

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

# BIBLE HISTORY OLD TESTAMENT VOL. 1



ALFRED EDERSHEIM



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# **Bible History Old Testament Vol.1**

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Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

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# **The World before the Flood, and the History of the Patriarchs**



## Preface

One of the most marked and hopeful signs of our time is the increasing attention given on all sides to the study of Holy Scripture. Those who believe and love the Bible, who have experienced its truth and power, can only rejoice at such an issue. They know that “the Word of God liveth and abideth forever,” that “not one tittle” of it “shall fail;” and that it is “able to make wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Accordingly they have no reason to dread the results either of scientific investigation, or of searching inquiry into “those things which are most surely believed among us.” For, the more the Bible is studied, the deeper will be our conviction that “the foundation of God standeth sure.”

It is to help, so far as we can, the reader of Holy Scripture—not to supersede his own reading of it—that the series, of which this is the first volume, has been undertaken. In writing it I have primarily had in view those who teach and those who learn, whether in the school or in the family. But my scope has also been wider. I have wished to furnish what may be useful for reading in the family,—what indeed may, in some measure, serve the place of a popular exposition of the sacred history. More than this, I hope it may likewise prove a book to put in the hands of young men,—not only to show them what the Bible really teaches, but to defend them against the insidious attacks arising from misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the sacred text.

With this threefold object in view, I have endeavored to write in a form so popular and easily intelligible as to be of use to the Sunday-school teacher, the advanced scholar, and the Bible-class; progressing gradually, in the course of this and the next volume, from the more simple to the more detailed. At the same time, I have taken up the Scripture narrative successively, chapter by chapter, always marking the portions of the Bible explained, that so, in family or in private reading, the sacred text may be compared with

the explanations furnished. Finally, without mentioning objections on the part of opponents, I have endeavored to meet those that have been raised, and that not by controversy, but rather by a more full and correct study of the sacred text itself in the Hebrew original. In so doing, I have freely availed myself not only of the results of [4] the best criticism, German and English, but also of the aid of such kindred studies as those of Biblical geography and antiquities, the Egyptian and the Assyrian monuments, etc.

But when all has been done, the feeling grows only more strong that there is another and a higher understanding of the Bible, without which all else is vain. Not merely to know the meaning of the narratives of Scripture, but to realize their spiritual application; to feel their eternal import; to experience them in ourselves, so to speak—this is the only profitable study of Scripture, to which all else can only serve as outward preparation. Where the result is “doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness,” the Teacher must be like Him, by whose “inspiration all Scripture is given.” “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” But the end of all is Christ—not only “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,” but also He in whom “all the promises of God are Yea and Amen.”  
—A. E. Heniach Bournemouth.

**Dates of Events Recorded in the Book of Genesis,  
According to Hales, Ussher, and Keil.**

[5]

*Column 1—Ussher, Before Christ; Column 2—Ussher, Year of the  
World; Column 3—Event; Column 4—Hales, Before Christ;  
Column 5—Hales, Year of the World; Column 6—Keil, Year after  
the immigration into—Canaan*

<b>Ussher B.C.</b>	<b>Ussher Y.W.</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Hales B.C.</b>	<b>Hales Y.W.</b>	<b>Keil Y.C.</b>
4004	1	The Creation	5411	1	
3874	130	Birth of Seth	5181	230	
3769	235	Bith of Enos	4976	435	
3679	325	Birth of Cainan	4786	625	
3609	395	Bith of Ma- haleel	4616	795	
3074	930	Death of Adam	4481	930	
3544	460	Birth of Jared	4451	960	
3382	622	Birth of Enoch	4289	1122	
3317	687	Birth of Methuse- lah	4124	1287	

3130	874	Birth of Lamech	3937	1474	
3017	987	Transla- tion of Enoch	3914	1487	
2948	1056	Birth of Noah	3755	1656	
2348	1656	Deluge	3155	2256	
2346	1658	Birth of Arphaxad	3153	2258	
2311	1693	Birth of Salah	3018	2393	
2281	1723	Birth of Heber	2888	2523	
2247	1757	Birth of Pelag	2754	2657	
2233	1771	Confu- sion of Tongues	2554	2857	
2217	1787	Birth of Reu	2624	2787	
2185	1819	Birth of Serug	2492	2919	
2155	1849	Birth of Nahor	2362	3049	
2126	1878	Birth of Terah	2283	3128	
1998	2006	Death of Noah	2805	2606	
1996	2008	Birth of Abram	2153	3258	

*Dates of Events Recorded in the Book of Genesis, According to Hales, Ussher,  
and Keil.*

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1921	2083	Abram in Canaan	2078	3333	1
1910	2094	Birth of Ismael	2067	3344	11
		Beg of Circum- cision			24
1896	2108	Birth of Isaac	2053	3358	25
		Death of Sarah			62
1856	2148	Mar- riage of Isaac	2013	3398	65
1836	2168	Birth of Esau & Jacob	1993	3418	85
		Death of Abra- ham			100
		Esau's Mar- riage			125
		Death of Ishmael	1916	3495	148
1760		Jacob to Padan Aram			162
		Jacob's Mar- riage			169

1745	2259	Birth of Joseph	1902	3509	176
1739	2265	Jacob to Canaan	1896	3515	182
1732	2272	Jacob at Hebron	1889	3522	192
1728	2276	Joseph sold into Egypt	1885	3526	193
1716	2288	Death of Isaac	1873	3538	205
1715	2289	Joseph Gov. of Egypt	1872	3539	206
1706	2298	Jacob goes to Egypt	1863	3548	215
1689	2315	Death of Jacob	1846	3565	232
1635	2369	Death of Joseph	1792	3619	286

- [6] The reader will find in Ch. 10, some explanations regarding the systems of Chronology by Ussher and Hales. Hales professes to follow the text of the Greek or LXX translation of the Old Testament, correcting it by the Jewish historian Josephus, whose dates, however, are often manifestly very inaccurate. Ussher professes to follow the Hebrew text. The modern Jewish chronology places the birth of Isaac, when Abraham was one hundred years old, in the year of the world 2048. With this latter very nearly agrees the chronology adopted by a celebrated modern German commentator, Professor Keil, who places it only two years earlier, viz. in 2046. We have given in the last column, according to the chronology of Keil, the succession of events after the migration of Abram into Canaan. Keil

*Dates of Events Recorded in the Book of Genesis, According to Hales, Ussher,*

*and Keil.*

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places the latter event in the year of the world 2021, and before Christ 2137. From this the reader will easily be able to calculate all the other dates according to the chronology of Keil, which on the whole seems to us the most reliable. He bases it on the following data: according to [1 Kings 6:1](#), the Temple of Solomon was built 480 years after the Exodus, while the deportation of Israel into Babylon took place 406 years after the building of the Temple, that is, in all, 886 years after the Exodus. But as the commencement of the Exile must have fallen in the year 606 before Christ, we have the year 1492 before Christ (or 2666 after the Creation) as that of the Exodus. The year 606 before Christ is fixed as that of the commencement of the Babylonish exile, because it ended after 70 years, in the first year of the sole reign of Cyrus, which we know to have been the year 536 before Christ.

## Introduction

That the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” is also the “God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” and that “they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham,”—these are among the most precious truths of revelation. They show us not only the faithfulness of our God, and the greatness of our privileges, but also the marvelous wisdom of the plan of salvation, and its consistency throughout. For the Bible should be viewed, not only in its single books, but in their connection, and in the unity of the whole. The Old Testament could not be broken off from the New, and each considered as independent of the other. Nor yet could any part of the Old Testament be disjoined from the rest. The full meaning and beauty of each appears only in the harmony and unity of the whole. Thus they all form links of one unbroken chain, reaching from the beginning to the time when the Lord Jesus Christ came, for whom all previous history had prepared, to whom all the types pointed, and in whom all the promises are “Yea and Amen.” Then that which God had spoken to Abraham, more than two thousand years before, became a blessed reality, for “the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” That this one grand purpose should have been steadily kept in view, and carried forward through all the vicissitudes of history, changes of time, and stages of civilization,—and that without requiring any alteration, only further unfolding and at last completion—affords indeed the strongest confirmation to our faith. It is also a precious comfort to our hearts; for we see how God’s purpose of mercy has been always the same; and, walking the same pilgrim-way which “the fathers” had trod, and along which God had safely guided the Covenant, we rejoice to know that neither opposition of man nor yet unfaithfulness on the part of His professing people can make void the gracious counsel of God:



“He loved us from the first of time,  
He loves us to the last.”

And this it is which we learn from the unity of Scripture.

But yet another and equally important truth may be gathered. There is not merely harmony but also close connection between the various parts of Scripture. Each book illustrates the other, taking up its teaching and carrying it forward. Thus the unity of Scripture is not like that of a stately building, however ingenious its plan or vast its proportions; but rather, to use a Biblical illustration, like that of the light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. We mark throughout growth in its progress, as men were able to bear fuller communications, and prepared for their reception. The law, the types, the history, the prophecies, and the promises of the Old Testament all progressively unfold and develop the same truth, until it appears at last in its New Testament fullness. Though all testify of the same thing, not one of them could safely be left out, nor yet do we properly understand any one part unless we view it in its bearing and connection with the others. And so when at last we come to the close of Scripture, we see how the account of the creation and of the first calling of the children of God, which had been recorded in the book of Genesis, has found its full counterpart—its fulfillment—in the book of Revelation, which tells the glories of the second creation, and the perfecting of the Church of God. As one of the old Church teachers (St. Augustine) writes:

[8]

“Novum Testamentum in vetere latet,  
Vetus in novo patet.”<sup>1</sup>

That in a work composed of so many books, written under such very different circumstances, by penmen so different, and at periods so widely apart, there should be “some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest,” can surely not surprise us, more particularly when we remember that it was God’s purpose only to send the brighter light as men were able to bear it. Besides, we must expect that with our limited powers and knowledge

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<sup>1</sup>“Only in the New Covenant does the Old unfold, And hidden lies the New Testament in the Old.”

we shall not be able fully to understand the ways of God. But, on the other hand, this may be safely said, that the more deep, calm, and careful our study, the more ample the evidence it will bring to light to confirm our faith against all attacks of the enemy. Yet the ultimate object of our reading is not knowledge, but experience of grace. For, properly understood, the Scripture is all full of Christ, and all intended to point to Christ as our only Savior. It is not only [9] the law, which is a schoolmaster unto Christ, nor the types, which are shadows of Christ, nor yet the prophecies, which are predictions of Christ; but the whole Old Testament history is full of Christ. Even where persons are not, events may be types. If any one failed to see in Isaac or in Joseph a personal type of Christ, he could not deny that the offering up of Isaac, or the selling of Joseph, and his making provision for the sustenance of his brethren, are typical of events in the history of our Lord. And so indeed every event points to Christ, even as He is alike the beginning, the center, and the end of all history—"the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." One thing follows from this: only that reading or study of the Scriptures can be sufficient or profitable through which we learn to know Christ—and that as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" to us. And for this purpose we ought constantly to ask the aid and teaching of the Holy Spirit.

A few brief remarks, helpful to the study of patriarchal history, may here find a place. In general, the Old Testament may be arranged into "The Law and the Prophets."<sup>2</sup>

It was possibly with reference to this division that the Law consisted of the five books of Moses—ten being the symbolical number of completeness, and the Law with its commands being only half complete without "the Prophets" and the promises. But assuredly to the fivefold division of the Law answers the arrangement of the

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<sup>2</sup>Matthew 11:13, 22:40; Acts 13:15, etc. The ordinary Jewish division is into the Law (five books of Moses); the Prophets (earlier: Joshua, Judges 1 and 2 Samuel 1 and 2 Kings; and later: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets); and "The Writings," or sacred writings, hagiographa,—which comprise The Psalms, Proverbs, and Job;—the "five rolls," read at special festivals in the Synagogue: the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther; -Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles (called in Hebrews "Words, or Acts, of the Days," journals, or diaries). Comp. Luke 24:44.

Psalms into five books, of which each closes with a benediction, as follows:

- Book 1: [Psalm 1-41](#)
- Book 2: [Psalm 42-72](#)
- Book 3: [Psalm 73-89](#)
- Book 4: [Psalm 90-106](#)
- Book 5: [Psalm 107-150](#)

the last Psalm standing as a grand final benediction.

The Law or the Five Books of Moses are commonly called the Pentateuch, a Greek term meaning the “fivefold,” or “five-parted” Book. Each of these five books commonly bears a title given by the Greek translators of the Old Testament (the so-called LXX.), in accordance with the contents of each: Genesis (origin, creation), Exodus (going out from Egypt), Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (Second Law, or the Law a second time). The Jews designate each book by the first or else the most prominent word with which it begins. [10]

The book of Genesis consists of two great parts, each again divided into five sections. Every section is clearly marked by being introduced as “generations,” or “originations”—in Hebrew Toldoth—as follows:

### **Part 1—The History of the World to the Final Arrangement and Settlement of the Various Nations**

- General Introduction: Chap. 1-2:3.
- Generations of the Heavens and the Earth, 2:4-4:26.
- Book of the Generations of Adam 5-6:8.
- The Generations of Noah, 6:9-9:29.
- The Generations of the Sons of Noah 10-11:9.
- The Generations of Shem, 11:10-26.

### **Part 2—Patriarchal History**

The Generations of Terah (the father of Abraham), 11:27-25:11.

The Generations of Ishmael 25:12-18.

The Generations of Isaac, 25:19-35:29

The Generations of Esau, 36.

The Generations of Jacob, 37.

These two parts make together ten sections—the number of completeness,—and each section varies in length with the importance of its contents, so far as they bear upon the history of the kingdom of God. For, both these parts, or rather the periods which they describe, have such bearing. In the first we are successively shown man's original position and relationship towards God; then his fall, and the consequent need of redemption; and next God's gracious provision of mercy. The acceptance or rejection of this provision implies the separation of all mankind into two classes—the Sethites and the Cainites. Again, the judgment of the flood upon the ungodly, and the preservation of His own people, are typical for all time; while the genealogies and divisions of the various nations, and the separation of Shem, imply the selection of one nation, from whom salvation should spring for all mankind. In this first part the interest of the history groups around events rather than persons. It is otherwise in the second part, where the history of the Covenant and of the Covenant-people begins with the calling of Abraham, and is continued in Isaac, in Jacob, and in his descendants. Here the interest [11] centers in persons rather than events, and we are successively shown God's rich promises as they unfold, and God's gracious dealings as they contribute to the training of the patriarchs. The book of Genesis, and with it the first period of the Covenant history, closes when the family had expanded into a nation.

Finally, with reference to the special arrangement of the “generations” recorded throughout the book of Genesis, it will be noticed that, so to speak, the side branches are always cut off before the main branch is carried onwards. Thus the history of Cain and of his race precedes that of Seth and his race; the genealogy of Japheth and of Ham that of Shem; and the history of Ishmael and Esau that of Isaac and of Jacob. For the principle of election and selection, of separation and of grace, underlies from the first the whole history of the Covenant. It appears in the calling of Abraham, and is continued throughout the history of the patriarchs; and although the holy family

enlarges into the nation, the promise narrows first to the house of David, and finally to one individual—the Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one Prophet, the one Priest, the one King, that in Him the kingdom of heaven might be opened to all believers, and from Him the blessings of salvation flow unto all men.



**Part 1—The History of the World to the  
Final Arrangement and Settlement of the  
Various Nations**

[12]

## Chapter 1

*Creation—Man in the Garden of Eden—The Fall*

(Genesis 1-3)

“He that cometh unto God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” Hence Holy Scripture, which contains the revealed record of God’s dealings and purposes with man, commences with an account of the creation. “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.”

Four great truths, which have their bearing on every part of revelation, come to us from the earliest Scripture narrative, like the four rivers which sprung in the garden of Eden. The first of these truths is—the creation of all things by the word of God’s power; the second, the descent of all men from our common parents, Adam and Eve; the third, our connection with Adam as the head of the human race, through which all mankind were involved in his sin and fall; and the fourth, that One descended from Adam, yet without his sin, should by suffering free us from the consequences of the fall, and as the second Adam became the Author of eternal salvation to all who trust in Him. To these four vital truths there might be added, as a fifth, the institution of one day in seven to be a day of holy rest unto God. It is scarcely possible to imagine a greater contrast than between the heathen accounts of the origin of all things and the scriptural narrative. The former are so full of the grossly absurd that no one could regard them as other than fables; while the latter is so simple, and yet so full of majesty, as almost to force us to “worship and bow down,” and to “kneel before the Lord our Maker.” And as this was indeed the object in view, and not scientific instruction, far less the gratification of our curiosity, we must expect to find in the first chapter of Genesis simply the grand outlines of



what took place, and not any details connected with creation. On these points there is ample room for such information as science may be able to supply, when once it shall have carefully selected and sifted all that can be learned from the study of earth and of nature. That time, however, has not yet arrived; and we ought, therefore, to be on our guard against the rash and unwarranted statements which have sometimes been brought forward on these subjects. Scripture places before us the successive creation of all things, so to speak, in an ascending scale, till at last we come to that of man, the chief of God's works, and whom his Maker destined to be lord of all. (Psalm 8:3-8) Some have imagined that the six days of creation represent so many periods, rather than literal days, chiefly on the ground of the supposed high antiquity of our globe, and the various great epochs or periods, each terminating in a grand revolution, through which our earth seems to have passed, before coming to its present state, when it became a fit habitation for man. There is, however, no need to resort to any such theory. The first verse in the book of Genesis simply states the general fact, that "In the beginning"—whenever that may have been—"God created the heaven and the earth." Then, in the second verse, we find earth described as it was at the close of the last great revolution, preceding the present state of things: "And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." An almost indefinite space of time, and many changes, may therefore have intervened between the creation of heaven and earth, as mentioned in [ver. 1](#), and the chaotic state of our earth, as described in [ver. 2](#). As for the exact date of the first creation, it may be safely affirmed that we have not yet the knowledge sufficient to arrive at any really trustworthy conclusion.

[14]

It is of far greater importance for us, however, to know that God "created all things by Jesus Christ;" ([Ephesians 3:9](#)) and further, that "all things were created by Him, and for Him," ([Colossians 1:16](#)) and that "of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things." ([Romans 11:36](#). See also [1 Corinthians 8:6](#); [Hebrews 1:2](#); [John 1:3](#)) This gives not only unity to all creation, but places it in living connection with our Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time we should also always bear in mind, that it is "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." ([Hebrews 11:3](#))

Everything as it proceeded from the hand of God was “very good,”<sup>1</sup>

[15] that is, perfect to answer the purpose for which it had been destined. “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. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.” It is upon this original institution of the Sabbath as a day of holy rest that our observance of the Lord’s day is finally based, the change in the precise day—from the seventh to the first of the week—having been occasioned by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which not only the first, but also the new creation was finally completed. (See [Isaiah 65:17](#))

Of all His works God only “created man in His own image: in the image of God created He him.” This expression refers not merely to the intelligence with which God endowed, and the immortality with which He gifted man, but also to the perfect moral and spiritual nature which man at the first possessed. And all his surroundings were in accordance with his happy state. God “put him into the garden of Eden<sup>2</sup> to dress it and to keep it,” and gave him a congenial companion in Eve, whom Adam recognized as bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh. Thus as God had, by setting apart the Sabbath day, indicated worship as the proper relationship between man and his Creator, so He also laid in Paradise the foundation of civil society by the institution of marriage and of the family. (Comp. [Mark 10:6, 9](#))

It now only remained to test man’s obedience to God, and to prepare him for yet higher and greater privileges than those which he

<sup>1</sup>It is noteworthy that in [Genesis 1](#) we always read, “And the evening and the morning were the first day,” or second, or third day, etc. Hence the Jews calculate the day from evening to evening, that is, from the first appearance of the stars in the evening to the first appearance of stars next evening, and not, as we do, from midnight to midnight.

<sup>2</sup>Many different views have been broached as to the exact locality of Eden, which it would scarcely be suitable to discuss in this place. The two opinions deserving most attention are those which place it either near the northern highlands of Armenia, or else far south in the neighborhood of the Persian Gulf. We know that two of the streams mentioned as issuing from Paradise were the Tigris and the Euphrates, and we can readily conceive that the changes subsequently produced by the flood may have rendered the other descriptions of the district inapplicable to its present aspect.

already enjoyed. But evil was already in this world of ours, for Satan and his angels had rebelled against God. The scriptural account of man's trial is exceedingly brief and simple. We are told: that "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" had been placed "in the midst of the garden," and of the fruit of this tree God forbade Adam to eat, on pain of death. On the other hand, there was also "the tree of life" in the garden, probably as symbol and pledge of a higher life, which we should have inherited if our first parents had continued obedient to God. The issue of this trial came only too soon. The tempter, under the form of a serpent, approached Eve. He denied the threatenings of God, and deceived her as to the real consequences of eating the forbidden fruit. This, followed by the enticement of her own senses, led Eve first to eat, and then to induce her husband to do likewise. Their sin had its immediate consequence. They had aimed to be "as gods," and, instead of absolutely submitting themselves to the command of the Lord, acted independently of Him. And now their eyes were indeed opened, as the tempter had promised, "to know good and evil;" but only in their own guilty knowledge of sin, which immediately prompted the wish to hide themselves from the presence of God. Thus, their alienation and departure from God, the condemning voice of their conscience, and their sorrow and shame gave evidence that the Divine threatening had already been accomplished: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The sentence of death which God now pronounced on our first parents extended both to their bodily and their spiritual nature—to their mortal and immortal part. In the day he sinned man died in body, soul, and spirit. And because Adam, as the head of his race, represented the whole; and as through him we should all have entered upon a very high and happy state of being, if he had remained obedient, so now the consequences of his disobedience have extended to us all; and as "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin," so "death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Nay, even "creation itself," which had been placed under his dominion, was made through his fall "subject to vanity," and came under the curse, as God said to Adam: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee."

[16]

[17] God, in His infinite mercy, did not leave man to perish in his sin. He was indeed driven forth from Paradise, for which he was no longer fit. But, before that, God had pronounced the curse upon his tempter, Satan, and had given man the precious promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent; that is, that our blessed Savior, “born of a woman,” should redeem us from the power of sin and of death, through His own obedience, death, and resurrection. And even the labor of his hands, to which man was now doomed, was in the circumstances a boon.

Therefore, when our first parents left the garden of Eden, it was not without hope, nor into outer darkness. They carried with them the promise of a Redeemer, the assurance of the final defeat of the great enemy, as well as the Divine institution of a Sabbath on which to worship, and of the marriage-bond by which to be joined together into families. Thus the foundations of the Christian life in all its bearings were laid in Paradise.

There are still other points of practical interest to be gathered up. The descent of all mankind from our first parents determines our spiritual relationship to Adam. In Adam all have sinned and fallen. But, on the other hand, it also determines our spiritual relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the second Adam, which rests on precisely the same grounds. For “as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly,” and “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” The descent of all mankind from one common stock has in times past been questioned by some, although Scripture expressly teaches that “He has made of one blood all nations, for to dwell on the face of the earth.” It is remarkable that this denial, which certainly never was shared by the most competent men of science, has quite lately been, we may say, almost universally abandoned, and the original unity of the human race in their common descent is now a generally accepted fact.

Here, moreover, we meet for the first time with that strange resemblance to revealed religion which makes heathenism so like and yet so unlike the religion of the Old Testament. As in the soul of man we see the ruins of what he had been before the fall, so in the legends and traditions of the various religions of antiquity

we recognize the echoes of what men had originally heard from the mouth of God. Not only one race, but almost all nations, have in their traditions preserved some dim remembrance alike of an originally happy and holy state,—a so-called golden age—in which the intercourse between heaven and earth was unbroken, and of a subsequent sin and fall of mankind. And all nations also have cherished a faint belief in some future return of this happy state, that is, in some kind of coming redemption, just as in their inmost hearts all men have at least a faint longing for a Redeemer. [18]

Meanwhile, this grand primeval promise, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent,” would stand out as a beacon-light to all mankind on their way, burning brighter and brighter, first in the promise to Shem, next in that to Abraham, then in the prophecy of Jacob, and so on through the types of the Law to the promises of the Prophets, till in the fullness of time “the Sun of Righteousness” arose “with healing under His wings!”

## Chapter 2

### *Cain and Abel—The Two Ways and the Two Races*

(Genesis 4)

The language in which Scripture tells the second great event in history is once more exceedingly simple. Two of the children of Adam and Eve are alone mentioned: Cain and Abel. Not that there were no others, but that the progress of Scripture history is connected with these two. For the Bible does not profess to give a detailed history of the world, nor even a complete biography of those persons whom it introduces. Its object is to set before us a history of the kingdom of God, and it only describes such persons and events as is necessary for that purpose. Of the two sons of Adam and Eve, Cain was the elder, and indeed, as we gather, the first-born of all their children. Throughout antiquity, and in the East to this day, proper names are regarded as significant of a deeper meaning. When Eve called her first-born son Cain (“gotten,” or “acquired”), she said, “I have gotten a man from Jehovah.”<sup>1</sup>

Apparently she connected the birth of her son with the immediate fulfillment of the promise concerning the Seed, who was to bruise the head of the serpent. This expectation was, if we may be allowed the comparison, as natural on her part as that of the immediate return of our Lord by some of the early Christians. It also showed how deeply this hope had sunk into her heart, how lively was her faith in the fulfillment of the promise, and how ardent her longing for it. But if such had been her views, they must have been speedily disappointed. Perhaps for this very reason, or else because she had been more fully informed, or on other grounds with which we are not acquainted, the other son of Adam and Eve, mentioned in Scripture, was named Abel, that is “breath,” or “fading away.”

<sup>1</sup>It may be well here to note that whenever the word Lord is printed in our English Bibles in capitals, its Hebrew equivalent is Jehovah—a term which marks the idea of the covenant God.

What in the history of these two youths is of scriptural importance, is summed up in the statement that “Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.” We next meet them, each bringing an offering unto Jehovah; Cain “of the fruit of the ground,” and Abel “of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof.” Jehovah “had respect unto Abel and his offering,” probably marking His acceptance by some outward and visible manifestation; “but [20] unto Cain and his offering He had not respect.” Instead of inquiring into the reason of his rejection, and trying to have it removed, Cain now gave way to feelings of anger and jealousy. In His mercy, God indeed brought before him his sin, warned him of its danger, and pointed out the way of escape. But Cain had chosen his course.

Meeting his brother in the field, angry words led to murderous deed, and earth witnessed the first death, more terrible than it was violent, and at a brother’s hand. Once more the voice of Jehovah called Cain to account, and again he hardened himself, this time almost disowning the authority of God. But the mighty hand of the Judge was on the unrepenting murderer.

Adam had, so to speak, broken the first great commandment, Cain the first and the second; Adam had committed sin, Cain both sin and crime. As a warning, and yet as a witness to all, Cain, driven from his previous chosen occupation as a tiller of the ground, was sent forth “a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth.” So—if we may again resort to analogy—was Israel driven forth into all lands, when with wicked hands they had crucified and slain Him whose blood “speaketh better things than that of Abel.” But even this punishment, though “greater” than Cain “can bear,” leads him not to repentance, only to fear of its consequences. And “lest any finding him should kill him,” Jehovah set a mark upon Cain, just as He made the Jews, amidst all their persecutions, an indestructible people.

Only in their case the gracious Lord has a purpose of mercy; for they shall return again to the Lord their God—“all Israel shall be saved;” and their bringing in shall be as life from the dead. But as for Cain, he “went out from the presence of Jehovah, and dwelt in the land of Nod, that is, of “wandering” or “unrest.” The last that we read of him is still in accordance with all his previous life: “he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.”

[21] Now, there are some lessons quite on the surface of this narrative. Thus we mark the difference in the sacrifice of the two brothers—the one “of the fruit of the ground,” the other an animal sacrifice. Again, the offering of Cain is described merely in general terms; while Abel’s is said to be “of the firstlings of his flock”—the first being in acknowledgment that all was God’s, “and of the fat thereof,” that is, of the best. So also we note, how faithfully God warns, and how kindly He points Cain to the way of escape from the power of sin. On the other hand, the murderous deed of Cain affords a terrible illustration of the words in which the Lord Jesus has taught us, that angry bitter feelings against a brother are in reality murder ([Matthew 5:22](#)), showing us what is, so to speak, the full outcome of self-willedness, of anger, envy, and jealousy. Yet another lesson to be learned from this history is, that our sin will at the last assuredly find us out, and yet that no punishment, however terrible, can ever have the effect of changing the heart of a man, or altering his state and the current of his life. To these might be added the bitter truth, which godless men will perceive all too late, that, as Cain was at the last driven forth from the ground of which he had taken possession, so assuredly all who seek their portion in this world will find their hopes disappointed, even in those things for which they had sacrificed the “better part.” In this respect the later teaching of Scripture ([Psalm 49](#)) seems to be contained in germ in the history of Cain and Abel.

If from these obvious lessons we turn to the New Testament for further light on this history, we find in the Epistle of Jude ([ver. 2](#)) a general warning against going “in the way of Cain;” while St. John makes it an occasion of admonishing to brotherly love:

“Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” ([1 John 3:12](#))

But the fullest information is derived from the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we read, on the one hand, that “without faith it is impossible to please God,” and, on the other, that “by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he, being dead, yet speaketh.” ([Hebrews 11:4](#))

Scripture here takes us up, as it were, to the highest point in the lives of the two brothers—their sacrifice—and tells us of the



presence of faith in the one, and of its absence in the other. This showed itself alike in the manner and in the kind of their sacrifice. But the faith which prompted the sacrifice of Abel, and the want of faith which characterized that of Cain, must, of course, have existed and appeared long before. Hence St. John also says that Cain “was of that wicked one,” meaning that he had all along yielded himself to the power of that tempter who had ruined our first parents. A little consideration will explain this, and, at the same time, bring the character and conduct of Cain into clearer light. [22]

After the fall the position of man towards God was entirely changed. In the garden of Eden man’s hope of being confirmed in his estate and of advancing upwards depended on his perfect obedience. But man disobeyed and fell. Henceforth his hope for the future could no longer be derived from perfect obedience, which, indeed, in his fallen state was impossible. So to speak, the way of “doing” had been set before him, and it had ended, through sin, in death. God in His infinite grace now opened to man another path. He set before him the hope of faith. The promise which God freely gave to man was that of a Deliverer, who would bruise the head of the serpent, and destroy his works. Now, it was possible either to embrace this promise by faith, and in that case to cling to it and set his heart thereon, or else to refuse this hope and turn away from it. Here, then, at the very opening of the history of the kingdom, we have the two different ways which, as the world and the kingdom of God, have ever since divided men. If we further ask ourselves what those would do who rejected the hope of faith, how they would show it in their outward conduct, we answer, that they would naturally choose the world as it then was; and, satisfied therewith, try to establish themselves in the earth, claim it as their own, enjoy its pleasures and lusts, and cultivate its arts. On the other hand, one who embraced the promises would consider himself a pilgrim and a stranger in this earth, and both in heart and outward conduct show that he believed in, and waited for, the fulfillment of the promise. We need scarcely say that the one describes the history of Cain and of his race; the other that of Abel, and afterwards of Seth and of his descendants. For around these two Cain and Seth as their representatives, all the children of Adam would group themselves according to their spiritual tendencies.

[23] Viewed in this light the indications of Scripture, however brief, are quite clear. When we read that “Cain was a tiller of the ground,” and “Abel was a keeper of sheep,” we can understand that the choice of their occupations depended not on accidental circumstances, but quite accorded with their views and character. Abel chose the pilgrim-life, Cain that of settled possession and enjoyment of earth. The nearer their history lay to the terrible event which had led to the loss of Paradise, and to the first giving of the promise, the more significant would this their choice of life appear. Quite in accordance with this, we afterwards find Cain, not only building a city, but calling it after the name of his own son, to indicate settled proprietorship and enjoyment of the world as it was. The same tendency rapidly unfolded in his descendants, till in Lamech, the fifth from Cain, it had already assumed such large proportions that Scripture deems it no longer necessary to mark its growth. Accordingly the separate record of the Cainites ceases with Lamech and his children, and there is no further specific mention made of them in Scripture.

Before following more in detail the course of these two races—for, in a spiritual sense, they were quite distinct—we mark at the very threshold of Scripture history the introduction of sacrifices. From the time of Abel onwards, they are uniformly, and with increasing clearness, set before us as the appointed way of approaching and holding fellowship with God, till, at the close of Scripture history, we have the sacrifice of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to which all sacrifices had pointed. And not only so, but as the dim remembrance of a better state from which man had fallen, and of a hope of deliverance, had been preserved among all heathen nations, so also had that of the necessity of sacrifices. Even the bloody rites of savages, nay, the cruel sacrifices of best-beloved children, what were they but a cry of despair in the felt need of reconciliation to God through sacrifice—the giving up of what was most dear in room and stead of the offerer? These are the terribly broken pillars of what once had been a temple; the terribly distorted traditions of truths once Divinely revealed. Blessed be God for the light of His Gospel, which has taught us “the way, the truth, and the life,” even Him who is “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

## Chapter 3

[24]

### *Seth and his Descendants—The Race of Cain*

(Genesis 4)

The place of Abel could not remain unfilled, if God's purpose of mercy were to be carried out. Accordingly He gave to Adam and Eve another son, whom his mother significantly called "Seth," that is, "appointed," or rather "compensation;" "for God," said she, "hath appointed me ('compensated me with') another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew." Before, however, detailing the history of Seth and his descendants, Scripture traces that of Cain to the fifth and sixth generations. Cain, as we know, had gone into the land of "Nod"—"wandering," "flight," "unrest,"—and there built a city, which has been aptly described as the laying of the first foundations of that kingdom in which "the spirit of the beast" prevails. <sup>1</sup>

We must remember that probably centuries had elapsed since the creation, and that men had already multiplied on the earth. Beyond this settlement of Cain, nothing seems to have occurred which Scripture has deemed necessary to record, except that the names of the "Cainites" are still singularly like those of the "Sethites." Thus we follow the line of Cain's descendants to Lamech, the fifth from Cain, when all at once the character and tendencies of that whole race appear fully developed. It comes upon us, almost by surprise, that within so few generations, and in the lifetime of the first man, almost every commandment and institution of God should already be openly set aside, and violence, lust, and ungodliness prevail upon the earth. The first direct breach of God's arrangement of which we here read, is the introduction of polygamy. "Lamech took unto him two wives." Assuredly, "from the beginning it was not so." But this is not all. Scripture preserves to us in the address of Lamech

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<sup>1</sup> A modern commentator holds that the words of [Genesis 4:17](#), only imply that Cain "was building," not that he had finished the building of his city.

to his two wives the earliest piece of poetry. It has been designated "Lamech's Sword-song," and breathes a spirit of boastful defiance, of trust in his own strength, of violence, and of murder. <sup>2</sup>

[25] Of God there is no further acknowledgment than in a reference to the avenging of Cain, from which Lamech augurs his own safety. Nor is it without special purpose that the names of Lamech's wives and of his daughter are mentioned in Scripture. For their names point to "the lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh," just as the occupations of Lamech's sons point to "the pride of life." The names of his wives were "Adah," that is, "beauty," or "adornment;" and "Zillah," that is, "the shaded," perhaps from her tresses, or else "sounding," perhaps from her song; while "Naamah," as Lamech's daughter was called, means "pleasant, graceful, lovely." And here we come upon another and most important feature in the history of the "Cainites." The pursuits and inventions of the sons of Lamech point to the culture of the arts, and to a settled and permanent state of society. His eldest son by Adah, "Jabal, was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle," that is, he made even the pastoral life a regular business. His second son, "Jubal, was the father of all such as handle the harp (or cithern), and the flute (or sackbut)," in other words, the inventor alike of stringed and of wind instruments; while Tubal-Cain, <sup>3</sup> Lamech's son by Zillah, was "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron."

Taken in connection with Lamech's sword-song, which immediately follows the scriptural account of his sons' pursuits, we are warranted in designating the culture and civilization introduced by the family of Lamech as essentially godless. And that, not only because it was that of ungodly men, but because it was pursued independent of God, and in opposition to the great purposes which He had with man. Moreover, it is very remarkable that we perceive in the Cainite race those very things which afterwards formed the characteristics of heathenism, as we find it among the most advanced

<sup>2</sup>A modern critic has rendered Lamech's Sword-song thus: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice: ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech; Yea, I slay men for my wound, and young men for my hurt. For if Cain is avenged sevenfold, Lamech seventy and sevenfold" -referring to the invention of Tubal-Cain, and meaning that if God avenged Cain, he would with his sword avenge himself seventy and sevenfold for every wound and every hurt.

