

Genesis

NARRATIVE



THE STORIES OF THE
PATRIARCHS

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‘Genesis Narrative
The Stories of the
Patriarchs’

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Introduction.

The first book of the Bible is actually a compilation of the stories of 8 men and their Creator.

Our Lord tells His story in **Genesis Chapter 1 - 2:3** and after that each story begins with the phrase “*These are the generations of...*” or “*This is the account of...*”

Adam’s story begins at 2:4 and continues through chapter 5 and explains why the creation account of chapter 2 differs slightly from that of chapter 1.

Noah’s story is told in chapters 6 through 9, with the account of his sons Ham, Shem and Japeth in 10 and part of 11.

Shem’s story, begins in 11:10 and ends in 11:26.

Terah’s story covers 11:27 through 25:11 and is really about the life of his son Abraham.

Ishamel’s story requires only 7 verses, 25:12 through 25:18.

Isaac’s story begins in 25:19 and continues through the end of chapter 35. Much of Isaac’s story describes the life of Jacob.

Isaac’s oldest son, Jacob’s twin Esau, gets one chapter, 36,

And then the rest of Genesis has Jacob telling the story of his 12 sons with Joseph in the starring role.

It is my firm conviction, from archaeological discoveries and other extra-biblical sources, that Moses had the written accounts of these men in his possession when he compiled them into the book of Genesis.

We’ll soon begin telling the stories of these 8 men as if from their own lips. But first... The Creator’s Story

The Creator's Story: Genesis 1:1 - 2:3

In beginning We created the Heavens and the Earth. I say We because My Son, Who you call Jesus, and the Holy Spirit were there with Me. We didn't make it by combining parts of other things, or fashion it out of something else, or sit back and watch as bits and pieces of it slowly came together, but created it directly from nothing. We're the only ones who can do that. If I do say so Myself, it was perfect, a beautiful work of art with everything in order and harmonious.

But then one of My closest subordinates, who guarded My throne and led the angelic host in praise and worship, and to whom I had given Planet Earth as his home, rebelled against Me and tried to take for himself that which I had given him freely. He wanted to possess the Earth and its atmosphere, to own it and be its god, not just have use of it. Well, there can only be one will in my Creation, and only I am God. So when he convinced a bunch of angels to join in his rebellion, I pronounced judgment against him, and in a flash My beautiful Earth became an uninhabitable ruin, desolate and chaotic. He and his cohorts were left to sit there in the dark and smoldering ruin, unable to do anything to restore it. Remember, We're the only Creator. Finally he confronted Me saying, "It's not fair! You don't love me." (Sounds just like one of your children, doesn't it?)

Perfect Justice And Perfect Love

In response, I implemented a four-step rebuttal. First I re-created my beautiful planet, an act that caused all the host of heaven to shout for joy. Then I created man, a being vastly inferior to my angels, but sharing with them the qualities of eternal life, intellect and emotion, and agency or freedom of choice. Third, I published my Law, promising that everyone who kept my Law to the letter would spend eternity with Me enjoying blessing after blessing. But, anyone who so much as thought of breaking even one of my laws, no matter who he or she was, would spend eternity in a place of punishment forever separated from Me and My Love. I did that to show that I'm eminently fair. Everyone gets exactly what he or she deserves, perfect justice.

Finally, knowing that my standards are far too high for any human to meet and that everyone would be subject to judgment, I determined to punish myself for all their violations of My Law in the person of my Son; promising to pardon without prejudice everyone who would accept His vicarious atonement in faith, not only relieving them of the punishment they deserved but blessing them as if they had never broken My law in the first place. It would be an act of perfect love that would apply all along the time line of human history from beginning to end and should have forever put to naught the accusation that I don't love my creation.

The Six Days Of Creation

My first act of re-creation was to restore light. This was not simply bringing light to that which was dark, but also of bringing truth to that which was a lie. My now sworn enemy and his followers would know who was God and who was not. Since that was my first act of bringing order out of chaos I created the word evening from a root meaning chaos, and morning from a root meaning order. (I guess you know I speak Hebrew.) Then I had the day begin at evening to symbolize this. Each morning as the dawn breaks, order is restored out of chaos, awareness returns to those who were unconscious, and that which was hidden or obscured becomes clear. This was Day One and I pronounced it good.

Since the universe is filled with ultra-violet and infra-red rays that can be harmful to mankind and high winds that can cause storms, I next created a sheltered atmosphere around Earth by making a water vapor canopy to surround it and deflect these rays and high winds. I called the expanse between the surface of the Earth and this canopy the sky.

On Day Three I did two things. First I separated the land from the water to give the man and woman I would soon create a safe place to live. Then I caused all kinds of vegetation to grow on the land to provide food for them. This so delighted Me that I pronounced My work good twice, and later my chosen people would pick the third day of the week, the day of double blessing, as their preferred wedding day.

On Day Four I created repositories to house and reflect the light I had restored on day one. The larger repository that houses the light, I called the Sun; while the smaller one that reflects the light is called the Moon. I did this to establish a regular cycle to the life that was coming and to further instill a sense of order coming out of chaos.

Now's a good time to explain that along the way I've established certain "natural" laws on Earth. One of those natural laws has been named entropy, which states that absent any external controls, order always devolves into chaos. Clothes wear out, homes need maintenance and repair, mountains erode, weeds take over the garden, the list goes on. But in each of the six days of creation the law of entropy is reversed, something only I can do. Order proceeds out of chaos. Randomness becomes design. Evening becomes morning. What greater testimony does man need for the truth of creation over the lie of evolution?

On Day Five I created an even richer environment for my people by populating the land and sea with all kinds of birds and fishes. I blessed them and told them to be fruitful and multiply. This was also good.

Finally, on Day Six I created the animals who would dwell on the land and My crowning achievement, man. I gave mankind a sense of my own image so they could enjoy My creation like I did, and so I could have fellowship with them. As I had done with all My living creatures, I made male and female versions with reproductive capabilities through which the act of creation was transformed into procreation so they could

multiply and replenish the earth. Then I put man in charge, giving him dominion over all my creation.

On the Seventh Day I rested. All My work of Creation was finished, and the model of order out of chaos was firmly established. In six distinct acts of creation, I had demonstrated My power over the “natural order”. I could have done this all at once in the blink of an eye, but I wanted no doubt as to My identity for I am God and there is no other. And so in resting I put in place all the systems and cycles that would henceforth govern My Creation, and from that time forward man would have six days in which to work and one for rest. The moon and the sun would announce the evening and the morning of each 24-hour day, the moon also defining the number of days in a month and the sun counting off the days in a year. This “space-time” reference would never change for all the age of man. It’s a system unique to planet Earth and absolutely essential for the survival of every living thing that dwells there. It’s been so since the beginning of Creation.

Adam's Story: Genesis Chapter 2:4 - Chapter 5

Genesis 2:4-2:25

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. -**Gen 1:27**

I guess you could say everything started with me, at least from the human standpoint. Although I didn't arrive till the creation work was all but finished, everything that came before was for my benefit, to provide me with food, shelter and a pleasing environment.

The Lord had planted a large and beautiful garden, rich and lush, that covered most of what you call the Middle East today. Four rivers flowed through the garden, two of which, the Tigris and Euphrates are still there today. That means the general location of the Lord's garden is pretty well established.

Like I said, I was a relative late-comer to the creation and so when I arrived, the Garden of Eden, as He called it, was already there. Aside from its lush vegetation, the garden teemed with an incredible variety of other living creatures as well. So beautiful was it that when the Hebrew descendants of my family describe Paradise, they use a word whose root means garden, a reference to the Garden of Eden. And to think, the Lord had placed me in charge of it all. Wow!

The Lord instructed me that I was free to eat any fruit or vegetable in the Garden except those that grew on one of the trees in its middle, the one He called the Tree Of The Knowledge Of Good And Evil. Then He brought me every animal He had created, and whatever came out of my mouth when I saw each one became its name. We were all made of the same basic elements as the Earth and it was about then that my name became obvious. Adam is the Hebrew word for man and comes from adamah, the Hebrew for earth or ground.

To facilitate the propagation of all the species, the Lord established the process of procreation and had formed male and female versions of each of His creatures except me. So He put me into a deep sleep and from one of my ribs, He made a female version of me, a "womb-man" or woman. The Lord knew just what I wanted and the moment I saw her I fell deeply and hopelessly in love. It was a pure and innocent love, absolutely unconditional, like no other emotion the Lord has ever given us. I never wanted to spend even a moment

apart from her.

I hope you'll take a moment now and think about our situation. We were young and in love, beautiful people in a beautiful idyllic setting without a care in the world and in intimate non-stop fellowship with our Creator. Our minds, unfettered by the debilitating effects of sin, were free to soar among the very thoughts of God, our senses enjoying to the fullest, the countless pleasures He had created just for us. We walked and talked with Him as He taught us of the wonders of His Love. There was peace and harmony in the Garden; peace between us and our Creator (Who loved us as the highest and best examples of His creative power, created in His own image) and peace among all the species of His Creation. It was truly Heaven on Earth.

Now contrast that with the world's view of man's initial appearance on earth. Emerging from some primordial soup, growing first fins then legs, living in caves and digging in the dirt for food, resembling a monkey more than a man with an intellectual capability on par with the least of them, this ape-man stumbles aimlessly into one discovery after another that over the course of time accidentally results in us today. Or as author Frank Peretti has so aptly put it, "From goo to you, by way of the zoo." This view has early men hardly able to communicate with an ape, let alone God, and only by chance, emerging superior to their so-called relatives. Not only does it violate the natural laws its proponents espouse, but even they are slowly being forced to admit that even if their theory could work, there hasn't been enough time since the beginning for all this to happen.

Pardon my strong opinions, but I was there. I walked and talked with God and enjoyed all the limitless pleasure of His Garden and His Company. The experience so profoundly impacted me and was so deeply ingrained in my psyche, that even today, its memory is clear enough in the minds of my descendants that they long to go back there. They define Heaven in terms of my experiences in the Garden and indeed the two have much in common. The story of our eviction and the provision the Lord made for our return is next. But first take this advice from one who knows. Fall on your knees today and thank God for providing The Way back to the Garden.

Genesis 3

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. **-Gen 1:27**

As I said before, the moment I saw Eve (my name for the woman the Lord had given me) I fell deeply and hopelessly in love. It was a pure and innocent love, absolutely unconditional, like no other emotion the Lord has ever given us. It made me light in the head and weak in the knees. I never wanted to spend even a

moment apart from her.

One day while we were walking leisurely in the Garden, we wandered near the two trees in its middle. The Lord had warned us about these trees, and with good reason. The first was the Tree of Life. Eat from its fruit and be healed of any affliction or injury. The second was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eat from its fruit and know as God knows, the blessings of Good and the curse of Evil. If you'll allow me a moment of reflection, it seems that every form of religion in our world begins at one of these two trees. Some religions teach us of the joys of eternal life and encourage us to attain it, to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Life. While others teach us to become our own god, by becoming as good as He is (perfect), and by knowing what He knows, the full measure of good and evil. Promising someone they can become just like God is a powerful incentive, as you'll see in a few minutes, and many religions today do just that.

But our Lord knew we weren't capable of receiving the fullness of this knowledge, that like an incurable disease it would contaminate and eventually destroy us. He knew that the insidious nature of evil would overpower our sense of good and cause us to become evil, unfit for fellowship with Him and worthy only of destruction. He gave us explicit instruction not to eat the fruit of this tree.

So why did He even put such a tree in the Garden? Our Creator loved us, but desired love from us as well, and that required that we have a choice. The only really meaningful love is that which one gives freely and willingly. If we could only do what he asked, then we'd have no choice but to love and obey Him, and our love wouldn't be worth anything. We'd be little more than slaves or robots. So He created us with free will, which includes the ability to love or hate, to obey or disobey, to live or die. And He gave us only one rule; don't eat from that tree. Out of His love, He demonstrated the blessings that came from obeying His rule, giving us everything we could possibly ask for, but only warned us against the consequences of disobedience, not wanting to see us in pain.

So there we were, walking together through the Garden. Like all of God's creatures we wore no clothes but felt no embarrassment or shame. (It's still that way for every animal but man. In all of God's creation, only we feel the need to cover ourselves in public.) I was free to gaze lovingly upon the beautiful form of my beloved as she was free to admire me. It was like studying a fine work of art, only so much more, and I spent hours loving her this way, thanking the Lord for giving her to me.

When we came to the center of the Garden and the two trees, the one you call The Serpent was there. His name comes from a root meaning "enchanter" and that's just what he was. Approaching Eve he spoke with reason and logic, convincing her that God had lied and was just trying to keep her in her place, inferior to Him. He persuaded Eve that not only would she not die from eating the forbidden fruit, but that it looked and tasted good, and was beneficial for gaining wisdom, the wisdom of God. As I said, it was a powerful incentive, and he made it sound so good. I was right there with her and for the life of me don't know why I didn't stop her. I just know that all of a sudden she had eaten some and was immediately and irrevocably

changed. She had broken our only rule and nothing would ever be the same again.

I had two choices. Walk away and leave my beloved forever, or stay with her and try to get us out of this awful mess. It wasn't a hard choice; I couldn't bear the thought of living without her. I loved her so much it seemed better to join her in mortality than miss her for eternity. So I took the piece of fruit she offered me and at once felt that awful feeling in the pit of my stomach. This was a huge mistake. I knew it as soon as I looked at her. I was embarrassed to be naked and to see her that way. We quickly grabbed some leaves and fashioned coverings for ourselves. Then we went and hid from God.

Of course He knew what we had done and soon found us. For the first time in my life, I lied to God (I was doing a lot of things differently now) and tried to blame Him by blaming Eve. He gave her to me after all. Eve blamed the Serpent, but we all got punished. The serpent didn't have a leg to stand on (literally) and God declared war on him, promising that an offspring of Eve's would make him pay dearly. We didn't know it then, but God was referring to the Messiah, Who would be a descendent of Eve's. The way He described the Messiah as her offspring, not ours, hinted at the virgin birth. It was the first mention in the Bible of a coming redeemer who would reverse the consequences of the terrible mistake we had made.

Eve and I were banished from the Garden, our little piece of Heaven on Earth gone. From now on I would have to work hard every day to earn our living and Eve would remember every time we had a child, the pain we had caused God. Even the Earth would be cursed, producing thorns and thistles and other plants that weren't fit for us to eat.

But worst of all, God had been right. We were now mortal, subject to death. Disease and aging came into the world at that point, a consequence of sin. Having been banished from the Garden, we could no longer eat from the Tree of Life to prevent it. Sinners cannot achieve eternal life. But even here, God's grace was evident. Those very thorns and thistles, unfit for eating, contained antidotes and cures for the diseases our disobedience had produced. They wouldn't make us immortal, but they could ease our pain and discomfort along the way. The first incidence of judgment restrained by the Grace of God.

