

THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

VOLUME ONE

Herbert W. Armstrong led the Worldwide Church of God (formerly The Radio Church of God until 1968) until his death in 1986. Hundreds of millions heard his voice and read his literature. God called him in the fall of 1926 and he was converted in the spring of 1927. Over the course of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, God revealed through him a great many true biblical doctrines, which had been lost to the Church through the centuries. After his death, his successors ceased to believe and teach these doctrines. Although copyright law prohibits The Restored Church of God from reproducing and distributing literature produced while he led the Worldwide Church of God, we are committed to the preservation and teaching of all of these truths!

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INTRODUCTION

by David C. Pack

This is the first volume of a special series. These books truly represent “THE STORY OF THE BIBLE.” Many have attempted to write various kinds of “Bible Story Books,” but they are usually written only for children, and are primarily designed to entertain instead of *educate* or *inspire*. The reader will see that the wonderful style and artwork of this series capture the spirit of God’s Word, with its intended lessons and vital meaning.

Most children’s versions of the Bible terribly misrepresent important stories that it contains—and they are written with wrong emphasis—and wrong *meaning*! Instead of leading children to the true God, and to the true doctrines of His Word, children are left with the impression that the Bible only contains a *few* stories, and is mostly a book about war, violence, blood, thunder and death.

This is terribly wrong!

In keeping with the modern generation’s obsession with graphic violence, most efforts to reflect the teachings of the Bible “play” to this interest. Youth are given what they *want* to read, not what they *need* to understand. The many stories of the Bible are intended to teach VITAL LESSONS to people of *all* ages. Modern writers miss the mark when they *cater to* children, rather than properly *teach* them what God intends.

If young people learn the Bible in a *wrong* way—with emphasis on the *wrong* things, while ignoring the enormous number of lessons that the Bible contains—at least two bad things result.

First, all these wrong concepts and approaches must be unlearned and replaced by right knowledge and understanding of what the Bible *really* says. Unlearning error is a most difficult thing to do, and is actually far harder than learning the truth correctly the first time, leaving no need to sweep the mind clean of what has been wrong or misunderstood.

Second, young people will later find the stories of the Bible have been trivialized and made irrelevant, and they may find themselves turned off by its message rather than being excited and thrilled about what they are learning.

The modern system of education is morally and spiritually bankrupt! Deluded educators have been biased against God and His Word by the atheistic teaching of evolution poured into them from childhood. They have taught young people for decades that there are “no absolutes” and that they must fol-

low “situation ethics.” They have led the world into a kind of secular humanism—where people are driven by how they *feel* rather than clear definitions of *right* and *wrong*! But there is right and wrong in life—and those who are teaching the children of this world have cut themselves off from this knowledge (Isaiah 59:1-2). They cannot teach what they were never taught!

Also, this world’s churches keep young people steeped in traditional pagan philosophies and teachings that have deceived the world for millennia. They have ignored the great spiritual principle of CAUSE and EFFECT that governs *every* aspect of life. They have neglected to teach true *spiritual* values. They have defaulted their responsibility in all the critical areas of leadership—and have utterly failed in their greatest responsibility, which should have been to instill in young minds the marvelous truths of God’s Word—to teach youth how to live, not just how to earn a living.

This is a tragic state of affairs!

Many who attempt to study the Bible become confused, frustrated and disillusioned, believing that it is too difficult to understand. As a result, many who *would* seek to teach their children true Christian standards and values, either give up altogether or leave such education to the *many* theological “experts,” who offer no end of differing—and conflicting—views.

Such an approach only serves to further confuse young people about the Bible, thus, in many cases, alienating them from it. But those who truly seek to understand God’s Word, without adding their own interpretation (II Peter 1:20), will find that there *is* simplicity in it (II Corinthians 11:3).

Children need to be taught this simplicity! They need to know who and what they are—and why they were born—that they are future sons of God in the making!

You were born for a *reason*. Your life has a SUPREME PURPOSE! The Bible reveals how to be in harmony with the true God—and His purpose for life. The world is ignorant of this. So are most parents. They have no idea how or what to teach their children. No one is guiding parents, because no one knows *how* to guide them. Sadly, though the Bible is a gripping, interesting—even *fascinating*—book of true stories (all part of one great story), most find it dull, dry and boring.

This series is written to completely change this misconception in the minds of people of all ages! It uses language designed to expand your mind through the use of word pictures. Our goal has been to make the Bible *real*—to make it talk directly to parents and children. With only a little explanation, parents will be able to read these volumes to children as young as age three.

In today’s world, youth are universally misguided, abused, neglected and ignored and this fuels a variety of rampant, escalating social problems. This is because society as a whole has rejected the SOURCE of true happiness, success, peace and fulfillment—GOD’S WORD. As King Solomon admonished, “Train

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

How many are even *attempting* to do this today?

Many true doctrines of God were restored to His Church in the middle of the 20th century. By the 1990s, they had largely been discarded by its new leaders. Part of our commission is to once again “restore what was restored” and to continue to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6). The Restored Church of God *has* completely restored *all* God’s doctrines to the Church!

Under the faithful leadership of Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986), various Church youth programs were established as part of the fulfillment of this important responsibility. These included the Y.O.U. program (Youth Opportunities United—for teens), and the Y.E.S. program (Youth Educational Services—for young children). There was also a *Summer Educational Program* (S.E.P.), providing teenagers with the opportunity to fellowship with other teens and develop many skills and talents in a camp environment.

There was also much youth-oriented *literature*, offered to the young people of God’s Church. These included a *Youth* magazine for teenagers, *Youth Bible Lessons* for children from kindergarten through sixth grade—and *The Bible Story* series.

Children are far too precious to ignore or neglect. While parents *must utilize* the tools that are available to them, they cannot do this if these tools have not been created.

As the only true extension of Mr. Armstrong’s ministry, The Restored Church of God is re-creating these same written tools—as well as the magazines, books, booklets, articles and letters that once taught the full truth of God to millions around the world.

This series is being rewritten—with new volumes to appear on a regular basis—to once again make the Bible *simple*, so that the stories in it come to life! But these volumes are *not* just for children! It is our hope that parents and children alike will enjoy and benefit from them. Its forerunner was a six-volume work, once described as “written for children 5 to 105.” The original series is no longer available—but this new one is!



The vast universe is made up of a countless sea of galaxies, stars, planets, moons, asteroids, comets and many other heavenly bodies. These were all created by God.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM THE BEGINNING

Have you ever looked up into the sky at night and wondered about the stars? Some are big. Some are small. Some stars are so far away that it takes many years for their light to reach earth. Some stars have planets and moons that circle around them, just like the earth and our moon circle the sun.

Where did they all come from?

For every star that you see in the night, there are countless others that you cannot see. This is because they are too far away.

But imagine that you could see them. Imagine that you could see millions and billions of stars—yellow, orange, red, blue and white—spread across the blackness of space. Together with countless planets, moons, comets and other heavenly bodies, they make up the Milky Way Galaxy.

Now imagine a countless sea of galaxies that spread across the darkness of night. This is the universe.

How did the universe come to be? Where did our earth, moon and sun come from? And what about the other planets and stars that make up the universe? Where did they come from?

To find the answers, we must look backward in time. Before you were born...before your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were born...before the first human being walked the earth...before the earth, moon, sun, stars, galaxies and the entire universe existed...

There was God.

Everything Begins With God

Everything you can see, hear, smell, touch or taste came from materials created by God (Genesis 1:1). He is the Creator. He created everything in the universe—including you!

But no one created God. He never had a beginning (John 1:1-2), and He has always lived (Hebrews 7:3). There was never a time when He did not live—nor will there ever be one (Revelation 1:8; Isaiah 57:15). This is why He is often called the Eternal or Ever-living One.

This is hard to understand because we are physical. We can only understand physical things through our five senses—sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell.

But God is Spirit (John 4:24). He is not limited to five senses. And we cannot know Him or the things He has done unless He tells us.

And He does, through His written Word—the Holy Bible. In it, God reveals many wonderful things, which we cannot learn on our own unless we seek and obey Him (Deuteronomy 29:29). The Bible is a special book that reveals who and what God is, and why He created us.

What Does God Look Like?

Since God is Spirit, we cannot see Him. But do you want to know what God looks like?

Go look at your face in a mirror. What do you see? Two eyes, a mouth, a nose, hair and two ears. Guess what? God has two eyes, a mouth, a nose, hair and ears, too. He also has two arms, legs, hands and feet, just as you do. This is because God created you in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26).

The Bible says that His hair is as white as snow, His eyes like flames of fire, His feet the color of brass. He has a deep, booming voice, and a face that shines as bright as the sun (Revelation 1:14-16)! As you can tell, no one looks exactly like God.

God is a Family

God is not alone. Just as you have a family—a father and mother, and maybe brothers or sisters—so does God. In fact, God is a Family. His Family is now made up of two Beings: God the Father and the Word. They have always lived and always will. The Word, or Spokesman, later became Jesus Christ, God's Son (John 1:1-2, 14). They are both God. And, just like you have a family name (such as Smith or Jones), which is the same as your parents' last name, the Father and Christ also share a family name—God.

Just as the father is the head of the family, God the Father is the Head of the God Family. The Word (Christ) carries out His orders. Together, God and the Word planned and designed the universe. And through their awesome power—the Holy Spirit—they created everything in it.

God and the Word always agree with each other. They never fight or argue. They live together in perfect happiness and harmony. This is because their Family has government. God the Father leads and makes the final decisions, while the Word reports to Him and carries out the Father's commands. Both God and the Word talk to each other and plan things out. They use their supreme wisdom to come to the right decisions. But the Father is the One who has the final say. And the Word always obeys Him.

God Creates Angels

Before the universe was made, God created hundreds of millions of angels. Like God, angels are made of spirit and can live forever. But unlike God, angels did not always exist. And they cannot create life. Angels (like humans) are free moral agents. This means that God allows them to decide and choose for themselves whether or not they will obey Him. God never forces people or angels to obey Him. In His mercy, He wants everyone to freely choose His way of life.

After creating the angels, God created all the stars, planets, moons and galaxies that exist—the whole universe! Millions of angels sang for joy, especially when God created the earth (Job 38:7). They knew that it would be handed to them as part of a very special assignment.

Great War in Heaven

The Eternal gave a unique mission to one-third of all the angels: They were assigned to live on the earth and take special care of it. If they succeeded, they would eventually be given the entire universe to take care of and rule under God.

At first, the angels were happy about their assignment. They wanted to do all that they could to make the earth a beautiful garden paradise of peaceful meadows, green forests, sandy beaches and sparkling oceans.

But as time passed (the Bible does not say how long; it may have taken millions, even billions, of years), something changed.

It all began with Lucifer, who was an archangel. God appointed him leader over the millions of angels who lived on the earth. Full of wisdom and beauty, Lucifer was the smartest, most perfect being God had ever created (Ezekiel 28:11-14). While God ruled the vast universe from His throne in heaven, Lucifer ruled over the earth from his throne in the Garden of Eden. He obediently carried out God's commands.

But one day, Lucifer allowed a wrong thought to enter his mind. Instead of getting rid of it and replacing it with right thoughts, he allowed even more wrong thoughts and feelings to guide and control his mind. He soon became full of pride (verse 15). Instead of being thankful for the assignment God gave him, Lucifer became bitter and angry. He wanted more power, more responsibility—and he wanted it his way, not God's.

He began to think that he knew better than God, that he was smarter than Him. Lucifer allowed himself to think that he was greater than he really was—even greater than his Creator! Eventually, Lucifer came to believe that he should be God! And he reasoned that the only way to do so was to take God's place and remove Him from His heavenly throne (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Lucifer's wrong thoughts and attitudes led him to sin—to break God's spiritual laws of love and outgoing concern for others, first toward God, then toward people (I John 3:4; Romans 7:12-14). Lucifer the archangel became God's enemy.

He convinced the other angels around him to believe that his way was right. Through lies and deceit, Lucifer talked them into believing that God and His ways were unfair and unjust.

In turn, those angels convinced other angels of the same lies. Eventually, all the angels who lived on earth—one-third of all the angels God had created—rebelled against their Creator (Revelation 12:4; Job 4:18). They followed Lucifer into breaking God's laws, and refused to obey the Eternal.

Though originally created with super-intelligence, the minds of the fallen angels became twisted and evil. They decided their way—selfishness, greed, cruelty, putting themselves first before others—was somehow better than God's Way. They decided that, if God would not

do things their way, they would have to remove Him as Supreme Ruler!

Lucifer and the rebellious angels—now transformed into demons—foolishly invaded heaven to take over God’s throne. But God—armed with the limitless power of His Holy Spirit, and backed by twice as many loyal angels—put down the rebellion. He cast the evil spirits back to the earth. God then changed Lucifer’s name, which meant “morning star” or “shining one,” to Satan the devil, which means “adversary,” “accuser” and “slanderer” (Ezekiel 28:11-19).

Life on Earth Destroyed

Because they had failed to overthrow their Creator, Satan and his demons were full of hatred and bitterness. Like spoiled children who could not get their own way, they wrecked the face of the earth. Earthquakes shattered and trembled across the planet, while volcanoes burst and overflowed with molten lava. Poisonous gases filled the sky, choking everything that breathed, and shutting out the sunlight. The oceans and seas smashed against the land until the whole earth was covered with water. All physical life (dinosaurs, plants, insects and other prehistoric life) was destroyed.

Today, the scarred and beaten moons and planets, in decay within our solar system and throughout the universe, remind us of that great angelic war.

Satan’s rebellion proved to God that there was only one kind of being that could be trusted to manage and rule over His creation—other God-beings!

The Awesome Potential of Man

God is love (I John 4:8). His way of life is based on His spiritual laws of love and outgoing concern for others. It is the way of giving, assisting, helping, sharing and cooperating with others (Matthew 7:12; 22:37-40). Our Creator is not selfish, cruel, heartless or hateful. He does not—and cannot—think those ways. He cannot break His spiritual laws of love, which means that everything that He does is for the benefit of others. This is God’s holy, righteous character.

Godly character is: (1) The ability to know and decide what is right

from wrong. (2) To choose the right way over the wrong way. And (3), despite overwhelming obstacles, to do what is right and reject what is wrong.

Holy, righteous character is so precious, so special and unique, that it cannot be created all at once, in an instant. Just as it takes much time, patience and learning to be able to paint a beautiful masterpiece, godly character must be developed and grown over a long period. It is impossible for God to instantly create a being (whether angel or human) that has His character. Instead, it must be developed over a lifetime of experiences.

And God wants to develop His character in you! God wants you to become just like Him: Fair, honest, patient, selfless, trustworthy, pure, innocent, kind, humble, sincere, good, reliable, truthful, respectful, peaceful—without sin!

Since the fallen angels (now demons) were made of spirit, they cannot die. They are doomed to live forever in misery as selfish, proud, greedy, angry, twisted beings. Never again will they experience the joy of living God's way of life.

The Eternal understood that only another God-being—one who thinks and lives like God, and always puts others ahead of himself—could be trusted to take care of, manage and rule over the universe. So God decided to reproduce Himself—to expand His Family, just as your parents decided to expand their family by having you.

He decided to create physical beings—humans—in whom He could develop His righteous character. With a small portion of His Spirit working in their minds, they would literally become God's sons, yet still be physical. If they practiced seeking and obeying Him throughout their physical lifetimes, He would change them into spirit so that they could enter His kingdom. With His holy character fully developed within them, they would become just like God!

Only then could they be trusted to manage and rule the universe God's Way. Beginning with the earth, they would convert, or change, dead, battle-scarred planets and moons in countless galaxies throughout creation into garden paradises. They would also help and guide other humans into developing godly character so that they, too, would be born into the ever-expanding God Family.

But, if human beings refused to obey their Creator—if they rejected His laws and practiced the way of greed, selfishness and vanity—

the way of sin—God would have to reject them. In His mercy, He would end their physical lives, never allowing them to suffer forever in misery like the fallen angels.

Therefore, God the Father and the Word, guided by their supreme wisdom and intelligence, spent many years carefully planning and preparing for their next creation—MAN!

CHAPTER TWO

GOD RECREATES THE EARTH

For many years (perhaps millions), Satan the devil and his demons roamed a darkened, lifeless earth, which was covered with water and poisonous gases (Genesis 1:2). Then one day, after years of careful planning, God decided it was time to recreate the face of the earth. He knew that the conditions and surroundings had to be just right, so that it could support physical life.

On the first day, God, using the tremendous power of His Holy Spirit, cleared away the poisonous smoke, vapors, gases and clouds that filled the sky. This allowed some sunlight to shine upon earth for the first time in many years (verses 3-5).

On the second day, God cleared away a layer of water and replaced it with healthy, fresh air and clean clouds, which swirled in the sky (verse 8). This is known today as the atmosphere (the Bible refers to it as the first heaven).

On the third day, the Creator pushed back the waters into sections of oceans, seas and lakes across the earth. This cleared the way for dry land to appear and prosper with plant-life. God also formed sections made up of mountains, hills, plains, valleys, islands and continents (verses 9-10). Then He created grass, plants, trees and other vegetation (verses 11-13).

On the fourth day, God swept away the last layer of dust and gases. This allowed the stars to twinkle and shine down from the blackness of space into the night sky. God calls this space the second heaven (verse 14). His throne is in the third heaven (Acts 7:49).

On the fifth day, He created fish, whales and other creatures of the sea (Genesis 1:20-21). He also created birds to fly through the sky (verses 21-23).

With the waters and sky populated with life, God was now ready to create man.

God Creates Man From Dust

On the sixth day of the week, God created animals of every kind: Horses, cows, lions, deer, elephants, reptiles, insects and many more—anything that walked, crawled or moved about the earth (Genesis 1:24-25). Each animal was made after its own kind. This is why horses give birth to baby horses (foals); cows give birth to baby cows (calves); lions give birth to baby lions (cubs).

Likewise, God created man after His own kind. Like a piece of clay, man was sculpted into the same image and likeness as his Creator (verses 26-27). Just as you have hair, eyes, a nose, a mouth, arms and legs like your parents, God created human beings to look like Him.

However, God is Spirit (John 4:24). Man is flesh and blood, created from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). God lives forever. He can never die. But humans are temporary, physical; eventually, all human beings die.

After God formed and shaped the first man, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Man then became a soul—a living, breathing being, just like animals.

Animal Brain Versus Human Mind

Human beings and animals have temporary, physical lives. Both must rely upon food, drink and fresh, clean air in order to survive. But there are two major differences between humans and animals.

First, humans were made to look like the God kind. Animals were made to look like the animal kind.

Second, animals live by instinct. Like a computer, God programmed animals to automatically know how to survive. Through instinct, a colt automatically knows how to walk almost as soon as it is born. Through instinct, a calf automatically knows exactly where and how to get milk—from its mother. Through instinct, birds automatically know how to build nests.

But God did not give humans instinct. Instead, He gives each person a human spirit (Job 32:8). This means that we must learn to walk, speak, build things, and so forth. We do not automatically know how to do these things.

However, the human spirit empowers the brain to become a mind. This is why man can build and design towering skyscrapers, produce beautiful works of art, and create wonderful, awe-inspiring music.

Animals cannot do these things.

Man can produce powerful, super-fast computers of all shapes and sizes. He can build spacecrafts that can visit other planets—and even take people to the moon and back. He can create vast libraries of books that record thousands of years of human history.

Animals can do none of these things. The human mind is greater, higher and better than the animal brain.

And yet the human mind is far, far lower than God's mind!

The First Marriage

God named the first man Adam and placed him in the beautiful Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8). He then instructed Adam to tend the garden and keep it lush and green (verse 15). God also brought before the man every animal that moved on the earth or flew in the sky so that Adam would name them (verses 19-20).

As the animals came to Adam, he noticed that each kind was male and female. Seeing this, Adam began to feel lonely. He was the only human being on the face of the earth.

But the Creator did not intend for Adam to live alone. He said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper" (verse 18). God knew that without a helper or companion, Adam was physically incomplete.

So God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. He then took one of his ribs and created a woman from it (Genesis 2:18-22).

Later, Adam called her "Eve," which means "life," "living" or "life-giver," because she would become the mother of every man, woman and child who has ever lived (3:20).

Then, God performed the first wedding—Adam and Eve became husband and wife (Genesis 2:22-24). God intended for married couples to work together as a team and to walk in complete agreement, the way God and the Word agree. God made the man to be the head of his wife and family. And God made the wife to be head of the children and to manage the household. The Creator intended that the man look to his wife as a helper and for advice. The woman was made to look to





her husband for leadership, guidance and authority. Together, as they produce children and build families, husbands and wives physically complete each other.

Peace in the Garden of Eden

Adam and Eve did not need to fear the animals that roamed the earth. Unlike today, animals back then did not eat meat, nor did they attack and hurt each other. They all lived together in peace. Lions, bears and other large animals walked freely without attacking others.

One day soon, man and animals will live in peace and harmony again. This will happen when God sets up His kingdom on the earth. At that time, all will live according to His ways (Isaiah 11:6-9).

God instructed Adam and Eve to have a family and fill the earth with children. He also gave them the responsibility of ruling and taking care of the animals, water creatures, birds and plants (Genesis 1:28-30). Adam's job was to till the ground and spread the supreme beauty and lushness of the Garden of Eden around the world until it filled the whole earth (2:4-6).

God Creates the Sabbath

God recreated the earth, and then created plants, animals and humans, in six days. On the seventh day, the Creator decided to rest from His work (Genesis 2:2-3).

God was not tired. The Eternal is always filled with energy (Isaiah 40:28; Psalm 121:4). He rested on the seventh day of the week in order to set an example for us (Genesis 2:1-3).

God gave the first six days of the week for people to work and create things—just as God worked and recreated the earth. But the seventh day is special. It is holy—set apart for a special purpose. God called that day His Sabbath (Exodus 16:26). It is a day of rest, a holy time set apart from all work so that people can have more time to seek and worship God. The first six days of the week belong to man. But the seventh day—the Sabbath—belongs to God (Exodus 20:8-11).

Once God established the Sabbath day, the Creation Week was finished.

CHAPTER THREE

IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

God recreated the earth in six days. He then rested from His work on the seventh day—the Sabbath. Adam and Eve were placed in the garden paradise of Eden. Their job was to populate the earth and tend and keep the garden until the entire planet was like Eden.

Meanwhile, as he watched events unfold, Satan the devil schemed for a way to stop God's Plan.

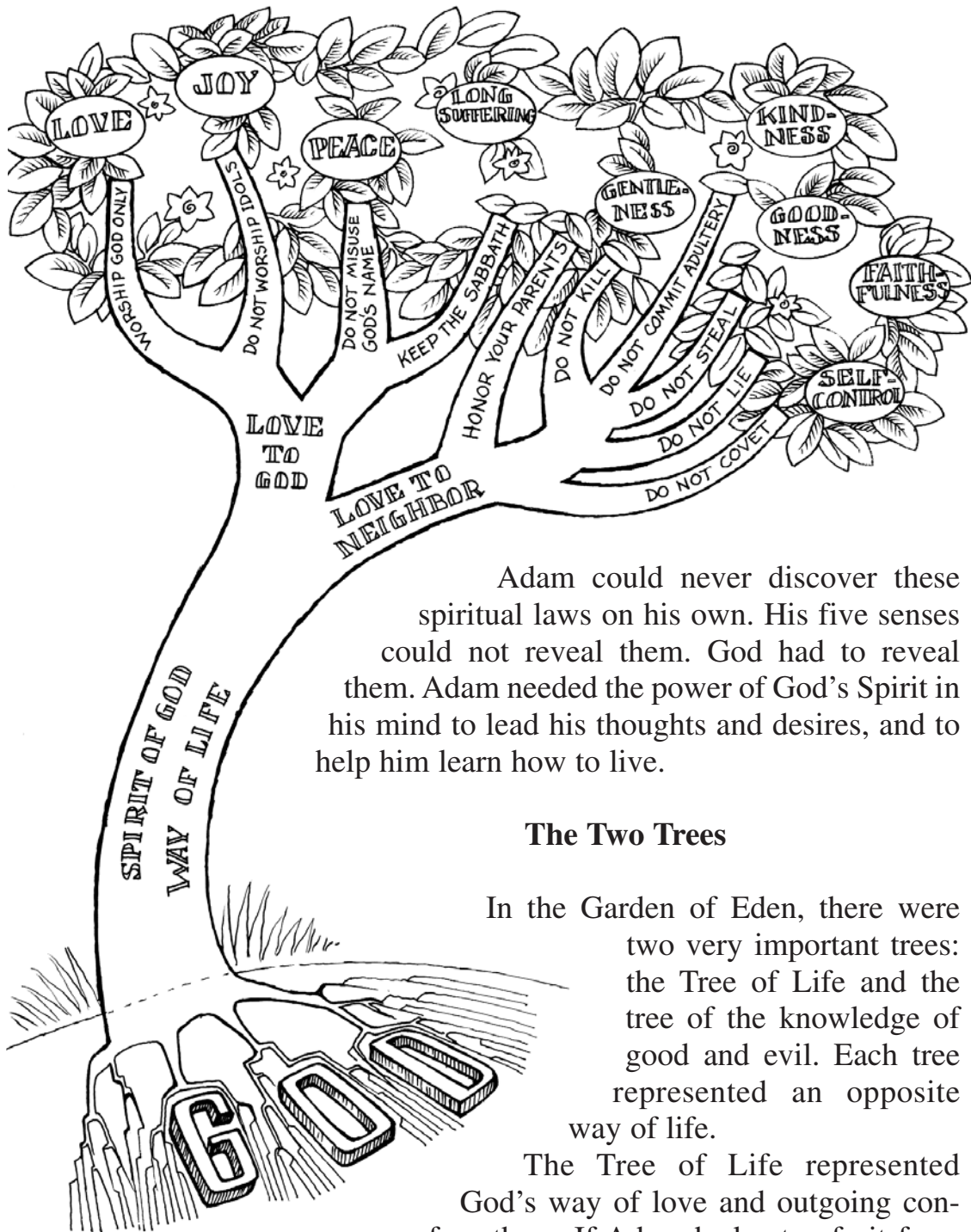
Human Spirit Not Enough

Physically, Adam was created perfect. With Eve as his wife, the married couple was physically complete.