<sup>3</sup>Perhaps "Tubal, the smith."

nations of antiquity, such as Greece and Rome. Over their family-life might be written, as it were, the names Adah, Zillah, Naamah; over their civil life the “sword-song of Lamech,” which indeed strikes the key-note of ancient heathen society; and over their culture and pursuits, the abstract of the biographies which Scripture furnishes us of the descendants of Cain. And as their lives have been buried in the flood, so has a great flood also swept away heathenism—its life, culture, and civilization from the earth, and only left on the mountaintop that ark into which God had shut up them who believed His warnings and His promises. The contrast becomes most marked as we turn from this record of the Cainites to that of Seth and of his descendants. Even the name which Seth gave to his son—Enos, or “frail”<sup>4</sup>—stands out as a testimony against the assumption of the Cainites. But especially does this vital difference between the two races appear in the words which follow upon the notice of Enos’s birth: “Then began men to call upon the name of Jehovah.”

[26]

Of course, it cannot be supposed that before that time prayer and the praise of God had been wholly unknown in the earth. Even the sacrifices of Cain and of Abel prove the contrary. It must therefore mean, that the vital difference which had all along existed between the two races, became now also outwardly manifest by a distinct and open profession, and by the praise of God on the part of the Sethites. We have thus reached the first great period in the history of the kingdom of God—that of an outward and visible separation between the two parties, when those who are “of faith” “come out from among” the world, and from the kingdom of this world. We remember how many, many centuries afterwards, when He had come, whose blood speaketh better things than that of Abel, His followers were similarly driven to separate themselves from Israel after the flesh, and how in Antioch they were first called Christians. As that marked the commencement of the history of the New Testament Church—, so this introduction of an open profession of Jehovah on the part of the Sethites, the beginning of the history of the kingdom of God under the Old Testament. And yet this separation and coming out from the world, this “beginning to call upon the name of Jehovah,” is what to

<sup>4</sup>The word is used for “man,” from his frailty, in such passages as [Psalm 8:4](#); [90:3](#); [103:15](#), etc.

this day each one of us must do for himself, if he would take up the cross, follow Christ, and enter into the kingdom of God.

## Chapter 4

[27]

### *Genealogy of the Believing Race, through Seth*

(Genesis 5)

One purpose of Scripture has now been fulfilled. The tendencies for evil of the Cainite race have been traced to their full unfolding, and “the kingdom of this world” has appeared in its real character. On the other hand, the race of Seth have gathered around an open profession of their faith in the promises, and of their purpose to serve God, and they have on this ground separated themselves from the Cainites. The two ways are clearly marked out, and the character of those who walk in them determined. There is, therefore, no further need to follow the history of the Cainites, and Scripture turns from them to give us an account of “the elders” who “by faith” “obtained a good report.”

At first sight it seems as if the narrative here opened with only a “book,” or account, “of the generations of Adam,” containing here and there a brief notice interspersed; but in truth it is otherwise. At the outset we mark, as a significant contrast, that whereas we read of Adam that “in the likeness of God made He him,” it is now added that “he begat a son in his own likeness, after his image.” Adam was created pure and sinless in the likeness of God; Seth inherited the fallen nature of his father. Next, we observe how all the genealogies, from Adam downwards, have this in common, that they give first the age of the father at the birth of his eldest son,<sup>1</sup> then the number of years which each of them lived after that event, and finally their total age at the time of death. Altogether, ten “elders” are named from the creation to the time of the flood, and thus grouped:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>With the exception of Seth, who, of course, was not the eldest son of Adam.

<sup>2</sup>Such are the numbers according to the Hebrew text. There are differences between this and the Greek translation of the so-called LXX (the Septuagint), and also the Samaritan text. For further particulars we refer to [ch. 10](#), where also the difference between the chronologies of Ussher and Hales is explained.

Column 1—Names; Column 2—Age at Birth of Son; Column 3—No. of years after that event; Column 4—Total Age; Column 5—Year of Birth from Creation; Column 6—Year of Death from Creation.

NAMES	ABS	#	YEAR TOTAL	BAC	DAC
ADAM	130	800	930	1	930
SETH	105	807	912	130	1042
ENOS	90	815	905	235	1140
CAINAN	70	840	910	325	1235

MAHALEEL	65	830	895	395	1290
JARED	162	800	962	460	1422
ENOCH	65	300	365	622	987
METHUSELAH	187	782	969	687	1656
LAMECH	182	595	777	874	1651
NOAH	500	450	950	1056	2006
FLOOD	100				
TOTAL	1656				

[28] On examining them more closely, what strikes us in these genealogical records of the Patriarchs is, that the details they furnish are wanting in the history of the Cainites, where simply the birth of seven generations are mentioned, viz.: Adam, Cain, Enoch, Irad, Mehajael, Methusael, Lamech, and his sons. The reason of this difference is, that whereas the Cainites had really no future, the Sethites, who “called upon the name of Jehovah,” were destined to carry out the purpose of God in grace unto the end. Next, in two cases the same names occur in the two races—Enoch and Lamech.

But in both, Scripture furnishes characteristic distinctions between them. In opposition to the Enoch after whom Cain called his city, we have the Sethite Enoch, “who walked with God, and was not; for God took him;” and in contradistinction to the Cainite Lamech, with his boastful ode to his sword, we have the other Lamech, who called his son Noah, “saying, This same shall comfort



us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which Jehovah hath cursed.” Thus the similarity of their names only brings out more clearly the contrast of their character.

Finally, as the wickedness of one race comes out most fully in Lamech, who stands seventh in the genealogy of the Cainites, so does the godliness of the other in Enoch, who equally stands seventh in that of the Sethites. Passing from this comparison of the two genealogies to the table of the Sethites, we are reminded of the saying, that these primeval genealogies are “monuments alike of the faithfulness of God in the fulfillment of His promise, and of the faith and patience of the fathers.” Every generation lived its appointed time; they transmitted the promise to their sons; and then, having finished their course, they all “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” That is absolutely all we know of the majority of them. But the emphatic and seemingly needless repetition in each case of the words, “And he died,” with which every genealogy closes, [29] tells us that “death reigned from Adam unto Moses,” ([Romans 5:14](#)) with all the lessons which it conveyed of its origin in sin, and of its conquest by the second Adam. Only one exception occurs to this general rule—in the case of Enoch; when, instead of the usual brief notice how many years he “lived” after the birth of his son, we read that “he walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years;” and instead of the simple closing statement that “he died,” we are not only a second time told that “Enoch walked with God,” but also that “he was not; for God took him.” Thus both his life and his translation are connected with his “walk with God.” This expression is unique in Scripture, and except in reference to Noah ([Genesis 6:9](#)) only occurs again in connection with the priest’s intercourse with God in the holy place. ([Malachi 2:6](#)) Thus it indicates a peculiarly intimate, close, and personal converse with Jehovah. Alike the life, the work, and the removal of Enoch are thus explained in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” ([Hebrews 11:5](#))

His translation was like that of Elijah ([2 Kings 2:10](#)), and like what that of the saints shall be at the second coming of our blessed Lord. ([1 Corinthians 15:51, 52](#)) In this connection it is very remarkable that Enoch “prophesied” of the very thing which was manifested in his own case, “saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”<sup>3</sup>

[30] When Enoch was “translated” only Adam had as yet died: Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, and Jared were still alive. On the other hand, not only Methuselah, the son of Enoch, but also his grandson Lamech, who at the time was one hundred and thirteen years old, must have witnessed his removal. Noah was not yet born. But how deep on the godly men of that period was the impression produced by the prophecy of Enoch, and by what we may call its anticipatory and typical fulfillment in his translation, appears from the circumstance that Lamech gave to his son, who was born sixty-nine years after the translation of Enoch, the name of Noah—“rest” or “comfort”—“saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which Jehovah hath cursed.”

Evidently Lamech felt the burden of toil upon an earth which God had cursed, and looked forward to a gracious deliverance from the misery and corruption existing in consequence of it, by the fulfillment of the Divine promise concerning the Deliverer. In longing hope of this he called his son Noah. A change, indeed, did come; but it was by the destruction of that sinful generation, and by the commencement of a new period in the covenant-history. We mark that, in the case of Noah, Scripture no longer mentions, as before, only one son; but it gives us the names of the three sons of Noah, to show that henceforth the one line was to divide into three, which were to become the founders of human history.

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<sup>3</sup>[Jude 14, 15](#). This quite accords with what was generally known about Enoch. One of the Old Testament apocryphal works, written before the time of Christ ([Ecclesiasticus 44:16](#)), has it that “Enoch was translated, being an example of repentance to all generations;” while another book ([B. of En. i. 9](#)) expressly states, that he prophesied the coming of the Lord for judgment upon the ungodly.

It is most instructive, also, to notice that Enoch, who seems to have walked nearest to God, only lived on earth altogether three hundred and sixty-five years—less than half the time of those who preceded and who succeeded him. An extraordinary length of life may be a blessing, as affording space for repentance and grace; but in reference to those most dear to God, it may be shortened as a relief from the work and toil which sin has brought upon this world. Indeed, the sequel will show that the extraordinary duration of life, though necessary at the first, yet by no means proved a source of good to a wicked and corrupt generation.

## Chapter 5

### *The Universal Corruption of Man—Preparation for the Flood*

(Genesis 6)

It is a remarkable circumstance that all nations should have preserved in their traditions notices of the extraordinary length to which human life was at the first protracted. We can understand that knowledge of such a fact would be most readily handed down. But we should remember, that before the “flood” the conditions of vigor, constitution, climate, soil, and nourishment were quite different from those on which the present duration of life depends. A comparison between the two is therefore impossible, for the best of all reasons, that we have not sufficient knowledge of the primitive state of matters. But this we can clearly see, that such long continuance of life was absolutely necessary, if the earth was to be rapidly peopled, knowledge to advance, and, above all, the worship of God and faith in that promise about a Deliverer which He had revealed, to be continued. As it was, each generation could hand down to remote posterity what it had learned during the centuries of its continuance. Thus Adam was alive to tell the story of Paradise and the fall, and to repeat the word of promise, which he had heard from the very mouth of the Lord, when Lamech was born; and though none of the earlier “fathers” could have lived to see the commencement of building the ark, which took place in the year 1536 from the creation, yet Lamech died only five years before “the flood,” and his father Methuselah—the longest-lived man—in the very year of the deluge. If we try to realize how much information even in our own days, when intercourse, civilization, and the means of knowledge have so far advanced, can be gained from personal intercourse with the chief actors in great events, we shall understand the importance of man’s longevity in the early ages of our race.

But, on the other hand, it was possible to pervert this long duration of life to equally evil purposes. The rare occurrence, during

so many centuries, of death with its terrors would tend still more to blunt the conscience; the long association of evil men would foster the progress of corruption and evil; and the apparently indefinite delay of either judgment or deliverance would strengthen the bold unbelief of scoffers. That such was the case appears from the substance of Lamech's prophecy; from the description of the state of the earth in the time of Noah, and the unbelief of his contemporaries; and from the comparison by our Lord ([Matthew 24:37-39](#); [Luke 17:26](#)) between "the days of Noe" and those of "the coming of the Son of man," when, according to St. Peter ([2 Peter 3:3, 4](#)), there shall be "scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

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The corruption of mankind reached its highest point when even the difference between the Sethites and the Cainites became obliterated by intermarriages between the two parties, and that from sensual motives. We read that "the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose."<sup>1</sup> At that time the earth must have been in a great measure peopled,<sup>2</sup> and its state is thus described, "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."

This means more than the total corruption of our nature, as we should now describe it, and refers to the universal prevalence of open, daring sin, and rebellion against God, brought about when the separation between the Sethites and the Cainites ceased. With the exception of Noah there was none in that generation "to call upon the name of Jehovah." "In those days there were 'giants(in Hebrew: Nephilim) in the earth .... the same were the mighty men (or heroes) which were of old, the men of renown."

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<sup>1</sup>Other theories concerning the "sons of God" have been broached, but cannot be maintained on careful and accurate investigation. Any reader curious on the subject may see it discussed in my edition of Kurtz's History of the Old Covenant, vol. 1., p. 96, etc.

<sup>2</sup>The most exaggerated estimates of the number of the human race at that time have been made, showing the fallacy of such calculations.

Properly speaking, these Nephilim were “men of violence,” or tyrants, as Luther renders it, the root of the word meaning, “to fall upon.”<sup>3</sup>

[33] In short, it was a period of violence, of might against right, of rapine, lust, and universal unbelief of the promise. With the virtual extinction of the Sethite faith and worship no further hope remained, and that generation required to be wholly swept away in judgment.

And yet, though not only the justice of God, but even His faithfulness to His gracious promise demanded this, the tender loving-kindness of Jehovah appears in such expressions as these: “It repented Jehovah that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him”—literally, “it pained into His heart.” The one term, of course, explains the other. When we read that God repented, it is only our human way of speaking, for, as Calvin says, “nothing happens by accident, or that has not been foreseen.” It brings before our minds “the sorrow of Divine love over the sins of man,” in the words of Calvin, “that when the terrible sins of man offend God, it is not otherwise than as if His heart had been wounded by extreme sorrow.” The consequence was, that God declared He would destroy “from the face of the earth both man and beast,”—the latter, owing to the peculiar connection in which creation was placed with man, as being its lord, which involved it in the ruin and punishment that befell man. But long before that sentence was actually executed, God had declared, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man,”—or rather, “dwell with man,” “bear rule,” or “preside,” among them,—“for that he also is flesh,” or, as some have rendered it, “since in his erring,” or aberration, he has become wholly “carnal, sensual, devilish;” “yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years;” that is, a further space of a hundred and twenty years would in mercy be granted them, before the final judgments should burst. It was during these hundred and twenty years that “the long-suffering of God waited,” “while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water.”

<sup>3</sup>The word Nephilim occurs once again in [Numbers 13:33](#), in the report of the men of gigantic stature, whom the spies saw in Canaan. But though the Nephilim in those days may have been men of gigantic proportions, it does not follow that Nephilim means “giants.” Lastly, there is nothing in the text which shows that they were exclusively the offspring of the sons of God.

For, to the universal corruption of that generation, there was one exception—Noah. It needs no more than simply to put together the notices of Noah, in the order in which Scripture places them: “But Noah found grace in the eyes of Jehovah;” and again: “Noah was a just man, and perfect”—as the Hebrew word implies, spiritually upright, genuine, inwardly entire and complete, one whose heart had a single aim—“in his generations,” or among his contemporaries; and lastly, “Noah walked with God,”—this expression being the same as in the case of Enoch. The mention of his finding grace in the eyes of Jehovah precedes that of his “justice,” which describes his moral bearing towards God; while this justice was again the outcome of inward spiritual rectitude, or of what under the fuller light of the New Testament we would designate a heart renewed by the Holy Spirit. The whole was summed up and completed in an Enoch-like walk with God. The statement that Noah found grace is like the forth-bursting of the sun in a sky lowering for the storm. Three times the sacred text repeats it, that the earth was corrupt, adding that it was full of violence, just as if the watchful eye of the Lord, who “looked upon the earth,” had been searching and trying the children of men, and was lingering in pity over it, before judgment was allowed to descend.

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Nor was this all. Even so, “the long-suffering of God waited” for one hundred and twenty years, “while the ark was a preparing;” and during this time, especially, Noah must have acted as “a preacher of righteousness.” The building of the ark commenced when Noah was four hundred and eighty years old; that is, before any of his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, had been born,—in fact, just twenty years before the birth of Shem. Thus the great faith of Noah appeared not only in building an ark in the midst of a scoffing and unbelieving generation, and that against all human probability of its ever being needed, and one hundred and twenty years before it was actually required, but in providing room for “his sons” and his “sonswives,” while as yet he himself was childless! Indeed, the more we try to realize the circumstances, the more grand appears the unshaken confidence of the patriarch. The words in which God announced His purpose were these: “The end of all flesh is come before Me,”—that is, as some have explained it, the extreme limit of human depravity;—“for the earth is filled with violence through

them,”—that is, violence proceeding from them (“from before their faces”),—“and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.” Noah and his family were alone to be preserved, and that by means of an “ark,”—an expression which only occurs once more in reference [35] to the ark of bulrushes in which Moses was saved. ([Exodus 2:3-5](#)) Noah was to construct his ark of “gopher,” most likely cypress wood, and to “pitch it within and without with pitch.” The ark was to be three hundred cubits long, fifty broad, and thirty high; that is, reckoning the cubit at one foot and a half, four hundred and fifty feet long, seventy-five broad, and forty-five high. <sup>4</sup>

As the wording of the Hebrew text implies, there was all around the top, one cubit below the roof, an opening for light and for air (rendered in our version “window”), in which, it has been suggested, some translucent substance like our glass may have been inserted. Here there seems also to have been a regular “window,” which is afterwards specially referred to ([ch. 8:6](#)). The door was to be in the side of the ark, which was arranged in three stories of rooms (literally “cells”), or the accommodation of all the animals in the ark, and the storage of food. For “of every living thing” Noah was to bring with him into the ark,—seven pairs, in the case of “clean beasts,” and one pair of those that were not clean. Then, when the appointed time for it came, God would “bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven.” But with Noah God would “establish” His “covenant,” that is, carry out through him His purpose in the covenant of grace, which was to issue in the birth of the Redeemer. Accordingly, Noah, his wife—for here there is no trace of polygamy,—his sons, and his sonswives were to go into the ark, and there to be kept alive during the general destruction of all around.

Thus far the directions of Scripture. Much needless ingenuity has been wasted on a calculation of the exact space in the ark, of its

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<sup>4</sup>Some have calculated the cubit at twenty-one inches, which would give a length of five hundred and twenty-five feet, a width of eighty-seven and half, and a height of fifty-two and a half. St. Augustine calculates that the proportions of the ark were the same as those of a perfect human figure, “the length of which from the sole to the crown is six times the width across the chest, and ten times the depth of the recumbent figure, measured in a right line from the ground.” *Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2. p. 566, note.



internal arrangements, and of the accommodation it contained for the different species of animals then existing. Such computations are essentially unreliable, as we can neither calculate the exact room in the ark, nor yet the exact number of species which required to be accommodated within its shelter. Scripture, which sets before us the history of God's kingdom, never gratifies such idle and foolish inquiries. But of this we may be quite sure, that the ark which God provided was literally and in every sense quite sufficient for the purposes for which it was intended, and that these purposes were fully secured. It may perhaps help us to realize this marvelous structure if we compare it to the biggest ship known—the Great Eastern, whose dimensions are six hundred and eighty feet in length, eighty-three in breadth, and fifty-eight in depth; or else if we describe it as nearly half the size of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. It should be borne in mind that the ark was designed not for navigation, but chiefly for storage. It had neither masts, rudder, nor sails, and was probably flat at the bottom, resembling a huge floating chest. To show how suitable its proportions were for storage, we may mention that a Dutchman, Peter Jansen, built in 1604 a ship on precisely the same proportions (not, of course, the same figures), which was found to hold one-third more lading than any other vessel of the same tonnage.

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All other questions connected with the building of the ark may safely be dismissed as not deserving serious discussion. But the one great fact would stand out during that period: Noah preaching righteousness, warning of the judgment to come, and still exhibiting his faith in his practice by continuing to provide an ark of refuge. To sum up Noah's life of faith, Noah's preaching of faith, and Noah's work of faith in the words of Scripture: "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." ([Hebrews 11:7](#)).

## Chapter 6

### *The Flood*

(Genesis 7-8:15)

There is a grandeur and majestic simplicity about the scriptural account of “The Flood” which equally challenges and defies comparison. Twice only throughout the Old Testament is the event again referred to—each time in the grave, brief language befitting its solemnity. In [Psalm 29:10](#) we read: “Jehovah sitteth upon the flood; yea, Jehovah sitteth King for ever,”—a sort of Old Testament version of “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.” Then, if we may carry out the figure, there is an evangelical application of this Old Testament history in [Isaiah 54:9, 10](#): “For this is as the waters of Noah unto Me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith Jehovah that hath mercy on thee.”

The first point in the narrative of “The Flood” which claims our attention is an emphatic mention, twice repeated, of Noah’s absolute obedience, “according unto all that Jehovah commanded him.” ([Genesis 6:22; 7:5](#)) Next, we mark a “solemn pause of seven days” before the flood actually commenced, when “all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened;” in other words, the floodgates alike of earth and heaven thrown wide open. The event happened “in the sixth hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month;” that is, if we calculate the season according to the beginning of the Hebrew civil year, about the middle or end of our month of November.

Then Noah and his wife, his three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—and their wives, and all the animals, having come into

the ark, “Jehovah shut him in,” and for forty days and forty nights “the rain was upon the earth,” while, at the same time, the fountains of the great deep were broken up. The flood continued for one hundred and fifty days,<sup>1</sup> when it began to subside.

The terrible catastrophe is thus described: “And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth. And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.”

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The remarks of a recent writer on this subject are every way so appropriate that we here reproduce them: “The narrative is vivid and forcible, though entirely wanting in that sort of description which in a modern historian or poet would have occupied the largest space. We see nothing of the death-struggle; we hear not the cry of despair; we are not called upon to witness the frantic agony of husband and wife, and parent and child, as they fled in terror before the rising waters. Nor is a word said of the sadness of the one righteous man who, safe himself, looked upon the destruction which he could not avert. But an impression is left upon the mind with peculiar vividness from the very simplicity of the narrative, and it is that of utter desolation. This is heightened by the repetition and contrast of two ideas. On the one hand, we are reminded no less than six times in the narrative ([Genesis 6, 7, 8](#)) who the tenants of the ark were, the favored and rescued few; and, on the other hand, the total

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<sup>1</sup>Genesis 8:3, 4, compared with 7:11, seems to imply that the forty days of rain must be included in these one hundred and fifty days, and not added to them.

and absolute blotting out of everything else is not less emphatically dwelt upon” ([Genesis 6:13, 17; 7:4, 21-23](#)). <sup>2</sup>

We will not take from the solemnity of the impressive stillness, amid which Scripture shows us the lonely ark floating on the desolate waters that have buried earth and all that belonged to it, <sup>3</sup>

[39] by attempting to describe the scenes that must have ensued. Only the impression is left on our minds that the words “Jehovah shut him in,” may be intended to show that Noah, even if he would, could not have given help to his perishing contemporaries.

At the end of the one hundred and fifty days it is said, in the peculiarly touching language of Scripture, “God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark.” A drying wind was made to pass over the earth, the flood “was restrained,” “and the waters returned from the earth continually.” On the seventeenth day of the seventh month, that is, exactly five months after Noah had entered it, the ark was found to be resting “upon the mountains of Ararat,”—not necessarily upon either the highest peak, which measures seventeen thousand two hundred and fifty feet, nor yet, perhaps, upon the second highest, which rises to about twelve thousand feet, but upon that mountain range. Still the waters decreased; and seventy-three days later, or on the first day of the tenth month, the mountain-tops all around became visible.

Forty days more, and Noah “sent forth a raven,” which, finding shelter on the mountain-tops, and food from the floating carcasses, did not return into the ark. At the end of seven days more “he sent forth a dove from him to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground,” that is, from the low ground in the valleys. “But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark.” Yet another week, and he sent her forth a second time, when she returned again in the evening, bearing in her mouth an olive-leaf. It is a remarkable fact, as bearing indirect testimony to this narrative, that the olive has been ascertained to bear leaves

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Perowne, in Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible, art. “Noah.”

<sup>3</sup>Mr. Perowne quotes from Lyell’s Principles of Geology, as an illustrative instance of the effects of an inundation, of course, on quite a different scale, “what occurred in the Runn of Cutch, on the eastern area of the Indus, in 1819, when the sea flowed in, and in a few hours converted a tract of land, two thousand square miles in area, into an inland sea or lagoon.”

under water. A third time Noah put forth the messenger of peace, at the end of another week, and she “returned not again unto him any more.”

“No picture in natural history,” says the writer already quoted, “was ever drawn with more exquisite beauty and fidelity than this. It is admirable alike for its poetry and its truth.” On the first day of the first month, in the sixth hundredth and first year, “the waters were dried up from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry. And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, was the earth dried,”—just one year and ten days after Noah had entered the ark.

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Thus far the scriptural narrative. It has so often been explained that the object of the Bible is to give us the history of the kingdom of God, not to treat of curious or even scientific questions, that we can dismiss a matter too often discussed of late in an entirely unbecoming spirit, in these words of a recent writer: <sup>4</sup> “It is a question among theologians and men of science whether the flood was absolutely universal, or whether it was universal only in the sense of extending over all the part of the world then inhabited. We do not here enter into this controversy; but we may notice the remarkable fact that the district lying to the east of Ararat, where the ark rested, bears traces of having at one time been under water. It is a peculiarly depressed region, lying lower than the districts around, and thus affording peculiar facilities for such a submersion.”

But there is another matter connected with the flood so marked and striking as to claim our special attention. It is that the remembrance of the flood has been preserved in the traditions of so many nations, so widely separated and so independent of each other, that it is impossible to doubt that they have all been derived from one and the same original source. As might be expected, they contain many legendary details, and they generally fix the locality of the flood in their own lands; but these very particulars mark them as corruptions of the real history recorded in the Bible, and carried by the different nations into the various countries where they settled. Mr. Perowne has grouped these traditions into those of Western

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<sup>4</sup>Dr. Blaikie, Bible History, p. 29.

Asia, including the Chaldean, the Phenician, that of the so-called “Sibylline Oracles,” the Phrygian, the Syrian, and the Armenian stories; then those of Eastern Asia, including the Persian, Indian, and Chinese; and, thirdly, those of the American nations—the Cherokee, and the various tribes of Mexican Indians, with which—strange though it may seem—he groups those of the Fiji Islands. To these [41] he adds, as a fourth cycle, the similar traditions of the Greek nations. But the most interesting of all these traditions is the Chaldean or Babylonian, which deserves more than merely passing notice.

Though it needs not such indirect confirmations to convince us of the truth of the narratives in the Bible, it is very remarkable how all historical investigations, when really completed and rightly applied, confirm the exactness of what is recorded in the Holy Scriptures. But their chief value to us must always be this, that they tell us of that Ark which alone rides on the waters of the deluge, and preserves for ever safe them who are “shut in” there by the hand of Jehovah.

### **Chaldean Narrative of the Deluge**

In general we may say that we have two Chaldean accounts of the flood. The one comes to us through Greek sources, from Berosus, a Chaldean priest in the third century before Christ, who translated into Greek the records of Babylon. This, as the less clear, we need not here notice more particularly. But a great interest attaches to the far earlier cuneiform inscriptions, first discovered and deciphered in 1872 by Mr. G. Smith, of the British Museum, and since further investigated by the same scholar.<sup>5</sup>

These inscriptions cover twelve tablets, of which as yet only part has been made available. They may broadly be described as embodying the Babylonian account of the flood, which, as the event took place in that locality, has a special value. The narrative is supposed to date from two thousand to two thousand five hundred years before Christ. The history of the flood is related by a hero, preserved through it, to a monarch whom Mr. Smith calls Izdubar, but whom he supposes to have been the Nimrod of Scripture. There are, as one might have expected, frequent differences between the Babylonian and the Biblical account of the flood. On the other

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<sup>5</sup>See *Assyrian Discoveries*, by George Smith. London, 1875.

hand, there are striking points of agreement between them, which all the more confirm the scriptural account, as showing that the event had become a distinct part of the history of the district in which it had taken place. There are frequent references to Erech, the city mentioned in [Genesis 10:10](#); allusions to a race of giants, who are described in fabulous terms; a mention of Lamech, the father of Noah, though under a different name, and of the patriarch himself as a sage, reverent and devout, who, when the Deity resolved to destroy by a flood the world for its sin, built the ark. Sometimes the language comes so close to that of the Bible that one almost seems to read disjointed or distorted quotations from Scripture. We mention, as instances, the scorn which the building of the ark is said to have called forth on the part of contemporaries; the pitching of the ark without and within with pitch; the shutting of the door behind the saved ones, the opening of the window, when the waters had abated; the going and returning of the dove since “a resting-place it did not find,” the sending of the raven, which, feeding on corpses in the water, “did not return;” and, finally, the building of an altar by Noah. We sum up the results of this discovery in the words of Mr. Smith:

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“Not to pursue this parallel further, it will be perceived that when the Chaldean account is compared with the Biblical narrative, in their main features the two stories fairly agree; as to the wickedness of the antediluvian world, the Divine anger and command to build the ark, its stocking with birds and beasts, the coming of the deluge, the rain and storm, the ark resting on a mountain, trial being made by birds sent out to see if the waters had subsided, and the building of an altar after the flood. All these main facts occur in the same order in both narratives, but when we come to examine the details of these stages in the two accounts, there appear numerous points of difference; as to the number of people who were saved, the duration of the deluge, the place where the ark rested, the order of sending out the birds, and other similar matters.”<sup>6</sup>

We conclude with another quotation from the same work, which will show how much of the primitive knowledge of Divine things, though mixed with terrible corruptions, was preserved among men at

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<sup>6</sup>Assyrian Discoveries, p. 218.

this early period: “It appears that at that remote age the Babylonians had a tradition of a flood which was a Divine punishment for the wickedness of the world; and of a holy man, who built an ark, and escaped the destruction; who was afterwards translated and dwelt with the gods. They believed in hell, a place of torment under the earth, and heaven, a place of glory in the sky; and their description of the two has, in several points, a striking likeness to those in the Bible.

[43] They believed in a spirit or soul distinct from the body, which was not destroyed on the death of the mortal frame; and they represent this ghost as rising from the earth at the bidding of one of the gods, and winging its way to heaven.”



## **Part 2: History of the Patriarchs**

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## Chapter 7

### *After the Flood—Noah’s Sacrifice—Noah’s Sin—Noah’s Descendants*

([Genesis 8:15-9:28.](#))

Rightly considered, the destruction of “all flesh” by the deluge was necessary for its real preservation. Death was needful for its new life. The old world was buried in the flood, that a new order of things might rise from its grave. For, manifestly, after the mixing up of the Sethite with the Cainite race, an entirely new commencement required to be made if the purpose of God in grace was to be carried to its goal. Hence, also, God once more pronounced upon Noah the blessing of fruitfulness which he had spoken to Adam, and gave him dominion over creation, yet, as we shall see, with such modifications as the judgment that had just passed, and the new state of things which had commenced, implied.

It deserves our notice that, even after the earth was quite dry, Noah awaited the express command of God before leaving the ark. His first act after that was to build “an altar unto Jehovah,” and there to offer “burnt-offerings” “of every clean beast, and of every fowl.” Nor was it merely in gratitude and homage to God, but also in spiritual worship that he thus commenced his life anew, and consecrated earth unto Jehovah. In bringing an animal sacrifice Noah followed the example of Abel; in calling upon the name of Jehovah he once again and solemnly adopted the profession of the Sethites. But there was this difference between his and any preceding sacrifice, that now for the first time we read of building an altar. While Paradise was still on earth, men probably turned towards it as the place whence Jehovah held intercourse with man. But when its site was swept away in the flood, God, as it were, took up His throne in heaven, and from thence revealed Himself unto men and held intercourse with them. (See also [Genesis 11:5, 7](#)) And the

truth, that our hearts and prayers must rise upwards to Him who is in heaven, was symbolized by the altar on which the sacrifice was laid. Scripture significantly adds, that “Jehovah smelled a sweet savor,” or rather “a savor of rest,” “of satisfaction;” in other words, He accepted the sacrifice. “And Jehovah said in His heart,” that is, He resolved, “I will not again curse the ground for man’s sake, for (or because) the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” Both Luther and Calvin have remarked on the circumstance that men’s universal sinfulness, which formerly had been the cause of the judgment of the flood, should now be put forward as the reason for not again cursing the ground. But in fact this only marks another difference between the state of man before and after the flood. If we may so say, God now admitted the fact of universal sinfulness as existing, and made it an element of His future government. He looked upon man as a miserable and wretched sinner, with whom in His compassion and long-suffering He would bear, delaying His second and final judgment till after He should have accomplished all that He had promised to do for the salvation of men. Putting aside Israel, as God’s special people, the period between Noah and Christ may be described, in the words of St. Paul, as “the times of this ignorance” which “God winked at,” ([Acts 17:30](#)) or as those when “through the forbearance of God” sins were passed over. ([Romans 3:25](#), see marginal rendering) Having thus explained the fundamental terms on which the Lord would deal with the nations of the earth during the period between the flood and the coming of the Savior, that is, during the Jewish dispensation, we proceed to notice, in the words which God addressed to Noah, some other points of difference between the former and the new state of things. First of all, the gracious announcement that, while the earth remained, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night were not to cease, implies not only His purpose to spare our earth, but also that man might henceforth reckon upon a regular succession of seasons, and that he was to make this earth for the present his home, to till it, and to possess it. Hence it was quite another matter when Noah became an “husbandman,” from what it had been when Cain chose to be “a tiller of the ground.” Next, as already stated, God renewed the blessing of fruitfulness in much the same terms in which He had spoken it originally to Adam, and once more conferred dominion

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[47] over the lower creation. But in this new grant there was this essential difference—that man’s dominion would now be one of force, and not, as formerly, of willing subjection. If God had at the first brought “every beast” and “every fowl” before Adam, as it were, to do homage to him, and to receive from him their names, it was now said to Noah and to his descendants, “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth; into your hand are they delivered.” Perhaps we ought also to notice in this connection that, whatever may have been the common practice before, now for the first time the use of animal food was expressly permitted, with the exception of the blood, and that probably for the reason afterwards mentioned in the case of sacrifices, that the blood was the seat of life. ([Leviticus 17:11, 14](#)) Another and most important change is marked by the solemn prohibition of murder, with this addition, that “whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” Such crimes were no longer to be avenged directly by God Himself, but He delegated His authority to man. ([Romans 8:1, 2](#)) As Luther rightly says, “In these words the civil magistracy is instituted, and the Divine right of bearing the sword.” For when it is added, as a reason why murder should be punished with death, that God made man in His own image, it seems to convey that vengeance might not be taken by any one at his own will, but that this belonged to those who on earth represented the authority of God, or were His delegates; whence also they are called in [Psalm 82:6](#), “gods,” or rather “Elohim.”<sup>1</sup>

And, as Luther rightly argues, “If God concedes to man the power over life and death, assuredly this carries with it authority over that which is less than life, such as goods, family, wife, children, servants, and land.” Thus the words spoken by the Lord to Noah contain the warrant and authority of those who are appointed rulers and judges over us. In later times the Jews have been wont to speak of what they called the seven Noachic commandments, which, according to them, were binding upon all Gentile proselytes. These were a prohibition of idolatry,  
of blasphemy,

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<sup>1</sup>Two terms are chiefly used in the Hebrew for God: the one, Elohim, which refers to His power as Ruler and Lord; the other, Jehovah, to His character as the covenant-God.

of murder,  
of incest,  
of robbery and theft,  
of eating blood and strangled animals, and  
an injunction of obedience to magistrates. (Comp. also [Acts 15:20](#))

In confirmation of what God had spoken, He “established” His “covenant” with Noah and his sons, and in “token” thereof “set,” or “appointed,” His “bow in the cloud.” It may have been so, that the rainbow was then seen for the first time, although this does not necessarily follow from the words of Scripture. They only tell us that henceforth the rainbow was to be a “token” or visible symbol to man of God’s promise no more to destroy all flesh by a flood, and also that He Himself would “look upon it” as such, so that He might “remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature.” The symbol of the rainbow was therefore to be both a sign and a seal of God’s promise. And we can readily understand how impressive, whenever a storm burst upon the earth, this symbol would have appeared to those who had witnessed the flood. In the poetical language of a German writer, “The rainbow, caused by the influence of the sun upon the dark clouds, would show to man, that what was from heaven would penetrate that which rose from earth; and as it spanned the gulf between heaven and earth, it would seem to proclaim peace between God and man; while even the circumstance that it bounded the horizon would symbolize, how the covenant of mercy extended to earth’s utmost bounds.”

