

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Blessings to you in the name of our great and mighty God, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! Today we have the distinct privilege to come together and embark on a new journey in the Scriptures, this time in Genesis, the first book of the Bible and the foundation of so much of what we believe, teach and confess as the people of God in Christ. This new series is one that we'll be breaking up into four separate parts over time, and in this first foray into the book we'll be covering the first eleven chapters — from creation all the way through the beginning of the nations. Over the next several days we'll talk about the structure of Genesis, the approach we'll be taking as we work through it, and especially, its importance to our everyday lives as followers of Christ. Thanks so much for being here as we get going; let's pray and get to it!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you said to us that you would give us peace — peace not like the world knows or can give, but peace that comes from you and is not of this world. We desire that peace today with such longing. Have mercy, and pour into our lives through and through — in our hearts and our minds — that perfect and abiding heavenly peace that only you can give. Do so as you teach us today by your Word and Spirit. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we'll be taking a brief opening look at Genesis as a whole. Our focus: Beginnings...and we'll start with just the first four words of the book.

Genesis 1:1a

In the beginning, God...

During my slow transition toward adulthood — I think it was my sophomore year of high school — I had a rather startling moment of realization. It was a small moment, and a sophomoric moment to be sure, but it was a moment nonetheless...enough so that it has stayed with me through the years.

During that year, I began doing my own laundry full time. Mom had taught me the basics much earlier, and there had been times when as a younger person I had enjoyed the novelty of the chore, but once I hit 15, the days of motherly kindness and beneficence in the clothes-washing realm were over for good. Gone but not forgotten was the feeling of walking into the laundry room to find a freshly hung shirt. Gone but not forgotten was the the delightful experience of opening my dresser drawer to find neatly folded Levi's or a selection of matching socks awaiting my summons. When I started doing my own clothes, it was easy to throw a dirty hamper full of my stuff into the washer and then move it to the dryer a little while later. What was less easy was to take the end result, separate it out, fold it, hang it, and put it in its place.

So — what was my startling moment of realization? It was the closet and dresser factor. It was the realization that my mother had not only been the washer of my clothes, but just as important, the organizer of my clothes. It was the realization that she wasn't just the person who dumped a jumble of garments into the washing machine, but also the person who lovingly un-jumbled them and set them in order as she finished the task. It wasn't until I got an inside look at the process that I saw all that went into what she did.

As we open for the first time to the book of Genesis today, most of us are doing so with at least a general understanding of the fact that our God is the God of creation. We call Him, in fact, the Creator. When we look at the world around us, when we consider the cosmos, when we stop to think about the nature of all that has been made, what a grand design we see, and what a grand Designer we praise for His handiwork.

Many of us, however, have never pondered much beyond that. We go to the closet or the dresser of the universe, as it were, see things neatly hung and carefully folded, and since what we see is what we expect to see we go away without another thought. The truth, however, is much deeper. The creation, which tells of the glory of its Creator, tells us something else as well: it tells us that the God of creation is also the God of order...and furthermore, that the God of order has put things into place in a very particular manner because of His great love for the crown of His creation...the human race. Human beings — children and women and men — are the climax and crown of God's creative work. And the beauty we'll be seeing in the Scriptures together in the days ahead is clothed in a most profound truth: the Grand Designer who is also the Grand Organizer is more than anything the Grand Lover of the people He has made.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, let me leave you with this thought: as we move into this first book of the Bible, the fact that God is the God of purposeful and intentional and loving order will be all around us. Everywhere we look we'll see it...and not just in the six days of creation and the time prior to the Fall. If anything — and this is super good news that you and I need to latch on to right out of the starting gate — we're going to see the power and love of our organized God in its greatest measure *after* the Fall. We're going to see it in a Creator who becomes the Re-Creator. We're going to see it in a God who takes a once-perfect-but-now-jumbled-up people stained with sin and lovingly washes them, un-jumbles them, and sets them in order once again in the Person and work of His Son.

At its heart, even Genesis, this first portion of God's Word, this book that lays out the beginning of everything, is really about new beginnings — specifically, a new beginning in the One who is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. Genesis, in more ways than you can shake a stick at, is really about Jesus. And while that may be a slow transition for some of you as we begin, I promise that by the time we finish you'll walk away blessed and changed from the process of having taken an inside look at all that God has done for us in Christ.

Have a terrific day everyone — I'm so glad you came along today, and I look forward to being with you again tomorrow as we continue to introduce this great and foundational portion of God's Word. Take care, and I'll see then!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone – God’s joy and peace to you on this Tuesday, and welcome to another edition of EDiBS! It’s great to be with you as we continue with our brand new series in the book of Genesis, where today we’ll be continuing with some introductory remarks on this deeply important portion of the Scriptures. These early sessions are a great opportunity to introduce EDiBS to new people in your life, and with Genesis being so foundational to our faith as God’s people this is an especially great series to invite folks to be part of each day. Do consider it! As always, thanks so much for coming along today; let’s pray as we begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we are weak but you are strong, and we take great comfort in the fact that we belong to you, having been redeemed by all that you’ve done for us in your life, your death, and your resurrection. Grant us the blessing of growth in our faith today as we open your Word. In your holy and precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

Getting things started, our opening observations of the first book of the Bible continue with more in the way of setting and background. Today’s focus: our God of order...the structure of Genesis.

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

One of my son’s favorite sandwiches is the Monte Cristo, specifically the one on the menu at a restaurant called Cheddar’s. Coming in at just over 1450 calories, it’s not an everyday kind of meal, but every once in a while it’s definitely worth the splurge!

What makes the Monte Cristo so good? Ingredients that come in two sets of four. In the first foursome you’ve got the foundation: smoked ham, smoked turkey, and two cheeses — jack and cheddar. The second set of four ingredients is a little more nuanced, but it enfolds the first set to bring everything together: first there’s the sweet white bread which is paired with the meat and cheese. Second is the rich, egg-based batter in which the bread, meat and cheese is dipped before it’s deep-fried. Once the sandwich comes out of the fryer, the third ingredient is added: a dusting of powdered sugar. And finally, completing this second set of four ingredients is the side of raspberry preserves served as a condiment. Put it all together and you have a tour de force of decadence that, surprisingly, is neither too heavy nor too sweet. I’m not sure how Cheddar’s pulled it off with so many rich ingredients, but at the end of the day the sandwich is a balanced one that really works...and it’s really good!

Two sets of four — a formula that works. Two sets of four — each complementary to the other. Two sets of four, fashioned into a carefully ordered recipe of eight ingredients that together bring richness and balance. That’s the Monte Cristo, alright...but it also happens to be a helpful template for something far greater: the general structure of the book of Genesis!

To be sure, there are lots of different ways that Genesis can be divided up. Some are quite complex; others are less so. Some focus on division and organization based on specific theological points; others focus more on the big picture in terms of things like events and people. Both kinds of approaches are commendable. Each has its strengths. Each serves a purpose. There’s much to be learned no matter which way you go — and thankfully, it’s not an

either-or kind of proposition. The best way to get a solid handle on the structure of *any* portion of Scripture, in fact, is to find what works best for you — and for most of us, the way that plays out is often along a continuum from the simple to the more involved. Where we start isn't necessarily where we finish, and what we delve into today might end up being a springboard for what we delve into a year from now. It's all good.

As you might have gathered from our introduction, what I'm going to share with you today about the structure of Genesis is very decidedly on the big picture end of the continuum, the general end, the simple end. The reason for that isn't to imply that you're simple; far from it. Rather, the reason for likening the structure of this first book of the Bible to a popular restaurant sandwich is to give you a strong visual that you can immediately call to reference no matter where you're at in the text. Once you've got that in place, you can feast as deeply and elaborately and for as long as you want on any portion of a given passage.

With that in mind, let's look just briefly at our two sets of four — and as we do, let's be sure to see the wonderful order, design, and interconnectedness of this portion of Scripture, all put in place by our gracious heavenly Father. Remember, He's the God of order, and His grand design is everywhere present!

The first set of four today is a set of four events. Are there people involved? Yes, but as a whole the events take precedence over the people.

- Event number 1: Creation (Genesis 1-2).
- Event number 2: The Fall (Genesis 3-5).
- Event number 3: The Flood (Genesis 6-9).
- Event number 4: The Rise of Nations (Genesis 10-11).

These first four events cover the first 11 chapters of the book, which is what will comprise the first of our four-part series (another set of four!). They're what we might call foundational events, marked moments in the history of all that has happened since God spoke the universe into existence.

The second set of four today is a set of four people. Are there events which take place? Of course, but once again, as a whole these four people take precedence over the events that occur.

- Person Number 1: Abraham and his great journey of faith (Genesis 12-24).
- Person number 2: Isaac, and along with Isaac, his family (Genesis 25-26).
- Person number 3: Jacob and his topsy-turvy, knock-down drag-out life (Genesis 27-36).
- Person number 4: Joseph and his own perilous, but ultimately powerful, journey. (Genesis 37-50).

This second set of four covers chapter 12 through the end of Genesis, and while it may be a more nuanced grouping with more ins and outs and pandering and positioning than the event-centered portion of the book, the lives and stories of these four men — as well as all they represent and point to with respect to types and foreshadowings of the coming of Christ — enfold and bring together the overarching message not just of Genesis itself, but of the whole Bible. That's a profound thought — and it's something we'll be coming back to over and over again as we study each day.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for this session, in this admittedly simple and general way of looking at Genesis, viewing it through a broadly focused lens as it were, I hope you'll see that there's a richness of ingredients here. Four important events which, over time, lead into the lives of four important people. What's the big deal? In all of them, brought together as they are in this special way, through events and through people we are shown both our need for and the promise of a Savior.

From the creation of the universe, and with it, the human race...
to the tragedy of sin's entrance into the world...
to God's immediate promise of redemption in the aftermath...
to the way that promise flowed into, and through, and out of, His people of old...
here is a book that now flows into you and me.

And it is a book that in showing us the reality of who we are, warts and all, also shows us the hyper-reality of the love of God in Christ, who has loved us and made us His own in spite of it all. That's rich indeed...really good!

Have a great day everyone, and God-willing, I'll see you again tomorrow to pick this up again. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Blessings to you in Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, a great day to be together as we come to God's Word to learn and grow as His people. Today we're coming to our session with more on the opening of Genesis, so let's pray and plan to get all we can from these next few minutes.

Prayer

God, we ask very simply, very humbly, but with very sincere hearts that you would speak to us today through your Holy Word. Grant us wisdom and understanding. Give us your blessing. Help us to genuinely meditate on the Scriptures, that we may be like trees planted by streams of water. We love you, and we thank you for this time. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our introduction to Genesis continues with some bullet points — a brief listing, if you will — regarding the critical place this first book of the Bible holds in relation to every other portion of Scripture. Our focus: the glue that holds things together!

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who died in 1860, was an avowed atheist. He was a student of Immanuel Kant's doctrine of Transcendental Idealism, which, in basic terms, is the

idea that time and space aren't truly real, but simply human perceptions; a medium through which people internalize the universe. From the seeds of those ideas Schopenhauer advanced his own theory about life and the universe, and today he's remembered as one of the champions of a school of thought known as Philosophical Pessimism...or as I like to call it, the International Society of Glass Half-Empty People.

As you might deduce from his chosen field of study, Schopenhauer wasn't a very positive or happy individual. By all accounts he was pretty much the opposite, and it showed not only in his countenance but in the overall way he presented himself. By habit he usually dressed like a vagrant, and it often made the people around him uncomfortable. One day he was sitting on a park bench in Berlin, deep in thought as philosophers are wont to do. His appearance made a policeman suspicious, so the officer approached and asked him, "Who are you?" Schopenhauer looked at him with grief-stricken eyes and said, "I wish to God I knew."

Schopenhauer didn't realize that in his response to the officer, he had just answered his greatest question in life. There was so much truth in that longing, frustrated cry of his heart... and so much tragedy in that he failed to grasp it. In God, he *could* know who he was. But he didn't have the frame of reference, the presence of mind, or the willingness of heart to consider that fact.

Everyone, the one way we can truly find out who we are is, indeed, from God. The one way we can truly know about the world and our place in it is from the One who created it and placed us here. The one way we can truly come to a sensible frame of reference regarding life and the universe is to seek out the Architect of it all. And guess what? One of the best places to begin that quest is in the book of Genesis.

As we continue with our introductory remarks in this new series, I want to make some declarations today about the unique place of importance Genesis holds in the canon of Scripture. Simply put, the Bible wouldn't just be incomplete without Genesis, but in actuality, it would be incomprehensible as well. Consider these brief points:

Genesis, above all, lays the groundwork and sets the stage for the entire drama of the redemption of humanity — a drama which unfolds through the whole of Scripture and comes to its fruition in the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Genesis is also the book that provides the foundation for almost every important doctrine and teaching in Scripture. Everything — from sin to redemption to justification, from the personality and personhood of God to the promise of the Messiah — is there...and much more.

Genesis, though not a science text, accurately shows us the concepts of order and complexity in all that exists. Time and again, in case after case, it has stood the test of modern science, whether describing the expanding nature of the cosmos, the intricacies of our solar system, the earth's atmosphere, its flora and fauna, or a host of other things. It is a reliable testament to God as the Creator of all things, the Divine Composer who both lovingly wrote the great score of the universe and still lovingly conducts it to this day.

Genesis also tells us most of what we know about the foundation of civilization and its institutions: marriage, language, government, culture, the development nations, religion...all are depicted there in a comprehensive manner.

Finally, lest I leave this out or fail to give it the prominence it deserves in your thinking, let me say one more specific thing about Genesis today: Genesis is critically important to, and plays a large role in, the New Testament. There are over 165 passages in Genesis either directly quoted or clearly referred to in the New Testament, and many of them are quoted more than once, which puts the total number of references at over 200.

Wrapping Up

In fact, as we wrap things up for the day, we would be remiss if we didn't close with this: Jesus Himself declared the importance of believing all that Moses wrote, including Genesis. Our Savior said, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (John 5:46-47) It's true: the foundations that we see in Genesis carry through all the way to One who has proclaimed that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. If you ever needed an endorsement for the authenticity, veracity, and relevance of the Bible's first book, you need look no further.

There is such blessing ahead for us as we prepare to move forward with our study! As we take our next steps, one of the greatest is knowing that we can do so with confidence, and that through it, God will be with us to establish our faith and anchor us in His promises.

Have a terrific day, everybody; I can't wait to be with you tomorrow. Until then, God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Hello everyone — Grace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you on this last day of our study week together, where as we gather we're coming to the last of our introductory sessions on Genesis. On Monday we'll be moving into the text in earnest, and after several days of ramping things up, I'm eager to get there with you! I'm glad you've joined in for these opening sessions; hopefully they've been encouraging for you and have helped you to think more broadly and meditatively about the impact that this book has as part of Scripture and part of our lives. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are so good and gracious to your people; so abundant in your loving-kindness; so slow to become angry and so quick to forgive our sins. We have sinned, Father, and we know that sin separates us from you. And so as we come to you and your Word this day,

we come first of all confessing our iniquities and humbly asking that you would forgive and restore us. You are the only One who is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and yet we know you do so willingly and joyfully. As we receive your loving absolution today, grant us your Spirit as we open our Bibles. Teach us and grow us strong in Christ today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started, our time together today is going to be brief as we raise one more preliminary issue prior to delving into the text of Genesis. We'll frame it as a question, and since it's a question we'll be answering in different ways in almost every session of this series, we'll let it stand on its own for now. Our focus: Who, What...and Why?

Genesis 1:1a

In the beginning, God created.

One day, students in one of Albert Einstein's classes concluded that there was no God. Though not an overtly spiritual person himself, Einstein did think deeply about the created order of things, refused to be labeled an atheist, and didn't really like to be called agnostic either. God to Einstein was something very real, but also, as he put it, "the most difficult problem in the world, too vast for our limited minds to properly grasp." It was something he wrestled with and pondered over for a good part of his life.

Knowing this about him, we can chuckle a bit at how Einstein responded to his students' declaration. First, he asked them how much of the world's existing knowledge they thought they had among themselves, collectively, as a class. The students discussed it for a while and decided on 5%. Einstein thought their estimate was a little generous, but he replied: "Is it possible God exists in the 95% you don't know?"

I think it's fascinating that Albert Einstein — one of the most brilliant minds of his time and indeed, all time — understood the philosophical importance of embracing God's existence. To him, the idea that everything in the universe could have happened by chance was absurd. Speaking of the vastness and complexity of space, time, and matter, its marvelous arrangement, and its mathematical underpinnings, he wrote, "We are in the position of a little child, entering a huge library whose walls are covered to the ceiling with books in many different tongues. Even with all he does not know, the child knows nonetheless that someone must have written those books."

Who is that Someone? What has that Someone "written" — and why? Those three things are profoundly important for us to consider as human beings. Each one touches us. Each one is impactful. Each one has bearing on our lives. Jean-Paul Sartre, in fact, took those three things and packaged them together into a kind of formula...something he called the essential problem of philosophy. It's simple and it goes like this: "There is something, instead of nothing. Why?" Guess what, everybody? Everything in life flows from the answer to that question. And our study in Genesis will be providing us, in rich detail, all we need to answer it well!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the Bible says that God is more than some mysterious, divine author who wrote the universe into existence in a language we'll never understand. Instead, it tells us that God is a Personal Being who created the heavens and the earth and all that is in

them for His good pleasure. It tells us that God is purposeful, intentional, and intimately involved in all the things He has made...including you and me. And it tells us that far from being unknowable and mysterious, God — because He loves us — has made Himself known and eminently knowable, especially in His One and only Son. When we begin to ask the \$64,000 questions of life, we can certainly thank our physicists, philosophers, and others for what they bring to the table. Many of them through the years, even people like Albert Einstein, have spent more time than they realized in the shadow of the Almighty. But we have more to go on than shadows. We have divine revelation. We have God's holy Word. And when we come back on Monday, we're going to see it begin coming together in a way that not only brings questions, but provides answers! Do come along, wont you? Until then, take care, have a great weekend, and God's rich peace to you in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome Monday's edition of EDiBS, where today brings us to a new week of Bible study and fellowship together as an online family and as members of Christ's family throughout the world. I'm glad to have all of you along, and wherever you might be around the globe today, please know that it's my great honor to be with you in this way and that I appreciate your taking the time to be with me! We're about to embark on a journey through the first chapter of Genesis today, so let's pray and open our Bibles.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are to be praised and honored and glorified now and forever. You are great and mighty – there is none beside you, and all things are in subjection to your awesome power. Look with mercy on your people today – forgive us, renew us, and ignite us with a passion for your kingdom. Bless the teaching of your Word, in Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come at last to the opening words of God's Word. Our focus: the beginning of everything.

Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Many years ago I read a story in the *London Observer*, the Sunday-only sister paper to the *Guardian*. It was about a family of mice who lived all their lives in a large piano. Each day they heard the music of the instrument as it filled all the dark places of their dwelling with sound and harmony. They loved it. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought that there must be Someone above them who made those beautiful sounds. Even though the Player was invisible to them, they felt close to that wonderful Maker of music, and life was good.