Our Lord didn't take away our shame at being naked either. Instead, He used it to teach us another lesson. He removed our hastily assembled leafy coverings and made clothing for us using animal skins, showing us that our guilt would not be absolved by the works of our own hands, but by the shedding of innocent blood. What later became known as the Levitical system of animal sacrifice began there.

As we left the garden, we watched while the Lord stationed powerful angels there to guard the way back to the Tree of Life and had an altar built at its entrance. This so we could sacrifice the innocent animals whose blood would temporarily set aside our sins until the Messiah came to redeem us once and for all, and lead us back into the Garden forever.

Genesis 4 and 5

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. **-Gen 1:27**

There's just no way I can adequately explain the differences between life in the Garden and life outside because in all of humanity only Eve and I experienced both. But try to imagine how your life would be today if literally everything and everyone in your environment was aligned to accomplish God's will, the free and unfettered expression of His love toward His creation.

In your mind try and free yourself from the economic bonds that imprison you. He never intended that. If your income stopped today, how long before your security was threatened and your lifestyle irrevocably changed? Maybe you're one of the blessed ones who love your work, but how much more would you love it if there wasn't the ever-present need to earn the money required to meet your obligations and guard against future uncertainties? And if you're stuck in a job you hate but can't leave because you need the income, try to imagine what you'd do if money was no longer a factor. You, like nearly everyone else in the world, are held prisoner to your economic system. It wasn't like that in the Garden.

You've never known anything different, but how much emotional and physical energy do you think you expend each day overcoming the obstacles to your goals? I'm talking about everything from weeds in your lawn and garden to the gradual but never-ending decay of your home and belongings (not to mention your physical body) to the destructive efforts of those opposed to or jealous of your success. What could you accomplish if your mind, that unfathomable device that no man or machine can even begin to replicate, was freed from the bondage of sin that causes you to devote countless debilitating hours to jealousy, envy, regret, anger and escapist diversion? I could go on but I don't want to discourage you any more than you already are. Besides, like I said, you can't begin to imagine how it was in the Garden.

From the first days of our mortality, our life after death, Eve and I began to experience this incredible difference. Sure the work was hard, and overcoming the resistance God's creation now threw up at us was very frustrating, but the most difficult thing was the way our minds began to work against us. The regret we felt at what we'd done, and our anger at the one who deceived us sapped nearly all our energy. If it weren't for God's promise that He'd send Someone to redeem us, we never would have made it.

When Eve became pregnant, we thought we would soon be restored. The Lord had promised that an offspring of hers would save us, and like all humans we were now self-centered, impatient and figured that would happen right away. She declared, "With the help of the Lord I've brought forth a man," and named our son Cain which means "brought forth". And so when our second son came along she named him Abel, which means "temporary" or "meaningless" thinking him to be an unnecessary addition to our family. These two

boys would soon demonstrate the unspeakable difference between life in the Garden and outside in the most dramatic way possible.

As they matured from boys to men, Cain became an accomplished farmer while Abel tended our flocks of sheep and goats. Cain was proud of his gardening ability and brought some of his finest produce as an offering to the Lord, while Abel brought the prescribed animal sacrifices. Cain was astonished and angered when the Lord refused the best works of his hands in favor of Abel's innocent animals. But the Lord reminded Cain of the required offering, told him if he brought it, he too would be accepted, and warned him that the sin being sown in his mind would soon be harvested in his actions unless he overcame it. In the first recorded incidence of contention between a man and his brother, the Lord taught Cain that evil thoughts will spring unbidden into a sin infested mind. These thoughts are attacks by our enemy and in and of themselves do not constitute sin. It's our responsibility to reject them before they can influence our behavior, because the moment we accept and consider them, they become sin and will eventually overcome us. It's a consequence of possessing the knowledge of good and evil. We're just not strong enough to deal with it alone.

Like most of us, Cain allowed the sin in his mind to influence his behavior. He lured Abel into the fields and murdered him. For the second time, a human life had been prematurely ended. The first was when the Serpent ended Eve's life and mine. He murdered us as surely as if he had gunned us down there and then, and now my first-born son had murdered his brother. And like his father before him, he lied to the Lord when confronted. (I was created in the image of God. All our offspring were created in my now flawed image.)

The Lord banished Cain from His presence, forbidding the ground from producing food for him, and made him into the first wandering nomad. From earliest times, it was the responsibility of the next of kin to avenge a brother's murder. All living people on Earth were Cain's next of kin, being sons and daughters of ours, and so Cain was afraid for his life, pleading for mercy before God. In another of His unending acts of grace, the Lord marked Cain and warned all of his brothers and sisters against avenging Abel's death.

Cain took one of his female relatives as his wife (all women were either his sisters or his cousins, so who else could he marry?) and moved away to start a new life with a family of his own. Before his first child was born he had laid out the beginnings of a city. The seventh descendant from me in Cain's line was Lamech. Lamech had three sons; Jabal a livestock breeder, Jubal a musician, Tubal-cain a toolmaker, and a daughter Naamah, whose name means "pleasure". From these children came the beginnings of animal husbandry, manufacturing, the arts and music, and entertainment. In just 7 generations we see the foundation of a recognizable civilization; cities in which to live, leisure and entertainment, and industry. In opposition to the agrarian way of life God had shown us, my son Cain and his descendants were responsible for originating the way of man.

Obviously, Eve and I were shocked beyond description by the episode between Cain and Abel. Eve was especially despondent. After all, Cain was to have been our redeemer, and now both he and his brother

were gone. But the Lord is good, and gave us another son. She was sure this one would be the One and named him Seth, which means “appointed”. This time the Lord showed us a little more of His intent, since the name of each head of the 10 succeeding generations contained another clue to understanding His plan.

What you call chapter 5 of the Book of Genesis contains the names of these 10 patriarchs beginning with me. I already told you that in English my name means “**man**” and Seth’s means “**appointed.**” Seth’s first born was named Enosh, meaning “**mortal**”. Enosh brought forth Kenan, which means “**sorrow**”. Then came Mahalel meaning “**the Blessed God**”, Jared meaning “**shall come down**”, Enoch, meaning “**teaching**”, Methuselah, meaning “**his death shall bring**” (By the way, the year Methuselah died the flood came) Lamech which means “**despairing**”, and finally Noah, a name meaning “**rest**”.

These 10 names, listed in the order of their bearers’ birth, form a sentence that explains God’s plan and have been dubbed “The Gospel in Genesis 5.” Here’s how they read:

“Man is appointed mortal sorrow, but the Blessed God shall come down teaching that His death shall bring the despairing rest.”

A clearer description of God’s plan to redeem mankind cannot be found anywhere in scripture.

From the beginning, he has made His intention clear, even going to the extent of writing it in the stars. For when He had Seth, Enoch and I name 12 constellations He pointed out we were instructed to give them names that spell out the Gospel story. Every night as they lay out in the open fields, my sons could teach their sons of the coming Redeemer by looking up and remembering the names of these constellations. (You know them as the 12 signs of the Zodiac which were later given corrupted Babylonian names. That’s why astrology was a crime punishable by death in ancient times)

So you see, God’s plan for the redemption of man has always been known. And so those of us who carried memories of life in the Garden either from personal experience like Eve and I, or from the stories we told our children and their children, or from reading the account of our lives in their Bibles, would not despair but have hope that one day the Lord would come as the promised Redeemer and lead all of God’s children back to that beautiful paradise He called His Garden.

Noah's Story: Genesis 6-11

Genesis 6-7

When men began to increase in numbers on the Earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and they married any of them they chose (**Gen 6:1**)

My name is Noah, of the 10th generation from Adam. If you plot the lives of the 10 Patriarchs listed in Adam's story on a time line, you'll discover that I was born 1056 years after Adam was created, only 126 years after his death, and 600 years before the Great Flood.

I want you to take a moment and realize that each of these patriarchs had sons and daughters not named in the account you call Genesis 5; that these unnamed children all had sons and daughters of their own, and that Cain was building a parallel line of his descendants. Add to that the absence of any form of birth control, and the fact that everyone was sexually active for several hundred years, and you'll quickly see that there had to be a huge number of humans on Earth by the time I was born. I really don't know exactly what the total population was, but if you just took the 10 patriarchs and assumed each had only four sons, who also had four sons, etc. there would have been in excess of 1 million people on Earth during my lifetime. The real number was likely 3-4 times that many.

In those 10 generations, the effect of the sin nature that contaminated all of Adam's offspring had become distressingly obvious. As would be the case throughout history, mankind was distinguishing himself primarily by his inclination toward evil. And as if that wasn't enough, some of the angels who had rebelled with Satan before Adam's creation was getting into the act. Remembering that God had promised that a descendent of Eve's was coming to restore all that Adam had lost in the Garden, Satan put his cohorts to work in an effort to so contaminate the human gene pool that not a single pure bred human would remain to fulfill God's commitment. He had these fallen angels take on human form, select the most desirable human women, and marry them to produce offspring we called the Nephillim, or fallen ones. They were super human in strength and size and were the origin of the so-called demi-gods of mythology, but their allegiance was to Satan not God. Later their Babylonian name Shaitan (from the Hebrew for Satan) would be translated into English as "Titan", and "Gigantes," the Greek for Nephillim, would become your word "giant,"

To further anger God, Satan started tinkering with animal genetics as well, producing dragonflies with 4 foot wing spans, birds too large and bulky to fly, and reptiles whose mass was far too big and heavy for their

skeletons to support and with brains too small to operate them. You call all these things dinosaurs today, and delight at finding their bones buried in flood residue, but in our day they were called abominations. We understood that a perfect all-powerful God could never create such pitifully imperfect creatures.

And so God determined that He'd have to cleanse His now-ruined creation by bringing a great flood over all the Earth, and warned mankind that this judgment would come in 120 years. He then tapped me on the shoulder. It seems that of all men, my genetic line was still pure and therefore I could help preserve mankind for the coming Redeemer. Many of the animals were still pure as well, so He told me to build a huge ark, a floating hotel really, to save us and the animals from the coming judgment.

This boat was way bigger than necessary to save just me, my three sons, and our wives, even with all the animals aboard. It contained 1.5 million cubic feet of storage, the equivalent of a train with 500 boxcars. Given that from the biggest to the smallest, the size of the average animal is that of a sheep, and about 250 sheep can be transported on one boxcar, this ark had room for 125,000 animals, or 62,500 pair. Today you count many more species than people in the past did, but even so only 31,000 are mammals, birds, reptiles, or amphibians. All the rest are fishes or insects of some kind, Therefore, there was plenty of space on the ark.

In my opinion, God wanted room enough so that if any of mankind were to repent and be saved, there would be room for them. But alas, even after 120 years of warning, out of several million, no humans joined us on the ark.

As it is today, the reaction then to news of impending judgment was denial and derision. First, there was nothing of a concrete nature to convince them. I mean, they had never even seen any rain on the Earth, let alone a flood. Because of the water vapor canopy the Lord had placed around the Earth, the weather was always perfect. And within a few short generations of the Lord's appearance in the Garden, men had forgotten all about Him. They were taking all the credit for their successes, and had invented clever stories to explain their existence and reject their Creator's role in it. The few who tried to warn them were ridiculed and mocked, and it was commonly held that my sons and I were stark raving mad, a family of weirdoes to be laughed at and pitied as we dutifully built our giant boat. It took a lot of faith to see that God existed and was serious about this judgment. Outside our family, faith was in short supply. Yes, it was a lot like it is today.

But finally the day came and the Lord commanded us to go into the ark, taking the animals He had brought to us. He told us to bring seven of every kind of "clean" animals, proof that the so-called Levitical system was in place from the beginning, and two of every other kind that came to us to be saved. (Funny how the animals knew to come when mankind didn't.) He brought seven of every kind of bird. When we were all aboard, and when in the last seven days all mankind got their final chance to be saved (like the seven final years of your time?) the Lord shut us into the ark and the rains came. It was my 600th birthday.

Genesis 8

As I said, the people of Earth had never seen rain before. With the water vapor canopy the Lord had placed around the Earth to create its atmosphere and protect its inhabitants, the weather was always perfect, comparable to the nicest summer day in your time, with just the gentlest of breezes. Each night, water came up out of the ground to nourish the vegetation, creating a fine mist that settled on all the plants and kept everything clean and fresh. It was a truly remarkable example of the attention to detail in God's perfect creation.

But now for the first time ever, water began falling out of the sky as the canopy collapsed onto Earth. At the same time, the gentle mist that had come up out of the ground at night became a rush of bubbling fountains, too numerous to mention, that crescendoed into literal geysers of water hundreds of feet high. It seemed like water was coming from everywhere. It began on the 17th day of the second month, 1656 years after Adam's creation and continued for 40 days and nights. We thought it would never end. With the collapse of the canopy, the winds began to blow and for the first time we experienced stormy weather on Earth. Talk about scared!

But the dimensions the Lord had given us in building the ark turned out to be exactly perfect for maximum stability in the rolling waters as we rose, and although this was our first voyage ever (actually anybody's first ever), we were relatively comfortable aboard. After 40 days the entire earth was covered so that even the tallest mountains rested beneath at least 20 feet of water, and for 150 days it remained that way as we floated around atop this never ending sea. Those who know the principles of hydraulics know that water seeks its own level. If it covers the tallest mountain in one place, it has to be just as high every other place too, and the mountains in our area were over 17 thousand feet tall. Of course, I didn't visit every place on Earth during my extended cruise, but I can tell you that all during that time I never saw even one peak protruding above the water. It looked to all of us in the ark as if the water had completely covered the surface of the Earth. (You know, even today if you could raise all the ocean floors to sea level and lower all of the mountain peaks as well, there's enough water on Earth to cover its surface to a depth of over eight thousand feet!)

All told we were in the ark for 370 days. Many have wondered what we did during that year, but what's truly miraculous is revealed by what we didn't do. There were no deaths and no births during that time, either among us humans or the animals. Neither did we spend all our time cleaning up after them. The Lord put them into a mild form of hibernation, requiring only a minimum of food. Good thing, too! Can you imagine the stench of living in a huge barn with thousands of animals who've been processing food in one end and out the other for over a year with no place to put the manure, let alone the rotting carcasses of the dead? The apostle Peter was right. The Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials while holding the unrighteous for judgment (**2 Peter 2:9**). In all the Earth only the creatures that live in the sea and those of us on the ark survived.

But finally, on the 17th day of the 7th month, five months to the day since the Lord had shut us in, the ark came to rest in the mountains of Urartu high above the fertile plains of Mesopotamia to the west. As we felt the rumble of the ark's flat bottom scraping over solid ground, we knew that the time of judgment was past and the time for a New Beginning had come. Centuries later in Egypt, the Lord adjusted my people's calendar making what had been the 7th month into the 1st one (see **Exodus 12:1-2**) and 1400 years after that on the 17th day of what was now the 1st month, our Savior, the Lord Jesus came out of His tomb also indicating that the time for judgment was past and the time for a New Beginning had come. The ultimate New Beginning on the anniversary of the first one. Some coincidence, huh?