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From this scene of intercourse between Noah and God we have to pass to an event in his history, alas, of a very different character. When Noah—with his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth—left the ark to become husbandman, he planted a vineyard, as Jewish legend has it, from a slip of the vine that had strayed out of Paradise. But it may boldly be asserted that, except the forbidden fruit itself, none has brought more sin, ruin, and desolation upon our earth. Whether Noah was unacquainted with the intoxicating property of the vine, or neglected proper moderation, the sad spectacle is presented of the aged patriarch, so lately rescued from the flood, not only falling a victim to drunkenness, but exposing himself in that state to the impious and vile conduct of his son Ham. As Luther says, “Ham would not have mocked his father, when overcome with wine, if

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he had not long before cast from his soul that reverence which, according to God's command, children should cherish towards their parents." It is a relief to find the other sons of Noah, so far from sharing their brother's sin, reverently defending their father from the unnatural vileness of Ham. As we might have expected, the conduct of the brothers received meet reward,—the curse descended on Ham, while a blessing, suited to each, was given to Shem and Japheth. But, in the words of the patriarch, the curse lights specially upon Canaan, the son of Ham, not to the exclusion of his other sons, but probably because as Noah had suffered from his son, so Ham was to experience his punishment in his son; and Canaan may have been specially singled out, either because he fully entered into the spirit of his father, or more probably because of the later connection between Israel and the Canaanites, in whom they would see alike the spirit and the curse of Ham fully realized. In connection with this we mark, that, twice before ([Genesis 9:18, 22](#)), when Ham is mentioned, it is added that he was "the father of Canaan."

Shem, Ham, and Japheth, who were to repeople the earth, seem to have impressed their own characteristics on their descendants. Their very names are symbolical and prophetic. Shem means splendor or glory, Ham burning heat, and Japheth enlargement. Bearing this in mind, we listen to the words of the patriarch: "Cursed be Canaan, A servant of servants shall he be to his brethren;" and we know that this has been the fate of the children of Ham, or the races of Africa; while, strangely, the name of Canaan has been interpreted as meaning "he who is subject." Again, "Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Shem, And Canaan shall be their slave:" a prophecy most signally fulfilled when Israel took possession of the land of Canaan; and, lastly, "God (Elohim) shall enlarge Japheth (enlargement); And he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, And Canaan shall be their slave."

This latter prophecy consists of three parts. It promises from God, as the God of power, that enlargement to Japheth which is the characteristic of his descendants, the European nations. And it adds that Japheth (not, as some have read it, God) shall dwell in the tents of Shem, that is, as St. Augustine has said, "in the churches which the apostles, the sons of the prophets, reared;" thus referring to the blessing which was to flow to all nations through the Hebrew

race.<sup>2</sup> Lastly, Canaan was to be the servant of Japheth, as seen in the subjection to Greece and Rome, of Tyre and Carthage, the ancient centers of wealth and merchandise, and of Egypt, the empire of might and of the oldest civilization.

But the words spoken to Shem, the ancestor of the Hebrew race, deserve special notice. The blessing here begins quite differently [50] from that of Japheth. It opens with a thanksgiving to God, for, as Luther says, “Noah sees it to be such that he cannot express it in words, therefore he turns to thanksgiving.” Then, the blessing of Shem is not outward, but spiritual; for Jehovah is to be the God of Shem. To speak in an anticipatory figure, Shem’s portion, in the widest sense, is that to be hereafter assigned to Levi, amongst the Jews; and Japheth is to dwell in his tents,—in other words,—Israel is to be the tribe of Levi to all nations. More than that, whereas Elohim is to give enlargement to Japheth, Jehovah the covenant-God is to be the God of Shem. Thus the primitive promise to Adam is now both further defined and enlarged. The promised Deliverer is to come through Shem, as the ancestor of the chosen race, in the midst of whom Jehovah is to dwell; and through Shem, Japheth is to share in the coming spiritual blessing. Here, then, is clearly defined the separation of the Jews and the Gentiles, and the mission of each: the one from Jehovah, the other from Elohim; the one in the Church, the other in the world.

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<sup>2</sup>As a German writer expresses it: “What are we all but descendants of Japheth, who dwell in the tents of Shem; and what is the language of the New Testament, but that of Javan spoken in the dwellings of Shem?”

## Chapter 8

### *Genealogy of Nations—Babel—Confusion of Tongues*

([Genesis 10-11:10](#))

IT was the Divine will, that after the flood the whole earth should be repopled by the descendants of Noah. For this purpose they must, of course, have separated and spread, so as to form the different nations and tribes among whom the world should be apportioned. Any attempted unity on their part would not only be contrary to the Divine purpose, but also, considering the universal sinfulness of man, prove dangerous to themselves, and even be untrue, since their inward separation had already appeared in the different characters and tendencies of Ham and his brothers. But before recording the judgment by which the Divine purpose was enforced, Scripture gives us the genealogy of the different nations, and this with a threefold object—to show how the earth was all peopled from the descendants of Noah; to define the relation of Israel towards each nationality; and, best of all, to register, as it were, their birth in the book of God, thereby indicating, that, however “in time past He suffered all nations to walk in their own ways,” ([Acts 14:6](#)) they also were included in the purposes of mercy, and intended finally to “dwell in the tents of Shem.”

In accordance with the general plan on which Holy Scripture is written, we read after the prophecy of Noah, which fixed the future of his sons, no more of that patriarch than that he “lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years,” and that he died at the age of nine hundred and fifty years. Regarding the division of earth among his three sons, it may be said generally, that Asia was given to Shem, Africa to Ham, and Europe

to Japheth. In the same general manner a modern scholar has traced all existing languages to three original sources, themselves, no doubt, derived from a primeval spring, which may have been lost



in the “confusion of tongues,” though its existence is attested by constant and striking points of connection between the three great families of languages. The more we think of the allotment of Europe, Asia, and Africa among the three sons of Noah, the more clearly do we see the fulfillment of prophecy regarding them. As we run our eye down the catalogue of nations in [Genesis 10](#), we have little difficulty in recognizing them; and beginning with the youngest, Japheth, we find of those known to the general reader, the Cymry [52] of Wales and Brittany (Gomer), the Scythians (Magog), the Medes (Madai), the Greeks (Ionians, Javan), and the Thracians (Tiras). Among their descendants, the Germans, Celts, and Armenians have been traced to the three sons of Gomer. It is not necessary to follow this table farther, though all will remember Tarshish, or Spain, and the Kittim, or “inhabitants of the isles.”

Passing next to Shem ([ver. 21](#)), we notice that he is called “the father of all the children of Eber,” because in Eber the main line divided into that of Peleg, from whom the race of Abraham sprang, and the descendants of Joktan ([ver. 25](#)). The descendants of Shem are exclusively Asiatic nations, among whom we only notice Asshur or Assyria, and Uz, as the land which gave birth to Job.

We have reserved Ham for the last place, because of the connection of his story with the dispersion of all nations. His sons were Cush or Ethiopia, Mizraim or Egypt, Phut or Libya, and Canaan, which, of course, we know. It will be noticed, that the seats of all these nations were in Africa, except that of Canaan, whose intrusion into the land of Palestine was put an end to by Israel. But yet another of Ham’s descendants had settled in Asia’. Nimrod, the founder of the Babylonian empire, the conqueror of Assyria, and the builder of Nineveh([ver. 11](#)), was the son of Cush. Altogether this “mighty one in the earth,” who founded the first world-empire, reminds us of Cain and of his descendant Lamech. Leaving out of view the possible meaning of his name, which some have explained as being “we will rebel,” boastful violence and rebellion certainly constitute the characteristics of his history. Most strangely have the Assyrian tablets of the royal successors of Nimrod been made to furnish an explanation of his description as “a mighty hunter”—for this is the title given in them to the great conquering warrior-monarchs, as “hunting the people.” Thus we gather the full meaning of the ex-

[53] pression, “he began to be a mighty one in the earth.” From Babylon, which was “the beginning of his kingdom,” Nimrod “went out into Assyria” ([ver. 11](#), marginal rendering), “and builded Nineveh”—the remarkable circumstance here being that each time four cities are mentioned in connection with Nimrod: first, the four cities of his Babylonian empire, of which Babel was the capital, and then the four cities of his conquered Assyrian empire, of which Nineveh was the capital. Now all this tallies in the most striking manner with what we read in ancient history, and with those Assyrian monuments which within our own lifetime have by the labors of Layard and Loftus been exhumed from their burial of many centuries, to give witness for the Bible. For, first, we now know that the great Asiatic empire of Babylon was of Cushite origin. Nay, even the name Nimrod occurs in the list of Egyptian kings. Secondly, we are made aware that Babel was the original seat of the empire; and, strangest of all, that the earliest Babylonian kings bore a title which is supposed to mean “four races,” in reference to “the quadruple groups of capitals”<sup>1</sup> of Babylonia and Assyria. Lastly, we know that, as stated in the Bible, “the Babylonian empire extended its sway northwards” to Assyria, where Nineveh was founded, which in turn succeeded to the empire once held by Babel. In all these respects, therefore, the latest historical investigations have most strikingly confirmed the narrative of Scripture.

Of the magnificence of Babel, the capital of the empire of Nimrod, “the mighty hunter,” it is difficult to convey an adequate conception, without entering into details foreign to our purpose. But some idea of it may be formed from its extent, which according to the lowest computation, covered no less than one hundred square miles, or about five times the size of London; while the highest computation would make it cover two hundred square miles, or ten times the extent of London!<sup>2</sup> Such was the world-city, the first “beginning” of which at least Nimrod had founded.

No wonder that the worldly pride of that age should have wished to make such a place the world-capital of a world-empire, whose tower “may reach unto heaven!” The events connected with the dis-

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<sup>1</sup>See Mr. Bevan’s article in Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 2, pp. 544, etc.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Smith, however, regards these accounts as exaggerated.

comfiture of their plan took place in the days of Peleg, the grandson of Shem. ([Genesis 10:25](#)) As Peleg was born one hundred years after the flood, and lived two hundred and thirty-nine years, there must have been already a considerable population upon the earth.

If evidence were required that the flood had indeed destroyed sinners but not sin, it would be found in the bearing and language of men in the days of Nimrod and Peleg. After leaving the ark, they had “journeyed eastward” ([ch. 11:2](#)) till they reached the extensive well-watered plain of Shinar, where they settled. Being still all “of one language and of one speech,” they resolved to build themselves there “a city, and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven,” for the twofold purpose of making themselves “a name,” and lest they “be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” Such words read singularly like those which a Nimrod would employ, and they breathe the spirit of “Babylon” in all ages. Assuredly their meaning is: “Let us rebel!”—for not only would the Divine purpose of peopling the earth have thus been frustrated, but such a world-empire would in the nature of it have been a defiance to God and to the kingdom of God, even as its motive was pride and ambition. A German critic has seen in the words “let us make us a name”—in Hebrew, sheen—a kind of counterfeit of the Shem in whom the promises of God centered, or, if one might so express it, the setting up of an anti-Christ of worldly power. Something of this kind seems certainly indicated in what God says of the attempt ([ver. 6](#)): “And this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do.” These words seem to imply that the building of Babel was only intended as the commencement of a further course of rebellion. The gathering of all material forces into one common center would have led to universal despotism and to universal idolatry,—in short, to the full development of what as anti-Christ is reserved for the judgment of the last days. We read, that “Jehovah came down to see the city and the tower,” that is, using our human modes of expression, to take judicial cognizance of man’s undertaking. In allusion to the boastful language in which the builders of Babel and of its tower had in their self-confidence stated their purpose: “Go to, let us make brick,” etc. ([ver. 3](#)), Jehovah expressed His purpose of defeating their folly, using the same words: “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language.” And by this simple means, without any

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outward visible interference, did the Lord arrest the grandest attempt of man's rebellion, and by confounding their language, "scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth." "Therefore is the name of it called Babel, or confusion." What a commentary [55] does this history afford to the majestic declarations of the second Psalm! <sup>3</sup>

Its distance from Babylon, however, seems opposed to the idea that these are the ruins of the tower spoken of in Scripture. But even so, Birs Nimrud can only be a few centuries younger than the tower of Babel; and its construction enables us to judge what the appearance of the original tower must have been. Birs Nimrud faced north-east, and formed a sort of "oblique pyramid, built in seven receding stages. The platform on which these stages rested was of crude brick; the stages themselves of burnt brick, painted in different colors in honor of gods or planets—each stage as it was placed on the other receding, so as to be considerably nearer the back of the building, or the south-west." The first stage, painted black in honor of Saturn, was a square of two hundred and seventy-two feet, and twenty-six feet high; the second stage, orange colored, in honor of Jupiter, was a square of two hundred and thirty feet, and twenty-six feet high; the third stage, bright red, in honor of Mars, was a square of one hundred and eighty-eight feet, and also twenty-six feet high; the fourth stage, golden, for the Sun, was one hundred and forty-six feet square, and fifteen feet high; the fifth stage, pale yellow, for Venus, was one hundred and four feet square, and fifteen feet high; the sixth stage, dark blue, for Mercury, was sixty-two feet square, and fifteen feet high; and the seventh stage, silver, for the Moon, was twenty feet square, and fifteen feet high. The whole was surmounted by a chapel, which must have nearly covered the whole top. The whole height, as already stated, was one hundred and fifty-three feet; or about one-third that of the great pyramid of Egypt, which measures four hundred and eighty feet. It is also interesting to notice, how exactly what we know of early Babylonian architecture tallies with what we read in Scripture: "Let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime (or rather, bitumen) had they for mortar." The small

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<sup>3</sup>Professor Rawlingson in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 1.

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burnt bricks, laid in bitumen, are still there; not only in the tower, but in the still existing ruins of the ancient palace of Babel, which was coeval with the building of the city itself.

Holy Scripture does not inform us whether “the tower” was allowed to stand after the dispersion of its builders; nor yet does it furnish any details as to the manner in which “Jehovah did there confound the language of all the earth.” All this would have been beyond its purpose. But there, at the very outset, when the first attempt was made to found, in man’s strength, a vast kingdom of this world, which God brought to naught by confounding the language of its builders, and by scattering them over the face of the earth, we see a typical judgment, of which the counterpart in blessing was granted on the day of Pentecost; when, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, another universal kingdom was to be founded, the first token of which was that gift of tongues, which pointed forward to a reunion of the nations, when the promise would be fulfilled that they should all be gathered into the tents of Shem!

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## Chapter 9

### *The Nations and their Religion*

#### Job

A modern German writer has well said: “The birth of heathenism may be dated from the moment when the presumptuous statement was uttered, ‘Go to, let us build a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name.’” Even Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, regards Nimrod as the father of heathenism, the characteristic of which is to find strength and happiness in sin, and not in God. Its essential principle is to reject all that is not seen, and to cling to that which is temporal. Thus we also may be heathens in heart, even though we are not such in mind, and do not worship stocks or stone. Indeed, it is very remarkable, that neither nation nor tribe has ever been discovered which did not acknowledge and worship some superior Being; and yet from the most savage barbarians to the most refined philosopher, they have all been destitute of the knowledge of the one living and true God. The only exception in the world has been that of Israel, to whom God specially revealed Himself; and even Israel required constant teaching, guidance, and discipline from on high to keep them from falling back into idolatry. Idolatry is the religion of sight in opposition to that of faith. Instead of the unseen Creator, man regarded that which was visible—the sun, the moon, the stars—as the cause and the ruler of all; or he assigned to everything its deity, and thus had gods many and lords many; or else he converted his heroes, real or imaginary, into gods. The worship of the heavens, the worship of nature, or the worship of man—such is heathenism and idolatry. And yet all the while man felt the insufficiency of his worship, for behind these gods he placed a dark, immovable, unsearchable Fate, which ruled supreme, and controlled alike gods and men. It was indeed a terrible exchange to make—to leave our heavenly Father and His love for such delusions

and disappointments. The worst of it was, that man gradually became conformed to his religion. He first imputed his own vices to his gods, and next imitated the vices of his gods. Assuredly, the heathen nations were the younger son in the parable ([Luke 15:12](#)), who had left his father's house with the portion of goods that belonged to him—heathen science, art, literature, and power—to find himself at the last driven to eat the husks on which the swine do feed, and yet not able to satisfy the cravings of his hunger! Blessed be God for that revelation of Himself in Christ Jesus, which has brought the prodigal back to the Father's home and heart!

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But even so, God did not leave Himself without a witness. The inward searching of man after a God, the accusing voice of his conscience, the attempt to offer sacrifices, and the remnants of ancient traditions of the truth among men—all seemed to point upward. And then, as all were not Israel—who were of Israel—, so God also had at all times His own, even among the Gentile nations. Job, Melchizedek, Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, may be mentioned as instances of this. It will be readily understood that the number of those “born out of season,” as it were, from among the Gentiles, must have been largest the higher we ascend the stream of time, and the nearer we approach the period when early traditions were still preserved in their purity in the earth. The fullest example of this is set before us in the book of Job, which also gives a most interesting picture of those early times.

Two things may be regarded as quite settled about the book of Job. Its scene and actors are laid in patriarchal times, and outside the family or immediate ancestry of Abraham. It is a story of Gentile life in the time of the earliest patriarchs. And yet anything more noble, grand, devout, or spiritual than what the book of Job contains is not found, “no, not in Israel.” This is not the place to give either the history of Job, or to point out the depth of thought, the vividness of imagery, and the beauty and grandeur of language with which it is written. It must suffice to take the most rapid survey of the religious and social life which it sets before us. Without here referring to the sayings of Elihu, Job had evidently perfect knowledge of the true God; and he was a humble, earnest worshipper of Jehovah. Without any acquaintance with “Moses and the prophets,” he knew that of which Moses and the prophets spoke. Reverent, believing acknowl-

edgment of God, submission, and spiritual repentance formed part of his experience, which had the approval of God Himself. Then Job offered sacrifices; he speaks about the great tempter; he looks for the resurrection of the body; and he expects the coming of Messiah.

[59] We have traced the barest outlines of the religion of Job. The friends who come to him, if they share not his piety, at least do not treat his views as something quite strange and previously unheard. This, then, is a blessed picture of at least a certain class in that age. How far culture and civilization must have advanced in those times we gather from various allusions in the book of Job. Job himself is a man of great wealth and high rank. In the language of a recent writer: <sup>1</sup>

“The chieftain lives in considerable splendor and dignity.... Job visits the city frequently, and is there received with high respect as a prince, judge, and distinguished warrior. (Job 29:7, 9) There are allusions to courts of justice, written indictments, and regular forms of procedure. (Job 13:26; 31:28) Men had begun to observe and reason upon the phenomena of nature, and astronomical observations were connected with curious speculations upon primeval traditions. We read of mining operations, great buildings, ruined sepulchers.... Great revolutions had occurred within the time of the writer; nations, once independent, had been overthrown, and whole races reduced to a state of misery and degradation.”

Nor ought we to overlook the glimpses of social life given us in this history. While, indeed, there was violence, robbery, and murder in the land, there is happily also another side to the picture. “When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street, the young men saw me, and hid themselves; and the aged arose and stood up.” Along with such becoming tribute of respect paid to worth, we find that the relationship between the pious rich and the poor is thus described: “When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.”

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<sup>1</sup>Canon Cook, in Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 1, p. 1097.



Assuredly there is nothing in all this which we could wish to see altered even in New Testament times! But the more terrible in contrast must have been the idolatry and the corruption of the vast majority of mankind; an idolatry which they had probably inherited from before the flood, and which soon attained gigantic proportions, and a corruption which went on ever increasing during the “times of this ignorance.”

## Chapter 10

### *The Chronology of the Early History of the Bible—Commencement of the History of God's Dealings with Abraham and his Seed*

Before further proceeding with our history some brief explanation may be desirable of the chronological table given in this volume, and in general of the early chronology of the Bible. It will be noticed, first, that the years are counted from "B.C.," that is, from "before Christ;" the numbers, of course, becoming smaller the farther we come down from the creation of the world, and the nearer we approach the birth of our Savior. Thus, if the year of creation be computed at 4004 before Christ, the deluge, which happened 1656 years later, would fall in the year 2348 B.C. Further, it will be observed that we have given two chronological tables of the same events, which differ by many hundreds of years—the one "according to Hales," the other "according to Ussher," which latter is that of "the dates in the margin of English Bibles," and, we may add, corresponds with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The explanation of the difference between them is that our calculations of Biblical dates may be derived from one of three sources. We have, in fact, the five books of Moses in three different forms before us. First, we have the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament; next, there exists a translation of it in Greek, completed long before the time of our Lord, which was commonly used by the Jews at the time of Christ, for which reason also it is generally quoted in the New Testament. This version is known as that of the "LXX," or "Seventy," from the supposed number of translators. Finally, we have the Samaritan Pentateuch, or that in use among the Samaritans. Now, as the genealogies differ in these three in regard to the ages of the patriarchs, the question arises which of them should be adopted? Each in turn has had its defenders, but the most learned critics are now almost unanimous in concluding, as indeed we might have expected, that the Hebrew text contains the true chronology. Of the other two, the

Samaritan is so untrustworthy that for practical purposes we may leave it entirely out of view. The Septuagint chronology differs from that of the Hebrew text in prolonging the ages of the patriarchs, partially before the deluge, but chiefly between the deluge and the calling of Abraham,—the result being that the flood is thrown five hundred and eighty-six years later than in the Hebrew text; and the birth of Abraham yet other eight hundred and seventy-eight years—the total difference amounting to no less than one thousand two hundred and forty-five years! It is not difficult to guess the reason why the Greek translators had thus altered the original numbers. It was evidently their wish to throw the birth of Abraham as late as possible after the flood. Of these two chronologies, that of the Hebrew text may, for convenience sake, be designated as the short, and that of the “LXX” as the long chronology; and, in a general way, it may be said that (with certain modifications which it would take too long to explain) Hales has adopted the long, or Greek, and Ussher the short, or Hebrew chronology. [61]

This may suffice on a matter which has engaged only too much discussion. <sup>1</sup> It is far more important to think of the kingdom of God, the history of which is given us in the Holy Scriptures; for now we are at the beginning of its real appearance. If God had at first dealt with mankind generally, then with one part of the race, and lastly with one division of nations, He now chose and raised up for Himself a peculiar people, through whom His purposes of mercy towards all men were to be carried out. This people was to be trained from its cradle until it had fulfilled its mission, which was when He came who was the Desire of all nations.

Three points here claim our special attention:

1. The election and selection of what became the people of God. Step by step we see in the history of the patriarchs this electing and separating process on the part of God. Both are marked by this twofold characteristic: that all is accomplished, not in the ordinary and natural manner, but, as it were, supernaturally; and that all is of grace. Thus Abram was called alone out of his father’s house, he was elected and selected. The birth of Isaac, the heir of the promises,

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<sup>1</sup>The modern Jews count the year of the Creation from 3761 B.C., so that, in order to calculate the Jewish era, we have to add to our Christian era the number 3761.

[62] was, in a sense, supernatural; while, on the other hand, Ishmael, the elder son of Abram, was rejected. The same election and selection appears in the history of Esau and Jacob, and indeed throughout the whole patriarchal history. For at the outset the chosen race was to learn what is the grand lesson of all Scriptures that everything comes to us from God, and is of grace, that it is not man's doing, but God's working; not in the ordinary manner, but by His special interposition. Nor should we fail to mark another peculiarity in God's dealings. To use a New Testament illustration, it was the grain of mustard-seed which was destined to grow into the tree in whose branches all the birds of the air were to find lodgment. In Abram the stem was cut down to a single root. This root first sprang up into the patriarchal family, then expanded into the tribes of Israel, and finally blossomed and bore fruit in the chosen people. But even this was only a means to an end. Israel had possessed, so to speak, the three crowns separately. It had the priesthood in Aaron, the royal dignity in David and his line, and the prophetic office. But in the "last days" the triple crown of priest, king, and prophet has been united upon Him Whose it really is, even JESUS, a "Prophet like unto Moses," the eternal priest "after the order of Melchizedek," and the real and ever reigning "Son of David." And in Him all the promises of God, which had been given with increasing clearness from Adam onwards to Shem, then to Abraham, to Jacob, in the law, in the types of the Old Testament, and, finally, in its prophecies have become "Yea and amen," till at the last all nations shall dwell in the tents of Shem.

2. We mark a difference in the mode of Divine revelation in the patriarchal as compared with the previous period. Formerly, God had spoken to man, either on earth or from heaven, while now He actually appeared to them, and that specially as the Angel of Jehovah, or the Angel of the Covenant. The first time Jehovah "appeared" unto Abram was when he entered the land of Canaan, in obedience to that Divine call which singled him out to become the ancestor of the people of God. ([Genesis 12:7](#)) After that a fresh appearance of Jehovah, and of the Angel of the Covenant, in whom He manifested Himself, marked each stage of the Covenant history. And this appearance was not only granted to Abraham and to Hagar, to Jacob, to Moses, to Balaam, to Gideon, to Manoah and to his wife, and to David, but even towards the close of Jewish history this

same Angel of Jehovah is still found pleading for rebellious, apostate Israel in these words: “O Jehovah of Hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem?” ([Zechariah 1:12](#)) The more carefully we follow His steps, the more fully shall we be convinced that He was not an ordinary Angel, but that Jehovah was pleased to reveal Himself in this manner under the Old Testament. We shall have frequent occasion to return to this very solemn subject. Meantime it may be interesting to know that of old the Jews also regarded Him as the Shechinah, or visible presence of God,—the same as appeared in the pillar of the cloud and of fire, and afterwards in the temple, in the most holy place; while the ancient Church almost unanimously adored in Him the Son of God, the Second Person of the blessed Trinity. We cannot conceive any subject more profitable, or likely to be fraught with greater blessing, than reverently to follow the footsteps of the Angel of Jehovah through the Old Testament.

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3. The one grand characteristic of the patriarchs was their faith. The lives of the patriarchs prefigure the whole history of Israel and their Divine selection. In the words of a recent German writer, amidst all varying events, the one constant trait in patriarchal history was “faith which lays hold on the word of promise, and on the strength of this word gives up that which is seen and present for that which is unseen and future.” Thus “Abraham was the man of joyous, working faith; Isaac of patient, bearing faith; Jacob of contending and prevailing faith.” But all lived and “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth.” And it is still so. Without ignoring the great privilege of those who are descended from Abraham, yet, in the true sense, only “they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham;” “and if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” To adapt the words of a German poet:

“What marks each one within the fold  
Is faith that does not see;  
And yet, as if it did behold,  
Trusts, unseen Lord, to Thee!”

## Chapter 11

### *The Calling of Abram—His Arrival in Canaan, and Temporary Removal to Egypt*

(Genesis 11:27-13:4)

With Abram an entirely new period may be said to begin. He was to be the ancestor of a new race in whom the Divine promises were to be preserved, and through whom they would finally be realized. It seemed, therefore, necessary that, when Abram was called, he should forsake his old home, his family, his country, and his people. Not to speak of the dangers which otherwise would have beset his vocation, a new beginning required that he should be cut off from all that was “behind.” Had he remained in Ur of the Chaldees, he would at best only have been a new link in the old chain. Besides, the special dealings of God, and Abram’s faith and patience, as manifested in his obedience to the Divine command, were intended to qualify him for being the head of the new order of things, “the father of all who believe.” Lastly, it was intended that the history of Abram, as that of his seed after him, should prepare the way for the great truths of the Gospel, and exhibit as in a figure the history of all who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Hitherto, God had only interposed, as in the flood, and at the confounding of tongues, to arrest the attempts of man against His purposes of mercy. But when God called Abram, He personally and actively interfered, and this time in mercy, not in judgment. The whole history of Abram may be arranged into four stages, each commencing with a personal revelation of Jehovah. The first, when the patriarch was called to his work and mission;(Genesis 12-14) the second, when he received the promise of an heir, and the covenant was made with him;(Genesis 15, 16) the third, when that covenant was established in the change of his name from Abram to Abraham, and in circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant;(Genesis 17-21) the fourth, when his faith

was tried, proved, and perfected in the offering up of Isaac. ([Genesis 22-2511](#)) These are, so to speak, the high points in Abram's history, which the patriarch successively climbed, and to which all the other events of his life may be regarded as the ascent. Descending the genealogy of Shem, Abram stands tenth among "the fathers" after the flood. He was a son—apparently the third and youngest—of Terah, the others being Haran and Nahor. The family, or perhaps more correctly the tribe or clan of Terah, resided in Chaldea, which is the southern part of Babylonia—. "Ur of the Chaldees," as recently again discovered, <sup>1</sup> was one of the oldest, if not the most ancient, among the cities of Chaldea. It lies about six miles away from the river Euphrates, and, curious to relate, is at present somewhere near one hundred and twenty-five miles from the Persian Gulf, though it is supposed, that at one time it was actually washed by its waters, the difference being accounted for by the rapid deposit of what becomes soil, or of alluvium, as it is called.

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Thus Abram must in his youth have stood by the seashore, and seen the sand innumerable, to which his posterity in after ages was likened. Another figure, under which his posterity is described, must have been equally familiar to his mind. It is well known that the brilliancy of a starlit sky in the East, and especially where Abram dwelt, far exceeds anything which we witness in our latitudes. Possibly this may have first led in those regions to the worship of the heavenly bodies. And Abram must have been the more attracted to their contemplation, as the city in which he dwelt was "wholly given" to that idolatry; for the real site of Ur has been ascertained from the circumstance that the bricks still found there bear the very name of Hur on them. Now this word points to Hurki, the ancient moon-god, and Ur of the Chaldees was the great "Moon-city," the very center of the Chaldean moon-worship! The most remarkable ruins of that city are those of the old moon-temple of Ur, which from the name on the bricks are computed to date from the year 2000 before Christ. Thus bricks that are thirty-eight centuries old have now been brought forward to bear witness to the old city of

<sup>1</sup>See the article Ur, in Smith's Bible Dictionary. The view previously adopted, which finds Ur in quite a different district, is evidently erroneous.

Abraham, and to the tremendous change that must have passed over him when, in faith upon the Divine word, he obeyed its command.

[66] Jewish tradition has one or two varying accounts to show how Abram was converted from the surrounding idolatry, and what persecutions he had to suffer in consequence. Scripture does not indulge our fancy with such matters; but, true to its uniform purpose, only relates what belongs to the history of the kingdom of God. We learn, however, from [Joshua 24:2, 14, 15](#), that the family of Terah had “in old time, on the other side of the flood,” or of Euphrates, “served other gods;” and we can readily understand what influence their surroundings must, in the circumstances, have exercised upon them. It was out of this city of Ur that God called Abram. Previously to this, Haran, Abram’s eldest brother, had died. We read, that “Terah took Abram, his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son’s son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife, and they went forth with them from Urof the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.” The words which we have italicized leave no room for doubt, that the first call of God had come to Abram long before the death of Terah, and when the clan were still at Ur. ([Acts 7:2](#)) From the circumstance that Haran is afterwards called “the city of Nahor,” ([Genesis 24:10; 27:43](#)) we gather that Nahor, Abraham’s brother, and his family had also settled there, though perhaps at a later period, and without relinquishing their idolatry. It is a remarkable confirmation of the scriptural account, that, though this district belongs to Mesopotamia, and not to Chaldea’, its inhabitants are known to have for a long time retained the peculiar Chaldean language and worship. Haran has preserved its original name, and at the time of the Romans was one of the great battle-fields on which that power sustained a defeat from the Parthians.

The journey from Ur, in the far south, had been long, wearisome, and dangerous; and the fruitful plains around Haran must have held out special inducements for a pastoral tribe to settle. But when the Divine command came, Abram was “not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” Perhaps the arrival and settlement of Nahor and his family, bringing with them their idolatrous associations, may have formed an additional incentive for departing. And so far, God had in His providence made it easier for Abram to leave, since his



father Terah had died in Haran, at the age of two hundred and five years. The second call of Jehovah to Abram, as given in [Genesis 12:1-3](#), consisted of a fourfold command, and a fourfold promise.

The command was quite definite in its terms: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee;” leaving it, however, as yet undecided which was to be the place of his final settlement. This uncertainty must have been an additional and, in the circumstances, a very serious difficulty in the way of Abram’s obedience. But the word of promise reassured him. It should be distinctly marked, that on this, as on every other occasion in Abram’s life, his faith determined his obedience. Accordingly, we read, “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”([Hebrews 11:8](#))

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The promise upon which he trusted assured to him these four things: “I will make of thee a great nation;” “I will bless thee,” with this addition (in [ver. 3](#)), “and thou shalt be a blessing, and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee;” “I will make thy name great;” and, lastly, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

When we examine these promises more closely, we at once perceive how they must have formed yet another trial of Abram’s faith; since he was not only going, a stranger into a strange land, but was at the time wholly childless. The promise that he was to “be a blessing,” implied that blessing would, so to speak, be identified with him; so that happiness or evil would flow from the relationship in which men would place themselves towards Abram. On the other hand, from the peculiar terms “them that bless thee,” in the plural, and “him that curseth thee,” in the singular, we gather that the Divine purpose of mercy embraced many, “of all nations, kindreds, and tongues.” Lastly, the great promise, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,” went far beyond the personal assurance, “I will make thy name great.” It resumed and made more definite the previous promises of final deliverance, by fixing upon Abram as the spring whence the blessing was to flow. Viewed in this light, all mankind appear as only so many families, but of one and the same father; and which were to be again united in a common blessing

in and through Abram. Repeated again and again in the history of Abram, this promise contained already at the outset the whole fullness of the Divine purpose of mercy in the salvation of men. Thus was the prediction to be fulfilled: “God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem,” as is shown by St. Peter in [Acts 3:25](#), and by St. Paul in [Galatians 3:8, 14](#).

[68] Abram was seventy-five years old “when he departed out of Haran,” accompanied by Lot and his family. Putting aside the various traditions which describe his prolonged stay at Damascus, and his supposed rule there, we learn from Scripture that Abram entered the land of promise, as many years afterwards his grandson Jacob returned to it, leaving on his right the majestic Lebanon, and on his left the pastures of Gilead and the mountain-forests of Bashan. Straight on he passed over hills and through valleys, till he reached the delicious plain of Moreh, or rather the spreading terebinth-tree of Moreh, in the valley of Sichem. Travelers have spoken in the most enthusiastic terms of this vale. “All at once,” writes Professor Robinson, “the ground sinks down to a valley running towards the west, with a soil of rich, black vegetable mold. Here a scene of luxuriant and almost unparalleled verdure burst upon our view. The whole valley was filled with gardens of vegetables, and orchards of all kinds of fruits, watered by several fountains, which burst forth in various parts, and flow westward in refreshing streams. It came upon us suddenly, like a scene of fairy enchantment. We saw nothing to compare with it in all Palestine.”

Another traveler <sup>2</sup> says: “Here there are no wild thickets; yet there is always verdure, always shade,—not of the oak, the terebinth, or the garoub-tree, but of the olive-grove, so soft in color, so picturesque in form, that for its sake we can willingly dispense with all other wood.”

Such was the first resting-place of Abram in the land of promise, in the plain, or rather in the wood of Moreh, which probably derived its name from the Canaanitish proprietor of the district. For, as shown by the remark of the sacred writer, “and the Canaanite was then in the land,” the country was not tenantless, but occupied by

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<sup>2</sup>Van de Velde.

a hostile race; and if Abram was to enter on its possession, it must once more be by faith in the promises.

Here it was that Jehovah actually “appeared” unto Abram, under some visible form or other; and now for the first time in sight of the Canaanite was the promise conveyed, “unto thy seed will I give this land.” It is added that Abram “there builded an altar unto Jehovah who appeared unto him.” Thus, the soil on which Jehovah had been seen, and which He had just promised to Abram, was consecrated unto the Lord; and Abram’s faith, publicly professed in the strange land, grasped Jehovah’s promise, solemnly given.

From Shechem, Abram removed, probably for the sake of pasturage, southwards to a mountain on the east of Bethel, pitching his tent between Bethel and Ai. This district is, in the words of Robinson, “still one of the finest tracts for pasturage in the whole land.” In the glowing language of Dean Stanley: “We here stand on the highest of a succession of eminences, ... its topmost summit resting, as it were, on the rocky slopes below, and distinguished from them by the olive-grove, which clusters over its broad surface above. From this height, thus offering a natural base for the patriarchal altar, and a fitting shade for the patriarchal tent, Abram and Lot must be conceived as taking the wide survey of the country .. such as can be enjoyed from no other point in the neighborhood.” What met their astonished gaze from this point will be described in the following chapter. Meantime, we note that here, also, Abram “builded an altar unto Jehovah;” and, though He does not seem to have visibly appeared unto him, yet the patriarch called upon the name of Jehovah. After a residence, probably of some time, Abram continued his journey, “going on still toward the south,”—a pilgrim and a stranger “in the land of promise;” his possession of it only marked by the altars which he left on his track.