One day, however, a daring mouse climbed up part of the piano while it was being played, and he returned very thoughtful. He had discovered, so he thought, how the music was made. Wires were the secret; tightly stretched wires of graduated lengths which trembled and vibrated. All the mice, he said, must now revise their old beliefs. None but the most conservative could any longer believe in the foolishness of an Unseen Piano Player.

Later, another explorer carried the idea even further: hammers were now the secret...a multitude of hammers dancing and leaping on the wires. This was a more complicated theory than the first, but it only advanced the growing idea that the mice lived in a purely mechanical and mathematical world void of an actual Musician. In time, the Unseen Piano Player came to be thought of as a myth. But how interesting it was: no one ever thought to ask what or who activated the hammers to strike the wires...and as the years went on, still the Pianist continued to play.

As we come to the opening verses of Genesis today, we do so encountering an unvarnished, straightforward assertion of fact:

In the beginning...God...created...the heavens and the earth.

In other words, says the Bible, there is a Master Musician. He has composed and orchestrated the score of the universe. The music that fills the dark places of the dwellings of space and time with sound and harmony is not merely the byproduct of the mechanical and the mathematic; it is the work of a Creator.

This declaration is not presented to us in the guise of story or myth.

It has nothing in the way of symbolic language about it.

It is not meant to be a polemical statement.

Instead, it is simply given to the reader as a descriptor — and it not only introduces us to what *was* in the beginning, but also explains what *is* now, and yes, in a way even points to what *will* be in the future. The first sentence of Scripture establishes each of these things by saying, in very plain terms, that the world did not create itself or come about by chance. It was created by God; God who, by definition, is eternal; He has always been and will always be.

Now — this accent on God as the main subject of a given sentence in the text is going to continue in ongoing fashion as we move forward from passage to passage over the next several days. Not only is God the subject of the first sentence of the Bible, but in almost every one of the next thirty or so verses...all the way through the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest...God is going to be the predominant focal point. It's going to be that way for a reason, and since that's the case, let's talk for a moment today about the special way God is described here. Following that we'll talk about another very important word in the opening verse, and that in turn will set the stage for tomorrow's session.

The word for God used in the opening verses of Genesis is the Hebrew word *Elohim*. Grammatically, it's a plural word, but when *Elohim* refers to the Lord God Almighty, the verbs and pronouns are in the singular. Right at the outset, then, we are being introduced to the Lord as He reveals Himself throughout Scripture: One God, eternally co-existent in three Persons — Father Son and Holy Spirit. In that sense, *Elohim* has a clarity about it, even as it encapsulates a concept that our finite minds can't fully grasp. Martin Luther, on the use of the term, said this: "With Elohim, we have clear testimony that Moses aimed to indicate the Trinity or the three Persons in the one divine nature." We'll see more pointers to our triune God just a little later on in the chapter, and we'll talk more about the actions of each Person of the Trinity in the work of creation at that point, but once again, from the very beginning of His revelation to humanity, God reveals Himself to us in this very special way.

Finally, the other word I want to briefly touch on today is the word we have in verse 1 for "created." The Hebrew verb here is another specific one, and it means to create something out of nothing. God, we are told very intentionally in this passage, created the heavens and the earth *out of nothing*...not out of other preexisting things, not out of Himself, not out of His own essence. God in fact — and this is very different than what we see in the Eastern religions or in pantheism, for example — is separate and distinct from His creation. He is over it. He is above it. The Bible actually teaches that even if the universe were to perish, God Himself would still remain. Why the use of such a verb here? It's another signpost for us from the very beginning that shows the uniqueness of the attributes of the One true God. He is inimitable, matchless, peerless, and unequalled; He is beyond all things. It's yet another way that the Scripture sets a

line of demarcation separating the nature and Personhood of the Creator from that of His creation.

Wrapping up

As we wrap things up for the day, I know it seems like we've barely gotten started and that perhaps we're plodding very slowly through some rather perfunctory and self-explanatory material. The truth, though, is that there's so much in the very opening verses of Genesis to get a handle on that to breeze through this section with only a cursory glance would be a tragic mistake. Soon enough — too soon, even — things will pick up and we'll begin to move quite quickly. For now, hang with me as we lay a solid foundation and tend to some of the important theological framework that will help us down the line as we get deeper into our study.

I'm so glad you came along today, everyone — take care, and God-willing, I'll see you next time to take this up again. God's peace!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, where we've gathered for another day of Bible study together as dearly loved people created by God. It's a blessing to know that our Lord is with us, a blessing to know that He desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth...and frankly, that's a big reason for the existence of EDiBS: to help people come to an ever deepening and confident knowledge of the truth that brings salvation. Today we're back in the opening verses of Genesis, so let's pray and seek God's help as we open His holy Word.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, grant us grace today as we open your Word to learn of you and from you. Teach us, lead us, and put within us all that you have planned for our hearts through this time in the Scriptures. This we ask in Jesus' precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming back to the simple proclamation that was delivered to us in yesterday's session — the proclamation of God as Creator. Our focus: the heavens, the earth...and other things too!

Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

I hate to admit this, but I just got through making a box of macaroni and cheese. As a boy, I learned to make a wonderful homemade version from my mother. That's what I usually do when the hankering hits me. But this time it was the blue box with the directions on the side of the package. What can I say? Time was of the essence, ingredients were in short supply, and I didn't have a lot of options in front of me. The result? A passable, if gloppy, facsimile of the real thing. It was ok, but not great. It didn't taste bad, but it didn't taste good either. In the end, it did the job...but it won't go down in history as the meal of the century.

Today we come back to the opening of Genesis 1...a short, straightforward portion of God's Word that tells us of the activity of our Creator. God, the Bible says, made everything — and He made it out of nothing. He didn't pick up a handy dandy creation kit at Hobby Lobby, didn't open some cosmic junk drawer and rummage around for spare material He had lying around. Instead, in a thoughtful, intentional, purposeful manner, God — out of nothing — created everything. And as we return to that proclamation today, we do so remembering God's own assessment of the outcome. It wasn't merely passable. It wasn't just an okay facsimile of something that came prior. Instead, it was unique and fresh and new. It more than did the job. Everything, God said, was very good.

Have you taken time lately to consider the magnitude of that reality? When God created the universe, it was an entity unto itself, not a copy of anything else. In the beginning, there was nothing else. There was God the Father, there was God the Son who is the Living Word, and there was God the Holy Spirit. And then? The Triune God created. At first the earth was without form and void. But then God the Father, decreeing and speaking in and through God the Son, began to move on His work. God the Spirit was there hovering over the face of the waters as things prepared to take shape...hovering, the same verb in Hebrew used of a mother bird

protectively fluttering over her brood...hovering, the same verb we see in Deuteronomy 32 that describes a mother eagle stirring her young into flight.

God began to create...and what sprang forth came from the deepest intentions of His heart. That includes the heavens, to be sure, and the earth as well. From the tiniest speck of dirt on the face of this third planet from our galaxy's sun to the largest star in a solar system a billion trillion miles from here, God created it all. God, by the power of His Word, gave a command... and what was not suddenly was. There was no recipe to follow, no instructions on the side of a box somewhere...there was only God, doing what only God could do.

I've shared this with you many times through the years, especially during the years I was on the farm in Missouri: it's an amazing thing for me to consider the handiwork of God. Why? Because it's an affirmation for me of His greatness and His majesty, and it's a testimony to me of His love for humanity. Only a God of love would create such a beautiful place for His people to journey through on their way to their eternal home!

Now — I realize, just as you do, that we're living in difficult times, and that our world...a fallen world now...has many things contending against it. I know that even nature itself is up against a wall on many fronts in the world today, many times because of the ignorance or selfishness of men. But the majesty of God's creation still supersedes anything that humanity in its inanity has done to harm it, and it still declares His glory from generation to generation!

Did you know that when God's people would gather in assembly before Him, they often began their worship by proclaiming His greatness from time immemorial...beginning with creation itself? They saw the beauty of creation as being witness to the absolute holiness and goodness of the Lord. To them it was a wonderful declaration of God's creative and unique role as the First Cause and the Only Cause. "You alone are the Lord," the people would say — stating, in an explicit way, that there was no other beside Him.

A great example of that declaration can be found in the Old Testament book of Nehemiah:

"Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. 6 You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you."

Nehemiah 9:5b-6

Notice that the description goes from top to bottom: from the highest heaven to the very depths of the sea, from angelic beings to things that walk, swim and crawl, God has done it all. He has spoken it into existence, He continues to sustain it by His good and gracious will — and as a result, the hosts of heaven worship Him! If the angelic beings in their great multitude find the Lord worthy of worship, how much more do those of us with flesh and blood, body and soul, have reason to ascribe to the Lord glory and praise!

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, if it's been awhile since you've been in touch with the beauty of creation, let me encourage you to get out there and breathe it in. Take a walk through your neighborhood. Listen to the birds sing. Be mindful of the breeze on your face, the sun on your shoulders, or the smell of rain in the air. Feel the rhythm of lapping water at the edge of a

lakeshore. Go to the ocean and watch the waves as they tumble in at the behest of the moon. As you do, consider the beauty all around you...and as you consider the beauty all around you, stand in awe of your Creator God, whose works declare His glory...and whose works declare His deep and abiding love for you as His child.

Have a great day, everyone — tomorrow we'll come back and talk about yet another aspect of creation, one we rarely ponder. I hope you'll come along! God's rich peace to each of you, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS! It's a super day to be with you in the study of God's Word, and as is always the case, I'm glad to have you along and glad to know that you're placing a priority on getting into the Bible on a regular basis. We're still marching through the opening words of Genesis today, so let's take some time to pray and prepare our hearts for what God has for us.

Prayer

Father, we ask for your hand to be upon us in a gracious and loving way as we look to the Scriptures over these next several minutes. Give us focus, give us teachable hearts, and give us wisdom, that we continue to learn and grow as your people. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we know that God created the heavens and the earth. God did all this in the beginning...but what about before the beginning? That's our focus!

Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

You're getting ready to go to the symphony. It's going to be an evening without equal. The featured work is going to be Franz Liszt's Sonata in B Minor...one of the most beautiful and technically difficult pieces ever composed for piano. Very few professional musicians can even play it. You're meeting friends at 5, have an early dinner reservation at 5:30, the concert begins at 8, and your tickets are waiting for you at will-call. All is ready. Everything is planned out. All is set, correct? In a way, yes; yet in another way, no. The curtain may be set to rise, your seats may be reserved, and all the events surrounding the evening's activities have been scheduled... but there are still things to do beforehand. Some of them are of the nuts and bolts variety, like showering and putting on your evening wear. But other things bear a different kind of preparation and a different kind of thinking.

To attune your mind to what you're going to hear, you might read up on Liszt's background. You might consider, and even listen to some works of, the many composers on whom he was a great influence and to whom he was a great benefactor, like Richard Wagner and Frederic Chopin and Edvard Grieg, like Clara and Robert Schumann and Claude Debussy. Finally, you might even spend some time reading about Niccolò Paganini, the great violinist, and why? Because it was Paganini's virtuosity as a violinist that inspired Liszt's determination to be equally skilled as a pianist.

Indeed, the concert will begin at 8 o'clock, but make no mistake: beautiful, lovely, significant things can happen before the beginning, all of which will serve to make your evening all the richer.

The one thing we know...the one thing we usually think of when we consider that which was before the beginning...is that God was there. The One, complete, eternal, uncreated Being is God. God Himself was before the beginning: "Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting (Psalm 93:2)."

“Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God (Psalm 90:1-2).”

We also know that when God set about to create the heavens and the earth, all was absolutely ready. Everything had been planned out. All was set, correct? In a way, yes; but perhaps surprisingly, in another way no. The curtain on creation was certainly set to rise, all was reserved and ready, all the events surrounding our Triune God’s activities were scheduled. But we often forget that *beforehand* — *before* the beginning — God was doing other things as well. Beautiful, lovely, significant things. And yes, all of them were with the mindset and intention of making everything all the richer...all the richer for you and me.

The book of Ephesians tells us that *before* the beginning, there was an eternal purpose in the heart of God to gather together as one all things in Christ. *Before* the beginning, God had a specific plan to fulfill this eternal purpose. Look at what Scripture says about this fact, and keep in mind that this is by no means an exhaustive list:

The mission of Jesus was foreordained before the foundation of the world:

“He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (1 Peter 1:20).”

Eternal life was promised before time began:

“...In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began (Titus 1:2).”

The mystery of the gospel — the message of the cross — was foreordained before the ages:

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory (1 Corinthians 2:7).”

The grace given to us was given before the world began:

“...He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began (2 Timothy 1:9).”

As believers in Jesus Christ, we were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world:

“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love (Ephesians 1:4).”

At some time before the beginning, God even created the angels, because they witnessed the creation of the heavens and the earth (Job 38:7).

That there was a “before” *prior* to the beginning of all things, and that God in His power and wisdom was at work in the midst of it, is frankly beyond our ability to comprehend. Our finite minds, bound by space and time and the limitations of human understanding, can’t grasp such an unbounded concept, especially as ascribed to an Uncreated Being. But God’s Word proclaims with clarity that this is the case: before the beginning, there was God. And God was there, already thinking of us...an astounding thought to be sure!

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, we could go on from there — but even with this short survey we see something extraordinary, don't we. In these things we are sensitized and reminded of something that we rarely think about, if we ever think about it at all: God, *before* the beginning, was already planning and acting and preparing, out of the fullness of His love, the redemption of all things in His Son. Paul said it this way in the first chapter of Colossians:

“For in Him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him God was pleased to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of His cross. (Col. 1:19–20).”

There's the heart of it everyone: God, not just from the beginning but from *before* the beginning, was all about making peace for us and in us and between us...peace with one another, and especially peace with Him. What was His chosen Instrument? Christ's blood on Calvary's cross. It connects the beginning with the end...and to a brand *new* beginning at the same time! Think on that, won't you? There's a whole lot there aimed directly at you and me as people redeemed by Jesus Christ! I'll see you again next time to close out the week, everyone - have a great day, and the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Hello everybody! Grace and peace to you today in our great and mighty God, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! It's my joy to be with you as we finish up another week in God's Word, a week where our conversation has focused on the opening of the book of Genesis.

It has also been another kind of week: one where we've been working behind the scenes on the technical side to try and get all of our EDiBS family reconnected again after a big outage in early February. Yesterday was the first day back for about 200 of you, and I'm so happy that the problem has, for the most part, been solved. We'll be doing a little more fine-tuning with our domain verifications and authentications over the next week, and if there are any of you who are still being blocked, we should have you taken care of very soon. Thanks for hanging in there with us as we worked with our IT partners to get things back on line. I appreciate it!

Coming now to the task at hand, today we'll have one last thing to talk about today before we head into the actual days of creation beginning on Monday. Let's get to it, and let's begin with prayer.

Prayer

Gracious God, thanks for all that you've done to bless us and draw us close to you this week. We've come once more to you today to ask for your blessing on our time. Please grant us all the wisdom, understanding, and application that you desire us to have as we meditate on your precious Word. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, there's one particular thing I have purposely *not* talked about in our opening sessions on Genesis, and yet not even two weeks into things, the question has already been put to me by several of you out there. Today is a fitting time to address the issue. So — our focus this session? the importance of tone and tenor.

French novelist and playwright Alexandre Dumas, who wrote *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, among other celebrated works, was known for his generosity and his big heart. He was also known for his big ego, and with that big ego — since he always thought he was right about everything — came the love a good argument. He had a fiery temper, and once had such a heated quarrel with a rising young politician that a duel was called. Since both men were superb shots they decided to draw lots, with the loser agreeing to shoot himself. Dumas lost. Pistol in hand, he withdrew in silent dignity to another room, closing the door behind him. The rest of the company waited in gloomy suspense for the shot that would end his life and career. It rang out at last, and his heart-stricken friends ran to the door and opened it. There they found Dumas, smoking revolver in hand, very much alive. "Gentlemen, a most regrettable thing has happened," he announced. "I missed."

In the Christian church today, there are so many wonderful people...people known for their generosity and their big hearts. So much is done in the name of Christ for so many through their kindness and their selfless acts of service. The world would not be what it is today were it not for men and women like them, and indeed, we are all the better for their compassion and the way they put their faith to action in life.

In the Christian church today, it also happens that many of those wonderful people with big hearts have other big things as well. Some have big egos. Some have the propensity to argue. Some have fiery tempers. And yes, some have all three in equal and impressive measure. Such people are gleaming examples to us all of what it is to be *simul justus et peccator*, 100% saint and 100% sinner at the same time. The truth, of course, is that every one of us is *simul justus et peccator*. Every one of us wears and bears that label. Each of us has a collection of warts on the skin of our faith. And one wart common to many of us, if not most of us, is that regardless of the subject at hand, we love to be right.

There are times, however, when our being right...or more accurately, the manner by which we so often insist that we are right...is simply wrong. There are times when, though we may win as Christians, our victory is not winsome, but wicked. To stand for truth — perhaps even take a bullet for truth — is always the right thing to do. It is never right, however, to shoot someone else down in the process of proving our point.

Unfortunately, that happens a lot in the church these days, especially when it comes to the use of God's Word. Christian people often use it like a weapon — not as the Sword of the Spirit, but as a revolver of ridicule. When someone questions a person's cherished belief or challenges their deeply held conviction, out comes the spiritual firearm, and with it they attempt to blow their opponent out of the water. The crazy thing? You see it not only when they're dealing with people outside the faith, but when they're dealing with fellow believers as well. Can I just say one thing about folks like that today?

Their aim is way off.

Why am I bringing all of this up today? I'm bringing this up because many Christian people, when they read through Genesis (especially the opening chapters), do so with an eye toward weaponizing it. They want to be locked and loaded with proof texts that affirm whatever theological construct they're trying to establish: they want to affirm Creationism or Intelligent Design theory and condemn evolution, or they want to argue for a young earth rather than an old earth, or they want to _____ (fill in the blank). Whatever their pet issue might be, they cherrypick passages that will help them in the fighting of their particular ideological war.

But there's a problem with that. First, not only is their methodology flawed since in arguing with and attempting to take down their detractors they are acting precisely contrary to the Bible's call to speak the truth in love, but second, they also get so caught up in trying to prove or disprove various points of view that they lose their grasp on the power and beauty of God's Word as His divinely-wrought love letter to the world. The Scriptures are not chiefly academic, they're spiritual. They weren't written as a legal brief, they were written to make us wise unto salvation. They weren't given by God so that we could use them to line up all the pagans and mow them down with our superior wisdom and intellect, they were given to bring comfort and endurance and hope and truth as they reveal God's love for us in His Son.

Now — let me be clear: I believe, and also teach, from a historical, orthodox, Christian perspective. God's Word is indeed Divinely wrought. The Scriptures are inspired, inerrant and infallible. They are living, active, and powerful. When they are brought to bear on a person's life the Holy Spirit can use them to supernaturally change that person from the inside out. I will never not believe those things. I also, however, believe that because of everything I just mentioned, I don't have to try and make the Bible "say something" to someone. God can do that

very well all by Himself, thank you very much. Therefore, rather than arm myself to the teeth with proof texts, rather than outline all the ways I can dismantle my neighbor's criticisms or questions about a given point of faith, rather than spend time preparing to put down whatever issue might come up in a conversation about religion or theology, my aim is much simpler. When it comes to the role of God's Word in my life...whether as a pastor, a teacher, or just as a friend to the guy sitting next to me at the neighborhood pub, I try very hard to be devotional and declarative, not derogatory and defensive.