And yet they were spiritually incomplete. Though God created man with creative mind-power, Adam still lacked something. His human spirit was limited to physical knowledge. Adam's mind could learn only from his five senses—sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell.

But God is Spirit, and His laws are spiritual. Spirit cannot be seen. The five senses cannot know or understand spirit or spiritual things. It would be like trying to describe colors to a person born blind.

To know God and keep His spiritual laws, Adam needed something extra in his mind: the power of God's Holy Spirit. Combined with the creative power of the human spirit, the Holy Spirit would enable Adam to develop a close, father-son relationship with God. It would also lead Adam to obey and understand God's laws, which define right from wrong, good from evil. When you obey them, good things happen: blessings, protection, happiness, guidance, answered prayers and more. But when you break God's laws, bad things happen: suffering, pain, misery and even death! God's spiritual laws define the right way to live. Based on love and outgoing concern for others, they show you how to love God and how to love and get along with other people (Matthew 22:34-40).

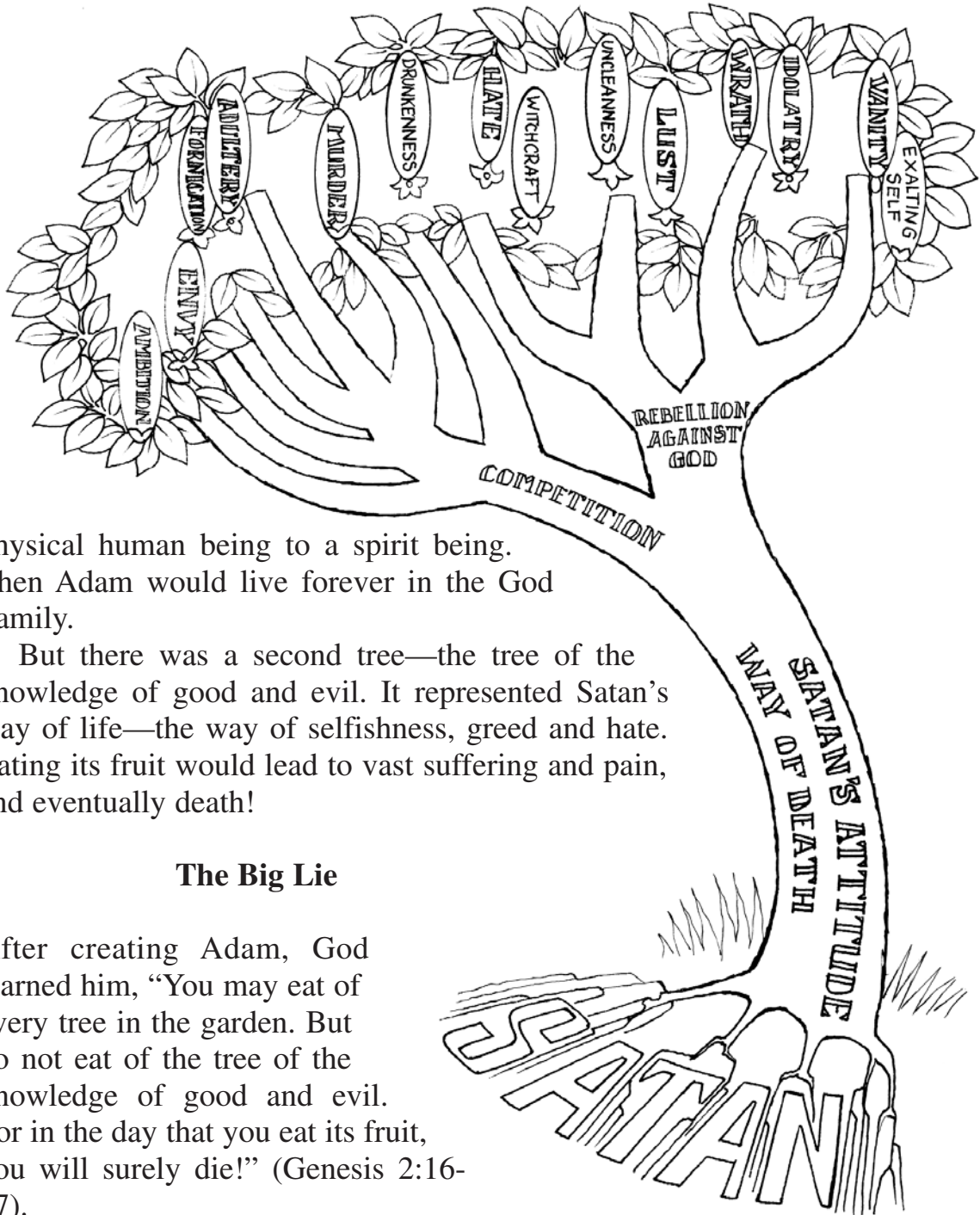


Adam could never discover these spiritual laws on his own. His five senses could not reveal them. God had to reveal them. Adam needed the power of God's Spirit in his mind to lead his thoughts and desires, and to help him learn how to live.

The Two Trees

In the Garden of Eden, there were two very important trees: the Tree of Life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Each tree represented an opposite way of life.

The Tree of Life represented God's way of love and outgoing concern for others. If Adam had eaten fruit from that tree, he would have received God's Holy Spirit. And, if he used it to build godly character, God would some day change Adam from a



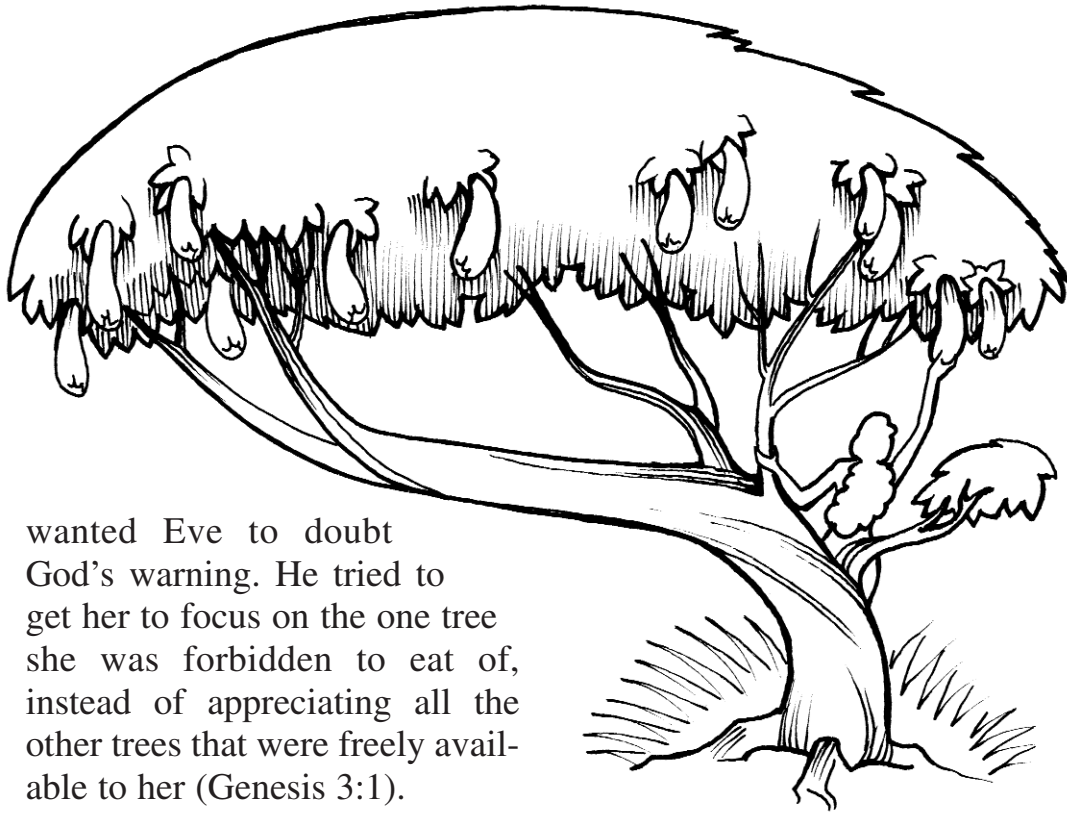
physical human being to a spirit being. Then Adam would live forever in the God Family.

But there was a second tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It represented Satan’s way of life—the way of selfishness, greed and hate. Eating its fruit would lead to vast suffering and pain, and eventually death!

The Big Lie

After creating Adam, God warned him, “You may eat of every tree in the garden. But do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For in the day that you eat its fruit, you will surely die!” (Genesis 2:16-17).

The devil saw this as his chance to do evil. Disguising himself as a serpent, he approached Eve and said, “Has God really said that you can’t eat of every tree in the garden?” Satan



wanted Eve to doubt God's warning. He tried to get her to focus on the one tree she was forbidden to eat of, instead of appreciating all the other trees that were freely available to her (Genesis 3:1).

Eve replied, "We are allowed to eat fruit of any tree in the Garden. But we are not allowed to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or even touch it. If we do, we will die" (verses 2-3).

In a calm, soothing voice, the devil said, "You will not die. You have an immortal soul. You can never die!" (verse 4).

This was one of the biggest lies ever told—that people have immortal souls and cannot die. Even today, millions of people believe this lie. Yet the Bible teaches that God created people to have temporary, physical lives. As with animals, all people eventually die (Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Romans 6:23).

The devil continued to spread more of his lies. Satan said, "Besides, God knows that if you eat that tree's fruit, your eyes will be opened. You'll get special understanding. You will become so wise that you will be just like God. Then you won't need Him to tell you right from wrong, or good from bad, anymore. You will know everything you need to know to make your own decisions!" (Genesis 3:5).

As Eve listened to Satan's cunning string of lies, Adam stood silent. As her husband and leader, he should have led her away from the ser-

pent and his deceit—away from anything contrary to God’s commands. But instead of leading Eve away from trouble, Adam followed his wife into the path of evil.

Eve thought about what the serpent had said. She allowed her mind to be filled with wrong thoughts. She looked at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and focused her mind on what she was not allowed to have.

She thought, “This fruit looks harmless to me. It even looks tasty. I bet it tastes sweet.”

So she stepped closer to the tree.

“What if the serpent is right?” she wondered. “Perhaps I can get special knowledge if I eat this fruit. Why, I would become just like God! Maybe that’s why God is trying to keep it away from me.”

With her mind filled with doubt and clouded by vanity, Eve reached for the nearest, juiciest-looking fruit and took a bite (verse 6). Then she gave a piece of it to her husband. Adam followed her lead and ate.

Cause and Effect

God saw what was happening. He had the power to stop it, but did not. He allowed Satan to tempt and deceive the woman. And though He had commanded them not to, God allowed Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.

This was a test of their character. God wanted to know whether or not they would obey Him or rely upon themselves.

Remember, God cannot instantly create His holy, righteous character in people. Godly character is so precious and special, it takes much time, patience and learning to develop. It does not happen overnight.

Also, God does not force His ways on people. He does want everyone to be happy and live forever, just as He does. But as with the angels, God gave Adam and Eve free choice—the chance to choose for themselves whether they would obey or disobey Him. God wanted them to choose to obey Him, to want to follow His lead. The Creator knew that if they did, they would live happy, healthy lives.

But when Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, something strange happened. Up until this time, they were naked. Since there were no other people around and the weather was perfect and sunny, they felt no need to wear clothes. But upon eating

the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve looked at their naked bodies and felt ashamed. They decided for themselves that it was wrong for them to be naked. They did not rely on God to teach them.

So they rushed to sew together clothing made from fig tree leaves (verse 7).

Shut Out of Paradise

When they heard God drawing near as He walked through the garden, Adam and Eve tried to hide.

God called out, saying, “Adam, where are you?” (Genesis 3:9). He already knew where Adam and Eve were hiding—God knows everything (Jeremiah 23:23-24). Nothing can be kept from His knowledge.

Rather than approaching the man about the sins he had just committed, God gave Adam a chance to show some character and admit his mistakes.

Reluctantly, Adam came out from behind the trees. Trembling with fear, he looked down to the ground and said, “I’m here. When I heard your voice, I was afraid and ran to hide myself.”

“Why were you afraid?” God asked.

In a small voice, Adam said, “Because I was naked.”

“And who told you that you were naked?” God said. “Have you eaten fruit of the tree I expressly told you not to eat?”

Adam pointed to Eve and said, “The woman You made for me—she ate the forbidden fruit, and then I ate.” In saying this, Adam blamed God and his wife for his own wrongs.

God turned to the woman. “Eve, what is this that you have done?”

Eve followed Adam’s example and shifted the blame to someone else: “The serpent deceived me! He made me eat it!”

God was very disappointed with Adam and Eve. They had disobeyed Him—sinned. Instead of relying on their Creator to reveal His spiritual laws and the right way to live, Adam and Eve ate of the tree of self-knowledge. They decided for themselves what was good and evil.

Since they had rejected their Creator, God had no choice but to reject them.

From animal skins, He made clothing for the man and woman to wear. Then He drove Adam and Eve out of Eden. To make sure that

neither they nor their children got back in, God set up two angels—cherubim—to guard the entrance. He also placed a flaming sword that blocked the path of anyone who dared to enter the garden. Adam and Eve were no longer allowed to live in the garden paradise. Nor were the generations of their future children.

God was not being cruel. He knew that man, after eating the forbidden fruit, could not be allowed to enter the Garden of Eden and eat of the Tree of Life. Otherwise, man would have been doomed to live forever in misery, suffering and unhappiness, just like the fallen angels. Although He sent him out of Eden at that time, God would give man an opportunity to eat of the Tree of Life much later.

But first, people must learn the hard way that they cannot decide for themselves right from wrong. God gave mankind 6,000 years to live as it chooses. That is why there has been so much war, violence, hatred, death, pain and sadness.

When the 6,000 years are over (which will be very soon), God will offer everyone His Holy Spirit and teach them His ways. If they obey Him and build His righteous character, God will then offer them eternal life—the chance to live forever in happiness and peace as members of His Family.

What If...?

What if Adam and Eve had rejected Satan? What if they had not eaten the forbidden fruit, but instead had eaten from the Tree of Life?

Our world would be far different from what it is today. There would be no crowded cities filled with crime, violence and disease. Humans would never wage war. No one would ever take another person's life. People would not steal, taking what did not belong to them. Everyone would respect their parents and elders. Children would always be safe. All families would have their own land to develop and live on. All foods would be healthy. No one would ever get sick or catch a disease. People would always tell the truth. All marriages and families would be happy. Everyone would keep God's Sabbath, resting on the seventh day of the week. No one would misuse God's many names. No one would desire things that they cannot possess. And there would only be one religion, because everyone would know and obey the one true God.

Mankind would have developed God's holy, righteous character. In turn, God would have offered people membership in His Family, and they would be changed into spirit, as God-beings.

This is what God had wanted for us. Although Adam and Eve chose to eat the wrong fruit, God still plans to help mankind reach the ultimate goal: to be born into His kingdom.

CHAPTER FOUR

BROTHER VERSUS BROTHER

Expelled from the garden paradise of Eden, Adam and Eve were forced to fend for themselves. Using tree limbs, leaves and mud, they built themselves shelter from the weather and wild animals. Through hard, exhausting work, they tilled and plowed the earth so that it would yield plenty of healthy vegetables and fruits for their survival. And they tended flocks of sheep and goats for clothing materials, milk and meat.

Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the fruit of self-knowledge—of good and evil—they had to protect themselves from bears, lions and other wild animals. The nature of all animals changed from being peaceful to violent and savage. Many became meat-eaters, killing the sick, weak and helpless. Some even desired to eat people!

Adam and Eve Have Children

As time passed, the man and wife gave birth to a son. His name was Cain. Soon after, they had another son, named Abel (Genesis 4:1-2).

Because Adam and Eve had decided to choose for themselves right from wrong and not trust God, they did not know how to properly teach and rear their children. Without God's guidance, they made many mistakes.

Whenever Cain wanted his way, he would scream, shout and fight until his parents gave in—which was most of the time. Since they did not give him rules, correct him or teach him God's Way, Cain became a spoiled bully. Eventually, he grew up to be a spoiled, selfish, immature man.

On the other hand, his younger brother Abel was respectful and selfless. He tried to please his parents and get along with his big broth-

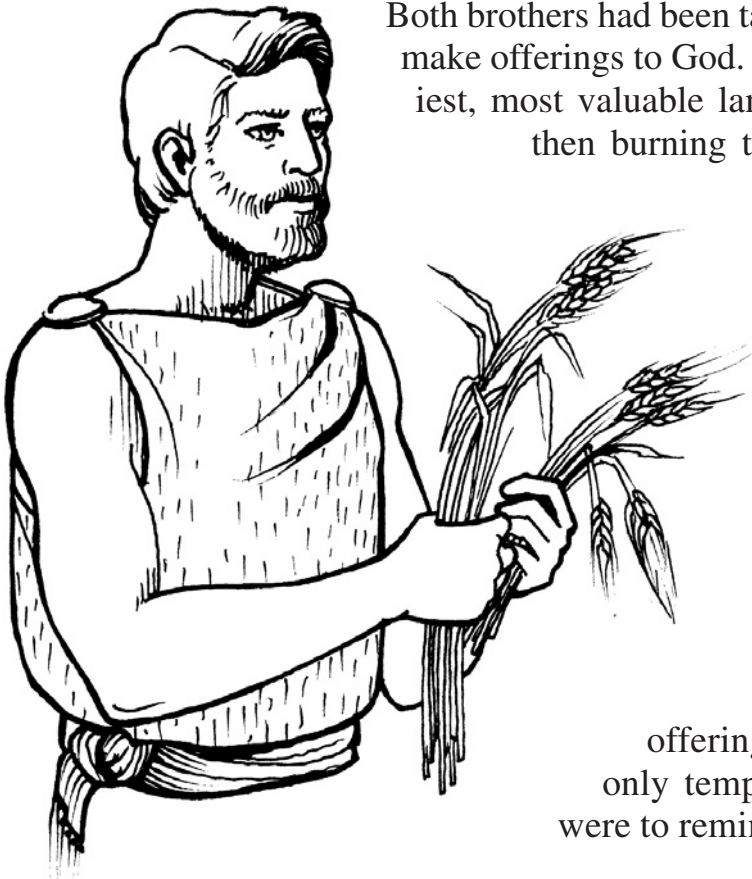
er. Though Abel was not perfect and sometimes broke God's laws, he continually sought to obey God.

As they grew into adulthood, Cain became a farmer, while Abel became a shepherd. Both professions were honorable in God's sight (verse 2).

As a farmer, Cain plowed the soil, and planted and watered seeds. This was hard, sweaty, back-aching work. But it produced tall rows of sweet corn, green leafy lettuce and other fruits and vegetables. Cain took great pride in what his hard work produced.

As a shepherd, Abel tended flocks of sheep. He led them out to choice green pastures of grass to eat from. Abel protected them from wolves, lions and other wild animals. He guided their every step, away from potential danger, into safety and shelter. Abel used the wool of his sheep to make clothing and other materials. And sometimes he used lamb (baby sheep) for meat.

The Purpose of Offerings and Sacrifices



Both brothers had been taught by their parents to make offerings to God. By choosing the healthiest, most valuable lamb, goat or grains, and then burning them on a special altar,

these offerings were to show their Creator that Cain and Abel appreciated the many blessings He gave them. Offerings were also to be used to ask God for forgiveness whenever His spiritual laws were broken.

These burnt offerings, or sacrifices, were only temporary reminders. They were to remind people that the Word

(the second member of the God Family) would some day be born as a human being. His name would be Jesus Christ. Since He would live a perfect life, never breaking God's Law, His death would become the perfect sacrifice, or offering. It would wipe away the death penalty, which all people earn through sin—breaking God's laws (I John 3:4; Romans 3:23; 6:23). Then Christ would be changed from a flesh-and-blood man back into a Spirit Being and a member of the God Family. His perfect sacrifice would provide all people the same opportunity.

Today, we don't need to make burnt offerings. Upon repentance—changing our thoughts, attitudes, words and actions so that we can copy God's ways—we can rely on Jesus Christ's sacrifice to take away the death penalty.

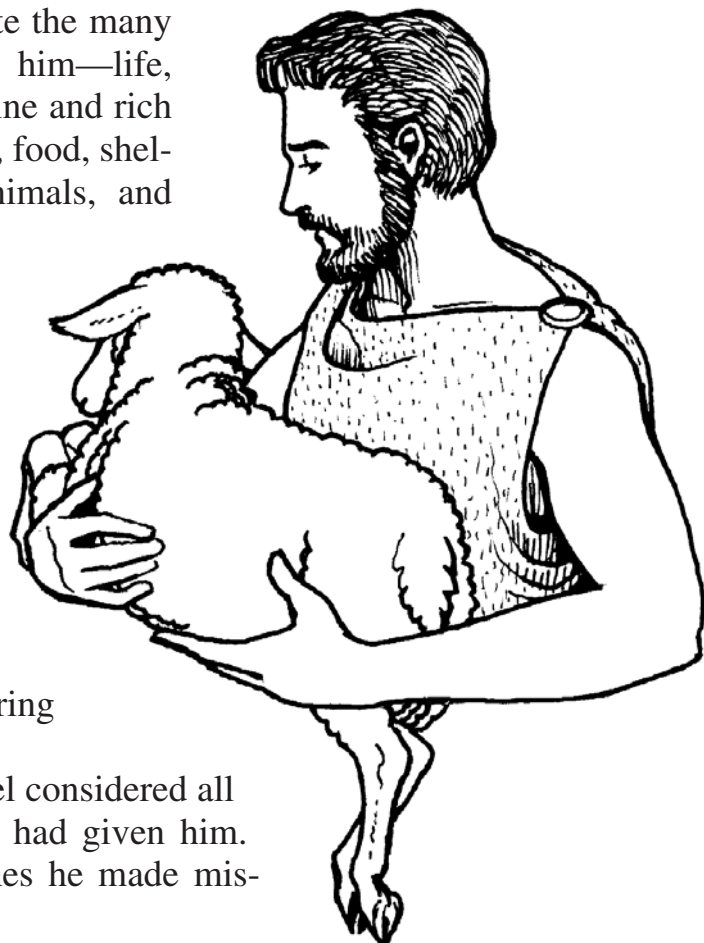
Offerings and Attitudes

When it came to giving offerings, Cain carelessly chose some of his crops and burned them on a stone altar. He did not appreciate the many blessings God had given him—life, air to breathe, rain, sunshine and rich soil to grow healthy crops, food, shelter, safety from wild animals, and much more.

Without considering what God had done for him, Cain carelessly grabbed some vegetables and grains and presented his offering to God on a stone altar.

God was not impressed. He saw that Cain had given his offering with the wrong attitude.

On the other hand, Abel considered all the blessings His Creator had given him. He thought about the times he made mis-



takes and broke God’s spiritual laws—yet God was patient and merciful toward him. He gave Abel the chance to change his mind and actions.

Abel examined his flock and looked for the perfect lamb.

“Not this one,” he said to himself. “It has a birthmark. And this one next to it is too old.”

Finally, he came to the right one. It did not have a spot or blemish, and it was only a year old—not too young or too old. This was the best lamb of the flock.

Abel gently took the lamb, carried it to a stone altar and killed it. God saw that Abel took the best of what he owned, the little lamb, and gave it—sacrificed it. God was well pleased, because Abel had given his offering with the right attitude (Genesis 4:3-5).

Wrong Attitudes Lead to Sin

Cain had the wrong attitude. Instead of repenting—changing his mind in order to live God’s Way—he became angry, bitter and filled with hate. Inspired by the rebellious Satan the devil, Cain was upset that God rejected his offering, but accepted Abel’s.

“Who does God think He is?” he thought to himself. “Doesn’t He realize that I’m the firstborn? Why does God favor Abel over me? What’s so special about my little brother? I’m bigger and stronger than than he is! Doesn’t God realize that I’m better than Abel?”

Aware of Cain’s bad attitude, God asked, “Cain, why are you so angry? All you have to do is follow Me and stop being selfish, then I will accept you. But if you do not follow Me, and continue in your selfish ways, your wrong thoughts and attitudes will grow and cause you to do evil. If you continue in your selfish ways, sin will rule over you, when you should rule over it!” (Genesis 4:6-7).

God’s words gave wise instruction, but Cain refused to listen. He allowed bitterness and anger to grow in his mind.

Every time he saw Abel, Cain thought, “He thinks he’s better than me. I’ll show him.”

He allowed his evil thoughts of anger to grow into hatred toward God and Abel. Cain wanted to get rid of them. He knew that he could not harm God, but Abel was a different matter...

Brother Kills Brother

One day, while talking with Abel in a field, Cain's uncontrollable anger got the best of him. When Abel turned his back, Cain grabbed a large stick, raised it above his head and struck his brother from behind. Shocked, Abel crumpled down to his knees in great pain. Blood gushed from the back of his head. Filled with rage, Cain struck Abel again. And again. And again.

Abel was dead. Cain had become the world's first murderer (Genesis 4:8).

For the last 6,000 years, the world has been filled with war, killing and death. All because Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of self-knowledge.

Cain Refuses to Take Blame

Again, God saw what had happened. Nothing can take place without Him knowing about it. God had the power to stop Cain from killing Abel, but He did not. The Eternal has given people 6,000 years to learn that their ways do not work; they only lead to unhappiness, trouble and death.

Cain tried to hide Abel's body, but God was not fooled.

God said, "Cain, where is your brother?" He was giving Cain a chance to admit to the evil he had just done.

