jealousies they saw in their homes among their mothers.

These children were older than Joseph and had received their early impressions from the old Jacob--the Jacob before Peniel. These impressions came before their father was mellowed in spiritual things.

Perhaps you say, "Yes, but couldn't they have learned differently after Jacob became Israel and had his experience with God and began to really walk with God?" This might seem logical, but indelible impressions had already been made on their lives.

Regrettably, we cannot go back and change the past, but this shows us the importance of training children in their formative years. Those who know Christ as Saviour and have children in this stage of life should be sure that they are doing their best for the Lord and their children.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS

Genesis 37:5-11

The Scriptures record that there was a twofold response to Joseph's dreams: His brothers "envied him; but his father observed the saying" (Gen. 37:11).

His brothers were jealous of him, but his father pondered and heeded what Joseph said. He began to reflect on how all this might fit into God's program, although at first he had rebuked Joseph.

These prophetic dreams were God-given, and we are not told what Joseph's attitude was as he told his father and brothers about them.

Whether it was wise or unwise for Joseph to have told them, God permitted him to do so and even used the brothers' reaction as a means toward fulfilling the prophetic aspect revealed in the dreams.

Many times in the years to follow, Joseph must have wondered about his dreams and their fulfillment. The next 13 years of his life were filled with many tests and trials. Humanly speaking, they all seemed to stem from the time when he incited his brothers' hatred by sharing his dreams with them.

Had Joseph been looking at only the circumstances, he would have despaired of all hope, but his trust was in God.

God's ways are mysterious; they are beyond man's comprehension. As God sovereignly works, man is often unable to understand why he is being led down a certain path.

"Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" (Prov. 20:24).

FACING DEATH PREPARES FOR LIFE

Genesis 37:18-24

We do not know how many hopeless and hungry hours Joseph spent in the pit--possibly it was for an entire night.

Although Reuben intended to deliver Joseph back to his father, no doubt the intent of the rest of the brothers was to let Joseph starve in the pit. They had cast him into a place of death.

Even in this there is a spiritual lesson for us. Resurrection comes only out of death. We must recognize ourselves as dead with Christ before we can experience the victorious life.

Galatians 2:20 says, "I am [literally, "I have been"] crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

The believer has gone through death with Christ and also through the resurrection with Christ. The believer has Christ within him, and he is to live his life by the faith of the Son of God. All of these benefits must be appropriated by faith.

Joseph's night alone with God in the pit was really what he needed. Although Joseph lived a righteous life, he was not yet ready for what God purposed to do with him.

So God brought him to this place of death to prepare him to live. We, too, must pass through the place of death to self before we become useful to God.

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12).

FAITH FOR LIFE'S UNCERTAINTIES

Genesis 37:25-36

The brothers sold Joseph into Egypt, "but God was with him" (Acts 7:9).

In spite of what the unrighteous may do to the child of God, they can proceed no further than God permits. In the midst of such trials, the believer needs to put into practice what is stated in Psalm 37.

Notice that there are no limits to the cruelty of Satan. The brothers evidenced no shame for their sin and even tried to comfort their father. Imagine their trying to comfort him when they were the ones who were responsible for his grief.

Although the brothers had apparently gotten rid of Joseph, they had not gotten rid of their responsibility.

From this account, we should realize the uncertainty of life itself. Joseph went on a mission, but he never returned--he never saw his homeland again.

He was mightily used of God in the path in which God led him, but the opportunity to be a blessing in his own land was never his again. Let us take advantage of every opportunity to be a blessing to others.

Life itself is uncertain. Tomorrow we may be in eternity. Are you ready to meet God? You cannot be sure of tomorrow, so take advantage of the opportunity to receive Christ today.

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

A LIFE OF FAITHFULNESS

Genesis 39:1-6

One of the great lessons that Joseph learned in Egypt was the lesson of obedience through suffering. He did not understand the mysterious circumstances, but he allowed God to be his circumstances.

Because of this, God also became his basic environment--Joseph lived in the sphere of the spiritual even though he was a slave in the house of Potiphar.

There was idolatry and corruption all around him, but Joseph was able to remain sensitive to sin and to grow even stronger in his confidence in God because his attention was fixed on God.

Joseph was only 17 years of age, but because of his simple trust in God, he performed his duties as a slave to the utmost of his power. He was indwelt by the Spirit; therefore, it was God's power that gave him the ability he needed.