Wrapping Up

And that, as we wrap things up for the day, is how I'm going to teach this book. You will find me extolling the name of the Lord and the wonder of His creation and the power of His love and the amazingness of His mercy over and over and over again. You will always find me doing it in accordance with how those things are revealed in the text. What you won't find from me is the hostile weaponization of God's Word to set up and then knock down straw men. You won't hear me railing against this group or that group because they're at odds with the historical position of Scripture. You won't see me show up on screen or in print with a strident spirit of debate or argumentation towards those who disagree with me on various points of Christian teaching. Some people have that gift and calling, because they're able to do it winsomely and with intelligence and gentleness. I don't. My calling is to open the Scriptures with you each day and help sensitize you to the presence of God and His grace as he reveals Himself to us there. My calling is to let the Bible speak for itself...to get out of its way and let the Word do its work.

Remember, everyone: devotional and declarative. That's my focus, and I hope that in the days ahead it will be yours as well! Have a great weekend, and God-willing I'll see you again Monday. Until then, God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ! It's always good to get back to the Scriptures together after a little time away, and as we come back to God's Word on this first study day of the week, we'll be going into the next section of Genesis 1. Thanks for coming along today; let's pray as we prepare to study:

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are good and just and right in all you do. We praise you today for your mercy, which you have poured into our lives through the sacrifice of your one and only Son. We are grateful and we give you thanks for the salvation which you have brought us. Open our hearts as we look to your Word, and teach us by your Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come now to the first day of creation. Our focus: "Let there be light!"

Genesis 1:3-5

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

When I was a very young boy I had a dream that I was thrust into a dark place. Not your typical dark, but the inkiest, darkest dark imaginable...a darkness that was almost palpable. I could see nothing — nothing around me, nothing on the ground, not even my hand held out in front of my face. The darkness was so complete that it even consumed the sound of the space that I was in. No matter how hard I try or what words I choose, I can't adequately describe the sensation of that dream. What I can do is tell you that it remains vivid to this day almost 50 years later, and it still leaves me with an unsettling sensation.

That childhood memory came back to me recently when I visited a cave in Tennessee. When the tour group I was part of reached the deepest point of the cavern, the guide flipped a switch and turned out the lights, plunging us into the same kind of inky darkness I remembered from my dream. True absence of light...if you've experienced it, it's something you'll never forget.

As I'm remembering those brief moments of darkness today from my own life, I'm moved to think of how fitting it is that the very first thing God chose to do in bringing form and function to the heavens and the earth was to create light. Remember, at the beginning the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. It was into this environment that God spoke light, and it was in this manner that He began to bring order to His universe.

Let's observe just a few things about the passage today. First, we should be quick to note that there is nothing inherently bad about darkness in the physical sense. God, in fact, does not dispel darkness when He creates light, but brings light *to* the darkness and then separates the two. The light He calls Day, the darkness He calls night, and thus there is evening and there is morning, the first day. Darkness and light together are two halves of the whole, complementing one another and performing in tandem in accordance with God's design. Evening and morning, day and night, light and darkness, are all good things.

The second thing to be aware of in the text today is that this light, the first thing that God speaks into existence, arrives on the scene *prior* to the sun, the moon, and the stars, which don't

appear until day number four. We'll get to that portion of the creation in the next few days, but for the moment we have to ask: if light comes first, and if this light is not generated or reflected by a celestial body, of what does it consist? What is its substance? The answer in one sense is that this is far beyond us, but in another sense the answer is a simple one: this light has a quality and aspect which supersedes any kind of physical substance, because it is from God. It is not merely natural, but also supernatural. In fact, in the new heavens and the new earth, which we all eagerly await as believers in Christ (and which we studied together in our series on Revelation), there won't be any sun or moon at all, because in the new heavens and the new earth God Himself will be the Light. A profound and beautiful thought, to be sure!

The third and final thing to mention with regard to today's passage is one that I'll just mention briefly. At this point in the creation account, we have now come to the First Day. The question often asked is this: is the Bible talking about a literal 24-hour day here or is it speaking of an epoch of time encompassing an entire geological era? God-loving, Christ-honoring, faithful Christians from many different corners of the kingdom have different perspectives on this. People in my own family, in fact, hold differing positions on the matter. Some folks believe that God, in six days, six literal days, six 24-hour periods, created all things. Others believe that God used much longer periods of time to form all that has been made, and that each day mentioned in Scripture is a poetic or symbolic expression of those long periods. Among those who hold to the "geological era" idea, there's no shortage of viewpoints as to the hows, the whens, and the whats that bring it all together, and even among those who embrace six literal days as God's methodology there are still varying ideas as to how, exactly, He did things.

Without wading into a debate — of which there would be no end, ever — I will simply say this about the text itself. The Hebrew word used for "day" in these opening passages of Genesis is the regular, ordinary, everyday word for a 24-hour period: *Yom*. Furthermore, the language in these opening passages is not poetic or symbolic; it is simple, nuts-and-bolts, descriptive language that would be used to describe any number of things, from the building of a table to the setting of that table to the cooking of food that would be put on that table at mealtime. In other words, the text of Scripture treats the days of creation as ordinary ones encompassing normal time periods. Because God is God, because God by virtue of His very nature can do anything, and because of other more technical aspects of the creation account that we'll get into when we cover the other days of God's work, I personally have no trouble whatsoever embracing a literal six-day creation, and that's what I hold to as a person of faith and what I teach as a pastor. If you've come to a different conclusion as to how God did what He did, I can respect that as well. The most important acknowledgment to make and the place we are all called by God's Word to arrive at together is that He indeed is the Maker of heaven and earth, and as such, He is over all things.

Wrapping Up

In fact, wrapping up for the day, why don't we close with the wonderful words of the 95th Psalm, a beautiful passage that reminds us of our great Creator God and calls us to worship His holy name:

*Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*

*Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise!*

*For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.*

*In His hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are His also.*

*The sea is His, for he made it,
and His hands formed the dry land.*

*Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!*

*For He is our God,
and we are the people of His pasture,
and the sheep of His hand.*

Have a great day everybody — I can't wait to be with you again tomorrow! Until then, take care,
and know that the Lord is with you...and *for* you too.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's peace, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! As we get into the swing of this new week it's good to have each of you here to gather around God's Word, and today we're continuing on in our look at the first chapter of Genesis. We've done quite a bit of introduction on this first book of the Bible, and it's still a great time to be inviting your friends and family to join in for this new series. These next few minutes will take us into the second day of creation, so let's pray as we open up our Bibles.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Thank you for this day to belong to you and to be called your own. We ask for your blessing as we look to your Word in this next little while. Teach us and grow us up into maturity as we study, and continue your transforming work in our lives throughout this day. We ask this in your precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the second day of God's creative work brings us to another division, or separation, if you will. Our focus: an important expanse.

Genesis 1:6-8

6 And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." 7 And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. 8 And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

When I was staying in Austin, Texas this past fall with my dear friends, the Esparza Family, I had the opportunity to spend some time each day at a gym nearby. Lifetime Fitness was a wonderful club with more amenities than I had ever seen before, and I wish I would have taken better advantage of all that was offered there. Among those many amenities there was a steam room...something I had not experienced before. Dry heat saunas are wonderful, and I was familiar with how they worked, but the steam room? It was a whole different animal.

Instead of redwood or cedar, the steam room was tiled from floor to ceiling...and instead of hot, dry air, the steam room was a very warm and humid environment, scented with eucalyptus. It would get so filled with warm, wet air that you couldn't see from one end to the other, and in short, it was wonderful — my happy place. After a some cardio or a circuit on the weight machines, taking time to sit inside at the end of a workout was like being enveloped in an all-encompassing warmth that soaked me through from the outside in. It was a wonderful feeling that I'd love to experience again someday.

As we come to God's Word today, we'll be looking at the passage before us in a brief, summary fashion. In verses 6-8 of Genesis 1, God speaks into existence an expanse...a space...a firmament...and He does so for one specific purpose: to separate the waters. What does that mean? Where once all the waters were together in one place, as we saw in the second verse of the chapter, with this new expanse to divide them there is now water *on* the earth and water *above* the earth. The water on the earth is like what we know today, and probably very similar in fashion: oceans, lakes, rivers, streams. The water above? The water above is apparently a thick layer of vapor; a very warm and humid environment. This creates within the atmosphere of the earth something of a terrestrial steam room, and in the early days of our planet, the days prior to

the existence of rain, this vapor layer will play a large role in making God's creation a very happy place for living things.

With this element of creation now in place, the stage is quickly being set for the introduction of vegetation, animals, and most important, human beings. With this element in place, a perfect habitat is being created that will sustain life in perpetuity. With this element in place, yet another building block of God's grand design for His world is being brought forth and put into its proper position. It's yet another purposeful action on the part of our Creator as He makes all things for His good pleasure — and eventually, ours as well.

Interestingly, this second day of creation is one where God does not announce that what He does is good. That need not concern us, however, because this space, this expanse — what the Bible calls "heaven" and what today we would simply refer to as the sky — is part of the larger whole of His work. And not only will the whole of our Lord's handiwork be called good, once it's all done it will actually be called "very good." So there is evening and morning, the second day...and with it, more of our Almighty God's divine imprint on all that is and all that will be.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, many biblical scholars who specialize in the study of Genesis, and with them, Christian academics in the fields of meteorology, biology, and geology, have done fascinating work related to the earth's earliest days. Much of what they posit is well supported by modern science, and their research only adds to the reasonableness of Scripture's account of creation. We'll talk about some of that work as we get further into the chapter, but for now let's take a moment as we close to recognize not the complexity that undergirds what we've read today, but rather, the simplicity of the passage's declaration: God is at work. He's doing a good thing. He's doing it on purpose, doing it according to His perfect, divine plan, doing it for His own good pleasure...and ultimately, doing it for us as well!

More to come next time, everyone — have a great day, blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and I'll see you again soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! It's Wednesday, a glorious day that the Lord has made, and it's my great joy to welcome you to another daily edition of EDiBS. As we spend time together, it's always my prayer that you're growing in your faith, growing in your knowledge of God's love for you in His Son Jesus Christ, and growing in your hunger and zeal for the things of our Lord in every area of your life. Today we're continuing to give our attention to the first chapter of Genesis, where we're now coming to the third day of creation. Let's pray and get to it.

Prayer

Father, we thank you from the depths of our hearts for the gift of your Word, and the gift of your Spirit as well to enlighten our hearts and give us wisdom and understanding as we read. Teach us today. Help us to know you more. Help us to grow in maturity as your dearly loved children. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we find a lot going on during the third day of God's creative work. Our focus: the gathering of water, the emergence of dry ground, and the appearing of vegetation.

Genesis 1:9-13

9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

Back in the days when we lived on our little hobby farm in the Ozark mountains, we raised a large, happy family of Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs, most of whom I no longer remember. Most, that is, except for one: Crystal. I don't recall why my daughter gave her that moniker, but I do remember that Crystal was quite the piece of work!

Many you know that pigs are quite intelligent, and Crystal was especially so. She was the one who always found a way under the fence and ran willy-nilly around the property while we tried to catch her. She was the one who ruled over the goats, with whom she and the other pigs lived in the same pasture. She was also the most vocal of all the pigs that we had. But for me, the most amazing thing about Crystal was her ability to organize and create her own space. All of our other pigs would root around the ground, wallow in the mud, find something to eat here and there, and then stretch out wherever they happened to find themselves when they got tired. Crystal? She would literally build a world for herself. She'd dam up water to create a little reservoir, keep a nice supply of soft mud right next to it, and make sure that her snack supply was within easy reach. Once those things were in place, she'd circle around her little construction site several times, building a berm all the way around it as though to close herself in. Once she was done, she'd plop down in the middle of it all and lounge in all of her pot-bellied glory for the most of the day. It was always a sight to behold.

In today's reading from God's Word, coming now to the third day of creation, we continue to see things take shape — and that in a most literal sense. This is a big day, even a breakthrough day in a way, and why? Because here on the third day we see God beginning, in a special way, to

organize the space He has created. He's literally building a world for Himself. And while we would never equate the rudimentary, snout-based activities of my pig on the farm to the grand, creative actions of our Almighty God, there are some faint similarities playing out that help to create a picture for us. Water is being dammed up, as it were, becoming still more organized as God works with it to put it where He desires. Land is now emerging from where the water used to cover it. Plants and all types of vegetation now spring forth as well, which will be a food source for the animals and human beings who will soon be created. All of this is an awe-inspiring display of God's perfect plan coming together just as He intends, in just the right order, at just the right time, and for all the right reasons.

As we consider these things today, I'd like for us to keep just a couple of things in mind. First, let's remember that as all the water divides across the earth and goes to where it goes and as all the vegetation comes onto the scene, these things are happening a day *prior* to the creation of the sun. The sun, coming into being on day number four, is not here right now to dry up or draw away water from one place to another, nor can it give the plants and trees the light they need to live and grow. How then, do these things occur? Look at the text: Twice we are told, in verses 9 and 11, that God simply called them to be — and when He did so, it was so. "And it was so" is, in fact, an oft-repeated four-word phrase here in Genesis 1 that gives elegant witness to God's power and authority over all that He is making.

Second, take a moment and notice something just a bit on the technical side: when God calls the land to produce vegetation, the plants and trees are created according to their various *kinds*. This description appears ten times in Genesis 1, and it's a term distinctly different than what you and I think of when we talk about *species*, for example. How so? The word *kind* is broader in scope than *species*, and actually, that's a good way to describe it in its basic sense: within a kind, there can be a great deal of variation — many different species. At the same time, however, something of one kind will never develop into something of another kind. Species can be and are connected and related within their kinds. But kinds are distinct and unique from one another. They always have been and always will be. This point will become more important for us down the line a little bit, but for now, we can see that in this way, God is showing us yet again that the principles of order and design are at play in His creative work, far removed from mere chaos or chance...something which has sadly become the popular platform of our day.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, many scientists today believe that life on earth began when immense meteorites carrying amino acids impacted our planet at a time when the sun was cooler and the earth was a watery ball covered with ice. The idea is that a meteor hit the ice, broke through, and "seeded" the water underneath with the building blocks of life, which ultimately assembled into an "organic soup"...out of which all things eventually developed, including you and me. They don't explain where the amino acids on the meteorites came from, and they can't say how the whole process was triggered, but these scientists do believe that life on earth began in "a geological instant," by which they mean 10 million years or less.

Everyone, there *is* another explanation for the beginning of life. It's less fraught and more straightforward than what I just shared with you. We saw a glimpse of it, expressed very simply, in today's passage. It's what we've been talking about for the past couple of weeks now...and it's what we will continue to work through in the days ahead. If I may I point out the obvious, it takes a lot more faith to believe the scenario I just recited for you than to believe in the biblical record given to us in Genesis. Think about that, won't you, and when we come back next time,

we'll pick this up again. Have a great day, and until then, God's peace, and the joy of the Lord — our Creator God — be your abiding strength. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Christ's rich peace to each of you today, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. I'm so glad you've joined in for our time together in God's Word as we head to the end of the week, and I pray that you'll be strengthened and encouraged as a result of these next few minutes. Today we'll be continuing on in Genesis 1 with a look at the fourth day of creation, so let's pray and open our Bibles.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for this time to be with you in your Word today, and we ask that you would touch our lives as we open the Scriptures. In this moment we pray for your comforting presence and your peace, which passes all human understanding. We know you are sufficient for every need we have, and we ask that in your mercy you would richly minister to those needs among us today. In your strong and saving name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the fourth day of creation is directed primarily heavenward. Our focus: the sun, the moon, and the stars.

Genesis 1:14-19

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. 16 And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17 And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Both of my children have a love for, and a more than casual knowledge of, the stars. When we left the suburbs of southern California for the countryside of rural Missouri back in 2005, one of the things we gained in the move was a new appreciation for the the hours after sunset each day. We were over 30 miles from any major town, 10 miles from the closest little village, and since we lived in the middle of an Amish settlement, we were also one of the few homes in the immediate area that had electricity. All of those things made for a very dark night sky, and with it, an incredible view of the heavens beyond what we had ever known before. Between the reading they did, the little telescope we had, and the slow-paced rhythm of life on the farm, Taylor and Jacob soaked up a lot when they were young. They learned the constellations and the stories behind them, they knew how individual stars and planets were positioned and where to look for them at different times of the year...they could even do some basic navigation by gazing at the evening sky. My kids are both in their twenties now, but their childhood love of astronomy has stayed with them, and I hope that it's something they'll be able to pass on to their own kids when the time comes.

As we come to the fourth day creation in today's session, we come to the subject of the heavenly bodies. This is a beautiful passage, and though in looking to these verses we'll continue with our primary pattern of simply letting Scripture stand and speak for itself, we'll also have an observation to make about the focus of what is being said.

The descriptive nature of verses 14-19 is very clear, isn't it: on this day, God creates "lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night," specifically, the sun, the moon

and the stars. Some Bible teachers through the years have taught that God on this day is not actually *creating* the lights in the sky, but merely setting them into place. The stars and planets were actually created, so they believe, at the beginning, and these verses are merely describing the next step in the process of God's creative handiwork. While that's a view that does have followers in the church today, the more accepted view is that which is rendered by a plain reading of the passage: On the fourth day, God said "Let there be," and there was... and that, I think, is enough for us to embrace without the need for any philosophical time hopping exercises or reorderings of what happened when.

At any rate, it's not the manner in which God created the sun, moon, and stars that is the focus here anyway. Rather, if we take a moment to read through the text, we see that the real star of the passage, if you will, is the *why*, not the *what*.

Did you notice the purpose for which all these heavenly bodies are created? It's an eminently practical one, and it is also singularly directed. They are created:

- to separate the day from the night;
- to be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years;
- AND (and this is an astounding thought) to give light upon the earth.

Here we have a portion of God's Word that speaks of the entire cosmos, and yet all of it — from the sun and the moon in our own solar system to all the starry host throughout the universe — is harnessed for the specific needs and functions of this planet...our planet! This fact is shared with us first in verses 14-16 and reiterated and expanded upon for us in verses 17-19. With all that there is to all that He is doing, God focuses on Earth as the central point of His physical creation. Everything in the entirety of the heavens is put *in* place to serve *this* place.

Dr. James Burton Coffman, a theologian who lived almost until his 101st birthday, made this point quite eloquently. He wrote,

Where else in the billions of galaxies all around us in space is there another planet of suitable size, placed at suitable distance from its mother star, inclined at exactly the proper angle upon the plane of its orbit, possessing precisely the kind of satellite needed as in the case of our moon, possessing the necessary water supply, the proper atmosphere with its delicately-balanced percentages of the component elements, performing continually the diurnal revolutions upon its own axis to give succession of day and night, and constantly moving in the annual revolutions around the sun in the plane of its own orbit to provide for the seasons and the marking of years? If this exceedingly complex and precise placement of the earth was not a special act of God, why is it, as far as can be determined, absolutely unique? Significantly, such things as signs, day and night, seasons, and years, are categorically mentioned as the result of creation on Day 4.