But Cain lied instead. "I don't know where Abel is. Am I my brother's keeper—am I responsible for his well-being?" (Genesis 4:9).

What Cain (and most people today) did not realize is that, yes, we are all our "brother's keeper." We should all be concerned with the happiness and well-being of others. God's great spiritual laws are based on love and selfless concern for others—first toward God, then toward other people.

But Cain was selfish. He did not put God first, nor did he love others as much as he loved himself. If he had, Cain would not have murdered his brother Abel.

Since Cain would not admit his sins, God said, "What have you done? You have murdered your brother, your own flesh and blood! You stole his life from him—and it was not yours to take. I am the one who

gives life—and only I have the authority to take it away. Because of you, Abel’s blood cries out to Me from the ground!” (verses 10-11).

Cain said nothing. He refused to take responsibility for his wrong actions.

“You are under a curse!” God said. “Whenever you till the soil and try to grow food, no crops will come up for you. You will never be a farmer again! For now on, you will be a fugitive and a vagabond—you will leave your family and wander the earth for the rest of your life” (verse 12).

Cain could hardly believe his ears. “That’s not fair!” he screamed. “My punishment is greater than I can bear!”

Again, Cain only thought about himself. He did not feel sorry for killing his brother or taking a son away from his parents, or for breaking God’s laws. With sin ruling his mind, Cain always put himself first.

“You’ve taken away my profession, my only means to make food for myself,” he complained. “How am I supposed to survive? And if I go, I will no longer be with my family. I’ll be completely alone and helpless. Anyone who finds me will be able to kill me” (verses 13-14).

Since Adam and Eve would have many more children, Cain was afraid that some of them might grow up and try to kill him for killing Abel.

God reassured Cain. “Whoever kills you, vengeance shall fall on him seven times.”

Then God put a mark on Cain, identifying who he was. “This mark will serve as a warning to any who seek revenge and desire to take your life,” God said (verse 15).

God was extremely merciful, though Cain did not deserve it.

Cain Wanders the Earth

Cain left his family and wandered the earth. Eventually, he came to live in the land of Nod, which was east of Eden (Genesis 4:16).

By then, Cain had a wife (verse 17). Many today wonder where she came from. They fail to understand that Cain married one of his many sisters (Genesis 5:1-4).

Remember, God created the first man to be physically perfect. Our Creator did not intend that people get sick or carry diseases, like so many do today. He planned for Adam and Eve’s many sons and daugh-

ters to marry each other and have children. And then their sons and daughters would marry each other have more children. God planned to continue this for several generations. Thousands of years later, He would forbid brothers and sisters and other close relatives from marrying each other (Leviticus 18). By that time, men would have broken so many physical laws of health, their bodies would be imperfect, and sickness and disease would be widespread. If God continued to allow brothers and sisters to marry, they would produce physically damaged children.

God, in His mercy, always knows what is best for us.

Wickedness Spreads

Tired of wandering, Cain and a group of followers decided to build a city. This was against God's will. He wanted people to spread out across the earth, not clump together in towns and cities. God knew that without His Holy Spirit guiding them, people would naturally break His laws. And by living close together, they would have more opportunity to steal, lie and hurt each other.

Cain named the world's first city after his firstborn son, Enoch (Genesis 4:17).

With people ready to follow his law-breaking ways, Cain ruled the city of Enoch with cruelty. Generation upon generation was born and grew into adulthood. Over time, perhaps millions of people grew to live on the earth. Though not as physically perfect as Adam and Eve, they lived long lives spanning hundreds of years!

Origins of Our World

Inspired by Satan the devil and his demons, Cain's evil ways soon spread throughout generations of children.

Cain's great-great-great-great-great-grandson Lamech married not one, but two women! Yet God had intended that each husband be married to only one wife.

Lamech's wife Adah gave birth to Jabal. He is the father of nomads, people who live in tents, herd cattle and wander from place to place. Nomads still exist today.

Jabal's brother Jubal invented stringed and wooden musical instru-

ments, like the harp and flute. He is the father of music influenced by the devil.

Lamech's other wife, Zillah, had a son named Tubal-Cain. He invented metal work—creating metal tools from bronze, brass, and other earthly materials. This included making swords and other weapons of war (Genesis 4:19-22).

Worldwide Evil

After Cain and Abel, the next son Eve had was Seth. Unlike most of those born after him, Seth worshipped God. He diligently obeyed Him. Seth taught his son Enosh to do the same (Genesis 4:25-26).

As the earth became filled with violence, war, killing, stealing and all forms of evil, a few of Seth's descendants worshipped God and followed His ways, for the most part.

After living 930 years, Adam died (Genesis 5:1-5). During his lifetime, he saw children and their descendants cause all kinds of trouble and harm.

With his last breath, Adam must have thought about the terrible choice he made back in the Garden of Eden and how it produced an evil world filled with violence and hate.

Just like our world is today.

But God will not allow it to stay this way. He has a Master Plan.

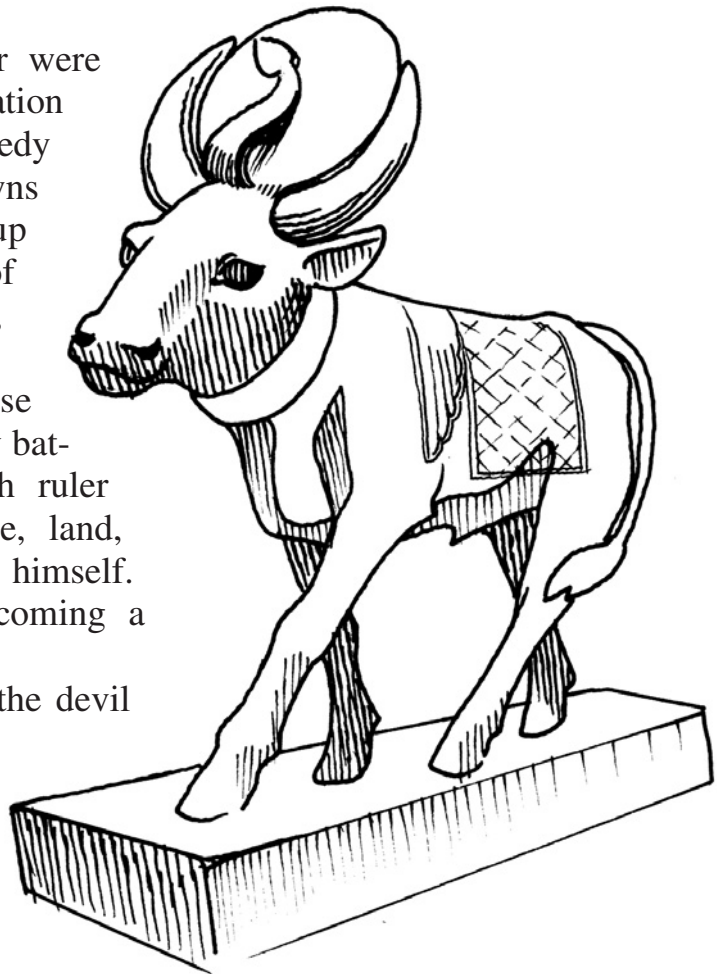
CHAPTER FIVE

FLOOD!

Fighting, killing and war were everywhere. Each generation became more selfish and greedy than the one before it. Towns and small cities sprang up across the land. Instead of seeking God for protection, people looked to strongmen and mighty warriors. These rulers of cities waged bloody battles with other cities. Each ruler wanted to get more people, land, goods and possessions for himself. The earth was quickly becoming a giant battlefield.

This was because Satan the devil inspired mankind to commit horrible acts of evil and cruelty, by constantly sending wrong thoughts and bad attitudes into their minds. People followed their carnal nature (Ephesians 2:2).

Carnal nature is the opposite of God's holy, righteous character. Godly character is the way of love—putting God first and treating other people the way you would like them to treat you (Galatians 5:22-23). Carnal nature is the way of putting self first before others (verses



19-21). Carnal nature always harms others and leads to heartache and misery.

Turning their backs on God, people worshipped false “gods.” They bowed down to idols—handmade statues and carved images, which were usually shaped to look like snakes, calves, birds and other animals—and forced others to worship them, too. This led to even more wars and bloodshed.

Witnessing generation after generation of people breaking His laws, God decided that He had had enough.

Out of all the millions and (possibly) billions of people on earth, God found that only one man faithfully obeyed Him. His name was Noah (Genesis 6:9).

God Speaks to Noah

When Noah was about 480 years old, God spoke to him: “Every thought and desire of man is continually evil. I am sorry I ever created him. He has rejected all of My laws, which would have given him happiness and peace. The lives of people are so horrible and unhappy, I am going to take their lives away. I will give them back much later. But for now, I cannot allow them to continue in their evil ways.”

Noah was speechless. But he knew that God was right.

“As for you, Noah,” God continued, “You have obeyed Me. You have practiced keeping My laws and have trusted Me to show you right from wrong, good from evil. I will spare you and your family. But as for the rest of mankind, I will destroy everything on the face of the earth: people, animals and the birds of the air.”

Noah felt grateful and very relieved. But he knew that God had more to say.

“Before I act, I will give mankind 120 years. During that time, I will use you to warn the people. Tell them that because of their evil ways, I will fill the earth with a great flood—so great that even the highest mountains will be underwater. Noah, you have 120 years to warn mankind of the great punishment I will unleash upon the earth” (Genesis 6:3, 5-8).

Then God commanded Noah to build a huge ship, called an ark. It was to be made of gopherwood and sealed watertight with pitch. About 450 feet long and three stories tall, God wanted the ark to be shaped

like a giant, hollow chest so that it would not tip over during the rough flood storms (verses 14-21).

Also, God wanted the ark to be large for another reason. He told Noah, “Take seven pairs (male and female) of every clean animal. One pair (male and female) of each unclean animal. Also take seven pairs (male and female) each of birds of the air. This will keep all those animals alive during the Flood” (Genesis 7:2-3; New King James Version).

Building the Ark

Noah began the huge task of building the ark. He hired a team of men to go to the forest and find the right kind of trees to use for wood. After chopping some down, they used oxen and carts to pull the trees to the ark’s building site. Some years later, Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth (Genesis 5:32). They grew up to help their father build the great ship. Many years passed as they gathered enough of the wood, pitch and other materials they needed.

As the frame of the ark slowly began to take shape, Noah’s friends and neighbors began to take notice. So they began to wonder among themselves.

One man said, “What is Noah doing?”

“Looks like he’s building some kind of big boat,” said another.

“A boat? But there’s no water around here for miles. Where’s he going to sail it? How will he get it there?”

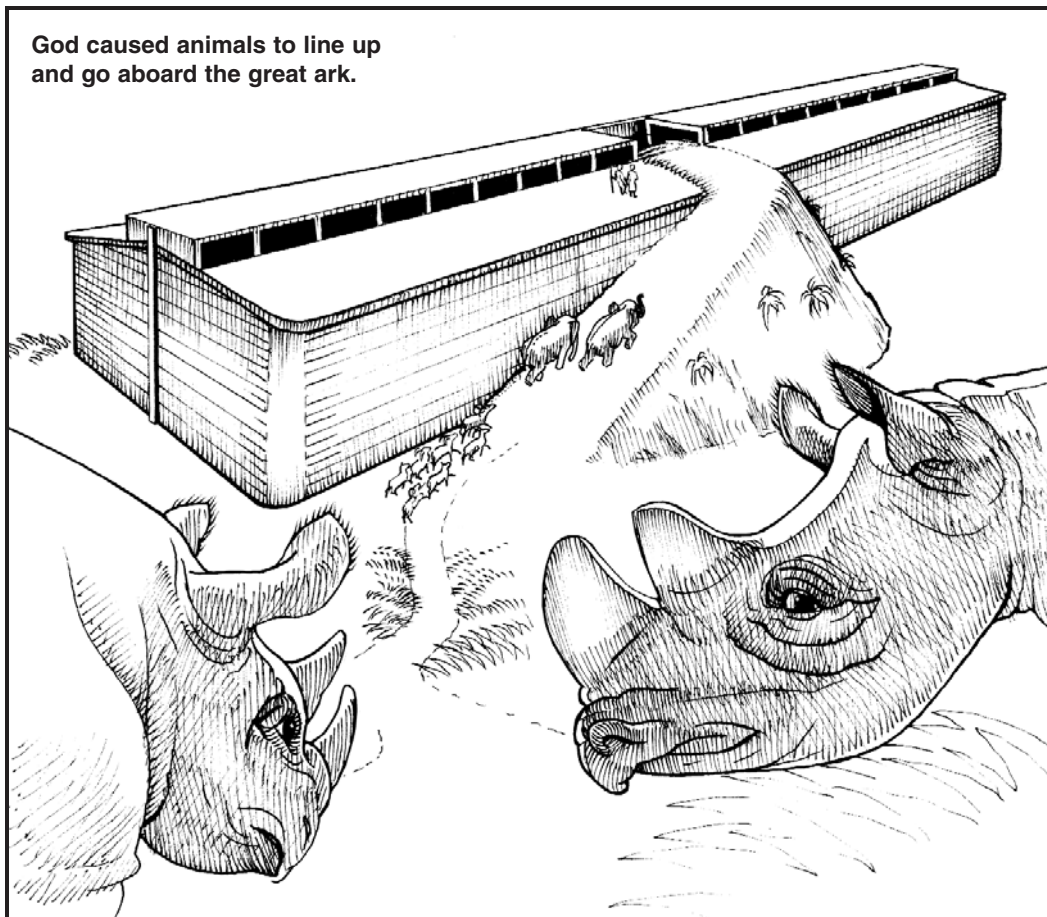
More and more people watched with growing interest as Noah and his sons continued to build.

Whenever and wherever he could, Noah preached to anyone who would listen. Year after year, he warned them about the great flood that God said would soon come. Noah told the people that God was going to send the flood because their way of life was wrong. Their thoughts and actions were contrary to—opposite—what God had intended.

“It’s too late for this world,” he preached. “But it’s not too late for you. You have a way of escape.”

But they would not believe Noah. They thought that their world would continue.

Some shouted, “You’re crazy! Only a madman would build an ark in the middle of land!”



Many teased and insulted Noah as he and his sons worked diligently on their massive project.

Wild Animals Line Up

Before the 120 years of warning had ended, the ark was finished. After it was filled with one year's worth of food for eight people and thousands of animals, God said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and your family. The rest of mankind will perish in the flood" (Genesis 7:1, 4).

Noah thought about all the people who had heard his warnings but would not change their lives. He began to feel sorry for them as he and his family entered the ark (verse 13).

A crowd gathered around the ark as Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives entered it. Many laughed and shouted insults at them.

An old man said, "Where is this flood you've been preaching about, Noah?"

“Yeah! When is your God going to give us some rain? My throat is dry!”

Everyone laughed and chuckled—but soon their laughter turned into silence. Every man, woman and child in the crowd was shocked to see an incredible sight: a long, seemingly endless line of animals marched up to the ark, two-by-two. Quietly, they went up the long ramp and through the giant entrance on the side of the ship. Horses, elephants, sheep, lions, birds, bears, and more—every kind of animal on earth peacefully entered the ark, just as God had said. This was a great miracle—an act that could only be done by God.

Some people in the crowd began to have second thoughts.

“Say, maybe Noah knows something we don’t,” some said.

Others wondered, “What if he was right all along?”

However, their doubts did not last for very long. Even after witnessing such a great miracle, the people would not reject their carnal nature and change. They were too stubborn and set in their ungodly ways.

God understood this. That is why He chose to take their physical lives then. He will bring everyone back to life in the future, when the kingdom of God will rule on the earth. At that time, they will be offered God’s Holy Spirit, which will help them to reject their carnal nature and live happy, healthy lives.

The Flood Begins

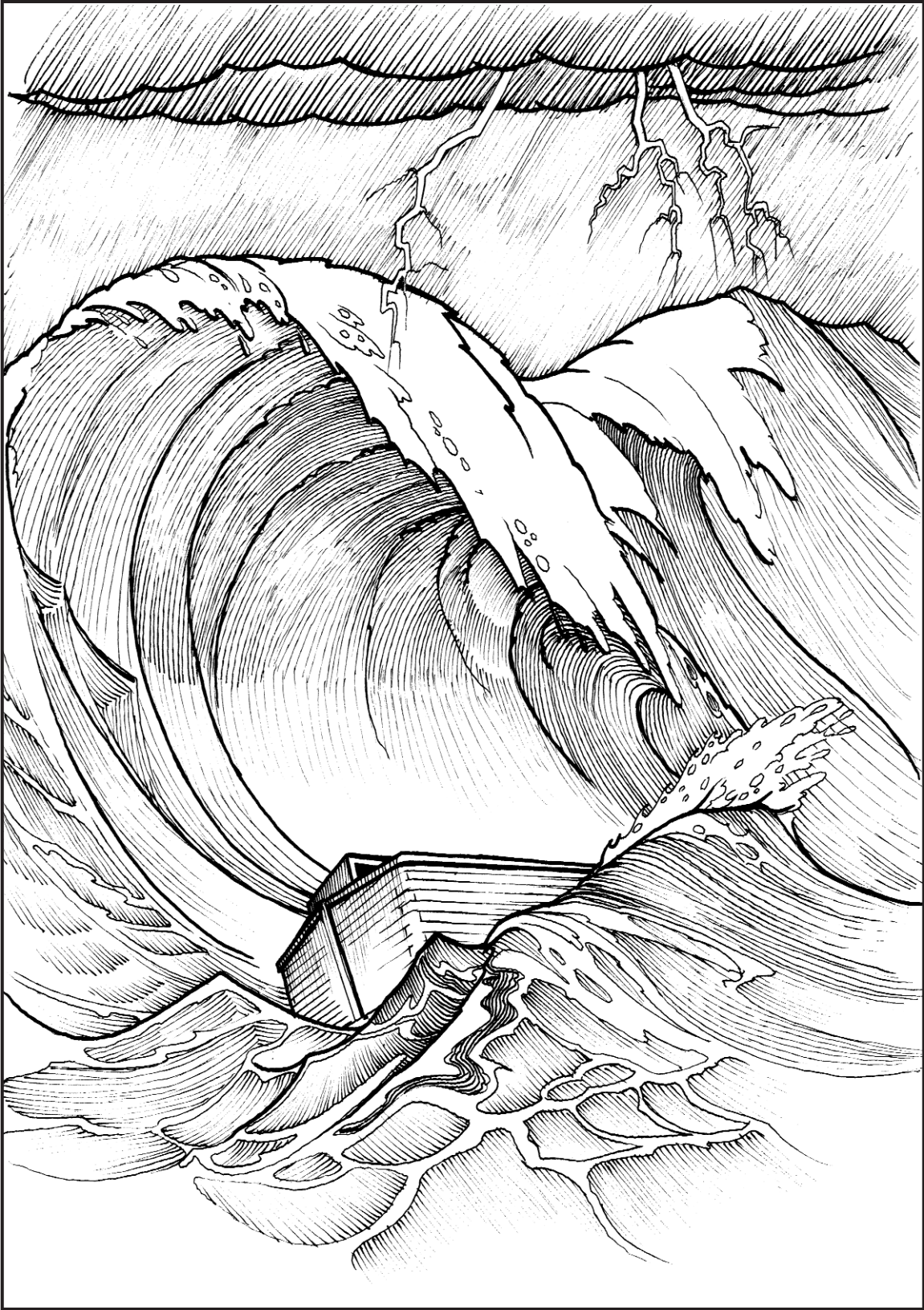
After Noah, his family, and all of the animals were secure aboard the ark, God closed the giant door and sealed it shut. No one could get in, and no one could get out (Genesis 7:15-16).

A day passed—no rain. Another day passed. Still nothing, not even a raindrop. A third day passed. And then another. Six days came and went, and still there was no flood.

By the seventh day, a growing crowd of hundreds and thousands of people surrounded the ark. As they did before, they cried out to Noah, laughing and shouting insults at him and his family.

“Noah, Noah! Help me! Help me! I’m drowning!” they teased.

They were all so sure that Noah’s warnings about the great Flood were false. They did not realize how merciful their Creator really was. Not only had He given them 120 years to change their rotten ways,



God had also given them seven extra days to repent.

But the people would not change their lives.

When the seventh day ended, storm clouds began to form. The air grew from a soft breeze into harsh winds that were so powerful, people could barely make it back to their homes.

Suddenly, everyone knew that a big storm was coming.

And then a drop of rain fell. Then a few more. Soon, what began as a light drizzle became a mighty shower of rain.

Those who had teased and laughed at Noah were no longer laughing. They now knew that his warnings were coming true—and that their end was near.

The earth trembled and shook as pockets of underwater springs exploded from the ground, shooting out rivers of water like a fire hose.

People shouted and screamed as they ran for cover. The rain from above and the waters from beneath rushed upon the earth. Across fields, towns and cities, the waters rose higher and higher until almost no one in them was left alive.

Those left headed for the highest mountains in hopes of out-running the ever-rising floodwaters. Fights broke out as people scrambled for higher ground. Some even had to fight off wild animals who were also fleeing to escape.

But in the end, all of the fighting was in vain. Even at the very top of the highest mountains, the dark, swirling floodwaters soon rose to cover them. The few people and animals left alive squirmed and twisted in the cold water, fighting to stay alive. But the flood currents were too strong (verses 10-23).

Except for those in the ark and the fish in the seas, the life of every man, animal and bird was taken in the great flood.

Too Late!

Aboard the ark, Noah listened to the screams of those he had warned. He heard the people beat and pound against the sides of the great ship.

“Noah! Noah! Save us!” they screamed. “Open the door and let us in!”

But it was too late for them. God had sealed the giant door shut. No one could open it.

Noah felt the waters lift the ark from the ground. Soon, the cries

and screams of the people outside were silent. At that moment, Noah realized that he, his wife, his sons and their wives were the last eight people alive on earth.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TOWER OF BABEL

It rained nonstop for 40 days and nights. Noah and his family had plenty of chores and duties to keep themselves busy. They had to feed and water all of the animals, as well as keep their stalls clean.

When the rain finally ended, the clouds parted and the sun appeared. In all directions, Noah could see that water covered the whole world (Genesis 7:17-18). Altogether, the ark journeyed across the water-filled earth for 150 days (about five months; verses 23-24).

At the end of the 150 days, God created a wind to pass over the waters, causing them to dry up (Genesis 8:1-3). As the flood slowly lowered, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. No longer would it drift around the earth (verse 4).

But Noah, his household and the animals still had to stay aboard the great ship. There was not yet enough land and vegetation to live on (verse 5).

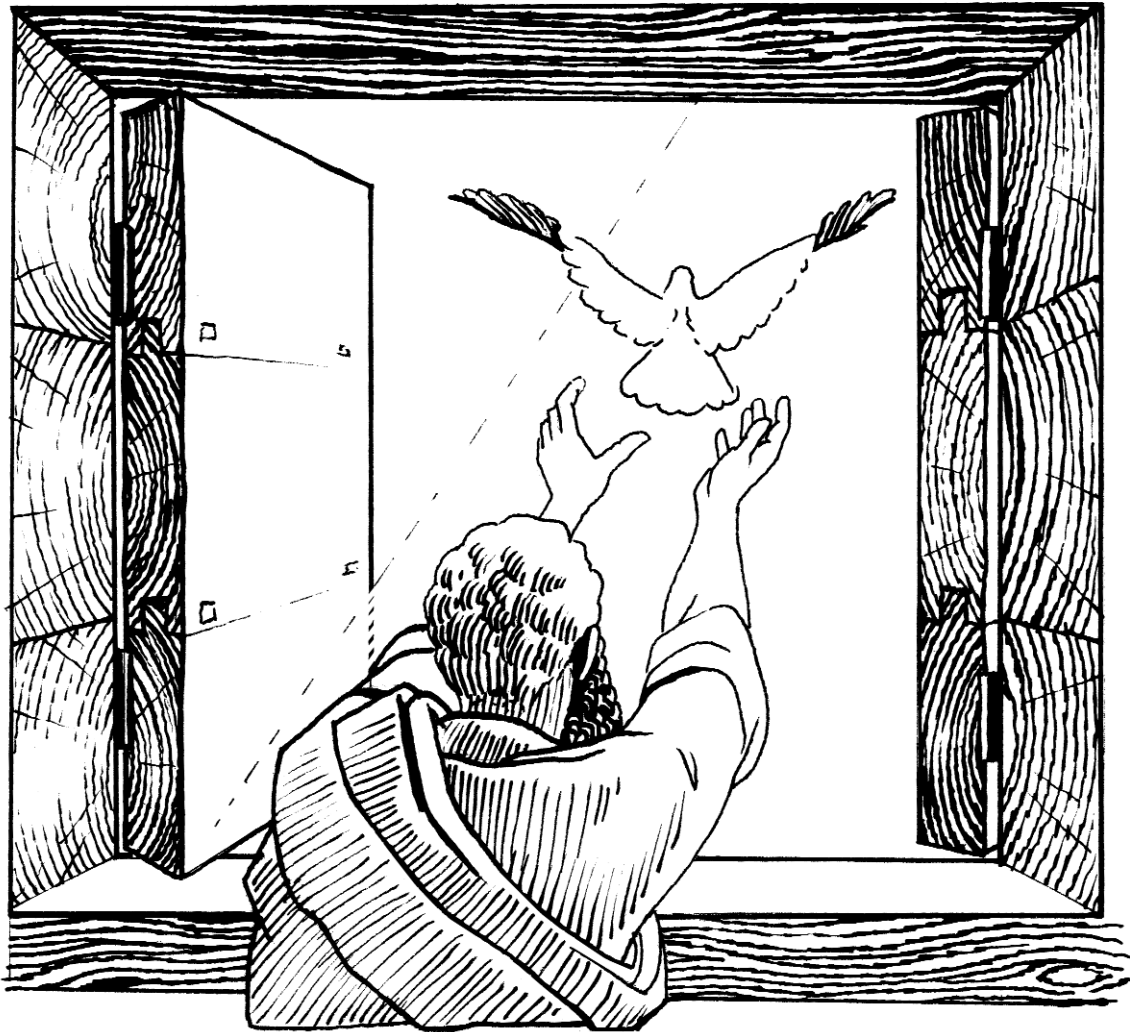
Noah Leaves the Ark

A few months passed before Noah could see the tops of the mountains. He sent out some birds to see if they could find dry land and fresh vegetation. Finally, a dove came back with a freshly plucked olive leaf in her mouth. Since olive plants grow at lower land levels, Noah knew that the waters had lowered enough so that people and animals could again survive on the earth.