Instead of complaining, Joseph faithfully served as a slave. This was because he was serving not just a Gentile master--he was serving God.

Joseph's life of faithfulness was obvious to Potiphar. God's Word says that Joseph's "master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand" (Gen. 39:3).

Even unbelievers are able to discern the Spirit-filled laborer. Do those who work closely with you see your faithfulness and observe that God is spiritually prospering your life?

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." (Luke 16:10)

RESISTING TEMPTATION

Genesis 39:7-13

It is important to remember that Joseph was Potiphar's property. For this reason, Potiphar's wife perhaps thought she could do with this chattel as she liked.

Humanly speaking, Joseph could have been very flattered that he was being tempted by his master's wife. What a feeling of importance Joseph might have had! But Joseph loved God and did not want to do anything that would dishonor Him.

This incident shows us, however, that even a believer is not able to build a wall around him high enough to keep out temptation. It is not sin to be tempted; it only becomes sin when one yields to the temptation.

Joseph was at the time of life when his reaction to temptation would have lasting effects. If he had yielded to the temptation of Potiphar's wife, who can imagine the different course that history might have taken.

What a person accepts or rejects, particularly in the realm of sexual temptation, will affect the rest of his life. This is why God's Word says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

The Apostle Paul solemnly charged young Timothy: "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity [love], peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom.8:13)

GOD NEVER DESERTS HIS OWN

Genesis 39:13-23

What a lie Potiphar's wife told about Joseph! He had refused her invitation to sin because he did not want to dishonor God, and now through her lie God was seemingly being dishonored anyhow.

When Potiphar heard his wife's report, he became very angry. He took Joseph and "put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison" (Gen. 39:20). Could this be the reward Joseph received for his faithfulness to God?

Although everything seemed to be going against him, the Bible emphasizes that "the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (v. 21).

Even though Joseph's situation seemed hopeless, God never left him for one moment.

We, too, have the assurance of God's Word: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). In the original language, this phrase is very emphatic: "I will by no means leave you nor will I by any means forsake you."

God will never leave us helpless nor abandoned. Therefore, "we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (v. 6).

Do you have this confidence? Regardless of how adverse your circumstances are, as a Christian do you know that God will never desert you?

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

SERVING WILLINGLY AND FAITHFULLY

Genesis 40:1-8

Service was one of the main links in the remarkable chain of events that God brought about in Joseph's life. Now he was made responsible for the king's butler and baker, for "he served them" (Gen. 40:4).

Joseph was made responsible for them because his godly character had won him favor with those in authority. And Joseph was willing to serve in any way he could.

As Joseph faithfully served God by serving others, little did he know how God would use his association with the butler and baker to bring about His will. Because God was in it, the relationship of the Hebrew slave with Pharaoh's two servants had far-reaching results.

We also need to realize that the smallest circumstance of life has meaning.

Even though we may not understand how God can use a particular thing to work out His glory, we need to realize that He can use small things as well as big things to accomplish His will.

The words, "all things," are very important words in Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Note particularly that Joseph's religious convictions did not stand in the way of earthly promotion. Men of the world soon detect when a person has quality of character. Joseph did not compromise to obtain promotions; the promotions came because he had a character that would not compromise.

"Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you" (1 Sam. 12:24).

GOD KNOWS OUR HEARTACHES

Genesis 40:9-15

Having assured the chief butler that he would be restored to his former responsibility, Joseph urged him, "But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: for indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon" (Gen. 40:14,15).

These verses reveal the heart and thoughts of Joseph. They show how human he really was. But his trials were inhuman; they were extremely hard to bear.

There was nothing wrong with Joseph's seeking release, but he found that waiting for God's time is often one of the hardest things to do. Joseph was not rebuked by God for seeking his release because God knew the heartache Joseph had.

Regardless of what you are going through, God understands your deepest emotions; He knows how you feel.

Hebrews 4:14-16 tells us, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:13,14).

SPECIAL FAVORS FORGOTTEN

Genesis 40:16-23

Joseph's faithfulness is seen even in his interpretation of the baker's dream. As sad as it was to deliver such a message, Joseph would not swerve from the truth for one moment, even for his own advantage.

He realized that it was his responsibility to pass on what God had revealed to him.

Faithfulness is the characteristic that is so greatly needed in our lives today. The Word of God says, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2).