Wrapping Up

What an amazing thought to consider indeed, and wrapping things up for the day, that's not even the half of it: Psalm 147 and Isaiah 40 tell us God has the stars all numbered...and that God has a name for each one! When Psalm 19 tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God, that, in my mind, is one of the biggest jumping off points in all of Scripture for meditating on the greatness of God and His creation...and for thinking about why it is that His focus during the making of it all was on this planet and the people He would create to fill it. We'll have so

much more to talk about on this subject going forward — I hope you'll plan to be part of it as we go along!

I'm loving the chance we have to be together each day, everyone, and I hope you're enjoying this new series as much as I am. I'm always praying that we can learn and grow together as God's people in Christ, and with that in mind, I'll look forward to seeing you again the first of next week. Until then, have a terrific weekend; God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's rich blessings to you in Christ as we walk through the early stages of Holy Week together. I pray the days ahead will be special ones where you're drawn to the cross in meaningful ways to see the great love your Savior has for you — so great that He deigned to take your sin upon Himself at Calvary and die in your place. This week the drama will find its high point on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and then, of course, we'll be keeping watch and eagerly awaiting the celebration of our Lord's resurrection on Sunday. In the past, we've sometimes taken the days prior to Easter to focus on our Lord's final journey to Jerusalem. This year we'll be keeping to our regular study schedule with the exception of Thursday and Friday, when we'll pause for a few quiet moments together to focus on the deep meaning of those days. I hope you'll plan to be part of the observance!

Thanks for coming along on this Monday; we're heading into the fifth day of creation in Genesis 1 today, so let's pray and prepare our hearts for what the Lord has for us.

Prayer

Lord God, thank you for another week to be together as your people, and thank you for this time today to come before you in an intentional way to learn your Word and learn from your Word. We ask that you bless this study time, and that you work in our lives for the good as a result of what we read. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the fifth day of the creation account in Genesis 1 is comprised of creatures both swimming and flying. Our focus: a wonderfully unique — and important — combination.

Genesis 1:20-23

20 And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." 21 So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." 23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

As a child who grew up in southern California about an hour from anywhere you might like to go...mountains one way, desert another, and the ocean still another...I was fortunate to spend many school breaks on family camping trips to the beach. Sunday afternoons after church were another common time for beach outings. Because of that, to this day I have a love for anything and everything ocean-related, from the surf to the sand to all things great and small that live there. Not only are there almost innumerable species of marine life in the ocean — things we're still discovering today, in fact — but there are almost innumerable species of birds there too... more species than I can name. Taken together, the birds of the air and the creatures of the sea help to make up one of my true happy places in the world. I've been privileged to live in some amazing spots through the years: the suburbs of southern California, Sonoma County wine country, The Ozark Mountains in Southwest Missouri, and the even the Cherokee National Forest in the mountains of Eastern Tennessee. They've all been uniquely special. But for me, there's nothing quite like the feeling of being on the coast.

Maybe that's why, as we come to the fifth day of our Lord's creation, I especially enjoy the text that's before us. Here we see what amounts to some very simple narrative regarding what God creates during this period: the great variety of birds and sea creatures, each according to their own kinds. That said, and simple though it may be, there are still a few things of significance I'd like to sensitize you to as we look at this passage. I couldn't think of the perfect words to describe things as I wanted to, but I think the following "ABC" model will work. Today I want to make sure we all notice the presence of three things:

Abundance,
Blessing, and
Clarity.

Verses 20-21: First, abundance. Did you notice the word the Bible uses when it describes what God's desire and resulting action is with regard to the creatures of the waters? God says to "let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures." Have you ever seen a swarm of anything before? It's a massive, churning, visible thing to behold! Near where I grew up there was a little mountain town with a trout pond. You could buy food for the trout from a gumball machine to throw into the water, but before that food ever touched anything wet, those fish swarmed to the surface of the pond like a monster from the deep. Their swarming roiled the entire surface of the pond because there were so many of them. That's the image we get as we see God creating the creatures of the sea, from the smallest to the biggest. The water literally teems with innumerable creatures of every size and shape, and that's an amazing image to think about when we consider the vastness of the oceans in our world!

The same idea is intimated with respect to the birds, though not as directly (at least at first). They are to fly above the earth across the the expanse of the heavens...another astounding thought as we visualize these new creatures rising and take their place in the air.

Verses 22-23: Now — as God sees this aspect of His work and considers it, He sees, of course, that it is good...and this is where our first observation joins up with the next one: the principle of blessing. In verse 22, God pronounces His first blessing upon a living thing when He says to the creatures of the sea and the birds of the air, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." Not only have they been created in great numbers, and not only have they been created good, but the birds of the air and the creatures of the sea are also now to increase — to multiply. We'll talk more about all that's behind the idea of blessing in a special session coming up in the next week or so, but for the moment, let's not miss that our good God who has made another good thing now gives to that which He has made *more* of a good thing: the good thing of reproducing and increasing upon the earth.

Verse 21: From Abundance and Blessing, let's move on to the last of today's points. This one stands alone, and it has to do with making distinctions...and making them with Clarity. If you go back to verse 21, you'll notice that when God talks about the creatures of the sea and the birds of the air, He once again talks about them being made according to their *kinds*. Within a *kind*, there can be a great deal of variation — many different species, for example. At the same time, however, something of *one* kind will never develop into something of *another* kind. Kinds are distinct and unique from one another. They always have been and always will be.

Why is this important to talk about with respect to the fifth day of creation and the fact that God created both the creatures of the sea and the birds of the air on this one day, each according to its own kind?

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, we're actually going to have to tackle this at length in tomorrow's session because we've run out of time! To introduce it, however, and to encourage you to come back for the discussion, I'll say this: this is an important issue because all of what we talked about today directly sets itself up against, and throws a wrench into a lot of what is assumed, about evolutionary theory in today's world. It also shines a light on one of the great deficiencies of that theory. Now remember — we don't want to set up a straw man here, and we will strenuously avoid doing that as we gather next time. We will, though, lay out several points that need to be addressed on both sides of the matter, and I'm confident that we'll all be the better for it by the time we get to the end. Until tomorrow then, God's rich and abiding peace be with each of you! Have a wonderful day, know that the Lord is with you, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, who was and is and is to come. It's great to be with you today for a few dedicated minutes in God's Word, and as always, it's also great to have the promise of the Lord's presence with us as we go about our task. Let's pray as we go back once more to the fifth day of creation in Genesis 1.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for this day and for this time to be in your Word as your people, and we pray for your blessing on what we're about to study in the Scriptures. Open our eyes, give us a teachable spirit, and speak to our hearts. We ask this in your precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we left off last time with an unanswered question: what is it about the fifth day of creation...and the specific things that God created on that day...that merits an earnest discussion in the marketplace of faith, science, and reason? Our focus this session: let the fossil record speak.

Genesis 1:20-21

20 And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." 21 So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Edward Sell, an Anglican priest who served for most of his life as an academic and missionary to Muslims in India, wrote almost 50 books about matters of faith and life during his career. Living and working as he did during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he witnessed a time of explosive growth in the field of science — something that on the one hand he lauded as a great gift from God, but on the other hand regarded with a certain amount of concern. His reservation wasn't that science would overtake or invalidate the Christian faith; not in the least. Instead, his sense of disquiet resided in the fact that as much *good* science as there was being done, there was just as much extremely *bad* science being foisted on the populace, and worst of all? Most people tended to accept it uncritically, assuming that anything the academic community put forth must be an accurate representation of how things were.

Sell wrote that as people gained an increased and legitimate understanding about certain aspects of the natural world through new discoveries and breakthroughs, there was a danger that they would begin to recklessly embrace *every* idea posited by science as gospel truth, whether it could be verified or not. This, in turn, could lead people to wrongly see science as the panacea for every challenge and difficulty facing humanity.

Sell's quarrel, then, wasn't with the Scientific Method or the advancement of knowledge; his consternation arose from the fact that many scientific theories of the day — and notably, Darwinism was one of them — could not be proven in the least, but were nonetheless held up as established truth. Furthermore, the vast majority of those theories — again, Darwinism included — were subtle or even outright attacks on much of what was taught by the Christian faith.

Everyone, if we look at the state of the academic community today, here is what we need to recognize: we are right now experiencing, just as Edward Sell experienced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a veritable explosion of growth in the field of science. In more ways than we can possibly count or quantify, this is to be lauded as a great gift from our Almighty God. New discoveries and breakthroughs are helping to advance technology, eradicate disease, overcome societal ills, and improve our overall quality of life, and they are literally daily occurrences. At the same time, however, there is a flip side which is also true: as much good science as there is being done in our day, there is just as much extremely bad science being foisted on the populace — much of it being accepted uncritically, and much of it assumed to be an accurate representation of how things are.

So — back to the question that prompted this discussion in the first place: why is it important to talk about this issue with respect to the fifth day of creation and the fact that God created both the creatures of the sea and the birds of the air on this one day, each according to its own kind? It's important to talk about because as I said to you yesterday, this fifth day of creation in particular directly sets itself up against, and throws a wrench into a lot of what is assumed, about evolutionary theory in today's world — a theory, by the way, which has never been able to be proved, or even convincingly demonstrated, and yet continues to be held up as an established truth.

To state things briefly, it's pretty much universally assumed by evolutionary scientists today that birds evolved from small, meat-eating dinosaurs. Where did the small, meat-eating dinosaurs come from? The common belief is that over millions upon millions of years they slowly evolved from sea creatures. When you try to square that with the Scriptural record, it obviously doesn't match up, because God tells us that He made the sea creatures and the birds on the same day, clearly separate from one another, and clearly of their own kinds. A dog can be a poodle or a great dane and still be a dog, because it's of the same kind. A fish, however, can never be a bird, because they are of completely different kinds. This discrepancy, of course, doesn't surprise us; there's no reason to think that an evolutionist would give any credence to the biblical record.

Here, however, is where things begin to break down: if such creatures as what we're talking about today slowly evolved into existence, one from another, over vast periods of time, wouldn't the fossil record show that? It should...but it doesn't. The Bighorn Basin in Wyoming, for example, contains a continuous record of fossil deposits for what geologists say is five million years. Because this record is so complete, paleontologists always assumed that a positive trail of evolution would be found there. Instead, the fossil record doesn't document a single transition from one species to another. Instead, it shows something totally different: it shows, first of all, that the great majority of species that have been found are unchanged in their documented history from first to last, and second, that when a species does show up in the record, it doesn't show up as something developing slowly over time, but as something that appears all at once, fully formed. The bottom line? Things just don't add up.

This, incidentally, explains to us why Darwin's most vehement opponents during his lifetime weren't members of the clergy, but fossil experts. In fact, Darwin himself admitted that the state of the fossil evidence was the most obvious and gravest objection which could be urged against his theory. Why? Because the fossil evidence being found then — and still being found today — overwhelmingly showed that the changes posited by Darwin's theory simply hadn't occurred. If evolution means the gradual change of one kind of organism into another kind, the outstanding

characteristic of the fossil record is the *absence* of evidence to support it. Here then, in this fifth day of the creation account, is an instance where the plain-spoken witness of the biblical record makes more sense and frankly takes less faith to believe than the alternative. This is just one example of many that we could cite. As such, it opens the door for more questions to be asked — and hopefully, more winsome, earnest, and kindly dialogue to occur.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I know that for some of you a conversation like this is a bit tedious, and I appreciate you for hanging in there with me these past few minutes. Since you're still here, I'd like to leave you with one more thought as we close: there's great science being done in our world today by great scientists...work that is creative and innovative, careful and inquisitive. It's work which is yielding solid, verifiable gains in multiple disciplines, work that is moving the needle forward on a host of important fronts. Some of those scientists are Christians; many of them are not. But science is not the enemy of the Christian, or of the Christian Church. It would be wrong to cast the mold in that way because it's simply not true. Are there places where conflict is inevitable? Are there platforms we cannot embrace? Are there issues and areas of study in which we will be at opposite ends of the spectrum, finding the need to graciously, but firmly, stand our ground? Of course; today's session was about one of those issues. But before we're through with the creation account here in the first and second chapters of Genesis, please note that we'll be finding ourselves at several intersections where science and faith meet not in collision, but in concert. When those moments arise, we'll build on the talking points we've started here today.

I hope this has been helpful, everyone — may we all be confident but humble, and always, always teachable as we live out our God-given faith! Joy to you in Christ, and I'll see you again next time. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Joy and peace to each of you in our Savior Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for your presence today as we take some time to open God's Word together, where today we continue to move forward with the account of creation in Genesis 1. In this session we'll be taking our first look at all that happened on the sixth day, so let's pray as we go to the Scriptures, shall we?

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day and this time together to be in your Word, we ask that you would cause it, by your gracious Spirit, to penetrate our lives and do that which you desire it to do within us. We place ourselves before you with humble, yet eager anticipation, because we know what a great privilege it is to open the Scriptures and learn of you...to learn from you. Bless this time, we pray in Christ's holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the coming of the sixth day, we've now drawn near to the apex, the high point, the grand and ultimate focus of God's creative work. We'll be talking about it over the course of several days, and as we begin, we turn our attention to the creation of the animals. That's our focus for the day.

Genesis 1:24-25

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. 25 And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

People are funny when it comes to their animals. I grew up with an indoor dog and an outdoor cat. Once I reached adulthood, I dispensed with cats altogether, but went a little overboard on the canine front, generally having three at any given time. My daughter was a bit different. While she would never be one to look a gift puppy in the mouth, she was more into pigs...which we also had at least three of at any given time. For my son, it was all about our goats: the three of them — yes, another three! — were genuine buddies to him in life, and he has fond memories of running around the farm with them. There were also animals that, because we lived in the countryside, we feared: bobcats and mountain lions and the occasional bear, any of which could, and sometimes did, make short work of one of our farm animals.

Not to be outdone, however, and again, remembering that people are funny when it comes to their animals, one of my daughter's best friends raises and trains rats, and she dresses them up in the most adorable little Victorian gowns and accessories you've ever seen. My nephew has a pet scorpion that he caught at home in his hallway. He put it in a terrarium, took it to the IT firm where he works as an engineer, and placed it on his desk, where it has become a celebrated and very popular office mascot. In short, when it comes to people and their creatures, you never can tell!

Today we come to the sixth day of creation: the day where God begins by creating the animals of the land, and ends with the creation of human beings. The two have been together ever since, and it's because of this day in our Lord's special week of work that we enjoy the special responsibility of dominion over and stewardship of these creatures, both great and small.

On the fifth day of creation, we saw God make the birds and sea animals. Now God turns His creative attention toward land animals, and the Bible puts them into three basic categories: livestock — animals that can and ultimately will be domesticated for man's use; creeping things — think small animals like squirrels or rats or lizards, and perhaps even smaller, tinier things that wander along the ground; and finally, beasts of the field — animals, some of which we would classify today as gentle giants, and others which we see as top-of-the-food chain predators, though at the time of their creation they were plant-eating rather than carnivorous (more on that later). Scripture paints with broad strokes here, so we can't answer questions concerning which category dogs or cats or camels or platypuses fit into. That's not really the point, and before you let that irritate you, take a moment to put it into perspective: scientists estimate that there are up to fifty *million* different kinds of animal species today...and less than two million have even been named. When God shares His creation blueprint with us through His servant Moses, He's not providing us with a college zoology text or a master's thesis in biology; He's simply speaking to us as the Master — and in doing so, He graciously provides us with an astoundingly beautiful, if general, description of His work.

As we get into this sixth and final day, there are several things that we should make ourselves aware of. First, the verses that make up this passage — verses 24-31 — constitute the longest and most descriptive treatment of all the days of creation week. Second, and related to the first, this portion of God's Word is one where we see a clear build-up to the pinnacle of the entire creation account: the creation of human beings, male and female, in God's own image. Finally, this passage provides us with one more distinctive, an especially important one and yet one that is often missed. In verse 24 God creates the animals, and God speaks to make them so, just as He has done previously. Here, however, He causes them to arise, to be brought forth from, the earth. Did you notice that? Not only is this a special feature that sets the land animals apart from everything else that has been made thus far, but it also serves as a set-up, a preparation for, yet another distinctive: the fact that even these amazing creatures, made in such an amazing and special way, are less than, lower than, what God will create next. We won't see it in full until we get to chapter two, but the teaser is this: though God will make man from the earth just as He does the animals, the manner in which He will make man is far removed from what we've seen happen in the text today...something that will forever set human beings apart from any other living thing.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, so far, thus far, day six of creation. There's so much more to come, and I hope you'll join in for our study time when we come back to it next week. I say "next week" to remind you that both tomorrow and Friday we'll be pausing our study of Genesis to observe the holy days of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. There will be no video for either of them; just a brief written devotion that I pray will touch your heart and draw you close to our Lord Jesus as we move into the weekend and prepare to celebrate the resurrection of our Savior.

Thanks so much for your time today everyone — please know that you will be in my prayers in the coming days, and if I may, I would ask that I be in your prayers as well. It would do my heart much good right now. Have a great day, blessings to you in our great and mighty God, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Hello everyone — God's peace to you today, and welcome to a special Maundy Thursday edition of EDiBS. Today is such an important day in the history of our faith...and yet sadly, it's a day that often seems to get lost during Holy Week. Years ago, Maundy Thursday was considered a high point of worship and preparation both for Good Friday and for the celebration of the Resurrection on Sunday, but many churches have done away with its observance. Today's session is simply designed to help you begin or end your day — or perhaps begin your Good Friday — in a meditative and quiet state of mind. Let's pray:

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
You call us to live your life,
follow where you have trod,
be your presence in the streets,
show compassion to the poor,
support the weak,
embrace the outcast,
bring lives into your kingdom.

Yet our hearts are troubled.
We are fearful of the task,
deafened to your promise
to be with us
wherever we might go.
Forgive our timidity,
grant us peace for the journey,
and strength for the day,
that we might demonstrate our love for you
As we spread your love to others
in the lives that we live and share.
In your precious name we pray,
Amen.

Maundy Thursday — some of you know it as Holy Thursday or even Green Thursday — is an evening to remember, literally. We call it “Maundy” from the Latin *Mandatum*, or mandate... command...for the new commandment that Jesus gives us on this night: the command to love one another. On this night we celebrate the gift of the love of Jesus, given to us for our spiritual nourishment — and we are also given the call to love others as He gives to us the ultimate example of what selfless love is all about.

On Maundy Thursday we let our Lord wash our feet — an astounding display of unconditional love — and then we watch in hushed amazement as He is broken and given for us. On this night, more than any other night, we pray together as God’s people to be faithful to this new commandment; that we will be empowered, equipped and most of all, emboldened to love others in the same way that we have been loved by Him.

I have just one thought for you tonight: How can you love someone between now and Sunday morning in a way that will show them Jesus? How can you be a reflection of the power of His love in a life that so desperately needs it? When it comes to you...and it will be big and scary and intimidating and seemingly unrealistic...then go do it. Because that’s probably where God wants you this weekend as one of His Easter people.

Jesus, you went up to Jerusalem to suffer and so enter into your glory.
Bring your Church to the Passover feast of heaven.

You were lifted high on the cross and pierced by the soldier's lance.
Heal our wounds.

You made the cross the tree of life.
Give its fruit to us, the redeemed, the reborn, the baptized.

On the cross you forgave the repentant thief.
Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy — and forgive our sins.

Much love to each of you in this Savior who loves us, friends. I’ll see you again next time.