A fresh trial now awaited the faith of Abram. Strong as it always proved in what concerned the kingdom of God, it failed again and again in matters personal to himself. A famine was desolating the land, and, as is still the case with the Bedouin tribes under similar circumstances, Abram and his family “went down into Egypt,” which has at all times been the granary of other nations. It does not become us to speculate whether this removal was lawful, without previous special directions from God; but we know that it exposed him to

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the greatest danger. As we must not underrate the difficulties of the patriarchs, so neither must we overrate their faith and their strength. Abram “was a man of like passions with us,” and of like weaknesses. When God spoke to him he believed, and when he believed then he obeyed. But God had said nothing as yet to him, directly, about Sarai; and, in the absence of any special direction, he seems to have taken the matter into his own hands, after the manner of those times and countries. From [Genesis 20:13](#) we learn that when he first set out from his father’s house, an agreement had been made between the two, that Sarai was to pass as his sister, because, as he said, “the fear of God” was not among the nations with whom they would be brought in contact; and they might slay Abram for his wife’s sake. <sup>3</sup>

The deceit—for such it really was—seemed scarcely such in their eyes, since Sarai was so closely related to her husband that she might almost be called his sister. In short, as we all too oftentimes do, it was deception, commencing with self-deception; and though what he said might be true in the letter, it was false in the spirit of it. But we must not imagine that Abram was so heartless as to endanger his wife for the sake of his own safety. On the contrary, it seemed the readiest means of guarding her honor also; since, if she were looked upon as the sister of a mighty chief, her hand would be sought, and certain formalities have to be gone through, which would give Abram time to escape with his wife. This is not said in apology, but in explanation of the matter.

Ancient Egyptian monuments here again remarkably confirm the scriptural narrative. They prove that the immigration of distinguished foreigners, with their families and dependents, was by no means uncommon. One of them, dating from the time of Abram, represents the arrival of such a “clan,” and their presentation and kindly reception by Pharaoh. Their name, appearance, and dress show them to be a pastoral tribe of Semitic origin. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>There is in the British Museum an ancient Egyptian “papyrus,” which, although of somewhat later date than that of Abram, proves that his fears, on entering Egypt, were at least not groundless. It relates how a Pharaoh, on the advice of his counselors, sent armies to take away a man’s wife by force, and then to murder her husband.

<sup>4</sup>Another curious coincidence is, that the name of this “chief” is abshah, “father of land” which reminds us of Abraham, the “father of a multitude.” The whole bearing of

Another ancient tablet records how such a foreigner attained the highest dignities in the land. So far, then, Abram would meet with a ready welcome. But his device was in vain, and Sarai “was taken into the house of Pharaoh.” As the future brother-in-law of the king, Abram now rapidly acquired possessions and wealth. These presents Abram could, of course, not refuse, though they increased his guilt, as well as his remorse and sense of shame. But he had committed himself too deeply to retrace his steps; and the want of faith, which had at first given rise to his fears, may have gone on increasing. Abram had given up for a time the promised land, and he was now in danger of losing also the yet greater promise. But Jehovah did not, like Abram, deny her who was to be the mother of the promised seed. He visited “Pharaoh and his house with great plagues,” which by-and-by led to their ascertaining the true state of the case—possibly from Sarai herself. Upon this the king summoned Abram, and addressed him in words of reproach, which Abram must have the more keenly felt that they came from an idolater. Their justice the patriarch acknowledged by his silence. Yet the interposition of God on behalf of Abram induced Pharaoh to send him away with all his possessions intact; and, as the wording of the Hebrew text implies, honorably accompanied to the boundary of the land. [71]

It is a true remark, made by a German writer, that while the occurrence of a famine in Canaan was intended to teach Abram that even in the promised land nourishment depended on the blessing of the Lord,—in a manner teaching him beforehand this petition, “Give us this day our daily bread,”—his experience in Egypt would also show him that in conflict with the world fleshly wisdom availed nothing, and that help came only from Him who “suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, He reproveth kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm,” ([Psalm 105:14, 15](#)) thus, as it were, conveying to Abram’s mind these two other petitions: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” And so Abram once more returned to Bethel, “unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning; unto the place of the altar which he had made at the first: and there Abram called on the name

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the Egyptian monuments on the narratives of the Bible will be fully discussed in the next volume.

of Jehovah.” In one respect this incident is typical of what afterwards befell the children of Israel. Like him, they went into Egypt on account of a famine; and, like him, they left it under the influence of “fear of them which fell” upon the Egyptians—yet laden with the riches of Egypt.

## Chapter 12

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### *The Separation of Abram and Lot—Abram at Hebron—Sodom Plundered—Lot Rescued—The Fleeting with Melchizedek*

(Genesis 13, 14)

Hitherto Abram had been accompanied by Lot in all his wanderings. But a separation must take place between them also. For Abram and his seed were to be kept quite distinct from all other races, so that the eye of faith might in future ages be fixed upon the father of the faithful, as on him from whom the promised Messiah was to spring. Like so many of God's most marked interpositions, this also was brought about by what seemed a series of natural circumstances, and probably Abram himself was ignorant of the Divine purpose in what at the time must have been no small trial to him. The increase of their wealth, and especially of their herds and flocks in Egypt, led to disputes between the herdsmen of Abram and of Lot, which were the more painful that, as the Bible notes, "the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land," and must have been witnesses to this "strife" between "brethren." To avoid all occasion of it, Abram now proposed a voluntary separation, allowing Lot, though he was the younger and the inferior, the choice of district—and this not merely from generosity, but in faith, leaving it to the Lord to determine the bounds of his habitation.

As the two stood on that highest ridge between Bethel and Ai, the prospect before them was indeed unrivaled. Looking back northwards, the eye would rest on the mountains which divide Samaria from Judaea; westwards and southwards, it would range over the later possession of Benjamin and Judah, till in the far distance it descried the slope on which Hebron lay. But the fairest vision was eastward: in the extreme distance, the dark mountains of Moab; at their foot, the Jordan, winding through a valley of untold fertility; and in the immediate foreground, the range of hills above Jericho.

[73] As the patriarchs gazed upon it, the whole cleft of the Jordan valley was rich with the most luxuriant tropical vegetation, the sweetest spot of all being around the Lake of Sodom, at that time probably a sweetwater lake, the "circuit" of the plain resembling in appearance, but far exceeding in fertility and beauty, the district around the Sea of Galilee. In this "round" of Jordan, and by the waters of Sodom, rich cities had sprung up, which, alas! were also the seat of the most terrible corruption. As Lot saw this "round" or district, fair like Paradise, green with perennial verdure, like the part of Egypt watered by the Nile, his heart went out after it, unmindful of, or not caring to inquire into, the character of its inhabitants. The scene might well have won the heart of any one whose affections were set on things beneath. Lot's heart was so set; and he now vindicated by his choice the propriety of his being separated from Abram. Assuredly their aims went asunder, as the ways which they took. Yet, even thus, God watched over Lot', and left him not to reap the bitter fruit of his own choice.

Nor was Abram left in that hour without consolation. As most he needed it when alone, and with apparently nothing but the comparatively barren hills of Judaea before him, Jehovah once more renewed to him, and enlarged the promise of the land, far as his eye could range, bestowing it upon Abram and his "seed for ever." For the terms of this promise were not made void by the seventy years which Judah spent in the captivity of Babylon, nor yet are they annulled by the eighteen centuries of Israel's present unbelief and dispersion. The promise of the land is to Abram's "seed for ever." The land and the people God has joined together; and though now the one lies desolate, like a dead body, and the other wanders unresting, as it were a disembodied spirit, God will again bring them to each other in the days when His promise shall be finally established. So Abram must have understood the word of Jehovah. And when, so to speak, he now took possession by faith of the promised land, he was directed to walk through it. In the course of these wanderings he reached Hebron, one of the most ancient cities of the world, where in the wood of one, Mamre, he pitched his tent under a spreading terebinth, and built an altar unto Jehovah. This place seems through the rest of his life to have continued one of the centers of his movements.



Meanwhile Lot had taken up his abode in a district which, like the rest of Canaan at the time of Joshua's conquest, was subdivided among a number of small kings, each probably ruling over a city and the immediately surrounding neighborhood. For twelve years had this whole district been tributary to Chedorlaomer. In the thirteenth year they rebelled; and, in the fourteenth, the hordes of Chedorlaomer and of his three confederates swept over the intervening district, carrying desolation with them, till they encountered the five allied monarchs of the "round of Jordan," in the vale of Siddim, the district around what afterwards became the Dead Sea'. Once more victory attended the invaders—two of the Canaanitish kings were killed, the rest fled in wild confusion; Sodom and Gomorrah were plundered, and their inhabitants—Lot among them—carried away captives by the retreating host. This was the first time—at least in Scripture history—that the world-kingdom, as founded by Nimrod, was brought into contact with the people of God, and that on the soil of Palestine. For Chedorlaomer and his confederates occupied the very land and place where afterwards the Babylonian and Assyrian empires were. <sup>1</sup> It became necessary, therefore, that Abram should interfere. God had given him the land, and here was its hereditary enemy; and God now called and fitted him, though but a stranger and a pilgrim on its soil, to become its deliverer; while alike the mode and the circumstances of this deliverance were to point forward to those realities of which it was the type.

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One who had escaped from the rout brought Abram tidings of the disaster. He immediately armed his own trained servants, three hundred and eighteen in number; and being joined by Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, the chieftains to whom the district around Hebron belonged, followed in pursuit of Chedorlaomer and his allies. Probably, as is common in such warfare, victory had made them careless. They may have feasted, or their bands, laden with captives and spoil, may have been straggling, and without order. Certainly they were ignorant of any coming danger, when Abram, having divided his force, fell upon them, in the dead of night, from several sides at the

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<sup>1</sup>Genesis 10:10. There is frequent reference to the kingdom of Elam on the Assyrian monuments, confirmatory of Scripture, and Mr. Smith inserts the names of Chedorlaomer and his three confederates in his "list of Babylonian monarchs" (see *Assyrian Discoveries*, pp. 441, 442).

[75] same time, inflicted a great slaughter, and pursued them to close by Damascus. All the spoil and all the captives, among them Lot also, were rescued and brought back. As the returning host of Abram entered the valley of Shaveh, close under the walls of what afterwards became Jerusalem, they were met by two persons bearing very different characters, and coming from opposite directions. From the banks of Jordan the new king of Sodom, whose predecessor had fallen in battle against Chedorlaomer, came up to thank Abram, and to offer him the spoils he had won; while from the heights of Salem—the ancient Jerusalem—the priest-king Melchizedek descended to bless Abram, and to refresh him with “bread and wine.” This memorable meeting seems to have given the valley its name, “the king’s dale;” and here, in later times, Absalom erected for himself a monumental pillar. (2 Samuel 18:18) But now a far different scene ensued, and one so significant in its typical meaning as to have left its impress alike on the prophecies of the Old and in the fulfillment of the New Testament. Melchizedek appears like a meteor in the sky—suddenly, unexpectedly, mysteriously,—and then as suddenly disappears. Amid the abundance of genealogical details of that period we know absolutely nothing of his descent; in the roll of kings and their achievements, his name and reign, his birth and death remain unmentioned. Considering the position which he occupies towards Abram, that silence must have been intentional, and its intention typical; that is, designed to point forward to corresponding realities in Christ. Still more clearly than its silence does the information which Scripture furnishes about Melchizedek show the deep significance of his personality. His name is “King of Righteousness,” his government that of the “Prince of Peace;” he is a priest,” neither in the sense in which Abram was, nor yet “after the order of Aaron,” his priesthood being distinct and unique; he blesses Abram, and his blessing sounds like a ratification of the bestowal of the land upon the patriarch; while Abram gives “him tithes of all.” There is in this latter tribute an acknowledgment of Melchizedek both as king and priest—as priest in giving him “tithes,” and as king in giving him these tithes of all the spoil, as if he had royal claim upon it; while Abram himself refuses to touch any of it, and his allies are only allowed to “take their portion.”

This is not the place to discuss the typical meaning of this story; yet the event and the person are too important to pass them unnoticed. Twice again we meet Melchizedek in Scripture: once in the prophecy of [Psalm 110:4](#): “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek;” the other time in the application of it all to our blessed Savior, in [Hebrews 7:3](#). That Melchizedek was not Christ Himself is evident from the statement that he was “made like unto the Son of God” (or “likened unto” Him, [Hebrews 7:3](#)); while it equally appears from these words, and from the whole tenor of Scripture, that he was a type of Christ. In fact, we stand here at the threshold of two dispensations. The covenant with Noah had, so to speak, run its course, or rather was merging into that with Abram. As at the commencement of the New Testament, John gave testimony to Jesus, and yet Jesus was baptized by John; so here Melchizedek gave testimony to Abram, and yet received tithes from Abram. If we add, that in our view Melchizedek was probably the last representative of the race of Shem in the land of Canaan, which was now in the hands of the Canaanites, who were children of Ham, as well as that he was the last representative of the faith of Shem, in the midst of idolatry—being a “priest of the most high God,”—the relation between them will become more clear. It was the old transferred to the new, and enlarged in it; it was the rule and the promise of Shem, solemnly handed over to Abram by the last representative of Shem in the land, who thus gave up his authority in the name of “the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth,” “which hath delivered” Abram’s enemies into his hands. It has been well observed, that “Abram’s greatness consisted in his hopes, that of Melchizedek in his present possession.” Melchizedek was both a priest and a king,—Abram only a prophet; Melchizedek was recognized as the rightful possessor of the country, which as yet was only promised to Abram. True, the future will be infinitely greater than the present,—but then it was as yet future. Melchizedek owned its reality by blessing Abram, and transferring his title, as it were, to him; while Abram recognized the present, by giving tithes to Melchizedek, and bending to receive his blessing. Thus Melchizedek, the last representative of the Shemitic order, is the type of Christ, as the last representative of the Abrahamic order. What lay in germ in Melchizedek was to be gradually

unfolded—the priesthood in Aaron, the royalty in David—till both were most gloriously united in Christ.

[77] Melchizedek was, however, only a shadow and a type; Christ is the reality and the antitype. It is for this reason that Scripture has shut to us the sources of historical investigation about his descent and duration of life, that by its silence it might point to the heavenly descent of Jesus. For the same reason also Abram, who so soon afterwards vindicated his dignity and position in the language of superiority with which he declined the king of Sodom's offer of the spoils, bent lowly before Melchizedek, that in his blessing he might receive the spiritual inheritance which he now bequeathed him. Nor will the attentive reader fail to remark the language in which Melchizedek spoke of God as “the most high,” and the “possessor of heaven and earth”—terms which Abram adopted, but to which he added the new name of “Jehovah,” as that of “the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth”—a name which indicated that covenant of grace of which Abram was to be the representative and the medium. It is quite in accordance with this whole transaction that Abram put aside the offer of the king of Sodom: “Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.” Assuredly, it had not been as an ally of the king of Sodom, but to vindicate his position, and that of all connected with him, that the Lord had summoned Abram to the war, and given him the victory. And so these figures part, never to meet again: the king of Sodom to hasten to the judgment, already lingering around him; the king of Salem to wait for the better possession promised, which indeed was already commencing.

## Chapter 13

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*The Twofold Promise of “a Seed” to Abraham—Ishmael—Jehovah visits Abraham—The Destruction of Sodom—Abraham’s Sojourn at Gerar—His Covenant with Abimelech*

(Genesis 15-20, 21:22-34)

High times of success and prosperity are only too often followed by seasons of depression. Abram had indeed conquered the kings of Assyria, but his very victory might expose him to their vengeance, or draw down the jealousy of those around him. He was but a stranger in a strange land, with no other possession than a promise,—and not even an heir to whom to transmit it. In these circumstances it was that “Jehovah came unto Abram in a vision,” saying, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward”—that is, Myself am thy defense from all foes, and the source and spring whence thy faith shall be fully satisfied with joy. It was but natural, and, as one may say, childlike, that Abram should in reply have opened up before God all his wants and his sorrow, as he pointed, not in the language of doubt, but rather of question, to his own childless state, which seemed to leave Eliezer, his servant, his only heir. But Jehovah assured him that it was to be otherwise than it seemed; nay, that his seed should be numberless as the stars in the sky. “And he believed in Jehovah: and He counted it to him for righteousness.” The remark stands solitary in the narrative, as if to call attention to a great fact; and its terms indicate, on the part of Abram, not merely faith in the word, but trustfulness in the person of Jehovah as his Covenant-God. Most touching and sublime is the childlikeness of that simple believing without seeing, and its absolute confidence. Ever since, through thousands of years, it has stood out as the great example of faith to the church of God. And from this faith in the living God sprang all the obedience of Abram. Like the rod of Aaron, his life budded and blossomed and bore fruit “within the secret place of the Most High.”

[79] To confirm this faith Jehovah now gave to Abram a sign and a seal, which yet were such once more only to his faith. He entered into a covenant with him. For this purpose the Lord directed Abram to bring an heifer, a she-goat, and a ram, each of three years old, also a turtle-dove and a young pigeon. These sacrifices—for they were all representatives of the kinds afterwards used as sacrifices—were to be divided, and the pieces laid one against the other, as the custom was in making a covenant, the covenanting parties always passing between them, as it were to show that now there was no longer to be division, but that what had been divided was to be considered as one between them. But here, at the first, no covenanting party appeared at all to pass between the divided sacrifices. All day long, as it seemed to Abram, he sat watching lonely, only driving from the carcasses the birds of prey which came down upon them. So it seemed to the eye of sense! Presently even gathered around, and a deep sleep and a horror of great darkness fell upon Abram. The age of each sacrificed animal, the long, lonely day, the birds of prey swooping around, and the horror that had come with the night, all betokened what Jehovah now foretold: how for three generations the seed of Abram should be afflicted in Egypt; but in the fourth, when the measure of the iniquity of the present inhabitants of Canaan would be full, they were to return, and enter on the promised possession of the land. As for Abram himself, he was to go “to his fathers in peace.” Then it was that the covenant was made; not, as usually, by both parties passing between the divided sacrifice, but by Jehovah alone doing so, since the covenant was that of grace, in which one party alone God undertook all the obligations, while the other received all the benefits.

For the first time did Abram see passing between those pieces the smoking furnace and the burning lamp—the Divine brightness enwrap in a cloud, just as Moses saw it in the bush, and the children of Israel on their wilderness march, and as it afterwards dwelt in the sanctuary above the mercy-seat, and between the cherubim. This was the first vision vouchsafed to Abram, the first stage of the covenant into which God entered with him, and the first appearance of the glory of the Lord. At the same time, what may be called the personal promise to Abram was also enlarged, and the boundaries of the land clearly defined as stretching from the Nile in the west, to the

Euphrates in the east, an extent, it may be here observed, which the Holy Land has never yet attained, not even in the most flourishing days of the Hebrew monarchy.

Precious as the promise of God to Abram had been, it had still left one point undetermined—who the mother of the promised seed was to be. Instead of waiting for the direction of God in this respect also, Sarai seems in her impatience to have anticipated the Lord; and, as we always do when taking things into our own hands, in a manner contrary to the mind of God, as well as to her own sorrow and disappointment. Ten years had elapsed since Abram had entered Canaan—, when Sarai, despairing of giving birth to the heir of the promise, followed the common custom of those days and countries, and sought a son by an alliance between her husband and Hagar, her own Egyptian maid. The consequences of her folly were dispeace in her home, then reproaches, and the flight of Hagar. What else might have followed it is difficult to tell, had not the Lord in mercy interposed. None less than the Angel of the Covenant Himself appeared to the fugitive slave, as she rested by a fountain in the wilderness that led down into her native Egypt. He bade her return to her mistress, promised to the son whom she was to bear that liberty and independence of bearing which has ever since characterized his descendants, and gave him the name of Ishmael—the Lord heareth,—as it were thus binding him alike by his descent, and by the Providence that had watched over him, to the God of Abram. Hagar also learned there for the first time to know Him as the God who seeth, the living God, whence the fountain by which she had sat henceforth bore the name of “The Well of the Living, who beholdeth me.” So deep are the impressions which a view of the Lord maketh, and so closely should we always connect with them the events of our lives.

Hagar had returned to Abram’s house, and given birth to Ishmael. And now ensued a period which we must regard as of most sore trial to Abram’s faith. Full thirteen years elapsed without apparently any revelation on the part of God. During this time Ishmael had grown up, and Abram may almost insensibly have accustomed himself to look upon him as the heir, even though in all probability he knew that he had not been destined for it. Abram was now ninety-nine years old, and Sarai stricken in years. For every human hope and prospect must be swept away, and the heir be, in the fullest sense,

[81] the child of the promise, that so faith might receive directly from God that for which it had waited. It was in these circumstances that Jehovah at last once more appeared in visible form to Abram,—this time to establish and fulfill the covenant which He had formerly made.<sup>1</sup> Hence also now the admonition: “Walk before Me, and be thou perfect,” which follows but can never precede the covenant. In token of this established covenant, God enjoined upon Abram and his descendants the rite of circumcision as a sign and a seal; at the same time changing the name of Abram, “father of elevation” (noble chief?), into Abraham, “the father of a multitude,” and that of Sarai, “the princely,” into Sarah, or “the princess,”<sup>2</sup> to denote that through these two the promise was to be fulfilled, and that from them the chosen race was to spring. These tidings came upon Abraham with such joyous surprise that, as in humble worship, he “fell upon his face,” he “laughed,” as he considered within himself the circumstances of the case,—as Calvin remarks, not from doubt or disbelief, but in gladness and wonder.

To perpetuate the remembrance of the wonder, the promised seed was to bear the name of Isaac, or “laughter.” Thus, as afterwards, at the outset of the calling of the Gentiles, the name of Saul was changed into Paul—probably after the first-fruits of his ministry,—so here, at the outset of Israel’s calling, we have three new names, indicative of the power of God, which lay at the root of all, and of the simple faith which received the promise. The heir of the promises was indeed to be the child of Sarah; but over Ishmael also would the Lord watch, and “multiply him exceedingly,” and “make him a great nation.” Ever since those days has the sign of circumcision remained to bear testimony to the covenant with Abraham. On the eighth day, as the first full period of seven has elapsed, a new period is, as it were, to begin; and each Jewish child so circumcised is a living witness to the transaction between God and Abraham more than three thousand years ago. But, better far, it pointed forward

<sup>1</sup>The expression “I will make My covenant” ([Genesis 17:2](#)) is quite different from that rendered by the same words in [Genesis 15:18](#). In the latter case it is “to make”—literally, to “cut a covenant;” while the terms in [Genesis 17:2](#) are, “I will give My covenant,” i.e., establish, fulfill it.

<sup>2</sup>Others have derived the name Sarah from a root, meaning “to be fruitful.”



to the fulfillment of the covenant-promise in Christ Jesus, in whom there is now no other circumcision needed than that of the heart.

While Abraham's faith was thus exercised and blessed, the "evil men and seducers," among whom Lothad chosen his dwelling, had been waxing worse and worse, and rapidly filling up the measure of their iniquity. That judgment which had long hung over them like a dark cloud was now to burst in a terrible tempest. Abram was sitting "in the tent door in the heat of the day," when Jehovah once more appeared in visible form to him. This time it was, as it seemed, three wayfarers, whom the patriarch hastened to welcome to the rest and refreshment of his abode. But the heavenly Guests were the Lord Himself (See [Genesis 18:13](#)) and two angels, who were to be the ministers of His avenging justice. There can be no doubt that Abraham recognized the character of his heavenly Visitors, though, with the delicacy and modesty so peculiarly his, he received and entertained them according to the manner in which they presented themselves to him. The object of their visit was twofold—the one bearing reference to Sarah, the other to Abraham. If Sarah was to become the mother of the promised seed, she also must learn to believe. ([Hebrews 11:11](#)) Probably she had not received quite in faith the account which Abraham had given of his last vision of Jehovah. At any rate, the first inquiry of the three was after Sarah. The message of the birth of a son was now addressed directly to her; and as her non-belief appeared in her laughter, it was first reproved and then removed. The first object of their visit accomplished, the Three pursue their way towards Sodom, accompanied by Abraham. Now it was that Jehovah Himself ([Genesis 18:17](#)) opened to the patriarch the other purpose of their coming. It was to tell him the impending doom of the cities of the plain, and that for two reasons: because Abraham was the heir to the promises, and because he would "command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah, to do justice and judgment." From the latter words we gather that the doom of Sodom was communicated to Abraham that it might serve as a warning to the children of Israel. It was not to be regarded as an isolated judgment; but the scene of desolation, which was for ever to occupy the site of the cities of the plain, would also for ever exhibit to Israel the consequences of sin, and be to them a type of future judgment. It is in this light

[83] that the Scriptures both of the Old and the New Testament present to us the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. On the other hand, as God had in the covenant made gift of the land to Abraham and to his seed, it seemed fitting that he should know of the terrible desolation which was so soon to spread over part of it; and that in his character as the medium of blessing to all, he should be allowed to intercede for their preservation, as formerly he had been called to fight for their deliverance. It was therefore neither on account of the intimate converse between God and Abraham, nor yet because Lot, the nephew of Abraham, was involved in the catastrophe, but strictly in accordance with God's covenant-promise, that God made a communication of the coming judgment to Abraham, and that he was allowed to plead in the case.

Mercy, indeed, was extended to Lot; but he did not escape the consequences of his selfish and sinful choice of a portion in this world. A second time was he to be taught that it is not in the abundance of the things which a man hath that wealth or happiness consists. Jehovah so far listened to the pleading of Abraham, whose believing urgency reminds us of the holy "importunity," ([Luke 11:8](#)) characteristic of all true prayer, that He promised to spare the cities of the plain if even ten righteous men were found in them. But the result of the trial by the two angels who went to Sodom was even more terrible than could have been anticipated. The last brief night of horror in Sodom was soon past; and, as the morning glow lay on the hills of Moab, the angels almost constrained Lot and his family to leave the doomed city. Lingering regret for it led Lot's wife to look behind her, when judgment overtook her also, and she was changed into a pillar of salt. Tradition has since pointed out a mountain of salt, at the southern extremity of the Dead Sea', as the spot where the occurrence had taken place. It need scarcely be said that, like most traditions, which only import a disturbing element into our thinking, this also is not founded on fact. The judgment which descended on the doomed cities is described in the sacred text as a "rain of brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven," by which the whole district was overthrown. This account in all its literality has been again confirmed by the late investigations of Canon Tristram, made on the spot. The whole neighborhood of the Dead Seaabounds with sulphur and bitumen, furnishing the materials for the terrible

conflagration which ensued when the lightning from heaven struck it, probably accompanied by an earthquake, which would throw up fresh masses of combustible matter. Far and wide the smoke of the burning country was seen to ascend; and as Abraham watched it on the height beyond Hebron, where the evening before he had spoken the last pleading words to Jehovah, it seemed like a vast furnace, from which the cloud of smoke rose to heaven.

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The basin of the Dead Sea has been specially examined by an American expedition under Lieutenant Lynch. The results of their soundings have brought to light the remarkable fact that it really consists of two lakes, the one, thirteen, the other one thousand three hundred feet deep,—the former being regarded as the site of the doomed cities, and the latter as probably a sweetwater lake, whose waters had washed their shores. In that case, the suggestion is that the catastrophe was brought about by volcanic agency. But whatever changes in the appearance of the country the judgment from heaven may have produced, the most trustworthy authorities have given up the view that the cities of the plain have been submerged by volcanic agency, and are satisfied that the account which Scripture gives of this catastrophe ought to be taken in its utmost literality.

It is equally sad and instructive to notice how little effect mere judgments, however terrible, are capable of producing even upon those most nearly affected by them. Lot and his daughters had been allowed to retire to Zoar, a little town not far from Sodom. But the same weakness of faith which had made them at the first reluctant to leave their own doomed city, now induced them to forsake Zoar, though safety had been promised them there. Far worse than that, they fell into the most grievous and abominable sin, the issue of which was the birth of the ancestors of Israel's hereditary enemies Moab and Ammon. ([Deuteronomy 23:3, 4](#)) But even this is not all. Whether from a dislike to a neighborhood so lately visited by such judgments, or in quest of better pasturage for his flocks, Abraham left the district of Mamre, and traveled in a south-easterly direction, where he settled in the territory of Abimelech, king of Gerar, in the land of the Philistines. Abimelech seems to have been a royal title, like that of Pharaoh. (Comp. [Genesis 26:1, 8](#)) But in this instance, as we gather from Scripture, the possessor of this title was far different from the king of Egypt. In fact, he appears to have

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been not merely true and upright in character, but to have feared the Lord. Accordingly, when Abraham was once more guilty of the same dissimulation as formerly in Egypt, passing off his wife for his sister from fear for his own life, God directly communicated to Abimelech in a dream the real state of matters. Upon this, Abimelech hastened to amend the wrong he had, unwittingly, so nearly committed. In comparison to the Gentile king, Abraham occupies indeed an unfavorable position. He is unable to vindicate his conduct on other grounds than what amounts to a want of faith. But, as God had informed Abimelech, Abraham, despite his weakness, was “a prophet;” and in that capacity, as already quoted, “He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, He reprov’d kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.” The alliance with Abraham which Abimelech had sought by marriage, was shortly afterwards concluded by a formal covenant between the two, accompanied by a sacrifice of the sacred number of seven ewe lambs. ([Genesis 21:22](#)) To show that this was intended not as a private but as a public alliance, Abimelech came accompanied by his chief captain, or phichol, (Comp. [Genesis 26:26](#)) at the same time expressly stating it as the motive in the public step which he took, that God was with Abraham in all that he did. In similar manner, the sympathy on these points between Abimelech and his people had formerly been shown, when the king had communicated to “all his servants” what God had told him about Abraham, “and the men were sore afraid.” In these circumstances we do not wonder that Abraham should have made the land of the Philistines the place of lengthened residence, pitching his tent close by Beersheba, “the well of the oath,” with Abimelech, or rather “the well of the seven” ewe lambs,—and there he once more “called on the name of Jehovah, the everlasting God.”

## Chapter 14

[86]

*Birth of Isaac—Ishmael sent away—Trail of Abraham's faith in the Command to sacrifice Isaac—Death of Sarah—Death of Abraham*

([Genesis 21-25:18](#))

At last the time had come when the great promise to Abraham should receive its fulfillment. The patriarch was in his hundredth and Sarah in her ninetieth year when Isaac was born to them. Manifestly, it had been the Divine purpose to protract as long as possible the period before that event; partly to exercise and mature Abraham's faith, and partly that it should appear the more clearly that the gift of the heir to the promises was, in a manner, supernatural. As we have seen, the very name of their child was intended to perpetuate this fact; and now Sarah also, in the joyousness of her heart, said, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me,"—literally, "Laughter has God prepared for me; every one that heareth it will (joyously) laugh with me." Thus, as Abraham's laughter had been that of faith in its surprise, so the laughter of Sarah was now in contrast to that of her former weakness of trust, one of faith in its gratitude. But there might be yet a third kind of laughter,—neither of faith, nor even of unbelief, but of disbelief: the laughter of mockery, and it also would receive its due recompense. According to God's direction ([Genesis 17:12](#)), Abraham had circumcised Isaac on the eighth day. When the period for weaning him arrived, the patriarch made, after the manner of those times, a great feast. We can scarcely say what the age of the child was,—whether one year, or, as Josephus implies, three years old. In either case, Ishmael must have been a lad, springing into manhood—at least fifteen, and possibly seventeen years of age. "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking,"—literally, "that he was a mocker." As a German writer observes: "Isaac, the object of holy laughter, serves as the target of his unholy wit and profane banter. He

does not laugh; he makes merry. ‘What! this small, helpless Isaac, the father of nations! Unbelief, envy, and pride in his own carnal pre-eminence,—such were the reasons of his conduct. Because he does not understand, ‘Is anything too hard for Jehovah? therefore he finds it laughable to connect such great issues with so small a beginning.’ It was evidently in this light that the apostle viewed it, when describing the conduct of Ishmael in these words.

[87] “As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit.” ([Galatians 4:29](#)) On this ground, and not from jealousy, Sarah demanded that the bondwoman and her son should be “cast out.” But Abraham, who seems to have misunderstood her motives, was reluctant to comply, from feelings of paternal affection quite natural in the case, till God expressly directed him to the same effect. The expulsion of Ishmael was necessary, not only from his unfitness, and in order to keep the heir of the promise unmixed with others, but also for the sake of Abraham himself, whose faith must be trained to renounce, in obedience to the Divine call, everything,—even his natural paternal affection. And in His tender mercy God once more made the trial easier, by bestowing the special promise that Ishmael should become “a nation.” Therefore, although Hagar and her son were literally cast forth, with only the barest necessities for the journey—water and bread,—this was intended chiefly in trial of Abraham’s faith, and their poverty was only temporary. For, soon afterwards we read in Scripture, that, before his death, Abraham had enriched his sons (by Hagar and Keturah) with “gifts;” ([Genesis 25:6](#)) and at his burying Ishmael appears, as an acknowledged son, by the side of Isaac, to perform the last rites of love to their father. ([Genesis 25:9](#))

Thus “cast out,” Hagar and her son wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba, probably on their way to Egypt. Here they suffered from what has always been the great danger to travelers in the desert—want of water. The lad’s strength failed before that of his mother. At length her courage and endurance also gave way to utter exhaustion and despondency. Hitherto she had supported the steps of her son; now she let him droop “under one of the shrubs,” while she went “a good way off,” not to witness his dying agony, yet still remaining within reach of him. To use the pictorial language of Scripture, “She lift up her voice and wept.” Not her cry, however, but that of

Abraham's son went up into the ears of the Lord; and once more was Hagar directed to a well of water, but this time by an "angel of God," not, as before, by the "Angel of Jehovah." And now also, to strengthen her for the future, the same assurance concerning Ishmael was given to Hagar which had previously been made to Abraham. This promise of God has been abundantly fulfilled. The lad dwelt in that wide district between Palestine and Mount Horeb, called "the wilderness of Paran," which to this day is the undisputed dominion of his descendants, the Bedouin Arabs.

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Bitter as the trial had been to "cast out" Ishmael, his son, it was only a preparation for a far more severe test of Abraham's faith and obedience. For this—the last, the highest, but also the steepest ascent in Abraham's life of faith—all God's previous leadings and dealings had been gradually preparing and qualifying him. But even so, it seems to stand out in Scripture alone and unapproached, like some grand mountain-peak, which only one climber has ever been called to attain. No, not one; for yet another and far higher mountain peak, so lofty that its summit reacheth into heaven itself, has been trodden by the "Seed of Abraham," Who has done all, and far more than Abraham did, and Who has made that a blessed reality to us which in the sacrifice of the patriarch was only a symbol. And, no doubt, it was when on Mount Moriah—the mount of God's true "provision"—Abraham was about to offer up his son, that, in the language of our blessed Lord ([John 8:56](#)), he saw the day of Christ, "and was glad."

The test, trial, or "temptation" through which Abraham's faith had now to pass, that it might be wholly purified as "gold in the fire," came in the form of a command from God to bring Isaac as a burnt-offering. Nothing was spared the patriarch of the bitterness of his sorrow. It was said with painful particularity: "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest;" and not a single promise of deliverance was added to cheer him on his lonely way. The same indefiniteness which had added such difficulty to Abraham's first call to leave his father's house marked this last trial of the obedience of his faith. He was only told to get him "into the land of Moriah," where God would further tell him upon which of the mountains around he was to bring his strange "burnt-offering." Luther has pointed out, in his own terse language, how to human reason it must have seemed

[89] as if either God's promise would fail, or else this command be of the devil, and not of God. From this perplexity there was only one issue—to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” And Abraham “staggered not” at the word of God; doubted it not; but was “strong in faith,” “accounting”—yet not knowing it—“that God was able to raise up Isaac even from the dead; from whence he also received him in a figure.” For we must not detract from the trial by importing into the circumstances our knowledge of the issue. Abraham had absolutely no assurance and no knowledge beyond that of his present duty. All he had to lay hold upon was the previous promise, and the character and faithfulness of the covenant God, who now bade him to offer this sacrifice. Sharp as the contest must have been, it was brief. It lasted just one night; and next morning, without having taken “counsel with flesh and blood,” Abraham, with his son Isaac and two servants, were on their way to “the land of Moriah.” We have absolutely no data to determine the exact age of Isaac at the time; but the computation of Josephus, that he was twenty-five years old, makes him more advanced than the language of the Scripture narrative seems to convey to our minds. Two days they had traveled from Beersheba, when on the third the “mountains round about Jerusalem” came in sight. From a gap between the hills, which forms the highest point on the ordinary road, which has always led up from the south, just that one mountain would be visible on which afterwards the temple stood. This was “the land of Moriah,” and that the hill on which the sacrifice of Isaac was to be offered! Leaving the two servants behind, with the assurance that after they had worshipped they would “come again”—for faith was sure of victory, and anticipated it,—father and son pursued their solitary road, Isaac carrying the wood, and Abraham the sacrificial knife and fire. “And they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering: so they went both of them together.” Nothing further is said between the two till they reach the destined spot. Here Abraham builds the altar, places on it the wood, binds Isaac, and lays him upon the altar. Already he has lifted the sacrificial knife, when the Angel of Jehovah, the



Angel of the Covenant, arrests his hand. Abraham's faith has now been fully proved, and it has been perfected. "A ram caught in the thicket" will serve for "a burnt-offering in the stead of his son;" but to Abraham all the previous promises are not only repeated and enlarged, but "confirmed by an oath," "that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie," he "might have a strong consolation."