Time proved that Joseph had given God's interpretation of the dreams. As Joseph knew that the chief butler was now back in his position, no doubt the hope of getting out of prison grew brighter. Surely the butler would remember Joseph to Pharaoh as Joseph had asked.

But whatever hopes Joseph had were dashed to pieces, for the Scriptures say, "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him" (Gen. 40:23).

Joseph had been concerned about the butler when he was sad and had tried to do all he could to encourage him, but now the butler forgot him completely. What ungratefulness!

Does the ungratefulness of people distress you? Perhaps you have done something for someone and have had to put forth much extra effort, but then they either take it for granted or soon forget it altogether.

More importantly, are you grateful when others do things for you?

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:18).

TRAINING THROUGH CHASTENING

Hebrews 12:1-11

If you are now going through testing, there are three things you should especially remember.

First, God's way is the wisest way. Training is always accompanied by some type of hardship.

Even athletes realize they cannot properly train without giving up some of the pleasures of life and enduring the hardship of training. God trains us through chastening.

Second, God's time is the best time. God was working out His purpose through Joseph. It was impossible for Joseph to realize it at the time, but later he could look back and see that God's time had been exactly right--everything had worked out.

But imagine the lonely years of waiting. God does not act too early nor too late. He is never in a hurry but accomplishes things in His own time.

Too many of us either lag behind or run ahead of God's time. But we need to remember that the clock of divine providence keeps strict time. Because of our circumstances it may appear to be slow at times and fast at others, but the all-wise God knows precisely

when to act.

Third, God's grace is sufficient. He will give us the grace we need to be patient.

James 1:4 says, "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." The word "perfect" means "mature" or "complete." God is seeking to teach us valuable lessons so we will be mature believers.

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty" (Job 5:17).

FAILURE OF THE WORLD'S WISDOM

Genesis 41:1-14

The inability of the wise men to interpret Pharaoh's dreams emphasizes the truth later recorded in 1 Corinthians 3:18,19: "Let no person deceive himself. If any one among you supposes that he is wise in this age. . .[let him discard his worldly discernment and recognize himself as dull, stupid and foolish, without true learning and scholarship], that he may become [really] wise. For this world's wisdom is foolishness (absurdity and stupidity) with God. For it is written, He lays hold of the wise in their [own] craftiness" (Amplified).

Egypt was a symbol of the world. During the time of Joseph, Egypt was the center of learning and culture--it was a proud leader among ancient civilizations. But the people were idol worshipers; they did not know Jehovah.

But now Pharaoh was made to see that all human resources and wisdom are powerless and worthless and that true wisdom comes only from God.

How wonderful it would be if leaders in today's world would also come to that realization! "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him" (Ps. 25:14).

If world leaders would turn to the Scriptures and seek God's face, they would learn what is shortly going to come to pass.

From the results of Joseph's time in prison, we see that patience had had her perfect work. God's man was now ready. All things had been working together for Joseph's good, although he had not always recognized it.

"Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go" (Isa. 48:17).

ADVICE WITHOUT SELF-INTEREST

Genesis 41:25-36

After Pharaoh told his dreams to Joseph, God revealed through Joseph that the dreams had to do with seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of great famine.

Joseph then advised Pharaoh that every precaution should be taken during the seven years of plenty so there would be food available during the seven years of famine.

In all of this, Joseph did not say a word about himself nor speak in behalf of his own need. He had died to self; the previous 13 years had completely erased any desires for self. He had seen God working, and that was his supreme desire.

We who know Jesus Christ as Saviour have also died to self. Note, it is not that we should die to self but that we have died to self.

God's Word makes this truth very clear. Romans 6:6 says, "Knowing this, that our old man is [was] crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed [rendered inoperative], that henceforth we should not serve sin."

Our crucifixion took place when Christ died on the cross for us. It is not that we ought to die but that we have died. Our need now is to apply this truth, by faith, to ourselves.

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:23,24).

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7).

THE TEST OF POSITION AND PROSPERITY

Genesis 41:37-45

Joseph now came to the greatest test of his life thus far--exaltation and prosperity.

The hands that had known the hard toil of a slave were now adorned by the king's ring. Joseph's feet had been freed from the torment of the fetters, and now a gold chain was put around his neck.

Joseph had lost his coat of many colors 13 years earlier when his brothers took it from him in anger and jealousy. Later, he had left his outer garment behind in the hands of Potiphar's wife when he had fled from her. But now he was given a royal wardrobe of fine linen.