As the waters steadily receded, I began sending a dove out to explore the situation. After returning several times with nothing over a period of months, it came back one day with a freshly plucked olive leaf. Since olives only grow at low altitudes, I knew the water was finally gone. I took the cover off the ark on the first day of the first month of my 601st year and saw that the ground was dry. One month and 27 days later the Lord commanded us to leave the ark and release the animals. It had been 53 weeks since we'd stood on dry ground and it was quite a sensation. We were the now only humans in a freshly cleansed world with nothing but promise ahead.

After we descended from the mountain, I built an altar and in gratitude sacrificed some of the clean animals the Lord had told me to bring for this purpose. As the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, He promised never again to curse the ground because of man's evil inclinations, and never again to destroy all living creatures in this manner. As long as Earth endured, there would now be seasonal weather patterns, and the regularity of these patterns would be our reminder of His promise.

Genesis 9-11

After leaving the ark, my three sons, our wives, and I traveled west into the fertile plains of Shinar, a place we named Mesopotamia, literally "between the rivers". (You call this place Iraq today.) The rivers were the Tigris and Euphrates, two of the four rivers that flowed through the Garden. The other two had disappeared, although scientists in your time believe they may now have been rediscovered flowing underground beneath the sands of Saudi Arabia.

The eight of us were the only ones remaining on Earth, and boy was it different from before the Great Flood. The biggest difference was the absence of the water vapor canopy that had protected us before. Instead of an endless string of perfect days, there was now weather. Clouds formed, the wind blew, storms came and there were distinct differences during the year. The Lord called these differences seasons.

As you can imagine, every time it rained we were all alarmed, wondering if we were going to get wiped out

in another flood. So the Lord placed a rainbow in the sky each time the rains came to reassure us that He hadn't forgotten His promise never to destroy the whole world by water again.

By the way, this has always puzzled me. Down through the ages there have been "scholars" who put forth the idea that the flood during my time was just a regional one. Don't they understand that if it was, then God lied to us about the rainbow? There have been many regional floods, after all. Do they think He would lie, or is this just another one of those attempts that began in the Garden to deny the Word of God? It has never ceased to amaze me how man, who wasn't there when these events took place, has the arrogance to explain them in contradiction to the description given by God, Who was there. They call themselves scientists, but science by definition requires observation. Only God plus the eight of us saw the flood and lived to tell about it. Why don't they just say they don't know what happened, but have chosen not to believe the explanation given by the One Who does know, instead of trying to convince us all that they know more than God?

Oh well, back to my story. When we got to Mesopotamia, we settled in and began to make lives for ourselves. Although all mankind had originally been vegetarian, the Lord now ordained the eating of meat as long as the animal had been properly bled out. He also placed a separation between us and the animal kingdom, causing the animals we now hunted for food to fear us for their own protection. The peaceful co-existence between us was over, and there would certainly be no more communication. Things were way different from the Garden. Foreseeing that men would argue to the point of taking each other's lives, the Lord ordained the concept of capital punishment, making us accountable for the shedding of blood and formalizing the law requiring a person's closest kinsman to avenge his or her pre-meditated murder.

One event stands out clearly in our early years after the flood because it caused such trouble. I had planted a vineyard and each year made my own wine. One year after stupidly drinking too much I passed out in my tent, and in my drunkenness didn't bother to cover myself properly. Ham, a son whose name means "dark" in my language, came in and saw me uncovered. I'm not going to get into the details of what happened, but it was a very wrong thing for Ham to do and grossly disrespectful to me. When Ham bragged to his brothers, they came in and covered me up, and when I awoke and learned what had happened, I put a curse on Ham's descendants, through his son Caanan. (Canaan became the father of all the Amorites, a group of tribes who inhabited what would become the promised land and who Joshua was ordered to exterminate when the Lord sent the Israelites to claim the land. This was punishment for the pagan excesses they had committed through out a 400-year "grace period" the Lord had given them when He promised the land to Abraham. The children of Israel failed to exterminate them all, subjugating some of them as slaves, fulfilling my curse. The notion popular in some circles today, that this curse was fulfilled in the US slave trade from Africa in the 1800's has no Biblical standing, and besides Africa was populated by other branches of Ham's family as we'll see.) Because Shem and Japheth had thought to cover me up, I also pronounced blessings on them, that the Lord would be Shem's God and that He would extend the territory of Japheth. Later, God picked Abraham, a descendant of Shem's, to become the father of His covenant people, and the descendants of

Japheth, whose name means extend, wound up populating most of the Earth.

Over the next several hundred years we had children who had children of their own and soon the population of the earth had grown again from the eight of us to nearly half a million. Given that I lived 350 years after the flood meant that I saw the next 10 generations of my people. Because of the way Moses recorded my story, you might think that since my death is announced in the last line of Genesis 9, that events recounted in chapters 10 and 11 happened after I died. Not so. I was around for all of them and in fact didn't die until Abraham was 59 years old. He was part of the 10th generation from me. My son Shem actually out lived 8 of the next 9 generations including Abraham's. You see, the collapse of the water vapor canopy during the flood let harmful ultra-violet rays penetrate the atmosphere and almost immediately life spans began to shorten dramatically as the human cell regeneration process became contaminated. The longest recorded life of some one born after the flood was 464 years and Abraham only lived 175 years. Today very few humans live past 80 or so.

Although God had commanded us to replenish the Earth, my people decided instead to band together and build a huge city. Pre-flood civilization had demonstrated that cities are always more evil than rural areas, and that's why the Lord wanted us to spread out, but man always thinks he knows more than God. When Nimrod, a grandson of Ham's, became a great leader and convinced the 70 family heads descended from my three sons to defy God's will and challenge His plan, something had to be done.

By banding together, they began to rely more on each other than on God. But their growing self-reliance didn't fill the need man has for a relationship with their Creator. Having defied God they couldn't very well turn to Him so they concocted a false religion based on the creation rather than the Creator. They began worshiping the heavenly bodies, planets and stars, and built a giant observatory in Babel to better study them. This tower was 4 acres large at its base, and consisted of 7 levels, each dedicated to one of the naked eye planets. It was over 153 feet tall, equivalent to 15 stories. On top was a tower with all the signs of the zodiac, a corruption of God's Gospel in the Stars.

This was too much for the Lord, so he came down and destroyed the tower. Then He scattered them by giving each of the 70 families a unique language, unknown to all outside their families. This sudden inability to communicate with others caused the 70 families to become closer to their own and avoid "outsiders" who they could no longer understand. Little by little they began to separate, moving away from each other and accomplishing God's plan.

Ham and his descendants went into Africa, one group under his son Mizraim settling Egypt and the northern countries while the descendants of Mizraim's brother Cush, which means black in my language, went further south. As I said before, Canaan settled around the eastern coast of the Mediterranean.

Shem's people went into the Arabian Peninsula and north east into what's now Syria. Of the descendants of

Japheth some went further north and west, initially settling along the Danube and finally spreading throughout Europe while others went north east settling Russia and all of Asia, finally reaching all the way to China.

Because they could only communicate with each other the families clung together, married their own kind, and adopted their own customs. It didn't take long for dominant physical characteristics to become more so and in the span of a few generations, each family line was so decidedly different in appearance and language from the others as to regard all outsiders as strangers. Soon everybody forgot that they were actually cousins. (Just for kicks, see if you can figure out which of my sons you're descended from. If you're a human being on planet Earth, you only have three choices. Then see which of Earth's 70 families you belong to.)

By the way, the study of the 70 family heads listed in Genesis 10 is critically important to your mastery of the rest of God's Word. It was 2006 years after the creation when I finally died, and for the 4000 years from then till now, the nations of earth have contended with one another for supremacy. In His word, the Lord often has His prophets call these nations by their original family names. Knowing their origins and histories can often unlock keys to understanding not available to a casual observer.

Remember, he has given you His Word for your edification, and as admonitions for you on whom the End of the Age has come. One day soon the Lord will put an end to man's petty bickering for power and establish His own Kingdom on Earth. This Kingdom will never be defeated nor will it be given to another. If you've given your heart to Him, then you're already part of His Kingdom, but understanding His word in light of the events of your time will help you learn how close His return is. For you are not in darkness (devoid of knowledge) that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are children of the light (given information and potential for understanding) and should be expecting His return.

In my day millions perished because offered the light, they chose darkness. For 120 years God tried to warn them, but one day the flood came and swallowed them all up. The same has already been written of your day, but it's the fire next time. In my day it was I, Noah, whose name means comfort, who was commissioned to warn the people. In your day it's Jesus, whose name means God brings salvation. If you haven't already done so, accept Him now and receive God's salvation while there's still time.

Abraham's Story: Genesis 11:27-25:18

Genesis 11:27-32

I will bless those who bless you , and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (**Gen 12:3**)

In the second year after the Great Flood, when Shem was 100 years old, his wife gave birth to their first son, Arphaxad, and over the next 290 years 10 generations of Shem's descendants were born, culminating in my birth. My name is Abram (later changed by God to Abraham) the first of three sons born to Terah. Shem was still alive when all these offspring came into the world and in fact was still alive when I died at the age of 175. It shows you how the flood related collapse of the water vapor canopy that had surrounded and protected the Earth had dramatically shortened human life spans.

After I had grown to be a man and married Sarai (later Sarah) my father took the two of us, and my nephew Lot, and set out northward along the Euphrates River for the land of Canaan, modern Israel. It was a monumental journey for our time that would have covered well over 1000 miles had we completed it. As it turned out we stopped in Haran, a flourishing city on the caravan route in what you would call southeastern Turkey, some 300 miles northeast of Damascus.

Keep in mind the land of Canaan was only about 600 miles due west of Ur (the city in what you call southern Iraq from which we had begun our journey). But there was a large and dangerous desert between us. So the accepted route of travel was to head northwest along the Euphrates to a place called Carchemesh and then turn southwest along the Mediterranean coast to Canaan. It added about 500 miles to the journey but meant you had at least a fighting chance of arriving at your destination alive. Haran was about 75 miles short of Carchemesh, but seemed like a nice place, so we stopped there.

Even though our family worshiped idols, and in fact made our living producing images of these false gods, I had several encounters with the true and living God while searching for answers no idol could provide. Later God promised my descendants that they would always find Him when they sought Him with all their hearts. (**Jere. 29:13**) I was perhaps the first dramatic example of that promise. Although it was only a few hundred years after the Great Flood, and less than that since the Tower of Babel had been destroyed, the people of the world had already forgotten all about their Creator again.

But God wasn't about to give up on His children that easily, and though I didn't realize it till later, He had

chosen me to begin a new race of humanity, through whom He would reveal Himself to the world. One day He told me to leave my father's household and go to a land He would show me. He said He would make my descendants into a great nation through whom all the people of the Earth would be blessed, and that He would bless all those who blessed me, but curse all those who cursed me.

My family thought I had gone crazy, but I knew I had finally met and heard the voice of the One True God. So against their advice, I took Sarai and started out. I was 75 years old at the time and Sarai was 10 years younger. Our nephew Lot came with us, as did the employees and servants we had amassed to help tend our flocks and look after our business interests. I knew we had done well in Haran, but I was still surprised at the size of our retinue. By many of the standards of the day I had become a wealthy man, but one of the true indications of wealth had eluded me. Sarai and I had no children.

Many days after we passed through Carchemesh and turned southward, we came to a place in central Israel called Shechem, near Mt. Ephraim. While we were there, the LORD appeared to me again, saying, "To your offspring, I will give this land." I built an altar and worshipped Him there, before continuing to Bethel. I built another altar just east of Bethel and again worshiped the LORD.

We finally settled in the south at a place that would later be called Hebron and for a time, lived there in peace. But then a drought brought famine on the land, and so we packed up and headed for Egypt where the Nile River assured a plentiful supply of water and food for the animals and us.

Having learned something of the customs of Egypt, I knew the Pharaoh had acquired a harem of beautiful young women. He had done so by sending his spies to search for the most desirable young women in the land and bringing them to him. It was a crime in Egypt to take another man's wife. So if they discovered a married woman they thought Pharaoh would like, they simply faked an accident resulting in the husband's death. Then they took the newly widowed woman into the harem.

Incredibly, although Sarai was nearing 70 years old, she was still as attractive and desirable as any of the young women in Pharaoh's harem. It was one of the many gifts the LORD had given us. I was afraid that Pharaoh would want her for his own and have me killed. So I told Sarai if she was questioned by the Egyptians, to identify herself as my sister rather than as my wife. I knew I was powerless to prevent them from taking her, but at least I could stay alive that way. Sure enough, she soon came to Pharaoh's attention and he took her.

In return for taking Sarai, Pharaoh helped me acquire many cattle, sheep and other animals at favorable rates. But I missed her terribly, and the increase of my wealth, as significant as it was, did little to relieve the anguish of my heart. The LORD must have heard my prayers for her return because He inflicted terrible diseases on Pharaoh and his household, and caused Pharaoh to realize that this punishment was because of Sarai. In anger he commanded his officers to find and arrest me. "Why did you lie to me and say she is your

sister,” he demanded? “Look what you’ve done to me!” He immediately released Sarai, and told the officers to escort us out of his kingdom. Hagar, the Egyptian handmaiden Pharaoh had assigned to Sarai, came with us. I remember thinking at the time, “What harm can that do?” Little did I know that I was unwittingly helping to start a family feud that’s lasted nearly 4000 years.

Genesis 12-15

My nephew Lot had come with me to Egypt and had also prospered there. Of course, being related to me he was no longer welcome in Pharaoh’s kingdom either, so together we journeyed back to the land of Canaan and settled near Bethel just west of the Jordan River. Our combined flocks were pretty big, and try as we might we just couldn’t keep them from getting mixed together. This was a source of endless frustration between Lot’s shepherds and mine; so we agreed to put some distance between us. The whole Jordan River Valley was lush and green in those days so there was plenty of good land. I gave Lot first choice, and he moved southeast toward the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, so I stayed west of the Jordan in Canaan.

After Lot left, the Lord reminded me that he was going to give me the land of Canaan, and told me to walk through all of it like a landowner inspecting his property, so I did. It was quite a gift, stretching from the Euphrates River in the North to the River of Egypt in the South and from the Mediterranean in the West to the Jordan River in the East. I finally settled near Hebron in the South, where I built another altar and worshipped.

As often happens among humankind, a coalition of kings in the area took it into their heads to take up arms against their neighbors and to make a long story short, there was a war. My nephew Lot and his family wound up hostages when Sodom and Gomorrah were defeated and ransacked. When I heard the bad news, I rounded up my private army and gathered some additional help from neighbors with whom I had formed an alliance. Together we rescued Lot, his family and all the lost plunder of Sodom and chased those kings all the way to Damascus!