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"For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself." ([Hebrews 6:13](#))

This "oath" stands out alone and solitary in the history of the patriarchs; it is afterwards constantly referred to ([Genesis 24:7](#); [26:3](#); [50:24](#); [Exodus 13:5](#), [11](#); [33:1](#), etc.), and, as Luther observes, it became really the spring whence all flowed that was promised "by oath" unto David, in [Psalm 89:35](#); [110:4](#); [132:11](#). No wonder Abraham called the place "Jehovah Jireh," "Jehovah seeth," or "Jehovah provideth," which means that He seeth for us, for, as even the term implieth, His providence, or providing, is just His seeing for us, what, where, and when we do not see for ourselves. As we remember that on this mountain-top the temple of the Lord afterwards stood, and that from it rose the smoke of accepted sacrifices, we can understand all the better what the inspired writer adds by way of explanation: "As it is said to this day, In the mount where Jehovah is seen,"—where He seeth and is seen,—whence also the name of Moriah is derived.

But before passing from this event, it is necessary to view it in its bearings upon Abraham, upon Isaac, and even upon the Canaanites, as well as in its higher typical or symbolical application. It is very remarkable that a German writer who has most strenuously opposed the truth of this scriptural narrative, has been compelled to some extent to admit the deeper bearing of this history on the faith of Abraham. He writes: "Hitherto even Isaac, that precious gift so long promised, had been only a natural blessing to Abraham. A son like any other, although the offspring of Sarah, he had been born and educated in his house. Since his birth Abraham had not been called to bear for him the pangs of a soul struggling in faith, and yet every blessing becomes only spiritual and truly lasting, if we appropriate it in the contest of faith." At God's bidding Abraham had necessarily given up country, kindred, and home, and then his paternal affection

[91] towards Ishmael. It yet remained to give up even Isaac after the flesh, so as to receive him again spiritually; to give up not merely “his only son, the goal of his longing, the hope of his life, the joy of his old age”—all that was dearest to him; but the heir of all the promises, and that in simple, absolute faith upon God, and in perfect confidence, that God could raise him even from the dead. Thus was the promise purged, so to speak, from all of the flesh that clung to it; and thus Abraham’s faith was perfected, and his love purified. Upon Isaac, also, the event had a most important bearing. For when he resisted not his father, and allowed himself to be bound and laid on the altar, he entered into the spirit of Abraham, he took upon himself his faith, and thus showed himself truly the heir to the promises. Nor can we forget how this surrender of the first-born was the first of that dedication of all the first-born unto God, which afterwards the law demanded, and which meant that in the first-born we should consecrate all and everything unto the Lord. Perhaps the lesson which the Canaanites might learn from the event will seem to some quite secondary, as compared with these great truths. Yet we must bear in mind, that all around cruel human sacrifices were offered on every hill, when God gave His sanction to a far different offering, by for ever substituting animal sacrifices for that surrender of the best beloved which human despair had prompted for an atonement for sin. And yet God Himself gave up His beloved, His own only begotten Son for us,—and of this the sacrifice of Isaac was intended to be a glorious type; and as Abraham received this typical sacrifice again from the dead “in a figure,” so we in reality, when God raised up His own Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead, and has made us sit together with Him in heavenly places.

After the offering up of Isaac, Abraham lived many years; yet scarcely any event worth record in Scripture occurred during their course. The first thing we afterwards read is the death of Sarah, at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven. She is the only woman whose age is recorded in Scripture, the distinction being probably due to her position towards believers, as stated in [1 Peter 3:6](#). Isaac was at the time thirty-seven years old, and Abraham once more resident in Hebron. The account of Abraham’s purchase of a burying-place from “the children of Heth” is exceedingly pictorial. It also strikingly exhibits alike Abraham’s position in the land as a stranger and a

pilgrim, and yet his faith in his future possession thereof. The treaty for the field and cave of Machpelah (either “the double” cave, or else “the separated place,” or “the undulating spot”), which Abraham wished to purchase for “a burying-place,” was carried on in public assembly, “at the gate of the city,” as the common Eastern fashion is. The patriarch expressly acknowledged himself “a stranger and a sojourner” among “the children of Heth;” and the sacred text emphatically repeats again and again how “Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land.” On the other hand, they carry on their negotiations in the true Eastern fashion, first offering any of their own sepulchers, since Abraham was confessedly among them “a prince of God” (rendered in our version “a mighty prince”), then refusing any payment for Machpelah, but finishing up by asking its fullest value, in this true oriental manner: “My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver (about fifty guineas <sup>1</sup>); what is that betwixt me and thee?”

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In contrast, Abraham truly stands out prince-like in his courtesy and in his dealings. And so the field and cave were secured to him—a “burying-place,” Abraham’s only “possession” in a land that was to be his for ever! But even in this purchase of a permanent family burying-place, Abraham showed his faith in the promise; just as, many centuries later, the prophet Jeremiah showed his confidence in the promised return of Judah from Babylon, by purchasing a field in Anathoth. ([Jeremiah 32:7, 8](#)) In this cave of Machpelah lie treasured the remains of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebekah, of Leah also, and the embalmed bodies of Jacob and perhaps Joseph. <sup>2</sup> No other spot in the Holy Land holds so much precious dust as this; and it is, among all the so-called “holy places,” the only one which to this day can be pointed out with perfect certainty. Since the Moslem rule, it has not been accessible to either Christian or Jew. The site over the cave itself is covered by a Mahomedan sanctuary, which stands enclosed within a quadrangular building, two hundred feet long, one hundred and fifteen wide, and fifty or sixty high, the walls of which are divided by pilasters, about five feet apart, and two and a half feet wide. This building, with its immense stones, one of which is no

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<sup>1</sup>A very considerable price for those times.

<sup>2</sup>See “Those Holy Fields; Palestine illustrated by Pen and Pencil, p. 39.

less than thirty-eight feet long, must date from the time of David or of Solomon. The mosque within it was probably anciently a church; and in the cave below its floor are the patriarchal sepulchers.

Three years after the death of Sarah, Abraham resolved to fill the gap in his own family and in the heart of Isaac, by seeking a wife for his son. To this we shall refer in connection with the life of Isaac. Nothing else remains to be told of the third-eight years which followed the death of Sarah. We read, indeed, that Abraham “took a wife,” Keturah, and that she bore him six sons, but we are not sure of the time when this occurred. At any rate, the history of these sons is in no wise mixed up with that of the promised seed. They became the ancestors of Arab tribes, which are sometimes alluded to in Holy Writ. And so, through the impressive silence of so many years as make up more than a generation, Scripture brings us to the death of Abraham, at the “good old age” of one hundred and seventy-five, just seventy-five years after the birth of Isaac. To quote the significant language of the Bible, he” was gathered to his people,” an expression far different from dying or being buried, and which implies reunion with those who had gone before, and a firm and assured belief in the life to come. And as his sons Isaac and Ishmael, both aged men, stand by his sepulcher in the cave of Machpelah, we seem to hear the voice of God speaking it unto all times:

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” ([Hebrews 11:13](#))

## Chapter 15

[94]

### *The Marriage of Isaac—Birth of Esau and Jacob—Esau sells his Birthright—Isaac at Gerar—Esau’s Marriage*

([Genesis 24](#); [25:19-26:35](#))

The sacred narrative now turns to the history of Isaac, the heir to the promises, still marking in its course the same dealings on the part of God which had characterized the life of Abraham. Viewed in connection with the Divine promises, the marriage of Isaac would necessarily appear a subject of the deepest importance to Abraham. Two things were quite firmly settled in the mind of the patriarch: Isaac must on no account take a wife from among the Canaanites around,—he must not enter into alliance with those who were to be dispossessed of the land; and Jehovah, who had so often proved a faithful God, and in obedience to whose will he now refused what might have seemed highly advantageous connections, would Himself provide a suitable partner for Isaac. These two convictions determined Abraham’s conduct, as they also guided that of “his eldest servant,” whom Abraham commissioned to execute his wishes, and who, in general, seems to have been deeply imbued with the spirit of his master.

Some time before ([Genesis 22:20](#)) Abraham had been informed that his brother Nahor, whom he left behind in Haran, had been blessed with numerous descendants. To him the patriarch now dispatched “his servant, the elder of his house, who ruled over all that was his”—generally supposed to have been Eliezer of Damascus ([Genesis 15:2](#)), though at that time he must, like his master, have been far advanced in years. But before departing, he made him swear by Jehovah—since this matter concerned the very essence of the covenant—to avoid every alliance with the Canaanites, and to apply to his “kindred.” And when the servant put before him the possibility, that the execution of this wish might render it necessary for Isaac to

return to the land whence Abraham had come, the patriarch emphatically negated the suggestion, as equally contrary to the Divine will, while his faith anticipated no difficulty, but calmly trusted the result in God's hands. In all this Abraham had no fresh revelation from heaven; nor needed he any. He only applied to present circumstances what he had formerly received as the will of God, just as in all circumstances of life we need no fresh communication from above—only to understand and to apply the will of God as revealed to us in His holy word.

[95] The result proved how true had been Abraham's expectations. Arrived at Haran, Abraham's servant made it a matter of prayer that God would "prosper his way," for even when in the way of God's appointment, we must seek and ask His special blessing. There, as he stood outside the city by the well to which, according to the custom of the East, the maidens would resort at even to draw water for their households, it naturally occurred to him to connect in his prayer a mark of that religious courtesy, hospitality, and kindness to which he had been accustomed in his master's house, with the kindred of Abraham, and hence with the object of his journey. His prayer was scarcely finished when the answer came. "Before he had done speaking" (Comp. [Daniel 9:20, 21](#)) Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came to the well by which the stranger stood with his camels. Her appearance was exceedingly prepossessing ("the damsel was very fair to look upon"), and her bearing modest and becoming. According to the sign on which he had fixed in his own mind, he asked her for water to drink; and according to the same sign, she exceeded his request by drawing for his camels also. But even so Abraham's servant did not yield to his first impressions; only at the literality of the answer to his prayer, "the man wondering at her, held his peace, to know whether Jehovah had made his way prosperous or not."

Before asking further who her kindred were, and seeking their hospitality, he rewarded her kindness by splendid presents. But when the answers of Rebekah showed him that Jehovah had actually led him straight "to the house of his master's brethren," the man, fairly overcome by his feelings, "bowed down his head, and worshipped Jehovah."

The description of what now ensued is not only exceedingly graphic, but true to the life. It is said that Rebekah “ran and told her mother’s house,” that is, evidently to the female portion of the household. Next, Laban, Rebekah’s brother, seeing the jewels and hearing her tale, hastens to invite the stranger with true Eastern profusion of welcome. But the terms in which Laban, partially at least an idolater, addressed Abraham’s servant: “Thou blessed of Jehovah,” remind us how easily the language of Abraham—in other words, religious language, is picked up by those who have really no claim to use it. The servant of Abraham, on the other hand, is quite like his master in his dignified bearing and earnestness of purpose. Before accepting hospitality at the hands of Bethuel and Laban, he will have an answer to the commission on which he has been sent, nor can persuasions or entreaty prevail on him to prolong his stay, even over the following day. With the full consent of Rebekah, the caravan returns to Canaan. Once more it is evening when the end of the journey is reached. It so happens that Isaac has “gone out to meditate in the field”—an expression which implies religious communion with God, probably in connection with this very marriage—when he meets the returning caravan. Rebekah receives her future husband with the becoming modesty of an Eastern bride, and the heart-happiness of the son of promise is secured to him in union with her whom the Lord Himself had “provided” as his wife. Isaac was at the time of his marriage forty years old.

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In the quiet retirement of his old age Abraham not only witnessed the married happiness of his son, but even lived fifteen years beyond the birth of Esau and Jacob. As for Isaac, he had settled far from the busy haunts of the Canaanites, at the well Lahai-Roi a retreat suited to his quiet, retiring disposition. For twenty years the union of Isaac and Rebekah had remained unblest with children, to indicate that here also the heir to the promises must be a gift from God granted to expectant faith. At last Jehovah listened to Isaac’s “entreaty,” “for his wife,” or rather, literally, “over against his wife,” for, as Luther strikingly remarks: “When I pray for any one, I place him right in view of my heart, and neither see nor think of anything else, but look at him alone with my soul;” and this is true of all intercessory prayer. Rebekah was now to become the mother of twin sons.

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But even before their birth a sign occurred which distressed her, and induced her “to inquire of Jehovah” its meaning, though we know not in what precise manner she did this. The answer of God indicated this at least quite clearly, that of her children “the elder shall serve the younger;” that is, that, contrary to all usual expectation, the firstborn should not possess the birthright which the Divine promise had conveyed to the family of Abraham. The substitution of the younger for the elder son was indeed in accordance with God’s previous dealings, but it seemed strange where the two were sons of the same parents. It is not only reasonable, but quite necessary for the understanding of the subsequent history, to believe that Rebekah communicated the result of her inquiry to her husband, and that afterwards both Esau and Jacob were also made acquainted with the fact.

This alone fully accounts for the conduct of Jacob and of his mother in seeking to appropriate the birthright, contrary to what would otherwise have been the natural arrangement. When the two children were born, the red and hairy appearance of the elder procured for him the name of Esau, or “hairy;” while the younger was called Jacob, or he “who takes hold by the heel,” because “his hand took hold by Esau’s heel”—a name which afterwards was adapted to mean “a supplanter,” ([Genesis 27:36](#)) since he who takes hold by the heel “trips up” the other.

The appearance of the children did not belie their character when they grew up. The wild disposition of Esau, which found occupation in the roaming life of a hunter, reminds us of Ishmael; while Jacob, gentle and domestic, sought his pleasures at home. As is so often the case, Isaac and Rebekah made favorites of the sons who had the opposite of their own disposition. The quiet, retiring Isaac preferred his bold, daring, strong, roaming elder son; while Rebekah, who was naturally energetic, felt chiefly drawn to her gentle son Jacob. Yet at bottom Esau also was weak and easily depressed, as appeared in his tears and impotent reproaches when he found himself really deprived of the blessing; while Jacob, too, like his mother, impetuous, was ever ready to take matters into his own hands. We repeat it, that all parties must at the time have been aware that, even before the birth of the children, the word of God had designated Jacob as heir of the promises. But Isaac’s preference for Esau made him reluctant



to fall in with the Divine arrangement; while the impetuosity of Rebekah and of Jacob prompted them to bring about in their own way the fulfillment of God's promise, instead of believingly waiting to see when and how the Lord would do it. Thus it came that Jacob, watching his opportunities, soon found occasion to take advantage of his brother. One day Esau returned from the chase "faint" with hunger. The sight of a mess of lentils, which to this day is a favorite dish in Syria and Egypt, induced him, unaccustomed and unable as he was to control the desires of the moment, to barter away his birthright for this "red" pottage. The circumstances become the more readily intelligible when we remember, besides the unbridled disposition of Esau, that, as Lightfoot has pointed out, it was a time of commencing famine in the land. For, immediately afterwards ([Genesis 26:1](#)), we read that "there was a famine in the land," greater even than that at the time of Abraham, and which compelled Isaac for a season to leave Canaan'. From this event, so characteristic and decisive in his history, Esau, after the custom of the East, obtained the name of Edom, or "red," from the color of "the mess of pottage" for which he had sold his birthright. [98]

In regard to the conduct of the two brothers in this matter, we must note, that Scripture in no way excuses nor apologizes for that of Jacob. According to its wont, it simply states the facts, and makes neither comment nor remark upon them. That it leaves to "the logic of facts;" and the terrible trials which were so soon to drive Jacob from his home, and which kept him so long a bondsman in a strange land, are themselves a sufficient Divine commentary upon the transaction. Moreover, it is very remarkable that Jacob never in his after-life appealed to his purchase of the birthright. But so far as Esau is concerned only one opinion can be entertained of his conduct. We are too apt to imagine that because Jacob wronged or took advantage of Esau, therefore Esau was right. The opposite of this is the case. When we ask ourselves what Jacob intended to purchase, or Esau to sell in the "birthright," we answer that in later times it conveyed a double share of the paternal possessions. ([Deuteronomy 21:17](#)) In patriarchal days it included "lordship" over the rest of the family, and especially succession to that spiritual blessing which through Abraham was to flow out into the world ([Genesis 27:27, 29](#)), together with possession of the land of Canaan

and covenant-communion with Jehovah. ([Genesis 28:4](#)) What of these things was spiritual, we may readily believe, Esau discredited and despised, and what was temporal, but yet future, as his after conduct shows, he imagined he might still obtain either by his father's favor or by violence. But that for the momentary gratification of the lowest sensual appetites he should have been ready to barter away such unspeakably precious and holy privileges, proved him, in the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews ([Hebrews 12:16](#)), to have been "a profane person," and therefore quite unfitted to become the heir of the promises. For profanity consists in this: for the sensual gratification or amusement of the moment to give up that which is spiritual and unseen; to be careless of that which is holy, so as to snatch the present enjoyment,—in short, practically not to deem anything holy at all, if it stands in the way of present pleasure. Scripture puts it down as the bitter self-condemnation which Esau, by his conduct, pronounced upon himself: "and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way; thus Esau despised his birthright."

Before farther following the history of Isaac's trials and joys, it seems desirable to make here a few general remarks, for the purpose of explaining the conduct alike of Isaac and of Jacob, and its bearing on the history of the covenant. It has been common to describe Abraham as the man of faith, Isaac as the model of patient bearing, and Jacob as the man of active working; and in the two latter cases to connect the spiritual fruits, which were the outcome of their faith, with their natural characters also. All this is quite correct; but, in our opinion, it is necessary to take a broader view of the whole matter. Let it be borne in mind, that God had both made and established His covenant with Abraham. The history of Isaac and Jacob, on the other hand, rather represents the hindrances to the covenant. These are just the same as we daily meet in our own walk of faith. They arise from opposite causes, according as in our weakness we either lag behind, or in our haste go before God. Isaac lagged behind, Jacob tried to go before God; and their history exhibits the dangers and difficulties arising from each of these causes, just as, on the other hand, God's dealings with them show how mercifully, how wisely, and yet how holily He knew to remove these hindrances out of the way, and to uproot these sins from their hearts and lives. Accordingly, we shall

consider the history of Isaac and Jacob as that of the hindrances of the covenant and of their removal.

Viewed in this light we understand all the better, not only Jacob's attempt to purchase the "birthright"—as if Esau had had the power of selling it!—but what followed that transaction? It seems that a grievous famine induced Isaac to leave his settlement, and it naturally occurred to him in so doing to follow in the wake of his father Abraham, and to go into Egypt. But when he had reached Gerar, the residence of Abimelech, king of the Philistines, where Abraham had previously sojourned, "Jehovah appeared unto him," and specially directed him to remain there, at the same time renewing to him the promises He had made to Abraham. Both in this direction and in the renewal of blessing we recognize the kindness of the Lord, Who would not expose Isaac to the greater trials of Egypt, and would strengthen and encourage his faith. Apparently, he had on reaching Gerar not said that Rebekah was his wife; and when he was, at last, "asked" about it, the want of courage which had prompted the equivocation, ripened into actual falsehood. Imitating in this the example of Abraham, he passed off his wife as his sister. But here also the kindness of the Lord interposed to spare him a trial greater than he might have been able to bear. His deceit was detected before his wife had been taken by any one; and an order given by Abimelech—whether the same who ruled at the time of Abraham, or his successor—secured her future safety. The famine seems now to have become so intense, that Isaac began to till land for himself. And God blessed him with an unusually large return—still further to encourage his faith amidst its trials. Commonly, even in very fruitful parts of Palestine, the yield is from twenty-five to fifty times that which had been sown; and in one small district, even eighty times that of wheat, and one hundred times that of barley. But Isaac at once "received an hundredfold"—to show him that even in a year of famine God could make the most ample provision for His servant. The increasing wealth of Isaac excited the envy of the Philistines. Disputes arose, and they stopped up the wells which Abraham had digged. At last, even Abimelech, friendly as he was, advised him to leave the place. Isaac removed to the valley of Gerar. But there also similar contentions arose; and Isaac once more returned to Abraham's old settlement at Beersheba. Here Jehovah

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again appeared unto him, to confirm, on his re-entering the land, the promises previously made. Beersheba had also its name given it a second time. For Abimelech, accompanied by his chief captain and his privy councilor, came to Isaac to renew the covenant which [101] had formerly been there made between the Philistines and Abraham. Isaac was now at peace with all around. Better still, “he builded an altar” in Beersheba, “and called upon the name of Jehovah.” But in the high day of his prosperity fresh trials awaited him. His eldest son Esau, now forty years old, took two Canaanitish wives, “which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.” Assuredly, if Isaac had not “lagged far behind,” he would in this have recognized the final and full unfitness of Esau to have “the birthright.” But the same tendency which had hitherto kept him at best undecided, led, ere it was finally broken, to a further and a far deeper sorrow than any he had yet experienced.

## Chapter 16

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*Isaac's Blessing Obtained by Jacob Deceitfully—Esau's Sorrow—Evil Consequences of their Error to all the Members of their Family—Jacob is sent to Laban—Isaac Renews and Fully Gives him the Blessing of Abraham*

(Genesis 27-28:9)

If there is any point on which we should anxiously be on our guard, it is that of “tempting God.” We do so tempt the Lord when, listening to our own inclinations, we put once more to the question that which He has already clearly settled. Where God has decided, never let us doubt, nor lag behind. But if anything might be described as clearly settled by God, it was, surely, the calling of Jacob and the rejection of Esau. It had been expressly foretold in prophecy even before the children were born; and Esau had also afterwards proved himself wholly unfit to be the heir of the promise, first by his light-minded profanity, and next by his alliance with the Canaanites, than which nothing could have more directly run counter to the will of God, and to the purposes of the covenant. Despite these clear indications, Isaac did lag behind, reluctant to follow the direction of God. In truth, he had thrown his natural affections as a makeweight into the scale. As we shall presently show, Isaac hesitated, indeed, to allot unto Esau the spiritual part of the blessing; but what he regarded as the natural rights of the first-born appeared to him inalienable, and these he meant now formally to recognize by bestowing upon him the blessing.

A German writer aptly observes: “This is one of the most remarkable complications of life, showing in the clearest manner that a higher hand guides the threads of history, so that neither sin nor error can ultimately entangle them. Each one weaves the threads which are committed to him according to his own views and desires; but at last, when the texture is complete, we behold in it the pattern

which the Master had long devised, and towards which each laborer had only contributed one or another feature.” At the time of which we write Isaac was one hundred and thirty-seven years old <sup>1</sup>

[103] —an age at which his half-brother Ishmael had died, fourteen years before; and though Isaac was destined to live yet forty- three years longer ([Genesis 35:28](#)), the decay of his sight, and other infirmities, brought the thought of death very near to him.

Under these circumstances he resolved formally to bestow the privileges naturally belonging to the first-born upon Esau. With this, however, he coupled, as a sort of preliminary condition, that Esau should bring and prepare for him some venison. Possibly he regarded the finding of the game as a sort of providential sign, and the preparation of it as a token of affection. There would be nothing strange in this, for those who believe in God, and yet for some reason refuse implicitly to follow His directions, are always on the outlook for some “sign” to justify them in setting aside the clear intimations of His will. But Rebekah had overheard the conversation between her husband and her son. Probably she had long been apprehensive of some such event, and on the outlook for it. And now the danger seemed most pressing. Another hour, and the blessing might for ever be lost to Jacob. Humanly speaking, safety lay in quick resolution and decided action. It mattered not what were the means employed, if only the end were attained. Had not God distinctly pointed out Jacob as heir to the promises? Had not Esau proved himself utterly unfit for it, and that even before he married those Canaanitish women? She could only be fulfilling the will of God when she kept her husband from so great a wrong, and secured to her son what God had intended him to possess. Thus Rebekah probably argued in her own mind. To be sure, if she had had the faith of Abraham, who was ready on Mount Moriah to offer up his own son, believing that, if it were to be so, God was able to raise him

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<sup>1</sup>The age of Isaac is thus ascertained: When Joseph stood before Pharaoh ([Genesis 41:46](#)), he was thirty years old, and hence thirty-nine when Jacob came into Egypt. But at that time Jacob was one hundred and thirty years of age ([Genesis 47:9](#)). Hence, Jacob must have been ninety-one years old when Joseph was born; and as this happened in the fourteenth year of Jacob’s stay with Laban, Jacob’s flight from his home must have taken place in the seventy-seventh year of his own, and the one hundred and thirty-seventh of his father Isaac’s life.

from the dead, she would not have acted, not even felt, nor feared, as she did. But then her motives were very mixed, even though she kept the promise steadily in view, and her faith was weak and imperfect, even though she imagined herself to be carrying out the will of God. Such hours come to most of us, when it almost seems as if necessity obliged and holy wisdom prompted us to accomplish, in our own strength, that which, nevertheless, we should leave in God's hand. If once we enter on such a course, it will probably not be long before we cast to the winds any scruples about the means to be employed, so that we secure the object desired, and which possibly may seem to us in accordance with the will of God. Here also faith is the only true remedy: faith, which leaves God to carry out His own purposes, content to trust Him absolutely, and to follow Him whithersoever He leadeth. And God's way is never through the thicket of human cunning and devices. "He that believeth shall not make haste;" nor need he, for God will do it all for him.

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In pursuance of her purpose, Rebekah proposed to Jacob to take advantage of his father's dim sight, and to personate Esau. He was to put on his brother's dress, which bore the smell of the aromatic herbs and bushes among which he was wont to hunt, and to cover his smooth skin with a kind of fur; while Rebekah would prepare a dish which his father would not be able to distinguish from the venison which Esau was to make ready for him. It is remarkable, that although Jacob at first objected, his scruples were caused rather by fear of detection than from a sense of the wrong proposed. But Rebekah quieted his misgivings,—possibly trusting, that since she was doing, as she thought, the will of God, she could not but succeed. In point of fact, Jacob found his part more difficult than he could have expected. Deceit, equivocation, and lying, repeated again and again, were required to allay the growing suspicions of the old man. At last Jacob succeeded—with what shame and remorse we can readily imagine—in diverting his father's doubts; and Isaac bestowed upon him "the blessing," and with it the birthright. But it deserves special notice, that while this blessing assigned to him both the land of Canaan and lordship over his brethren, there is in it but the faintest allusion to the great promise to Abraham. The only words which can be supposed to refer to it are these: "Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." ([Genesis](#)

27:29) But this is manifestly very different from the blessing of Abraham, “In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” ([Genesis 22:18](#))

[105] It is clear that Isaac imagined he had blessed Esau, and that he did not dare confer upon him the spiritual privileges attached to the birthright. So, after all, Jacob and Rebekah did not attain that which they had sought! Jacob had scarcely left the presence of his father, when Esau entered with the venison he had prepared. If Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob had been each wrong in their share in the transaction, Esau deserves at least equal blame. Not to speak of his previous knowledge of the will of God on this point, he disguised from his brother Jacob that he was about to obtain from his father’s favor that which he had actually sold to Jacob! Surely, there was here quite as great dishonesty, cunning, and untruthfulness as on the part of Jacob. When Isaac now discovered the deceit which had been practiced upon him, he “trembled very exceedingly,” but he refused to recall the blessing he had pronounced: “I have blessed him—yea, and he shall be blessed.” Now, for the first time, the mist which in this matter had so long hung about Isaac’s spiritual vision, seems dispelled. He sees the finger of God, who had averted the danger which his own weakness had caused. Thus, while all parties in the transaction had been in error and sin, God brought about His own purpose, and Isaac recognized this fact. Now, for the first time also, Esau obtained a glimpse of what he had really lost. We read, that “afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”([Hebrews 12:17](#))

At his earnest entreaty for some kind of blessing, Isaac pronounced what in reality was a prophecy of the future of Edom. Translating it literally, it reads: “Behold, thy dwelling shall be without fatness of the earth, And without the dew of heaven from above.”

This describes the general aspect of the sterile mountains of Edom; after which the patriarch continues, by sketching the future history of the Edomites: “But by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; Yet it shall come to pass that, as thou shakest it, thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.”

The last sentence, it has been well remarked, refers to the varying success of the future struggles between Israel and Edom, and



introduces into the blessing of Jacob an element of judgment. And when we compare the words of Isaac with the history of Israel and Edom, down to the time when Herod, the Idumean, possessed himself of the throne of David, we see how correctly the whole has been summed up in the Epistle to the [Hebrews 11:20](#): “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.”

For, that Isaac was now acting in faith, and that he discerned how, without knowing it, he had blessed, not according to his own inclination, but according to the will and purpose of God, appears from the subsequent history. It seems that Esau, full of hatred and envy, resolved to rid himself of his rival by murdering his brother, only deferring the execution of his purpose till after the death of his father, which he also believed to be near at hand. Somehow Rebekah, ever watchful, obtained tidings of this; and knowing her elder son’s quick temper, which, however violent, did not long harbor anger, she resolved to send Jacob away to her brother Laban, for “a few days,” as she fondly imagined, after which she would “send and fetch” him “from thence.” But kindness towards her husband prompted her to keep from him Esau’s murderous plan, and to plead as a reason for Jacob’s temporary departure that which, no doubt, was also a strong motive in her own mind, that Jacob should marry one of her kindred. For, as she said, “If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life be to me?” Petulant as was her language, her reasoning was just, and Isaac knew it from painful experience of Esau’s wives. And now Isaac expressly sent Jacob to Laban, to seek him a wife; and in so doing, this time consciously and wittingly, renewed the blessing which formerly had been fraudulently obtained from him. Now also the patriarch speaks clearly and unmistakably, not only reiterating the very terms of the covenant-blessing in all their fullness, but especially adding these words: “God Almighty .... give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee.” Thus Isaac’s dimness of spiritual sight had at last wholly passed away. But the darkness around Esau seems to only have grown deeper and deeper. Upon learning what charge Isaac had given his son, and apparently for the first time awakening to the fact that “the daughters of Canaan

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pleased not Isaac <sup>2</sup> his father,” he took “Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael” as a third wife—as if he had mended matters by forming an alliance with him whom Abraham had, by God’s command, “cast out!” Thus the spiritual incapacity and unfitness of Esau appeared at every step, even where he tried to act kindly and dutifully.

[107] To conclude, by altering and adapting the language of a German writer: After this event Isaac lived other forty-three years. But he no more appears in this history. Its thread is now taken up by Jacob, on whom the promise has devolved. Scripture only records that Isaac was gathered to his fathers when one hundred and eighty years old, and full of days, and that he was buried in the cave of Machpelah by Esau and Jacob, whom he had the joy of seeing by his death-bed as reconciled brothers. When Jacob left, his father dwelt at Beersheba. The desire to be nearer to his father’s burying-place may have been the ground of his later settlement in Mamre, where he died. ([Genesis 35:27-29](#)) Rebekah, who at parting had so confidently promised to let Jacob know whenever Esau’s anger was appeased, may have died even before her favorite son returned to Canaan’. At any rate the promised message was never delivered, nor is her name mentioned on Jacob’s return.

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<sup>2</sup>There is no mention here that Esau dreaded God’s displeasure, or even thought of it. We may remember our earthly, and yet, alas, forget our heavenly Father.

*Jacob's Vision at Bethel—His Arrival at the House of  
Laban—Jacob's double Marriage and Servitude—His Flight from  
Haran—Pursuit of Laban, and Reconciliation with Jacob*

(Genesis 28:10-31:55)

It had been a long and weary journey that first day when Jacob left his home at Beersheba. <sup>1</sup> More than forty miles had he traveled over the mountains which afterwards were those of Judah, and through what was to become the land of Benjamin. The sun had set, and its last glow faded out from the gray hills of Ephraim, when he reached “an uneven valley, covered, as with gravestones, by large sheets of bare rock,—some few here and there standing up like the cromlechs of Druidical monuments.” <sup>2</sup> Here, close by a wild ridge, the broad summit of which was covered by an olive grove, was the place where Abraham had first rested for some time on entering the land, and whence he and Lot had, before their separation, taken a survey of the country. There, just before him, lay the Canaanitish Luz; and beyond it, many days journey, stretched his weary course to Haran. <sup>3</sup> It was a lonely, weird place, this valley of stones, in which to make his first night's quarters. But perhaps it agreed all the better with Jacob's mood, which had made him go on and on, from early morning, forgetful of time and way, till he could no longer pursue his journey. Yet, accidental as it seemed—for we read that “he lighted upon a certain place,”—the selection of the spot was assuredly designed of God.

Presently Jacob prepared for rest. Piling some of the stones, with which the valley was strewed, he made them a pillow, and laid him down to sleep. Then it was, in his dream, that it seemed as if

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<sup>1</sup>We infer from the sacred text that Jacob made his first night's quarters at Bethel.

<sup>2</sup>Stanley, Sinai and Palestine, p. 217.

<sup>3</sup>The journey from Beersheba to Haran is quite four hundred miles.

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these stones of the valley were being builded together by an unseen hand, step upon step, “a ladder”—or, probably more correctly, “a stair.” Now, as he watched it, it rose and rose, till it reached the deep blue star-spangled sky, which seemed to cleave for its reception. All along that wondrous track moved angel-forms, “ascending and descending upon it;” and angel-light was shed upon its course, till quite up on the top stood the glorious Jehovah Himself, Who spake to the lonely sleeper below: “I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac.” Silent in their ministry, the angels still passed up and down the heaven-built stairs, from where Jacob lay to where Jehovah spake. The vision and the words which the Lord spoke explain each other, the one being the symbol of the other. On that first night, when an outcast from his home, and a fugitive, heavy thoughts, doubts, and fears would crowd around Jacob; when, in every sense, his head was pillowed on stones in the rocky valley of Luz, Jehovah expressly renewed to him, in the fullest manner, the promise and the blessing first given to Abraham, and added to it this comfort, whatever might be before him: “I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” And what Jacob heard, that he also saw in symbolic vision. The promise was the real God-built stair, which reached from the lonely place on which the poor wanderer lay quite up to heaven, right into the very presence of Jehovah; and on which, all silent and unknown by the world, lay the shining track of angel-ministry. And so still to each one who is truly of Israel—is the promise of that mysterious “ladder” which connects earth with heaven. Below lies poor, helpless, forsaken man; above, stands Jehovah Himself, and upon the ladder of promise which joins earth to heaven, the angels of God, in their silent, never-ceasing ministry, descend, bringing help, and ascend, as to fetch new deliverance. Nay, this “ladder” is Christ,<sup>4</sup> for by this “ladder” God Himself has come down to us in the Person of His dear Son, Who is, so to speak, the Promise become Reality, as it is written:

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<sup>4</sup>So both Luther and Calvin understood it.

