

Genesis

Genesis 1:1-2 - "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." I believe this is exactly how it happened. Others writing about this passage may attempt to convince you that there is a secret gap between the two verses where the whole of the evolutionary process took place. They come to this conclusion because they have first embraced the manufactured evidence produced by a few sinful charlatans of science. I choose to first view the Bible, trusting in its absolute reliability. Any discrepancies between its content and popular thought are due to the error and bias of humanity, not the scripture's ambiguity. God's word is clear; He created everything in the world, out of nothing, in six literal days, just a few thousand years ago. Trust the scripture fully, deal with it honestly, and you will come to the same conclusion. Don't be taken in by those who invent phantom passages.

Genesis 2:1-2 - "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made." This seventh day of rest may very well be the most overlooked day of the creation week. In fact, yesterday I overlooked it when I said it was a six day creation. This is not totally incorrect, as all His work was done in six days, but the seventh day of rest is important as well. It established a principle that we hopefully hold to even today. All people need a day of rest, and in the modern age we are certainly no different. The Hebrews were commanded to observe this day, but not any other of the creation days. We must certainly then believe it is important. Today's believer is not bound by the Old Testament law, but should live by a Sabbath principle, to keep one day aside for rest and worship of the Lord. Don't overlook it, as we may be tempted to do when we observe this creation week.

Genesis 2:7 - "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Man is unique among all creation. There is no dog, no cow, and no monkey with a living soul. Contrary to popular religious thought, our development did not happen in stages, creeping from the ooze to become a little more complicated through millions of years, eventually reaching the just-above-monkey stage. God made us just as we are from the beginning, with personality, reason, and free will. It was these very attributes that led to our fall, and degradation through the curse of sin. It is clear that our path has been downward since that moment of sin. No upgrades have resulted through time. This is another passage to remember when combating the evil of evolutionary religion. Humans are uniquely blessed by God, and differ from any other living being. We are not merely a derivative of lesser creatures, only fortunate enough to have won the gene lottery.

Genesis 2:16 - "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:" This is the way many of our commands begin. God gives us so many wonderful things in the world to enjoy, just as He gave Adam and Eve. Then He simply says we cannot partake of one thing or another for our own good, and we get the idea He is keeping something from us. The fact of the matter is that God does not keep anything good from us, He only shelters us from evil. This was the case in the life of Adam; he was privileged to have everything good from God, but the one thing he was kept from only caused pain (and death). The next time we are tempted to snatch from God that which we think He is holding hostage, we should remember the lessons learned by Adam. Don't just focus on the tree that was forbidden. Instead remember all of the other terrific fruit that was available from literally every other tree God created. Let's partake of the fruits God has given us, and leave the forbidden stuff alone.

Genesis 3:1 - "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" We may tend to focus on the "Yea, hath God said" portion of this scripture, as we well should. In this case I was struck instead by the "subtil" portion. This is one of the prime reasons we are so often taken in by Satan's schemes. They come to us with such a ring of truth, almost to the point of making us unaware of the reality of a given situation. The enemy will typically only offer an outright lie along with a heavy dose of truth, and a theory that makes some logical sense. Here Eve saw the logic in what the serpent was saying. When she looked at the tree, and examined the thought that it could change her view of the world, she was taken in. When we are attacked in this way, we too spend time considering the attractive parts. Instead we should recognize the tactics and see that it is a scam.

Genesis 3:21 - "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them." I believe this was the first example of blood sacrifice for sin. God's method for covering sin has always been blood. The pattern carries itself through in the Old Testament, and is brought to completion when Christ shed His blood to, not only cover, but erase the sins of all who would have faith in Him. His blood was sufficient to atone for the sins of all mankind. This sacrifice served two purposes. First to cover sin, second to cover their nakedness. The sacrifice of these animals is also quite symbolic. Their death was both the result of sin, and the solution to the problems it created. It is ironic how the penalty for

sin (death) is also the means for making atonement for it. Each time we read of sacrifice in the Old Testament it should point us to Christ. This first sacrifice is particularly illustrative of God's direct involvement in our redemption.