A Good Friday Meditation

Hello, everyone. God’s rich peace to you on this Good Friday...a day where peace takes on a whole new meaning.

When I think about Good Friday I can't help but begin to think of the Resurrection at the same time. After all, the Resurrection is the proof that Good Friday worked. It's the proof that sin was atoned for, that reconciliation was made a reality, and that adoption was made complete. Good Friday and Easter Sunday together form a life-shaping truth that we cling to for hope and joy.

A few years ago at a Maundy Thursday worship service, one of my church members quietly approached me before the service and shared that his sister, whom we have been praying for as she battled cancer and awaited a liver transplant, had just received bad news. Her cancer had returned and was more pervasive than the doctors originally thought. They wouldn't be able to operate. And because of that, she had now been taken off of the transplant list as well. It was very bad news indeed.

And yet, because we were just about to start church, because I had Scripture on my mind, and because my focus had up to that moment been focused on our impending observances of the Christ's death and resurrection, I found myself saying something that at first glance might seem very heartless and uncaring. I looked my parishioner in the eye and said, "Everything's going to be okay."

Like I said, heartless and uncaring, right? Only...it wasn't. I didn't say those words to be trite. I didn't say them to dismiss the importance of what had just been shared with me. I didn't say "Everything's going to be okay" as a way to shut down the conversation so I could get on with the task of starting church. I spoke those words because I was addressing a fellow Christian, and as such they were the most natural words, the most comforting words, and the truest words I could say.

Everyone, the fact of Christ's death and resurrection does make everything okay in the life of a believer. Even the worst thing. Yes, there are still very real times of heartbreak and hardship. There are still very real times of grief, pain, and distress to contend with. There are still times when very bad news comes that must be met with very difficult choices. But what is also true is that all of those times are in the hands of the God who loves us and gave Himself for us. Christ's death and resurrection has intervened on the stage of human history to bring life and immortality to light in my life and yours. 1 Corinthians 15 says it this way: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Let me say it one more way: Christ suffered so that you and I and every other Christ follower, one day, will not. Really? Really. My suffering and your suffering and the suffering of your loved one has all been unequivocally overcome in the death and resurrection of Christ. That's a glorious hope! It's also a joyful truth that the Gospel holds out as a beacon for us to see by when times are dark.

In Romans 15 there's a beautiful passage penned by the apostle Paul, God breathing in and through him. He writes, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." What an incredible verse. It's breathtaking. Why do I bring it up? Because it's predicated on all that Paul taught in the previous chapters of that letter about the Lord Jesus Christ and His work of redemption in our lives. The life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is the source for all of our hope, joy and peace...a source that fills us to overflowing.

Today is Good Friday. It is good because Christ overcame the power of sin, death, and the grave. It is good because through the suffering of Christ, the seed that the Father planted burst

forth into glorious life. It is good because in Christ's suffering, our suffering has an end. And it is good because if we share in a death like His, we will also share in a resurrection like His. This Friday is good. Rejoice today in the One who made it so. God bless you richly for Jesus' sake, and have a wonderful weekend of worship and celebration as you rejoice that Christ is risen — He is risen indeed!

I'll see you again not Monday, but Tuesday, keeping with my tradition of taking Easter Monday as a day of personal worship, rest, and celebration. I'll look forward to seeing you all then!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and a most Blessed Easter to you as we continue to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ! I'm so glad to have you along with me today – thanks very much for coming along for a new week of daily time together in the Scriptures. With the Lord's help I trust that the next few minutes will be profitable for us all as we head back to Genesis 1 and the sixth day of creation, so let's pray and get to it.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you and praise you for your goodness to us as your people. You are the God of grace and glory, who alone is worthy of our worship and praise, and who alone meets our needs in this life. We bless your holy name, we honor you for your presence among us, and we ask that you would us near to you and grow us strong in faith and in deed. We pray this in the mighty and saving name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Getting Started As we get started today, having seen the unique and particular manner in which God created the animals during the initial portion of the sixth day — if you'd like you can go back and review that session at EDiBS.life — We now come to the high point of the entire creation account: the creation of man. Our focus this session: a fitting introduction.

Genesis 1:26

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

A group of young people doing a science project for school once broke down all of the chemical elements that make up a person. Here's what they came up with, using a 150-pound man as their example. According to their calculations, 150-pound man is made up of:

92.4 lbs. oxygen
31.5 lbs. carbon
14.6 lbs. hydrogen
4.6 lbs. nitrogen
2.8 lbs. phosphorous
1.12 lbs. chlorine
1.02 lbs. iron
0.34 lbs potassium
0.24 lbs. sulphur
0.12 lbs sodium
0.04 lbs magnesium
0.02 lbs. flourine

For the record, I am not well-versed in the field of chemistry, biology, or any other scientific subject. I can't say, therefore, whether this formula is a testament to the emerging academic brilliance of some young scientists-to-be or merely an especially impressive case of creative writing. What I can say, however, is that these students got at least one thing right in their formulation: men and women, human beings, are most certainly made from the elements. The Scripture is true, poetic though its declaration may be: from dust we were taken, and to dust we shall return.

Of course, dust is not *all* that we are, and with the words of today's passage before us God sets about helping us to understand some of the additional characteristics that go into the making us, us: specifically, the beauty of who we are, the backdrop against which He has made us, and the blessing that He has bestowed upon us as the chief objects of His creation. We'll be talking about different aspects of the creation of human beings from now until the end of Genesis 1, and actually, Genesis 2 will continue with the creation of man — male and female — in even more detail. That means we have several days ahead of us where the main topic of conversation has everything to do with us!

In our time together today, my main aim is to lay out some important bullet points regarding this verse so that we can talk about them in a more in-depth manner towards the end of the week. That, in fact, is going to be the format of tomorrow's session too, and then, making our list and checking it twice, we'll move into unpacking things as a whole. Briefly then, please make note of the following things today:

First, we have the use of the plural when God speaks of Himself. "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness." Here is God being shown to us, described for us, as One...yet also self-describing Himself in a plurality of Persons. We've already had an implicit mention of God as Triune at the very beginning of the book, and now the implicit turns to the explicit: here is our One God conversing with Himself in the unbroken, interconnected, yet utterly distinct circle of the Godhead: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. More to come on that in the days ahead!

Second, notice that it is only with the creation of human beings that God now makes something *in His own image*. Think about that for a minute: knowing that we are made in the image of God shows us that we are different from every other order of created being! Furthermore — and this is an especially important point in today's world with the ongoing blurring of distinctions between man and beast — the fact that God has created us in His own image also means there is an unbridgeable gap between human life and animal life. Yes, we are biologically similar to certain animals, but we are absolutely distinct in our moral, intellectual, and spiritual capabilities.

Finally today, having been made in the image of God, distinct from anything in the animal kingdom, God gives man dominion over that animal kingdom and the world in which it roams. Man is to rule it. Man is to put it to use. Man is to responsibly steward the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the livestock, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and yes, the very earth itself. It has all been made for man...for man to manage and enjoy and to use as his intellect, creativity, and heart sees fit. So far, then, the opening sentences on the creation of man here in Genesis 1:26.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, each of these first three points regarding the creation of human beings gives us so much to talk about, and talk about it we will in the coming days! Tomorrow we'll delve into more on the subject by discussing some additional attributes given to the human race not shared with any other part of the created order, and then in the next several sessions we'll begin assembling an important framework that brings it all together. I hope you'll join in as we do that; lots of good study time and lots of things to think about as we move forward! Have a great day everyone, and I'll see you again soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace, peace, and resurrection joy to you in our risen Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS! I'm glad to be with you today, where over the next few minutes we'll be continuing on the downslope of Genesis 1. Right now we're in the midst of studying the sixth day of creation, and specifically, the creation of the human race. Let's take a moment for a word of prayer, and then let's open our Bibles and begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, we come before you on this day with hearts full of thanks for your love and mercy. We praise you, Lord Jesus, for your gracious and saving work for us at Calvary. We are grateful, O Holy Spirit, for your power and presence in our lives, which calls us to faith, enlightens us with your gifts, and sustains us in our faith. Speak to us now through your strong Word – in the name of our Savior we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're headed back to the creation of man on day six of creation. Our focus: true dignity and worth!

Genesis 1:26

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

I'm always struck by the things that theologian J.I. Packer writes. I say "writes" because while many people think he's been long dead, he's actually very much alive at the age of 92, and his mind continues to think and express great things about our great God very deeply and very devotionally. He can't physically write as he used to, nor can he read as he once did, because macular degeneration has taken his sight — but that hasn't stopped his words from finding their way to the page.

Back in the mid 1980s Packer wrote a book called *Your Father Loves You*, and in one section he discussed both the fact that we are made in God's image and the significance thereof. He said, "The assertion that man is made in God's image shows each man his true dignity and worth. As God's image-bearer, he merits infinite respect. God's claims on us must be taken with total seriousness. No human being should ever be thought of as simply a cog in a machine, or mere means to an end."

I love those words, because they cause me to stop and think about my own life and the manner in which I see myself and those around me. God's image-bearer? Amazing! Meriting infinite respect? The thought leaves me speechless. It bears unending reflection and is worthy of constant reminder.

Recently I came across an illustration that speaks to this truth in a very down-to-earth way. I'd like to share it with you today; maybe it will help you as it has helped me.

A Dutch bicycle manufacturer, VanMoof, has come up with an ingenious idea for ensuring that its product is safely transported to its customers. The website *Oddity Central* reported it as follows:

VanMoof plans to sell 90 percent of its bicycles online by 2020, but after seeing a considerable number of products getting damaged during deliveries and incurring serious losses, the company was left with two options – rethink its business plan or come up with an effective solution. Luckily, they managed to come up with something so brilliant that it's bound to be copied by other companies that rely heavily on online sales. Creative director Bex Rad wrote on the company blog: "Earlier this year our co-founder had a flash of genius. Our boxes are about the same size as a (really really reaaaally massive) flatscreen television. Flatscreen televisions always arrive in perfect condition. What if we just printed a flatscreen television on the side of our boxes?"

Guess what? By simply printing a flatscreen TV on its bicycle boxes, VanMoof has been able to reduce the rate of damaged goods by 70 to 80 percent!

Everyone, here is a trustworthy saying: when we value what's in the box, we treat the box with greater care. In verse 26 of Genesis 1 we've seen God place great value and pronouncing great blessing upon what He has made. There's great value in the box. Tomorrow when we get to Genesis 1:27, we'll read the following: "So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them." When we understand that people have been imprinted with the very image of God, as Packer so eloquently wrote, we treat people with greater care. But wait, there's more! Why? Because there's something else that belongs on the outside of our box...something that increases our value even more. Yes, we possess God's image; but we have also been bought and redeemed by the sacrifice of God's own Son. That means that every person you meet has a price tag placed on them by God Himself — the value of the very life of Christ.

Let me say it one more time: when we value what's in the box, we treat the box with greater care.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, that certainly applies to the people all around you each day, but don't forget: it also applies to you. Do you value what's in the box of you? God does. Infinitely so. It's something that bears unending reflection, and it's worthy of constant reminder. Think about that, won't you? I'll see you again next time to talk about it some more. God's rich peace to you, everyone — have a great day, and the joy of the Lord be your strength.

Greetings

Greetings, folks! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! It's a blessing to be with you today as we come to the end of the week, and it's always great to share together in the learning of God's Word and the message of His love for us — chiefly demonstrated in His Son. We're coming to the end of Genesis 1 today, so let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, Father Son & Holy Spirit, we proclaim your great worth this day as we bow in your presence. You are high and lifted up, so far beyond our thoughts and so far above our ability to grasp the true sense of your holiness and righteousness. We declare your perfection — knowing even so that we cannot fully comprehend the vast nature of what that truly means. And yet we are in awe of you, and we worship you, and we stand amazed at your love for us — a love so great that you would send Jesus to us in order that we not perish but have everlasting life. Please bless the hearing of your Word now. May it find its mark in our hearts. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 1 ends in beautiful detail and on a wonderful high point. Our focus this session: And it was very good!

Genesis 1:27-31

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

When I left the city and moved to the country, I was enthralled, entranced, and in every way smitten by the little piece of property we'd bought in the Missouri Ozarks. The giddiness, in fact, never wore off. For almost the entire time we lived there, every day was a day of discovery. I learned that there were black walnut and shagbark hickory trees on our land that gave large crops of nuts each year. I found, completely by chance, a persimmon tree that gave wonderful fruit for baking each year. There was also a mulberry tree, whose fruit we'd put into pancakes and waffles. In addition, there were gooseberries growing in the woods and blackberry thickets near the creek, and there was wild garlic and onions that grew in the meadow. To top it all off, we had rich, sweet fox grapes growing along our fencerows and up many of our cedar trees, and with those clusters we made fox grape jelly and other treats. I always marveled that none of those things had been planted by anyone; they were simply native to the region. They were indigenous species. Add the spring-fed pond, the beautiful oak and sassafras trees, the wildflowers that bloomed from early spring to late fall, and when you put it all together, those 12 1/2 acres were, in my mind, a kind of paradise. It wasn't a perfect place, but it was a beautiful place nonetheless. I can only imagine what it must have been like before the Fall!

Today, coming to the end of the first chapter of Genesis, we don't need to do much imagining about the world prior to the Fall, and why? Because after 30 descriptive verses detailing the creative work of Almighty God to bring the heavens and the earth into existence, the 31st verse sums everything up in a simple, declarative manner. What was the divine assessment concerning all that had been created? "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."

So — what was in this world? Let's review: fish and sea creatures and birds, verses 21-23. Livestock, beasts of the field, and things that crept along the ground, verses 24-25. There were also plants and trees and other vegetation, all of which were created not just for their beauty, but as a food source for both animals and humans, verses 11-12 & 29-30. And what of those humans? We'll get to them in detailed fashion when we open to Genesis 2, but already in Genesis 1 we see that the creation of man was the high point, the pinnacle, of God's work. Man, in fact — as we saw in verse 26 and now see reiterated in verse 28 — was given the whole of the earth and everything in it for personal use and common good; man was to subdue and rule over it. Add the waters of the sea and the stars of the sky and the two great lights (the sun and the moon) to rule the day and the night, and when you put it all together, guess what you have? You have, not a *kind* of paradise, but paradise *indeed*; paradise personified. This was not an imperfect place; it was perfect in every way, it was Very Good. And as to beauty? Again, while we can only imagine, the world as yet untainted by the curse of sin must have been an astoundingly lovely, harmonious, and balanced place.

It was this world into which God placed Adam and Eve, created in God's own image and bearers together of that image. Adam and Eve, distinctly male and distinctly female. Adam and Eve, separate from and superior to every other part of God's creation. What does their having been made in the image of the Creator signify? In one sense, it means that they acted on His behalf, stewarding that which He made, ruling all that He created. In another sense, it means that they enjoyed one another in relational perfection just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the three Persons of the Godhead, enjoy One another in relational perfection. Finally, having been created in the image of God, Adam and Eve also possessed in themselves attributes and characteristics like unto God, things with which no other part of creation was blessed. Think of reason and morality. Think of the capacity for love and commitment in relationships with others. Think of the uniqueness of communication through developed language. Think of creativity and art. Human beings possess these things because they are created in God's own image. The animal kingdom, though certainly blessed in its own right and certainly possessing its own unique attributes in terms of, for example, relationships and communication, exists on a separate, and lower, plain than does humanity. They do not bear the image of God, because they were not created in His image. Only Man...male and female...fit the bill — and when we come back together next time, we'll have more to say on this point, because it's an important one not to be overlooked or under-considered.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, because we have lost the knowledge, and even the very concept, of true perfection as sinful people living in a sinful world, we can't begin to fathom what Very Good was like at the end of the sixth day of creation. And yet the simple way our Bible lays it out for us is beautiful. It harkens back to a time when loveliness, harmony, and balance were all that there was; the glory of God in His creation shone forth in complete purity, with nothing to cloud it. While we know that perfection is gone for now, we also know that In Christ, all things

are being made new again. There's a theological richness afoot as we begin to remember, even now at this early stage of our study of Genesis, that Jesus Christ is actually the Second Adam, come to redeem and restore. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive! We'll have much to say about that all-important truth from — oh, about Genesis 3 onward! I'm looking forward to the days ahead, everyone, and I hope you'll come along for the ride.

Have a terrific weekend, and I'll look forward to being with you again next week. Until then, God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone — Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our risen Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! It's my joy and privilege to be with you for some time in God's Word at the beginning of another week, and I pray that it will be a blessing for you as we seek the Lord together. Today we'll be adding one more point regarding the "specialness" of what God did in creating human beings on the sixth day, and we'll finish with a perspective on faith and belief that I think will be profitable for our consideration. Let's take a few moments and prepare our hearts as we open our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, hear the cry of our heart today as your people. Some of us are happy, others of us sad, still others of us pensive and unsure of ourselves right now. But you know all things, and you love us dearly...so we ask that in your mercy you would look upon our need and bless us as we cast all our cares upon you. Speak to us today through your holy Word. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've seen that Genesis 1 ends with the creation of man as the pinnacle of God's creative work during the six days of creation. The Bible also sets man on an altogether different and higher plane than the rest of created life, which much of modern-day thought has rejected because of the ever broadening influence of evolutionary theory. Our focus this session: a reaffirmation of the uniqueness of man.

Genesis 1:27-28

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Lewis Thomas was one of the most eminent scholars of the twentieth century in the fields of medicine and medical research. His CV reads like an Ivy League Who's Who: he attended Princeton University and Harvard Medical School, spent time as Dean of Yale Medical School and New York University School of Medicine, and he also served as President of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Institute. Besides his life in the world of medicine, he also wrote essays and poetry, often about the cultural implications of scientific discoveries.

In 1981, Dr. Thomas was interviewed by Harvard Magazine, and in that interview he made what to his esteemed colleagues was a shocking statement about the world and humanity's place within it. Why was it shocking? Two reasons: first, because he expressed genuine doubt in one of the scientific community's most commonly held assumptions, and second, because he did so in a public and very secular forum. He said,

I cannot make peace with the randomness doctrine; I cannot abide the notion of purposelessness and blind chance in nature. And yet I do not know what to put in its place for the quieting of my mind. It is absurd to say that a place like this is absurd, when it contains, in front of our eyes, so many billions of different forms of life, each one in its way absolutely perfect, all linked together to form what would surely seem to an outsider a huge, spherical organism. We talk — some of us, anyway — about the absurdity of the human situation, but we do this because we do not know how we fit in, or what we are for. The stories we used to make

up to explain ourselves do not make sense anymore, and we have run out of new stories, for the moment.

What an incredibly profound statement from an individual universally lauded and admired in the world of science...and what an unabashedly raw and honest admission as well: the admission that the preeminent ideas arising from the world of academia do not provide satisfactory answers to the deepest questions of life. Did you catch the last line of Dr. Thomas's statement? Let me quote it again: "The stories we used to make up to explain ourselves do not make sense anymore, and we have run out of new stories, for the moment." Wow.

Everyone, even if we were to look at the world from a completely secular perspective, we would have to come to terms with a difficult pill to swallow, and it is this: man in the evolutionary view was not the goal of evolution. Evolution had no goals. Rather, according to evolutionary theory man is a mere happenstance, as is every other living thing on earth. And if man is lumped together with every other form of life we've discovered thus far in our world as something having ultimately come from the proverbial primordial soup of the ancient past, then the human situation is absurd indeed. This was Lewis Thomas's conundrum, and he was bold to admit it.