But Noah wanted to be sure. He waited seven days and sent out the dove again. This time it did not return. Noah then knew that life could survive on its own in the wilderness (Genesis 8:6-12).

Noah and his family had been in the ark for about one year before God dried up the flood and renewed the earth.

One day, God gave Noah some good news: “It is time for you and



your family to leave the ark. Bring out the animals that are with you and let them go. I want them to spread across the earth and have children and grow in number” (verses 16-19).

Noah obeyed God and set the animals free. Then he and his family set off into the fresh, green new world.

One of the first things Noah did was build an altar of worship and offer a burnt sacrifice to God. Noah wanted to show God that he was thankful for all that He had done for him and his family (verse 20).

God promised to never again punish the world with a great flood. Then God said that every time people saw a rainbow, it would be a sign that He would keep His promise (Genesis 9:8-17). And God never lies (Hebrews 6:18).

Civilization Begins

Noah's three sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth) and their wives had many children. Before long, several generations were born (Genesis 9:18-19). Today, often four generations live at the same time: children, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. But back in Noah's time, because people lived hundreds of years and had many children, as many as ten generations lived at the same time.

Some families settled in the lower plains areas where there was plenty of rich soil to make farmlands. Others moved to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers region, in what became the land of Shinar.

Like those before the Flood, people tended to crowd together instead of spreading out the way God had intended.

In Shinar, there were few rocks or trees to use for making buildings. So the people made bricks from the soil and used them to make homes, barns, storehouses and other buildings (Genesis 11:2-3). They built them so close together that villages and small towns formed. Eventually, these grew into cities. Just as today, many people preferred to live in close, cramped cities.

Noah Preaches About the Son of God

Meanwhile, Noah preached about God's Way to all who would listen. He reminded people about what sin is—the breaking of God's spiritual laws, and putting self before God and other people (I John 3:4).

Noah also taught about a member of the God Family who would someday be born as a human being (John 1:1, 14). As the Son of God, He would be both man and God. Thousands of years in the future, this special servant—Jesus Christ—would free everyone from the way of sin. Because He would reject carnal nature and never break God's laws, Christ's death would become the perfect sacrifice, or offering. It would pay the penalty of sin—death—for all people, past, present and future (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Three days after His death, God the Father would raise His son Jesus back to life. But instead of being a physical man, Jesus would be changed back into spirit as a God-being (Revelation 1:12-18). This would provide all people the chance to be born into the God Family (I Corinthians 15:47-49).

But until that time, burnt offerings would remind the people that they needed Christ's perfect sacrifice.

Satan Uses Nimrod to Deceive

Most did not care for Noah's messages. They did not want to trust God to guide their lives. Following their carnal nature, most people continued to decide for themselves right from wrong.

Satan and his demons also hated Noah's preaching. The devil wanted people to worship him, not God. So he devised a lie to mislead people into believing that the Son of God was born right after the Flood!

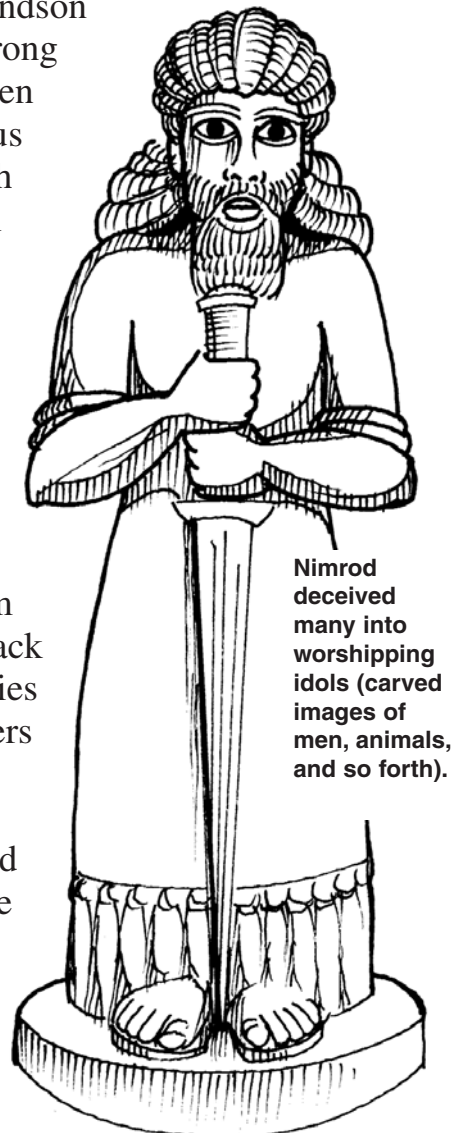
To do this, Satan used a man named Nimrod. He was the grandson of Ham and the great-grandson of Noah. Nimrod was a mighty hunter, strong and fierce. Over the centuries, he has been known by many names among various ancient cultures. Nimrod was popular with the people because he protected them from wild animals (Genesis 10:1, 6, 8-9).

Like Satan, Nimrod hated God's laws. He foolishly thought that he could create his own happiness without them.

He led the people who crowded together to build walls around their towns. At first, this protected them from wild animals getting inside. But eventually, the walls came to protect people from war. Just as before the Flood, man slid back into his evil, wicked ways. Armies of cities fought against each other to take what others possessed.

God was not pleased.

He witnessed Nimrod lead others to build Babel, the first large city built after the flood. With other cities under his rule, Nimrod became an evil dictator, or ruler, over the kingdom of Babylonia. As his power and riches grew, he came to be



feared by all under his reign—and by many others who were not.

He forced his subjects to reject the one true God and worship false gods and their images—idols. Nimrod deceived and misled people into worshipping the devil, whom he called “Merodach,” which means lord or master. Another name of the devil was Baal. Among many pagan worshippers, Baal was considered the chief of all the so-called “gods” and their idols.

Nimrod claimed to be Baal’s high priest. He carried out Baal’s wishes and taught others to do the same. As both an evil ruler and a religious leader, Nimrod’s power over the people continued to grow.

But he wanted even more power.

So Nimrod devised a plan to keep the minds of the people away from God. He decided to lead them into a great project to build the tallest tower in the world! Dedicated to the “sun god,” the tower would be seen throughout the plains of Shinar. Everyone outside the kingdom would know about it, causing many to come near. Nimrod would then lead—even force—them to worship Baal.

If all went according to Nimrod’s plan, Babel would become the capital of a world-ruling government.

But God had other plans!

Tower of Confusion

Many months passed as the tower slowly took shape and could be seen across the plains. If the project continued, it would reach up into the sky.

God knew that He had to stop this. He knew that if they continued, nothing could keep men from acting out every kind of evil they could think up.

So God confused their language. Up until then, everyone spoke the same language (Genesis 11:1). They could easily share ideas and thoughts. But God confused their speech, causing people to speak in different languages. They could no longer understand each other. This led to arguments and fights. Most of the people could no longer live or work together.

So the tower project ended. People who spoke the same language banded together and moved to their own region of the earth. Those who spoke other languages did the same.

Because of this, the tower came to be called “Babel,” which means “confusion” (verses 2-9).

Where Worldly Holidays Come From

Those who stayed in or near Babylonia grew great in number. Over the years, Nimrod led them to build other cities in Babylonia, as well as in Assyria and other lands. These were all devil-worshipping kingdoms (Genesis 10:10-12).

The many who had left Babel and freed themselves from Nimrod’s rule continued to worship Satan, but called him by many different names.

Yet, a very tiny number of people, led by Noah’s son Shem, still feared and obeyed God. For many years, Shem fought against the spread of Nimrod’s idol-worshipping mystery religion.

Eventually, Nimrod was killed for his evil ways. His death so shocked his followers that many drifted away from the mystery religion.

However, Satan wanted to continue his deception. So he used Semiramis, Nimrod’s wife, to do this. Long after her husband’s death, she gave birth to a son, who she claimed was a miracle-child—Nimrod reborn! She said that the baby had no human father, but rather was the son of the “sun-god.”

This lie was used to replace the true Son of God, Jesus Christ, in the minds of the people. Semiramis deceived many into worshipping this false god.

It is the same today. Millions say that they worship Christ. But they do not really worship Him, because they do not obey God.

Though Nimrod was just a man, he came to be worshipped as a “sun god” after his death. Semiramis became known as “the Virgin Mother,” as well as the “Queen of Heaven.”

With Semiramis ruling over several kingdoms and religious systems, the Babylonian mystery religion spread far and wide. Over the centuries, it merged with other pagan religions and traditions of men.

Even today, many millions of people practice the ancient customs of this false, evil religion: Christmas, Easter, New Year’s and most of the world’s other holidays. They do not realize that what they practice came from ancient, idol-worshipping religions. These religions forced

people to commit horrible evils, such as sacrificing babies by burning them in fire!

When people reject God and put their trust in themselves or other men, trouble always follows.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GOD CALLS ABRAM

Most of those born after the Great Flood grew up to hate God and His ways. Few listened to the preaching of Noah and Shem, who warned them to keep God's laws.

More than 350 years after the flood, God decided to use a special servant to fulfill a great commission. His name was Abram. He was a descendant of Shem (who was still alive and serving God elsewhere).

Abram lived in Ur in the land of Mesopotamia, along with his father Terah, his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot and other relatives. Abram was a kind of prince in a rich family that owned lots of sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels and many servants. In those days, the father of a wealthy family ruled over his sons and daughters, and servants and possessions like a king over a kingdom. The firstborn son was heir to the family's wealth; upon the father's death, the firstborn would become ruler.

One day, God spoke to Abram. "I want you to leave your home, your country and your family's house," He said. "I will guide you to a special land, and there I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. I will bless those who bless you, curse those who curse you. Through you, every family on the face of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Abram was stunned. The God of the universe had just offered him and his descendants the greatest blessings he could ever imagine.

Yet God did not say when He would do this, nor how. Neither did He tell Abram where this special land was located.

But instead of asking God to explain Himself, Abram decided to do what most men would not: He obeyed God without question. He trusted God to show him the way.

At 75 years old, Abram packed his belongings and, along with Sarai and Lot, departed for the Promised Land.

Into the Promised Land

After traveling through the rugged wilderness, Abram and his caravan of relatives, servants, animals and other belongings arrived in the land of Canaan. The people who lived there, called Canaanites, descended from a man called Canaan. He was the son of Ham and the grandson of Noah.

Sometime after the Great Flood, Canaan had horribly mistreated Noah. What he had done was so evil that Noah pronounced a curse upon Canaan and his descendants.

The Canaanites worshipped idols. They were so cruel and violent that they even sacrificed their children to please their many false gods.

When Abram came to Shechem, a town in the northern part of Canaan, God appeared to him. He said, “Abram, this is the land I will give to your descendants.”

Wanting to show he appreciated this great gift, Abram built an altar to use in worshipping the Eternal. He sacrificed the best of his cattle as a burnt offering to God.

Then Abram took his caravan southward and made temporary dwellings east of a town that would later be named Bethel. He then built another altar. There, he worshipped God and called upon His name for more guidance.

Afterward, Abram traveled down to the southernmost part of Canaan.

Journey Into Egypt

Abram soon found himself in a land suffering from severe famine. Farmlands were dying because few crops would grow. Fresh drinking water was drying up and becoming scarce.

If the Canaanites had been close to God—if they had feared Him, carefully followed His laws, and obeyed His will—they would have trusted in their Creator to feed them. Instead, the Canaanites worshipped demons (who pretended to be like God). Cut off from the many benefits of living God’s Way, the land and people of Canaan suffered from the famine.

The devil probably tried to tempt Abram to disobey God and head

back to Ur. Just as he had done with Eve back in the Garden of Eden, Satan tried to convince Abram to decide for himself right from wrong, good from evil.

“God has brought you all these hundreds of miles to dwell in a foreign land—and for what?” Satan reasoned. “So that you can die here in the wilderness? It would be so much easier to go back to your native land. All of your relatives are there. Why, they are fat with riches, food, water and cattle!”

But Abram did not give in to temptation. He rejected his carnal nature and trusted in God. He relied upon his Creator to provide for him and his group of travelers.

God did not abandon him.

He led Abram to the neighboring land of Egypt, which is in the northeast corner of what is today called Africa. Egypt was a prosperous kingdom of city-states, which were ruled by kings. The chief king was called Pharaoh.

In spite of the famine in Canaan, Egypt’s rich soil grew plenty of vegetables, grains and fruits for all to eat. This was because the Nile, the longest river in the world, supplied enough fresh water for the crops.

God wanted Abram and his household to stay in Egypt until the famine was over.

A Half-truth is Still a Lie

As he was about to enter Egyptian territory, a terrible thought crossed Abram’s mind: “My wife Sarai is so beautiful and fair-skinned that she will stand out in the eyes of the Egyptians. Some will ask about her to see if she is free to marry. When they find out that I am her husband, they may get so jealous and desire her for a wife that they may seek to kill me!” (Genesis 12:11-12).

Despite God’s promise to produce a great nation through him, Abram began to doubt that he would be protected in Egypt. (As you read *THE STORY OF THE BIBLE*, you will find that even the most obedient servants of God sometimes give in to doubt. God understands this. He knows that it takes many years for people to reject their carnal nature and build Holy, righteous character in its place.)

Explaining his doubts to Sarai, Abram said, “Say to whoever asks

that you are my sister, but do not mention that you are my wife. This could mean the difference between my life or death!”(verse 13).

Sarai was Abram’s half-sister; they both had the same father, but different mothers. However, by not mentioning that Abram was also her husband, Sarai would not be speaking the full truth. In effect, Abram was telling Sarai to deceive people—to mislead them from the truth.

This is not the way of God or His character. It is the way of Satan and carnal nature. By giving in to his doubts, Abram temporarily trusted in himself to work out his problems, instead of trusting in God.

When he and his caravan came into Egypt, Abram’s fears came to pass. Sarai’s beauty stood out in the eyes of the people. Egyptian officials asked about her. They wanted to know if she was free to marry. Sarai followed Abram’s instruction and told them only part of the truth.

The princes of Egypt reported Sarai’s great beauty to the Pharaoh, saying that she was free to marry. The Pharaoh kept a harem, a private collection of many beautiful women. He did not obey God’s will to have only one wife.

Intending to marry her, Pharaoh ordered his men to take Sarai and place her in his harem. With wedding plans soon underway, Pharaoh offered Abram many sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels and servants. In a better situation, Abram would have been happy with such goods. But his increased riches meant nothing to him without his wife by his side.

Abram realized that unless some miracle happened, he was about to lose Sarai forever!

God Steps In

The Pharaoh was quite pleased with himself. He was ruler over prosperous, growing city-states. And because of the famine, people from other lands turned to his kingdom for help. This increased his fame and might.

“And now I have in my harem one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen,” he thought. “Soon, she will be one of my many wives.”

Believing that Abram was only Sarai’s brother and not her husband, Pharaoh treated Abram with kindness and favor. He gave him many gifts of cattle, servants and other possessions.

In turn, Abram taught the Egyptian mathematics, astronomy (which is the study of stars and other heavenly bodies), and other sciences. This pleased Pharaoh even more. With such great knowledge, his men would build massive water projects to water their farmlands. Also, they would build giant structures, such as royal palaces, grand temples and gigantic pyramids.

“Truly this man Abram is a blessing to me,” Pharaoh said to his officials.

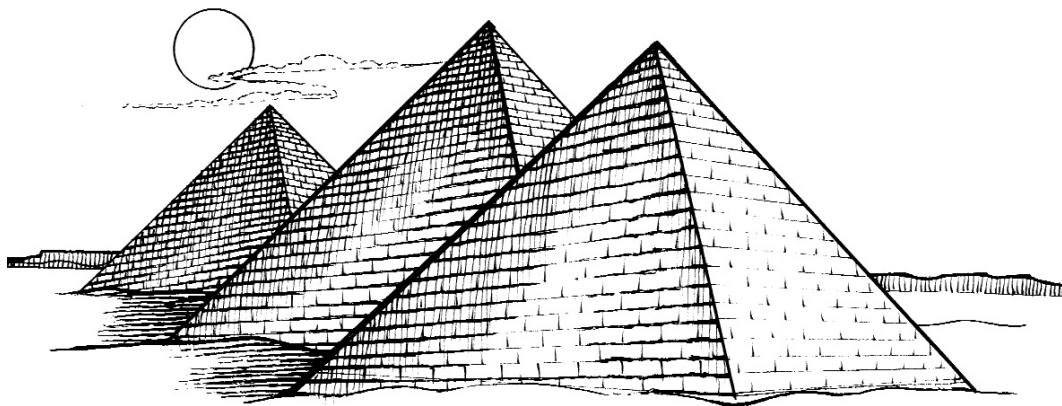
But what the Egyptian king did not know was that he would soon regret his words.

Pharaoh may have been pleased, but God was far from happy. He did not intend for Sarai to be married to anyone but Abram. God planned to produce vast, powerful nations and peoples through Abram and Sarai—and that could not happen if Sarai was married to another man.

So the Eternal decided to step in.

As Pharaoh and his court of princes and rulers celebrated his upcoming wedding to Sarai, something strange happened. One of Pharaoh’s servants fell ill. And then another. Soon, the whole palace was filled with sick and dying people. God had struck them with a plague!

Backed by the powers of demons, Pharaoh’s physicians tried to use their black magic and evil chants to get rid of the plague. But the



The Egyptians used Abram’s knowledge of mathematics and other sciences to build giant structures, such as palaces, temples and pyramids. Many of these buildings still exist today.

power of God is far stronger than the power of puny men and demons. The sickness would not go away.

It did not take long for Pharaoh to find out the reason why—and he was mad!

Before all of the officials and servants that were left alive, Pharaoh looked down from his throne and pointed his finger at Abram.

“You are the reason why my people suffer from this plague!” he said.

Abram did not know what to say.

Pharaoh continued. “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that Sarai was your wife?”

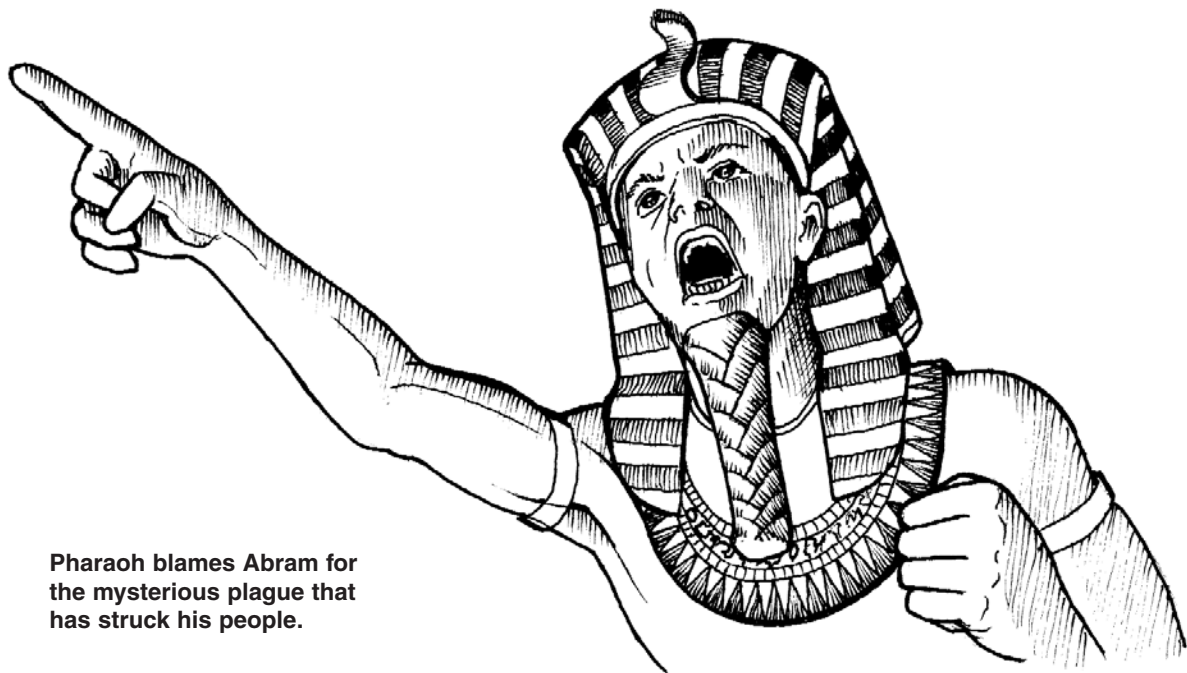
Again, Abram was silent.

“Sarai said that she was your sister, but neither of you said anything about being husband and wife. Why? Because of you, I might have married her, when you knew that it would have been wrong. And now your God has put a plague on my house!”

Abram looked around him and saw the angry Egyptian faces, and wondered if the king was about to put him to death.

Then Pharaoh said, “Abram, take your wife and your possessions and leave Egypt at once!” (Genesis 12:18-19).

Before Abram could say a word, Pharaoh’s men surrounded him. Then they escorted Abram, Sarai and their caravan out of Egypt.



Pharaoh blames Abram for the mysterious plague that has struck his people.

During the journey, Abram had much to think about. He knew that these events happened because he failed to trust God. He did not rely on his Creator to work out his problems. Abram had relied on himself.

Relying on yourself and following the desires of carnal nature, rather than trusting in God, always leads to disaster.

Abram Calls Upon God

Abram was shaken by these events. He knew that he needed to get close to God. Abram decided to lead his caravan to the altar he had built between Ai and Bethel. Once there, he offered animal sacrifices—the very best of his possessions—and called upon God’s name.

God listened to Abram’s pleas for forgiveness and mercy. The Eternal understood that it was natural for human beings to give in to their carnal nature and Satan’s rebellious attitudes (Romans 8:5-8). When He saw that Abram truly wanted to change and build godly character, God knew that He could still work through him.

No matter how great a person’s sin, God will always listen to those who repent—change their wrong thoughts and attitudes—and wholeheartedly follow His ways.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ABRAM RESCUES LOT

Abram had many servants and cattle, as well as much silver and gold. And so did his nephew Lot. In fact, their herds grew so large that they needed great amounts of green pastures and fresh drinking water. Abram and Lot soon discovered that there was not enough grazing land and water for both of their growing herds (Genesis 13:1-6).

As the situation grew worse, another problem arose. Some of Abram's herdsmen and some of Lot's herdsmen began to compete against each other for land and water. This led to arguments and strife. Abram knew that if the problem was not resolved soon, fights would break out—even resulting in death (verse 7).

So he took his nephew aside and said, "Lot, we have problems between our herdsmen. They cannot walk together in peace unless we are all in complete agreement. We cannot afford to let bad feelings and strife divide us—we are family."

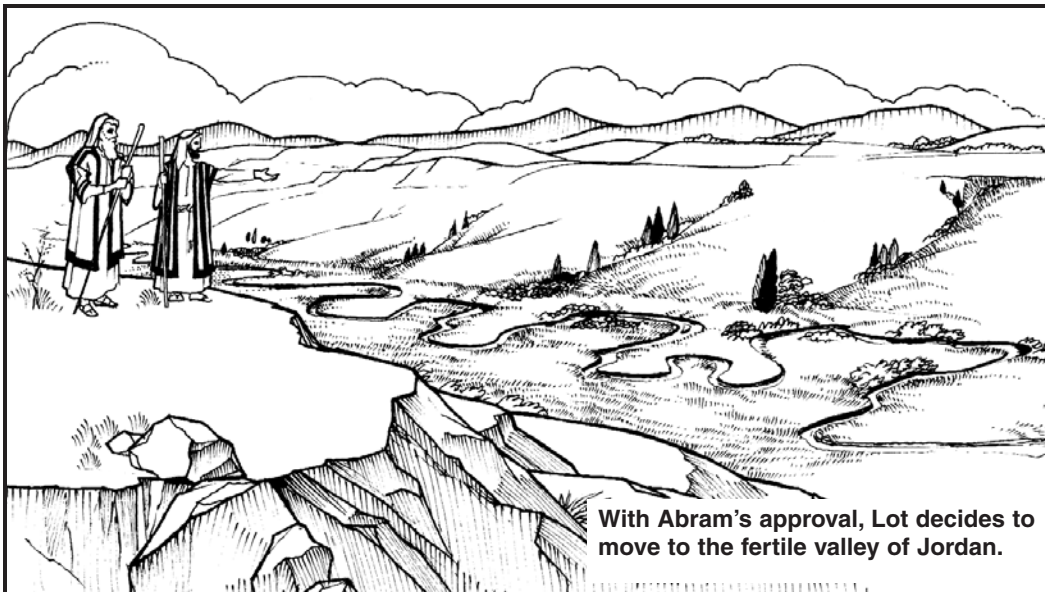
Lot agreed. He knew that something should be done—but what?

"I think it's time for your group and my group to separate," Abram said. "This will ensure peace between us. Besides, God has promised me all of Canaan. Pick which section of land you want for your very own use, and I will take my possessions and go the opposite direction. I am giving you first choice of the Promised Land" (verses 8-9).

Lot's eyes grew wide with astonishment. He knew that Abram, as the head, or Patriarch, of their family, had the right to choose whatever part of the Promised Land he desired. Abram thought more about maintaining peace than gaining material things.