Genesis 4:8 - "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." I recognized something in this verse today that I had never seen before. God had just spoken with Cain about his unacceptable sacrifice, now he decides to march over and confront his brother on the matter. God had accepted Abel's sacrifice because he had, as God put it, done well. Cain knew he had not done well, and it seems he resented his brother for doing better. The principle is; don't confront those you are sinfully angry with. If one has feelings of jealous hatred against another, that sin is enough. A conversation in this state can lead to all manner of violence. It seems Cain arrived at this conversation with a myriad of angry, wicked, and violent thoughts toward his brother. An argument out in the field was the last thing he needed if he was going to avoid further sin. This is all based on some supposition for sure, but the principle stands to reason.

Genesis 5:23-24 - "And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." This is one of the more intriguing passages in all the Bible. The fact that God would leave us such little testimony of a man that was obviously so close to Him is fascinating. Perhaps the Lord is revealing much by saying so little about Enoch. The simple fact that he walked with God is a revelation of His faith, devotion, and character. The question will always be asked: why did God take him? We only have a little evidence from Hebrews, in the New Testament (11:5). Perhaps it had something to do with His great faith? God, in any case, did not allow him to taste death; which was the penalty for sin. We should turn our mysterious interest into encouragement. Those who please God are blessed. Translation to heaven, and a lasting testimony of faith for generations are proof of his blessed life.

Genesis 6:5 - "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." A particular phrase in this verse has interested me for many years. Can it really be that man's heart was turned to only evil continually? The statement is shocking, because it excludes so thoroughly all good, or even moderately decent thought. The impact of this truth is tremendous. Society was in an absolutely irreparable condition, and God was left with only one choice. The very fact that man had degraded in character to this degree is a testimony to God's abundant mercy. If we are not careful, we may see the subsequent judgment by flood as harsh. How many chances had God given these wicked souls? Their downward spiral had taken many years, and God, in His always consistent merciful kindness had observed it all. He was therefore left with only one choice.

Genesis 6:17 - "And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die." Scoffers point to verses such as this one to declare God's vengeful anger and rage. They would seek to impune God's character by painting Him as a bitter, fickle old man in the sky. They are blasphemous, and dead wrong. One of the principles established in these early books of the Bible is that God only takes righteous action. Simply put; if God does it, it is right. We have no business making judgment calls about God, but we can measure His perfection in good by His own word. We know He acts in judgment only when His overflow of mercy has been scorned. He created man in His own image, and can therefore end the life of anyone He decides in righteousness must die. Let us not forget who He is, when we see the drama of His Old Testament acts.

Genesis 7:1 - "And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." This is a wonderful statement for God to make about Noah. What a terrific blessing it would be to receive God's approval in this manner. He had chosen to spare the life of Noah and his family, because Noah had pleased Him. When God observed the actions of Noah's generation, he saw only one man that stood out. Noah had no idea that his obedience would earn him such an exclusive privilege as to be the only saved from a worldwide judgment. He chose to please God for another reason. Noah loved God enough to do right, even among a people that only did evil. There is no indication that even his family stood with him. They were perhaps the recipient of blessing simply because of their relationship with him. Let us use Noah as our example, and serve God because we love Him.

Genesis 8:5 - "And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen." What a wonderful day this must have been for Noah and his family. While Noah had obeyed God in all details, and certainly understood the blessing he had received by being saved, he must have been weary of flood. Leaving the ark was certainly a desire of his heart by this time, and the site of these mountain tops must very well have thrilled his soul. Sometimes even in the midst of great blessing there is relief at the site of a new day. I can remember times of great joy and prosperity in my own life that did grow tiresome because of the hard work contained therein. Certainly Noah and family thanked God all their lives for the salvation of the ark, but something tells me they also remembered the sight of those mountains with fond gratitude. Stay the course for God and you will be blessed. Remember also that even in God's will there are opportunities for rest from a weary journey.

Genesis 11:6 - "And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do." I don't know that I understand all that happened at Babel. In truth I can't say that I believe anyone really does. The thing we can say for certain is that God was not happy with what was taking place. This verse makes one wonder what exactly what the people had "imagined to do". The scattering of the people abroad indicates a need for separation due to a collective compulsion to do evil. I suppose the most striking aspect of the story is that this happens so soon after the judgment of the whole earth by flood. It doesn't seem to take more than a few generations for evil to again take hold of a people. The principle I drew was that we must teach our children God's way. Indeed the first ministry we must have is to our own families, in teaching them to embrace Christ, and His commandments. Let us go forward in this effort with care.