Once Joseph was treated as offscouring by the Egyptians, but now all Egypt was commanded to bow before him as he rode on the second chariot as the prime minister of Egypt.

All of this took place because Joseph sought to please God and resisted the temptation to sin. Rather than gratifying the flesh, Joseph sought to glorify God.

Joseph found that godliness paid great dividends. He experienced the truth of the principle later stated in Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17).

FORGETTING PAST TRIALS

Genesis 41:46-57

As time passed, "unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On bare unto him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh [forgetting]: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house" (Gen. 41:50,51).

This does not mean that God had caused Joseph to forget about his family, but He caused him to forget about the trials of the past as related to his family.

This is exactly what happens when a person walks with the Lord. The blessings are so many he forgets about the trials.

Joseph named his second son "Ephraim," which means "fruitful." Joseph said, "For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction" (v. 52). Joseph had forgotten the trials and now saw only the fruit that God had brought about in his life.

So it will be with us when we really grasp the significance of the truths stated in Romans 8:28,29.

As we are conformed more and more to the image of Jesus Christ, we will be so thrilled with what God has accomplished in our lives that we will tend to forget the tests and sufferings that were used to cause us to be conformed to God's Son.

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Pet. 5:10).

BROTHERS MEET AGAIN

Genesis 42:1-17

Joseph accused his brothers of being spies. Think of the contrast! More than 20 years ago they had accused Joseph of spying on them and telling their father on them; now he was accusing them of being spies.

When they accused Joseph, they cast him into a pit. Now that he accused them, "he put them all together into ward three days" (Gen. 42:17). Joseph's actions paralleled their actions many years before, but he did not do it for revenge.

Memory is one of the most marvelous faculties of our nature. Often when a person receives the kind of evil treatment that he has dealt to others, he remembers his sin and is convicted.

A step God used in awakening the consciences of Joseph's brothers was having them imprisoned. There God could bring even stronger conviction. Their guilt was beginning to strike home.

Joseph's heart was bursting with the desire to disclose himself to his brothers, but he realized he dare not do this and spoil God's

program. Joseph looked on his brothers with compassion and saw them as ones needing to be made right with God.

When you see those who are without Jesus Christ, is your heart moved with compassion? When you are in a crowd of people and realize that maybe 98 percent of them are not born again, how does it affect you? Does it mean anything to you, or are they just people?

"Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil. . . , but contrariwise blessing" (1 Pet. 3:8,9).

NO GRUDGES HELD

Genesis 42:18-28

All of this was too much for Joseph, and "he turned himself about from them, and wept" (Gen. 42:24). His heart was still tender toward them in spite of what they had done to him.

Controlling himself, he "returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes" (v. 24).

It is possible that Simeon had been the leader in what the brothers had done to Joseph earlier, but now all the brothers were beginning to show true repentance.

Verse 21 shows three aspects of this repentance: conscience--"we are verily guilty"; memory--"we saw the anguish of his soul"; and reason--"therefore is this distress come upon us." The brothers were being brought to an end of themselves.

Joseph responded in two ways, although his brothers noticed only one of his responses. First, he wept with a broken heart because of his love for his brothers--especially Benjamin--and for his father. Second, he bound Simeon in their presence.

The brothers saw only the hardness that Joseph expressed; they did not know how tender his heart was underneath it all.

As Joseph's tenderness of heart indicated when he stood before his brothers, he had forgiven them long ago--even though they did not realize it. Have you forgiven those who have wronged you?

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

JUDGING BY THE CIRCUMSTANCES

Genesis 42:29-38

When the brothers returned to Canaan, they rehearsed to their father all that had taken place in Egypt.

Realizing the trouble they were in, Jacob said to his sons, "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36).

Jacob later realized that all these things were really for him in God's sovereign plan. All he could see was the immediate circumstances and, as far as he was concerned, there was no hope whatever.

The son passed the tests better than the father. Joseph responded to hopeless situations better than Jacob. Faith had conquered for Joseph, but Jacob was slow to see that God could bring good out of these circumstances.

Reuben tried to assure his father that Benjamin would be safe when they took him to Egypt. Reuben said, "Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again" (v. 37). But it was impossible for Jacob to see any possibility of allowing Benjamin to go to Egypt.

Jacob did not think he could stand any more grief, but his sons knew it was hopeless to return to Egypt without their youngest brother.

"Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord" (Ps. 31:24).