*“Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”*  
(*John 1:51*)

“And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I knew it not.” Quite another fear now came upon him from that of loneliness or of doubt. It was awe at the conscious presence of the ever-watchful, ever-mindful covenant-God which made him feel, as many a wanderer since at such discovery: “How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” And early next morning Jacob converted his stony pillow into a memorial pillar, and consecrated it unto God. Henceforth this rocky valley would be to him no more the Canaanitish Luz, but Bethel, “the house of God;” just as John the Baptist declared that God could of such stones raise up children to Abraham. At the same time Jacob vowed a vow, that when God had fulfilled His promise, and brought him back again “in peace,” he would, on his part also, make the place a Bethel, by dedicating it to God, and offering unto the Lord a tenth of all that He should give him, which also he did. (*Genesis 35:6, 7*)

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No further incident worth recording occurred till Jacob reached the end of his journey in “the land of the people of the East.” Here he found himself at a “well,” where, contrary to the usual custom, three flocks were already in waiting, long before the usual evening time for watering them. Professor Robinson has made this personal observation, helpful to our understanding of the circumstances: “Over most of the cisterns is laid a broad and thick flat stone, with a round hole cut in the middle, forming the mouth of the cistern. This hole we found in many cases covered with a heavy stone, which it would require two or three men to roll away.” We know not whether these flocks were kept waiting till sufficient men had come to roll away the stone, or whether it was the custom to delay till all the flocks had arrived. At any rate, when Jacob had ascertained that the flocks were from Haran, and that the shepherds knew Laban, the brother of Rebekah, and when he saw the fair Rachel, his own cousin, coming with her flock, he rolled away the stone himself, watered his uncle’s sheep, and in the warmth of his feelings at finding himself not only at the goal of his journey, but apparently God-directed to

her whose very appearance could win his affections, he embraced his cousin. Even in this little trait the attentive observer of Jacob's natural character will not fail to recognize "the haste" with which he always anticipated God's leadings. When Laban, Rachel's father, came to hear of all the circumstances, he received Jacob as his relative. A month's trial more than confirmed in the mind of that selfish, covetous man the favorable impression of Jacob's possible use to him as a shepherd, which his first energetic interference at the "well" must have produced. With that apparent frankness and [111] show of liberality under which cunning, selfish people so often disguise their dishonest purposes, Laban urged upon Jacob to name his own "wages." Jacob had learned to love Rachel, Laban's younger daughter. Without consulting the mind of God in the matter, he now proposed to serve Laban seven years for her hand. This was just the period during which, among the Hebrews, a Jewish slave had to serve; in short, he proposed becoming a bondsman for Rachel. With the same well-feigned candor as before, Laban agreed: "It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man (to a stranger)." The bargain thus to sell his daughter was not one founded on the customs of the time, and Laban's daughters themselves felt the degradation which they could not resist, as appears from their after statement, when agreeing to flee from their father's home:

*"Are we not counted of him strangers? for he has sold us." (Genesis 31:14, 15)*

The period of Jacob's servitude seemed to him rapidly to pass, and at the end of the seven years he claimed his bride. But now Jacob was to experience how his sin had found him out. As he had deceived his father, so Laban now deceived him. Taking advantage of the Eastern custom that a bride was always brought to her husband veiled, he substituted for Rachel her elder sister Leah. But, as formerly, God had, all unknown to them, overruled the error and sin of Isaac and of Jacob, so He did now also in the case of Laban and Jacob. For Leah was, so far as we can judge, the one whom God had intended for Jacob, though, for the sake of her beauty, he had preferred Rachel. From Leah sprang Judah, in whose line the promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled. Leah, as we shall see in the

sequel, feared and served Jehovah; while Rachel was attached to the superstitions of her father's house; and even the natural character of the elder sister fitted her better for her new calling than that of the somewhat petulant, peevish, and self-willed, though beautiful younger daughter of Laban. As for the author of this deception, Laban, he shielded himself behind the pretense of a national custom, not to give away a younger before a first born sister. But he readily proposed to give to Jacob Rachel also, in return for other seven years of service. Jacob consented, and the second union was celebrated immediately upon the close of Leah's marriage festivities, which in the East generally last for a week. It were an entire mistake to infer from the silence of Scripture that this double marriage of Jacob received Divine approbation. As always, Scripture states facts, but makes no comment. That sufficiently appears from the lifelong sorrow, disgrace, and trials which, in the retributive providence of God, followed as the consequence of this double union.

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The sinful weakness of Jacob appeared also in his married life, in an unkind and unjust preference for Rachel, and God's reproofing dealings in that He blessed the "hated" wife with children, while he withheld from Rachel a boon so much desired in a family where all that was precious stood connected with an heir to the promises. At the same time, this might also serve to teach again the lesson, given first to Abraham and then to Isaac, how especially in the patriarchal family this blessing was to be a direct gift from the Lord. (See also [Psalm 127:3](#)) Leah bore in rapid succession four sons, whom she significantly named Reuben ("behold! a son"), saying, "Surely Jehovah hath looked upon my affliction;" Simeon ("hearing"), "Because Jehovah hath heard that I was hated;" Levi ("cleaving," or "joined"), in the hope "Now this time will my husband cleave to me;" and Judah ("praised," viz., be Jehovah), since she said: "Now will I praise Jehovah." It deserves special notice, that in the birth of at least three of these sons, Leah not only recognized God, but specially acknowledged Him as Jehovah, the covenant-God.

We do not suppose that Rachel, who had no children of her own, waited all this time without seeking to remove what she enviously and jealously regarded as her sister's advantage. Indeed, the sacred text nowhere indicates that the children of Jacob were born in the exact succession of time in which their names are recorded. On the

contrary, we have every reason to suppose that such was not the case. It quite agrees with the petulant, querulous language of Rachel, that she waited not so long, but that so soon as she really found herself at this disadvantage compared with her sister, she persuaded her husband to make her a mother through Bilhah, her own maid, as Sarah had done in the case of Hagar. Thus the sins of the parents too often reappear in the conduct of their successors. Instead of waiting upon God, or giving himself to prayer, Jacob complied with [113] the desire of his Rachel, and her maid successively bore two sons, whom Rachel named "Dan," or "judging," as if God had judged her wrong, and "Naphtali," or "my wrestling," saying: "With great wrestling have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed." In both instances we mark her gratified jealousy of her sister; and that, although she owned God, it was not as Jehovah, but as Elohim, the God of nature, not the covenant-God of the promise.

Once again the evil example of a sister, and its supposed success, proved infectious. When Leah perceived that she no longer became as before, a mother, and probably without waiting till both Rachel's adopted sons had been born, she imitated the example of her sister, and gave to Jacob her own maid Zilpah as wife. Her declension in faith further appears also in the names which she chose for the sons of Zilpah. At the birth of the eldest, she exclaimed, "Good fortune cometh,"<sup>5</sup> and hence called him "Gad," or "good fortune;" the same idea being expressed in the name of the second, Asher, or "happy." Neither did Leah in all this remember God, but only thought of the success of her own device. But the number of children now granted to the two sisters neither removed their mutual jealousies, nor restored peace to the house of Jacob. Most painful scenes occurred; and when at length Leah again gave birth to two sons, she recognized, indeed, God in their names, but now, like her sister, only Elohim, not Jehovah; while she seemed to see in the first of them a reward for giving Zilpah to her husband, whence the child's name was called Issachar ("he gives," or "he brings reward"); while she regarded her last-born son, Zebulun, or "dwelling," as a pledge that since she had borne him six sons, her husband would now dwell with her!

<sup>5</sup>This is the correct translation; or else after another reading: "With good luck!"



It has already been stated that we must not regard the order in which the birth of Jacob's children is mentioned as indicating their actual succession.<sup>6</sup> They are rather so enumerated, partly to show the varying motives of the two sisters, and partly to group together the sons of different mothers. That the scriptural narrative is not intended to represent the actual succession of the children appears also from the circumstance, that the birth of an only daughter, Dinah ("judgment") is mentioned immediately after that of Zebulun. The wording of the Hebrew text here implies that Dinah was born at a later period ("afterwards"), and, indeed, she alone is mentioned on account of her connection with Jacob's later history, though we have reason to believe that Jacob had other daughters (See [Genesis 37:35](#), and [46:7](#)), whose names and history are not mentioned.

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And now at last better thoughts seem to have come to Rachel. When we read that in giving her a son of her own, "God hearkened to her," we are warranted in inferring that believing prayer had taken in her heart the former place of envy and jealousy of her sister. The son whom she now bore, in the fourteenth year of Jacob's servitude to Laban, was called Joseph, a name which has a double meaning: "the remover," because, as she said, "God hath taken away my reproach," and "adding," since she regarded her child as a pledge that God—this time "Jehovah"—"shall add to me another son." The object of Jacob's prolonged stay with his father-in-law was now accomplished. Fourteen years servitude to Laban left him as poor as when first he had come to him. The wants of his increasing family, and the better understanding now established in his family, must have pointed out to him the desirableness of returning to his own country. But when he intimated this wish to his father-in-law, Laban was unwilling to part with one by whom he had so largely profited. With a characteristic confusion of heathen ideas with a dim knowledge of the being of Jehovah, Laban said to Jacob (we here translate literally): "If I have found grace in thy sight (i.e. tarry), for I have divined<sup>7</sup> (ascertained by magic), and Jehovah hath

<sup>6</sup>In Jacob's last blessing ([Genesis 49](#)) we find quite a different succession of his sons; this time also with a view to the purposes of the narrative, rather than to chronological order.

<sup>7</sup>It is a very remarkable circumstance that the Hebrew word for divining is the same as that for serpent. In heathen rites also the worship of the serpent was connected with

blessed me for thy sake.” The same attempt to place Jehovah as the God of Abraham by the side of the god of Nahor—not denying, indeed, the existence of Jehovah, but that He was the only true and living God—occurs again later when Laban made a covenant with [115] Jacob. ([Genesis 31:53](#)) It also frequently recurs in the later history of Israel—. Both strange nations and Israel—itsself, when in a state of apostasy, did not deny that Jehovah was God, but they tried to place Him on a level with other and false deities. Now, Scripture teaches us that to place any other pretended God along with the living and true One argues as great ignorance, and is as great a sin, as to deny Him entirely.

In his own peculiar fashion Laban, with pretended candor and liberality, now invited Jacob to name his wages for the future. But this time the deceiver was to be deceived. Basing his proposal on the fact that in the East the goats are mostly black and the sheep white, Jacob made what seemed the very modest request, that all that were spotted and speckled in the flock were to be his share. Laban gladly assented, taking care to make the selection himself, and to hand over Jacob’s portion to his own sons, while Jacob was to tend the flocks of Laban. Finally, he placed three days journey betwixt the flocks of Jacob and his own. But even so, Jacob knew how, by an artifice well understood in the East, to circumvent his father-in-law, and to secure that, though ordinarily “the ring straked, speckled, and spotted” had been an exception, now they were the most numerous and the strongest of the flocks. And the advantage still remained on the side of Jacob, when Laban again and again reversed the conditions of the agreement. ([Genesis 31:7](#)) This clearly proved that Jacob’s artifice could not have been the sole nor the real reason of his success. In point of fact, immediately after the first agreement with Laban, the angel of God had spoken to Jacob in a dream, assuring him that, even without any such artifices, God would right him in his cause with Laban. ([Genesis 31:12, 13](#)) Once more, then, Jacob acted, as when in his father’s house. He “made haste;” he would not wait for the Lord to fulfill his promise; he would use his own means—and employ his cunning and devices—to

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magic; and in all this we recognize how all false religion and sorcery is truly to be traced up to the “old serpent,” which is Satan.

accomplish the purpose of God, instead of committing his cause unto Him. And as formerly he had had the excuse of his father's weakness and his brother's violence, so now it might seem as if he were purely on his defense, and as if his deceit were necessary for his protection—the more so as he resorted to his device only in spring, not in autumn,<sup>8</sup> so that the second produce of the year belonged chiefly to his father-in-law.

The consequences proved very similar to those which followed his deceit in his father's house. The rapidly growing wealth of Jacob during the six years of this bargain so raised the enmity and envy of Laban and of his sons, that Jacob must have felt it necessary for his own safety to remove, even if he had not received Divine direction to that effect. But this put an end to all hesitancy; and having communicated his purpose to his wives, and secured their cordial consent, he left secretly, while Laban was away at the sheep-shearing, which would detain him some time. Three days elapsed before Laban was informed of Jacob's flight. He immediately pursued after him, "with his brethren," his anger being further excited by the theft of his household gods, or "teraphim," which Rachel, unknown, of course, to Jacob, had taken with her. On the seventh day Laban and his relatives overtook Jacob and his caravan in Mount Gilead. The consequences might have been terrible, if God had not interposed to warn Laban in a dream, not to injure nor to hurt Jacob. Being further foiled in his search after the missing teraphim, through the cunning of his own daughter, Laban, despite his hypocritical professions of how affectionate their leave-taking might have been if Jacob had not "stolen away," stood convicted of selfishness and unkindness. In fact, if the conduct of Jacob, even in his going away, had been far from straightforward, that of Laban was of the most unprincipled kind. However, peace was restored between them, and a covenant made, in virtue of which neither party was to cross for hostile purposes the memorial pillar which they erected, and to which Laban gave a Chaldee and Jacob a Hebrew name, meaning "the heap of witness."

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Hypocritically as in the mouth of Laban the additional name of Mizpah sounds, which he gave to this pillar, it is a very significant

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<sup>8</sup>Thus we understand [Genesis 30:41, 42](#). The spring-produce is supposed to be stronger than that of autumn.

designation to mark great events in our lives, especially our alliances and our undertakings. For Mizpah means “watchtower,” and the words which accompanied the giving of this name were:

“Jehovah watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.”

## Chapter 18

[117]

*Jacob at Mahanaim—The Night of Wrestling—Reconciliation  
between Jacob and Esau—Jacob Settles at Shechem—Jacob  
Proceeds to Bethel to Pay his Vow—Death of Rachel—Jacob settles  
at Hebron*

(Genesis 32-36)

We are now nearing what may be described as the high point in the spiritual history of Jacob. Quite different as the previous history of Abraham had been from that of Jacob, yet, in some sense, what Mount Moriah was to Abraham, that the fords of Jabbok became to his grandson: a place of trial and of decision,—only that while the one went to it, the other only left it, with a new name, and all that this implied.

One dreaded meeting was past, and its apprehended dangers averted. Jacob had in his fear “stolen away” from Laban. He had been pursued as by an enemy, but God had brought peace out of it all. Standing by his “Mizpah,” he had seen Laban and his confederates disappearing behind the range of Gilead, their spears and lances glistening in the sunlight, as they wound through the pine and oak forests which cover the mountain side. One enemy was now behind him; but another and far more formidable had yet to be encountered. In dealing with Laban, Jacob could justly plead his long service and the heartless selfishness of his employer. But what could he say to Esau in excuse or palliation of the past? How would he meet him? and did his brother still cherish the purpose of revenge from which he had fled twenty years ago? To these questions there was absolutely no answer, except the one which faith alone could understand: that if he now returned to his own country, and faced the danger there awaiting him, it was by the express direction of the Lord Himself. If so, Jacob must be safe. Nor was he long in receiving such general assurance of this as might strengthen his faith. Leaving

the mountains of Gilead, Jacob had entered the land of promise, in what afterwards became the possession of Gad. A glorious prospect here opened before him. Such beauty, fruitfulness, freshness of verdure, and richness of pasturage; dark mountain forests above, and rich plains below, as poor Palestine, denuded of its trees, and with them of its moisture—a land of ruins—has not known these many, many centuries! And there, as he entered the land, “the angels of God met him.” Twenty years before they had, on leaving it, met him [118] at Bethel, and, so to speak, accompanied him on his journey. And now in similar pledge they welcomed him on his return. Only then, they had been angels ascending and descending on their ministry, while now they were “angel hosts” to defend him in the impending contest, whence also Jacob called the name of that place Mahanaim, “two hosts,” or “two camps.” And if at Bethel he had seen them in a “dream,” they now appeared to him when waking, as if to convey yet stronger assurance.

Such comfort was, indeed, needed by Jacob. From Mahanaim he had sent to his brother Esau a message intended to conciliate him. But the messengers returned without any reply, other than that Esau was himself coming to meet his brother, and that at the head of a band of four hundred men. This certainly was sufficiently alarming, irrespective of the circumstance that since Esau was (as we shall presently show) just then engaged in a warlike expedition against Seir, the four hundred men with whom he advanced, had probably gathered around his standard for plunder and bloodshed, just like those wild Bedouin tribes which to this day carry terror wherever they appear. Even to receive no reply at all would, in itself, be a great trial to one like Jacob. Hitherto he had by his devices succeeded in removing every obstacle, and evading every danger. But now he was absolutely helpless, in face of an enemy from whom he could neither retreat nor escape. It is said in the sacred text: “Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.” The measures to which he resorted prove this. He divided his caravan into two bands, in the hope that if Esau attacked the one, the other might escape during the fray. The result thus aimed at was very doubtful, and, at the best, sad enough. Jacob must have deeply felt this, and he betook himself to prayer. Mingling confession of his utter unworthiness with entreaty for deliverance from the danger before him, he successively pleaded

before God His express command to return to Canaan, His past mercies, and His gracious promises, at the same time addressing God as Jehovah, the covenant-God of Abraham and of Isaac. Not one of these pleas could fail. That cry of despair was the preparation for what was to follow: Jacob was now learning to obtain, otherwise than by his own efforts, that which Jehovah had promised to give.

We know, with almost perfect certainty, the exact spot where the most important transaction in the life of Jacob took place. It was at the ford of Jabbok, the confluence of the two streams which flow from the East into Jordan, between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, and almost midway between these two points. Indeed, there is only one ford of Jabbok “practicable,” “and even here,” as a recent traveler records, “the strong current reached the horse’s girths.”<sup>1</sup>

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The beauty and richness of the whole district is most striking—park-like scenery alternating with sweet glades, covered with rich crops; “trees and shrubs grouped in graceful variety;” then peeps into the great Jordan valley, with its almost tropical vegetation, and of the hills of Palestine beyond. Looking down upon the ford, the brook Jabbok is almost invisible from the thicket of oleander which covers its banks; while on the steeper sides, up either way, forests of oak and of evergreen oak merge into the darker pine. It was night in this solitude. Overhead shone the innumerable stars once the pledge of the promise to Abraham. The impressive silence was only broken by the rushing of Jabbok, and the lowing of the flocks and herds, as they passed over the brook, or the preparations for transporting the women, children, and servants. Quite a large number of the cattle and sheep Jacob now sent forward in separate droves, that each, as it successively came to Esau as a gift from his brother, might tend to appease his feelings of anger, or satisfy the cupidity of his followers. At last they were all gone, each herdsman bearing a message of peace. The women also and children were safely camped on the south side of Jabbok. Only Jacob himself remained on the northern bank. It was a time for solitude—“and Jacob was left alone,” quite alone, as when first he left his father’s house. There on the oleander banks of Jabbok occurred what has ever since been of the deepest significance to the church of God. “There wrestled with him a man

<sup>1</sup> See the description in Canon Tristram’s *Land of Israel*, pp. 470-563.

till the breaking of day.” That “Man” was the Angel of Jehovah in Whom was His Presence. “And when He saw that He prevailed not against him, He touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with Him.” The contest by wrestling must now have become impossible. But a far other contest ensued. “And He said, Let Me go, for the day breaketh. And he (Jacob) said, I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.” Jacob had now recognized the character of his opponent and of the contest, and he sought quite another victory, and by quite other means than before. He no longer expected to prevail in his own strength.

He asked to be blessed by Him with whom he had hitherto only wrestled, that so he might prevail. That blessing was given. But first the Lord brought before him what had been his old name as expressive of his old history—Jacob, “the cunning, self-helpful supplanter;” then He bestowed on him a new name, characteristic of his new experience and better contest by prayer: Israel, “a prince with God.” In that new character would he have “power with God and men,” and “prevail” against all enemies. But the mysterious name of the Angel he must not yet know; for “the mystery of godliness” was not to be fully revealed till all the purposes for which Jacob was to become Israel—had been fulfilled. And now “He blessed him there.” “And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel (the face of God): for I have seen God face to face, and my soul has recovered.<sup>2</sup> And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day.” And “to this day,” literally, is this custom observed among “the children of Israel.”

Now what was the meaning of this solemn transaction? Assuredly, it was symbolical—but of what? It was a real transaction, but symbolical of Jacob’s past, present, and future. The “man” who wrestled with Jacob “until the breaking of day” was Jehovah. Jacob had, indeed, been the believing heir to the promises, but all his life long he had wrestled with God—sought to attain success in his own strength and by his own devices. Seeming to contend with man, he had really contended with God. And God had also contended

<sup>2</sup>So the words are rendered by one of the ablest German critics.



with him. At last farther contest was impossible. Jacob had become disabled, for God had touched the hollow of his thigh. In the presence of Esau Jacob was helpless. But before he could encounter his most dreaded earthly enemy, he must encounter God, with Whom he had all along, though unwittingly, contended by his struggles and devices. The contest with Esau was nothing; the contest with Jehovah everything. The Lord could not be on Jacob's side, till he had been disabled, and learned to use other weapons than those of his own wrestling. Then it was that Jacob recognized with whom he had hitherto wrestled. Now he resorted to other weapons, even to prayer; and he sought and found another victory, even in the blessing of Jehovah and by His strength. Then also, truly at "the breaking of day," he obtained a new name, and with it new power, in which he prevailed with God and man. Jacob, indeed, "halted upon his thigh;" but he was now Israel, a prince with God. And still to all ages this contest and this victory, in despair of our own efforts, and in the persevering prayer, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me," have been and are a most precious symbol to the children of God. May we not also add, that as the prophet Hosea pointed to it as symbolical of Israel's history ([Hosea 12:4](#)), so it shall be fully realized when

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*"they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn?" ([Zechariah 12:10](#))*

As Jacob passed over Jabbok in the early morn, the glittering of spears and lances in the sunlight, among the dark pine forests, betokened the approach of Esau with his four hundred men. But Jacob had nothing more to fear: the only real contest was over. It was necessary, when Jacob returned to take possession of the land and of the promises, that all that was past in his history should be past—it was so! Never, after that night, did Jacob again contend with carnal weapons; and though the old name of Jacob reappears again and again by the side of his new designation, it was to remind both him and us that Jacob, though halting, is not dead, and that there is in us always the twofold nature, alike of Jacob and of Israel. What now followed we cannot tell better than in the words of a recent German writer: "Jacob, who in his contest with the Angel of

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Jehovah had prevailed by prayer and entreaty, now also prevails by humility and modesty against Esau, who comes to meet him with four hundred men.” As already hinted, Esau had probably been just engaged in that warlike expedition to Mount Seir, which resulted in his conquest of the land, where he afterwards settled. ([Genesis 36:6, 7](#)) This accounts for his appearance at the head of an armed band. Possibly, he may, at the same time, have wished to have the revenge of giving anxiety to his brother, and of showing him the contrast between their respective positions; or he may to the last have been undecided how to act towards his brother. At any rate, under the overruling guidance of God, and “overcome by the humility of Jacob, and by the kindness of his own heart, Esau fell upon the neck of his brother, embraced and kissed him. With reluctance he accepted the rich presents of Jacob, and he offered to accompany him to the end of his journey with his armed men—a proposition which Jacob declined in a friendly spirit. Thus the two brothers, long separated in affection, were reconciled to each other. Their good understanding remained undisturbed till the day of their death.”

There was nothing in Jacob’s language to his brother which, when translated from Eastern to our Western modes of conduct and expression, is inconsistent with proper self-respect. If he declined the offer of an armed guard, it was because he felt he needed not an earthly host to protect him. Besides, it was manifestly impossible for cattle and tender children to keep up with a Bedouin warrior band. While Esau, therefore, returned to Mount Seir, there to await a visit from his brother, Jacob turned in a north-westerly direction to Succoth, a place still east of Jordan, and afterwards in the possession of the tribe of Gad. Here he probably made a lengthened stay, for we read that “he built him a house, and made booths for his cattle,” whence also the name of Succoth, or “booths.” At last Jacob once more crossed the Jordan’, “and came in peace<sup>3</sup> to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan.” The words seem designedly chosen to indicate that God had amply fulfilled what Jacob had asked at Bethel: to “come again in peace.”([Genesis 28:21](#)) But great changes had taken place in the country. When Abram entered the land, and made this his first resting-place, there was no

<sup>3</sup>So the words should be translated.

city there, and it was only “the place of Shechem.” ([Genesis 12:6](#)) But now the district was all cultivated and possessed, and a city had been built, probably by “Hamor the Hivite,” the father of Shechem, who called it after his son. (Comp. [Genesis 4:17](#)) From “the children of Hamor” Jacob bought the field on which he “spread his tent.” This was “the portion” which Jacob afterwards gave to his son Joseph ([Genesis 48:22](#)), and here the “bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought out of Egypt,” were, at least at one time, buried. ([Joshua 24:32](#)) Far more interesting than this, we know that by the well which Jacob there dug, sat, many centuries afterwards, “David’s greater Son,” to tell the poor sinning woman of Samaria concerning the “well of water springing up unto everlasting life”—the first non-Jewess blessed to taste the water of which “whosoever drinketh” “shall never thirst.” ([John 4:14](#)) Here Jacob erected an altar, and called it El-elohe-Israel, “God, the God of Israel.”

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But his stay at Shechem was to prove a fresh source of trial to Jacob. Dinah, his daughter, at that time (as we gather) about fifteen years of age, in the language of the sacred text, “went out to see the daughters of the land,” or, as Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us, to take part in a feast of the Shechemites. A more terrible warning than that afforded by the results of her thoughtless and blameworthy participation in irreligious and even heathen festivities could scarcely be given. It led to the ruin of Dinah herself, then to a proposal of an alliance between the Hivites and Israel, to which Israel could not, of course, have agreed; and finally to vile deceit on the part of Simeon and Levi, for the purpose of exacting bloody revenge, by which the whole male population of Shechem were literally exterminated. How deeply the soul of Jacob recoiled from this piece of Eastern cruelty, appears from the fact, that even on his deathbed, many years afterwards, he reverted to it in these words: -

*“Simeon and Levi are brethren; Their swords are weapons of iniquity. O my soul, come not thou into their council; Unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united!”* ([Genesis 49:5, 6](#))

But one, though undesigned, consequence of the crime proved a further blessing to Jacob. It was quite clear that he and his family

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must remove from the scene of Simeon's and Levi's treachery and cruelty. Then it was that God directed Jacob to return to Bethel, and fulfill the promise which he had there made on fleeing from the face of Esau his brother. About ten years must have elapsed since the return of Jacob from Mesopotamia', and yet he had not paid his vows unto the Lord! From what follows, we infer that, in all probability, the reason of this delay had been that the family of Jacob had not been purged from idolatry, and that hitherto Jacob had been too weak to remove from his household what must have rendered his appearance at Bethel morally impossible. But now we read, that "he said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments" (this as a symbol of purification): "and let us arise, and go up to Bethel." And all the teraphim and idolatrous "charms" were buried deep down below a terebinth-tree "which was by Shechem." A touching incident is recorded immediately on their arrival at Bethel. "Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried beneath Bethel, under an oak, and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth (the oak of weeping)." Thus Deborah's long and faithful service in the household of Isaac, and the family-mourning over the old, tried family friend, are deemed worthy of perpetual memorial in the Book of God! But from the circumstance that Deborah died in the house of Jacob, we infer not only that her mistress Rebekah was dead, but that there must have been some intercourse between Isaac and Jacob since his return to Canaan'. Most probably Jacob had visited his aged parent, though Scripture does not mention it, because it in no way affects the history of the covenant. At Bethel God again appeared to Jacob; and while He once more bestowed on him the name of Israel and the covenant-promises previously given, Jacob also paid his vow unto the Lord, and on his part likewise renewed the designation of the place as Bethel.

From Bethel they continued their journey towards Mamre, the place of Isaac's residence. On the way, some distance from Ephrath, "the fruitful," which in later times was called Bethlehem, "the house of bread," ([Micah 5:2](#)) Rachel died in giving birth to Jacob's twelfth son. His mother wished to call her child Ben-oni, "the son of my sorrow;" but his father named him Benjamin, which has been vari-

ously interpreted as meaning “son of the right hand,” “son of days, i.e. of old age,” and “son of happiness,” because he completed the number of twelve sons. From [Jeremiah 31:15](#), we gather that Rachel actually died in Ramah. “Jacob set a pillar upon her grave.” As the oak, or rather the terebinth, of Deborah was still known at the time of the Judges, when Deborah’s greater namesake dwelt under its shadow, “between Ramah and Bethelin MountEphraim,” ([Judges 4:5](#)) so the pillar which marked Rachel’s grave was a landmark at the time of Samuel. ([1 Samuel 10:2, 3](#)) Another crime yet stained the family of Jacob at Migdal Eder, “the watchtower of the flock,” in consequence of which Reuben was deprived of the privileges of the firstborn. ([Genesis 49:4](#)) At last Jacob came to his journey’s end, “unto Isaac his father, unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah’, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned.” Here Scripture pauses to record, by way of anticipation, the death of Isaac, at the age of one hundred and eighty years, although that event took place twelve years after Jacob’s arrival at Hebron; and, indeed, Isaac had lived to share his son’s sorrow, when Joseph was sold into Egypt, having only died ten years before Jacob and his sons settled in Egypt.<sup>4</sup> But the course of sacred history has turned from Isaac, and, in fact, Jacob himself is now but a secondary actor in its events. The main interest henceforth centers in Joseph, the elder son of Rachel, with whose life the progress of sacred history is identified.

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<sup>4</sup>As Jacob was seventy-seven years old when he went into Mesopotamia, he must have been one hundred and eight on his return to Hebron; while Isaac was at the time only one hundred and sixty-eight years old, since Jacob was born in the sixtieth year of his father’s age, as appears from [Genesis 25:26](#). It is, however, fair to add that Dr. Herald Browne proposes another chronology of Jacob’s life (after Kennicott and Horsley), which would make him twenty years younger, or fifty-seven years of age, at the time of his flight to Padan-Aram. (See Bible Commentary, vol. 1. pp. 177, 178.)

## Chapter 19

*Joseph's Early Life—He is Sold by his Brethren into Slavery—Joseph in the House of Potiphar—Joseph in Prison*

([Genesis 37-39](#))

FOR the proper understanding of what follows, it is necessary to bear in mind that what may be called the personal history of the patriarchs ceases with Jacob; or rather that it now merges into that of the children of Israel—of the family, and of the tribes. The purpose of God with the patriarchs as individuals had been fulfilled, when Jacob had become father of the twelve, who were in turn to be the ancestors of the chosen people. Hence the personal manifestations of God to individuals now also ceased. To this there is only a solitary exception, when the Lord appeared unto Jacob as he went into Egypt, to give him the needful assurance that by His will—Israel removed from Canaan, and that in His own good time He would bring them back to the land of promise. By way of anticipation, it may be here stated that this temporary removal was in every respect necessary. It formed the fulfillment of God's prediction to Abram at the first making of the covenant ([Genesis 15:12-17](#)); and it was needful in order to separate the sons of Jacob from the people of the land. How readily constant contact with the Canaanites would have involved even the best of them in horrible vices appears from the history of Judah, when, after the selling of Joseph, he had left his father's house, and, joining himself to the people of the country, both he and his family rapidly became conformed to the abominations around. ([Genesis 38](#)) It was necessary also as a preparation for the later history of Israel, when the Lord God would bring them out from their house of bondage by His outstretched arm, and with signs and wonders. As this grand event was to form the foundation and beginning of the history of Israel as a nation, so the servitude and the low estate which preceded it were typical, and that not

only of the whole history of Israel, but of the Church itself, and of every individual believer also, whom God delivers from spiritual bondage by His mighty grace. Lastly, all the events connected with the removal into Egypt were needful for the training of the sons of Israel, and chiefly for that of Joseph, if he were to be fitted for the position which God intended him to occupy. Nor can we fail to recognize, that, although Joseph is not personally mentioned in the New Testament as a type of Christ, his history was eminently typical of that of our blessed Savior, alike in his betrayal, his elevation to highest dignity, and his preserving the life of his people, and in their ultimate recognition of him and repentance of their sin. Yet, though “known to God” were all these “His works from the beginning,” all parties were allowed, in the free exercise of their own choice, to follow their course, ignorant that all the while they were only contributing their share towards the fulfillment of God’s purposes. And in this lies the mystery of Divine Providence, that it always worketh wonders, yet without seeming to work at all—whence also it so often escapes the observation of men. Silently, and unobserved by those who live and act, it pursues its course, till in the end all things are seen “to work together” for the glory of God, and “for good to them that love God, that are the called according to His purpose.”

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The scriptural history of Joseph opens when he is seventeen years of age. Abundant glimpses into the life of the patriarchal family are afforded us. Joseph is seen engaged in pastoral occupations, as well as his brethren. But he is chiefly with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, the maids of Leah and Rachel. Manifestly also there is ill feeling and jealousy on the part of the sons of Leah towards the child of Rachel. This must have been fostered by the difference in their natural disposition, as well as by the preference which Jacob showed for the son of his beloved wife. The bearing of the sons of Jacob was rough, wild, and lawless, without any concern for their father’s wishes or aims. On the other hand, Joseph seems to have united some of the best characteristics of his ancestors. Like Abraham, he was strong, decided, and prudent; like Isaac, patient and gentle; like Jacob, warmhearted and affectionate. Best of all, his conduct signally differed from that of his brethren. On the other hand, however, it is not difficult to perceive how even the promising

[128] qualities of his natural disposition might become sources of moral danger. Of this the history of Joseph's ancestors had afforded only too painful evidence. How much greater would be the peril to a youth exposed to such twofold temptation as rooted dislike on the part of brothers whom he could not respect, and marked favoritism on that of his father! The holy reticence of Scripture—which ever tells so little of man and so much of God—affords us only hints, but these are sufficiently significant. We read that “Joseph brought unto his father” the “evil report” of his brethren. That is one aspect of his domestic relations. Side by side with it is the other: “Now Israel—loved Joseph more than all his children.” Even if “the coat of many colors,” which he gave to “the son of his old age,” had been merely a costly or gaudy dress, it would have been an invidious mark of favoritism, such as too often raises bitter feelings in families. For, as time is made up of moments, so life mostly of small actions whose greatness lies in their combination. But in truth it was not a “coat of many colors,” but a tunic reaching down to the arms and feet, such as princes and persons of distinction wore,<sup>1</sup> and it betokened to Joseph's brothers only too clearly, that their father intended to transfer to Joseph the right of the first-born. We know that the three oldest sons of Leah had unfitted themselves for it—Simeon and Levi by their cruelty at Shechem, and Reuben by his crime at the “watch-tower of the flock.”

What more natural than to bestow the privilege on the first-born of her whom Jacob had intended to make his only wife? At any rate, the result was that “his brethren hated him,” till, in the expressive language of the sacred text, “they could not get themselves to address him unto peace,”<sup>2</sup> that is, as we understand it, to address to him the usual Eastern salutation: “Peace be unto thee!”

It needed only an occasion to bring this state of feeling to an outbreak, and that came only too soon. It seems quite natural that, placed in the circumstances we have described, Joseph should have

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<sup>1</sup>Mr. R. S. Poole (in the article on Joseph, in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible) writes: “The richer classes among the ancient Egyptians wore long dresses of white linen. The people of Palestine and Syria, represented on the Egyptian monuments as enemies or tributaries, wore similar dresses, partly colored, generally with a stripe round the skirts and the borders of the sleeves.”

<sup>2</sup>This is the literal translation.



dreamt two dreams implying his future supremacy. We say this, even while we recognize in them a distinct Divine direction. Yet Scripture does not say, either, that these dreams were sent him as a direct communication from God, or that he was directed to tell them to his family. The imagery of the first of these dreams was taken from the rustic, that of the second from the pastoral life of the family. In the first dream Joseph and his brothers were in the harvest-field—which seems to imply that Jacob, like his father Isaac, had tilled the ground—and Joseph’s sheaf stood upright, while those of his brothers made obeisance. In the second dream they were all out tending the flock, when the sun and moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to Joseph. The first of these dreams was related only unto his brethren, the second both to his father and to his brothers. There must have been something peculiarly offensive in the manner in which he told his dreams, for we read not only that they hated him yet the more for his dreams,” but also “for his words.” Even Jacob saw reason to reprove him, although it is significantly added that he observed the saying. As we now know it, they were prophetic dreams; but, at the time, there were no means of judging whether they were so or not, especially as Joseph had so “worded” them, that they might seem to be merely the effect of vanity in a youth whom favoritism had unduly elated. The future could alone show this; but, meantime, may we not say that it was needful for the sake of Joseph himself that he should be removed from his present circumstances to where that which was holy and divine in him would grow, and all of self be uprooted? But such results are only obtained by one kind of training—that of affliction.