Genesis 12:1-2 - "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:" One wonders why God chose Abraham. The answer is of course that God chooses whom He will, for His own reasons. What a wonderful privilege this was for God's man. Indeed anyone chosen by God is privileged, but Abraham was blessed like no other in all of scripture. He was chosen to be the father of God's great nation of people, and given deed to a great land. His choosing was the beginning of some of God's mightiest works in the world. Christ himself would come from Abraham's lineage many years later, and all happened in the plan of God from this very day. If God directs you to a specific path, you should walk it with careful precision. He sees all that is ahead, and has a plan to prosper His people in wonderful ways.

Genesis 12:12 - "Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive." This is a ridiculous presumption that causes Abraham and his wife great hurt. It is an idea that totally leaves God out of the picture, and causes Abraham to forget the Lord's promises to him. Most of the time we examine what happened, rather than reflect on the thought that set the events in motion. This can be a major problem for us too. We sometimes work up a scenario in our mind, without having any evidence that it is even possible. God had promised to bless Abraham greatly, yet soon after he is worrying about being killed by Egyptians. God also promises believer's His provision, and we lay awake nights wringing our hands about finances. Let's not make presumptions about what may happen, or we may end up like Abraham and Sarai.

Genesis 13:12 - "Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom." I have heard many a sermon on this passage of scripture. They have all been good, I might add. The phrase of focus is that Lot "pitched his tent toward Sodom". This is the beginning of Lot's great sorrow. Our lives will be in the same condition if we lean toward favoring sin, instead of feeding an intense hatred for it. The very least we can say about Lot in this action, is that he showed some interest in this wicked place called Sodom. A few chapters later we find Lot in the heart of the city, setting in a seat of some prominence there. He even degrades his principles to the extent he is willing to sacrifice his daughters, throwing them to a mob of angry perverts. His wife grew to love the city, and eventually lost her life in God's judgment. In all this, let us not forget that it began with a slight move toward embracing evil.

Genesis 15:6 - "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." This is a rather famous passage, that is quoted a couple of times in the New Testament, and remembered by many. There is good reason for this, as it tells us much about how God dealt with His Old Testament servants. Abraham had the same type of faith that we must have in God. There was nothing that Abraham could do to accomplish what God had promised. He could not assist the Lord, or make things happen himself. He instead could only place his whole life in God's hands, trusting Him to do what He said. God tells us in His word that Christ came to die in our place so that we might be saved. We trust that He is telling the truth, and put our eternal destiny in His hands. We can be confident Abraham did the same. We don't know all Abraham understood about the Messiah, but we do know God declared him righteous for Christ's sake, on the basis of faith.

Genesis 16:2 - "And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai." I would typically urge a husband to listen to what his wife has to say, but in this instance it was a very bad idea. This verse made me hearken back to other bad advice from Old Testament women, like Job's wife saying: "curse God and die." I could also hear echoes of Eve saying something like: "what could it hurt to just try the fruit?" Perhaps Jezebel was the queen of all the "bad advice" wives, as she often whispered some wicked plot in Ahab's ear. The spiritual condition of our wife matters little. Even a saved woman, (as I believe Sarai was) can come up with a doozie of a rotten scheme. Husbands must take careful note of what they do on the basis of their wives's suggestion. Even if your wife has a great track record, check out every idea as it comes, and measure it by God's word. This will affirm your headship in the home, and perhaps spare you some heartache.

Genesis 18:14 - "Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." The question that begins this verse comes with both a certain answer and a strict caution. There is no thing of any kind that is too hard for the Lord. At the same time, we must know that it is God that prompts us to believe, or do the thing that is seemingly too hard. What I mean is that many today believe God for big things that He has no intention of doing, because they are not in His will. Let us rejoice in the knowledge that even the most impossible desires of God are fulfilled, but be certain it is God's desire we are seeking after. In this situation the voice of the Lord was unmistakable, but it is not always that way. I have heard this verse used to rally congregations behind extravagant church building programs that were questionable at best. Is it impossible for God to pay off a large debt? No, but was it God's will to become indebted? Embrace the truth of this question, but don't abuse it.