Today, I would like to be equally bold in pointing out a more-than-plausible answer to that conundrum, one that speaks deeply into the struggling heart of anyone trying to make sense of the whys and wherefores of life in a world they are wrestling to understand — especially when it comes to their place in it. What is it? The biblical declaration that humans did not evolve from something that came before them, but were specially created in the image of God.

According to the Bible, God created all that there is, including every living thing. According to the Bible, man was the chief object of that creation, literally formed by God and given the breath of life by God. According to the Bible, man is not an evolutionary descendant of the beasts; in fact, man has been given dominion *over* the beasts. And finally, according to the Bible it is not merely or even chiefly the biological differences (anatomical or physiological) that definitively set you and me apart from every other life form anyway. Instead, it is our mind and soul and our God-given ability to communicate with our Creator that truly sets us apart. We are different from the plants and the trees and the beasts and the fish and the fowl. We are the apple of God's eye. Dr. Paul Kretzmann said it this way: "But the fact that God gives to humanity the power and government over all the animate and inanimate things of the earth indicates that the propagation of the human race is not the process of mere animal reproduction, for man, as the crown of creation, is living on a higher plane."

Why bring all of this up today? To make a simple point, one that Dr. Lewis Thomas (and many others like him) searched to find as one thoroughly perplexed and at times distressed by the inadequacies of his life's work to quiet his mind about how human beings fit into the big picture or what they are here for. What is that point? That the Scriptures provide a cohesive and coherent framework upon which to hang sensible answers to the deep questions of existence. They are not folly nor fairytale. They provide at least as much — and on the whole, much more — in the way of measurable evidence and philosophical integrity for their assertions as does any atheistic, Darwinistic, or evolutionary world view, and it frankly takes far less faith to simply take God at His Word than it does to keep up with a disjointed and continually changing secular story about the origins of the universe. As G.K. Chesterton said, "It is absurd for the Evolutionist to complain that it is unthinkable for an admittedly unthinkable God to make everything out of nothing, and then pretend that it is more thinkable that nothing should turn itself into anything."

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, there is a truth that, whether Christians or not, I believe all people must see when it comes to sifting good science from bad, not to mention good theology from bad. No one has said it more poignantly than Dr. Philip Johnson, whom I mentioned to you last week as one of the fathers of the Intelligent Design movement. Please hear what he has to say as we close, and then let his words sift you and move you to deeper reflection. Dr. Johnson, speaking of evolution as a belief system rather than an established scientific fact, said,

The story of human descent from apes is not merely a scientific hypothesis; it is the secular equivalent of the story of Adam and Eve, and a matter of immense cultural importance. Propagating the story requires illustrations, museum exhibits, and television reenactments. It also requires a priesthood, in the form of thousands of researchers, teachers, and artists who provide realistic and imaginative detail and carry the story out to the general public The scientific priesthood that has authority to interpret the official creation story gains immense cultural influence thereby, which it might lose if the story were called into question. The experts therefore have a vested interest in protecting the story, and in imposing rules of reasoning that make it invulnerable. When critics ask, 'Is your theory really true?' we should not be satisfied to be answered that 'it is good science, as we define science'.

This, in a different way, is exactly what Dr. Thomas was saying...and again, the reality is that the witness of God's Word provides a clear alternative that holds water where the other theories leak. Think about that as you go through your day!

We'll have more to say on this in the days ahead, so do stay connected to the series and be sure to join in each day as we study. Have a wonderful day, folks, and I'll see you again next time.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich blessings to you in Christ, and welcome to another session of EDiBS, our day by day journey through God's Word together as an online ministry family. On this Tuesday we're opening for the first time to the second chapter of Genesis, a book that has already served to teach us and order our thoughts in special and significant ways. I'm glad you're here; let's pray and get to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Almighty God, speak to us now through your precious Word. Help us to do more than simply read it; instead, help us to take it into the depths of our hearts, where it can do its transforming work in us. We thank you and ask these things in the great and saving name of our Savior Jesus, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 2 begins with the seventh day, when God finished all the work He had done. Our focus this session: a day of rest.

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Greek legend shares an incident concerning the great teller of fables, Aesop. As the story goes, one day Aesop was playing games in the street with some little boys when a man walked by and began to mock and jeer at him. "Why are you wasting your time with such frivolous activity?" the man demanded. Aesop responded by picking up a bow, loosening its string, and placing it on the ground. Then he said to his detractor, "Now, answer the riddle, if you can. Tell us what the unstrung bow implies."

The man looked at it for several moments but had no idea what point Aesop was trying to make. Finally, Aesop explained. Looking at the man he said, "If you keep a bow always bent, it will break eventually; but if you let it go slack, it will be more fit for use when you want it."

As we come now to the opening verses of Genesis 2, I have one simple thought for you to meditate on as we start this new chapter of study: what's the condition of your bow today? Aesop was right — a bow can't stay taut and bent in perpetuity; the constant tension will eventually cause it to break. Letting it rest slack on occasion is a good thing, because it will be more fit for use and ready to perform when it's actually needed.

People are also like that. That's one reason we all need to take time to rest. In fact, with today's passage, God sets out that very pattern for us when we see Him rest from all His work.

We have much to study in this portion of Scripture, and we'll be looking at several very important points in the days ahead that touch on the rhythm of life as it revolves around work and yes, rest. Why did God rest on the seventh day? What, actually, is rest? What are the implications for us? And perhaps most urgent, is the sabbath rest something to which we need to give renewed attention in this day and age?

As we get ready to delve into those topics, let's start by doing something a little different than what I would typically suggest. Set aside some special time today to relax physically, to renew yourself emotionally, and to focus spiritually. Take time to loosen the bow. We'll tighten up the string anew when we come back tomorrow, and we'll have lots to discuss that will help us to grow as God's people. But until then, rest.

Take care, everyone, and I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS! Thank you for being here today as we take time to open our Bibles, where right now we're working our way through the opening chapters of the book of Genesis. As we gather, the Lord gathers with us as we come to His Word and seek His face, so let's pray and ask His blessing on our study time over these next few minutes.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this time to be quiet, to rid ourselves of distractions, and to focus on you and your Word together. We ask that by it you would teach us and transform us, and that through it you would also encourage and sustain us. We do so need you in our lives, and we are truly grateful for your presence with us right now. May your name be glorified in all things, Lord! In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're back to Genesis 2 and the Scriptural narrative regarding the seventh day. Our focus: the gift and the holiness of a sabbath rest.

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

My father did it, and I never understood why. These days I find myself doing it, and I think I'm beginning to realize what it's all about. What am I talking about? The propensity to sit, usually quietly, almost always outside, for long periods of time...seemingly doing nothing. For years, whether in the evening after work or on the weekend, whether at the beach or on the back patio, Dad engaged in that behavior. At 87, he still does it today. To other people in the family, such a state fails to qualify as activity, and just as I used to chuckle over my dad's habit of sitting by himself in his own world, my own children tease me about the same thing. They ask me what universe I'm occupying, or what I'm thinking about, or if I'm really conscious. The only answer I can give them is that the quiet time is rejuvenating. It's precious to me. And while it's certainly void of activity in the typical sense of the word, it's anything but passive. The best way I can describe it, in fact, is that it's an active, purposeful rest — and it's something I consider to be a great gift from my Lord.

As we come back to the opening of Genesis 2 today, we come back to the statement in Scripture that on the seventh day, God rested from all His work...all the work He had done in creating the heavens and the earth. Yesterday we talked briefly about the fact that God did this in part to give us a pattern to follow ourselves: just as God rested from His work, so on one day of the week it's also given for us to rest. Aside from that, however, is there any other reason that God rested? Did He need it? Was He tired or fatigued? Was it necessary for Him to pause before moving to the next thing on His divine agenda?

The answer to those questions is, of course, no. God is omnipotent. He neither slumbers nor sleeps. He is the First Cause of all that is in the universe, the One from whom all things proceed. Nothing can fatigue Him or bring Him to the point of needing *anything*, including rest. Once again, then, why is it that on the seventh day, our Almighty and Everlasting God rested?

One thing we can say in response to that question is that God rested to show that His work of creation was complete. There was nothing more to add to what had been made. God made everything that needed to be made, and everything was very good.

Second, God rested on the seventh day not just as a pattern *for* us, but also as a gift *to* us. God desired the rest and replenishment of His people, and by showing what rest was, He set us up for the blessings of refreshment, renewal, and restoration.

Third though, and most important, God rested on the seventh day to show us a much deeper truth: the establishment of the Sabbath would ultimately become a foreshadowing of the rest that would be brought to all of us through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who fulfilled the purpose and plan of the Sabbath for us and in us by His perfect life, His atoning sacrifice for sin, and His resurrection victory over sin death and the devil. Because of that reality, *every* day for us is a day of rest in the finished work of our Savior, and every day is one specially given to us by God and set apart to God.

Related to that last point, notice, if you would, one more thing about today's passage: not what *is* there, but what is conspicuously *not* there. The description of each day of creation ended with the phrase, "So there was evening and there was morning, the ____ day. Where is that phrase as applied to day number seven? The answer is that it's not there. You won't find it. This is because God's rest for us isn't confined to one literal day, nor is it designed to be fleeting or to come around only on certain appointed days. In Jesus, God has made an eternal Sabbath rest for His people. That's why we say that God's act of rest on the seventh day was at its heart a day not for the rejuvenating of Himself, but for the rejuvenation of us. He meant for it to be precious. And while His rest on that day was certainly void of activity in the typical sense of the word, it was anything but passive. It was active and purposeful...and again, a gift for us all. Scholar and teacher James Boice expressed it beautifully when he wrote, "God, having completed His work of creation, rests, as if to say, 'This is the destiny of those who are My people; to rest as I rest, to rest in Me.'"

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, that's something I'd like us all to remember: there absolutely exists for the people of God a sabbath rest. It isn't one day a week out of seven; it's every day of the week through the love of our Redeemer. Our true rest, our true peace, and our true times of refreshment, renewal, and restoration, are found in Him. If like me you at times find those things in short supply — maybe even in short supply right now — then right now is a great time to lay down your burdens, unload the heaviness that weighs upon your heart, and find sabbath rest for your soul in our crucified, risen, and ascended Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will come to you with what you need.

Thanks for being here today, everyone — I'll look forward to seeing you again next time. God's peace, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's grace, mercy, and peace to each of you today in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to be with you for another session of Bible study, where today we'll be going back to Genesis 2 as the Scriptures return to one special aspect of God's creative work. Let's turn there now and then take a moment and pray.

Prayer

Gracious God, you are great and mighty – alone in your splendor and your glory. There is none beside you, and we proclaim you as you are: the only and all-wise God of the universe. Thank you for your love and mercy, and thank you for your promise to never leave us or forsake us. Bless us now through the hearing and study of your Word, and give us understanding as we learn. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, in Genesis 2 a transition begins to occur: from the creation of the heavens and the earth on days one through six to God's rest on the seventh day, we now double back to the creation of man, and thus move, from this point forward, to an emphasis on people in the biblical narrative. Our focus this session: a flashback to Adam.

Genesis 2:4-7

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. 5 When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— 7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

It was third grade. We were about to do, in my estimation at least, one of the coolest art projects ever. The excitement in the room was palpable.

Mrs. Davis, our teacher, was an amateur potter with her own kiln. Sometimes she would bring some of her finished pieces to class and show us the kinds of things she liked to make. She also told us how her kiln worked to fire, bake, and finish each pot, vase, or sculpture she created.

As eight-year-old kids, we were certainly interested when she'd share her work with us, but we didn't obsess over it. We enjoyed it in the moment, and then, as third graders are wont to do, we moved on to other things.

That all changed on the day Mrs. Davis, with no advance notice, brought pottery clay to class and announced that we would be making our own pots, vases, and sculptures. Suddenly, our passing interest in her world became an undying passion in our own. We were going to be potters just like her — and you can bet your bottom dollar that every single one of us in Room 8 at Yucaipa Elementary School in Yucaipa, California, was intent on creating a personal masterpiece.

We have quite a few things to talk about in the passage we've just read today, and we'll get to them all before we close out the week, but for this session I want to jump to verse 7 and give

you just one thing to think about for the day. Genesis 2, coming now from a different angle than did Genesis 1, begins to restate for us the creation of man on the sixth day. In doing so, it gives us more detail than the first chapter of Scripture did, and the detail is quite frankly fascinating. Why? First, our Bible tells us that God did more than merely *speaking* humanity into existence as He had done with every other part of the created order. Instead, He took and *formed* man from the dust of the ground, and then *breathed* life into him...breathed, literally, His very Spirit into him. We'll be addressing that point in our next session, because it's truly profound to consider and worthy of our study time.

Also profound to consider and worthy of our study, however, is the simple Hebrew word used to describe *how* God formed man from the dust of the ground: it's a verb commonly used to describe the work of — you guessed it — a potter. Not, however, an amateur potter like Mrs. Davis, but a master potter. A true craftsman. An individual who knows the raw material and understands how to fashion it just so to achieve what has been envisioned in the mind's eye.

The fact that God is a Master Potter and a true Craftsman isn't something that would give most of us pause. We ascribe monikers like that to Him all the time, and because He's God, we expect such superlatives to be used when referring to Him. What we often don't realize, however — and if we did it would give us *tremendous* pause — is that as the Master Potter, the raw material He's using is you and me...and because He is a true Craftsman, He understands how to fashion us just so to achieve what He has envisioned us to be in His mind's eye.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, if you've only ever had a passing interest in what God thinks of you and how He's working out His plans in your life, a passage like this should make you stop and rethink things. Like He very literally did with Adam on the sixth day of creation, God is likewise, albeit in different ways, shaping and forming you today. He has an ongoing and unique interest in you. You are the kind of thing He likes to make, and indeed, remake. In fact, someday...by the time He's finished with you...you'll understand that all along, He was creating you to be His masterpiece. The truth is that in God's eyes, you're one of His coolest art projects ever — and I believe that truth is worthy of your undying passion!

Let's close today with a verse from Isaiah 64: "But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." (Isaiah 64:8)

Have a great day everyone — I'll see you again tomorrow to take this up another time. God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Hello everyone — God's grace and peace to you today in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! I'm glad you're here today for Bible study, and prayerful as always that these next few minutes we'll be spending together will be profitable minutes for you — profitable for your growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's our never-ending goal here at the ministry, and if there's ever anything I can do to serve you in a specific way, do be sure to let me know. On this last day of our week we're still chugging our way through Genesis 2, so let's pray as we open the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord, you have been a great blessing to your people. You have called them from darkness into light; you have washed their crimson stain of sin away through the blood of your Son; you have taken those who were nobodies and in Christ have made them somebodies. Your people have a hope and a future because of your grace and your mercy. Bless the hearing and learning of your Word this day, and use it in our lives to build us up and grow us deep in the knowledge and love of our Savior. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

Getting started on this Friday, we're returning to Genesis 2 to continue following the Lord's creation of Adam and the human race. Our focus this session:

Genesis 2:4-7

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. 5 When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— 7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Yesterday morning, I took a walk on the beach here in Georgia. Along with the shells and sand dollars and jellyfish taking up space along the shore, one other thing caught my eye: the last vestiges of what had been a beautiful sandcastle. It was beginning to wash away as the waves encroached on its position, but you could still see the splendor of what it had been. There were towers and tunnels and rock-encrusted parapets, all crafted with care. There were flags made from seaweed and bamboo twigs. Clam, muscle, and oyster shells were used as roofing materials and for decoration. To top things off, the entire compound was surrounded by a moat filled with ocean water. It was obvious that a lot of thought had gone into its making. As I said a moment ago, by the time I arrived on the scene it was already fading into history, but there was still enough remaining to be impressed — especially when you stopped to consider that it had all be done by hand. Someone had put a lot of work into their creation.

Coming back today to God's Word and considering the text before us, we've happened upon a retelling of, and an expansion on, the day when God created man. There are a lot of other things in place by the time our Lord forms Adam, but the beauty of Adam, the uniqueness of Adam, and the splendor of Adam stands out nonetheless. Every part of him has been carefully and thoughtfully crafted. Every part impresses. A lot of thought has gone into his making, and yes — it's very clear that God put a lot of work into this most special aspect of His creation. Perhaps most impressive of all? It has all been done by hand!

There are several important points to make regarding today's passage, and what I'd like to do is simply enumerate them one by one as we go verse by verse. Each of them contributes to the overarching theme at hand: the image Adam bears and the role he fills as God's creative masterpiece.

Verse 4: The first thing we see in verse 4 is something we mentioned yesterday: with this verse we have now come to a transition in God's Word from things to people. The generations of the heavens and the earth, that is, when and how they were created, is now complete. The focus now shifts to the people who will populate the earth and the lives they will live — both unto God, and later, away from God. We are moving now into the personal.

In keeping with that shift from things to people, we see another remarkable thing in today's text, also in verse 4: God, for the first time, is not referred to as Elohim in the Hebrew, but as Yahweh — His "personal" name, if you will. What most of your Bible translations render as "the LORD God" (usually with LORD in all caps), is the name for our Lord that scholars call the Tetragrammaton because of the four consonants that spell it out: YHWH. That's a different topic of conversation for another time, but for the moment, we should simply note that Yahweh — the Tetragrammaton — is a name which refers to God's self-existence. It's reflects on who He is. It's a declaration that He is the only self-existent and self-sufficient Being. Another way to say it is that only God has life in and of Himself — and that's the essential meaning of His name...again, used for the first time here.

Verses 5-6: Moving on to verses 5-6, we next come to a flashback, as it were. This is not a different or competing account of the early days of creation to what we have in Genesis 1, but simply a different facet thereof, the sharing of the narrative from another angle. For various reasons — principally to show that without a man on earth to work it and subdue it, the world was not yet truly complete — this account thus begins before there was any vegetation on the earth at all. Yet after chaos was brought to order, and after wonderfulness was brought forth from nothingness, the time came for God to initiate His coup de grâce: the creation of man to fill the earth and subdue it. Which brings us, of course, to the extraordinary witness of verse 7.

Verse 7: Again, this is something that we've mentioned before, and I alluded to it in today's introduction as well, but what a marvelous statement we have in this final verse of the day: "Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."