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The sons of Jacob were pasturing their flocks around Shechem, when the patriarch sent Joseph to inquire of their welfare. All unconscious of danger the lad hastened to execute the commission. Joseph found not his brethren at Shechem itself, but a stranger directed him to “Dothan,” the two wells, whither they had gone. “Dothan was beautifully situated, about twelve miles from Samaria. Northwards spread richest pasture-lands; a few swelling hills separated it from the great plain of Esdraelon. From its position it must have been the key to the passes of Esdraelon, and so, as guarding the entrance from the north, not only of Ephraim, but of Palestine itself. On the crest of one of those hills the extensive ruins of Dothan are still pointed out,

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and at its southern foot still wells up a fine spring of living water. Is this one of the two wells from which Dothan derived its name? From these hills Gideon afterwards descended upon the host of Midian. It was here that Joseph overtook his brethren, and was cast into the dry well. And it was from that height that the sons of Jacob must have seen the Arab caravan slowly winding from Jordan on its way to Egypt, when they sold their brother, in the vain hope of binding the word and arresting the hand of God.”<sup>3</sup>

But we are anticipating. No sooner did his brothers descry Joseph in the distance, than the murderous plan of getting rid of him, where no stranger should witness their deed, occurred to their minds. This would be the readiest means of disposing alike of “the dreamer” and of his “dreams.” Reuben alone shrunk from it, not so much from love to his brother as from consideration for his father. On pretense that it would be better not actually to shed their brother’s blood, he proposed to cast him into one of those cisterns, and leave him there to perish, hoping, however, himself secretly to rescue and to restore him to his father. The others readily acceded to the plan. A Greek writer has left us a graphic account of such wells and cisterns. He describes them as regularly built and plastered, narrow at the mouth, but widening as they descend, till at the bottom they attain a width sometimes of one hundred feet. We know that when dry, or covered with only mud at the bottom, they served as hiding-places, and even as temporary prisons. ([Jeremiah 38:6](#); [Isaiah 24:22](#)) Into such an empty well Joseph was now cast, while his brothers, as if they had finished some work, sat down to their meal. We had almost written, that it so happened—but truly it was in the providence of God, that just then an Arab caravan was slowly coming in sight. They were pursuing what we might call the world-old route from the spice district of Gilead into Egypt across Jordan, below the Sea of Galilee, over the plain of Jezreel, and thence along the seashore. Once more the intended kindness of another of his brothers well-nigh proved fatal to Joseph. Reuben had diverted their purpose of bloodshed by proposing to cast Joseph into “the pit,” in the hope of being able afterwards to rescue him. Judah now wished to save

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<sup>3</sup>Our quotation here is from the present writer’s book on Elisha the Prophet, a Type of Christ ([ch. 19](#) “an Unseen Host,” p. 225).

his life by selling him as a slave to the passing Arab caravan. But neither of them had the courage nor the uprightness frankly to resist the treachery and the crime. Again the other brothers hearkened to what seemed a merciful suggestion. The bargain was quickly struck. Joseph was sold to “the Ishmaelites” for twenty shekels—the price, in later times, of a male slave from five to twenty years old ([Leviticus 27:5](#)), the medium price of a slave being thirty shekels of silver, or about four pounds, reckoning the shekel of the sanctuary, which was twice the common shekel ([Exodus 21:32](#)), at two shillings and eight-pence. Reuben was not present when the sale was made. On his return he “rent his clothes” in impotent mourning. But the others dipped Joseph’s princely raiment in the blood of a kid, to give their father the impression that Joseph had been “devoured by a wild beast.” The device succeeded. Jacob mourned him bitterly and “for many days,” refusing all the comfort which his sons and daughters hypocritically offered. But even his bitterest lamentation expressed the hope and faith that he would meet his loved son in another world—for, he said: “I will go down into the grave (or into Sheol) unto my son, mourning.”

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Except by an incidental reference to it in the later confession of his brothers ([Genesis 42:21](#)), we are not told either of the tears or the entreaties with which Joseph vainly sought to move his brethren, nor of his journey into Egypt. We know that when following in the caravan of his new masters, he must have seen at a distance the heights of his own Hebron, where, all unsuspecting, his father awaited the return of his favorite. To that home he was never again to return. We meet him next in the slave-market. Here, as it might seem in the natural course of events, “Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him off the hands of the Ishmaelites.” The name Potiphar frequently occurs on the monuments of Egypt (written either Pet-Pa-Ra, or Pet-P-Ra), and means: “Dedicated to Ra,” or the sun. According to some writers, “at the time that Joseph was sold into Egypt, the country was not united under the rule of a single native line, but governed by several dynasties, of which the fifteenth dynasty of Shepherd-kings was the predominant one, the rest being tributary to it.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>R. S. Poole, as above. We have here stated the ordinarily received view. But Canon Cook has urged strong and, as it seems to us, convincing reasons for supposing that the

[132] At any rate, he would be carried into that part of Egypt which was always most connected with Palestine.

Potiphar's office at the court of Pharaoh was that of "chief of the executioners," most probably (as it is rendered in our Authorized Version) captain of the king's bodyguard. In the house of Potiphar it went with Joseph as formerly in his own home. For it is not in the power of circumstances, prosperous or adverse, to alter our characters. He that is faithful in little shall also be faithful in much; and from him who knoweth not how to employ what is committed to his charge, shall be taken even that he hath. Joseph was faithful, honest, upright, and conscientious, because in his earthly, he served a heavenly Master, Whose presence he always realized. Accordingly "Jehovah was with him," and "Jehovah made all that he did to prosper in his hand." His master was not long in observing this. From an ordinary domestic slave he promoted him to be "overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand." The confidence was not misplaced. Jehovah's blessing henceforth rested upon Potiphar's substance, and he "left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought that he had, save the bread which he did eat." The sculptures and paintings of the ancient Egyptian tombs bring vividly before us the daily life and duties of Joseph. "The property of great men is shown to have been managed by scribes, who exercised a most methodical and minute supervision over all the operations of agriculture, gardening, the keeping of live stock, and fishing. Every product was carefully registered, to check the dishonesty of the laborers, who in Egypt have always been famous in this respect. Probably in no country was farming ever more systematic. Joseph's previous knowledge of tending flocks, and perhaps of husbandry, and his truthful character, exactly fitted him for the post of overseer. How long he filled it we are not told."<sup>5</sup>

[133] It is a common mistake to suppose that earnest religion and uprightness must necessarily be attended by success, even in this world. It is, indeed, true that God will not withhold any good thing

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sale of Joseph took place at the close of the twelfth dynasty, or under the original Pharaohs, before the foreign domination of the Shepherd-kings had commenced. The question will be fully discussed in the next vol. Meantime, the curious reader must be referred to the essay on Egyptian History at the close of vol. 1 of *The Speaker's Commentary*.

<sup>5</sup>R. S. Poole, as above.

from those whose Sun and Shield He is; but then success may not always be a good thing for them. Besides, God often tries the faith and patience of His people—and that is the meaning of many trials. Still oftener are they needed for discipline and training, or that they may learn to glorify God in their sufferings. In the case of Joseph it was both a temptation and a trial by which he was prepared, outwardly and inwardly, for the position he was to occupy. The beauty which Joseph had inherited from his mother exposed him to wicked suggestions on the part of his master's wife, which will surprise those least who are best acquainted with the state of ancient Egyptian society. Joseph stood quite alone in a heathen land and house. He was surrounded only by what would blunt his moral sense, and render the temptation all the more powerful. He had also, as compared with us, a very imperfect knowledge of the law of God in its height and depth. Moreover, what he had seen of his older brothers would not have elevated his views. Still, he firmly resisted evil, alike from a sense of integrity towards his master, and, above all, from dread “of this great wickedness and sin against God.” Yet it seemed only to fare the worse with him for his principles. As so often, the violent passion of the woman turned into equally violent hatred, and she maliciously concocted a false charge against him.<sup>6</sup> We have reason to believe that Potiphar could not in every respect have credited the story of his wife. For the punishment awarded in Egypt to the crime of which she accused him, was far more severe than that which Joseph received. Potiphar consigned him to the king's prison, of which, in his capacity as chief of the bodyguard, he was the superintendent. How bitterly it fared there with him at the first, we learn from these words of [Psalm 105:17, 18](#)

*“He sent before them a man: Sold for a slave was Joseph, They afflicted with fetters his feet, The iron entered into his soul.”<sup>7</sup>*

The contrast could scarcely be greater than between his former [134]

<sup>6</sup>Quite a similar Egyptian story exists, entitled “The Two Brothers,” which has lately been translated. It resembles so closely the Biblical account that we are disposed to regard it as at least founded upon the trial of Joseph. Differing in this from Mr. Poole, we hold that the weight of evidence is in favor of the supposition.

<sup>7</sup>This is the literal translation.

prophetic dreams and his present condition. But even so Joseph remained steadfast. And, as if to set before us the other contrast between sight and faith, the sacred text expressly states it: “But”—a word on which our faith should often lay emphasis—“Jehovah was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.” By-and-by, as his integrity more and more appeared, the charge of the prisoners was committed unto him; and as “what he did Jehovah made to prosper,” the whole management of the prison ultimately passed into Joseph’s hands. Thus, here also Jehovah proved Himself a faithful covenant-God. A silver streak was lining the dark cloud. But still must “patience have her perfect work.”

## Chapter 20

[135]

*Joseph in Prison—The Dream of Pharaoh’s Two officers—The Dream of Pharaoh—Joseph’s Exaltation-His Government of Egypt*

(Genesis 40, 41; 47:13-26)

Eleven years had passed since Joseph was sold into Egypt, and yet the Divine promise, conveyed in his dreams, seemed farther than ever from fulfillment. The greater part of this weary time had probably been spent in prison, without other prospect than that of such indulgence as his services to “the keeper of the prison” might insure, when an event occurred which, for a brief season, promised a change in Joseph’s condition. Some kind of “offense”—real or imaginary—had, as is so often the case in the East, led to the sudden disgrace and imprisonment of two of Pharaoh’s chief officers. The charge of “the chief of the butlers”—or chief of the cupbearers—and of “the chief of the bakers” naturally devolved upon “the captain of the guard,”—a successor, as we imagine, of Potiphar, since he appointed Joseph to the responsible post of their personal attendant. They had not been long in prison when, by the direct leading of Divine Providence, both dreamed in the same night a dream, calculated deeply to impress them. By the same direct guidance of Providence, Joseph was led to notice in the morning their anxiety, and to inquire into its cause. We regard it as directly from God, that he could give them at once and unhesitatingly the true meaning of their dreams. We are specially struck in this respect with the manner in which Joseph himself viewed it. When he found them in distress for want of such “interpreter” as they might have consulted if free, he pointed them straight to God: “Do not interpretations belong to God?” thus encouraging them to tell, and at the same time preparing himself for reading their dreams, by casting all in faith upon God. In short, whether or not he were eventually enabled to understand their dreams, he would at least not appear like the

Egyptian magicians—he would not claim power or wisdom; he would own God, and look up to Him.

[136] We say it the more confidently, that Joseph's interpretation came to him directly from God, that it seems so easy and so rational. For, it is in the supernatural direction of things natural that we ought most to recognize the direct interposition of the Lord. The dreams were quite natural, and the interpretation was quite natural—yet both were directly of God. What more natural than for the chief butler and the chief baker, three nights before Pharaoh's birthday, on which, as they knew, he always "made a feast unto all his servants," to dream that they were each again at his post? And what more natural than that on such an occasion Pharaoh should consider, whether for good or for evil, the case of his absent imprisoned officers? Or, lastly, what more natural than that the chief butler's consciousness of innocence should suggest in his dream that he once more waited upon his royal master; while the guilty conscience of the chief baker saw only birds of prey eating out of the basket from which he had hitherto supplied his master's table?

Here, then, it may be said, we have all the elements of Joseph's interpretation to hand, just as we shall see they were equally obvious in the dreams which afterwards troubled Pharaoh. Yet as then none of the magicians and wise men of Egypt could read what, when once stated, seems so plainly written, so here all seems involved in perplexity till God gives light.

As already stated, the two dreams were substantially the same. In each case the number three, whether of clusters in the vine from which the chief butler pressed the rich juice into Pharaoh's cup, or of baskets in which the chief baker carried the king's bakemeat, pointed to the three days intervening before Pharaoh's birthday. In each case also their dreams transported them back to their original position before any charge had been brought against them, the difference lying in this: that, in the one dream, Pharaoh accepted the functions of his officer; while, in the other, birds which hover about carcasses ate out of the basket. It is also quite natural that, if the chief butler had a good conscience towards his master, he should have been quite ready at the first to tell his dream; while the chief baker, conscious of guilt, only related his when encouraged by the apparently favorable interpretation of his colleague's. Perhaps we ought also to notice,



in evidence of the truthfulness of the narrative, how thoroughly Egyptian in all minute details is the imagery of these dreams.

From the monuments the growth and use of the vine in Egypt, which had been denied by former opponents of the Bible, have been abundantly proved. From the same source we also learn that bakery and confectionery were carried to great perfection in Egypt, so that we can understand such an office as a royal chief baker. Even the bearing of the baskets furnishes a characteristic trait: as in Egypt men carried loads on their heads, and women on their shoulders. <sup>1</sup>

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The event proved the correctness of Joseph's interpretation. On Pharaoh's birthday-feast, three days after their dreams, the chief butler was restored to his office, but the chief baker was executed. When interpreting his dream, Joseph had requested that, on the chief butler's restoration, he, who had himself suffered from a wrongful charge, should think on him, who, at first "stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews," had so long been unjustly kept in apparently hopeless confinement. This wording of Joseph's petition seems to indicate that, at most, he only hoped to obtain liberty; and that probably he intended to return to his father's house. So ignorant was he as yet of God's further designs with him! But what was a poor Hebrew slave in prison to a proud Egyptian court official? It is only like human nature that, in the day of his prosperity, "the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him!"

Two other years now passed in prison—probably more dreary and, humanly speaking, more hopeless than those which had preceded. At length deliverance came, suddenly and unexpectedly. This time it was Pharaoh who dreamed successively two dreams. In the first, seven fat kine were feeding among the rich "marsh-grass" <sup>2</sup> on the banks "of the Nile." But presently up came from "the river" seven lean kine, which devoured the well-favored, without, however, fattening by them. The second dream showed one stalk of corn with seven ears, "full and good," when up sprang beside it another stalk, also with seven ears, but "blasted with the east wind;" "and the thin ears devoured the seven good ears." So vivid had been the dream that it seemed to Pharaoh like reality—"and Pharaoh awoke, and,

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<sup>1</sup>This would not have been true of other countries. Thus, in Italy and Spain, women carry their loads on their heads.

<sup>2</sup>So the literal rendering.

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behold, it was a dream.” Only a dream! and yet the impression of its reality still haunted him, so that he sent for “the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof” to interpret his dreams. But these sages were unable to suggest any explanation satisfactory to the mind of Pharaoh; for we can scarcely believe that they did not attempt some interpretation. In this perplexity, his memory quickened by Oriental terror at his master’s disappointment, the chief of the cup-bearers suddenly remembered his own and the chief baker’s dreams just two years before, and Joseph’s interpretation of them. The event becomes all the more striking and also natural if we may take the date literally as “at the end of two full years,” or on the third anniversary of that birthday of Pharaoh.

Before proceeding, we notice some of the particulars which give the narrative its vivid coloring, and at the same time wonderfully illustrate its historical truthfulness. And, first of all, we again mark the distinctly Egyptian character of all. The “river” is “the Nile,” the sacred stream of Egypt, on which its fertility depended—and Pharaoh stands on its banks. Then the term which we have rendered “marsh-grass,” or “reed-grass,”<sup>3</sup> is certainly an Egyptian word for which there is no Hebrew equivalent, because that to which it applied was peculiar to the banks of the Nile.

Next, the whole complexion of the dreams is Egyptian, as we shall presently show. Moreover, it is remarkable how closely recent independent inquiries have confirmed the scriptural expressions about “the magicians” and “the wise men” of Egypt. It has been always known that there was a special priestly caste in Egypt, to whom not only the religion but the science of the country was entrusted. But of late we have learned a great deal more than this. We know not only that magic formed part and parcel of the religion of Egypt, but we have actually restored to us their ancient magical Ritual itself! We know their incantations and their amulets, with a special reference to the dead; their belief in lucky and unlucky days and events, and even in the so-called “evil eye.” But what is most to our present purpose, we know that the care of the magical books was entrusted to two classes of learned men, whose titles exactly correspond to what, for want of better designation, is rendered as

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<sup>3</sup>“Meadow” in our Authorized Version, [Genesis 41:2](#)

“magicians,” or perhaps “scribes,” and “wise men!” It was before this assemblage, then, of the wisest and most learned, the most experienced in “magic,” and the most venerable in the priesthood, that Pharaoh vainly related his dreams. Most wise truly in this world, yet most foolish; most learned, yet most ignorant! What a contrast [139] between the hoary lore of Egypt and the poor Hebrew slave fetched from prison: they professedly claiming, besides their real knowledge, supernatural powers; he avowedly, and at the outset, disclaiming all power on his part, and appealing to God! A grander scene than this Scripture itself does not sketch; and what an illustration of what was true then, true in the days of our Lord, true in those of St. Paul, and to the end of this dispensation: “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”

And yet when we hear the interpretation through the lips of Joseph, how simple, nay, how obvious does it appear, quite commanding Pharaoh’s implicit conviction. Clearly, the two dreams are one—the first bearing on the pastoral, the other on the agricultural life of Egypt. The dreams are about the flocks and the crops. In both cases there is first sevenfold fatness, and then sevenfold leanness, such as to swallow up the previous fatness, and yet to leave no trace of it. The second dream illustrates the first; and yet the first bears already its own interpretation. For the kine were in Egypt revered as symbol of Isis, the goddess of earth as the nourisher; and in the hieroglyphics the cow is taken to mean earth, agriculture, and nourishment. And then these kine were feeding by the banks of that Nile, on whose inundations it solely depended whether the year was to be one of fruitfulness or of famine. Equally Egyptian is the description of the stalk with many ears, which is just one of the kinds of wheat still grown in Egypt. But, we repeat it, obvious as all this now seems to us, the wise men of Egypt stood speechless before their monarch! And what a testimony, we again say, for God, when Joseph is “brought hastily out of the dungeon!” To the challenge of Pharaoh: “I have heard of thee, to wit: Thou hearest a dream to interpret it”—that is, thou only requirest to hear, in order to interpret a dream,—he answers, simply, emphatically, but believingly: “Ah, not I” (“not to me,” “it does not belong to me”), “God will answer

[140] the peace of Pharaoh;”<sup>4</sup> i.e., what is for the peace of the king. Nor can we omit to notice one more illustration of the accuracy of the whole narrative, when we read that, in preparation for his appearance before Pharaoh, Joseph “shaved himself.” This we know from the monuments was peculiarly Egyptian under such circumstances; whereas among the Hebrews, for example, shaving was regarded as a mark of disgrace.

The interpretation, so modestly yet so decidedly given by Joseph, that the dreams pointed to seven years of unprecedented fruitfulness followed by an equal number of famine, so grievous that the previous plenty should not be known, approved itself immediately to the mind of Pharaoh and “of all his servants.” With this interpretation Joseph had coupled most sagacious advice, for the source of which, in so trying a moment, we must look far higher than the ingenuity of man. (See [Matthew 10:18, 19](#)) He counseled the king to exact in the years of plenty a tax of one-fifth of the produce of the land, and to have it stored under royal supervision against the seven years of famine. Viewed as an impost, this was certainly not heavy, considering that they were years of unexampled plenty; viewed as a fiscal measure, it was most beneficial as compared with what we may suppose to have been previously a mere arbitrary system of taxation, which in reality was tyrannical exaction; while at the same time it would preserve the people from absolute destruction. Lastly, regarded in the light of a higher arrangement, it is very remarkable that this proportion of giving, on the part of Pharaoh’s subjects, afterwards became the basis of that demanded from Israel by Jehovah, their heavenly King.<sup>5</sup> We can scarcely wonder that Pharaoh should have at once appointed such a council or to superintend the arrangements he had proposed. In point of fact he naturalized him, made him his grand vizier, and publicly proclaimed him “ruler over all the land.” Once more every trait in the description is purely Egyptian. Pharaoh gives him his signet, which “was of so much importance with the ancient Egyptian kings, that their names were always enclosed in an oval which represented an elongated signet.”<sup>6</sup> He arrays him “in

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<sup>4</sup>We again translate the Hebrew text literally.

<sup>5</sup>This will be fully shown in a future volume, when the religious and charitable contributions of Israel are explained.

<sup>6</sup>Mr. R. S. Poole, as above.

vestures of byssus,”<sup>7</sup> the noble and also the priestly dress; he puts the chain, or “the collar of gold”<sup>8</sup>

“about his neck,” which was always the mode of investiture of high Egyptian officials; he makes him ride “in the second chariot which he had,” and he has it proclaimed before him: “Avrech,” that is, “fall down,” “bend the knee,” or “do obeisance.”<sup>9</sup> To complete all, on his naturalization Joseph’s name is changed to Zaphnath-paaneah, which most probably means “the supporter of life,” or else “the food of the living,” although others have rendered it “the savior of the world,” and the Rabbis, but without sufficient reason, “the revealer of secrets.” Finally, in order to give him a position among the highest nobles of the land, Pharaoh “gave him to wife Asenath” (probably “she who is of Neith,” the Egyptian goddess of wisdom<sup>10</sup>), “the daughter of Poti-pherah (“dedicated to the sun”), priest of On,” that is, the chief priest of the ancient ecclesiastical, literary, and probably also political capital of the land,<sup>11</sup> “the City of the Sun.” This is the more noteworthy, as the chief of the priesthood was generally chosen from among the nearest relatives of Pharaoh. Yet in all this story there is really nothing extraordinary. As Egypt depends for its produce entirely on the waters of the Nile, the country has at all times been exposed to terrible famines; and one which lasted for exactly seven years is recorded in A.D. 1064-1071, the horrors of which show us the wisdom of Joseph’s precautionary measures. Again, so far as the sudden elevation of Joseph is concerned, Eastern history contains many such instances, and indeed, a Greek historian tells us of an Egyptian king who made the son of a mason his own son-in-law, because he judged him the cleverest man in the land.

<sup>7</sup>The byssus was the Egyptian “white, shining” linen, or rather a peculiar stuff of purely Egyptian growth.

<sup>8</sup>Literally, “a collar, that of gold,” not merely indefinitely, “a collar of gold.”

<sup>9</sup>Cannon Cook rendered it, “Rejoice, then,” and supposes the people or the attendants to have shouted this. *The Speaker’s Comment.*, vol. 1., p. 482.

<sup>10</sup>We must here differ from Mr. Poole, who regards Asenath as a Hebrew, not an Egyptian name, meaning “storehouse,” and as parallel to the Hebrew name of Bithiah (1 [Chronicles 4:18](#)), a “daughter,” or “servant of Jehovah,” which an Egyptian woman adopted on her marriage to Mered, or rather on her conversion unto the Lord. But in the case of Asenath the text seems to imply that the name was Egyptian.

<sup>11</sup>Mr. Poole, as above. This, as the ordinary chronological supposition; but see the note on the subject in the previous chapter.

What is remarkable is the marvelous Divine appointment in all this, and the equally marvelous Divine choice of means to bring it about.

Joseph was exactly thirty years old on his elevation, the same age, we note, on which our blessed Lord entered on His ministry as “the Savior of the world,” “the Supporter of life,” and “the Revealer of secrets.” The history of Joseph’s administration may be traced in a few sentences. During the seven years of plenty, “he gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering,” a notice which remarkably agrees with “the representations of the monuments, which show that the contents of the granaries were accurately noted by scribes when they were filled.” Then, during the years of famine, he first sold corn to the people for money. When all their money was exhausted, they proposed of their own accord to part with their cattle to Pharaoh, and lastly with their land. In the latter case exception was made in favor of the priestly caste, who derived their support directly from Pharaoh. Thus Pharaoh became absolute possessor of all the money, all the cattle, and all the land of Egypt, and that at the people’s own request. This advantage would be the greater, if there had been any tendency to dissatisfaction against the reigning house as an alien race. Nor did Joseph abuse the power thus acquired. On the contrary, by a spontaneous act of royal generosity he restored the land to the people on condition of their henceforth paying one-fifth of the produce in lieu of all other taxation. Besides the considerations already stated in favor of such a measure, it must be borne in mind that in Egypt, where all produce depends on the waters of the Nile, a system of canals and irrigation, necessarily kept up at the expense of the State, would be a public necessity. <sup>12</sup> But the statement of Scripture, which excepts from this measure of public taxation “the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh’s,” remarkably tallies with the account of secular historians.

[143] Two things here stand out in the history of Joseph. The same gracious Hand of the Lord, which, during his humiliation, had kept him from sin, disbelief, and despair, now preserved him in his exaltation from pride, and from lapsing into heathenism, to which his close connection with the chief priest of Egypt might easily

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<sup>12</sup>In point of fact, we know that a monarch of the twelfth dynasty, Amenemha III., first established a complete system of canalization, and made the immense artificial lake of Moeris to receive and again distribute the superfluous waters of the Nile.

have led him. More than that, he considered himself “a stranger and a pilgrim” in Egypt. His heart was in his father’s home, with his father’s God, and on his father’s promises. Of both these facts there is abundant evidence. His Egyptian wife bore him two sons “before the years of famine came.” He gave to both of them Hebrew, not Egyptian names. By the first, Manasseh, or “he that maketh forget,” he wished to own the goodness of God, who had made him forget his past sorrow and toil. By the second, Ephraim, or “double fruitfulness,” he distinctly recognized that, although Egypt was the land in which God had caused him “to be fruitful,” it was still, and must ever be, not the land of his joy but that of his “affliction!” If it be asked why, in his prosperity, Joseph had not informed his father of his life and success, we answer, that in such a history safety lay in quiet waiting upon God. If Joseph had learned the great lesson of his life, it was this, that all in the past had been of God. Nor would He now interfere with further guidance on His part. The Lord would show the way, and lead to the end. <sup>13</sup> But as for him, he believed, and therefore made no haste. Thus would God be glorified, and thus also would Joseph be kept in perfect peace, because he trusted in Him.

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<sup>13</sup>There is no evidence, that at that time Joseph knew that God purposed to reunite him again to his family, far less that they were to come to him into Egypt.

## Chapter 21

*The Sons of Jacob Arrive in Egypt to Buy Corn—Joseph Recognizes his Brothers—Imprisonment of Simeon—The Sons of Jacob come a Second Time, Bringing Benjamin with them—Joseph Tries his Brethren—He Makes himself Known to them—Jacob and his Family Prepare to Descend into Egypt*

(Genesis 42-45)

We are now approaching a decisive period in the history of the house of Israel. Yet once again everything seems to happen quite naturally, while in reality everything is supernatural. The same causes which led to a diminution of rain in the Abyssinian mountains, and with it of the waters of the Nile, brought drought and famine to Palestine. It is quite in character that, in such straits, the wild, lawless sons of Jacob should have stood helplessly despondent, while the energies of their father were correspondingly roused. “Why do ye look one upon another? ... I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence.” The ten sons of Jacob now departed on this errand. But Benjamin, who had taken the place of Joseph in his father’s heart, was not sent with them, perhaps from real fear of “mischief” by the way, possibly because his father did not quite trust the honest intentions of his sons. The next scene presents to us the Hebrew strangers among a motley crowd of natives and foreigners, who had come for corn; while Joseph, in all the state of the highest Egyptian official, superintends the sale. In true Eastern fashion the sons of Jacob make lowest obeisance before “the governor over the land.” Of course they could not have recognized in him, who looked, dressed, and spoke as an Egyptian noble, the lad who, more than twenty years before, had, in “the anguish of his soul,” “besought” them not to sell him into slavery. The same transformation had not taken place in them, and Joseph at once knew the well-remembered features of his brethren. But what



a change in their relative positions! As he saw them bending lowly before him, his former dreams came vividly back to him. Surely, one even much less devout than Joseph would, in that moment, have felt that a Divine Hand had guided the past for a Divine purpose. Personal resentment or pique could not have entered into his mind at such a time. If, therefore, as some have thought, severity towards his brethren partially determined his conduct, this must have been quite a subordinate motive. At any rate, it is impossible to suppose that he cherished any longer feelings of anger, when shortly afterwards, on their expression of deep penitence, “he turned himself about from them and wept.” But we prefer regarding Joseph’s conduct as consistent throughout. The appearance of his brothers before him seemed to imply that God had not meant to separate him from his family, nor yet that he should return to them, but that they should come to him, and that he had been sent before to keep them alive. But for such a reunion of the family it was manifestly needful, that their hearts and minds should have undergone an entire change from that unscrupulous envy which had prompted them to sell him into slavery. This must be ascertained before he made himself known to them. Moreover, its reality must be tested by the severest trial to which their altered feelings could be subjected.

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Thus viewing it, we can understand the whole conduct of Joseph. Of course, his first object would be to separate the sons of Jacob from the crowd of other purchasers, so as to deal specially with them, without, however, awakening their suspicions; his next to ascertain the state of matters at home. Then he would make them taste undeserved sorrow by the exercise of an arbitrary power, against which they would be helpless—even as Joseph had been in their hands. Thus they might see their past sin in their present sorrow. All these objects were attained by one and the same means. Joseph charged them with being spies, who, on pretense of buying corn, had come to find out the defenseless portions of the land. The accusation was not unreasonable in the then state of Egypt, nor uncommon in Eastern countries. It was not only that this afforded a pretext for dealing separately with them, but their answer to the charge would inform Joseph about the circumstances of his family. For, naturally, they would not only protest their innocence, but show the inherent improbability of such an imputation. Here no argument could be

[146] more telling than that they were “all one man’s sons,” since no one would risk the lives of all his children in so dangerous a business. But this was not enough for Joseph. By reiterating the charge, he led them to enter into further details, from which he learned that both his father and Benjamin were alive. Still their reference to himself as one “who is not,” seemed to imply persistence in their former deceit, and must have strengthened his doubts as to their state of mind. But now experience of violence would show them not only their past guilt, but that, however God might seem to delay, He was the avenger of all wrong. More than that, if Benjamin were placed relatively to them in the same circumstances of favoritism as Joseph had been; and if, instead of envying and hating him, they were prepared, even when exposed through him to shame and danger, not only to stand by him, but to suffer in his stead, then they had repented in the truest sense, and their state of mind was the opposite of what it had been twenty years ago. <sup>1</sup> Proceeding on this plan, Joseph first imprisoned all the ten, proposing to release one of their number to fetch Benjamin, in order to test, as he said, the truthfulness of their statements.

This excessive harshness was probably intended to strike terror into their hearts; and, at the end of three days, he so far relented as to retain only one of their number as a hostage; at the same time encouraging them both by the statement that, in so doing, his motive was “fear of God,” and by the assurance that, once satisfied of their innocence, he cherished no evil design against them. The reference to “fear of God” on the part of an Egyptian, and this apparent shrinking from needless rigor, must have cut them to the heart, as it brought out in contrast their own implacable conduct towards Joseph. Simeon was chosen to remain behind as hostage, because he was the next oldest to Reuben, who was not detained, since he had endeavored to save the life of Joseph. This also must have contributed to remind them of their former wrong; and, for the first time, they avow to one another their bitter guilt in the past, and how God was now visiting it. So poignant were their feelings that, in the presence of Joseph, they spoke of it, in their own Hebrew, ignorant

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<sup>1</sup>This is substantially the view taken by Luther, and presented in his usual quaint and forcible language.

that Joseph, who had conversed with them through an interpreter, understood their words. Joseph was obliged hastily to withdraw, so as not to betray himself; but he wavered not in his purpose. Simeon was bound before their eyes, and the rest were dismissed; but each with ample provender for the journey, besides the corn they had bought, and with the purchase-money secretly restored to them.

The terror with which the unexpected turn of events had inspired them was deepened when, at their first night's quarters, one of them discovered the money in his sack. But, as before, the impression was wholesome. They traced in this also the avenging hand of God: "What is this that God hath done unto us?" [147]

The narrative which, on their return, they had to tell their father was sufficiently sad. But the discovery they now made, that the money which they had paid had been secretly put back into each man's sack, seemed to imply some deep design of mischief, and filled Jacob and his sons with fresh fears. If the condition of their again appearing before the ruler of Egypt was, that they must bring Benjamin with them, then he, who had already lost two sons, would refuse to expose to such a risk his darling, the last remaining pledge of his Rachel. Reuben, indeed, volunteered the strange guarantee of his own two sons: "Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee." But this language was little calculated to reassure the heart of Jacob. For a time it seemed as if Jacob's former sorrow was to be increased by the loss of Simeon, and as if Joseph and his family were never again to meet.

If we ask ourselves why Joseph should have risked this, or added to his father's sorrow, we answer, to the first question, that, since Joseph now knew the circumstances of his family, and had Simeon beside him, he could at any time, on need for it appearing, have communicated with his father. As to the second difficulty, we must all feel that this grief and care could not be spared to his father if his brothers were to be tried, proved, and prepared for their mission. And did it not seem as if Joseph had rightly understood the will of God in this matter, since the heart of his brethren had been at once touched to own their past sin and the Hand of God?

Could he not then still further commit himself to God in well-doing, and trust Him? Nay, could he not also trust Jacob's faith to bear up under this trial? At most it would be short, and how blessed

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to all the fruits expected from it! Once more the event proved the correctness of his views. As the stock of provisions, which the sons of Jacob had brought, became nearly exhausted, a fresh application to the royal granaries of Egypt was absolutely necessary. This time it was Judah who offered himself in surety for Benjamin. His language was so calm, affectionate, and yet firm, as to inspire Jacob with what confidence can be derived from the earnest, good purpose of a true man. But he had higher consolation—that of prayer and faith: “God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin.” Yet, even if God had otherwise appointed,—if He saw fit to take from him his children, his faith would rise to this also: “And I, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved!”—good is the will of the Lord, and he would bow before it.

It is touching, as it were, to watch the trembling hands of the old man as he makes feeble attempts to ward off the wrath of the dreaded Egyptian. It was a famine-year, and, naturally, there would be scarcity of the luxuries which were usually exported from the East to Egypt. Let them, then, take a present of such dainties to the Egyptian—“a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds.” As for the money which had been put back into their sacks, it might have been an oversight. Let them take it again with them, along with the price of what corn they were now to purchase. And so let them go forth in the name of the God of Israel—Benjamin, and all the rest. He would remain behind alone, as at the fords of Jabbok,—no, not alone; but in faith and patience awaiting the issue. Presently the ten brothers, with more anxious hearts than Joseph ever had on his way to Egypt or in the slave-market, are once more in the dreaded presence of the Egyptian. Joseph saw the new-comers, and with them what he judged to be his youngest brother, whom he had left in his home a child only a year old. Manifestly, it was neither the time nor the place to trust himself to converse with them. So he gave his steward orders to take them to his house, and that they should dine with him at noon. Joseph had spoken in Egyptian, which seems to have been unknown to the sons of Jacob. When they saw themselves brought to the house of Joseph, it immediately occurred to them that they were to be charged with theft of the former purchase-money. But the steward with kindly

words allayed the fears which made them hesitate before entering “at the door of the house.”

The sight of Simeon, who was at once restored to them, must have increased their confidence. Presently preparations were made for the banquet. It was a deeply trying scene for Joseph which ensued when he met his brethren on his return home. Little could they imagine what thoughts passed through his mind, as in true Oriental fashion they laid out the humble presents his father had sent, and lowly “bowed themselves to him to the earth.” His language ill concealed his feelings. Again and again he inquired for his father, and as they replied: “Thy servant our father is in good health; he is yet alive,” they again “bowed clown their heads, and made obeisance.” But when he fastened his eyes on Benjamin, his own mother’s son, and had faltered it out, so unlike an Egyptian: “God be gracious unto thee, my son,” he was obliged hastily to withdraw, “for his bowels did yearn upon his brother.” Twenty-two years had passed since he had been parted from his brother, and Benjamin now stood before him—a youth little older than he when his bitter bondage in prison had commenced. Would they who had once sacrificed him on account of jealousy, be ready again to abandon his brother for the sake of selfishness? At the banquet a fresh surprise awaited the sons of Jacob. Of course, after the Egyptian fashion, Joseph ate by himself, and the Egyptians by themselves; he as a member of the highest caste, and they from religious scruples. We know from secular history that the Egyptians abstained from certain kinds of meat, and would not eat with the knives and forks, nor from the cooking utensils which had been used by those of any other nation. But it must have seemed unaccountable, that at the banquet their places were arranged exactly according to their ages. How could the Egyptian have known them, and what mysterious circumstances surrounded them in his presence? Yet another thing must have struck them. In their father’s house the youngest of their number, the son of Rachel, had been uniformly preferred before them all. And now it was the same in the Egyptian palace! If the Egyptian ruler “sent messes unto them from before him,” “Benjamin’s mess was five times so much

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as any of theirs.” Why this mark of unusual distinction, as it was regarded in ancient times? <sup>2</sup>

[150] However, the banquet itself passed pleasantly, and early next morning the eleven, gladsome and thankful, were on their way back to Canaan. But the steward of Joseph’s house had received special instructions. As before, each “bundle of money” had been restored in every man’s sack. But, besides, he had also placed in that of Benjamin, Joseph’s own cup, or rather his large silver bowl. The brothers had not traveled far when the steward hastily overtook them. Fixing upon the eleven the stain of base ingratitude, he charged them with stealing the “bowl” out of which “his lord drank, and whereby, indeed, he divined.” Of course this statement of the steward by no means proves that Joseph actually did divine by means of this “cup.” On the contrary, such could not have been the case, since it was of course impossible to divine, out of a cup that had been stolen from him, that it was stolen ([ver. 15](#))! But, no doubt, there was in Joseph’s house, as in that of all the great sages of Egypt, the silver bowl, commonly employed for divination, in which unknown events were supposed to appear in reflection from the water, sometimes after gems or gold (with or without magical inscriptions and incantations) had been cast into the cup, to increase the sheen of the broken rays of light. Similar practices still prevail in Egypt.