GUILT PRODUCES FEAR

Genesis 43:1-18

Jacob reluctantly let his sons take Benjamin to Egypt, and he gave them instructions as to what they should take along so they

might be well received.

The sons did as Jacob instructed. They "took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin; and rose up, and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph" (Gen. 43:15).

When Joseph saw his brothers--and Benjamin with them--he commanded the ruler of his house, "Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready; for these men shall dine with me at noon" (v. 16).

Then conscience did its work again. The brothers had such guilt concerning Joseph that anything caused them to greatly fear--especially in the strange land of Egypt.

The ruler of Joseph's house "did as Joseph bade; and the man brought the men into Joseph's house. And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses" (vv. 17,18).

The brothers had been so brave before when they sold Joseph into slavery, but now even hospitality brought fear to them. When a person is guilty of sin, almost everything brings fear to him.

"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

A BROTHER IS HONORED

Genesis 43:19-34

Joseph was unable to restrain himself, and he "made haste; for his bowels [heart] did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there" (Gen. 43:30). What a moving account of the love of Joseph for Benjamin!

Finally gaining control of himself, Joseph "washed his face, and went out, and refrained [controlled] himself, and said, Set on bread" (v. 31).

Joseph still did not identify himself to his brothers. God's program was not yet completed. Joseph was well trained to wait for God's time, regardless of how difficult it was because of his own emotions.

It is highly significant to observe the way they were seated at the meal. Most likely, the reason they marveled was that they were astonished that this Egyptian ruler knew their ages and was able to seat them in the right order. This especially would bring fear to the brothers, for they would wonder what else he knew about them.

The brothers were tested at the meal regarding their attitude toward their younger brother. They had been envious of Joseph because of their father's special love for him. They might well have felt the same way toward Benjamin.

How do you respond when someone receives more honor than you?

"And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

NO EXCUSES; MERCY SOUGHT

Genesis 44:1-16

Perhaps you say this was cruel. Maybe it seems cruel, but sometimes God has to do severe things to get people to see their sinfulness.

Joseph's brothers were being severely tested to see what their reaction would be toward Benjamin when it was discovered that the silver cup was in his sack. Would they sacrifice him for their own safety as they once had done to Joseph?

When they were brought in before Joseph, he said to them, "What deed is this that ye have done? wot [know] ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?" (Gen. 44:15).

Earlier, the brothers had said, "We shall see what will become of his dreams" (37:20). Now they were completely at the mercy of Joseph because his dreams had been fulfilled, even though they did not realize it was Joseph before whom they stood.

In defense, Judah said, "What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found

out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found" (44:16).

The brothers had nowhere to turn; they could only cast themselves upon Joseph's mercy.

When we who know Christ experience difficulties, we should cast ourselves on His mercy.

"Wash me thoroughly [thoroughly] from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Ps. 51:2,3).

A RIGHT HEART ATTITUDE

Genesis 44:17-34

Through Joseph the Lord's objective had now been reached. God had wanted to give perfect rest and peace to the brothers, but this was impossible as long as there was unconfessed sin in their lives.

God used the avenues of conscience and fear to bring about this repentance. The brothers were being tested to see if they could forgive Benjamin, who had brought them all of this trouble.

If they had treated him in the spirit of the former days, as they had treated Joseph, they would have abandoned Benjamin to his fate. Had they done this, they could not have been forgiven.

But Judah expressed their change of heart when he said he would rather stay in Egypt as a slave than go back and see his father die of a broken heart because of the loss of Benjamin.

The brothers had a forgiving spirit toward Benjamin. This is extremely important, for the Lord Jesus Christ said, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:15).

The four conditions of reconciliation had been met: Conscience had been awakened, sin had been confessed, repentance had been made, and a new life had been evidenced.

Joseph's brothers now had the right heart attitude. Because God's work had been accomplished in the lives of the brothers, Joseph was now free to reveal his identity. Might we also be sensitive to sin.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

Not You . . . But God

Genesis 45:1-15

"Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph" (Gen. 45:3). Previously he had spoken to them through an interpreter, but now in their own language he said, "I am Joseph."

When Joseph disclosed his identity, "his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence" (v. 3).

They had reason to be troubled and terrified. Joseph was standing before them as one who had risen from the dead. They could not think of what to say, because any act of self-defense would surely only bring them into deeper trouble.