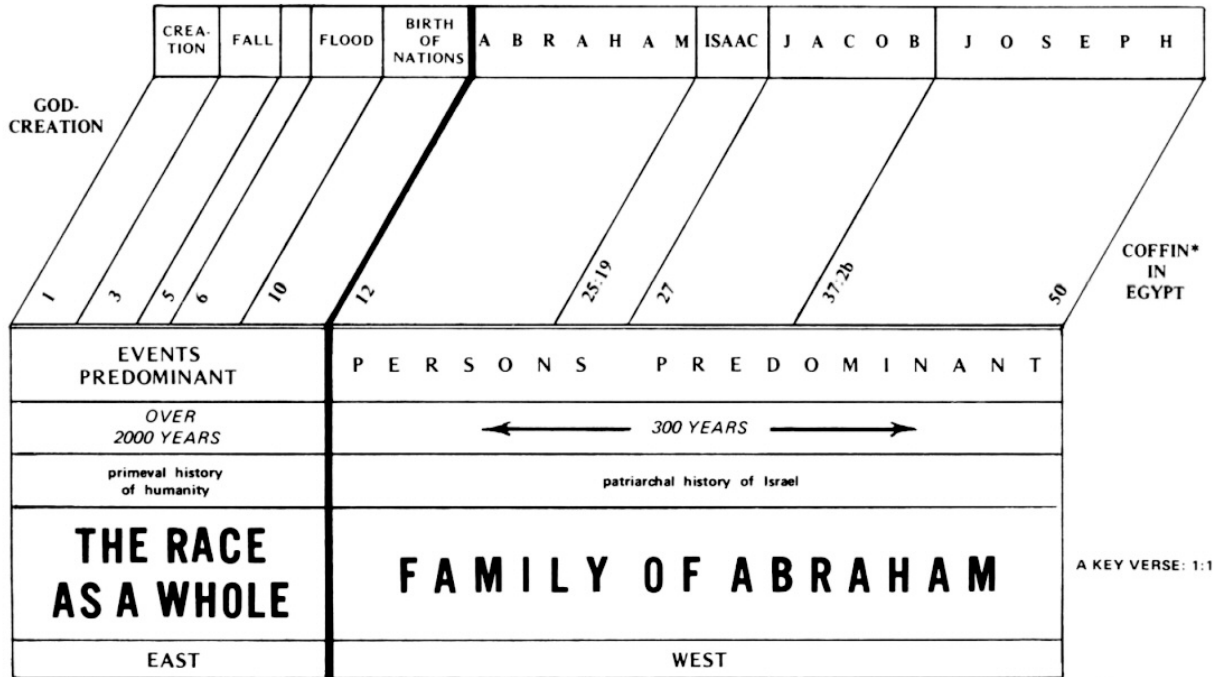
Please don't dismiss the significance of this point. Though we've mentioned it several times now over the past several weeks, it still bears repeating: man is the only living thing in all of creation where the God of the universe did more than speak something into existence. Instead, He formed man from the dust. With His own divine hand He fashioned man just as He wanted man to be. After He had created the body of man, God did something more: He breathed His very self, His Spirit, His divine breath of life, into the nostrils of man. That's how man became not just a living being, but a living being created in the image of God.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, at this point in time man was perfect. He was very good. As the image bearer of his Creator and the subduer of his Lord's creation, he was the in perfect

place at the perfect time for the perfect reason. It was all in accordance with God perfect plan... which is what we'll be seeing more of when we come back together next time.

Have a terrific weekend everyone; the Lord is with you, and I'm praying for you as you head into the next couple of days. Take care, and I'll see you again soon.



COFFIN* IN EGYPT

A KEY VERSE: 1:1

- "Beginnings" in GENESIS:
1. world 1:1-25
 2. human race 1:26-2:25
 3. sin in the world 3:1-7
 4. promise of redemption 3:8-24
 5. family life 4:1-15
 6. civilization 4:16ff.
 7. nations of the world chs. 10, 11
 8. Hebrew race ch. 12ff.

The coffin suggested DELIVERANCE from bondage (see 50:25)

A KEY PHRASE: "these are the generations of"



Greetings

Greetings, everybody — God's peace, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you as we enter a new week of Bible study together, presently continuing forward in our study of Genesis. As always, I'm glad to know you've joined in for our time in God's Word, and also as always, I invite you to take a moment and pray with me as we begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are the bringer of joy to our lives and the bringer of joy to all the world, because you have sent your Son Jesus Christ to us as Savior. We thank you for the redemption we have because of Christ and His cross; because of the sacrifice He made to bring us forgiveness and reconciliation. It's in Jesus' precious name that we come to you this day, asking for a great blessing as we open the Scriptures. Speak to us Lord God, and do your work in us. Amen.

Getting Started

Getting things started on this Monday, With the Lord now having created Adam, He next sets out to prepare a special dwelling place for him. Our focus: Eden, in the east.

Genesis 2:8-9

8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

I just bought my first gardening magazine in about three years, which for me is a pretty long dry spell. I'm generally a sucker for anything plant-related, and any trip to the store always includes time in the magazine aisle. For whatever reason, however, things haven't been capturing my imagination, sparking my interest, or piquing my curiosity. I guess I've been focused on other things.

That all changed over the weekend. *Southern Living* put out its annual springtime small-garden special interest publication, and the cover grabbed me and didn't let go. What was it that pulled me in? A beautiful courtyard with lovely geometry, a stunning water feature, and a mix of formal and informal plantings that provided the perfect combination of color, balance and structure. Taken together, it was a scene of perfect loveliness...or at least about as perfect as things can get in this world.

As we come to God's Word today, we're being given a description of another garden — one not merely having the guise of perfection, but one which is truly perfect. There's nothing in its description that's particularly stunning...nothing that would immediately cause us to do a

double take if we saw it on the cover of a magazine...but there are nonetheless two intriguing and important things to see that pull us in to this divinely prepared place.

First is what I just mentioned: this garden, the garden of Eden, Paradise, was divinely prepared by God Himself for Adam's habitation. Although His entire work of creation was perfect, God chose to do even more for man by preparing this special place and planting it with every good thing. It would be home for humanity. There's beauty in this fact, because it's part of an ongoing witness to humanity's special place and position in the created order of things, and it's also witness to God's love and His hand of favor on man as the chief object of His creation.

Second however, and above all, is something completely concrete...and yet totally abstract. It captures the imagination, sparks interest, and piques curiosity, because on the one hand it's something we can understand and take at face value, yet on the other hand it's something completely beyond us and outside our ability to experience. What am I talking about? In the midst of the garden there were two special trees: the tree of life, whose fruit provided perfect health and strength, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was placed there for the purpose of testing man.

Man, remember, was not created as an automaton or a robot, incapable of making his own decisions. Rather, man was created with an intellect and a heart and a will. He was free to make choices and render decisions as a sentient being. He was created in the image of God, and God never desired for Himself a creature incapable of understanding or participating by choice in a relationship with Him. This also, incidentally, is witness to humanity's special place and position in creation, and likewise, to God's love and hand of favor. Because God loved man, He gave man the freedom of choice; so the presence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As Dr. Paul Kretzmann wrote in his commentary on Genesis, "By obedience to God's command concerning it Adam would retain his consecrated righteousness and holiness in the perfection of heavenly bliss, while by disobedience he would become guilty of sin with all its attendant harm."

Wrapping Up

We know, of course, and bear in our own lives every day, the outcome of Adam's free will in this matter, and we'll be getting into that particular narrative very soon as we continue on through these opening chapters of Genesis. As we wrap things up for the moment, however, hold onto this thought: even as we start, with this development, an amazing journey that will take us to the highest of heights with the creation of Eve and then to the deepest depths as Adam plunges the entirety of the cosmos into ruin, we are making our journey as a people dearly loved, and continually loved, by God. How is it that we...fallen, sinful human beings living in a fallen, sinful world, can even recount this history today? How is it that we can testify to these things? Why are we even here if such terrible things befell humanity? We can recount and testify, and we are here today, because the terribleness of the Fall was not the end of the story. We can recount and testify, and we are here today, because though by one man came death, by another Man, capital M, came the resurrection from the dead. Sin is not the end; redemption is. It was so for the ancients as they looked for the coming of the promised Redeemer, and it is for us today as people blessed to have the record of that Redeemer in the Person and work of Jesus the Christ.

Tough times are coming for us in the days ahead as we remember the unrivaled calamity of sin's entrance into the world. But don't forget: directly on the heel of that of unrivaled calamity will be the coming of unparalleled mercy, compassion, and grace. It is all of God. And it is all for

you and me! Let that truth capture, spark, and pique you anew, everyone — take care, and the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich blessings to each of you on this beautiful Tuesday, and welcome to another edition of EDiBS. Thanks so much for coming along today, and thanks also for inviting your friends and loved ones to come along with you as we walk through the Word of God together. Right now in our study time we're back in the second chapter of Genesis, so let's pray and ask for God's hand of blessing and grace as we open our Bibles.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for this time to draw near to you through your holy Word, and we ask that in our reading and meditation over today's passage, you would grant us all that we need to understand it, learn from it, and live out its truth in our own lives as your ransomed, redeemed, restored, dearly loved people. We are grateful for the salvation you have brought to us — and we ask that you would help us to walk in that gratitude. In your precious name we pray, amen

Getting Started

As we get started today, we have a bit of place-making to do as we continue to talk about the Garden of Eden. Our focus this session: the river that flowed from Eden.

Genesis 2:10-14

10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.
11 The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.
13 The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. 14 And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

When I lived on my first little hobby farm in Missouri back in the early 2000s, there was a beautiful spring-fed pond on our land. There were also, however, two small year-round creeks that fed into it, so we always had plenty of water entering in, along with a spillway at one side of the dam that always had water flowing over the top and down into another creek bed.

One spring we had a series of nonstop storms that brought huge amounts of rain to our area, and most waterways in the county were overrun by flooding. The creeks flowing into our pond were no exception, and the volume of water was so massive that both stream beds were completely inundated and covered over for several days. When the flood waters finally receded, we were astounded to see that the landscape had been completely altered. It was unrecognizable. The previously well-defined creek beds were gone, and in their place were newly formed twists and turns that bore almost no resemblance to what had been there before. It was only by walking almost a half-mile upstream that we were able to find anything we recognized from before. Did we recognize where things had been and were we able to orient ourselves in a manner that allowed us to get our bearings? Yes. But that didn't change the fact

that most everything we had known was gone; everything else now existed only in our memories.

I mention that experience today for just one reason: it's something to keep in mind when we talk about the very real place the Bible describes as the Garden of Eden. Scripture gives us clear details to indicate that it was indeed a genuine place that truly existed. We know, for example, that it was in the east. We know that it was planted by God Himself and full of good things, rich and lush. And now, coming to today's text, we are given several geographical markers that set it in an actual place, specifically the names of several rivers. Two of the rivers mentioned are rivers we know today: the Tigris and the Euphrates. The other two and any history attached to them are lost to antiquity, and any number of modern-day rivers have been suggested as their namesakes.

As often happens when we go so far back in history, however, we're faced with a problem when it comes to determining a solid answer for the location of Eden. Why? Based on the description we've been given in God's Word, there's simply no place we know of on earth today that fits. One river dividing into four is challenging enough from a geographical point of view, but throw in the inclusion of the Tigris and the Euphrates and you have a true conundrum. This difficulty has led many skeptics to call out Scripture on this matter, and it's often used by people who identify as atheists as a proof against the historicity...or even the concept...of Eden.

Scholar Michael Houdmann states the challenge well when he writes, "If the Tigris and Euphrates mentioned are the same rivers by those names today, that would put the Garden of Eden somewhere in the Middle East, likely in Iraq." That, of course, is a common theory today, and it's all well and good until we try to find and plat the other two rivers. Why? Because because there's no evidence of such waterways in Iraq or elsewhere in the Middle East today.

But Houdmann continues, and as he does so he provides an answer to the skeptics when he says, "However, even a small local flood can change the course of a river, and the Flood of Noah's day was more than a localized flood. The Deluge would have completely changed the topography of the earth, and because of this, the original location of the Tigris and Euphrates is uncertain. In fact, it could easily be that the modern rivers called the Tigris and Euphrates are simply named after those associated with Eden, in the same way that Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, is named after the town in Judea."

I know we're getting a few chapters ahead of ourselves by mentioning the Great Flood of Genesis 6 today, but it's important for us to bear in mind that, as the apostle Peter said in his second epistle, "The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (2 Peter 3:6). As described in Genesis 6-9, the Flood would have totally restructured the surface of the globe. It would have eroded the land surface in one area and redeposited those sediments elsewhere. Biblically, the Flood covered the planet with processes operating at rates, scales, and intensities far beyond those possible today. No place on Earth would have survived untouched...and afterwards, no place would look the same as it had before.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up, what's the bottom line today? Scripture identifies the wonderful garden paradise in Eden as a real place. It provides clear — though pre-Flood — markers as to its location, a location with which the ancients would have been familiar. People have searched for the Garden of Eden for centuries to no avail, and though various spots have been claimed as

the original location, the best honest answer we can give to those assertions is that no one can be sure. That doesn't however, mean that the reality of the garden of Eden is to be dismissed... far from it! Rather, it simply means that cataclysmic events changed things. Things are different now. The world as it was known then has been destroyed and reconstituted...which in itself attests to the historicity of the biblical record in another way.

Everyone, wherever Eden was, we can be sure that it was just as God has described it for us, and that the Scriptures are trustworthy and true. That's important for a whole host of reasons — reasons we'll be getting into as we move forward with our study. Do stay with us as we do that, because we have some great days of learning and growing ahead! Be confident in your great and mighty God today — He loves you, He is for you, and He is with you. Take care, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings folks! Grace and peace to you today in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. It's so good to be with you today as we come to God's Word...and we come knowing that He is with us, that He will not leave us, and that He will be faithful to lead us through all that's coming up in the day before us. Put your trust in Him in a fresh new way today, and purpose in your heart to temper the noise and chaos of the world with faith in Christ and the quiet strength that He provides. Let's pray as we open our Bibles again to Genesis 2.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, open our eyes to the truth of your Word today, that from it we grow in our faith, grow in our walk, and grow in our witness to a world that so desperately needs your love and forgiveness. You are our sure hope, and we thank you from the depth of our hearts for all that you have done and continue to do for us. Please bless our study time, in your precious and saving name we pray. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the perfect garden, paradise, planted by God in Eden, is ready for the habitation of man. Our focus: "work it and keep it."

Genesis 2:15

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

I was deeply touched recently by a passage from a book written back in 1987 by Jeannette Clift George. You may know her best not as an author, but as an actress — in particular, the actress who brilliantly played Corrie ten Boom in the 1975 film *The Hiding Place*. Her performance in that movie earned her a Golden Globe nomination stateside and a BAFTA award in Great Britain...and it also gave her a newfound platform as a Christian woman to begin sharing her faith in the marketplace of ideas. She was a lovely soul, deeply committed to Christ, and she died just two years ago at the age of 92.

The passage that grabbed hold of me was a paragraph on vocation from her book, *Travel Tips From A Reluctant Traveler*. There she shares a story about purpose and calling that brings to mind the simple truth of today's reading in Genesis 2 in a very relatable way. Have you ever thought about the fact that while God put Adam into the most spectacular paradise the world ever saw, He did so not for Adam to lounge or languish, but so that he could work? That's one of our Lord's wonderful gifts to us as His people. In working, we find purpose and identity in a special way, and that fact is wonderfully worthy of our remembrance. We'll talk about the implications of this more in the coming days, but for now I'd just like to pass along Ms. George's observation and let it speak to your heart, hopefully with the same power and impact with which it spoke to my own.

Because I'm quoting at length from her book today, I'm not able, due to copyright matters, to put it on video. Just the same, I pray that in reading it you will be encouraged. Here then is Jeanette Clift George:

About six years ago, I was speaking at a luncheon held in the civic auditorium of a city in Oklahoma. I settled myself at my place at the head table. I picked up my fork and noticed that two rose-petaled radishes adorned my salad plate. Someone had taken the time to pretty up two radishes, just for me. Then I noticed that each salad at the head table had two neatly curled radishes.

I turned to the lady sitting to my right. "I'm impressed by the radishes," I said.

"You're impressed by what?" she asked.

"The radishes," I said. "Look, each salad plate at our table has curled radishes."

"Yes," she said, exercising a questioning smile. "They're pretty."

"They're more than pretty," I said. "Someone took special care to do these."

"Don't they all have them?" she asked, gazing out at the tables. I looked and was astonished. Each salad plate was adorned with two curled radishes!

"They are curled! That took a lot of time!"

"I'm not on the planning committee, but Gertrude is," my table mate responded. She turned to get the attention of Gertrude, three chairs down. "Mrs. George wants to ask you something about the radishes," she whispered.

"The what?" Gertrude mouthed.

"The RA- DI-SHES!"

"Is there something wrong with your radishes?" she asked.

"No. They are fine. I just thought it was nice to have them all curled."

"Oh, Marietta does those."

"All of them?" I knew the head count in the room and was astonished. "That's almost eight hundred radishes!"

"Yes, but Marietta wants to do it. Would you like to meet her? She's in the kitchen."

So Gertrude and I went into the kitchen, and there I met Marietta, the lady of the radishes.

"Gertrude tells me you curled all those radishes. They're lovely. Each salad looks so...festive."

"I don't mind doing it. It just takes time," Marietta replied. I didn't know what more to say so I left.

Later, I spoke, and there was an encouraging response. Afterward, ladies scurried past me with murmured greetings, and a few lingered to speak of God in their lives. When we finished, it was raining heavily so we hurried across the parking lot to the car.

Through the rain, I could see a lady, carrying a large polka-dot umbrella that had collapsed on one side, waiting by our car. It was Marietta! She was smiling as though we had found her on a sunny day in an especially delightful garden.

"I had to see you. I heard your speech. It was good!" she said.

I slipped inside the car. Marietta crouched down close to the window and called to me, "Just remember this. You keep telling people about Jesus, and I'll keep curling the radishes."

The rain and my tears splattered the picture of her face as we started to back out of the driveway. Ah, dear Marietta, I haven't forgotten. We are, each of us, to do our jobs in the love of Him who does all things well.

The gift of vocation...the gift of work...the gift of God's calling on each of us to live in His love and do whatever we do, all that we do — even the littlest things — unto Him and to the glory of His holy Name. A gift indeed, one first given in the Garden. A gift that remains for you and me today.

Take care everyone, rejoice in the Lord for His great goodness to us, and I'll see you again next time to continue the conversation. God's peace!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you today, and I always appreciate that you take the time to come along and draw near to God and His Word with me each day. This session finds us continuing on with Adam in the Garden of Eden, so let's take a moment, prepare our hearts, and get ready for some good time in our Bibles. Will you pray with me?

Prayer

Father, thank you for this time to be with you in your Word today, thank you for the blessing of the Internet that enables this kind of study time in the Scriptures, and thank you most of all for all the promises of your Word, which we are always alive and full and free to us in the name of Jesus. Please help us to grow today in our walk with you. We ask this in Christ's name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come once again to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Our focus this session: clear calling, clear command, clear consequence.

Genesis 2:15-17

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Mr. and Mrs. Windsor, each teachers of mine in our local school district and the parents of my best friend Jay, had given me a great honor. Calling me up on the phone prior to leaving on family vacation, they said they wanted me to take care of their home — including their dog, Sally — while they were away. With the job came certain responsibilities...many responsibilities, in fact...including cleaning the house, watering the plants, mowing the lawn, and caring for Sally each day. In return for quality work I was assured quality compensation. But there would be consequences for blowing it, they teased, which I assured them would not happen. The icing on the cake? The job would involve actual house-sitting responsibilities, meaning I would be staying overnights there in their absence. They had already spoken with my parents, who had given their approval, and 15 year-old me was ecstatic for the opportunity and eager to get started.