For years, Abram had treated Lot like a son, partly because Lot's father was dead. But also because Abram and Sarai still did not have children of their own.

Lot looked out into the horizon and saw the lush, fertile valley of Jordan to the east. There, the land was rich, like Egypt along the Nile



River. Upon seeing the valley, Lot thought about how his herds and riches would increase if he went there. He did not consider turning this opportunity down and letting Abram take the land.

So he told his uncle, “I will take the land to the east.”

Happy that they could part on peaceful terms, Abram watched Lot and his group head for the valley of Jordan (verses 10-11).

Eventually, Lot settled among the cities of the plain. These cities and towns were so evil and desperately wicked that, if they did not change their law-breaking ways, God would be forced to severely correct them. God knew that He would have to put them out of their misery, just as He had done with the Great Flood.

By choosing to live among such evil people, Lot was in danger of becoming like them and suffering God’s wrath (verses 12-13).

God Reaffirms His Promise

With Lot and his herdsmen gone, God spoke to Abram and reaffirmed His promise to him.

He said, “Abram, look around you. Look to the north, south, east and west. Everywhere you can see I will give to you and your descendants forever. Also, I will bless you with so many descendants, it will be like numbering the dust of the earth, if that is possible for men to do so! Now, arise, and walk throughout the Promised Land, from its length to its width. It all belongs to you.”

Hearing these words, Abram felt closer to his Creator than he ever had before. He knew that the Eternal would keep His promise. God does not—and cannot—lie.

Abram did what he was told, and traveled throughout the Promised Land, inspecting it. Then he came to a town called Hebron and lived near a grove of trees belonging to Mamre the Amorite. Mamre became his ally and friend.

Then Abram built another altar to worship and give burnt offerings to God (Genesis 13:14-18).

Lot is Captured

One day, while Abram and his men conducted business, a man stumbled into their presence. Gasping to catch his breath, the man said that he had urgent news for Abram.

The man's clothes were caked with mud and dirt. Through the rips and holes in his clothing, Abram could see bruises and wounds on the man's body. Abram ordered his servants to give the man cool water to quench his thirst.

With his belly full, the man was ready to tell Abram his story: "The kings of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam and the king of nations have attacked!" (Genesis 14:13).

Abram and his men were well aware of what the man had meant. The kings of the five cities of the plain—Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela—rebelled against the king of Shinar. For 12 years they had paid tribute to him. Because of Shinar's military might, these kings were forced to give Shinar's king the best of their possessions.

But in the thirteenth year, they decided, "No more! If the king of Shinar wants our riches, he'll have to take them from us!"

When he did not receive the yearly tribute from the five cities of the plain, the king of Shinar was enraged.

"How dare they rebel against me!" he shouted. "I will make them pay!"

Joined by the troops of the kings of Ellasar, Elam, and the king of nations, he ordered his men to attack the five cities of the plain.

"And if anyone dares to get in our way, destroy them!" he ordered.

Like a human war machine, the massive army destroyed anyone who dared to cross their path—even giant warriors such as the

Rephaim, the Zuzim, the Emim, the Horites and others who towered over ordinary men. Having easily destroyed these giants, the army of the four kings from the east came to Kadesh and attacked other cities and towns.

“The kings of the five cities joined together,” the man said to Abram, “and met the invaders in the Valley of Siddim. Though there were five armies against four, the four kings from the east won the battle. Those soldiers who managed to escape fled to the mountains. With the cities of the plain unguarded, the four kings invaded Sodom and Gomorrah and took all of their possessions before leaving” (verses 1-11).

Abram did not like the sound of this report. He knew that his nephew Lot, against better judgment, lived among the people of Sodom.

“And what of Lot?” he asked. “Has anything happened to him and his family?”

The man hesitated, then said, “The four kings from the east took Lot and his possessions with them!” (verse 12).

Abram Rescues Lot

Abram stood up and shouted to his men, “Get your weapons and prepare your camels! We’re going to rescue Lot!”

Then he and his private group of 318 bodyguards and well-trained servants mounted their camels and headed for the invading army before it could escape. Mamre the Amorite and his brothers, Aner and Eshol, came with Abram (Genesis 14:14-24).

They raced to the northern edge of Canaan until they caught sight of the enemy’s camp. After waiting for night to fall, Abram divided his men into groups and surrounded the unsuspecting army.

Meanwhile in the camp, the king of Shinar relaxed in his tent, drinking wine and admiring the silver and gold that he took from Sodom and Gomorrah. The other three kings sat with him and boasted of their success in battle.

“We slew the armies of the Rephaim, the Zuzim and all the other armies of giants. They were no match for us. Now everyone in Canaan trembles at the mere mention of our names.”

The king of Elam said, “Yes, and we have taught Sodom and Gomorrah a lesson they will not soon forget.”

All four kings laughed and drank more wine.

“This is only the beginning,” said the king of Shinar. “With our combined armies, we can take over all the land we desire. We can rule everything. No one can stop us!”

And as the four kings laughed and boasted some more, Abram gave the command: “Attack!”

In the camp, the weary soldiers from the east were caught by surprise. After winning so many battles, they never expected that any group so small would dare attack them. Tired from constant battle and long traveling, the soldiers were confused and frightened. In the darkness and confusion, Abram’s men rushed down upon them like a landslide. Many of the soldiers died.

But some escaped and fled to the north. Abram and his men pursued them for 150 miles, finally catching them in Damascus. The four kings and army from the east were destroyed (verse 15).

Abram rescued Lot and his possessions, as well as the goods and people taken from Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 16). If Abram had not stepped in, Lot and the others would have become slaves in a foreign land, never to be heard from again.

But Abram knew that it was God who really gave him his success.

Abram Meets Melchizedek

Upon returning with Lot, the people and their possessions, Abram was greeted by the king of Sodom at the Valley of the Kings, east of Jerusalem (Genesis 14:17). The king wanted to thank him. He also wanted to ensure that he could get Abram to fight for him in the future.

So the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Don’t worry about giving me back my possessions—keep them. I only want the people” (verse 21).

This offer would have made Abram even richer than he already was. But Abram saw through the king’s scheme.

He said, “I have raised my hand to the Eternal, God the most High. He is the Possessor of heaven and earth—everything belongs to Him. Therefore, I will rely upon Him to reward me” (verse 22).

Earlier, Abram had met Melchizedek, the King of Salem. He gave Abram and his fighting men bread and wine, which refreshed and strengthened them. Melchizedek was the priest of God most High. He was also the Word, the member of the God Family who spoke for God



In tithing, God requires that we pay Him only one-tenth of what we earn...



...while He allows us to keep the rest.

the Father and carried out his commands. One day, He would be born as a human being and be called Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:1-10).

Melchizedek may have seemed like a flesh-and-blood man, but He was really God, appearing as a man. He represented God's way of life to those who would listen.

He told Abram, "Blessed be Abram of God most High, who is the possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hands."

Abram fully understood that neither he nor his men were responsible for defeating the four kings from the east. That honor went to God alone. Abram knew that his success came from obeying and trusting in God (Psalm 18:1-3, 28-50).

That is why Abram gave Melchizedek a tithe—a tenth part—of all that he owned (Genesis 14:18-20).

God owns everything (Genesis 14:19, 22; Job 41:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Revelation 10:6). And no matter how hard one works, the money people earn belongs to God. However, because He loves to share, God gives us 90 percent of it. All He expects is that we pay Him ten percent. If we do, God promises to shower us with more blessings than we could imagine (Malachi 3:8-10).

As His priest, Melchizedek represented God to the people, just as God's true ministers represent Him today. That is why Abram paid God's tithe to the King of Salem.

Abram continued to say to the king of Sodom, “Because God owns everything, I will take nothing from you. Everything belongs to our Creator, and He is the one who will bless me, not you. Also, I do not want you to be able to say that you made me rich because I accepted anything from you. Except for what my men have already eaten, I will not take anything from you. As for my allies—Aner, Eshol and Mamre—let them take their portion” (Genesis 14:23-24).

The king of Sodom’s plan had failed and he was not happy. But he knew better than to upset Abram.

CHAPTER NINE

ABRAM GETS A SON

Though Abram had great courage, wisdom and wealth, he still made mistakes. He was an ordinary human being who sometimes gave in to the pulls and desires of his carnal nature. Like all righteous servants of God, Abram occasionally had doubts.

The Creator understood this and was mercifully patient with him.

Many years had passed since God had promised the land of Canaan to Abram. One day, while fighting wrong thoughts that tempted him to doubt God's promise, Abram received a surprise visitor: God!

The Eternal spoke to him in a vision. To Abram, it appeared as though God was literally right in front of him, but he wasn't. Abram bowed down on his knees and listened.

"Abram, do not be afraid. I am your shield; I will protect you from anything that comes against you. I am also your great reward. Your gold, silver and the rest of your riches are nothing compared to what I will give you" (Genesis 15:1).

Abram knew that God was trying to encourage him, but his doubts would not go away.

He reminded God, "You promised that I would have many descendants who will inherit the Promised Land. Yet I am still childless, and Sarai and I are growing too old to have children. I have no choice but to make my servant, Eliezer of Damascus, my heir" (verses 2-3).

According to tradition then, if the head of a ruling family did not have an heir to pass the family wealth and right to, a servant could be chosen as an heir.

God said, "Abram, Eliezer shall not be your heir. I will give you an heir from your own flesh and blood."

Abram began to feel relieved. In the vision, he followed God outside the tent. The Creator told him to look up into the sky and count all the stars, if that were possible for him to do.

“So shall be your descendants,” God promised. “So many, they will be hard to number” (verses 4-5).

Abram felt complete relief. He believed God. And God considered his belief—Abram’s faith—as righteousness (verse 6). (Righteousness means keeping God’s commandments.) Because of his belief, Abram is known today as the father of the faithful (Galatians 3:6-9).

Though Abram believed God, he naturally wanted to know how and when he would inherit Canaan (Genesis 15:8).

After following God’s command to sacrifice some animals to Him, Abram fell into a deep sleep. His dreams quickly turned into a nightmare, filled with horror and darkness (verses 9-12). Waking up, he listened to God explain what the nightmare had meant.

“Your descendants will be strangers in a strange land, a land not their own. They will serve the people there as slaves, and will suffer pain and heartache for many years. But I will judge the people who will harshly rule over your descendants. Your offspring will escape from them and carry off great possessions. As for you, Abram, you shall not live to see this. But do not worry, your descendants will return to the Promised Land. Then they shall be My instrument of judgment against the people of Canaan” (verses 13-16).

Then God made a special covenant, or agreement, with Abram. He enlarged the gift of the Promised Land to extend from the River of Egypt in the south, to the Euphrates River far in the north (verses 17-21).

Sarai Imposes Her Will

Some time had passed and Sarai still did not have a child. She began to doubt that God could fulfill His promise through her.

“After all,” she reasoned, “God did not say that Abram’s descendants would be through me. Perhaps there is another way...”

She went to her husband and said, “God has kept me from having children, so I want you to have children through my handmaid, Hagar. Unlike me, she is still young and healthy and able to bear you many children. I will provide you an heir through her.”

It was the custom for women who could not give birth, to have children through their personal servants.

Sarai took charge and gave Hagar, an Egyptian, to be Abram’s wife.



Sarai did not trust God to deliver His promise, and Abram did not stand up to his wife's demands.

Soon Hagar became pregnant—she was going to give birth to Abram's first child! Sarai should have been pleased; after all, she got what she wanted. However, she did not carefully consider the trouble that would result from not waiting on God.

Hagar, having married Abram and now carrying his child, began to think herself equal to Sarai, instead of being a servant under her. She began to despise Sarai and refused to obey her commands (Genesis 16:1-4).

Instead of taking responsibility for her mistake, Sarai blamed Abram. "You are the reason why Hagar no longer respects me. May God judge between you and me" (verse 5).

Again, Abram gave in to his wife's demands. He said, "Hagar is still your maid and is in your hand. Do to her as you wish."

Like a secondary wife, Hagar had certain rights of protection from Abram. But when he removed this protection, Sarai treated Hagar harshly—so harsh that Hagar ran away (verse 6).

God Speaks to Hagar

Feeling sad and lonely, Hagar headed for Egypt. Along the way, she drank from a well of water in the wilderness on the way to Shur. The

Messenger of the Eternal (the member of the God Family who would later become Jesus Christ) appeared to her.

He reminded Hagar that she was still Sarai's handmaid. "Return to your mistress and do as she says."

As she thought this over, the Messenger of the Eternal said, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will not be able to be numbered. The child you now carry is a son. You shall call him Ishmael, which means 'God hears,' because the Eternal has heard your sorrow. Ishmael shall be a wild man and will always be fighting or at war with other peoples. No one will be able to control him. And he shall dwell in the safety of all his brethren" (Genesis 16:7-12).

Hagar found comfort in these words. She called the Eternal "You-Are-the-God-Who-Can-See." She then called the well "Beer Lahai Roi," which means "well of the One who lives and sees me" (verses 13-14).

Hagar slowly came to understand what most people do not: God sees all and desires to give mercy and help those will obey Him.

She walked back home to Abram and obeyed Sarai's commands. Some time later, she gave birth to Ishmael. Abram was 86 years old (verses 15-16).

God Changes Abram and Sarai's Names

Thirteen years after Ishmael was born, God appeared to Abram and said, "I am El Shaddai—Almighty God! Walk before Me and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1).

Abram quickly fell to his knees and listened.

God said, "I will make a covenant with you and will increase your descendants. You shall no longer be called Abram. From now on, your name is Abraham, which means 'father of many nations,' for I will make through you many nations of people and kings. My covenant is between Me and you and your descendants forever, and they shall inherit the land of Canaan. It will belong to you forever" (verses 5-8).

Again, God's words increased Abraham's faith.

Then God said, "As for Sarai, you shall call her Sarah, which means 'Princess.' I will bless her, and she will be a mother of many nations. Many kings and countries shall come from her" (verses 15-16).

Hearing this, Abraham fell on his face and laughed. He thought to

himself, “I will be 100 years old by the time Sarah gives birth! And she is already 90 years old! How can God expect her to bear a child?” (verse 17).

Remembering that he was in the presence of Almighty God, Abraham said, “Lord, please consider my son Ishmael. He is already born. He is healthy and available to be my heir—choose him” (verse 18).

But God said no. “Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac, which means ‘laughter,’ because you laughed at My promise.”

“But what about Ishmael?”

“I have already blessed Ishmael,” God said. “I will make him prosper and he will have many descendants. Twelve princes shall come from him, and I will make him into a great nation. But as for My covenant, it is with Isaac, not Ishmael. Sarah will bear Isaac at this set time next year.”

Then God left Abraham (verses 19-22).

CHAPTER TEN

THE END OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

One hot day, as Abraham sat in the entrance of his tent, three men appeared. In reality, they were the Word (who would later become Jesus Christ) and two angels. They only appeared to be men.

It was the custom to greet strangers who came to your home and to give them refreshments. So Abraham rushed to give the three strangers water to wash their feet, which, because they wore sandals, were exposed to dirt and sand.

Abraham also instructed Sarah to quickly make cakes of bread while he ordered a young servant to prepare a roasted calf. When the food was ready, the visitors sat down and ate (Genesis 18:1-8).

Then they asked Abraham, "Where is Sarah your wife?"

He said, "Here in the tent."

Hearing her name mentioned, Sarah came to the entrance of the tent and listened.

The Word said to Abraham, "Next year I will return to you. By then, Sarah shall bear you a son" (verses 9-10).

If Abraham had any doubts about who his visitors really were, he now understood that he was in the presence of God.

Hearing that she was going to somehow give birth to a child, Sarah laughed within herself.

She thought, "I am 90 years old and well past my childbearing years. And now that I am old and gray I am expected to bear children?" (verses 11-12).

God turned to Abraham and said, "Why did Sarah laugh and say that she was too old to bear a son? Is anything too hard for the Eternal? Mark My words, I will return to you at the appointed time and Sarah will have a son."

Abraham slowly turned to his wife.

Sarah shook her head and said, “I did not laugh.” She denied it because she was afraid. Like Abraham, she began to realize that she was before God.

God replied, “No, Sarah, you did laugh” (verses 13-15).

Then Sarah realized her mistake.

Most people either do not understand or believe that God sees everything. He knows our thoughts and desires. He even knows our needs before we know them. He sees when we break His laws. And He sees and hears us when we ask for forgiveness and honestly try to change. God even knows the number of hairs you have on your head!

Nothing can be hidden from Him. God sees everything (Jeremiah 23:23-24).

Abraham Reasons With God

God (the Word) and the two angels rose and departed for the city of Sodom. Abraham decided to walk with them and send them on their way (Genesis 18:16).

As they walked together, God turned to Abraham and said, “Shall I hide from you what I am about to do? I know you, Abraham. You are my friend. I know that you keep My commandments, and that you teach your entire household to do the same. Because you obey My voice, I know that I can trust you. Therefore, I will tell you what I am about to do” (verses 17-19).

Abraham felt honored to be considered God’s trusted friend. But he was also deeply concerned. Something weighed heavily in God’s mind; he knew that this was the reason God and His two angels were disguised as men.

God said, “The outcry against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is great. Their sins have grown so terrible, they have become as evil as the last days before the Great Flood! Though I see everything and nothing can be hidden from Me, I am sending My two angels to see the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah in person. Then I will know whether or not the outcry against them is justified” (verses 20-21).

At that, the two angels departed for Sodom, but God remained with Abraham for a little while longer (verse 22).

Realizing that his nephew still lived in Sodom, Abraham began to worry. “What will become of Lot if God decides to destroy Sodom?”

Turning to God, Abraham said, “Great Eternal One, would You also destroy the righteous along with the wicked? Suppose there were 50 righteous God-fearing people who lived in Sodom—would You destroy the city and not spare the lives of the 50 who obey You? Far be it from You, the Judge of all the earth, to do such a thing.”

God replied, “If I find in Sodom 50 righteous people, I will spare the city for their sakes.”

Abraham was relieved. He had taught Lot the laws of God from his youth. He was confident that his nephew still kept them.

But then another thought crossed Abraham’s mind: “What if there are less than 50 righteous in all of Sodom?”

He turned to God again and said, “I know that I am only dust compared to You, O Lord, but please allow me to speak on this matter again. Suppose there were only 45 righteous people in Sodom—would you destroy the entire city and not spare the 45 who were righteous?”

God replied, “If I find only 45 righteous people in Sodom, I will not destroy it.”

Then Abraham approached his Creator again, asking if there were only 40 righteous in Sodom—then 30, then 20.

Finally, he asked God, “Suppose You found that there were only ten righteous people living in Sodom? Would You still destroy the city and not spare the ten who fear and obey You?”

God said, “I will not destroy Sodom if I find that ten righteous people live in the city.”

And then God left as soon as He was finished speaking. Abraham walked home, relieved that he was allowed to intervene for Lot’s sake (verses 23-33).

Sodom—City of Sin

In the evening, the two angels arrived at Sodom. Thinking that they were ordinary men, Lot greeted the angels at the city gate, where business and civil matters were conducted (Genesis 19:1).

Noticing that the darkness of night was about to fall upon them, Lot offered the visitors to spend the night at his home.

They said, “No, thank you. We will spend the night in the open square” (verse 2).

Lot began to fear for them. He knew how wild and evil the men of

Sodom could be toward strangers—especially at night.

At his insistence, the angels came home with Lot. Then he and his family made them a fine feast of roasted lamb and freshly baked unleavened bread (verse 3).

Just before Lot's household was about to go to bed, the men of Sodom, both young and old, came to the house and surrounded it. These men had heard rumors of two mysterious but handsome strangers spending the night there.

The men banged on the door and called out to Lot, saying, "Where are the strangers? Why are you hiding them from us? Bring them out that we may treat them as we wish" (verses 4-5).

Driven by their carnal nature, these wicked men intended to mistreat the newcomers and do evil things to them.

Lot, wanting to protect his guests, stepped outside, shutting the door behind him. He pleaded with the growing crowd not to harm or do evil to his guests. Then he offered to bring out his two daughters in their place (verses 6-8)!

Though he obeyed God's laws, Lot did not fully use God's wisdom. Choosing to live closely with such wicked people affected Lot's judgment.

The Sodomites snarled at him. "You are a foreigner! You came to live here with us, and now you keep acting as our judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with the strangers!"

The crowd pressed so hard against Lot that they almost broke the door down (verse 9).

The two angels reached out and pulled Lot into the house. Before shutting the door, they struck the Sodomite men with blindness—yet the crowd was so intent on doing evil to Lot and the strangers that they struggled to find the door and break it down (verses 10-11)!

Escape from Sodom

The angels told Lot to gather all of his relatives living in the city. "For we shall destroy this place. Sodom is so evil and the outcry against it is so great, God has no choice but to destroy the city" (Genesis 19:12-13).

Lot raced out of his home and pleaded with his sons-in-law, who were married to Lot's other daughters.

"You must leave the city at once! God is going to destroy it!"



But his sons-in-law thought that Lot was only joking (verse 14). Like those who would not listen to Noah's warning of the Great Flood, Lot's sons-in-law refused to take God seriously. They would soon regret their foolish mistake.

When morning came, the angels urged Lot to hurry up and leave Sodom. But Lot did not listen. He wanted more time to warn his friends and relatives of God's coming punishment.

Because Abraham had spoken to Him about sparing the city for the sake of the righteous who may be living in it, God was very patient and merciful toward Lot. Instead of leaving him behind, the two angels took hold of Lot, his wife and their two youngest daughters and brought them out of the city (verses 15-16).

Once outside the walls of Sodom, the angels warned them, "Escape for your life! As you flee, do not look behind you toward Sodom or stay anywhere in the plain. Sodom, Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain are about to be destroyed. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed, also!" (verse 17).

Lot had grown too fond of living among the wicked cities. This attitude led him to tolerate—put up with—their sins. It also affected his ability to make wise decisions. Being too close to sin always does this.

Though extremely grateful toward the angels for helping him escape, Lot said, “The mountains are too far for me and my family to escape. Allow us to go to this city.” He pointed to the small town of Bela, a few miles away.

The angels agreed. They waited for Lot’s family to escape to Bela (whose name was changed to Zoar, which means “little”). Then they would unleash God’s awesome power and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 14:2; 19:18-22).

Once the sun had fully risen, God rained flames of fire and burning brimstone down upon the wicked cities. Ash and smoke filled the air as fire spread wildly out of control. The people screamed and panicked and ran in all directions. In the smoky darkness and confusion, many people were trampled to death. Others were trapped in burning buildings or died from the poisonous smoke vapors. Thousands died as God wiped Sodom and Gomorrah off the face of the earth.

Just as Lot and his daughters entered Zoar, his wife began to regret leaving the city she loved. Hating to give it up, she looked back toward Sodom.

In an instant, Lot’s wife turned into a pillar of salt! The price for rebelling against God is always high (Genesis 19:23-26).

The Day After

The next day, Abraham rose early and looked across the valley to see what was left of the cities of the plain. He saw thick columns of smoke swirl up into the sky from what used to be cities. At first he wondered if Lot had been destroyed in Sodom. But when he later learned that the little town of Zoar had escaped God’s wrath, Abraham realized that Lot was there, safe and sound (Genesis 19:27-29).

Fearing the citizens of Zoar, who blamed him for Sodom and Gomorrah’s destruction, Lot left town. He and his daughters fled to the mountains and lived in a cave. Once there, Lot had much to think about. Because he had grown used to sin and tolerated it, Lot had almost lost his life (verse 30).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ISAAC IS BORN

Months later, God visited Sarah, just as He had said He would. And she gave birth to a son—Isaac. Twenty-five years had passed since God first called Abraham. At the age of 100 years old, Abraham finally had an heir to God’s promise (Genesis 21:1-3, 5-7).

Everyone in their household was happy and excited for Isaac’s birth—everyone, except Hagar and Ishmael.

Hagar and Ishmael Forced to Leave

One day Abraham and Sarah held a great feast in Isaac’s honor, who had grown from a tiny baby to a little child (Genesis 21:8).

As everyone celebrated, Sarah overheard Ishmael say rude and unkind things about Isaac. Fearing that Ishmael would someday become so jealous that he would do Isaac harm, Sarah spoke with Abraham.

“Hagar and Ishmael must leave,” she said. “Hagar’s son cannot be your heir while Isaac lives. Send them away now, before something horrible happens.”

Abraham did not want to do this. He had great affection for Ishmael. He worried that Ishmael would not be safe if he was cast out from their home.

But God reassured Abraham, saying, “Listen to Sarah and cast out Hagar and the boy. I will bless your descendants through Isaac. But do not worry about Ishmael. For your sake, I will make a great nation from him” (verses 9-13).

Early next morning, Abraham gave Hagar and Ishmael food and water and tearfully sent them on their way. Carrying enough supplies to last until they would come to the next wellspring, the mother and son wandered through the Wilderness of Beersheba.

By the time the supplies were used up, they realized that they were lost. With the rugged desert wilderness being hot and dusty, Hagar knew that if they didn't find water soon, she and her son would die!

Tired and weak, she placed Ishmael under a shrub to keep cool under its shade. Then she walked a small distance and sat down and cried (verses 14-16).

With his mouth dry and parched, Ishmael could barely speak. He thought about the crude things he had said about his little brother. Feeling sorry, Ishmael prayed to the one true God that Abraham had taught him about.

God heard his prayer.

The Messenger of the Eternal called out to Hagar and said, "Fear not. God has heard your son's prayer. Arise and lift Ishmael up, for God will make him a great nation" (verses 17-18).

Hagar looked up and saw a spring of cool, sparkling water appear from the desert floor. She and her son ran to it and drank until they could drink no more.

From that moment, God ensured that Ishmael would survive. Growing up in the desert wilderness, Ishmael became an archer, skilled at hunting wild animals for food, clothing and protection. He spent so much time living in the wild away from people that he was like a wild man.