Genesis 19:4-5 - "But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them." A strange thought came to mind as I read this passage. It is a thought that had never crossed my mind before in this context. Lot didn't seem to realize the power that lay within the grasp of the angels that lodged with him. The very power of Almighty God, the God who would destroy the city on the morrow was at their disposal if they would but call. We can affirm this in the next few verses, as the angels afflict the men with blindness. Isn't this often like us. God's power lay within our own homes, not in angels, but His word, yet when the enemy surrounds we instead resort to sin. Lot makes this terrible choice just three verses later. It is not so unlike the choices we may make if we forget God. Consider this application and hopefully you will be blessed as I was.

Genesis 19:14 - "And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law." This is the classic text about losing your influence. Lot had made so many compromises to gain and maintain his position in this wicked city, that his family members no longer respected him. He could likely "talk a good game" about his devotion to the Lord, but everyone knew the truth by his actions. We often think we can live a life that is less than obedient and still have a testimony in the lives of those we love. I'm afraid family members are not as easily fooled as friends or acquaintances. They see us in private moments; times when we are unable to put on our public, Christian face. Let's remember that others often see us for who we really are, and we can't expect them to embrace the message of a phony. Lot's compromise could have cost his son in laws their lives. Remember that being a truly obedient disciple always has eternal significance.

Genesis 22:1-2 - "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." This was not any ordinary command. A man of lesser faith would have ignored it for its difficulty. These type of requests from the Lord don't come often. I dare say another has never been made like it. Though we know the rest of the story, Abraham did not. He simply trusted that the Lord would work it together for his good. It's this type of story that causes us to forget that Bible characters were real people. Obedience in these circumstances seems nearly impossible to believe. Think of all that would go through a man's head at a time like this. Consider the painful seriousness of Abraham's command, then contrast it with your own lack of faith in small things. This type of identification with great Bible heroes can often do much to strengthen us.

Genesis 22:5 - "And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." This is perhaps the first indication of how strong Abraham's faith was in the sparing of Isaac. Here he makes a very clear statement that both will return. Doubters will lack faith in his willingness to carry out the act which God had asked of him. God differs with that view later in the chapter. The one who knows the hearts of all men knew that Abraham was set on doing what He asked. Therefore we know that Abraham's belief in God was consistent. This is a trait we see in all faithful people. Their belief does not come and go according to circumstance, and the people that are close to them observe it. These servants may not have known the whole story, but they were first-hand witnesses to the unwavering faith of their master. I wonder if those we know understand the same of us?

Genesis 22:13 - "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." Abraham had no idea that there would be a ram caught in this thicket. God had not revealed any special knowledge to him on the matter. He was left only with trusting a God he knew was absolutely faithful in all things. We are left with this same knowledge in many things today. God does not allow us to know what He will use to keep His promises, yet He commands we trust, leaving the rest to Him. A simple ram in a thicket was nothing to God. He was the one that created the ram, the thicket, and the mountain they were on. Much of what we trust God for is just as insignificant, yet we worry over it as though it may cause Him difficulty. He has no difficulties, and will perform all He chooses in His own perfect timing. What a wonderful sight

this ram, and what a terrific reminder that the God who provided it has also made provision for us in His son!

Genesis 24:1 - "And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things." It would be easy to pass by a verse such as this one with no real thought as to its significance. What a wonderful testimony to God's faithfulness in the life of a man that simply obeyed. It should also be a reminder to us of our goal for old age. Would it not be a wonderful thing to reach the end knowing that God had blessed us? As Abraham we will certainly have had our moments of chastisement and consequence for sin, yet the blessings should far outnumber them. A life of obedience to Him, is always a life of blessing from Him. We must choose day by day to do His will, understanding that His favor will follow. While blessing is not to be the motivation for service, it will likely be the result. Let's remember that an earthly life's rewards are only the beginning of what God has in store.