Joseph recognized their hesitation and said to them, "'Come near to me, I pray you.' And they came near. And he said, 'I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life'" (vv. 4,5).

Joseph told his brothers that the One responsible for his coming to Egypt was "not you . . . but God" (v. 8). This is a truth we desperately need to see--that God moves behind the scenes to accomplish His purpose in our lives.

For the Christian, things are not explained on a human basis--it is "not I, but Christ" (Gal. 2:20). It is only as we allow God to test, try and train us that He can accomplish His overall program and use us as He desires.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

A Father Hears Good News

Genesis 45:16-28

When the brothers reached home, they told their father, "Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:26).

Jacob was so surprised by the news that it was impossible for him to believe it. The Scriptures say, "And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not" (v. 26).

Earlier, when it was demanded that Benjamin go to Egypt with the brothers so they would be able to see Joseph, Jacob had said, "All these things are against me" (42:36).

He did not realize that just the opposite was true--all those things were really working together for good. God had patiently worked to accomplish His will.

When God undertakes a program, He continues with it until it is finished. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

When Jacob saw the wagons, he believed. Some say, "Seeing is believing." However, the Bible says quite the opposite is true. Jesus told Thomas, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Believers are to walk by faith, not sight; let us take God at His word.

"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

A Family Reunion

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34

When Jacob and his family arrived in Goshen, "Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while" (Gen. 46:29).

Again Joseph demonstrated that he was not ashamed to be associated with his family even though shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians. What a tender scene it must have been when Joseph met his father and embraced him, weeping for joy.

Jacob said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive" (v. 30).

It was at this time that we see Joseph's wise strategy as he prepared his family for their meeting with Pharaoh. Joseph's plan was to consult with Pharaoh at once. By bringing these matters before Pharaoh, Joseph was preventing the possibility that someone would accuse him of favoritism.

Also, when Pharaoh gave the word, the chiefs of the people would not thwart Joseph's plan. Later, it was in God's plan to have another Pharaoh--who did not know Joseph--afflict the Israelites in order to cause them to want to leave Egypt.

How Joseph must have thanked God to be united with his family again. Let us be sure to praise God for the many good things He brings into our lives.

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

GOD'S PURPOSE FULFILLED

Genesis 47:1-13, 27-31

God had promised Jacob that He would make a great nation of him in Egypt and that they would return to the land. Jacob's faith in God's promises was revealed in that he asked Joseph to bury him back in Canaan.

His request must have had a great impact on Joseph because Joseph later requested the same thing for himself (Gen. 50:24,25).

God had fulfilled His purpose through Joseph. Joseph had been used to preserve the posterity of the Hebrews. They were now safe in the land of Goshen.

Years later, when it was time to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, God used another man--Moses. God has limited Himself to working through people to accomplish His will.

Joseph had experienced the fulfillment of the truths stated in Psalm 37. He had delighted himself in the Lord, and the Lord had given him the desires of his heart (v. 4). He had waited upon the Lord and had inherited the earth (v. 9).

Being meek, he had delighted himself in the abundance of peace (v. 11). Because he was a good man, his steps had been ordered by the Lord, and he had delighted in the Lord's way (v. 23).

He had waited on the Lord and had kept His way; therefore, he had been exalted to inherit the land and had seen the wicked cut off (v. 34). He had been a perfect (mature) man; therefore, his end was peace (v. 37).

We need to apply this psalm to ourselves.

"Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise" (1 Kings 8:56).

TESTIFYING TO A KING

Genesis 47:1-12

Pharaoh did as Joseph had hoped. He told Joseph, "The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle" (Gen. 47:6).

The Israelites needed a place to grow as a people and, at the same time, remain separate from the Egyptians. The attitude of the Egyptians toward shepherds was used of God to make both of these things possible.

Jacob was both bold and spiritually courageous before Pharaoh. Although Pharaoh probably considered Jacob an outcast because he was a shepherd, Jacob conducted himself as a child of God before Pharaoh. After all, Jacob was a son of the King of kings and an ambassador of the Most High.

Jacob acknowledged his pilgrim status when he referred to the "years of my pilgrimage" (v. 9). Jacob viewed his entire life on earth as a pilgrimage. In this regard, he identified himself with Abraham and Isaac.

Hebrews 11:9, 10 says of Abraham, "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles [tents] with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

As we recognize we are also but pilgrims in this life, we will have more spiritual courage as we have opportunity to testify to those highly honored by the world.