His mother brought him a wife from Egypt (verses 19-21). They had many children. Eventually, their descendants became a great nation. Today, they are known as Arabs.

God Tests Abraham

Many years passed since Isaac was born. During that time, Abraham had taught him the importance of keeping God's spiritual laws.

One day, when Isaac was a very young man, God decided to test Abraham. He wanted to know if Abraham learned the valuable lesson of always trusting God and not relying on himself.

So He said to him, "Abraham, take Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. Once there, you will offer him to Me as a burnt sacrifice" (Genesis 22:1-2).

Abraham was stunned! For years, God had told him that He would produce a great people through Isaac. Yet God had just commanded

Abraham to sacrifice Isaac—kill him!

“How could this be?” he wondered. Though Satan the devil tried to tempt him, Abraham did not allow doubts to keep him from obeying God. He was determined to obey God no matter what.

Early next morning, Abraham saddled his donkey and then chopped some wood to use for the burnt offering. Along with Isaac and two servants, he then traveled to the place where God wanted the sacrifice to be offered. Three days later, they arrived (verses 3-4).

Abraham turned to his young servants and said, “Stay here with the donkey. Isaac and I will go up to the place of sacrifice and worship God. We will be back” (verse 5).

Though God had commanded him to take Isaac’s life, Abraham knew that the Eternal would keep His promise.

As they walked, Isaac asked his father, “We have the wood, the knife and everything we need for the burnt offering. But where is the lamb that is to be offered?”

Abraham looked his son in the eye and said, “God will provide the lamb” (verses 6-8).

When they finally arrived at the place God had directed them, Abraham built an altar and set the wood in place. Then, to Isaac’s surprise, his father bound him with rope and placed him on the altar, on top of the wood (verse 9).

Isaac’s eyes were wide with fear!

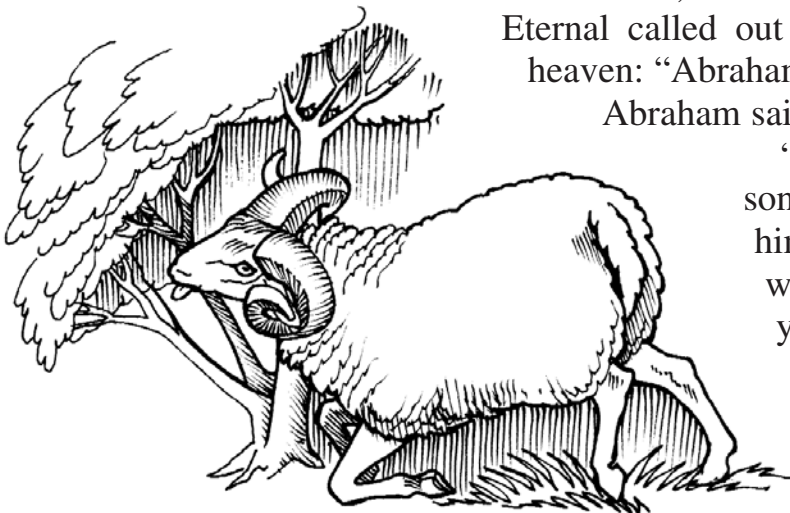
Calmly, Abraham said to him, “Put your trust in God.”

Then he stood over his son, stretched out his hand, ready to take the knife and kill his only son, the heir to God’s promise (verse 10).

Just then, the Messenger of the Eternal called out to Abraham from heaven: “Abraham, Abraham!”

Abraham said, “Here I am.”

“Do not slay your son or do anything to him. Because you are willing to sacrifice your only son for



Me, I now know that you fear God and will obey Me no matter what” (verses 11-12).

Abraham had passed the test!

God provided a ram, which was caught in a thicket by its horns, to be sacrificed. This led Abraham to call the place of worship “The-Eternal-Will-Provide” (verses 13-14).

Again, God promised Abraham that He would bless him with many descendants, as numerous as the stars in heaven or sand on a seashore. He said that they would be a mighty people.

“Because you have obeyed My voice, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through your seed.”

Then Abraham, Isaac and the young servants returned home to Beersheba (verses 15-18).

Sarah Dies

Some time later, after 127 years of living on the earth, Sarah died. Abraham bought a large field, which had a cave, and buried his wife in the cave (Genesis 23:1-4, 17-20).

CHAPTER TWELVE

ISAAC FINDS A WIFE

A few years had passed since Sarah died, and Isaac was still without a wife. Abraham began to worry that his son might be tempted to marry one of the local women of the land. He knew that Isaac must not marry foreigners, else he would be tempted to worship their pagan false gods and follow their evil practices and traditions.

So Abraham turned to his chief servant and made him promise to find Isaac a proper wife.

“Do not pick a wife from among the Canaanites—they do not worship God or keep His laws,” he said. “Instead, I charge you with finding a wife among my own people. Go back to the country where God called me out from and go to my family. Only from them should you pick a wife for Isaac.”

In those days, it was the custom that parents choose whom their sons and daughters would marry. Abraham desired that Isaac marry a woman who obeyed God, kept His laws, and would teach their future children to do the same. Abraham was certain that his distant family members still worshipped the one true God.

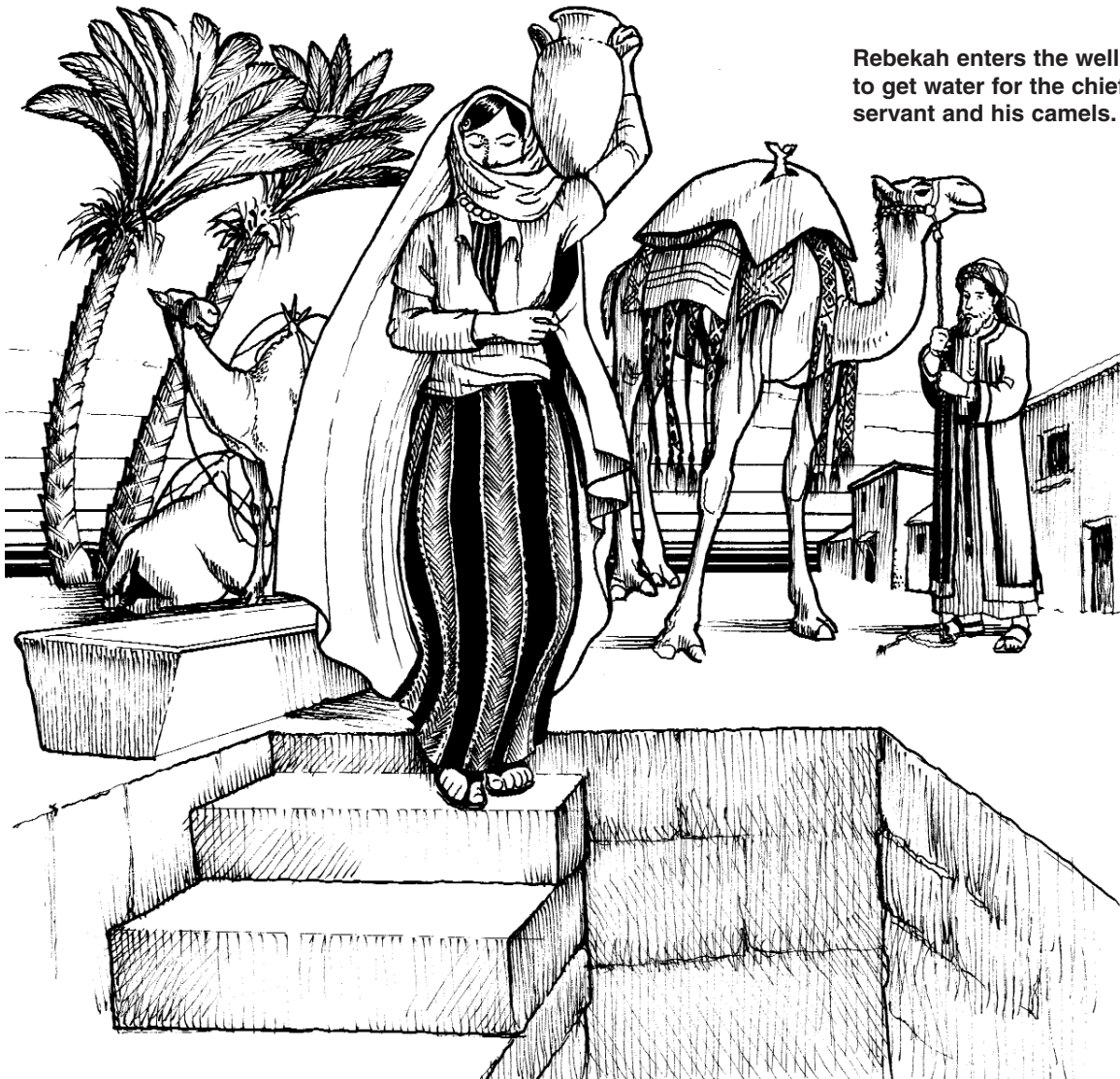
The servant replied, “What if the woman I choose is not willing to follow me back to this land? Should I take Isaac with me to your homeland?”

“No, Isaac must stay here. God will direct you. If the woman is not willing to follow you, then you shall be released from this oath.”

So the servant took ten camels and began his long journey to the land of Mesopotamia (Genesis 24:1-10).

Rebekah Gives Water to a Stranger

After hundreds of miles of travelling, the servant came to the city of Nahor. As evening drew near, he made the camels kneel down at a well



Rebekah enters the well to get water for the chief servant and his camels.

outside of the city. He waited for the local women to come to the well and draw out water.

Quietly, the servant prayed to God, “Eternal God of Abraham, my master, please give me success in finding the right wife for Isaac. When the women come out to draw water from the well, help me know which one I should choose from. When I say to a young woman, ‘Please give me a drink from your pitcher,’ and she says, ‘Here, drink, and I will give your camels a drink, also’—please let her be the one that You have chosen for Isaac.”

It was the custom of the time for women to provide water for strangers, but not to their animals. Any woman who offered to give water to both parties was unusually kind. She was willing to do more than she was expected to do.

Before the servant had finished his prayer, a young, beautiful woman named Rebekah appeared.

The servant asked her for a drink.

She said, “Here, my lord,” and poured water into his hands. Then she said, “I will draw water for your camels, too. They seem to be quite thirsty.”

Silently, the servant wondered to himself, “Is this the one?”

The man gave her a valuable gold ring and gold bracelets and asked for her name and who her parents were.

She answered, “I am Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel and granddaughter of Nahor.”

Suddenly, the servant knew that God had answered his prayer. Nahor was Abraham’s brother. This made Rebekah Abraham’s grandniece and Isaac’s distant cousin!

Grateful that God had heard his prayer, the servant explained to Rebekah who he was and about his mission. The young woman ran home and told everyone there what had happened.

When Laban, Rebekah’s brother, saw the new jewelry she was given and heard the story, he ran out to invite the servant to stay the night with them. They set food before him and encouraged the servant to eat, but he refused.

“First I must tell you about my mission.”

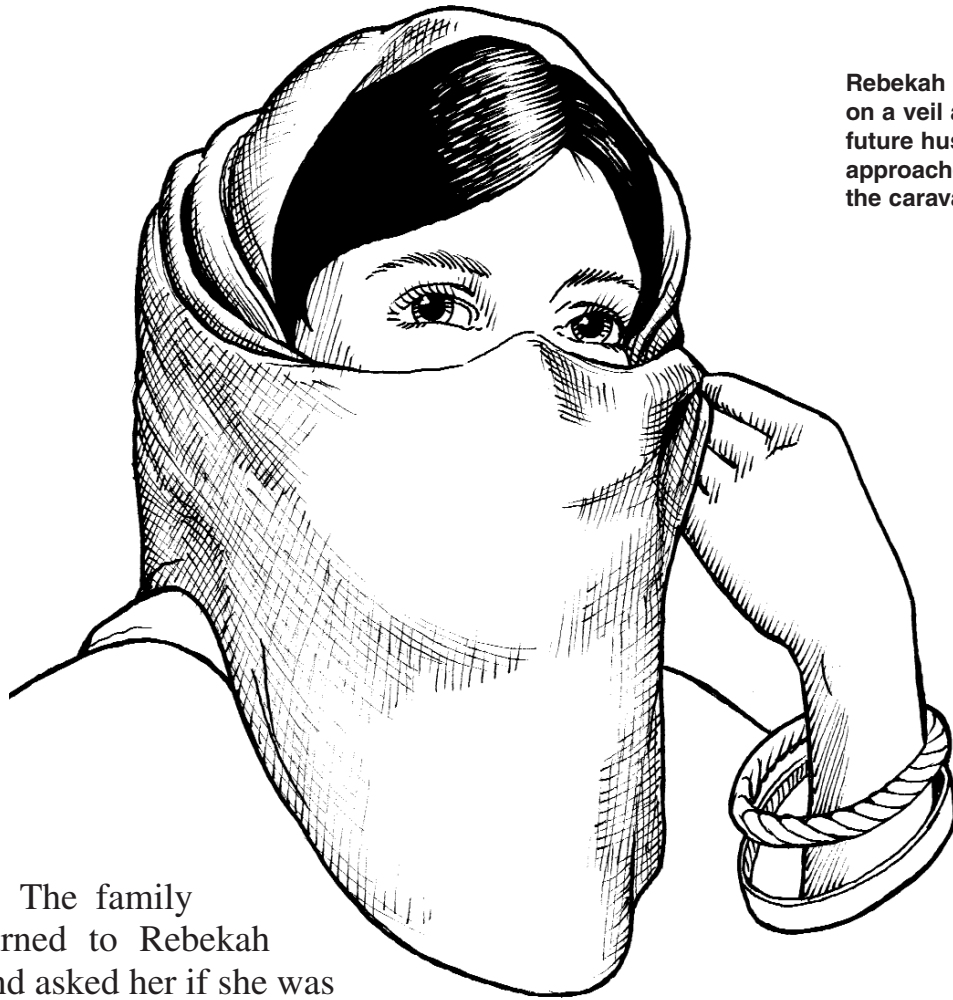
After hearing the details of his story, Laban and his father Bethuel said, “This thing comes from God. We now know that the Eternal wants Rebekah to marry Isaac. You may take her with you.”

Rebekah did not say anything. She fully trusted that God had chosen the right husband for her.

Upon hearing the family’s answer, the servant bowed down to his knees and worshipped God, thanking Him through prayer. Then the servant unloaded the goods that his ten camels carried, and gave Rebekah silver and gold jewelry, and expensive clothing. He also gave precious gifts to Laban and to Milcah—Laban and Rebekah’s mother.

Next morning, the servant was ready to take Rebekah to the Promised Land. But the family began to feel sad because she was about to move to a distant country. They asked the servant if Rebekah could stay with her family at least ten more days.

The man said no. “God has caused me to find Rebekah quickly. We must not stay in His way.”



Rebekah puts on a veil as her future husband approaches the caravan.

The family turned to Rebekah and asked her if she was willing to leave.

She simply replied, “Yes, I will go.”

And so the servant led Rebekah, her maids and the rest of the caravan on their long journey back to Canaan (Genesis 24:10-61).

Love at First Sight

One day, when Isaac was sitting in a field, deep in thought, he noticed something appear over the horizon: a caravan of camels and people (Genesis 24:62-63).

When he stood up, he recognized that Abraham’s chief servant was leading the caravan. And then he noticed a beautiful young woman among them.

Meanwhile, Rebekah noticed a man walking toward them from the distance. She asked the servant, “Who is that man coming toward us?”

He grinned, “That is my master; the one you have been chosen to marry.”

As Isaac drew near, Rebekah could see that he was a handsome man with a kind face.

Before he could get closer, she covered her face with a veil (for that was the custom then; women who were about to marry covered their faces from their future husbands until the day they married).

When the servant told him everything that had happened, Isaac knew that God had chosen Rebekah to be his wife. And Isaac was more than willing to be her husband. They were married, and loved each other for the rest of their lives (verses 64-67).

The Death of a Great Servant

Many years after Sarah’s death, Abraham married a woman named Keturah and had several sons (Genesis 25:1-4). Then, at the age of 175, Abraham died. He lived a full and happy life because he had learned to put God first (verses 7-8).

Some day soon, when God sets up His kingdom on the earth, Abraham will be raised back to life. Because he devoted himself to building God’s holy, righteous character, Abraham will be changed into spirit. He will never again feel pain or grow old or die. He will be a member of the God Family. He will teach others to reject human nature and keep God’s spiritual laws.

This is God’s Plan for everyone—including you!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JACOB AND ESAU

After twenty years of blissful marriage, Isaac and Rebekah were still childless. In ancient times, this was considered shameful. Without an heir to inherit the family wealth, the family name would die out and its possessions would be passed on to strangers.

Isaac turned to God, pleading with him to give Rebekah a child. God answered his prayers. Rebekah was soon with child (Genesis 25:20-21).

But as the months passed and her time of giving birth drew near, she felt great discomfort.

Praying to God for relief, Rebekah said, “It is as though a great war wages within my womb.”

In a way, she was correct. God told her, “Two nations are within your womb. Two peoples shall be separated from your body. One shall be stronger than the other, and the firstborn will serve the younger” (verses 22-23).

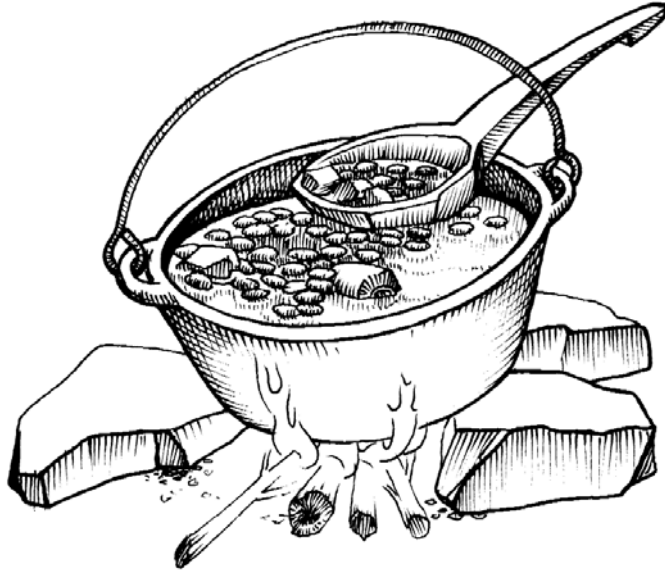
Rebekah realized that she was carrying twins! And from her twin sons would come two nations of people who would constantly be at odds with each other.

On the big day, Rebekah gave birth to a hairy, reddish son. He was named Esau. Immediately after he was born, out came his younger brother Jacob, holding on tightly to Esau’s heel (verses 24-26).

Esau Sells His Birthright

Esau grew up to become a skilled hunter. He roamed the land, searching for wild game. Jacob, on the other hand, became a shepherd. He stayed near home and tended flocks of sheep.

As many parents still do, Isaac and Rebekah made a big mistake: each favored one son over the other. Instead of showing both sons the



same amount of love and attention, Isaac favored Esau, because he loved to eat the wild game his son brought to him. And Rebekah favored Jacob, because he stayed close to home and was gentler than his older brother (Genesis 25:27-29).

Isaac and Rebekah's mistake caused Esau and Jacob to compete against each other. This created harsh feelings between them.

One day, while Jacob was cooking a lamb stew, Esau stumbled in from the wilderness and fell to the ground.

Smelling the hearty stew bubbling before him in a pot, Esau said, "Brother, please give me some of your stew. I'm so tired, I feel like I'm about to die." Esau had spent the entire day hunting for game. Now he was hungry and weak. He would do anything to fill his belly with Jacob's stew.

When Jacob considered his brother's request, a wrong thought popped into his mind: "Esau is the firstborn. He will inherit the family wealth and its blessings. Yet God has told our mother that I will rule over my brother and receive the rights of the firstborn. How can this possibly happen?...Unless God has just handed me my chance."

Giving in to his human nature rather than trusting in God to work things out, Jacob took matters into his own hands.

He told Esau, "You may have my stew—but first you must sell me your birthright!"

Esau did not consider what he was about to so easily give up. Failing to rely on his Creator to provide food for him, Esau relied upon himself.

"I'm about to die," he said. "Go ahead, take the birthright! What good is it to me now?"

“Swear to me, then.”

Esau swore an oath to Jacob and sold his birthright for a bowl of hot stew. Esau’s actions showed God that he despised the birthright and did not appreciate the great and wonderful blessings that were tied to it (verses 29-34).

Years later, Esau made even more mistakes, such as marrying two local women—foreigners who worshipped idols and did not fear or obey the God of Abraham (verses 34-35). Esau’s foolishness caused his parents to grieve. Though they had raised him to follow God’s ways, Esau continued to decide for himself right from wrong, good from evil.

Isaac Blesses Jacob

As the years went by, Isaac became very old and nearly blind. Afraid that he would soon die, he decided that it was time to bless Esau with the birthright blessing. Isaac was unaware that Esau had already sold it to Jacob.

He called out to his firstborn son and said, “I am old and my death may be near. Before I die, I will bless you.”

Noticing that Jacob was not around, Esau thought he could break his oath and steal the birthright blessing from his brother.

Isaac said, “Before I bless you, take your bow and arrows and hunt a deer for me. I want to enjoy some wild game before I die.”

So Esau left to hunt game in the wilderness (Genesis 27:1-5).

Meanwhile, Rebekah had been secretly listening in on their conversation. Because she favored Jacob over Esau, Rebekah came up with a plan. She found her youngest son and told him about the situation.

“Listen to me, Jacob. While your brother is away, go to your flock and pick two choice goats.”

“What will you do with them?” he asked.

“I will make a tasty stew, and I will make it so that your father shall not be able to tell the difference between goat and wild game. After he is finished eating, your father will bless you. Just pretend that you are Esau and all will be well.”

Jacob said, “But Esau is hairy and I am smooth-skinned. What if father decides to feel my skin? He will say that I’m a deceiver and will curse me!”

“Let your curse be on me. Now listen to me and do as I say. You will be blessed.”

Jacob obeyed his mother and gave her two goat kids. After cooking them, she clothed Jacob in Esau’s clothing and then put the skins of the goats on Jacob’s hands and neck.

When he was ready, Jacob brought the food and some bread to Isaac (verses 5-17).

Too blind to see who had just entered his tent, Isaac said, “Who are you, my son?”

Jacob lied and said, “I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done as you have asked. Please eat so that you may bless me.”

Isaac was not to be so easily fooled. He said, “How is it that you have found wild game so quickly?”

Beads of sweat appeared on Jacob’s brow. One false move and his deceit would be discovered.

Quickly, he told another lie: “The Eternal your God brought it to me.” Like all lies do, Jacob’s lies were beginning to grow and pile up. Life is so much easier when people just tell the truth.

Still, Isaac was not convinced. He wanted more proof.

He said, “Come near me. I want to feel you and see whether you are truly my son Esau.”

Cautiously, Jacob drew close so that his father could touch him. But all that Isaac could feel were hairy goatskins, which felt like Esau’s hair.

“Your voice is like Jacob, but your hands are like Esau. Are you really Esau?”

Again, Jacob lied. “Yes, I am.”

Isaac asked him to bring the food near and then he ate. When he was finished, Isaac said, “Come near and kiss me, my son.”

Jacob trembled as his father kissed him and smelled his clothing. But Isaac was now convinced that this was truly Esau (verses 18-27).

He gave this blessing: “May God give you and your descendants rich, fertile farmlands and plenty of fresh water. May He also make you rich in grains, fruits and vegetables. Let the nations bow down to you and serve you. May your brothers and their descendants bow down to you and may you rule over them. Anyone who curses you shall be cursed. And anyone who blesses you shall be blessed” (verses 27-29).

Jacob's Deceit is Uncovered

As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, Esau came in from the hunt. After he cooked the food and brought it before his father, Esau asked to be blessed (Genesis 27:30-31).

Isaac was puzzled. "Who are you?"

"Esau, your firstborn son."

Isaac trembled from shock. "Who? If you are Esau, then who brought me the food I just ate? I gave your blessing to that man—and he shall be blessed."

Hearing this, Esau screamed and cried. "Father, what about me? Bless me also!" he wept.

Both men realized that Jacob was the one who posed as Esau.

Isaac said, "Son, I am sorry but your brother deceived me. He has taken away your blessing."

"I should not be surprised," Esau said. "He is called Jacob for good reason." Jacob meant "deceitful" or "supplanter."

Then Esau said, "First my brother took away my birthright, and now my blessing. Have you no blessing left for me, father?"

Sadly, Isaac had only one blessing left to give. Jacob had already taken the best.

Isaac said, "You shall live far from rich soil and well-watered farmlands. You and your descendants will fight and make war to get the things you desire. And you shall serve your brother. But some day, you will break free from his rule."

Like a spoiled child, Esau did not appreciate his blessing. He hated Jacob with all his heart. He longed for the day Isaac would die.

"Then I will kill my brother Jacob," he said, when Isaac was not listening (verses 32-41).

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

JACOB AND RACHEL

One of the servants overheard Esau's desire for revenge, and told Rebekah. She warned Jacob and came up with a plan for him to stay with her brother Laban, who lived far away in Haran.

Jacob argued, "But I don't want to leave. This is my home."

But Rebekah, fearing for his life, convinced Jacob to leave. Now all she had to do was convince Isaac of her plan.

"I don't want Jacob to marry foreign women the way Esau did. If he marries one of these idol-worshipping local girls, what good will my life be?" she said to Isaac.

She then explained that Jacob should find a wife among her brother's household. "The same way Abraham found a wife for you years ago," she reminded him.

Reluctantly, Isaac agreed. So he sent Jacob off to Laban's household, far away in the land of Mesopotamia.

Esau took notice of how Jacob obeyed their parents by searching for a God-fearing wife. After he admitted to himself that his idol-worshipping wives did not please his parents, Esau went to his uncle Ishmael and married his daughter Mahalath.