Genesis 24:10 - "And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor." This is a wonderful story. God is using Abraham's servant to bring together two of our favorite Bible heroes, and set an important foundation for Israel's history. In the midst of all the wonderful detail, I couldn't get past the second phrase in this verse. All of Abraham's goods were in the hand of this servant. How is it that a rich and powerful man such as Abraham could trust everything to a lowly servant? This man was not likely experienced in handling such wealth; perhaps he wasn't worthy? Yes, it is likely he wasn't, just as much as it is true we are not. Still, God gives us the inheritance of His son, and entrusts us with His gospel. I wonder if the granting of this responsibility points more to faithfulness of the Master than the servant?

Genesis 24:12 - "And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham." I find it fascinating that Abraham's servant would pray for speed, but only for the benefit of his master. He asks for success, but it is not for his own sake. The master's request is chief in his mind, and it is therefore necessary that God grant his request. This is somewhat parallel to the prayers Jesus often prayed. Glorifying His father was always the main concern, and whether that meant happiness or difficulty for Him was not much considered. He understood that if the Father's will was done, all would benefit, because God's desire is to bless His children. Putting Abraham first meant greater blessing for this servant, and putting our Master first will mean greater benefit for us. Let us have the mind of this servant, by choosing to do or say that which brings glory to our God.

Genesis 24:14 - "And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master." This is not an uncommon Biblical practice. I do not feel the servant was presumptuous of God in any way with this request. I believe he was simply attempting to find exactly the person God wanted for Isaac. He made a wise choice in selecting a woman that would act in such a way, because a person that did so would be displaying Godly character. This offering would show thoughtfulness, kindness, a servant's heart, and a commitment to others above self. Each of these attitudes is an indication of the maturity and integrity God would have required in the wife of a chosen servant. We should be careful in making statements in prayer like this one, remembering that we must put God's will above all else in any decision. This was a well thought out test in a difficult situation, and it is clear God used it to confirm Rebekah's worthiness to the servant.

Genesis 24:51-52 - "Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the LORD hath spoken. And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth." Sometimes we are just absolutely positive that the Lord has done something. It may have been difficult to give up a daughter, but these parents were able to do it, because it was the will of God. Parents are not often willing these days to give up a child for the Lord, at least in our American culture. They may even be the most vocal critics of a promising young person's call to the ministry. They may hope for more "secure" vocations for their sons and daughters; something that will give them status and stability. All thinking in this manner should be assured that there is no place more safe than in the center of God's will. If a person is certain, as in this situation, that God has spoken, they should follow. Even if there are no gold bracelets, flocks, and pieces of property where He beckons.

Genesis 24:58 - "And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." The final three words of the verse are so important for all Christians to learn. Sometimes we believe that only missionaries need to say "I will go", but really we all must. Even if it is just across the street to visit a lost neighbor, we have to be willing to follow. God may ask of us some big things in the future, but He will start with the small. Say yes to Him in the little things today, and you will be well on your way to obedience in bigger things for the future. Rebekah's response causes me to believe that she had already developed a habit of saying yes to the Master in the small things. She was only ready to take this great leap of faith, because she had made dozens, perhaps hundreds of small jumps in the past. If you find it difficult to take a small step for God now, you can forget about working up the courage later. Make one tiny decision for Christ in the

next twenty four hours, perhaps it should be something you have resisted in the past. Then set your goals higher in the next twenty four. You will not regret it!

Genesis 26:7 - "And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon." It seems too easy an application simply to say that children learn behaviors, good or bad, from their parents. On the other hand, some applications are indeed this simple. Here we find Isaac afraid for his life. Instead of relying upon God for safety, he chooses to develop his own solution, following the same pattern as his father before him. Whenever a man concentrates more on what may happen to him, than what is required of him, he finds himself in a vulnerable position. Both Abraham and Isaac share the common sin of not trusting God with their very lives. They feel they are better equipped than God to take care of their physical well-being, but they are both wrong. I have no doubt the reaction we see from Isaac was learned from his father. We must recognize our flaws and take Biblical action to eliminate them, understanding that if we do not, they may be repeated by our children.