"I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed" (Ps. 119:46).

NEW HEIRS APPOINTED

Genesis 48:1-5, 14-22

After the famine was over, Joseph lived about 66 more years. Jacob lived only about 10 or 11 more years. Little is said about either of them during these years. However, there was one highly significant thing that occurred before Jacob's death.

Jacob said that his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, would be counted among his own sons, which was significant as far as the inheritance was concerned.

Although Reuben was the firstborn of Leah, he had lost the birthright because of the gross sin of lying with his father's concubine. This birthright was then passed on to Joseph, the firstborn of Rachel.

The birthright, having come to Joseph, was then given to his sons. This was later referred to in 1 Chronicles 5:1,2: "Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his

brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's)."

Joseph had received the double portion of inheritance, and his two sons were numbered among the 12 tribes of Israel as the recipients. God rewards those who honor Him.

"If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isa. 1:19).

FEARING GOD

Psalm 34:9-22

The secret of Joseph's life was summed up in his own words when his brothers first came to Egypt. He told them, "This do, and live; for I fear God" (Gen. 42:18). The last three words of this statement were the key to his life--"I fear God."

There were four things that were particularly significant about Joseph's secret--"I fear God."

First, he learned this secret early in his life while he was still at home. This shows us the importance of giving our children the spiritual training they need while they are yet young.

Second, the secret of Joseph's life was developed by his loyalty and obedience in the routine of daily duty. It did not matter whether things were small or large--he was faithful.

Third, the secret of Joseph's life was proved by the results. God honored His servant for his simple trust and confidence and justified his actions in his home life, slavery, prison and in Pharaoh's court.

Fourth, the secret of Joseph's life was made effectual in daily living by faith. Faith in God was evidenced throughout all his life, even when he faced death.

The divine commentary is that "by faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones" (Heb. 11:22). Faith is powerful and always brings results.

"O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" (Deut. 5:29).

A BELIEVER DIES

Genesis 49:28-33

"When Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people" (Gen. 49:33).

This was the final scene for this man who had become great in the sight of God and in the sight of the world. Everything was now accomplished. The last counsel and the last blessing had been given. The last charge had been delivered to his sons.

Then he "yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people." Jacob's death was the death of a believer. He yielded his spirit to God and was reunited with his own people in the grave.

The Christian is inspired by the hope of the resurrection; the grave is not his goal. First Thessalonians 4:16-18 says, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so

FAILING TO ACCEPT FORGIVENESS

Genesis 50: 1-17

A lack of faith was demonstrated by Joseph's brothers after the death of their father.

Joseph had assured the brothers that all had been forgiven (Gen. 45:8). The brothers had seemed to accept Joseph's statement, but after their father died, they began to wonder again if Joseph might retaliate.

The brothers pleaded that Joseph might take heed to their father's words and forgive them for what they had done.

Notice Joseph's reaction when he heard these words from his brothers: "And Joseph wept when they spake unto him" (50:17). Joseph wept because his brothers refused to believe him. It was heartbreaking for him to realize that his brothers had so little faith in him.

This gives us a small picture of how God's heart is broken when we do not take Him at His word. God can be trusted; therefore, let us exercise faith and take Him at His word.

We see the emotions of God when we read of how Jesus sorrowed over Jerusalem. He grieved because they rejected Him--they refused to place their faith in Him.

Jesus cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37). Let us take God at His word.

"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Genesis 50: 18-26 Confidence in God's Word

Joseph then said to his brothers, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

Joseph realized that even though his brothers had had evil in mind when they sold him into slavery, "God planned it for good" (v. 20, Berkeley). Oh, that we might grasp the sovereignty of God as Joseph did.

Just as his father, Jacob, was determined that Egypt was not to be the final resting place for his bones, so Joseph determined the same about his bones. It was this final and crowning statement of faith that won Joseph his place in God's hall of fame (Heb. 11).

It was not Joseph's striking victory at Potiphar's house nor his vast administrative achievements that won him this place. Rather, it was this last commandment of faith concerning his bones.

God's Word says that "by faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones" (v. 22).

God is pleased when we trust Him and demonstrate our confidence in Him by the way we live. It is by this faith principle that God works in our lives.

If we want to please the Lord more and glorify Him more, then we must start believing Him more and trusting Him more. When we really believe Him, we will act upon our faith because we have taken God at His word.

"Being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21).