Staircase to Heaven

During his journey, Jacob came to a certain place and stayed the night there. Not having a soft pillow to sleep on, he used a large flat stone. Though it was hard, it was still comfortable. Jacob fell fast asleep and began to have a strange dream.

He dreamt that a great ladder or staircase extended from the earth, all the way up into heaven. He saw angels climbing up and down the staircase.

Standing above it, God said to Jacob, "I am the Ever-living God of

Abraham and your father Isaac. The land on which you now rest I will give to you and your descendants. Counting the number of your offspring shall be like counting the dust of the earth. And you shall spread in all directions. Through your descendants, all families of the earth shall be blessed.”

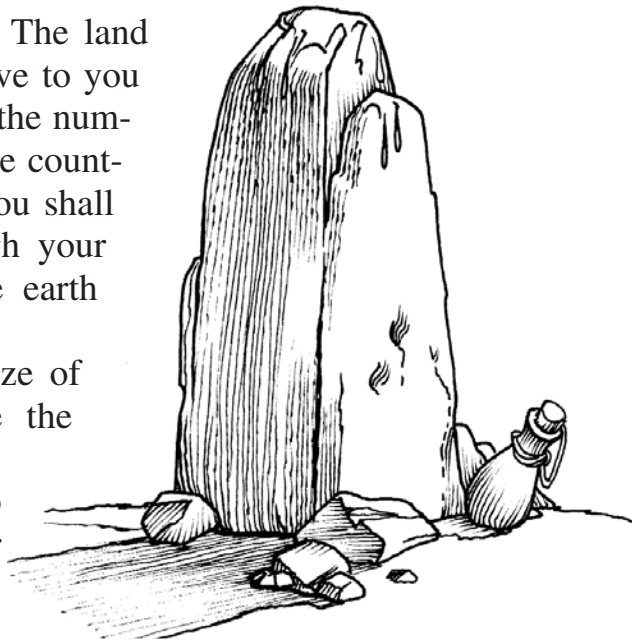
God had just enlarged the size of the Promised Land to include the whole earth!

In the dream, He promised to protect and guide Jacob no matter where he traveled, and to eventually bring him back home safely.

When he woke up, Jacob feared God. “The Eternal is in this awesome place, and I was not aware of it,” he said. “This place is the house of God and the gate of heaven!” (Genesis 28:10-17).

Early the next morning, he took the stone he had used as a pillow and set it up as a pillar. Then he poured oil on it and called the place Bethel, which means “House of God” (verses 18-19).

Afterward, Jacob vowed that if God kept His promise to protect him and provide for his needs and someday bring him back home, “then the Eternal shall be my God. And all that He gives me I will tithe to Him” (verses 20-22).



Rachel and the Well

Jacob continued his journey to Haran and eventually came to the land of Mesopotamia. When he came to a well in a field, he noticed that three flocks of sheep were lying near it, waiting to be given water. A large stone covered the mouth of the well, preventing the sheep from getting their drink.

Jacob asked the herdsmen of the flock where they came from.

“We are from Haran,” they answered.

Jacob felt relief. He now knew that his long journey was nearly finished and that Haran was nearby.

He asked the men, “Do you happen to know Laban, son of Nahor?”

“Why yes, we know him.”

“Is he alive and well?” Jacob asked them this because he had never met his uncle Laban and it had been many years since Rebekah had seen him.

They said, “Yes, he is well.”

Then one of the herdsmen pointed across the field to a young woman who was leading her sheep. “As a matter of fact,” he said, “Laban’s daughter Rachel is coming to the well with his sheep.”

Even from a distance, Jacob could see that Rachel was quite beautiful (Genesis 29:1-6). He wanted to speak to her alone, so he tried to convince the herdsmen to hurry up and remove the stone from the well and water their flocks. The herdsmen refused (verses 7-8).

Meanwhile, Rachel came to the well with her flock. Realizing that she was family to him, and taken in by her natural beauty, Jacob rolled the stone away and watered her sheep. Then, overcome with joy, he gently greeted Rachel with a kiss and told her who he was.

“I am Jacob, son of Rebekah, your father’s sister.”

Rachel was so happy and excited that a family member had come such a long distance to visit her, she ran home to tell her father (verses 9-12).

“Father, father!” she shouted. “Your sister’s son is here!”

Laban could barely believe his ears at the good news. So many years had passed since he had seen his sister—and now her son was here!

“Where is he? Bring my nephew inside so I can greet him!”

Rachel was speechless. She suddenly realized that, in her excitement, she had left Jacob standing at the well.

When she explained this to her father, Laban ran out to meet Jacob. He gave his nephew a giant bear hug and a kiss, and then brought him to his home.

Laban told Jacob, “We are family. Stay with us. My home is your home.”

Jacob Hears Wedding Bells

Jacob stayed with Laban, his sons, and his daughters (Rachel and Leah), helping them take care of their flocks and other livestock. By the time one month had passed, Laban realized that Jacob was faithful,

hardworking and attentive to his sheep. In fact, Jacob was becoming a more valuable worker than Laban's entire household of servants.

Not wanting his nephew to leave him, Laban said to Jacob, "You are family to me. I can't allow you to serve me for nothing. Name your wages. How much should I pay you?"

But Jacob did not want money. He wanted something that was far more precious to him: "I will work hard for you seven years. In return, you will give me your daughter Rachel to be my wife."

Hearing this, Laban was pleased. Not only would he have a diligent servant, but a son-in-law, too. He quickly agreed to Jacob's price (verses 15-20).

During the next seven years, Jacob worked hard for Laban. As he watered, fed and protected his uncle's sheep, the flocks grew quite large. This is because, just as it is today, when a man fears and obeys God, his hard work brings success. God was blessing Jacob's diligent labor, and Laban was receiving benefits from it.

Laban should have followed his nephew's example and put God first in his life. But instead, he worshipped idols.

Fearing that he would lose Jacob when the seven years were finished, Laban came up with a plan to keep his nephew working for him even longer.

Because Jacob was deeply in love with Rachel, the seven years seemed like only a few days to him. But when the time had come, Jacob demanded that he be allowed to marry her right away.

So Laban and his household of family and servants made a great wedding feast, which lasted a full week. During the wedding ceremony, the bride's face was covered with a long, expensive veil. It was not until after they were married that Jacob saw the face behind the veil.

It was Leah!

Jacob was shocked—then angry. He rushed to Laban, his new father-in-law, and demanded that he explain himself.

"Why did you deceive me? I served you seven years for Rachel, not for Leah! Why have you held Rachel from me?" (verses 21-25).

Laban knew that Jacob would be angry, so he already had a crafty answer to give him.

"It is the custom of our land that the firstborn gets married first—and Leah is my firstborn daughter. I'm sorry, my son, but I'm bound by tradition."

“Why didn’t you explain this to me before the wedding?” said Jacob.

Laban did not bother to answer. Pretending to feel pity for Jacob’s situation, he said, “How about this—keep Leah for your wife and I will also give you Rachel as your second wife.”

“Really?” Jacob said, surprised.

“By all means, my son...Of course, I cannot give Rachel away for free. All that I ask is that you serve me another seven years. But don’t worry about having to wait seven more years to marry her. You can marry Rachel right now and work off the years that you owe me later. All I ask is that you wait a week and spend some time with Leah” (verses 26-27).

Just as Jacob had deceived Esau and Isaac, Laban had deceived him. God was teaching Jacob a bitter lesson: Lying never pays. Like many people today, God knew that Jacob had to learn this through hard, painful experience.

Jacob gave in to Laban’s scheme, and married Rachel the following week. Jacob may have had to work another seven years, adding to his uncle’s wealth, but he was happy to finally be married to the woman he loved (verses 28-30).

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE DECEIVER IS DECEIVED

Jacob's 14 years of serving Laban had ended. Yet he had very few possessions to show for it. His hard work had gone toward increasing his father-in-law's riches, not his own.

He went to Laban and said that he wanted to take his family back to Canaan (Genesis 30:25-26).

Laban was afraid of losing such a profitable worker. He knew that his increase in wealth was due to having a God-fearing man manage his affairs. Quickly, he said to Jacob, "What can I do to make you want to stay? Name your own wages and I'll pay it."

"No need to pay me anything. Just allow me to pick from your flock all the speckled and spotted sheep and goats, as well as all the brown lambs. They will be my wages" (verses 27-32).

Laban quickly agreed. The next day, Jacob found out why.

Laban had his sons and herdsmen take most of the speckled, spotted and brown animals Jacob had wanted. Then they took them to a place that was three days away (verses 34-36). Now, instead of leaving for Canaan with a good-sized flock, Jacob would have to wait for the animals to be born.

During the next six years that Jacob tended to Laban's sheep, a mysterious thing happened: Jacob's flocks increased while Laban's flocks became smaller. God was with Jacob and made him prosper. Jacob also increased in camels, donkeys and servants (verse 43).

Laban was not pleased. He knew that Jacob would soon leave him.

Jacob Flees

One day, Jacob overheard Laban's son complain that Jacob had taken away their father's wealth. Hearing this, Jacob thought about how Laban no longer acted friendly toward him. He realized that Laban and

his sons would grow to be angrier at him if he did not soon leave.

“But if Laban sees me leave, he might use his men to force us to stay. I’ll be in trouble if I stay and I’ll be in trouble if I try to leave.”

Then God spoke to Jacob: “Return to Canaan and bring your family with you. I will protect and guide you” (Genesis 31:1-3).

With that, Jacob set into motion a plan of escape. He waited until Laban and his men were several miles away shearing his sheep. Then Jacob, his wives, children and servants fled on camels. They took all their livestock and possessions with them.

Jacob also made sure to tell everyone in his caravan not to take anything that belonged to Laban. He did not want to give his father-in-law any excuse to come after them (verses 17-18, 20).

Laban Rides in Hot Pursuit

Three days passed before Laban heard the news that Jacob had left him. Angry, he ordered his sons and servants to saddle their camels, and they raced into the wilderness in hot pursuit.

After seven days of long, hard riding through rugged countryside, they came within sight of Jacob’s campsite, which was in the mountains of Gilead. Laban decided that his men, who were tired and weak, should get a good night’s rest before swooping down on Jacob’s camp.

“He has too many possessions and women and children to be able to run away from us,” he told them.

That night, God spoke to Laban in a dream. In it, He warned him not to harm Jacob—else the Eternal would deal with him. Though Laban did not worship God, the dream made him fear God—at least for a little while (Genesis 31:22-25).

The next morning, Laban and his men entered Jacob’s camp.

“Why did you sneak away like a thief in the night?” he said to Jacob. “And why did you steal away my daughters like captives taken in war? If you had only told me that you were leaving, I would have sent you off with a great feast. Because of you, I didn’t even get a chance to kiss my daughters and grandchildren goodbye. Why have you treated me so harshly when I have treated you like a son?”

Trying not to let his fear show, Jacob said, “I left without telling you because I was afraid you would try to take your daughters away from me.”

“Why would you think such a thing? I have the power to harm you, but the God of your father warned me not to.”

“It would be wise to obey God’s warning,” said Jacob.

Laban said, “I agree. But tell me, if it was so urgent for you to journey back to Canaan, why did you feel the need to take my gods with you?” He was talking about his household idols, or carved images.

Jacob’s fear turned to boiling anger. “I do not steal idols!”

Laban took a step back. He realized he had said too much.

Jacob said, “If you think that I have your so-called ‘gods,’ then search my possessions. In fact, search the tents of everyone in my caravan—and make it quick!”

Laban searched Jacob’s tent, then Leah’s, and then the tents of Bilah and Zilpah. He did not find his idols.

Then he entered Rachel’s tent. As he searched, he noticed that Rachel was sitting on a saddlebag. He wanted to search through them, but she said, “Excuse me for not getting up, father. I am feeling weak and sickly right now.”

Her father decided to leave the saddlebags be (verses 26-35).

When he left the tent, Rachel let out a soft sigh. Laban’s household idols were hidden in her saddlebags! Jacob did not know she had stolen them (verses 19, 32).

Jacob’s face was burning red from anger. “Well, where are these so-called ‘gods’ you claim I have stolen from you?”

Laban was speechless.

Jacob said, “I have worked for you for 20 long years. And my hard work has fattened your tents with riches. Yet you have deceived me over and over again, and have changed my wages ten times! Why have you treated me so unfairly?”

Embarrassed, Laban knew that he was right. He could feel the stares of his sons and servants as they considered Jacob’s words.

Wanting to appear to be a fair man, Laban asked to make a covenant, or agreement, of peace with Jacob.

Jacob agreed. He set up a stone as a pillar. The other men piled some other stones to be used as a monument, or reminder, of their covenant. Then they sat down and feasted together (verses 43-48).

Early the next morning, Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren goodbye, and headed back to Haran (verse 55).

Jacob was finally free.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

JOURNEY TO CANAAN

Day by day, Jacob and his caravan were getting closer to Canaan. But first they had to travel through the land of Seir and the countryside of Edom. Jacob worried that this could mean trouble for them.

He explained to his men, “To get to Canaan, we must first cross my brother Esau’s territory. And Esau is the reason why I had left Canaan in the first place.”

He sent some messengers to find his brother and tell him that Jacob was about to enter his land with many possessions.

“And tell Esau that I hope to find favor in his sight” (Genesis 32:3-5). He wanted to know whether or not his brother still wanted to take his life.

The messengers soon returned to Jacob with alarming news: “We found your brother and gave him your message. Now he is riding out to meet you with 400 men!”

Jacob began to worry. “Esau doesn’t need 400 men with him just to greet me.”

So he divided his caravan into two groups. He reasoned that if one of the groups were attacked, the other could escape (verses 6-8).

Then, wisely, Jacob prayed to God for protection. He told his Creator that he knew he did not deserve His great mercy and protection. He also reminded God of His promise to bring him safely back home to Canaan, and to bless and increase his descendants (verses 9-12).

That night, Jacob took 550 of his best livestock and told his servants to take them ahead of him. “When you see my brother, tell him that these animals are my gift to him. Also say that I am riding in behind them.”

Jacob thought that this would smooth any bad feelings Esau may still have had toward him (verses 13-20).



Jacob Wrestles With God

Jacob ordered the two groups of his caravan to move on ahead of him. That night, he camped alone so that he could pray to God. He knew that the only way he could have success in meeting with Esau was if God stepped in (Genesis 32:21).

Then a strange thing happened. A mysterious man suddenly appeared and grabbed Jacob. The two men wrestled each other throughout the long night. When the sun started coming up, the attacker wanted Jacob to let go of him. Jacob refused. He knew that the “man” was really the Messenger of the Eternal, also known as the Word.

The Messenger of the Eternal touched Jacob’s hip, causing him to feel great pain. Still, Jacob would not let Him go. He knew that God was testing his character.

When he was younger, Jacob had followed the ways of lies and

deceiving people. But during the last 20 years, he had slowly learned to reject his carnal nature and put his trust in God. He finally understood that the Eternal would solve his problems.

When God sets up His kingdom on the earth, all people will learn to put their trust in Him.

The Messenger of the Eternal said, “Let Me go. The morning sun is coming up.” But Jacob still refused.

The Messenger of the Eternal had the power to easily break free from his grip—like an elephant breaking free from an ant! He wanted to give Jacob a chance to prove himself. He also wanted to teach him that following God and rejecting carnal nature and Satan’s attitudes is not easy. It is long, hard work that takes a lifetime to master.

Jacob said to Him, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”

So the Messenger of the Eternal blessed Jacob, changing his name to Israel, which means “he struggles with God” and “prince with God.”

After the wrestling match ended, Jacob called the place Peniel, which means “Face of God.” He knew that he had just wrestled with God face-to-face.

Then, still feeling pain in his hip, Jacob limped away (verses 24-31).

The Brothers Meet

Jacob returned to the caravan group that had his wives and children. Suddenly, he saw dust clouds appear across the horizon.

Riders were coming!

Jacob divided his wives and children into groups. He put the handmaids and their sons up front. Then Leah and her children in the middle. Then Rachel and Joseph went last.

“If any trouble happens, Rachel and Joseph will see the least of it,” he reasoned. He loved Rachel more than any woman on the face of the earth.

Then Jacob left his family and went out to meet the approaching riders. He knew that it was Esau and his 400 men (Genesis 33:1-3). As he neared them, Jacob bowed to the ground several times. He wanted Esau to know that he was coming as a servant and a friend, not as a deceiver.

Esau said nothing. He climbed down from his camel and ran over to Jacob...and hugged and kissed him! Together again, the two brothers wept (verse 4). God had answered Jacob’s prayers for success.

Esau pointed to the women and children behind him. “Who are these with you?”

“My wives and children. I will call them to you.”

The women and children walked toward Esau and bowed before him. Esau was very impressed by their respect for him (verses 5-7).

He then asked Jacob about the 550 pieces of livestock he had passed on his way to see him.

Jacob explained, “They are my gift to you.”

Esau thanked him but said that he already had enough possessions. Jacob urged him to take the livestock. Finally, Esau gave in and accepted the gift.

Esau wanted to escort his brother to his home in Seir, but Jacob said, “Your men ride faster than my family and livestock. Go on ahead, and my caravan will follow at a slower pace” (verses 8-14).

Entering Canaan

After they had said their goodbyes and parted peacefully, Jacob headed north toward Succoth. There he built himself a house and made booths, or shelters, for his livestock.

Then he traveled to Shechem, a city in Canaan, and bought some land. He also built an altar. He called it El Elohe Israel—“God, the God of Israel” (Genesis 33:16-20).

Jacob’s children were becoming young adults now. Unfortunately, most of them got involved in worldly pursuits when they should have kept their minds on the things of God.

For example, Dinah, Jacob’s daughter, got mixed up with the wrong crowd—idol-worshippers who followed pagan traditions. This led to Dinah getting into some terrible trouble. Enraged, her brothers Simeon and Levi did some horrible things to avenge their sister.

When one puts up with sin, it always leads to more sin, as well as heartache, pain—and even death!

Rachel Dies

Obedying God, Jacob and his caravan went to Bethel. There he built an altar to God, and the Eternal renewed His covenant with Jacob (Genesis 35:1-5).

Leaving Bethel, they headed for Ephrath. But Rachel died while giving birth to another son. He was named Benjamin.

Rachel was buried in what is today called Bethlehem (verses 16-19). It would be the same place where Jesus Christ would be born almost 2,000 years later (Matthew 2:6).

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

JOSEPH, THE FAVORITE SON

Finally back in Canaan after being away for so many years, Jacob reunited with his father. Isaac was now very old and gray, and living in Mamre, where Abraham and Sarah used to live.

Some time later, Isaac died. He had lived a long, successful life—180 years' worth. Jacob and his brother Esau then buried Isaac (Genesis 35:27-29).

Joseph Dreams

Jacob moved his caravan to the valley of Hebron and lived there for quite some time. Because he was growing old and weak, he relied on his grown-up sons to tend to his large numbers of sheep and other livestock.

One day his younger son Joseph, who was 17 at the time, helped his brothers Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher feed the flock. The older brothers got into some mischief, and Joseph told Jacob (Genesis 37:2).

The four brothers came to dislike Joseph. “Who does he think he is—our judge?”

Jacob's affection toward Joseph made matters worse. Following the same mistake Isaac and Rebekah had made, Jacob showed favor to Joseph. He did not show the same amount of care and concern for his other sons. This caused all of the older brothers to hate Joseph.

Unaware of their growing hatred, Jacob made an expensive coat of many colors and gave it to Joseph. In other families of that time, the father only would have done such a thing for the firstborn son. So when Joseph's brothers saw his new gift, they knew that it was a sign of how much more their father loved him.

They hated Joseph even more. Whenever they would speak to him, their words were always harsh (verses 3-4).

Some time later, Joseph started having some strange dreams. They seemed to show that he would grow up to be an important person. He would even rule over his father and brothers.

Unfortunately, Joseph was not wise enough to keep the dreams to himself. He told them to his brothers, which inspired them to plot against him (verses 5-11).

Into the Pit

One day, Jacob sent Joseph off to Shechem to bring back a report on his brothers. They were supposed to be feeding the flocks there.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, he quickly saw that his brothers and the flocks were gone. He asked a man if he had seen them.

The man said, “They left some time ago. I overheard them say that they were going to Dothan.” Dothan was about 15 miles north of Shechem. So Joseph journeyed there and saw his brothers and the flocks in the distance (Genesis 37:12-17).

His brothers were not happy to see him approaching. While Joseph was still off in the distance, they plotted to get rid of him.

Led by the same carnal attitude that led Cain to slay Abel, they said, “Look, here comes the mighty dreamer. What if we took his life and threw his body into this pit over here? I wonder if he ever dreamed that we would do that to him.”

“Why not take his life?” one brother said. “We can say that some wild beast killed him—no one will know the truth but us.”

Foolishly, they did not consider that God was listening to their wicked plan.

Reuben, the oldest of them, defended Joseph. He said, “Let’s not kill him.”

“Why?”

He pointed to the pit and said, “Let’s throw him down in there and pretend to leave him there. It will teach Joseph not to act as though he will rule over us some day.”

Reuben said this because he did not want Joseph to die. He knew that their father loved him deeply. Having shamed his father some years earlier, Reuben did not want Jacob to feel any more heartache (verses 18-22).

When Joseph came to them, his brothers surrounded him and

stripped off his coat of many colors. “You won’t be needing this anymore!” they said

Then they threw him down into the deep pit (verses 23-24).

Sold Into Slavery

Deep from within the pit, Joseph tried to jump and climb its walls. He was desperate to escape.

One of his brothers said, “Tell us, little brother, did your dreams tell you about your new home?”

They laughed and teased some more, especially when Joseph screamed, “Let me out! Let me out of here right now!”

“Or what? You’ll dream us to death?”

The brothers laughed and walked away from the pit. When they sat down for a meal, one brother said, “What about Joseph? Should we feed him or give him some water?”

“For what?” said another. “Let him feast on his dreams.”

When Reuben went off to run an errand, the other brothers thought again about killing Joseph. Guided by his carnal nature, Judah stood up and pointed to a company of Midianites, who were coming near them. They were known for selling many things on their constant travels—spices, oils and other goods. And sometimes they sold slaves.

Judah said, “Why kill our brother and have his blood on our hands? Where is the profit in that? Let’s sell him to the Midianites instead. They pay well for slaves.”

“Yes, that’s it!” a brother said. “These slave traders never stay in one place for too long. If we sell Joseph to them, they’ll take him far away. Our brother will never meddle in our affairs again.”

Joseph looks back to his brothers as he is led away into slavery.



So they all agreed.

When Joseph was pulled from the pit, he thought that his troubles were over. But they were only just beginning.

His brothers waved the Midianites over to them and sold Joseph to them for twenty shekels (about eight ounces) of silver.

Shocked, Joseph could scarcely believe that his brothers had betrayed him, as his new masters led him away (Genesis 37:25-28).

Jacob Grieves

When Reuben finally returned and saw that Joseph was no longer in the pit, he began to panic. “What have you done with Joseph?”

“Don’t worry, Reuben. The dreamer is still alive...though not well,” they laughed and grinned.

Then they explained what they had done with Joseph.

Reuben’s heart pounded faster and faster. He said, “What are we going to tell father? He’ll be heartbroken.”

The other brothers were no longer smiling. They knew that they had to come up with a plan in order to cover the truth of their betrayal.

So they took Joseph’s coat of many colors, killed a small goat, and smeared its blood on the coat. Then they ripped the coat in several places.

When they got home, they brought the coat to Jacob and said, “We have some bad news. Joseph is missing. When we went looking for him, we found this. Is this the coat you gave him, father?”

Jacob stared at it and softly said, “Yes, it is.” The brothers led him to believe that a wild animal had killed Joseph and taken his body away, leaving only his coat.

As was the custom in ancient times, Jacob tore his clothes and wore sackcloth, which was coarse and uncomfortable. This was a sign to all of his deep mourning. Though his family tried their best to comfort him, Jacob mourned and wept for many days (Genesis 37:29-35).

A Slave in Egypt

The Midianite traders brought Joseph all the way down into Egypt and sold him to Potiphar. He was an Egyptian officer and captain of the guard.

Just as He had done with Jacob, God protected and guided Joseph, making him successful in everything that he did. Potiphar noticed this. He understood that his new servant was different from his other slaves. Over time, when Joseph proved his worth through his hard work and giving attitude, Potiphar gave him higher duties.

He said to Joseph, “From now on, you will be in charge of my entire household. All of the business affairs that are in my house are now under your control. No one will be over you, except for me.”

Joseph was stunned. Though he was still a slave, he gained more responsibility than did almost all men who were free. He worked even harder for his master, making sure that everything in his household ran smoothly. All the other servants obeyed Joseph’s every command.

It did not take long for Potiphar to learn that he had made the right choice. Joseph prospered at everything he did. He proved to Potiphar that he could be trusted with anything. In time, Potiphar only concerned himself with eating; he let Joseph take care of the bigger affairs of the household (Genesis 39:1-6).

Cast Into Prison

Joseph had grown to become a handsome young man. And Potiphar’s wife began to take notice. Her carnal nature led her to desire Joseph in the same way she desired her husband. This was wrong. When God made Adam and Eve, He intended that husbands and wives desire and only be intimate with each other—and no one else.

Whenever her husband was away from home, Potiphar’s wife would try to be intimate with Joseph, but he always refused. Joseph feared and obeyed God.

One day, when Potiphar’s wife caught Joseph by his cloak and tried to tempt him, he shouted, “No!” As he ran from her, she held on to his cloak and it pulled away from him.

The wife was tired of Joseph turning her down. So she took the cloak and told others in the household that Joseph had tried to mistreat her.

“And when I started to scream, he ran away and left his cloak!” she lied.

As soon as her husband came home, the wife told him her lie, sobbing and weeping.

Potiphar was angry. He even thought about putting Joseph to death! But God put it into his mind to send Joseph to prison (Genesis 39:6-20).