When we returned, the King of Sodom met us. He was accompanied by Melchizedek, the King of Salem (later Jerusalem) who was also a priest of the Most High God, the One with Whom I had formed a relationship. Melchizedek blessed me and in return I paid him a tithe on all I had gained in rescuing Lot. Then we shared a covenant meal of bread and wine. Melchizedek, being both King and Priest, was a model of the coming church, who will rule and reign with our Lord in His soon-coming Kingdom. Much study has been focused on him, especially since the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews went to such lengths to differentiate his priesthood from that of Levi and Aaron (read **Hebrews 7**). Some have even suggested that Melchizedek was really our Lord Himself in one of His Old Testament appearances. Others say he was Noah’s son Shem and Melchizedek was his title. I can only tell you the Spirit of the Lord was very strong around us on that day.

In gratitude for my rescue efforts, the King of Sodom said I could keep all the goods I had recovered as a reward, but I refused, asking him only for compensation for my allies.

A little while later the LORD Himself appeared to me saying, "Don't be afraid Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

Great achievement can make a man a little bold, so I took the occasion to remind the LORD that although I had acquired much worldly wealth, I was still destitute of children and had no heir. The LORD said not to worry; I would have children as numerous as the stars in the heavens. I believed Him and my faith was credited to me as righteousness, just as your faith in the Lord's death and resurrection has made you righteous (**Romans 4:1-4**).

When He started talking about giving me the land again, I asked how I could know this would actually happen. In response, He had me organize a covenant ceremony, the most solemn and binding event of my time. He told me to cut some animals in half and arrange them along a path. When men made covenants, they walked between the cut up animals symbolically agreeing to suffer the same fate as the animals should they ever break the vow they were taking. By having me prepare the animals, I understood the LORD was going to enter into a covenant with me. But then as the sun was setting, the LORD caused a deep sleep to come over me.

Though I couldn't move, I could still hear His voice telling me that my descendants would be taken captive in a strange land and would be enslaved for 400 years. During that time, the LORD was going to give the native population, called the Amorites, ample opportunity to repent of their evil and pagan ways; to turn back to the God who had created them and loved them. But knowing the end from the beginning, He knew that His pleas would fall on deaf ears and His opportunities for reconciliation would pass unheeded. And so, when their 400-year grace period had expired, the LORD would send a redeemer among my descendants to free them from bondage and bring them to the land He was giving me.

Then, since I couldn't move, the LORD passed between the animals alone, in effect binding only Himself to the covenant. According to the laws of the time, this meant that for me the agreement was unconditional, not subject to any of my behavior. No matter what I did, the LORD was obligated to give this land to my descendants. Later, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the LORD told the Israelites in effect that although the land was theirs forever, in order to enjoy its bounty and His blessing, they would have to agree to certain standards of behavior. They couldn't forfeit the land altogether, but could be required to leave it for a time as punishment for disobedience.

True to His prophecy, the Amorites (actually a collection of 10 people groups) failed to repent. And so 400 years after my grandson Jacob and his family went down to Egypt, the LORD told an Israelite husband and wife that their soon-to-be-born son Moses would be Israel's redeemer. In the 4th generation from them, the

Israelites finally took possession of the land the LORD had promised me. Next, I'll tell you how I started a family feud that's last nearly 4000 years with no end in sight.

Genesis 16-18

Twenty years had passed since the famine had driven us to Egypt, and though we had been back in Canaan for the last 10 of those years, we still had not been given the son the LORD promised us. My wife Sarai became impatient (she was 75 years old after all) and decided to take matters into her own hands. Being barren was a source of great shame for her in a time when a woman's crowning achievement was to produce sons for her husband. The inability to do so was considered a curse from God, and she was worried that He wasn't going to fulfill His promise to us.

In my day the 282 laws in the Code of Hammurabi governed standards of conduct and behavior. He was a great king from the first Babylonian Dynasty who reigned about 2250 years BC and who had compiled the world's earliest written system of laws. Invoking a clause from the Code, she arranged for her handmaiden Hagar to become a surrogate mother. According to this clause, I was to make Hagar pregnant and the son she bore would be Sarai's and mine, insuring that we would have a male heir. Hagar and I did as Sarai instructed, we finally had our baby boy, and the world hasn't been the same since.

As soon as Hagar became pregnant, she began to despise Sarai, as only one who has been inferior and has suddenly become superior, at least in her own mind, can. The tension between the two of them was unbearable. In response, Sarai treated Hagar so badly that she finally ran away.

The Angel of the LORD found Hagar in the wilderness and directed her to return and submit to her mistress. He said she would have a son whose descendants would be too numerous to count. She was to name him Ishmael, which means, "God hears" showing the LORD had heard of her misery. Ishmael would be like a wild donkey, He said, always contrary to everyone and everyone against him. His people would live in hostility toward all their brothers. Obedient to the LORD, Hagar returned and gave birth to our son, whom we named Ishmael. I was 86 years old.

Thirteen years later, The LORD appeared to me again. "I am El Shaddai," He said, "Walk before me and be blameless." (He was cleansing me of all my sins.) He had come to confirm His covenant with me that would result in my descendants inheriting all the land of Canaan, and to announce the soon coming birth of the son He had promised us.

He then changed my name from Abram, which means exalted father, to Abraham, which means father of many, signifying the number of my descendants. By doing so, He also put a hint of His name into mine

because to say “Abraham” requires expelling a breath, as He had expelled His breath into Adam to bring him life. From now on, every mention of my name would be a reminder that the LORD is our Creator. He also changed Sarai’s name to Sarah, changing her as well. Sarai means dominating, while Sarah means princess. Then he ordered me to have all the males among my people circumcised as a memorial to this covenant. This was to be done from that time forward every time a newborn male reached the eighth day of his life signifying the everlasting nature of the covenant, and that the land was to be ours as an everlasting possession. (As a sign of His mercy, He had created the body’s natural anesthetic and coagulation enzymes to always be at their lifetime’s peak on the eighth day of a male’s life.)

I reminded the LORD that we already had a son, Ishmael. He replied that while He would bless Ishmael making him the head of a great nation, the father of 12 rulers, the son He had promised us was yet to come. When I laughed at the prospect of becoming a father at 100 years of age, the LORD told me to name our son Isaac, which means, “he laughs.” Sarah would become a mother after all, and at age 90!

A little while later, while I was camped near the Oaks of Mamre, three strangers came along. As it was nearly mealtime, I invited them to stop and rest, and to eat with us. I had Sarah prepare some unleavened bread while some of my men slaughtered and roasted a tender young calf. I brought them some cheese and milk, and in our conversation discovered that it was the LORD Himself, with 2 angels who had become our impromptu guests. He told me that by this time next year, Sarah would have delivered our promised son. Sarah overheard this and laughed in disbelief at such a thing, and though she later denied it, the LORD had heard her. Can’t blame her, I had laughed myself, when I first heard it. But the LORD gently scolded her, asking if she thought anything would be too hard for the LORD.

After the meal, I learned that the LORD was on His way to inspect Sodom and Gomorrah to see if their lewd and offensive behavior was really as bad as had been reported. I pleaded for the innocent among them, and after a short negotiation, the LORD finally promised that if He could find even 10 innocent men in the two cities, He would spare them all. Those two cities were a gross offense to Him, and shortly I’ll tell you about their destruction.

But as the LORD left, I became aware that He had called me His friend. That word meant a great deal more than it does in your time. It meant that we were bound in a covenant relationship, pledged to each other’s well being for the rest of our lives. In our case, because of the LORD’S eternal nature, all people on Earth through all the generations of humankind would be either blessed or cursed according the way they treated my people. It’s nice to have friends in high places.

Genesis 19

When the LORD saw for Himself that the lifestyle in Sodom and Gomorrah was every bit as perverse as He had been told, He sent the two angels who were traveling with Him into the city of Sodom. There they happened upon my nephew Lot who lived there. Lot invited them into his home to have dinner with his family and spend the night. When they suggested sleeping in the city square, he discouraged them strongly, knowing the men of the city as he did.

After a pleasant dinner, they were suddenly disturbed by a rude knocking at the door. Opening it, Lot was confronted by a delegation of drunken men demanding that he hand over the two visitors so that they could have sex with them. Of course Lot refused, but incredibly he offered them his two daughters instead.

Let me explain that middle-eastern hospitality customs of the day required that a host defend the safety of his guests with his own life if required. Having his daughters ravaged would be less humiliating than failing to protect his guests. Also, Lot knew the sexual preferences of his neighbors and gambled that they wouldn't be interested in his daughters. And it worked, at least partially. They refused his daughters, but in effect said, "If you're going to start judging us, we'll take you as well as your guests." It was a classic case of overreacting to a perceived affront to their sexual preference, quickly turning a sensitive situation into a potential disaster.

Just in the nick of time, the angel houseguests exhibited some of their supernatural powers, blinding the men so they couldn't find the door to break it down. Then they warned Lot to collect his family and get out of town immediately. They were about to destroy Sodom for its sinfulness. The LORD had forbidden men from having sex with each other, and the men of Sodom had showed flagrant and continual disregard. To this day, anal sex is called Sodomy in lurid memory of these men.

My nephew's two daughters were both engaged to be married and their boyfriends laughed at the angels and refused to leave. After some hasty negotiating, it was agreed that Lot and his wife and daughters would escape to a little town nearby called Zoar, leaving the boyfriends behind.

Hurry," the angels insisted, "because we can't destroy Sodom till we know you're safe. Run for your lives and don't look back!" This was out of consideration for me, because the LORD had promised me that in judging Sodom and Gomorrah, He wouldn't destroy the righteous with the wicked.

This act of mercy toward Lot became a model used by the Apostle Peter (**2 Peter 2:4-10**), and is a strong argument for a pre-trib rapture, rescuing the church before the final judgment of Earth takes place (**1Thes 1:10 & 5:9**).

Just like you, Lot was not without sin. But he acted in faith on the LORD's offer of rescue, and like it had been with me and is with you, his faith was credited to him as righteousness. His daughter's boyfriends received

the same offer but refused, and perished with the people of Sodom.

So it will be at the End of the Age, when those who have accepted in faith the LORD's offer of rescue will be removed and those who have refused it will remain and perish. (It's worth mentioning that in your day, evangelist Billy Graham has declared, "If the LORD doesn't judge the US, he'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.")

By daybreak they were safely hidden in Zoar. The LORD caused a massive explosion over Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities were immediately flattened and burst into flame, destroying everything and everyone. What had previously been a prosperous city on a fertile plain became a desolate wasteland and remains so in your time. But on a clear day when the sun is at just the right angle, if you look down toward the south end of the Dead Sea from the ruins of Masada, you can see faint traces of old foundations beneath the surface of the water. It's all that remains of Sodom and Gomorrah.

My nephew's wife loved their home and in violation of the angel's instructions, couldn't resist a last longing look at Sodom. The bright light and shock of the blast crystallized her body into a pillar of salt and she died in her tracks.

After a time Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and went to the mountains, afraid to live in a city again. They found a cave above the Dead Sea Valley and dwelt there. Bemoaning the fact that they had no husbands and therefore no children, Lot's daughters conspired to get their father drunk, have sex with him, and become pregnant. Each of them gave birth to a son, one they named Moab and the other ben-Ammi. These boys grew up to become fathers themselves. From one came the people known as Moabites and from the other, the Ammonites. These tribes inhabited the land you call Jordan and were often at odds with my other descendants, the Israelites. When the LORD sent the King of Babylon to judge the Israelites in about 600 BC, He also had him conquer and destroy the Moabite and Ammonite kingdoms, so in your day, there are no people who call themselves by those ancient names. But the capital of Jordan, Amman, gets its name from one of Lot's grandsons.

In your day, over half the people of Jordan call them selves Palestinians, after another ancient and also extinct group of people, the Philistines, traditional enemies of Israel. In 135 AD the Roman emperor Hadrian finally crushed the remnant of Israel and as an insult to my people, renamed the land the LORD had given to me Palestine, a corruption of Philistine. Most ancient mapmakers followed suit and the land became known as Palestine and the few people who lived there were called Palestinians.

The land wasn't called Israel again until 1948, when the United Nations first recognized the modern nation of Israel. The same stroke of the pen that had years earlier designated Israel as the traditional homeland for the Jews had named Trans-Jordan (later Jordan) as the Palestinian homeland. Funny how no one wanted that land until my people returned there. Now it seems the whole world has an opinion about what to do with

it. But that's a tale for another time.

Let's see how, history repeats itself as Abimelech, a neighboring King takes a liking to my 90- year old wife Sarah, and we finally receive the son the LORD had promised us.

Genesis 20-21

After the episode at Sodom and Gomorrah, I moved my family westward into the area south of Bethlehem. In your day that area is called "the Negev" which means the south. There was a Philistine city-state there called Gerar, whose King was Abimelech.

Since the LORD had preserved both Sarah's and my youthful appearances, she was still very attractive even though almost 90 years old. So much so that as we traveled into strange places we agreed she would refer to herself as my sister. (This was not totally untrue since my father was also hers, even though we had different mothers.) I was afraid that if people knew Sarah was my wife, someone would kill me to get her. As her brother I would be safe and if someone took her, I could at least stay alive to try and get her back. Remember the same thing had happened to us in Egypt some years earlier, and our plan had worked.

Sure enough King Abimelech took a liking to Sarah and whisked her into his household. But Abimelech, though a Philistine, was a God-fearing man and when the LORD appeared to him in a dream, he was both scared and mad. The LORD told him that because Sarah was a married woman, he and his family were all as good as dead for taking her.

Explaining to the LORD he had been misled, and was innocent of wrong-doing, Abimelech agreed to return Sarah. But boy was he mad when he found me! "Why did you do this?" he demanded.

I told him that having such a beautiful wife was both a blessing and a curse, and I lived in constant fear that someone would try to kill me and steal her away. That's why we concocted that story about being brother and sister. But I hadn't really lied; she was my half-sister after all.

Accepting my explanation, He gave both Sarah and me gifts, and I asked the LORD to forgive him and heal his household of the disease the LORD had inflicted upon them.

This was the second time the LORD had supernaturally prevented a powerful king from stealing Sarah's virtue. Having made her so beautiful and kept her looking so young, I guess He knew I would need His help keeping other men away. He had promised us a very special child and was not going to let anyone defile her in the meantime. He would personally watch over her for all the days of her life.

And true to His word, a short time later He finally allowed Sarah to become pregnant. Within a year of the LORD's visit to us by the oaks of Mamre, we had a son. Following His instructions we named him Isaac.

Sarah was beside herself with joy, having had her womanhood vindicated. In those days a woman could know no greater blessing than to give her husband a male child. Having waited and worried for all those years, she had delivered a son, and it was her crowning achievement. For His part, the LORD had waited to fulfill His promise until we would both be absolutely certain that our son was truly a gift from Him.

But for Hagar and Ishmael it was a different story and as the boys grew, even though there were 14 years between them, you could see the rivalry. Finally Sarah demanded that I send Hagar and Ishmael away, and the LORD agreed. "Isaac is the son I promised you," He said. "I will watch over Ishmael, but you must do what Sarah has said."

So early next morning, though it broke my heart to do it, I sent Hagar and Ishmael southward into the Negev and I never saw them again. Like He said He would, the LORD watched over them and Ishmael grew into manhood. Hagar went to her own people in Egypt to get him a wife.