Genesis 26:34-35 - "And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah." Sons and daughters in law often cause "grief of mind". Esau was wrong to take a Hittite wife, and doubly wrong to take two. God does not allow for His people to marry those who serve false gods. The Hebrew of old, and the Christian of today are on equal footing in this regard. It was not permissible for any Jew to marry a "foreign" wife, and no believer should ever be "unequally yoked". In both instances God is referring to the spiritual beliefs of a potential spouse. It is not merely their place of origin that creates a problem, but the implied paganism their origin indicates. Two people of opposite spiritual condition and world view are certain to have big trouble in marriage, and their in laws are also bound to feel the effects. Here we see a glimpse of the consequences Esau's sin caused within his family. This should be a lesson for everyone convinced their decision about a mate should be strictly their own. Perhaps your parents may have some valuable insight as well?

Genesis 27:20 - "And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the LORD thy God brought it to me." Isaac asks a sensible question in the midst of his son's deception. Isn't it interesting that Jacob brings God into the equation now? He thought nothing about God when he chose to lie to his father, yet he attempts to legitimize his falsehood here by offering manufactured praise to God! Bringing glory to Him was the farthest thing from Jacob's mind, yet it suited his need for an answer regarding the speed of his hunting. Those choosing to betray the Godly will often use their belief in Him as an advantage. Isaac lived a life of blessing from God, and would have eagerly praised Him for His provision. Jacob understood this, and he chose to drag God's goodness through the filthiest portion of his scheme, using his father's faith as an aid. I find this to be one of the lowest points of the entire plot. The name of God should never pass our lips without thought of how it is being used. Mentioning Jehovah should have been a conviction to Jacob, rather than a strategic advantage.

Genesis 29:31 - "And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren." I want to concentrate on just three words in this verse; "Leah was hated". No one can argue that Jacob was wronged by Laban, but was this the correct response? After the deception, Jacob's choice should have been to ask God for help in coping with his disappointment. He should not have served the second seven year term and taken on an additional wife. His "love" for Rachel was no justification for hating Leah, and subjecting her to a life of "sharing" her husband. God took specific action based upon Jacob's wrongdoing, giving grace unto the wife he should have learned to love. I see this as one of the most poorly understood stories in all scripture. I have even heard many Bible teachers praise Jacob for his actions, calling this the "greatest love story" in the Bible! Two things prove them wrong; God's response to Jacob's hatred, and Leah's place in the lineage of Christ. Do not be confused, God did not intend for Old Testament saints to have multiple wives. Their cultures often encouraged it, but it was still wrong, and God only chose to bless them in spite of their hardness of heart.

Genesis 32:11 - "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." This is the proper action for a man to take when he fears the future. Rather than choosing to turn his back on the land that God had directed him to, Jacob decides to be honest. He simply describes to the Lord his fears, and asks Him for help. There was no sign of a disobedient heart here, he was truly afraid, and truly seeking God's deliverance. It would be good for us to model Jacob's candor with our own prayer life. God knows our mind already, and would be pleased if we would admit our weakness and rely on Him. There was no need for Jacob to put on a brave face before his God. He did the best thing possible; present all his concerns before the Lord and wait for an answer. We should do the same whether it be in times of fear, anger, sadness, confusion or defeat. He knows our hearts, and will delight in our complete reliance.

Genesis 35:11-12 - "And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of

nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.” God does not forget His promises. While we are often in need of a reminder, God never lets anything slip His mind. I think we sometimes read a promise in scripture, affirming it intellectually as a fact, but not really believing it. That is why we often lack the faith to turn the difficult things over to God. I suppose a man that is informed by God that kings will be numbered among his offspring might let a moment of doubt enter in. That doubt is from the flesh; because we know God is perfectly trustworthy in all things. God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is still valid, and though much of it has been fulfilled, there is still more to come. The land belongs to Israel, and we can be absolutely certain they will have it. If we consider God’s character when examining a promise, we should have no difficulty fully believing it. All that our Lord says we can count on, so let’s embrace His word without even a momentary doubt!

Genesis 37:3-4 - “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.” As we begin the story of Joseph, we can’t help but feel somewhat sorry for his brothers. It was clear that Jacob loved him most, and we recognize how parental favoritism often creates resentment, therefore we are tempted to give the brothers a pass. The truth that shakes us from our momentary empathy is that all relational sins have a cause. The fact is, we are often prompted to sin against another because of something they have done (or been) to make us angry. This is no excuse whatsoever for sin. Certainly Jacob was wrong; and I would not be surprised if Joseph took a moment to flaunt his coat, which would also have been wrong. Still, no man can use another man’s evil to justify his own. Be careful not to use the actions of others as justification. Let’s be hard to offend and quick to forgive, so as not to follow in the footsteps of Joseph’s brethren.