The charge of treachery and of theft so took the brothers by surprise, that, in their conscious innocence, they offered to surrender the life of the guilty and the liberty of all the others, if the cup were found with any of them. But the steward had been otherwise instructed. He was to isolate Benjamin from the rest. With feigned generosity he now refused their proposal, and declared his purpose only to retain the guilty as bondsman. The search was made, and the cup found in the sack of Benjamin. Now the first great trial of their feelings ensued. They were all free to go home to their own wives and children; Benjamin alone was to be a bondsman. The cup had been found in his sack! Granting that, despite appearances, they knew him to be innocent, why should they stand by him? At home he had been set before them as the favorite; nay, for fear of endangering

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<sup>2</sup>Among the Spartans a double, among the Cretans a fourfold portion was set before princes and rulers. In Egypt the proportion seems to have been five times.

him, their father had well nigh allowed them all, their wives and their children, to perish from hunger. In Egypt, also, he, the youngest, the son of another mother, had been markedly preferred before them. They had formerly got rid of one favorite, why hesitate now, when Providence itself seemed to rid them of another? What need, nay, what business had they to identify themselves with him? Was it not enough that he had been put before them everywhere; must they now destroy their whole family, and suffer their little ones to perish for the sake of one who, to say the best, seemed fated to involve them in misery and ruin? So they might have reasoned. But so they did not reason, nor, indeed, did they reason at all; for in all matters of duty reasoning is ever dangerous, and only absolute, immediate obedience to what is right, is safe. “They rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city.” [151]

The first trial was past; the second and final one was to commence. In the presence of Joseph, “they fell before him on the ground” in mute grief. Judah is now the spokesman, and right well does his advocacy prefigure the pleading of his great Descendant. Not a word does he utter in extenuation or in plea. This one thought only is uppermost in his heart: “God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants.” Not guilty indeed on this charge, but guilty before God, who hath avenged their iniquity! How, then, can they leave Benjamin in his undeserved bondage, when not he, but they have really been the cause of this sorrow? But Joseph, as formerly his steward, rejects the proposal as unjust, and offers their liberty to all except Benjamin. This gives to Judah an opening for pleading, in language so tender, graphic, and earnest, that few have been able to resist its pathos. He recounts the simple story, how the great Egyptian lord had at the first inquired whether they had father or brother, and how they had told him of their father at home, and of the child of his old age who was with him, the last remaining pledge of his wedded love, to whom the heart of the old man clave. Then the vizier had asked the youth to be brought, and they had pleaded that his going would cost the life of his father. But the famine had compelled them to ask of their father even this sacrifice. And the old man had reminded them of what they knew only too well: how his wife, the only one whom even now he really considered such, had borne him two sons; one of those had gone out from him, just

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as it was now proposed Benjamin should go, and he had not seen him since, and he had said: “Surely he is torn in pieces.” And now, if they took this one also from him, and mischief befell him, his gray hairs would go down with sorrow to the grave. What the old man apprehended had come to pass, no matter how. But could he, Judah, witness the grief and the death of his old father? Was he not specially to blame, since upon his guarantee he had consented to part with him? Nay, he had been his surety; and he now asked neither pardon nor favor, only this he entreated, to be allowed to remain as bondsman instead of the lad, and to let him go back with his brethren. He besought slavery as a boon, for how could he “see the evil” that should “come on his father?”

Truly has Luther said: “What would I not give to be able to pray before the Lord as Judah here interceded for Benjamin, for it is a perfect model of prayer, nay, of the strong feeling which must underlie all prayer.” And, blessed be God, One has so interceded for us, Who has given Himself as our surety, and become a bondsman for us. ([Psalm 40:6, 7](#); [Philippians 2:6-8](#)) His advocacy has been heard; His substitution accepted; and His intercession for us is ever continued, and ever prevails. The Lord Jesus Christ is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,” and “hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.”

The last trial was now past. Indeed, it had been impossible to continue it longer, for Joseph “could not refrain himself.” All strangers were hastily removed, and Joseph, with all tenderness of affection and delicacy of feeling, made himself known to them as the brother whom they had sold into Egypt, but whom in reality God had sent before for the purpose not only of saving their lives, but of preserving their posterity, that so His counsel of mercy with the world might be accomplished. Then let them not be grieved, for God had overruled it all. Three times must he speak it, and prove his forgiveness by the most loving marks, before they could credit his words or derive comfort from them. But one object Joseph had now in view: to bring his father and all his family to be near him, that he might nourish them; for as yet only two out of the seven years of famine had passed. And in this purpose he was singularly helped by Divine Providence. Tidings of what had taken place reached Pharaoh, and the generous conduct of his vizier pleased



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the king. Of his own accord he also proposed what Joseph had intended; accompanying his invitation with a royal promise of ample provision, and sending “wagons” for the transport of the women and children. On his part, Joseph added rich presents for his father. [153] When the eleven returned, first alone, to their father, and told him all, “the heart of Jacob fainted, for he believed them not.” Presently, as he saw the Egyptian “wagons” arriving, a great reaction took place. “The spirit of Jacob their father revived.” The past, with its sorrows and its sin, seemed blotted out from his memory. Once more it was not, as before, Jacob who spoke, but “Israel” (the prince with God and man) who said, “It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.”

## Chapter 22

*Departure of Jacob and his Family into Egypt—Jacob’s Interview with Pharaoh—His Last Illness and command to be Buried in Canaan—Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh among the Sons of Israel*

(Genesis 46-48)

A difficult path lay before the patriarch Jacob. As yet he had had no direct intimation from God that he should remove with his family to Egypt. But, on the other hand, God’s dealings with Joseph, the invitation of Pharaoh, and the famine in Canaan served to point it out as the period of which God had spoken to Abram (Genesis 15:13), when his seed should leave Canaan, and become strangers and enslaved in a land that was not theirs. He knew that two things must take place before the return of Israel to, and their final possession of the promised land. “The iniquity of the Amorites” must be “full,” and the family of Israel must have grown into a nation. The former was still future, and as for the latter it is easy to see that any further stay in Canaan would have been hindering and not helpful to it. For at the time Canaan was divided among numerous independent tribes, with one or more of whom the sons of Jacob, as they increased in numbers, must either have coalesced or entered into warfare. Still more dangerous to their religion would have been their continuance among and intercourse with the Canaanites. It was quite otherwise in Egypt. Thither they went professedly as sojourners, and for a temporary purpose. The circumstance that they were shepherds, and as such “an abomination to the Egyptians,” kept them separate, alike politically, religiously, and socially, from the rest of the people, and, indeed, caused them to be placed in a district by themselves. Yet “the land of Goshen” was the best for the increase of their substance in flocks and herds. These may be designated as the outward reasons for their removal into Egypt at that time; the higher and spiritual bearings of the event have already been stated.

The assurance which Jacob needed for his comfort was granted him, as he reached Beersheba, the southern boundary of the promised land. There the patriarch offered “sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac,” and there the faithful Lord spake to him “in the visions of the night.” His words gave Jacob this fourfold assurance, that God was the covenant-God, and that Jacob need not fear to go down into Egypt; that God would there make of him a great nation, in other words, that the transformation from the family to the nation should take place in Egypt; that God would go down with him; and, lastly, that He would surely bring him up again. And each of these four assurances was introduced by an emphatic I, to indicate the personal and direct source of all these blessings. Thus strengthened, Israel pursued his journey in confidence of spirit. [155]

As so often in Scripture, a very important lesson is conveyed to us in this connection, though in a manner to escape superficial observation. It has been repeatedly remarked, that the Bible does not furnish the history of individuals as such, but gives that of the kingdom of God. This appears most clearly in the list, which is introduced at this stage, of “the names of the children of Israel which came into Egypt.” Manifestly, it is not to be taken as literally the catalogue of those who accompanied with Jacob on his journey to Egypt. For one thing, some of them, such as Joseph himself, and his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, and their children, if at the time they had any, were already in Egypt. Then, some of the grandsons and great-grandsons of Jacob, mentioned in this catalogue, must have been born after the sons of Jacob came into Egypt; while, on the other hand, there must have been others who are not mentioned, since it is impossible to imagine that all the families of those whose further descendants are not named became extinct. But if the principle is kept in view, that only what concerns the kingdom of God is recorded, then all becomes plain. We now regard this not as a biographical list, but as a genealogical table, drawn up with a special object in view. That object is, to enumerate first the ancestors of the tribes of Israel, and then such of their descendants as founded the separate and distinct “families” in each tribe. Accordingly this genealogical table contains, besides the names of such descendants of Jacob as literally went with him into Egypt, also those of such as became “heads of houses.” This appears quite clearly from a compar-

[156] ison with [Numbers 26](#), where the “families” of Israel are specially enumerated. Among their founders not one single name appears that had not been previously given in the earlier table. Certain names, however, have dropped out in the second table, viz., that of a son of Simeon, and of one of Asher, and those of three sons of Benjamin—no doubt, either because they became extinct, or else because they were removed from their places through some judgment. Nor does it seem strange to find the names of the future heads of families beforehand enumerated in this catalogue. Do we not similarly read, that in Abraham yet unborn generations of Levi had given tithes to Melchizedek? Indeed, Scripture constantly expresses itself on this wise. Thus we read that God said to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob: “I will give thee the land,” when, as yet, they were but strangers and pilgrims in it; and, many centuries before the event took place: “In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed;” while to Jacob himself God spake: “I will bring thee up again,” from Egypt. For with God nothing is, in the real sense, future. “He seeth the end from the beginning.” But when the sacred text sums up the genealogical table with the statement that “all the souls” were “threescore and ten,” we think of the significance of the number, seven times ten, seven being the sacred covenant number, and ten that of perfectness. <sup>1</sup>

On his journey Jacob sent Judah in advance, to inform Joseph of his arrival. He hastened to receive his father in the borderland of Goshen. Their meeting, after so long a parting, was most affectionate and touching. The Hebrew expression, rendered in our Authorized Version: “Joseph ... presented himself unto him,” implies extraordinary splendor of appearance. But when in the presence of his Hebrew father, the great Egyptian lord was once more only the lad Joseph. He “fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.” It now became the duty of Joseph to inform Pharaoh of the actual arrival of his family in Egypt, so as to obtain at the same time a

<sup>1</sup>The Greek version of the LXX gives the number at seventy-five, and from it, as best known among the Jews at the time, St. Stephen quotes ([Acts 7:14](#)). This number results, of course, from a slightly different arrangement of the table. That in the Hebrew text names of Leah: Six sons, twenty-five grandsons, and two great-grandsons, besides Dinah; of Zilpah: Two sons, eleven grandsons, two great-grandsons, and one daughter; of Rachel: Two sons, and twelve grandsons; and of Bilhah: Two sons and five grandsons. The two “daughter” are inserted for special reasons.

fresh welcome, and a temporary concession of the land of Goshen for their settlement. For this purpose Joseph went first alone to the king, and next introduced five of his brothers. Both he and they laid stress on the fact that by occupation the family were shepherds. This would secure their stay in Goshen, as the district was most suitable for pasturage, and at the same time most remote and most isolated from the great bulk of the people. For the Egyptian monuments show that shepherds were considered as the lowest class or caste, probably because their nomadic habits were so opposed to the settled civilization of the country. Another point which the sons of Jacob were specially to bring out before Pharaoh was this, that they had come only “to sojourn,” not to settle in the land, so that, as they had arrived at the first upon the express invitation of the king, they might be at liberty freely to depart when the time for it came. It is of importance to notice this in connection with the wrong afterwards done in the forcible detention of their descendants. It happened as Joseph had expected. Pharaoh assigned to them a dwelling-place “in the best of the land,” that is, in the portion most suitable, in fact, in almost the only district suitable for pasturage—in the borderland between Canaan and Egypt, the land of Goshen, or of Rameses, as it is sometimes called from the city of that name. A careful and able scholar <sup>2</sup> has thus expressed himself on the subject: “The land of Goshen lay between the eastern part of the ancient Delta, and the western border of Palestine; it was scarcely a part of Egypt Proper, was inhabited by other foreigners besides the Israelites, and was in its geographical names rather Semitic than Egyptian; it was a pasture-land, especially suited to a shepherd people, and sufficient for the Israelites, who there prospered, and were separate from the main body of the Egyptians.” <sup>3</sup>

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Before settling him in Goshen, Joseph presented his father to Pharaoh, who received him with the courtesy of an Eastern monarch, and the respect which the sight of age, far exceeding the ordinary term of life in Egypt, would ensure. In acknowledgment of Pharaoh’s

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<sup>2</sup>Mr. Grove, in *Smith Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 711.

<sup>3</sup>It is well known that one of the Egyptian monuments exhibits so striking an illustration of this entrance of the children of Israel into Egypt, that some have regarded it, though on insufficient grounds, as an actual representation of the event. The strangers are evidently of Semitic race, and came with their wives and children.

kindness, “Jacob blessed” him; and in answer to the question about his age, compared “the days of the years” of his own “pilgrimage” with those of his fathers. Abraham had lived one hundred and seventy-five, Isaac one hundred and eighty years; while Jacob was at the age of only one hundred and thirty, apprehending the approach of death. Compared to theirs, his days had not only been “few” but “evil,” full of trial, sorrow, and care, ever since his flight from his father’s house. Yet, however differing in outward events, the essential character of their lives was the same. His and theirs were equally a “pilgrimage.” For,

*“these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country, .... a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.”* ([Hebrews 11:13, 14, 16](#))

And in such wise also must each of our lives, whatever its outward history, be to us only a “pilgrimage.”

But seventeen more years were granted to Israel in his quiet retirement of Goshen. Feeling that now the time of his departure had really come, he sent for Joseph. It was not to express weak regrets, nor even primarily to take such loving farewell as, under such circumstances, might be proper and fitting. Israel, as he is here again characteristically named,<sup>4</sup> was preparing for another great act of faith. On his dying bed, he still held fast by the promises of God concerning the possession of Canaan, and all that was connected with it; and he exacted an oath from his son to bury him with his fathers, in the cave of Machpelah. Having obtained this solemn promise, it is said,<sup>5</sup> “he bowed himself in worship over the head of the bed.”

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<sup>4</sup>It is most instructive to notice in this history the frequent change of the names of Jacob and Israel.

<sup>5</sup>We translate literally. The Greek translators, or LXX, from whom the quotation is made in [Hebrews 11:21](#), have, by the slightest change in the Hebrew word, rendered it, “worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.” The meaning is substantially the same.

One thing still remained to be done. As yet the sons of Joseph had not been formally adopted into the family of Israel. But the two oldest of them, Manasseh and Ephraim, were to become heads of separate tribes; for Joseph was to have this right of the firstborn—two portions in Israel—. Therefore, when, shortly after his interview with his father, Joseph was informed that the last fatal sickness had come upon him, he hastened to bring his two sons that they might be installed as co-heirs with the other sons of Jacob. In this Joseph signally showed his faith. Instead of seeking for his sons the honors which the court of Egypt offered them, he distinctly renounced all, to share the lot of the despised shepherd race. For the first time we here find the blessing accompanied with the laying on of hands. <sup>6</sup>

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But Jacob's eyes were dim, and when Joseph had brought his two sons close to his father, placing Manasseh, as the eldest, to his father's right hand, and Ephraim, as the younger, to his left, he ascribed it to failure of sight when Israel crossed his hands, laying the right on Ephraim and the left on Manasseh. But Jacob had been "guiding his hands wittingly." In fact, he had done it prophetically. The event proved the truth of this prophecy. At the time of Moses, indeed, Manasseh still counted twenty thousand men more than Ephraim. ([Numbers 26:34, 37](#)) But this comparative relationship was reversed in the days of the Judges; and ever afterwards Ephraim continued, next to Judah, the most powerful tribe in Israel. What, however, chiefly impresses us is, to see how intensely all the feelings, remembrances, and views of the dying man are intertwined with his religion. No longer does he cherish any hard thoughts about his "evil" days in the past. His memory of former days is now only of the gentleness and the goodness of God, Who had led him all through his pilgrimage. His feelings come out most fully in the words of blessing which he spake: "The God, <sup>7</sup> before Whose face walked my fathers, Abraham and Isaac; the God Who pastured <sup>8</sup> me from my existence on unto this day; THE ANGEL Who redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name, and the name of my fathers,

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<sup>6</sup>The laying on of hands formed also an essential part in offering sacrifices. The offerer laid his hands on the victim, and confessed his sins,—thus transferring them, and constituting the sacrifice his substitute.

<sup>7</sup>The Hebrew puts it with the article—not merely God, but the God.

<sup>8</sup>Or "shepherded," like [Psalm 23:1; 28:9](#). See also its fullness in [John 10:11](#).

Abraham and Isaac, be named upon them, and let them increase to a multitude in the midst of the land.” In this threefold reference to God as the covenant-God, the Shepherd and the Angel-Redeemer, we have a distinct anticipation of the truth concerning the blessed Trinity.

The blessing having been spoken, “Jacob gave to his son Joseph,” as a special gift, “that parcel of ground” by Sychar ([John 4:5](#)), the ancient Shechem, which he had originally bought of “the children of Heth;” ([Genesis 33:19](#)) but which, as he prophesied, he—that is, his descendants—would have to take again <sup>9</sup> with sword and bow out of the hand of the Amorite. In this possession of Joseph, many centuries later, rested the Redeemer-Shepherd, when, even in His weariness, He called and pastured His flock. ([John 4](#)) But as for Jacob, the last assurance which he gave to his son was emphatically to repeat this confession of his faith: “Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers.” For men pass away, but the word and purpose of the Lord abide for ever!

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<sup>9</sup>The tense in [verse 22](#) is the prophetic past, in which the future is seen as already achieved.



## Chapter 23

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### *The Last Blessing of Jacob—Death of Jacob—Death of Joseph*

(Genesis 49:1)

The last scene had now come, and Jacob gathered around his dying couch his twelve sons. The words which he spake to them were of mingled blessing and prediction. Before him, in prophetic vision, unrolled, as it were, pictures of the tribes of which his sons were to be the ancestors; and what he saw he sketched in grand outlines. It is utterly impossible to regard these prophetic pictures as exact representations of any one definite period or even event in the history of Israel. They are sketches of the tribes in their grand characteristics, rather than predictions, either of special events, or of the history of Israel as a whole. And to them applies especially the description which one has given of prophetic visions generally, that “they are pictures drawn without perspective,”—that is, such that you cannot discern the distance from you of the various objects. Two other general remarks may be helpful to the reader. It will be observed that, generally, in the “blessing” spoken, the name of the ancestor seems to unfold the future character and history of the tribe. Secondly, as against all cavilers, it may be said deliberately, that these words of blessing must have been spoken by Jacob himself. When we attempt to imagine them as spoken at any other period in the history of Israel—, we find ourselves surrounded by insuperable difficulties. For these words can only apply to the tribes as Jacob viewed them. They could not have been written at any other period, since in that case every later writer would have said something quite inapplicable to one or other of the tribes, so that he could not have used this precise language concerning them all. With these brief prefatory remarks we address ourselves to the words of “blessing:”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>We always translate literally.

Reuben, my firstborn thou, My might and the firstling of my strength,  
Pre-eminence of dignity and pre-eminence of power -

Such should have been the position of Reuben, as the firstborn, had it not been for the “upboiling” of his passions and his consequent sin. Hence Jacob continues:

Upboiling like water, Thou shalt not have the pre-eminence,  
Because thou wentest up thy father’s bed, Then defiledst thou it -  
He went up my couch!

[162] The sons next in age to Reuben were Simeon and Levi. Their wanton cruelty at Shechem, from which Jacob recoiled with horror even on his death-bed, had made them “brethren,” or companions in evil. As they had united for evil, so God would scatter them in Israel, so that they should not form independent and compact tribes. In point of fact, we know that even at the second numbering of Israel ([Numbers 26:14](#)), Simeon had sunk to be the smallest tribe. In the last blessing of Moses ([Deuteronomy 33](#)), no mention at all is made of Simeon. Nor does this tribe seem to have obtained any well-defined portion in the land, but only to have held certain cities within the possession of Judah. ([Joshua 19:1-9](#)) Lastly, we know that such of the families of Simeon as largely increased and became powerful, afterwards left the Holy Land, and settled outside its boundaries. ([1 Chronicles 4:38-43](#)) The tribe of Levi also received not any possession in Israel; only that their scattering was changed from a curse into a blessing by their election to the priesthood. This scattering of two tribes was the significant answer which God in His righteous providence made to their ancestors’ attempt at vindicating the honor of their race by carnal means and weapons.

Simeon and Levi are brethren;  
Instruments of violence are their swords;  
Into their council come not thou, oh my soul,  
Unto their assembly be not thou united, mine honor;  
For in their anger they slew men,  
And in their self-will they hamstrung oxen.

Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce,  
 And their wrath, for it was cruel.  
 I will divide them in Jacob,  
 And scatter them in Israel.

The three older brothers being thus dispossessed, and Joseph receiving the twofold territorial portion, the other privileges of the birthright are solemnly transferred to Judah. He is to be the leader, “the lion.” As the lion is king of the forest, so was Judah to have royal sway, through David onwards to the Son of David, the Shiloh, unto Whom, as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” all nations should render homage and obedience. Similarly, fullness of earthly riches was to distinguish the lot of Judah, these earthly blessings being themselves emblems of the spiritual riches dispensed in the portion of Judah. The whole description here is full of Messianic allusions, which were afterwards taken up in the prophecy of Balaam ([Numbers 23:24; 24:9, 17](#)); then applied to David ([Psalm 89:20-37](#)); and from him carried forward in prophecy, through [Psalm 72](#), [Isaiah 9, 11](#), to [Ezekiel 21:27](#), and [Zechariah 9:9](#), till they were finally realized in Jesus Christ, “sprung out of Juda,” ([Hebrews 7:14](#)) “our peace, who hath made both one,” ([Ephesians 2:14](#)) and who “must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet,” ([1 Corinthians 15:25](#)) “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,” Who “hath prevailed.” ([Revelation 5:5](#))

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In the blessing upon Judah we note, for the first time, how the prophetic significance of the name unfolds and appears:

Judah thou! Thy brethren shall praise thee!  
 Thy hand in the neck of thine enemies,  
 Thy father’s sons shall bow down before thee.  
 A lion’s whelp <sup>2</sup> is Judah;  
 From the prey, my son, thou art gone up:  
 He stoopeth down, he coucheth like a lion, <sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>A young lion for agility and grace; a full-grown lion for strength and majesty; a lioness whose fierceness defends her offspring.

<sup>3</sup>A young lion for agility and grace; a full-grown lion for strength and majesty; a lioness whose fierceness defends her offspring.

And like a lioness <sup>4</sup> —who shall rouse him?  
 The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
 Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
 Until Shiloh <sup>5</sup> come,  
 And to Him willing obedience of the nations!  
 He bindeth unto the vine his foal,  
 And unto the choice vine his ass's colt;  
 He washeth his garments in wine,  
 And in the blood of grapes his raiment;  
 Sparkling his eyes from wine,  
 And white his teeth from milk.

As local illustrations of this richness of the portion of Judah, the reader will remember that the best wine in Palestine grew near Hebron and Engedi ([Numbers 13:23](#), etc.; [Song of Solomon 1:14](#)), and that some of the best pasture-land was south of Hebron, about Tekoa and Carmel. ([1 Samuel 25:2](#); [2 Chronicles 26:10](#); [Amos 1:1](#))

The next blessing also connects itself with the name of Zebulun, or “dwelling,” although it requires to be borne in mind, in further illustration of the fact that it was not intended as a literal prediction, that the possessions of the tribe of Zebulun, so far as we can judge from [Joshua 19:10-16](#), never actually touched the Mediterranean nor the Sea of Galilee, nor yet literally bordered on Zidon:

[164] Zebulun—by the coast of seas shall he dwell,  
 And that, by the coast of ships,  
 And his side towards Zidon.

The name of Issachar, “reward,” or “hire,” is also emblematical of the character of the tribe, as, in its rich portion of Lower Galilee, it preferred labor with quietude, to power and domination:

Issachar is a bony ass,  
 Crouching between the folds.

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<sup>4</sup>A young lion for agility and grace; a full-grown lion for strength and majesty; a lioness whose fierceness defends her offspring.

<sup>5</sup>This is not the place for critical discussion; but we state it as our deliberate conviction, that the term Shiloh can only refer to a personal designation of the Messiah, whatever the derivative meaning of the word may be.

He saw rest, that it was a boon,  
And the land, that it was pleasant,  
And he bent his shoulder to bear,  
And became a tributary servant.

The allusion in the case of Dan, or “judgment,” is again to the name. Although Dan was only the son of a bondmaid, he should not be behind his brethren, but “give judgment” to his people, that is, to Israel—the reference being possibly to such men as Samson, though also generally to the character of the tribe. There is another mysterious and most important allusion here, to which we shall immediately advert:

Dan shall give judgment to his people,  
As one of the tribes of Israel.  
Dan shall be a serpent by the way,  
An adder in the path,  
Which biteth the heels of the horse  
So that backwards falleth his rider.

We shall not presume to offer an authoritative explanation of this comparison of Dan to a serpent, and to that kind of adder which, being of the color of the sand, remains unobserved till it has given its deadly bite. We only put it as a suggestion, whether this may not contain an allusion to apostasy or to the Antichrist,<sup>6</sup> at the same time noting that the name of Dan is omitted from the list of the tribes in [Revelation 7:5-8](#).

It is also significant that, immediately after the mention of these contests in connection with Dan, Jacob bursts forth in a prayer, intended, as says Calvin, not only to express his own personal faith and hope, but his confidence for his descendants. Quite the oldest Jewish commentary, or rather paraphrase,<sup>7</sup> puts it this way: “My soul waiteth not for the deliverance of Gideon, the son of Joash, for it was only temporal; nor for that of Samson, for it was but transient; but for the redemption by the Messiah, the Son of David, which in

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<sup>6</sup>Many of the Fathers have regarded this “serpent” as referring to Antichrist.

<sup>7</sup>The Jerusalem Targum in its most correct recension.

Thy word Thou hast promised to send to Thy people, the children of Israel; for this, Thy salvation, my soul waiteth.”

For Thy salvation wait I, oh Jehovah!

[165] In reference to Gad, we have a threefold allusion to a kindred word, signifying oppression. To the prediction itself we cannot attach any definite historical fulfillment:

Gad—a press presseth upon him,  
But he presseth on their heel.

In the case of Asher, the reference is evidently to the most fertile possession of that tribe, extending from Mount Carmel to the land of Tyre, the district richest in corn and oil ([1 Kings 5:11](#)):

Out of Asher fatness: his bread -  
And he yieldeth royal dainties.

The allusion as to Naphtali is to the graceful agility and fleetness of the people, and also to their mental ability and quickness:

Naphtali is a hind let loose -  
He uttereth words of beauty.

At last Jacob comes to the name of his loved son Joseph. Then it seems as if his whole heart were indeed overflowing. First, he sketches his fruitfulness, like that of a fruit-free “planted by rivers of water,” ([Psalm 1:3](#)) whose boughs run over the wall ([Comp. Psalm 80:8-11](#)); then he describes his strength, as derived from God Himself; and, lastly, he pours forth richest blessings, richer far than any his ancestors had bestowed:

Son of a fruit-tree (a fruitful bough) is Joseph,  
Son of a fruit-tree by a well,  
Whose daughters (branches) spread over the wall.  
The archers harass him,  
They shoot at him, and hate him;  
But his bow abideth in firmness,  
And the arms of his hands remain supple  
From the Hands of the Strong One of Jacob,

From thence, from the Shepherd, from the Rock of Israel,  
 From the God of thy father—may He help thee!  
 And from the Almighty—may He bless thee!  
 Blessings of heaven from above!  
 Blessings of the deep that lieth beneath!  
 Blessings of the breasts and of the womb!  
 The blessings of thy father exceed  
 The blessings of my ancestors  
 Unto the bound of the everlasting hills <sup>8</sup> -  
 May they come on the head of Joseph,  
 And on the crown of the head of him who is separated <sup>9</sup> among  
 his brethren!

The allusions to Benjamin will be understood by a reference to Ehud ([Judges 3:15](#)), to [Judges 5:14](#); [20:16](#); [1 Chronicles 8:40](#); [12:2](#); [2 Chronicles 14:8](#); [17:17](#), and to the history of Saul and of Jonathan:

Benjamin—a wolf who ravins:  
 In the morning he devoureth prey,  
 And at even he divideth spoil!

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And now, having spoken these his last blessings, Jacob once more charged his sons to bury him in the cave of Machpelah. Then he gathered up his feet into the bed, laid him peacefully down, and without sigh or struggle yielded up the ghost, and was “gathered unto his people.”

Such was the end of Jacob—the most pilgrim-like of the pilgrim fathers. His last wishes were obeyed to the letter. The first natural outburst of grief on the part of Joseph past, he “commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father”—either to do the work themselves or to superintend it. Forty days the process lasted, <sup>10</sup> and seventy days, as was their wont, the Egyptians mourned.

<sup>8</sup>That is, as far as the mountains overtop the plains, so the blessings which Joseph now receives exceed those which any of Jacob’s ancestors had bestowed.

<sup>9</sup>That is, in dignity. The term in the Hebrew is Nasir.

<sup>10</sup>Everything here is truly Egyptian: the number of physicians in Joseph’s service, since in Egypt every physician treated only one special kind of disease; the mourning, which always lasted seventy days; and the process of embalming, which took from forty to seventy days. There were two modes of embalming, besides that for the poor—the most

[167] At the end of that period Joseph, as in duty bound, applied to Pharaoh, though not personally, since he could not appear before the king in the garb of mourning, craving permission for himself and his retinue to go up and bury his father in the land of Canaan. The funeral procession included, besides Joseph and “all his house,” “his brethren, and his father’s house,” also “all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt,”—that is, the principal state and court officials, under a guard of both “chariots and horsemen.” So influential and “very great a company” would naturally avoid, for fear of any collisions, the territory of the Philistines, through which the direct road from Egypt lay. They took the circuitous route through the desert and around the Dead Sea—significantly, the same which Israel afterwards followed on their return from Egypt—and halted on the Eastern bank of Jordan, at Goren-ha-Atad, “the buckthorn threshing-floor,” or perhaps “the threshing-floor of Atad.” The account of the funeral, as that of the embalming, and indeed every other allusion, is strictly in accordance with what we learn from Egyptian monuments and history. The custom of funeral processions existed in every province of Egypt—, and representations of such are seen in the oldest tombs. As a German scholar remarks: “When we look at the representations upon the monuments, we can almost imagine that we actually see the funeral train of Jacob.” At Goren-ha-Atad other mourning rites were performed during seven days. The attention of the inhabitants of the district was naturally attracted to this “grievous mourning of the Egyptians,” and the locality henceforth bore the name of Abel Mizraim, literally “meadow of the Egyptians,” but, by slightly altering the pronunciation: “mourning of the Egyptians.” Here the

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elaborate costing about two hundred and fifty pounds, and a simpler one about eighty-one pounds. The brain was first taken out through the nostrils; then an incision made in the left side, and all the intestines extracted, except the kidneys and the heart. The body was next filled with various spices—except frankincense,—sewed up, and steeped in natrum, which is found in the natrum lakes of Egypt, and consists of carbonate, sulphate, and muriate of soda. We here purposely omit a great number of particulars, such as the use of palm-wine in washing the internal parts, the occasional staining of the nails, the elaborate wrapping of the body in byssus, and other varying details. It is remarkable how well all parts of the body, and even the features, were preserved by this process. The body was laid either in an oblong case, or more frequently in one that had the shape of the mummy itself. Our description applies chiefly to the costliest mode of embalming.



Egyptians remained behind, and none but the sons and the household of Jacob stood around his grave at Machpelah.

On their return to Egypt an unworthy suspicion seems to have crossed the minds of Joseph's brethren. What if, now that their father was dead, Joseph were to avenge the wrong he had sustained at their hands? But they little knew his heart, or appreciated his motives. The bare idea of their cherishing such thoughts moved Joseph to tears. Even if bitter feelings had been in his heart, was he "in the place of God" to interfere with His guidance of things? Had it not clearly appeared that, whatever evil they might have thought to do him, "God meant it unto good?" With such declarations, and the assurance that he would lovingly care for them and their little ones, he appeased their fears.

Other fifty-four years did Joseph live in Egypt. He had the joy of seeing his father's blessing commence to be fulfilled. Ephraim's children of the third generation, and Manasseh's grandchildren "were brought up upon his knees." At the good old age of one hundred and ten years, as he felt death approaching, he gathered "his brethren" about him. Joseph was full of honors in Egypt; he had founded a family, than which none was more highly placed. Yet his last act was to disown Egypt, and to choose the lot of Israel—poverty, contempt, and pilgrimage: to renounce the present, in order to cleave unto the future. It was a noble act of faith, true like that of his fathers! His last words were these: "I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." And his last deed was to take a solemn oath of the children of Israel—, to carry up his bones with them into the land of promise. In obedience to his wishes they embalmed his body, and laid it in one of those Egyptian coffins, generally made of sycamore wood, which resembled the shape of the human body. And there, through ages of suffering and bondage, stood the figure-like coffin of Joseph, ready to be lifted and carried thence when the sure hour of deliverance had come. Thus Joseph, being dead, yet spake to Israel, telling them that they were only temporary sojourners in Egypt, that their eyes must be turned away from Egypt unto the land of promise, and that in patience of faith they must wait for that hour when God would certainly and graciously fulfill His own promise.

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When at the close of this first period of the Covenant-history we look around, we feel as if now indeed “the horror of great darkness” were fast falling upon Israel, which Abraham had experienced as he was shown the future of his descendants. ([Genesis 15:12](#)) Already personal intercourse between heaven and earth had ceased. From the time that Jacob had paid his vow in Bethel ([Genesis 35:15](#)), no personal manifestation of God, such as had often gladdened his fathers and him, was any more vouchsafed, except on his entrance into Egypt ([Genesis 46:2-4](#)), and then for a special purpose. Nor do we read of any such during the whole eventful and trying life of Joseph. And now long centuries of utter silence were to follow. During all that weary period, with the misery of their bondage and the temptation of idolatry around constantly increasing, there was [169] neither voice from heaven nor visible manifestation to warn or to cheer the children of Israel in Egypt. One mode of guidance was for a time withdrawn. Israel had now only the past to sustain and direct them. But that past, in its history and with its promises, was sufficient. Besides, the torch of prophecy, which the hands of dying Jacob had held, cast its light into the otherwise dark future. Nay, the fact that Joseph’s life, which formed the great turning-point in Israel history, had been allowed to pass without visible Divine manifestations to him and to them was in itself significant. For even as his unburied body seemed to preach and to prophesy, so his whole life would appear like a yet unopened or only partially opened book,—a grand unread prophecy, which the future would unfold. And not merely the immediate future, as it concerned Israel; but the more distant future as it concerns the whole Church of God—. For, although not the person of Joseph, <sup>11</sup> yet the leading events of his life are typical of the great facts connected with the life and the work of Him who was betrayed and sold by His brethren, but whom “God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior.”

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<sup>11</sup>It deserves notice that the person of Joseph is not mentioned in the Old or the New Testament as a type of Christ. This, of course, does not apply to the facts of his life in their bearing on the future, as these were unquestionably typical,