In all Ishmael lived to be 137 years old and had 12 sons whose descendants became the Arab people of today, inhabiting the vast area south of Israel and east of Egypt. Mohammed, who began the religion you call Islam, was a direct descendant of Ishmael's son Kedar.

And just as the LORD had told Hagar, Ishmael's descendants have lived in hostility toward all their neighbors even into your time. The animosity between Ishmael's descendants and those of his half brother Isaac would be a cause for bloodshed in almost every generation from my time to yours. And in addition to the wars, countless thousands of hours of diplomacy have been invested in a futile effort to achieve peace between the offspring of my two sons. In your time, the very survival of the world seems to hang in the balance, and in truth only the re-appearance of the Son of God will bring this elusive peace and save the world from total destruction. If I had only known what misery would spring forth from my lack of faith in the promise of God.

But our God is the master at helping us learn the lessons from our past. About midway between my time and yours, the Apostle Paul described Ishmael's separation from Isaac as being analogous to the incompatibility of the Law and Grace, the Old Covenant and the New. Just as the son of the slave woman and the son of the free woman could not share my inheritance together, the children of the Law and the children of Grace cannot share the rewards of God's Kingdom.

For as Ishmael was born into the bondage of slavery, all mankind is born into the bondage of sin, and the Law is helpless to redeem us. But Isaac was the supernaturally born son of the free woman, a manifestation of God's Grace. By this same Grace we are supernaturally born, freed from our bondage of sin to become heirs to the Kingdom.

Genesis 22

One day when Isaac had grown to be a young man, the LORD commanded me to do something that absolutely stunned me. I mean, what would you think? Here I had waited until age 100 to receive the son He had promised, a son through whom all His commitments to me would be fulfilled. Now, calling Isaac my only beloved son, He asked me to take this son of mine to a place He would show me and offer him as a sacrifice. In other words to kill him, before even one of the LORD's promises to me had come true. Needless to say I was in shock and spent the entire night wrestling with the idea, trying to make some sense of it, trying to reconcile this command with the character of the God I knew and had come to trust.

Finally toward morning, I reasoned that the LORD's character would not permit Him to break a vow He had made to me. We were in a covenant relationship after all, and He had promised that through Isaac I would have descendants as numerous as the sands on the seashore and the stars in the sky. All the nations of the world would be blessed through my descendants. And now with only one son left and me over 100 years old, He expects me to kill Isaac? The only thing I could figure is that there had to be more to this than met the eye. God could not break His covenant with me and still be God. If He wanted me to sacrifice Isaac, then He was going to have to bring him back to life again. That's all there was to it. On the strength of that reasoning I decided to obey Him.

So with a heavy heart, and fearing that Isaac was as good as dead, we set out at sunrise for a place called Mount Moriah, a three-day journey. I tell you, those were the longest three days and nights of my life. What did God intend? How was He going to resolve this conflict without destroying His integrity? I swear I had so many more questions than answers it was almost overwhelming. I just clung to His promise hoping that any moment now He would call the whole thing off and explain the mistake.

When we reached Moriah, I told the servants who had come with us to wait at the foot of the mountain while Isaac and I went on alone. To reassure them I said we would both be back. I didn't want them thinking I was actually going to sacrifice my only son.

On the way up to the summit, Isaac carried the wood we were going to need for the fire but almost broke my heart when he asked where the lamb we would need for the burnt offering was. All I could tell him was that God Himself would provide the sacrifice.

At the summit I built an altar, arranged the wood on top, bound Isaac and placed him on the wood. As I was about to slit my son's throat, the LORD stopped me. He said, "Don't harm Isaac. You have shown me that you love me more than anything, even more than your own son. There's a ram caught in the thicket nearby. Sacrifice it instead." Then He opened my mind to understanding.

Through my actions, the LORD was demonstrating that one day He would actually do in full what He had

me do only in part. On that very same mountain He would offer His only beloved Son as a sacrifice for sin, showing just how much He loved the world. And just as I had figuratively received Isaac back from the dead after three days and three nights of terrible anguish, He also would receive His Son back from the dead after the same interval of time.

The shock of this revelation was even greater than the one accompanying the LORD's commandment to sacrifice Isaac. The God of Heaven and Earth, the King of the Universe, would offer His own Son as a sacrifice for the sins of the world? It was preposterous! Why would He do it? Then I remembered. It was to show how much He loved His creation. The pain of losing all of us was greater than the pain of losing His own son. He wanted us back.

Throughout this entire ordeal, Isaac was a willing participant. And just as his willingness was rewarded by the sparing of his life, the willingness of God's Son to die for the sins of the world would be rewarded by His resurrection, for in that case it would require the actual death of the Son to reconcile the creation to the Father. And just as my faith in the promise of God was rewarded with the fulfillment of His covenant commitments to me, so the faith of any who would accept the death of His Son as payment for their sins would be rewarded with the fulfillment of His covenant promise to them; everlasting life. The Son's resurrection would be proof of that.

The LORD then confirmed His promise to me, repeating the blessings He had in store for my descendants, and I understood that the way all nations would be blessed through me was that somehow the Son of God would also be a descendant of mine.

For my part, I named the place where we stood "Jehovah Jira," or in your language "the Lord will provide." From then on people understood that on the mountain of the Lord the remedy for their sins would be provided. Years later the Jebusites built a city there and named it Shalom, or Salem to you. The word means peace. And so Jehovah Jira became Jira Shalom, literally "Providing Peace." In your time it's pronounced Jerusalem, but the meaning's the same. It's the place where the Son of God came, just as He promised, to give His life to provide peace between you and your Creator and grant you eternal life. You need only trust in the promise of God and your faith will save you. Believe me, I know. It's the Gospel in Genesis.

Genesis 23-25

When I was 137 years, old my beloved Sarah took sick and died. I can't begin to describe the loss I felt. We had been together through so much. After all she'd been my wife for over 100 years and she was still as beautiful and alluring to me as when we'd first met. If I hadn't been sure I would see her again in eternity, I couldn't have gotten through it.

We were living near Hebron at the time, so I arranged to purchase some land there to bury her. Since we were what you call Nomads, I didn't really own any land although the LORD had given me practically all the area West of the Jordan River and North of Egypt. I didn't want any future problems to disturb Sarah's final resting place, so even though Ephron the Hittite asked an exorbitant price for the field he thought was his, it contained a cave suitable for burying and I bought it for Sarah. Later I was buried there and after that Isaac, his wife Rebecca, their son Jacob and his wife Leah were all buried there as well. (Jacob's second wife Rachel is buried just outside Bethlehem, about 20 miles to the North.)

400 years later, when my descendants finally took possession of the Promised Land as the LORD had told me they would, Hebron was designated a City of Refuge. It was a place where the wrongly accused could find justice and protection, and for a time King David reigned over Israel from there as well. Today our burial place in Hebron is called the Tomb of the Patriarchs. A big Mosque covers the cave, and the whole city is hotly contested between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the scene of much violence. It's one of the ironies of history that a former city of refuge has become known for its intolerance and injustice.

A few years after Sarah's death, I decided it was about time I got a wife for Isaac. He was 40 years old and missed his mother terribly. According to the custom of our day, I sent my chief servant Eliezer to the land of my relatives in what you call Iraq, after making him swear that he wouldn't get a woman for Isaac from among the Canaanites. I wanted to keep our family line pure.

The sequence of events clearly foretells the story of the Messiah and his church. The LORD led Eliezer to a well where he met Rebecca, the virgin daughter of my brother Nahor, and the one the LORD had chosen for Isaac. Eliezer's name means "the comforter" and in a role strikingly similar to the Holy Spirit's role with the church, he asked her to leave her world behind and journey to a far place to become Isaac's bride. Though she had no idea he was coming and only a few minutes to decide, she agreed. He immediately bestowed lavish gifts upon her to bless and equip her. He then escorted her on the long journey through the wilderness extolling the virtues of her soon-to-be husband all the way until she came to know and love him though she'd never met him. Finally, near a place called Beer Lahai Roi, the Well of Living Water, he introduced her to Isaac and for the first time she laid eyes on her betrothed. They were married in Sarah's former tent and she was a great comfort to my son, giving meaning to his life.

So it has been with each of you. Though you didn't know he was coming, the LORD sent the Holy Spirit to find you and ask you to become the bride of His Son. Saying yes required you to leave your old life behind and agree to a long journey through the spiritual wilderness of this world to the place where your future husband awaits. As soon as you agreed, you received lavish spiritual gifts from Him, gifts that have not only blessed you but have also equipped you for service. The Holy Spirit has continually instructed you concerning your betrothed as He escorts you through the remainder of your life on Earth, and though you've never seen His face, you've come to know and love Him. Finally, when your journey is over, you'll be introduced to the Son

of God and for the first time you'll lay eyes on your betrothed. You'll be married in the Tabernacle in Heaven and give meaning to His life on Earth. After all, He died for you.

As for me, at the ripe old age of 140, I took another wife and together we had six sons. Truly I was becoming the father of many nations, just as the LORD had promised. Finally at age 175 I died. Isaac and Ishmael buried me in the cave at Hebron next to my beloved Sarah.

It had been 100 years since Sarah and I had set out from Haran and started this incredible adventure. Along the way I had become one of the richest men of my time with wealth that surpassed many of the so-called kings of my day. But by far my greatest treasure was my relationship with the LORD. As you read the words the LORD has had men write to memorialize His dealings with His creation, I believe you'll find that in all the Old Testament I'm the only one He called "friend." That was worth more to me than all the wealth.

But before you start envying me, remember you're His betrothed. All the inheritance the LORD gave to His Son is yours, and you will rule and reign with Him in His Kingdom forever. What's more you and I will also meet someday soon. I'll be at your wedding. Look for me among the friends of the groom. Shalom.

Isaac's Story: Genesis 25-35

Genesis 25-26

I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham. (**Genesis 26:24**)

I was seventy-five years old when my father Abraham died. My half-brother Ishmael and I buried him next to my mother Sarah in the place Abraham had prepared in Hebron. Ishmael, as you know, had been sent away when I was just a boy, and I hadn't seen him since. There was no love lost between us then, just as it is between our families today. The descendants of the 12 sons of Ishmael are still at odds with the descendants of the 12 sons of my son Jacob, some 4,000 years later.

Thirty-five years before my father died, I had married Rebekah, a sister of Laban the Aramean from Paddan Aram, an area near Damascus. Like us, the Arameans are Semitic, Aram being the 5th son of Shem and brother to Arphaxad, Abraham's ancestor. I was forty at our wedding, but in my sixtieth year before Rebekah became pregnant with our twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Their birth, like almost everything in my family's history, was fraught with prophetic implications.

First of all we had trouble getting pregnant, requiring nearly 20 years of prayer. I guess this was to show that it was only by the Grace of God that we received children. I always knew we would have at least one son, because I had heard the promises the LORD made to my father. But in an age when sons were a man's greatest blessing and the fulfillment of a woman's destiny, 20 years is a long time to wait.

Then the babies jostled each other so severely in Rebekah's womb that she inquired of the LORD for the reason why. He told her that our two babies represented two separate nations, one stronger than the other, and that the descendants of the older would serve those of the younger.

When the big day came, the first one born was all covered with hair, so we named him Esau, which in our language means hairy. Then right after him, as if they had been fighting to see who would be first, came the other one grasping his brother's heel. We named him Jacob, which literally means "he grasps the heel" but is figuratively translated "deceiver." That name sure turned out to be prophetic.

The boys were fifteen when their grandfather died, and as they grew to be men, Esau turned into quite the

outdoorsman, while Jacob was the quieter one staying close to home. Esau was my favorite, but Rebekah loved Jacob best.

I guess the fight that began in Rebekah's womb over who would be the firstborn was still going on, because one day as Esau came home famished from an extended hunting trip, he found Jacob cooking some red bean stew. "Give me some of that," Esau demanded. "First sell me your birthright," Jacob said.

The rights of the firstborn were significant in those days, and included a double portion of the father's estate, in our case giving Esau 2/3 of my wealth and Jacob 1/3, along with greater authority and other preferential treatment. Esau impatiently responded that if he died from hunger before I passed away, the rights of the firstborn wouldn't be of much use to him.

Jacob, sensing he had an advantage, made Esau swear an oath, and so for a bowl of red bean stew bought Esau's birthright. From this event Esau gained the nickname Edom, which in our language means red, and earned the displeasure of the LORD Who doesn't take these things lightly. Centuries later, the writer of the Book of Hebrews cited Esau's ingratitude in an admonition to take the blessings of the LORD seriously or risk losing them (**Hebr. 12:16-17**). It's interesting that even in your time when people think of my twins, it's always "Jacob and Esau" instead of the other way around.

Just as it had been in my father's time, there was a famine in Canaan, and we went south to the Philistine city of Gerar. There the LORD appeared to me and told me not to continue into Egypt, but to remain there where He would look after us. Then He repeated the oath He had made to Abraham, giving me all the land of Canaan and promising to bless all the nations of the world through my offspring. So we stayed there.

I was concerned, like my father had been with his wife, that the Philistines would find Rebekah attractive and kill me for her. This was their way around adultery. Just kill the husband and make the woman a widow, single and eligible. So like Abraham had done, I began telling folks Rebekah was my sister. But the King saw me caressing her one day and took me to task, saying I had put their men in jeopardy through my deceit. To remedy this, He published an edict prohibiting the men of Gerar from molesting her or me on pain of death.

True to His promise, the LORD blessed us in Gerar, so much so that it aroused the jealousy of the Philistines, who began filling in our wells to prevent us from getting enough water. The yield of our crops and flocks given by the LORD had been so generous that I was becoming quite a wealthy and powerful man, and finally the King himself became threatened and asked us to leave the area.

As we went, wherever we stopped the herdsman of Gerar contended with us, until we got far enough away for them to leave us alone. We finally settled in a place we would soon name Beersheba, about a day's journey inland from Gerar. There the LORD appeared to me again and repeated the blessings He had promised my father one more time.

The King of Gerar, along with several of his officials, had also visited us there asking for a treaty. He was afraid that even from this distance our growing strength would become a threat again. Reminding me that he had protected Rebekah and always treated me fairly, he convinced me to enter into an agreement, and the next morning after a great feast in honor of the King, we swore an oath together.

Later that day my servants informed me that they had dug another well and found water. In the custom of the day, I named the well Shibah, which in our language means oath, after the agreement I had made with the King of Gerar. Since our word for well is beer, the place became known as Beer Shibah, or as you would say, Beersheba.

A while later when Esau was in his fortieth year he married two Hittite girls, which caused Rebekah and me no end of grief and helped set the stage for her plot to have Jacob blessed over Esau.