Genesis 39:3-4 - “And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.” Men who are faithful to the Lord make good employees, and are often first to be promoted for their diligence. The attributes of a Godly person are even recognized by the lost, especially in the context of business. Hard work, attention to detail, obedience and loyalty are traits all employers are looking for, and traits every believer should develop. Let us not fail to also acknowledge God’s direction. Joseph had certainly developed righteous character, but it was also true that the Lord had a purpose in mind for him. No one will ever know what may have happened if Joseph had not been sold into slavery. What we do know is that God used this man’s character in the midst of the slavery to prosper him. If we seek to build character simply for the sake of success, we may well be disappointed. Let us rather seek to please Him by joyfully following any path He sets before us.

Genesis 39:12 - “And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.” One of my favorite phrases in all the Bible appears in this verse. Joseph “got him out”; what a wonderful, righteous action. He didn’t fool himself into believing he could pluck up the courage to resist, he just ran. I’m afraid some people believe that truly great men were made of mightier stuff than we are. The truth is, they just took God at His word. In this case we understand that God demands we “flee youthful lusts”; simple instructions that are eminently effective in avoiding sin. There are no religious supermen by nature, there are only men who choose to follow God’s instruction, and men who choose to go their own way. Anyone confronted by a situation similar to this one would be well served not to rely on inner strength. He should turn on his heels and run! If you have an inflated sense of your own ability to resist, you need to rethink it right away. The Bible describes Joseph as a man of great character, but when sexual temptation came, it was not his character he relied on; it was his feet.

Genesis 41:39-40 - “And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.” The action of this all-powerful leader may seem impulsive and reckless at first reading. He is choosing to elevate to the second most powerful position in his administration a man who is not only of foreign origin, but also a former slave and prisoner. The potential ramifications of this decision, if it were wrong, could have been monumental. A man that were secretly set against Pharaoh could have supplanted and destroyed him, by wielding the very power he had yielded to them. No leader would have willingly opened himself to these possibilities without the intervention of God. That is clearly what we see occurring here. God has intervened in this situation to provide blessing for Joseph, in fulfillment of His plan. No person can manufacture this type of development in life. Our only hope lies in following our Savior down His path of leading. We will not know where our path will finally lead, but we know for certain that God works together for our good. Let us look to Joseph as a delightful example of this truth.

Genesis 45:5 - “Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.” When a man has a heart of anger and unforgiveness, typically all he can think about is himself.

He rehearses the offense over and over in his mind, remembering his pain, and dwelling on the wrong that was done him. The important thing is that the offender pay for what they have done, no matter how unjust or inequitable the payment may be. Joseph was not such a person. Here he chooses the antithesis of sin. Instead of dwelling on himself, he thinks only of the well-being of Egypt, his father, and the very brothers that wronged him. What's even more astonishing is that he dismisses the offense, even to the point of comforting his brothers by acknowledging God's plan to turn it around! While this is a right and holy action, it is certainly not instinctive. Our flesh automatically demands we defend and protect ourselves, laying all blame on others. This is why we must look to God for help in matters of forgiveness. His will is that we instead act after the example of Joseph.

Genesis 50:19-20 - "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." The question in verse 19 is key to understanding the theme of forgiveness. To hold a sin against another, or to take vengeance for their evil is to put one's self in the place of God. Sins are self-centered actions; by their very nature they put us in a place (in our own minds) of equality with God. By indulging ourselves in sin, we are making ourselves preminent. When we do this, we are both acting against our own best interest, and rejecting the potential for a wonderful working of God. Joseph chose not to put himself first, and, in God's reverse logic, therefore obtained a greater benefit. Can't we see like Joseph that by doing what we want we are working against God? He had a magnificent plan in mind for this young man sold into slavery. Let us not automatically assume all difficult things are bad for us. Certainly it will be hard to see good at the moment of pain, but if we take a moment to observe the bigger picture, we may realize that our Lord indeed works in the most evil of circumstances.