Prison Dreams

God was still with Joseph. Even in prison, the Eternal caused him to prosper and succeed in everything he did. The keeper of the prison saw that Joseph was not an ordinary prisoner. Since Joseph was trustworthy and very capable in his duties, the keeper of the prison made him second in command of the entire prison. He did not have to worry about anything that was under Joseph's power. The keeper of the prison knew that Joseph would take care of it.

And God prospered Joseph even more (Genesis 39:21-23).

One day, the prison received two new prisoners—the chief butler and chief baker for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh had been angry with them because he had heard of a plot to poison his food and drink. The chief baker was in charge of Pharaoh's food. The chief butler was in charge of serving Pharaoh his drinks. The duties of both officers demanded that the men be trustworthy. But Pharaoh, not knowing which one he could trust, threw both men into prison.

One day, Joseph asked them why they seemed to be sadder than usual.

“Last night, we each had a strange dream. We want to know their meanings, but there is no one here who can tell us.”

Just as today, many people think that their dreams have hidden messages in them. But most dreams do not.

Wanting to comfort them, Joseph said, “Tell me your dreams. If they do have hidden messages in them, I won't be able to tell you what they are—but my God can.”

The butler and baker agreed (Genesis 40:1-8).

The butler said to Joseph, “In my dream, I stood before a vine with three branches. Each branch budded and blossomed and produced clusters of ripe grapes. I then took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup until it was filled with fresh wine. Then I placed the cup into Pharaoh's hand.”

Joseph thought about the butler's dream until God revealed its real meaning.

Joseph said, “The three branches are three days. In three days, Pharaoh will release you from prison and place you back in his palace as his butler.”

The butler smiled at the news.

Joseph then said, “When you are released, do not forget me. Tell my cause to Pharaoh. I am from the land of the Hebrews. I don’t belong here. I’ve done nothing to deserve being in prison.”

The butler promised Joseph that he would not forget him.

Encouraged, the baker told Joseph what he had dreamed about: “In my dream, there were three baskets of bread on my head. In the top baskets were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds kept eating them. Tell me, Joseph, what does this dream mean?”

Joseph thought about the baker’s dream. When God revealed its true meaning, he felt sorry for the man.

He said, “The three baskets are also three days. Within three days, Pharaoh will release you from prison...”

“Yes, yes, go on,” said the baker.

“You will be released from prison and Pharaoh will hang you on a tree. Birds will come to eat the flesh off your body.”

Three days later, Pharaoh celebrated his birthday (a pagan custom that God hates) by having a great feast for all his servants. Then, as was his custom, he decided to release some prisoners. The chief butler was let out of prison and returned to his duties. But the chief baker was let out of prison only to be hanged.

Because everything had happened according to what he had said, Joseph thought the chief butler would speak to Pharaoh for him. He thought he would soon be released from prison and on his way home.

That was not to be. The chief butler forgot about Joseph (verses 9-23).

Revealing Pharaoh’s Dreams

Two years later, Pharaoh had two strange dreams. They disturbed him so much that he wanted to know what they meant. So he ordered his court magicians and seers to tell him. But they could not reveal their true meaning. Since the dreams came from God, only He could reveal what they meant.

The chief butler remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him.

“He revealed what would happen to me and the baker. Here I am, alive and well; the baker was hanged.”

Pharaoh called for his guards and told them to bring Joseph out from prison.

Before bringing him into the king’s royal presence, the guards made Joseph shave his beard and put on clean and expensive clothing.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had two strange dreams. None of my magicians or seers can tell me what they mean. Can you?”

“No,” said Joseph. “I do not have such power. But the Eternal God of the universe can. In the past, He has used me to speak for Him.”

Impressed with his answer, Pharaoh told Joseph what he had dreamed: “In my dream, I was standing on the bank of the Nile, when seven cows suddenly came up out of the river. They were fat and well-fed. They left the river and started eating in the meadow. Then seven other cows came out of the Nile. These were sickly, ugly, and starving for food. These cows ate up the seven fat cows. Yet after they had eaten them, these cows still looked sickly and starved. Then I awoke. In my second dream, I saw seven heads of grain grow fat on one stalk. Then seven heads of thin, dried up grain suddenly sprang up and ate the fat ones. Tell me, Joseph, what do my dreams mean?”

Joseph did not rely upon himself. He waited for God to give him the answers.

Once He did, Joseph said, “The two dreams share the same meaning. God wants you to know what He is about to do. The seven fat cows and seven fat heads of grain are seven years of rich, fertile growth. Your farms will produce more grains, vegetables and fruits than you will know what to do with. But the seven thin cows and seven thin heads of grain are seven years of severe famine. Farmlands throughout Egypt, Canaan and other lands will almost dry up. Fresh water will be hard to find. The seven bad years will be so horrible that everyone will forget the fatness of the seven good years.”

Pharaoh was amazed at the deep understanding and wisdom behind God’s answer. And he respected Joseph.

He asked him, “Tell me, what should I do?”

“Select a wise and discerning man and set him over Egypt. During the seven good years, he will appoint officers to collect one-fifth—one out of five—of the grain, vegetables and fruit that Egypt will produce. That food will be stored away to be used during the seven bad years of

the famine that will surely come. Do this, and Egypt will not perish.”

Pharaoh was very impressed by Joseph’s wisdom. And he also knew who the right person to carry out Joseph’s plan would be.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE BROTHERS REUNITE

Pharaoh stood up from his throne and approached Joseph. He said, “I have found the man to be my second-in-command over Egypt. He is you!”

He took off his signet ring and placed it onto Joseph’s finger, and then had him clothed in expensive fine linen. He also placed a gold chain around Joseph’s neck. All of these things were signs of Joseph’s great office and power.

“From now on,” said Pharaoh, “you shall rule over my house. All my people will be ruled by you and shall obey your every command. In all Egypt, only I will be over you.”

Then Pharaoh had Joseph ride in a great chariot so that he could be seen by all. Pharaoh’s men told the people to bow before Joseph.

As Pharaoh’s second-in-command, Joseph had the power to sign important documents, and make decisions that would affect the entire kingdom of Egypt.

Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name, as well as a beautiful Egyptian wife—Asenath. She was the daughter of an important priest in the land.

After 13 long years of being sold into slavery, then wrongly thrown into prison, Joseph was finally free. He knew that God was with him (Genesis 41:39-46).

Grains Stored Away

During the seven years of plenty, Joseph gathered one-fifth of the food that had grown throughout Egypt and stored it in large storehouses in all the cities. He gathered so much grain that his men could no longer keep count of it (Genesis 41:47-49). The storehouses were almost bulging with food.

Meanwhile, Joseph's wife gave him two sons—Manasseh and Ephraim (verses 50-52).

When the seven years of plenty had ended, so began the seven years of famine. People throughout all the lands barely had enough food to survive; many others died.

Back in Egypt, now that farms were not producing as many crops as before, the people cried out for Pharaoh to give them food. But Pharaoh told them, "Go to Joseph and do whatever he commands you."

As the famine spread throughout the world, Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians. When peoples of other lands heard about Egypt's large food supplies, many traveled there to buy grain.

This caused Egypt to become more powerful and famous (verses 53-57). Pharaoh was pleased.

Joseph's Brothers Go to Egypt

Back in Canaan, Jacob and his family were suffering from the famine. Many of the sheep had died. The food supplies were low. Jacob knew that if they didn't find food soon, everything he owned would be gone.

So he told his sons to go to Egypt and bring back some food. "Buy as much food as you can carry."

Except for Benjamin, all of the sons headed for Egypt. Jacob did not allow Benjamin to go because he was afraid of losing him, the way he had lost Joseph.

When the brothers arrived at Egypt, they stood in a long line of many other people. They, too, had come from distant lands to buy grain (Genesis 42:1-5).

Now Joseph, who was governor of Egypt, personally oversaw the selling of grain to the foreigners. When his brothers, who were next in line, were brought before him and bowed, Joseph could hardly believe his eyes. At first he wanted to rush over to them and greet them with a kiss. It had been so long since he had seen another family member. But then Joseph started to boil with anger for what his brothers had done to him.

But he decided to trust God and not seek revenge. "Perhaps it's time my brothers learned a lesson," he thought.

Because Joseph wore the clothing and jewelry of high Egyptian

authority, his brothers did not recognize him. They thought he was just another Egyptian official.

Joseph decided to speak to his brothers through a servant who knew the Hebrew language. He wanted his brothers to think that he only spoke Egyptian.

Harshly, Joseph said, "Where do you come from?"

They said, "From the land of Canaan, lord."

"Then you must be spies! You've come to search for our weakness, haven't you?"

The brothers trembled at Joseph's words. They saw the eyes of the Egyptian soldiers who stood on guard with weapons in their hands.

"No, my lord! We are your humble servants. We have only come to buy grain, nothing more."

Joseph said, "I don't believe you."

They said, "What can we do to convince you, my lord? We are just twelve brothers sent by our aging father to bring back some grain."

"There are only ten of you here. If you are 12, where are the other two brothers?" Joseph asked.

They said, "The youngest is with our father, and the other brother is no longer alive."

"Liars! You are spies!" Then Joseph ordered his men to throw his brothers into prison.

Three days later, Joseph visited them. "You can have your grain," he said, "but one of you must stay here in prison while the rest of you go back to Canaan and bring me your youngest brother. Only then will I set your other brother free."

The brothers talked among themselves. "This trouble is happening to us because of what we did to Joseph."

Reuben said, "I told you not to harm him, but none of you would listen. Now we're going to have to pay for his blood."

Unknown to them, Joseph understood what they said. Overcome with emotion, he turned his back to them and cried. Though they had greatly wronged him, Joseph still loved his brothers (verses 6-24).

Brothers Return to Canaan

Joseph released his brothers, but kept Simeon in prison. Then he ordered that his brothers' sacks be filled with grain and given extra

supplies for the journey home. He also arranged to have their money hidden in the grain sacks.

On the way home, one of the brothers opened a sack and found money hidden in it. He told the others, “The money I used to buy grain is in this sack.”

All of them began to worry and fear. “This is the hand of God. He wants to get us in trouble with that Egyptian governor for what we did to Joseph” (Genesis 42:25-28).

One brother said, “Maybe that Egyptian governor is trying to make it look as though we are spies and thieves!”

When they reached home, they told Jacob everything that had happened in Egypt. Then they said, “Simeon will be stuck in prison if we don’t bring Benjamin back to Egypt with us.”

As Jacob thought this over, the brothers opened all of the grain sacks and found a surprise: each sack contained the money that was used to buy the grain!

The brothers trembled in fear. They knew that they could not go back to Egypt without being accused of stealing. The Egyptians could throw them back into prison—or even take their lives!

Jacob said to them, “Joseph is gone, and so is Simeon. And now you want to take Benjamin, my youngest son, into Egypt so that I can lose him, too?”

Reuben still wanted to go to Egypt and rescue Simeon. He stepped forward and said, “You may take the lives of my two sons if I fail to bring Benjamin back to you. And I will bring him back to you.”

But Jacob refused (verses 29-38).

Return to Egypt

Time passed, and Jacob and his family had used up the grain they had bought. To make matters worse, the land was still suffering from famine. People were still dying from lack of food. Jacob knew that his family had no other choice but to go back to Egypt and buy more grain.

When he told his sons this, Judah said, “But we can’t go back to Egypt unless Benjamin is with us. That Egyptian governor will be there—he will expect us to bring Benjamin.”

But Jacob still refused.

Judah said, “Send the boy with me. I will be responsible for him. If

I fail to bring him back, you can set the blame on me forever.”

Reluctantly, Jacob gave in.

Then he told the brothers to take with them gifts of fruit, nuts, honey, spices and oils, as well as twice the amount of money that they had found in their grain sacks earlier. “Perhaps these will smooth any harsh feelings the Egyptian governor may have toward you,” he said (Genesis 43:1-13).

So the brothers took the gifts, their brother Benjamin, the money and their donkeys, and headed for Egypt. When they arrived, they lined up with the other foreigners in order to buy grain.

Upon seeing that his brothers had returned with Benjamin, Joseph was happy and pleased. But he kept them from seeing his true feelings.

Joseph ordered his chief servant to take the brothers to his home and prepare a great feast for them.

When the brothers arrived at Joseph’s home, they were afraid. “He’s trying to make us feel comfortable so that he can wrongly arrest us for stealing the money. Then he’ll make slaves out of us.”

Driven by fear, they tried to explain to Joseph’s chief servant about the money. “We don’t know how it got into our grain sacks, but we brought it with us. Plus we brought extra money with us.”

The chief servant said, “Do not worry. Your God and the God of your father put the money in your sacks. I have the money you bought the grains with the first time you came to our land.”

Then the chief servant brought out their brother Simeon to them. The brothers were happy and excited to see him. “How have they treated you? Did you get enough food to eat? Did they beat you?”

Before Simeon could answer, the chief servant led them into the main dining hall of Joseph’s home. He had them sit down, gave them water, and then washed their feet. He also had their donkeys fed.

When Joseph came home, he greeted the men. In turn, they bowed down before him and trembled, and then gave him the gifts. When he asked them about their father, the brothers answered that Jacob was alive, though growing old and gray.

Joseph turned his back to them and smiled. He knew that he would be reunited with his father very soon.

When Joseph turned to face his brothers again, he saw young Benjamin with them.

“Is this the younger brother you spoke to me about?” he asked

them.

They said that he was.

Joseph was filled with so many emotions that he had to leave the room. He went into his chambers and thanked God for protecting his family all these years, especially Benjamin. He also thanked God for this opportunity to be reunited with them.

Then he washed his face, and came back into the dining hall. They all sat down to eat. Joseph sat before a large setting that was separate from his brothers. This was because it was a custom for Egyptians not to eat with Hebrew people. Joseph did not yet want his brothers to know who he really was. He was not done teaching them their lesson.

As the brothers ate and drank before Joseph, they noticed that Benjamin was served five times as much food. “What does this mean?” they whispered (verses 15-34).

Joseph’s Cup

Joseph had his chief servant fill his brothers’ sacks with food. “As much as they can carry,” he said.

Joseph also told the servant to place each man’s money in the sack, and to put his special silver cup in Benjamin’s sack.

Early the next morning, the brothers asked Joseph’s permission to leave. “We must tend to our aging father. He will be sick with worry if we delay any longer.”

So Joseph gave them his permission, and they left.

When they had left the city with their donkeys and sacks of grain, all the brothers sighed with relief (Genesis 44:1-4).

“That was a close one! I thought we’d all end up in prison,” said one brother.

“You still may be right,” said another. He pointed to dust clouds that were off in the distance behind them. The dust clouds were getting closer.

“Chariots!”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ISRAEL DWELLS IN EGYPT

When the brothers saw Egyptian chariots racing toward them, they knew the end was near. Outnumbered and having nowhere to run, the brothers prayed to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob more than they ever had before.

The Egyptian chariots and soldiers surrounded the brothers and drew out their weapons. Then Joseph's chief servant stepped forward and pointed his fingers at the brothers.

"Why have you repaid my master's good treatment toward you with evil?"

They asked, "What do you mean?"

"Do not act innocent. You have stolen my master's special silver cup!"

The brothers protested: "We don't know what you're talking about. Didn't we travel all the way from Canaan to return the money that was in our bags? If we are thieves, then why would we bother to do such a thing? And how could we ever think to steal silver or gold from the governor's house? Search our belongings and see whether or not we have this silver cup."

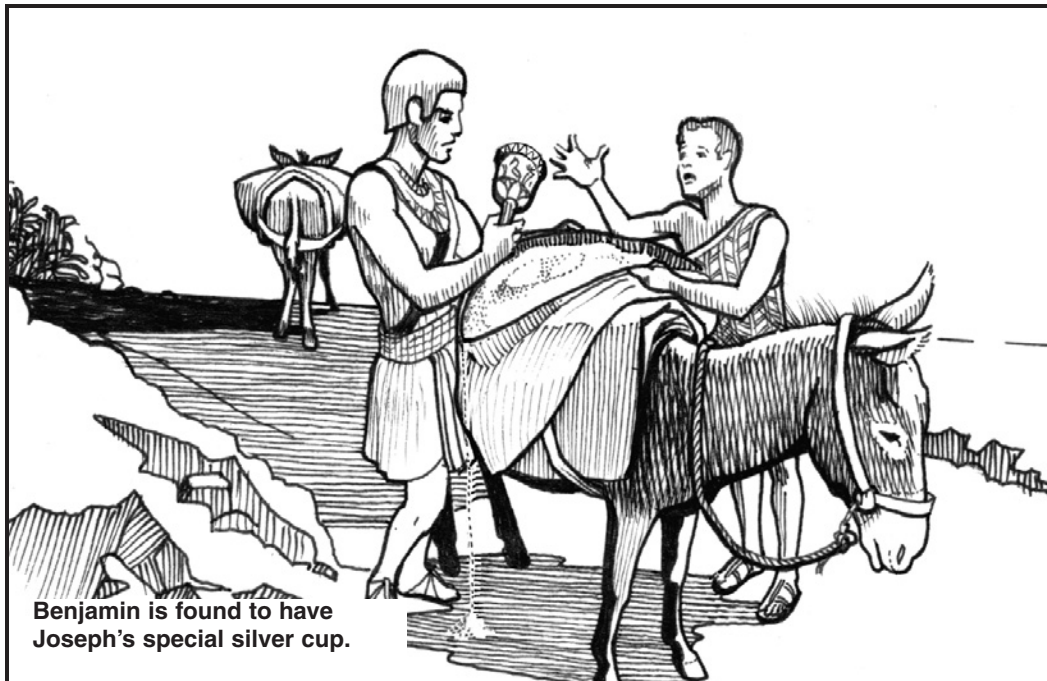
The chief servant said, "I intend to."

"And if you find it among any of us, let that man die. The rest of us will become the governor's slaves." The brothers were very sure of themselves.

"No," said the chief servant. "I will not take away the guilty man's life. I will only take away his freedom. The rest of you need not suffer for the evildoing of the guilty one."

The brothers agreed. Then each one, starting from the oldest to the youngest, let down his sack and opened it. Each brother was amazed to find the money they had used to buy grain.

"What? How did this get in here?" they asked. They did not know



that Joseph had his chief servant put the money into their sacks.

The brothers were embarrassed. But when Benjamin opened his sack, their embarrassment turned into something else: horror! Benjamin had dug his hand into the sack and pulled out Joseph's silver cup.

The older brothers moaned and tore their clothes. They knew that Benjamin would be arrested and taken to prison. And their father Jacob would never see him again (Genesis 44:4-13).

Joseph Reveals Himself

The chief servants and soldiers took the brothers back to Joseph's home. When they came before Joseph, they fell down to the ground.

Joseph said to the brothers, "How dare you bow before me as though you respect me. Did you really think that you could steal my special silver cup and get away with it? Don't you know that I have the power to see things through my magic arts?"

Of course, Joseph did not really practice magic. No servant of God does. He only said this because the brothers knew that pagan Egyptians practiced magic and other evil things. And Joseph still wanted his brothers to think that he was an Egyptian.

One of the brothers—Judah—spoke up: "What can we say, my lord?"

How can we clear ourselves? We cannot explain how the money or cup fell into our possession. The Eternal God knows that we are guilty of past sins, so my brothers and I are ready to become your slaves.”

“Only the guilty man—the one who had my cup—should become my slave,” Joseph said. “The rest of you are free to leave. Go home to your father in peace.”

Judah had tears streaming down his cheeks. He said, “We cannot go back home without Benjamin. Our father’s love and affection is bound up in the boy. If we return without Benjamin, he will surely die from heartache. He has already lost one son he deeply loved. Let me be your slave in place of Benjamin. I would rather be a slave in Egypt than let my father suffer again.”

When he heard Judah’s plea, Joseph could no longer contain himself. He shouted to his servants, “Leave this room at once!”

And when he was alone in the room with his brothers, Joseph wept aloud. Many outside the room could hear him cry.

Then Joseph turned to his brothers and said, “I am Joseph!”

His brothers were so shocked that they did not know what to say.

Joseph said, “Come near me,” and they did.

“I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into slavery.” Then he told them what had happened to him during the long years he had been in Egypt. He also told them that God had set him up to be lord of Pharaoh’s house, and to be a ruler throughout all of Egypt.

“Now hurry and go to our father. Tell him that I’m alive and ruling in Egypt. Tell him that he and our families can live in the land of Goshen. Bring your children and your children’s children. Hurry now and bring your flocks and herds and all of your livestock. There are still five more years of famine left. Come now, lest you lose all your possessions in the famine.”

Then Joseph hugged and kissed Benjamin and all his brothers. Everyone wept (Genesis 44:14-34; 45:1-15).

Land of Goshen

When Pharaoh heard that Joseph had reunited with his brothers, he and his servants were pleased. He said to Joseph, “Tell your brothers to go to Canaan and bring back their father, their families and their possessions. I will give them the best land in Egypt” (Genesis 45:16-20).

When the brothers came home and told their father the good news, Jacob could hardly believe it.

“Joseph? He’s alive?”

“Alive and well, and governor of all of Egypt!” they said.

After they told him everything Joseph had said, Jacob said, “Let’s go then. Joseph is alive and I want to see him before I die” (verses 25-28).

So Jacob, his sons and everyone who lived with them traveled to Egypt. Some time later, they came to the land of Goshen.

Riding in his chariot, Joseph raced to greet his father. When they saw each other, Joseph ran to Jacob, hugged him tightly and greeted him with a kiss. Both men wept.

The newly arrived families, with Pharaoh’s permission, made their home in Goshen, which was perfect for raising their sheep and other livestock. Goshen had plenty of fresh pastures for the animals to graze.

The Famine Grows Worse

The famine became worse throughout Egypt and Canaan, and people were running out of money to pay for grain.

Joseph gathered all the money he had earned through selling grain and brought it to Pharaoh. The Egyptian king was impressed with his fortune.

When the people no longer had money to pay for grain, they panicked. But Joseph said, “I will take your horses, flocks, cattle and donkeys for payment instead.”

The people were happy to trade their livestock for grain. Joseph was able to sell them food for another year.

But by the next year, everyone had sold all of their animals for grain. People began to starve again.

Then Joseph said that he would give them grain if they sold their land to Pharaoh. The people agreed.

Then Joseph gave them seed and told the people to plant crops for themselves. “One-fifth shall go to Pharaoh. The rest will be yours. No longer will you need to buy grain.”

The people thanked Joseph, saying, “You have saved our lives!”

And so Pharaoh grew rich in silver, gold, livestock and land, and Egypt became a mighty and powerful nation (Genesis 47:13-25).

The Blessings of Israel

Jacob lived in Egypt for 17 years. He saw his children and possessions greatly prosper and increase in the land of Goshen.

When he was 147 years old and near death, Jacob asked Joseph not to bury him in Egypt. “Bury me with my fathers, Abraham and Isaac. Promise me that you will.”

“I promise, father” (Genesis 49:27-31).

Some time later, when Jacob again felt sickly and near death, he called for Joseph, who brought with him his two sons—Manasseh and Ephraim.

Lying in his bed, Jacob told Joseph about the promise God had made to him years ago in Luz, now called Bethel.

“God said that He would increase my descendants and make many nations from them. He also said that He would give us the Promised Land to possess forever.”

Jacob explained that he wanted Manasseh and Ephraim to be part of God’s blessings, along with his other sons. So Jacob adopted the two boys as his own sons. He now considered them his first and second born sons, instead of Reuben and Simeon.

The boys kneeled before Jacob. He reached out to lay his hands on their heads in order to bless them. Jacob put his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh.

Since Jacob was going blind, Joseph thought that his father was about to make a big mistake.

“Manasseh is the firstborn; he should be blessed with Jacob’s right hand and receive the blessings of the firstborn,” he thought. So he removed Jacob’s left hand from Manasseh’s head.

“The firstborn son should be blessed with your right hand,” Joseph said.

Jacob said, “But not in this case. God has decided that the younger one, Ephraim, should be blessed with my right hand. Don’t worry—Manasseh will become a great nation, even the greatest nation the world will ever see. But Ephraim will become a great commonwealth, or group, of nations. His empire will stretch around the entire earth, and the sun will not set on it.”

With his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh,

Jacob asked God to bless their descendants with great power and increase their numbers. And he asked that they be called Israel (Genesis 48:1-20).

Thousands of years later, the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh did become great and powerful nations. From Ephraim sprang the British empire, including Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other English-speaking nations. From Manasseh sprang the most powerful single nation the world has ever seen—the United States of America.

Today, most people do not know these historical facts, which God has carefully hidden and only recently revealed.

The Death of Jacob

Before he died, Jacob told his sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Naphtali, Joseph and Benjamin—about future events that would happen to their descendants. And then he blessed them (Genesis 49:1-28).

After Jacob died, Joseph had Egyptian physicians preserve his body. When the Egyptians had mourned for 70 days, Joseph and his brothers, and all of Pharaoh's servants, as well as the high officials of Egypt, gathered to travel to Canaan. Egyptian soldiers and chariots went with them.

When they arrived, Joseph buried his father in the same cave Abraham and Isaac were buried in. Joseph had kept his promise (Genesis 50:1-14).

When they all came back to Egypt, Joseph's brothers were afraid that Joseph might seek revenge on them. "Now that father is gone, maybe Joseph will try to pay us back for selling him into slavery."

Joseph told them that they had no need to worry. He did not want revenge. Joseph knew that God had allowed him to become a slave because it was a part of His Master Plan (verses 15-21). Sometimes God allows even His most obedient servants to suffer, but He always makes things work out well in the end.

Joseph lived in Egypt for many years. He died at age 110 years old, and lived to see his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Before he died, he made his children vow to carry his body out of Egypt and bury it in the Promised Land (verses 22-26).

The children and descendants of Jacob (Israel) stayed in Egypt and grew in great numbers.

God waited for the day He would bring them out of Egypt.

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