Genesis 27-31

As I grew older, my eyesight began to fail me until finally I could barely see. Believing the time of my death was drawing close, I called my oldest son Esau near so I could bless him as was the custom of the day. Rebekah overheard us talking and when I sent Esau out hunting so he could kill and prepare some of my favorite wild game for dinner, she went into action. Summoning Jacob, she got him to kill a couple of young goats so she could make me a dinner like the one I had requested from Esau, and then dressed him in Esau's clothes and tied animal skins to his hands and arms so he would smell and feel like Esau to me. When the food was ready, she sent him in to see me and though the voice I heard was Jacob's, the meal he brought me, and his smell and the feel of the hairy skins on his arms fooled me into thinking he was Esau. So I blessed him.

I asked God to give him Heaven's dew and Earth's abundance, and told him that nations would serve him and even his own brother would bow down to him. I repeated the words that God had spoken to Abraham; that whoever cursed him would be cursed, and whoever blessed him would be blessed.

When Esau returned a little while later and brought me the wild game he had prepared and asked for his blessing, I realized that Rebekah and Jacob had tricked me. But since the blessing I had mistakenly given Jacob was consistent with the promise the LORD had made to Rebekah before the twins were born, and since Esau had in effect sold his rights to Jacob, I let it stand. Then I spoke a prophecy over Esau that reflected his bitterness at having been tricked out of both his birthright and his blessing. I told him his descendants would live by the sword in the parched desert and would for a time serve his brother's people but in later years, when they grew tired of servitude, would rebel.

As you might suspect, Esau was bitter and swore vengeance on Jacob, but decided to wait until after I died before getting even. Rebekah was afraid for Jacob and got me to send him away to her brother's people in Aram under the guise of finding himself a wife from among her people so he wouldn't marry into a Canaanite family like Esau had done. Before he left, I blessed him for real this time, asking that the LORD would transfer the promise first given to Abraham then me regarding the land of Canaan to him.

When Esau learned that Jacob had left, and that his two foreign wives were a problem for Rebekah and me, he tried to remedy the situation by taking a third wife, one of the daughters of my half brother Ishmael. I guess his intent was good, but his action had the effect of adding the festering animosity between Ishmael and me to the already volatile mixture of bitterness and rage he felt toward Jacob. No wonder his descendants were so dead set against the Israelites coming through their territory on the way up to the Promised Land under Moses, refusing them even a drink of water. And no wonder they fought so frequently against the Israelites after they got there until King David finally defeated and subjugated them, and then joined up with the Babylonians against them when Nebuchadnezzar came to conquer Israel centuries later. It's true that revenge is a dish best served cold, but Esau's people kept their hatred of Jacob alive for over 1000 years until the LORD had Nebuchadnezzar destroy them all. Sad to say, it turns out my prophecy for Esau was right on the mark.

Jacob left for the plains of Aram, going up the Jordan River Valley in the direction of Haran, where Abraham had stayed. Nearing the city of Luz, he stopped to camp for the night. In a dream he saw a ladder going up into heaven with angels ascending and descending on it. At the top stood the LORD Himself, and He repeated to my son Jacob the very promises He had made first to Abraham and then to me. The next morning Jacob built an altar there, re-named the place Bethel, which means House of God, and promised to accept the LORD as his God, just as my father and I had done before him. And so my prayer that the LORD would transfer the covenant to Jacob was answered. From then on the LORD would call Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I was now certain that the land of Canaan would be given to Jacob's descendants.

As it turned out, I wound up living through all the 20 years Jacob stayed with Rebekah's brother Laban. During that time Jacob married two of Laban's daughters and acquired their two handmaids as well. These four women bore him the 12 sons whose descendants would inherit the land, plus one daughter. The LORD blessed him in other ways as well and soon they had large flocks and many possessions. In an interesting twist on the rights of the firstborn, soon after his arrival Jacob had fallen in love with Laban's younger daughter Rachael and agreed to work for seven years for the right to marry her. On their wedding night, Laban pulled a switch on him and the next morning Jacob awoke to find Rachael's older sister Leah in bed with him! Laban explained that it was their custom to marry off the oldest daughter first, but that if he worked for another seven years he could have Rachael too. (Maybe this is where the saying, "What goes around comes around" originated.) Realizing he'd been had, and that maybe it was poetic justice for the way he and Rebekah had

tricked me, Jacob agreed and as I said wound up with both daughters and their handmaids.

After 20 years, during which time Jacob and Laban seemed to be engaged in a perpetual contest to see who could be the most deceptive, the LORD told Jacob to pack up and return to Canaan where Rebekah and I still lived. So he gathered his family, his flocks and all their possessions and headed out, not telling Laban they were leaving. To make things worse, Rachael took Laban's terraphim, his household gods. This was equivalent to taking the title to his property. Laban was away when they left, but after three days found out and chased Jacob all the way to Gilead, where he confronted him.

"You left with out saying goodbye, and I didn't even get to kiss my grandchildren one last time, and on top of that you stole my personal possessions," Laban complained.

Jacob explained that he was afraid Laban would not let him go. He then reminded Laban that during the 20 years he had worked to prosper him, Laban had treated him unfairly, making him personally bear losses and living expenses that should have been shared, and reducing his compensation 10 times.

Laban countered by reminding Jacob that he didn't have a legal right to take anything when he left, not the daughters, not the children, and not the flocks. But in a dream the previous night, the LORD had told Laban to let him go and so he would if Jacob would agree to a truce between them. This truce would assure Laban that Jacob would remain true to his daughters and not let any of the wealth he had acquired leave the family.

Laban reminded Jacob that the LORD would be watching to make sure Jacob didn't try to deceive him again. In the manner of covenant ceremonies of our day, the two men built a commemorative pillar and an altar and with a confirming oath offered a sacrifice to the LORD as evidence of their agreement. Then they shared a meal to signify that everything was settled between them, and the next morning Laban kissed his daughters and his grand children goodbye and returned home, having satisfied himself that at least their future was secure.

As for Jacob, he had another big confrontation ahead of him. Before he could get home he had to pass through lands belonging to his brother Esau, and who knew what kind of trouble that would stir up?

Genesis 32-34

In the twenty years Esau and Jacob had been separated by Jacob's deceit, both my sons had prospered. Additionally, Jacob had been visited by angels of God and had heard the voice of God Himself, promising all the land of Canaan to his children. Just as the LORD had said, both were on their way to becoming great nations.

Now as it appeared they were about to meet again, Jacob sent scouts ahead to find Esau and give him a message of peace. When the messengers returned with the news that Esau was coming to meet them with 400 men, Jacob's camp was terrified!

He divided his people into two groups thinking that if one was attacked the other might escape. Then he sought the LORD's guidance. Next morning he selected several groups of animals and sent them off as gifts to Esau. He told the herdsmen from each group to keep some distance between them so that Esau would be presented the gifts progressively rather than all at once. Jacob hoped by this method to soften Esau up and make him more forgiving.

That night as they neared the area where Rebekah and I still lived, Jacob sent his wives, children, and goods across the river remaining alone in the Arnon Gorge east of Canaan. During the night someone came and wrestled with him till daybreak, with neither one gaining the upper hand. Finally as the sun was rising this mystery opponent caused Jacob's hip to come out of joint so He could subdue him. Recognizing it was the LORD, Jacob asked for a blessing. The LORD blessed him and changed his name to Israel, which means "wrestles with God."

Now obviously the LORD could have easily subdued my son, but He wanted to demonstrate the nature of the relationship our descendants would have with Him. Throughout all the long centuries since, it's become clear that the Israelites have mostly wrestled with God, never really submitting, often battling Him to a draw, insisting on having their own way. In fact, if our Old Covenant writings could be summarized with one question it would be, "Israel, are you going to obey Me or not?" Strangely enough, the same can be said of your New Covenant, only His question to you is, "Church, are you going to believe Me or not?"

When Jacob saw Esau coming with his 400 men, he lined up his family by groups according to their mothers, and went out in front of them, formally bowing seven times before Esau. But Esau, overjoyed at seeing his brother again ran up and hugged Jacob. With tears in their eyes my sons were re-united and group-by-group Jacob brought his wives and children to meet Esau.

Even though Esau wanted Jacob and his family to remain with him and travel home together, Jacob declined and said they would catch up later. Then, anxious to get away, Jacob turned off toward Shechem, and after arriving there bought some land and settled down.

In my time, no woman would venture far from the safety of her family for fear of being accosted by a strange man. In fact it was so dangerous that if a woman ever was found alone in the countryside, it was assumed she was partly responsible for whatever disaster befell her. As for the man, anyone caught molesting a young woman was required to marry her, both to bear the consequences of his behavior and to provide for the woman, who having been defiled was no longer considered a suitable marriage partner for anyone else. In those days, everyone was required to be responsible for his or her own actions. Radical thought, huh?

Almost everyone is aware that Jacob fathered 12 sons with his two wives and their maids. Eleven of these had been born when Jacob returned, but there was also a daughter born to Leah, a girl named Dinah. One day, for reasons I'll never understand, Dinah went out alone to visit the women of the area, and while out was caught and raped by Shechem, the son of Hamor, leader of the town after which his son was named.

My grandsons were beside themselves with rage, especially Simeon and Levi, Dinah's biological brothers. When Hamor told Jacob that his son loved Dinah and wanted to marry her, conspiracies arose on every side. The men of Shechem saw that Jacob was rich and thought that by marrying into his family they could get some of that wealth for themselves.

But my grandsons devised the most evil treachery, convincing the men of Shechem that while inter marriage (forbidden by the LORD by the way) was desirable, it couldn't begin until the men of Shechem were circumcised like them. In their greed for a piece of Jacob's wealth, Shechem's men agreed and while they were incapacitated, Levi and Simeon attacked and killed them all, taking their property and possessions as spoil.

Using something as important as the sign of our covenant with the LORD in such a treacherous way was pure evil. Set aside the sin of murder for a minute. A major provision of our covenant was mutual protection. My grandsons used the LORD's promise of protection to disable and slaughter the very people they had sworn to protect. It was scandalous! If the other population groups found out about this, they could band together and wipe Jacob's family out completely. And who could blame them? My grandsons had just proven they couldn't be trusted, and in the eyes of our neighbors, revenge for the attack on Dinah was no excuse. "Remember," they would say, "she shouldn't have been out alone in the first place. And besides that, there are legal remedies for what happened and killing the whole town is not one of them." What a mess! They had to get out of there fast.

But the LORD in His great mercy, remained faithful to His promises and gave them both a destination and divine protection.

Genesis 35

Twenty years earlier, while fleeing from Esau, Jacob had rested for a night near the Canaanite city of Luz where he had a dream of angels ascending and descending on a ladder that reached into heaven. In his dream, the LORD spoke to Jacob and promised to bring him back to this land that He had promised to my father Abraham and then to me. When he woke up, Jacob had built an altar there, calling the place "The House of God" and "The Gateway to Heaven." He actually named the place Bethel, which means house of God, and that's its name even in your time, although you spell it Beit El. Now Jacob was finally returning, just as the LORD had promised.

After the awful thing my grandsons had done to the people of Shechem, it was obvious they would have to leave the area. The LORD told Jacob to return to Bethel and stay there for a while. As they prepared to leave Shechem, Jacob had everyone in his company hand over any idols of foreign gods, purify themselves, and put on clean clothes. So his wives and their servants gave him their little statues and took the rings from their ears. Jacob buried them all under a big oak tree outside of Shechem.

Why earrings, you ask? In those days earrings were a symbol of slavery and it was forbidden for any of God's people to be enslaved to anyone but Him. Likewise it was forbidden for any of us to cut or pierce or tattoo ourselves, or in any other way deface or degrade ourselves. We were children of the Most High God and were expected to behave accordingly.

When they had purified themselves, they started out from Shechem and the LORD struck the hearts of their neighbors with fear so that no one molested them, even after the terrible things they had done. It wasn't the first time the LORD had arranged a miraculous escape from the midst of our enemies, and it certainly wouldn't be the last.

When they arrived at Bethel in Canaan, Jacob stopped at the place where he had built the earlier altar and made another one. He called it El Bethel, God of the house of God. He recalled that the LORD had changed his name to Israel and had transferred the promises made to Abraham, and then me, to Jacob. That meant that all the land of Canaan would someday belong to Jacob's 12 sons, and that the entire world would be blessed through them. (At the time Jacob had only 11 sons but that would soon change.)

Centuries later that promise came true. Mary, a descendent of Jacob's 4th son Judah, gave birth to the Messiah, the Lamb of God Who took away the sins of the world. His death removed the barrier between man and God and made our access to Heaven possible. How's that for a blessing? The Messiah Jesus would even claim to His disciples that He was the fulfillment of Jacob's ladder dream (**John 1:51**). So Jacob's dream was a Messianic prophecy, showing that the Messiah would one day bridge that awful chasm that existed between God and man, created by the introduction of sin into the world. Then all who looked to Him in faith would gain access to the real House of God, to dwell with Him in eternal bliss.

But Israel (as he was now called) and his people were still some distance from Rebekah and me, and so once again they packed up and headed south. As they neared Bethlehem, Rachael went into labor, and after a very difficult time requiring her last ounce of energy, gave birth to our 12th grandson. As she lay dying, she named him Ben-oni meaning "son of my sorrow" but Jacob changed his name to Benjamin, which means "son of my right hand." They buried Rachael beside the road into Bethlehem, and even in your time, a small shrine still marks the place. Grieving the loss of the love of his life, Israel settled nearby in a canyon east of Bethlehem naming the place Migdal Eder, or Tower of the Flock.

Some time later Reuben, Israel's firstborn, convinced Bilah, one of his father's concubines, to have sex with

him. This was presumptuous of him, since on Israel's death Reuben would have inherited her as his own. So between this act of betrayal, and the despicable way Levi and Simeon had slaughtered the Shechemites, three of my first four grandsons had disqualified themselves from receiving the rights of the firstborn. Before they were through, all of the 10 preceding Joseph would be eliminated, leaving him as my son's principal heir.

And so my son Israel had 12 sons, future heads of the 12 tribes of Israel, whose descendants would each be given a portion of Canaan as their homeland when Moses and Joshua brought them back from Egypt several hundred years hence. As for me, I lived to the ripe old age of 180 years, and Israel came to Hebron to visit me. When I died he and Esau buried me in the cave at Machpelah alongside my father Abraham, my mother Sarah, and my wife Rebekah.

I hope through this story you can get a grasp of my life and times. It was a lot different than yours is. Though we never lived in a house and owned no property to speak of, we were wealthier than most kings of our time. My father and I had acquired herds and people as well as gold and silver to the degree that many kings feared us, as you recall from my adventures with Abimelech. These blessings came to us, not through any merit or worthiness of ours, but because when the LORD called we listened, and trusted Him. And for that alone He blessed us. I hope I've made that clear to you, because there's no other logical explanation. Sure we had our share of trouble, invariably caused by our own human weakness, but the LORD was always faithful even when we weren't.

I think that if you were able to take only one thing from the story of my life, it's that. His mercies are new every morning and His faithfulness endures forever. Next time you're in over your head, try to remember that. In the mean time, may He continue to bless you richly, and as you delight in Him, may He give you the desires of your heart.

Jacob's Story: Gen. 36-50

Genesis 36-37

What they intended for evil, the LORD intended for good... for the saving of many lives. (**Gen. 50:20**)

After my father Isaac died, my brother Esau and I concluded that it would be best for all if we maintained some distance between us. For one thing, our flocks and herds had grown so big that there literally wasn't enough local grazing area for their combined numbers. But it also made sense in light of our historical animosities.

Esau was content with the land he had located in Seir, an area east of the Dead Sea and a little south of Canaan in modern Jordan. He had made an accommodation with the Horites, a people who also lived there, and was able to find sufficient pastureland for his own animals as well as the share of my father's herds he had inherited. Later, because of Esau's nickname (Edom, or Red to you) as well as the color of the sandstone cliffs and canyons along its eastern border, that country became known as Edom.

Esau had acquired three wives who bore him just two sons, but their offspring grew into a sizable nation that over time was frequently contentious toward the offspring of my 12 sons, no doubt inspired by the unresolved conflict between my brother and me.

As for me, I settled in the land the LORD had first promised to my grandfather Abraham, then to my father Isaac and finally to me. We prospered there and lived an enjoyable life, except for the jealousy that arose from time to time among my sons. You remember that Rachel was the woman I truly loved, but because of my father-in-law's trickery, I wound up with her sister Leah along with their two handmaids. The 12 sons these four women bore me were always jockeying for position as my favorite, but I must confess that the firstborn of my beloved Rachel, Joseph, was closest to my heart.

I guess since Rachel was the only wife I sought, and the only woman I loved, I naturally favored Joseph, in many ways treating him as my only beloved son even though he was number 11 in the chronology, ahead of only Benjamin, Rachel's other son.

For his part, Joseph didn't help matters, going around in that special robe I had the weavers make for him. It was patterned after one a king would wear and was seamless; a very expensive method of weaving that meant the entire robe came from a single piece of cloth. With the special ornamentation I had them weave into the material, it was about as fine a garment as you could find in my day.

Then as if that wasn't enough, he started having these dreams that he couldn't resist telling us about. In each one it was clear that he was the high and mighty one and we were all peons. In one, my 12 sons were all out binding up sheaves of grain when suddenly his sheaf rose and stood upright while his brothers' sheaves bowed down before it. In another, the sun, the moon and eleven stars were paying homage to him. That one even got to me, but as we'll see these dreams were prophetic in ways we couldn't begin to understand. In fact for you prophecy buffs, the story I'm going to tell about my son Joseph contains many incidents that show how closely his life parallels and predicts the life of the Messiah. See if you can find them.

Of course his brothers never understood any of this. To them he was a cocky little kid who seemed to delight in keeping them stirred up, and one day they found a way to put him in his place for good. Or so they thought.

There was quite an age range among my sons since they were born over a period of about 30 years. One day when Joseph was about seventeen and some of the older ones were away with the flocks locating new pastureland, I sent Joseph to find them so he could report to me on how they were making out. We thought they were near Shechem, but it turns out they had gone to Dotham.

When the brothers saw Joseph coming, they conspired to kill him but Reuben, the oldest, convinced them to simply throw him into an empty cistern they had found nearby instead. He figured he could rescue Joseph later and see that no harm came to him. The others agreed so that's what they did. But while Reuben was off somewhere, Judah convinced them to sell Joseph to a passing Midianite caravan. They got 20 pieces of silver for him, which was the amount a boy who has been dedicated to the LORD was worth, and dipped his special robe into some goat's blood to make it look like Joseph had been attacked and killed by a wild animal.

When Reuben came back and found Joseph missing, he was fit to be tied. Like I said, he was the oldest and therefore the responsible one. But it was too late now. They brought me the robe, and of course I recognized it immediately, broke down and wept. To me, my beloved son was dead. The grief I felt was so intense I felt like dying myself. Maybe then I could see Joseph again.

But though I wouldn't know this for many years, Joseph was alive in Egypt, sold into slavery. And through a set of circumstances no one could predict we would meet again, bowing before him just as his dreams had foretold.

Gensis 38-39

I have already hinted at the similarities between the life of my son Joseph and the life of the Messiah. These similarities are so numerous and so remarkable that some Christians in your day claim to have found over

100 of them. Hindsight is always 20/20 after all. But even before the earthly appearance of our Lord Jesus, the parallels were noticed.

Old Testament scholars, studying Messianic prophecies hundreds of years before the fact, concluded that they fell into two categories which they called the suffering servant, and the conquering king. The Messianic portraits painted by these two categories of prophecies were so different that in the generation just before the Lord appeared a group of scholars headquartered in Qumran, near the Dead Sea, actually hypothesized that there were two messiahs, not one. The Essenes, as they were called, named these two Messiah ben Joseph (son of Joseph) for the suffering servant, and Messiah ben David (after King David) for the conquering king. My son Joseph was chosen as the prototype for the first messiah solely because of the remarkable similarities between his life and the first group of prophecies. So this wasn't just some New Testament idea.

In fact this idea became so prevalent that just before his death John the Baptist, who had spent time with the Essenes, sent messengers to inquire of Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come or should we expect another? (Matt 11:3) In your language the intent of the question is masked, but in Greek it's very clear. John was asking, "Are you the only messiah or should we also expect another, different from you?"

Of course John knew that Jesus was the one and only Messiah. By his question, he was trying to put the two-messiah hypothesis to naught. Jesus answered by pointing to prophecies He had fulfilled from both categories that are predicted in a passage of Isaiah (Chapter 61). He is the One and Only.

If you recall, Joseph had been rejected and betrayed by his brothers, cast into a pit, sold as a slave into Egypt, and reported to me as dead.

To spotlight the difference between Joseph and the others, I must tell you of an incident between Judah and Tamar that we'll compare with a similar situation concerning Joseph and the wife of his Egyptian master, Potifar.

Judah left our family for a time and married a Canaanite woman who bore him 3 sons. As the oldest, Er, matured, Judah got a wife for him, a woman named Tamar. But Er offended the LORD, resulting in his death and leaving Tamar a childless widow.

In our time, when a man died without an heir, it was the responsibility of the dead man's brother to have a child with the widow. The first son they produced would become the dead brother's heir and in this way his estate was protected. This remedy was called the Law of Levirate Marriage and would later be documented by Moses in Deuteronomy 25:5-6.

So Judah's second son, Onan, was given the responsibility of helping Tamar produce an heir. But he was also wicked and kept preventing her from becoming pregnant in a shameful attempt to prolong the assignment.

So the LORD caused his death as well.

Judah's third son Shelah was too young, but Judah persuaded Tamar go back to her father's home and wait so she could marry Shelah when he came of age. You understand that in our day a widow had no standing and was not a desired mate, so the only way for her to protect her interest and support herself was to produce a legitimate heir who would look after her. That's why she agreed, even though being sent back to her father's home was an even bigger disgrace than going childless. But when young Shelah grew up, Judah didn't follow through on his promise to Tamar, leaving her in limbo once again.

In the mean time Judah's wife had died, and when Tamar learned he was going away on a business trip, she ran ahead, dressed herself as a prostitute and with a veiled face stood at the side the road where he would be passing. Seeing her there but not knowing it was Tamar, Judah hired her for sex, leaving his seal and staff as a pledge for the payment they had agreed upon.

When it was discovered that Tamar was pregnant, Judah was outraged and sent for her to have her executed. That was the penalty for illicit sex in those days. Demanding the name of her lover to have him executed as well, Judah was shocked to say the least when she produced his seal and staff. (Since Judah had been unable to find the "prostitute" to exchange the pledge for the payment, he hadn't been able to retrieve them.)

"The man who owns these made me pregnant," she said, and Judah finally realized he'd failed to keep his promise to her. To his credit, he accepted the blame, pronounced her innocent and didn't sleep with her again. And so Tamar finally got her heir, preserving the estate of her dead husband and securing her own future, though it took years and she had to trick Judah into keeping his end of the bargain.

In the mean time, a man named Potifar, Captain of Pharaoh's guard, had purchased Joseph from the Midianites at the Egyptian slave market. Over time Joseph proved himself reliable and trustworthy, so Potifar put him in charge of all his household affairs. Now Potifar's wife was attracted to Joseph and began trying to seduce him. Time after time, Joseph refused, pleading with her that it would be a violation of the trust his master had shown him and a sin against God. After one particularly intense incident, Joseph ran from the house leaving his cloak behind.

As they would say centuries later, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." Potifar's wife ran to tell him that Joseph had tried to force himself upon her, using the cloak as evidence. Enraged, Potifar had Joseph thrown into jail.

And so my beloved son, having been rejected and betrayed by his brothers, cast into a pit, sold as a slave into Egypt, and reported to me as dead, has now been falsely accused and wrongly convicted.

I hope this contrast between Judah and Joseph gives you some insight into the difference in their characters.

Put that together with the sad tales my father has already told you about Reuben, Levi, and Simeon and you'll soon see why Joseph was my favorite. And it wasn't just me. Of all the men mentioned in the Bible, some flaw eventually surfaces in the character of all but two. Only Daniel and my son Joseph emerge with a 100% clean bill of health from the LORD's perspective. That doesn't mean they were sinless. They were human after all. But maybe it explains why these two men were chosen to play such remarkable roles in advancing the LORD's agenda among the Gentiles.

Genesis 40-41:40

The LORD continued to bless Joseph, even while he was a prisoner. Knowing my son was innocent of any crime; the LORD brought him to the attention of the warden as someone who could be trusted with responsibility. Soon Joseph was second in command of the prison, handling all the warden's routine administrative matters.

Some time later, two members of Pharaoh's court, officials who had upset him and were also languishing in prison as a result, had unusual dreams on the same night. Looking around among the inmates for someone to interpret them, they asked Joseph. "Interpretation of dreams is something only God can do," he replied, "but tell me about them."

The former Chief Cupbearer went first. In his dream there was a grape vine with three branches. The branches blossomed and budded and their clusters immediately ripened into grapes. The cupbearer had Pharaoh's cup in his hand and squeezed the grapes into it. Then he handed the cup to Pharaoh.

The LORD gave the interpretation to Joseph. The three branches stood for three days, after which Pharaoh would release the Chief Cupbearer from prison and reinstate him to his former position.

This was good news and the other official, the former Chief Baker, couldn't wait to tell of his dream. "On my head were three baskets of bread. The top basket was full of all kinds of bread I had baked for Pharaoh, but the birds kept flying down and eating it."

Again the LORD told Joseph what it meant. The three baskets were three days, but the birds eating the bread meant that in three days Pharaoh would have the baker beheaded and his body hung on a tree.

Joseph made each one promise to tell Pharaoh who had interpreted the dream for them and sent them away.

Three days later was Pharaoh's birthday, and during the festivities he sent for his two officials, restoring the Chief Cupbearer, but executing the Chief Baker just as Joseph had predicted. In his joy, the Chief Cupbearer forgot all about Joseph. Those of you with New Testament backgrounds will see something here that none

of us in my day could have picked up on. I'm talking about the incredible symbolism of these two dreams.

The Cupbearer was languishing in prison, as good as dead for all he knew. The wine in his dream was an indication that he was going to be released from bondage, brought back to life, if you will, and into the presence of Pharaoh. Now think of your communion service. The wine stands for the Blood of Christ, shed for the remission of sin. It releases us from the bondage of our sins, restores life to those who are as good as dead for lack of a Savior, and brings us into the presence of our King.

The Baker's body was broken and he was hung on a tree, just like his dream had foretold. The night before He was hung on Calvary's tree, Jesus took bread and broke it saying, "This bread is my body which is given for you." He had to die to give us life.

And just as these two prisoners experienced the fulfillment of their dreams on the third day after learning their meanings, so the believer received the fulfillment of the Lord's promise on the third day after He spoke it. For three days after his body was broken and His blood was shed, He arose from the dead to eternal life, proof that all who believed in Him would do likewise.

Two years later, Pharaoh had a couple of strange dreams that no one at court could explain, and finally the Chief Cupbearer remembered Joseph. Hustling him out of prison and into Pharaoh's presence, the officials asked Joseph to interpret Pharaoh's dream. Again Joseph said that interpretations belong to God alone, but agreed to hear the dreams and explain their meaning.

In the first one Pharaoh was standing by the Nile when seven fat and sleek cows came up out of the water and grazed among the reeds. Then seven skinny ugly cows also came out of the water and ate up the seven fat cows. But after doing so they were as skinny and ugly as before. Pharaoh woke up for a while, but after going to sleep again dreamed about seven heads of grain all full and ripe. But they were also eaten up by seven other heads of grain, scorched and withered by the East Wind.

Joseph told Pharaoh that the two dreams were one and the same. Seven years of abundance in Egypt would be followed by seven years of extreme famine. The famine would be so severe that it would consume all the abundance and more, and the people would forget all about the abundance because of the severity of the famine. The dream was given in two forms to show Pharaoh that the matter was settled in God's mind and would surely come to pass soon.

Joseph then suggested that Pharaoh appoint a wise and powerful man to make sure that as much of the abundance as possible would be stored up during the seven years of plenty, so there would be enough to see them through the famine. He recommended that 20% of each harvest be placed in storage for the next seven years.

Seeing Joseph's wisdom and agreeing with his recommendation, Pharaoh appointed him to the job, describing him as one in whom "the Spirit of God dwells." As for his power, Pharaoh decreed that in all of Egypt, only he would be superior to Joseph.

And so my beloved son, having been rejected and betrayed by his brothers, cast into a pit, sold as a slave into Egypt and reported to me as dead, falsely accused and wrongly convicted, has come out of his prison to become the second most powerful man in the known world, responsible alone for saving it from certain destruction. The world's first super hero.

Genesis 41:41-43

And so from the rags of the prisons to the riches of the court of Egypt, at age thirty my son Joseph had suddenly become the second most powerful man in the known world. All authority of Egypt had been given to him, and he was subject only to Pharaoh. In addition to the power and status, the finery and wealth, Pharaoh gave Joseph the daughter of the Priest of On to be his wife. Imagine that, a gentile bride for my son.

Joseph immediately began collecting a portion of the abundant harvest Pharaoh's dream had promised, and for seven years stored up mountains of grain in each of the cities of Egypt. He built huge warehouses to hold it all and before the seven years were up, they were stuffed to the rafters with more grain than he could measure. There was no spoilage during this time because wheat has an amazing ability for self-preservation. In fact, even in your time wheat from the days of the Pharaohs has been discovered in the pyramids and ground into flour to make bread just like the bread we ate back then, over four thousand years ago.

During this time Joseph's wife bore him two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Later I would adopt these sons as my own, and they would inherit Joseph's portion of my estate. In doing so, I blessed the younger one first and so you think of them in reverse order, Ephraim and Manasseh.

Inevitably the seven good years came to an end and famine settled over the land, and not just in Egypt. The whole Middle East was suffering and soon the word got around that in the entire region, only the Egyptians had enough food to eat. This is because when the Egyptians ran out of food, they petitioned Joseph to open the warehouses and give them some of the wheat they had stored up.

Even though Joseph had decided to sell them the wheat and not just give it to them, soon not only the Egyptians but also people from all over the region were coming to Joseph to buy food. Pharaoh was becoming an extremely wealthy man. In fact, because of Joseph's efforts, Pharaoh would eventually wind up personally owning all of Egypt; its land, its cattle, and its treasure, plus all the wealth of Canaan. Needless to say, he

was pleased with my son's plan and rewarded him handsomely.

Meanwhile, back in Canaan my other sons and I were also feeling the effects of the famine. One day I got them together and told them about the wheat for sale in Egypt. I sent all but Benjamin down to buy us some. Since Joseph was in charge of the selling, my other sons had to come before him to buy what we needed. As they bowed down before him, the first of his dreams came true, but although he recognized them, they had no idea who he was.

Joseph pretended not to know them and accused them of spying. He threw them into jail for three days, and then had them brought before him again. They had told him that there used to be twelve brothers, but that one had died and the other was still at home. To prove they weren't spies, Joseph made them return to Canaan with the food they were buying and bring Benjamin back. He ordered that one of them would have to remain in jail there to guarantee the others' return. They didn't think he could understand them as they began to repent among themselves for what they had done to him, and for a moment it brought tears to his eyes. Then, having filled their sacks with grain, he ordered his steward to give them provisions for the trip back and hide the money they had paid in their sacks too.

So where ten had arrived, only nine left for Canaan, Simeon being bound in prison against their return. Along the way they began to discover the hidden silver until shortly after their arrival back in Canaan it became obvious that all their silver had been returned. Sensing a trap, I was scared to death over the implications of this! Joseph was already gone as far as I knew, Simeon was a prisoner in Egypt and now they wanted me to send Benjamin down there too. It was more than I could do.

But soon the food they had bought ran out and we needed more. When I told them to get ready for another trip, they reminded me that unless Benjamin went with us, Simeon would stay in jail and they wouldn't be allowed to buy anything more.

Finally, after both Reuben and Judah promised Benjamin's safe return, I let them take him. We needed the food! I made them take some of our finest produce, honey, spices and nuts, and double the amount of silver to pay again for what they had bought the first time.

When they arrived in Egypt and sought Joseph, he had his steward escort them to his private residence and prepare a meal for them. Fearing the worst, they pleaded with the steward and told him about the mistake someone had made with the silver on the previous trip, offering to give it to him again. The steward told them not to worry, that he had received the silver, and that their God, the God of their fathers, had put the money in their sacks. Then he brought Simeon out to them.

The steward gave them water to wash with and fodder for their donkeys, and they prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon. When he came home and received the gifts, he asked about me, and singled out

Benjamin for a special blessing. Then he seated them at the table in the order of their birth, which astonished them. Once he was overcome with joy at being together with all his brothers and hurried from the room to weep privately, but they still had no idea whose company they had the pleasure of keeping. When the food was served they were astonished again as Benjamin was given a plate with five times the amount of food they got, but they all ate and drank freely with him.

And so my beloved son, having been rejected and betrayed by his brothers, cast into a pit, sold as a slave into Egypt and reported to me as dead, falsely accused and wrongly convicted, has come out of his prison to become the second most powerful man in the known world, responsible alone for saving it from certain destruction. In their affliction, his brothers have sought him, and in their repentance, he has provisioned them. And now, through the intercession of an unnamed servant, they have been reconciled to him and all are seated together at his banquet table, although they don't yet know him. It gets even better.

Genesis 44-46

After their meal, still not knowing that Joseph was their host, my sons were given the wheat they had bought, along with provisions for their journey back to Canaan. While they were getting ready to leave, Joseph set up one final deception to see into his brothers' hearts. He had the steward place their silver in the mouth of each one's sack of food just as before. Then he told him to place his own silver cup, the one he had just used at their meal, in the mouth of Benjamin's sack. He wanted to see what his brothers would do if my favorite, Benjamin, got into trouble.

Just after the brothers left for home, he had the steward run after them and accuse them of stealing the silver cup. They of course hotly denied any wrong doing and offered to let the steward search their bags. They promised that if he found anything that didn't belong to them, they would all become Joseph's slaves and the thief would be executed.

"So be it," said the steward, "as he began his search, "But whoever has the cup will become my slave. The rest of you will be allowed to leave." When he found Joseph's cup in Benjamin's bag they were absolutely mortified, knowing they'd been framed and subconsciously afraid that they were about to get exactly what they deserved for selling Joseph into slavery. What goes around comes around, after all. They went back to Joseph's house to plead for mercy, but Joseph insisted that Benjamin must become his slave. The others were free to go.

Then Judah spoke up repeating the story from their earlier meeting, how I had two sons with the only woman I called my wife. One of them was gone, and now if they returned without the other one, it would break my heart. He pleaded with Joseph to let him stay and become the slave so Benjamin could go home to their

father.

This was too much for Joseph. He chased his servants from the room and with loud weeping revealed his identity to his brothers. To say they were shocked would be the understatement of the age. At first they couldn't believe it, but when he told them how he got to Egypt in the first place they knew it was him. And then they realized that the brother they had so cruelly mistreated now held their future in the palm of his hand. It looked like it really was pay back time; up close and personal. Their shock turned to terror!

To allay the fear he saw dawning in their eyes, Joseph told them not to worry or be angry with each other. He said he believed all of this was really the LORD working behind the scenes to get him to Egypt ahead of them so he'd be able to feed them when the famine came and preserve God's chosen ones. So even though they had intended it for evil, the LORD intended it for good to save all their lives by a great deliverance. (I can't help but think of another time, several thousand years later, when the evil acts of His brothers resulted in the Messiah saving the lives of many by a great deliverance, again preserving His chosen ones.)

Immediately their fear melted into relief and they hugged and kissed him, all crying and talking at the same time. Joseph begged them to hurry back to Canaan to get me and the rest of the family before we all starved to death. After all there were still five years of famine left.

Someone had told Pharaoh that Joseph's brothers were in town so he came over to meet them. Learning of their starving family back in Canaan, he gave my sons 20 donkeys and carts to haul our wheat plus the abundance of extra food and clothing he and Joseph had given them up to Canaan. He said to use the carts to bring all of us to Egypt as quickly as possible. You should have seen them coming up the highway toward us with all those carts and donkeys piled high with the best Egypt had to offer. I tell you it was quite a sight, but in no way could it have prepared me for the news that my long lost son was alive and the number two man in Egypt. I refused to believe it. Funny how it was easier for me to believe the lie of his death than the truth of his life.

But then I looked at those carts and saw all the food and the Spirit within me convinced me that it was true. I was going to see my beloved son again after all. Judah had been afraid of breaking an old man's heart with sorrow, but I was afraid my heart would burst with joy.

When we were all ready, we loaded the carts and set off for Egypt. At Beersheba we stopped and I offered a sacrifice to the LORD. That night the LORD spoke to me in a vision telling me not to be afraid to go to Egypt. He said He would make my people into a great nation there, and would not only go with us but would also bring us back to the land He had given us. Then He brought the promise He had made to my grandfather Abraham into my mind. "Your descendants will go to a strange country and remain there for 400 years until the people of Canaan have used up all the time I am giving them to repent of their evil ways and return to Me."

Knowing in advance that they wouldn't repent, but still giving them the time He committed to, He had promised Abraham that at the end of the 400 years he would bring our descendants back into this land and give it to us. By going to Egypt now, we were beginning the fulfillment of that promise.

Sixty-six direct descendants of mine went to Egypt with me, not counting the wives of my sons and grandsons. Adding Joseph and his two sons who were already there means we would be seventy strong when we settled at Goshen in the Nile Delta region. 400 years later when Moses brought my descendants out of Egypt there were over 1.5 million of them, including women and children. A great nation, just like He promised.

When we entered Egypt, I sent Judah ahead to ask Joseph for directions to Goshen, and when we got there Joseph met us, driving his fancy Egyptian chariot. As soon as he saw me, Joseph ran up and threw his arms around me. He had been a teenage shepherd boy when I had last seen him and now he was 39 years old, a grown man and Prime Minister of the richest country in the world. As for me, my life was now complete. I had seen with my own eyes that my beloved son was alive and I could now die in peace. Praise the LORD.

Genesis 47-50

After we had settled in Goshen, Joseph took five of his brothers and went to see Pharaoh. When Pharaoh asked their occupation, they told him they were shepherds, as Joseph had instructed them. In the distant past, Egypt had been ruled for a time by foreigners they called the Hyksos, or shepherd kings. It had not been a pleasant time for Egypt and its memory gave birth to their dislike for all shepherds. Joseph knew that describing ourselves as such would insure that we would be given land in Goshen, a fair distance from any major population center, effectively separating us from the Egyptians and avoiding any social problems arising out of this dislike. He also knew Goshen was an area particularly suited for raising animals and would be to our liking as well. Everybody wins.

Later Joseph introduced me to Pharaoh, who was amazed when I told him I was 130 years old. Then I said that my father and his father had lived to be much older. You see the average life span among Egyptians was only about 35 years in those days. Much of this disparity was due to the differences in our diets. The so-called kosher diet that Moses would later document in the wilderness had been with man since the beginning (modified in Noah's time to include specially slaughtered meat) but only those of us who remained faithful to God followed it. The Egyptians and others who had turned away from God in favor of their pagan religions ate unclean food, lived in unsanitary conditions, and followed generally unhealthy practices. This made them easy prey for disease and infestation drastically shortening their lives. Later, when Joseph died at age 110, the Egyptians believed he had lived a charmed life, one favored by the gods, when in fact all his older brothers were still alive.

But the famine was still going strong when we settled in Goshen, and without the regular provisions Joseph sent our way, we would have all perished. Soon Joseph had collected all the money in circulation from Egypt as well as Canaan and deposited it in Pharaoh's accounts. And still the people faced starvation. So he traded them food for their animals and livestock, and before long, they all belonged to Pharaoh as well. When they came to him for still more, he took their land and finally themselves in trade until Pharaoh wound up owning all the money, livestock, land and people in the known world, and Joseph was in charge of it all. The people were happy with this arrangement, because he had kept them alive. Being in bondage to Pharaoh was better than any alternative they could see. (Try seeing yourself this way with the LORD. Same conclusion?)

At the end of the seven years of famine, Joseph gave each family enough seed to plant crops, but passed a law requiring them to give Pharaoh 20% of each year's harvest from that time on.

Some time later Joseph brought his two sons to visit me, and while they were there, I adopted them as my own. I told Joseph that all his subsequent sons would be his but that these two were mine to make up for the sons Rachael never got a chance to give me, having died giving birth to Benjamin. As I blessed them, I reversed the order of their birth signifying that the younger, Ephraim, would surpass the elder, Manasseh. From that time on, the names of Ephraim and Manasseh were included in any mention of my sons.

As I grew older my health continued to decline until one day I realized the end was near. Calling my sons together, I told each of them what would befall their descendants in the latter days. I prophesied over them beginning with the oldest.

I reminded Reuben that although he was my firstborn and had been strong in honor and power, he would not receive the rights of the firstborn and his descendants would no longer excel because he had had a sexual liaison with Bilhah, one of my concubines.

I then condemned Simeon and Levi for their inexcusable actions against the Shechemites and passed over them in bestowing the rights of the firstborn as well. I said their descendants would be scattered in the Promised Land, and indeed Simeon's people were absorbed into Judah and the Levites received no land allotment at all, being given forty cities located through out the country.

Judah was next. To him I gave a part of the firstborn's rights; to always have authority over his brothers. Later, Judah's descendants became the Kings of Israel, and ultimately a descendant of Judah's, the Messiah, would become the King of the whole world.

(Centuries later the Romans made Israel subject to Roman rule, depriving them of their national sovereignty. I had prophesied that the scepter, the symbol of tribal authority, would not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff, symbol of the King's authority, from between his feet until the One comes to whom it belongs. I was speaking of the Messiah, who would come from the tribe of Judah.

But now the Romans had usurped Israel's national sovereignty. The Priests went through the streets of Jerusalem in sackcloth and ashes, bemoaning the fact that the Scriptures had been broken. The scepter had departed from Judah and the Messiah had not come. They were wrong. The Christ child had been born in Bethlehem and was even then living in Nazareth preparing to begin His ministry.)

I told Zebulon his descendants would live near the sea, and become a haven for ships. Issachar would share a border with Assyria and be conquered by them.

Dan, whose name means judge, would provide justice. Samson, who began Israel's deliverance from the Philistines and became one of its judges, came from the tribe of Dan. But others, more treacherous, would bring about Israel's downfall. The descendants of Dan introduced idolatry into the land around the time of Solomon.

Gad, whose people settled the Golan, would live in almost constant warfare, protecting Israel's northern flanks.

The tribe of Asher would settle in the north near Lebanon and contribute nearly \$3 billion worth of materials for Solomon's Temple in the currency of your day.

I called Naphtali a doe set free who bears beautiful fawns. His descendants included more daughters than sons, but 11 of the 12 disciples came from the region of Naphtali and Zebulon.

I included prophecies for Ephraim and Manasseh in my words to Joseph, predicting the strength and battle skills of their descendants. Together they settled most of central Israel including the hill country and land east of the Jordan, the most fertile lands in the nation, and spilled over into Jericho. The blessings of the Almighty would be upon them because of the favor Joseph had found with the LORD, and the double portion of the first born would go to Joseph as well, for distribution to his two sons.

Benjamin, I said, would be a ravenous wolf. The heroes and warriors of Israel often were Benjamites, and their fighting forces were feared far and wide. King Saul and his son Jonathon are good examples. Saul of Tarsus, later named Paul, is perhaps the greatest from your perspective.

Just before dying, I made Joseph promise to carry my body to Hebron, to be buried in the cave with Abraham and Isaac and their wives. My first wife, Leah is also buried there. When the time came, all of Egypt spent 70 days mourning my passing and a huge company of officials from Egypt accompanied Joseph to Hebron and took part in seven more days of mourning there.

After I died, my other sons were afraid that Joseph would now seek revenge for all they had done to him. But he reminded them that even though they had intended evil in their actions, the LORD had meant it for good and many lives had been saved. So they all lived in peace in Egypt.

At the time of his death, Joseph reminded his brothers of the promise the LORD had made to me that He would be with us there and would surely bring us back into the land He had promised us. Joseph made them promise to carry his bones with them when the time came for their return. Then at age 110 he died, was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

I hope my story has helped you see the many ways in which the life of my son Joseph was a preview of the life of the Messiah. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us ..." (Rom 15:4). Studying Joseph's life can't help but illuminate events in the life of Jesus and prove once again the extent to which the LORD has gone to reveal Himself to you through the lives and times of His people.

And so my son Joseph, having been hated and betrayed by his brothers and sold as a slave, literally rose from his intended grave to become the second ruler of the known world. Through his supernatural power and selfless acts, he single handedly saved the world's population from certain death, acquiring all its wealth on behalf of the king in the process. It's no wonder some call Jesus "Messiah ben Joseph." Shalom.