At first, things went smoothly. I completed my chores conscientiously and on time. I made sure things stayed tidy. I made sure Sally had food and water each day and took time to play with her in the evenings. Over time, however, I started to coast — first a little, and then a little more. Then one day, in one fell swoop, everything went south. In the space of two hours, my world crashed down around me and left me, and others with me, broken. First, the Windsors' regular housekeeper had dropped by to check on things. When she walked inside she found the house a mess, the trash un-emptied, and several plants pining for water. I had fallen down on the job, and in a curt note she left on the kitchen table for me, I was put on notice. But that wasn't the worst of it. After coming in, finding the note, and worrying that I was going to be in trouble for my irresponsibility, I went out the back door to find Sally. I thought that playing with her for a little

while and giving her a nice treat would make me feel better, and afterward I would go back inside and take care of all the things I had let slide. I would start over with renewed commitment, and everything would be okay. But it wasn't to be.

Walking out the door, down the steps, and around the corner, I came upon the worst sight imaginable. The previous day, I had left the electric lawnmower on the back patio after cutting the grass. I meant to put it away in the garage after a quick dip in the Windsors' pool, but forgot all about it. I had left the extension cord draped over the mower handle, which is where it was normally stored when not in use — and it was there, tangled in that cord, that I discovered Sally's body. She had somehow gotten caught in it and had accidentally hung herself. She was already dead when I found her.

At the beginning of that ill-fated journey, my calling from the Windsor family had been a simple one: straightforward, inviting, and promising delight. The command was equally so: clear and detailed, so that I knew exactly what needed to be done. The consequences for failing, however, weren't something I had considered, because I didn't think failure was a realistic possibility. Sure, Mr. and Mrs. Windsor had half-joked with me about being careful not to blow it, but what could go wrong with a house-sitting job?

A lot, it turned out...and the consequences were equally devastating. On the day the Windsors returned from vacation — early, because my folks had to call them to share what had happened, and grieving deeply, because Sally had been a very important part of their world — I lost the respect of two grownups who meant the world to me, I lost my best friend whose beloved dog I had killed, I lost the trust of my parents who had vouched for my ability to handle the job in the first place, and I lost any belief in myself to ever do anything right again.

Joy had been set before me. Opportunity had been graciously bestowed upon me. Blessing had been promised to me. And me? I was free to make the most of it...or not. I, to my shame and sorrow, sorrow that lingers even today, chose not.

A few days ago when we first looked at the passage before us — this passage about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — I reminded you that man was not created as an automaton or a robot, incapable of making his own decisions. Rather, man was created with an intellect and a heart and a will. From the beginning, he was free to make choices and render decisions as a sentient being. I also reminded you that man was created in the image of God, and that God never desired for Himself a creature incapable of understanding or participating by choice in a relationship with Him. Finally, I told you that God's choice to do things in this way was witness to His love and hand of favor on the chief object of His creation. Because God loved man, He gave man the freedom of choice.

As you review those things in your mind today, and as you think of Adam and Eve, and as you prepare already to come to the portion of Scripture where the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will take center stage in a most tragic way, I invite you to do so with the true and admittedly very painful story from my youth hovering in the background. Why? Because there's a common pattern in the two accounts, and metaphorically at least, a common outcome.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, we know why the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was in the garden. For humanity to be truly free, it was a must. For love to be what God says love is,

it was a necessity. Furthermore, we know that had Adam and Eve retained their original state, they never would have died. It was their free choice to make the most of the joy and opportunity and blessing that God had given them — or not. To their shame and sorrow...sorrow that now lingers in the world even today...they chose not.

Before the moment when death came into the world, Adam and Eve were in a beautiful, pristine state. They existed on a level far above the present condition of the human race. It's difficult — impossible, really — to imagine what the human race was like then by viewing it as it is now. Pastor David Breese always said that it would be like trying to reconstruct the original version of an aircraft from its wreckage. If we knew nothing of flying, we'd hardly suspect that it had once soared above the earth. The material would be the same, but the capability of flight would be lost.

Question: has all now been lost for us as well? That, of course, is where the analogy breaks down. Why? Because our story has a different ending. Just as there will be more to share with you about Mr. and Mrs. Windsor and their son Jay in the days ahead, so it is with our great God and His sharing with us. His calling, command, and consequences were, and are, real...but just as real is His compassion. As quickly as the Fall happened, so came the promise of forgiveness in a Savior that would be for all — even for you and for me. Hang in there with me as we track that down in the coming weeks, because here is what's real: promise is coming to our pain, and redemption to our wreckage. God bless you richly, folks; I'll look forward to seeing you again soon. Take care.

Greetings

Greetings everybody! God's peace, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! Thanks for being with me today, and thanks for your willingness to commit yourself each day to time in the Scriptures. So many of you have shared with me over the years that as these daily studies have become more and more a habit for you, more and more an integral part of your day, you've experienced transformation in your life as your mind has been continually renewed by God's Word. I always love to hear how it's going for you, so be sure to drop a line any time. We're back in Genesis 2 today; let's pray as we open our Bibles.

Prayer

Lord, you are almighty, all-knowing, everywhere present...and you know us personally, love us unconditionally, and have adopted us into your family through the blood of your Son. Thank you for such a precious gift – and thank you that through your Word, you draw us deeper and deeper into the knowledge of just how great your love truly is. Bless our study time today, in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, with Adam in the splendor of the Garden of Eden, the perfection of creation all around him, there is much to occupy his time. At this point, however, Adam is doing all that he's doing alone, because there is no one like him with whom to spend his time. Our focus this session: the first Not Good thing in Scripture.

Genesis 2:18-20

18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

What is a friend? C. Raymond Beran's well-known definition beautifully expresses the answer. I won't share the whole piece with you, but in part it reads, "Friends are people with whom you dare to be yourself. Your soul can be naked with them. They ask you to put on nothing, only to be what you are. They do not want you to be better or worse. When you are with them, you feel as a prisoner feels who has been declared innocent. You do not have to be on your guard. You can say what you think, as long as it is genuinely you. Friends understand those contradictions in your nature that lead others to misjudge you. With them you breathe freely. They understand. Best of all, you can keep still with them. It makes no matter. They like you. They are like fire that purges to the bone. You can weep with them, sing with them, laugh with them, pray with them. Through it all, they see, know, and love you."

Today, God's Word informs us that in the beginning of his existence, Adam did not have that. He was alone. Things were good; things were, in fact, very good. But things were not as they could be. Adam did not have flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone, a helpmeet suitable for him, or a companion to do life with him. He did not have a partner to serve...or by whom he could be served. In all the beauty and perfection of creation, including the great and awesome spectacle of the animal kingdom, nothing was like Adam. Nothing was equal to Adam. Nothing completed Adam.

God saw it. And God determined that its absence was a not-good thing.

There is much here for us to consider. About aloneness, yes, but also about loneliness. About wholeness, yes, but also about the lack thereof. About goodness, absolutely...but also about what makes something not good. And in God's eyes, the first not-good thing in the vast expanse of His glorious creation was that Adam was by himself. Nothing else which had been made was fitting for him as a companion, a helper, a partner...a friend. Can you relate? Perhaps so...and perhaps more than you may at first realize.

Wrapping Up

I'm going to wrap up on the short side of things today, because I want that basic, elemental question to stay with you and give you something to chew on over the next couple of days. In our next several study sessions together, we're going to see how God changed Adam's state. My encouragement to you is simple: come along and see the goodness of the Lord at work, because His care and concern for Adam's life extends in a very similar way to you and me — and that's what we'll be talking about in the days ahead. God be with you, everyone...have a terrific weekend and rest in the grace and peace of our Savior Jesus. Take care, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you as we start another week together, and as we prepare our hearts to go before God and His Word

today, I do pray that you're benefitting from our journey through the Scriptures and that you're also being emboldened in your faith because of them. Let's bow our heads and seek the Lord's blessing as we head back to Genesis 2.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for a new day to praise your name, to live in your grace, and to rejoice in your mercy. Our intention in these next few moments is to have our hearts and minds engaged in your Word, to the end that we learn to embrace you more and more, even as you have so lovingly embraced us. Teach us by the Scriptures today, for your Word is truth. We ask this in your precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with nothing in the created order found suitable for Adam as a partner and helpmeet, God fashions one more bit of perfection to complete and complement him. Our focus this session: bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!

Genesis 2:21-23

21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

There's a beautiful Jewish saying about God's creation of woman. You've probably heard it: He made woman not out of man's foot to be under him, nor out of his head to be over him. Rather, she was taken from under his arm that he might protect her and from next to his heart that he might love her.

Some of you will find that a bit saccharin today, and others of you may even see it as gauche or politically incorrect for our times. Let me be quick to say that while we can all readily see the incompleteness of the description, what is described is profound in its observation. The reality, in fact, is that the beauty of that old Jewish saying is due in large part to its accurate and pithy reflection of a deep theological truth: man and woman, though very different, share in one common substance. And furthermore, they were made to be one, even as they serve One.

Coming to this passage today, the first thing we have to do is dispel a long-running myth: the myth about women and their rib count! The Scriptures tell us that after putting Adam into a deep sleep, God takes one of his ribs, closes up his flesh where it had been, and uses that rib to fashion the woman. However God chose to do that and whatever it looked like is all well and good; the Bible doesn't get into details about it because the Bible isn't a medical text or a scientific discourse on human anatomy. The description is there for us as it is so that we can follow and understand the narrative: God used Adam's own body to create the woman. What science *does* tell us clearly, however, is that even with one rib having been taken from Adam by God to fashion Eve, Adam would have retained all the genetic information for a full set of ribs, which would have been passed on to his offspring, both male and female — which is why to this day all of us, men and women both, have 12 full pair. Somewhere along the line, however, a legend emerged...an anatomic fable, if you will...stating that women have one more

rib than men, and that it stems from Eve's creation from Adam's body. I don't know why Christians continue to assert this idea, but it's just not true, and it frankly makes us look foolish to anyone who would question the veracity of our faith.

With that annoyance out of the way, what then is the importance of this passage? Why would God take something from the man to create the woman instead of simply forming her from the dust as He did the man? That subject will occupy our conversation for the next several days, because there's actually quite a bit to discuss. For the moment, though, consider this as a starting point: When Adam exclaims, "This is now — finally, at last — bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," he is declaring that Eve is indeed different, separate, and distinct from every other living thing that God has made, and yet uniquely fitted for, suited for, him alone. She is, though certainly not the same as Adam, nonetheless like him. She is *of* him.

With this declaration, then, Adam is also asserting something more: he is recognizing that as bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, there is an essential oneness present in his relationship with Eve. She is not more or less than he is; she completes him, and he completes her. In their togetherness they are whole...in a thousand different ways. This oneness, and all that it entails, goes to the heart of why when God created man in His own image, "male and female He created them." It's a beautiful thing. There's a richness there that invites exploration and reflection. There are also parameters there that need to be explored and reflected upon as well — especially in today's culture with its thoroughly relativistic worldview and its increasing rejection of codified sexual identities and traditional gender roles. Maleness and Femaleness has been largely set aside in recent years. Society is not the better for it. And Christian people, truly more than anyone else, must learn how to be winsome in their dialogue as they speak the truth in love on the matter.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, that's also a topic we'll be taking up in the days ahead as we continue our study of Adam, of Eve, and of their relationship together before God. I hope you'll come along and be part of things; do know that you're in my prayers each day, and even more important, that the Lord is always with you as you go through your days. Take care everyone, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon. God's peace, and have a great Monday!

Greetings

Greetings everybody! Grace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, where over the past several weeks we've been steadily working our way through the study of Genesis in our time together each day. Thanks for your commitment to be here as we continue to through the Scriptures; as you grow in your knowledge of God's Word, I'm always

praying that your intimacy with the Lord Jesus will grow as well and that you'll know the blessing of an ever closer walk with Him as a result. Let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, we praise you for your glory and your grace — your grace shown to us in the person and work of your one and only Son. Thank you for this day and this time to study your Word. Bless us by it, change us through it, and equip us to be your ambassadors because of it. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming back to Adam as he expresses joy over the woman that the Lord God has created and brought to him. Our focus this session: "...and they shall become one flesh."

Genesis 2:23-25

23 Then the man said,
"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

I would like to share some very unromantic, yet very true words about marriage with you today. I want to share them not because marriage is never romantic, but because marriage is a lot of other things besides just romance. Sometimes, in fact, marriage is anything but romantic...and yet those unromantic parts are often the most important parts of all. I also want to share these words because they are closely tied to what Scripture says about marriage, and it just so happens that in today's reading from God's Word we have the very institution of marriage before us. These words come from one of my favorite writers, Walter Wangerin, whom you may know as the author of the short story *Ragman*.

Marriage, Wangerin writes, is not romanticized in the creation account. Its ideal purpose is not one of sweet feeling, tender words, poetical affections or physical satisfactions — not "love" as the world defines love in all its nasal songs and its popular shallow stories. Marriage is meant in many ways to be flatly practical. One human alone is help-LESS, unable. But "Two are better than one," says Ecclesiastes, "Because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift the other." Marriage makes the job of survival possible. And the fact that a spouse is termed a "helper" declares marriage was never an end in itself, but a preparation. We've accomplished no great thing, yet, in getting married. We have completed a relationship (though many a fool assumes that the hard work's done with the wedding and turns attention to other interests). But more than anything, we've established the terms by which we now will go to work.

In other words, Wangerin seems to be reminding us, marriage is not an end unto itself, but the beginning of a whole new existence.

So it is, as the Bible has shared with us, that the woman was taken out of man, fashioned for him, fit for him...

And so it is that man recognized woman to be bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, a very part of him, equal to him even as differing from him...

And so it is that man and woman together completed one another...

And so it is that these two, *male* and *female*, were both necessary for, and meant to be complementary to, one another.

These two, God's Word declares, would become one flesh. They were created that way in the beginning as the Lord made them and fashioned them with His own hand, and now in marriage, that oneness would take on an entirely new meaning and dimension.

It's true that the marriage principle stated here in Genesis 2 is indeed based on the dynamic of oneness. As we said in yesterday's study session, this is one reason God took something from the man to create the woman instead of simply forming her from the dust separately. But what is equally important for us to see — and at this point I'm beating a dead horse since I've already mentioned it about 27 times over the past several days — is that this is a oneness with distinction. That is, it is oneness, but not sameness. It is oneness, but no clone. Through God joining them together, man and woman — and no other combination or definition thereof — come into the beauty of a one-flesh relationship. This very definitely refers to the physical aspect of their togetherness, but it also means that they come together as one spiritually. The benefits of that oneness are far-reaching.

So vital is this point of oneness that the Word of God here in Genesis 2 forms the foundation for all of what the Bible has to say regarding marriage, and also regarding maleness and femaleness. In both Old Testament and New, from beginning to end, Adam and Eve are the originals. They are the original family. They are God's ideal family... and they are God's design for family. And that's something we'll be exploring more of next time.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, let's remember that in this state, prior to the fall, there is no shame. The text says as much today in the final verse of the reading. What, then, is there? There is beauty and purity in nakedness with no embarrassment or sense of self consciousness or feelings of uncomfortableness. There peace of partnership and common goals with no competing interests or petty disagreements. There is joy in the loveliness of two bodies joined as one in heart, mind, and body. And along with all of those things, there's probably some great romance as well! This is the picture of life the way God designed it. The picture of life before sin. The picture of how it was meant to be. It's a picture where we see the goodness of God and the love He has for man and woman on full display...something that will come into play in a big way when we move into the third chapter of this book we call Genesis.

Thanks for your time today, everybody...I'm grateful for it, grateful for you, and looking forward to being with you again next time. Until then, take care, and the joy of our Lord Jesus be with you and keep you! I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's joy and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm coming to you from "the field" today, and a bit off of our typical 4:15 AM schedule, because of some travel that took much longer than anticipated yesterday. The reason for said travel is actually pretty exciting, and it's EDiBS-related as well, so be watching for some special news in the coming days as I prepare to share with you about it! Please forgive me for the interruption today; though I'll be on the road for about the next week or so, I'll be driving, and that means I'll be back in control of my own schedule and that our daily study sessions will be posting each morning at their regular time.

As we prepare to open the Scriptures and learn from our Lord today, we'll be finishing our study of Genesis 2, so let's pray and ask for God's blessing on our time.

Prayer

Father, you have told us in your Word that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and we are mindful today that in your Son we have been wonderfully remade — reborn, made new, the old being gone and the new having come. Thank you for such an incredible demonstration of your love, that you would send Jesus to die for us. Bless us now as we give ourselves to the study of the Scriptures. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 2 ends with a beautiful statement about man and woman, something we touched on just a bit in our time together yesterday. Our focus this session: No shame.

Genesis 2:25

25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

I have many friends with children still in high school, and some of them have just been through prom season with their sons or daughters. It's a fun time, but it can also be a stressful time for the dates as they get ready for the big night. One dad I recently talked to was laughing about the curious nature of dating. He said, "Isn't it funny that when we want to be the most attractive to someone else, we do the most to change our normal appearance?" I'd never really thought about it that way before, but he's right! From time immemorial, men and women have labored under the idea that to truly impress someone, they have to fix themselves up and present a certain version of themselves, not only physically but also with respect to their personalities. The irony is that in trying to put themselves in a certain light, it's usually one that obscures the reality of who they actually are!

Actually, let me check what I just said. This behavior hasn't been happening from time immemorial. In the beginning, with the creation of our first parents, this was not the case at all. Man and woman, Adam and Eve, had no need to put on appearances. They were as they truly were, with no filters. That, in fact, is what God's Word is saying to us today when we are told that the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

The idea of nakedness is far more than mere nudity. It has the sense of being totally open and exposed as a person — and here in the text, that includes Adam and Eve totally open not just before one another, but also before God. That these two were naked...and not just naked but also not ashamed...reminds us that in the beginning there was no sin. There was only life in all its wonder and goodness and rightness. For Adam and Eve, there was nothing to hide, nothing to fix, and no need to impress. They were in perfect fellowship with the Lord and with each other.

All this would change, of course, with the coming of the Fall. We'll be covering that tragic incident together very soon, but many of you will remember that when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, the first thing they realized was that they were naked...and that their nakedness caused them shame. They immediately covered themselves. They suddenly, in the space of an instant, were a man and a woman jaded by fear and loathing and the realization that what had

been whole was now broken. They were forever changed in their relationship with one another — and with God too.

On the face of it, this was an insurmountable human disaster. It should have been the end. In many ways it was the end. Death had entered the world. But our great God is a God who takes what is dead and makes it alive again. Our great God is a God who, though holy and just, is also compassionate and forgiving. Our God is a God who gives beauty for ashes. And He first revealed those things about Himself when, while the aftermath of the Fall into sin was still burning hot, He gave the soothing promise that sin would atoned for, and that through a Savior, there would be reconciliation in the world — between people, yes, but also between people and God. We would be a people given a place of refuge. And in the One who would come to redeem us, we would also be remade into a people who could once again be unashamed.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, if you're like me you sometimes — maybe even often times — are a person who struggles with the shame of your sin. You may, like me, be a man or a woman whose past constantly seeks to persecute you and accuse you as one who is unworthy to stand before a holy God. You may even be someone who despairs of hope and lives in constant self reprobation because you consider yourself unforgivable. Would you please hear me today? You're not. In the way of the world and under the curse, those things are all true. But in the way of Jesus Christ and His cross of sacrifice, they are true no longer. Your sin has been atoned for. Your guilt has been taken away. Your condemnation has itself been condemned by the cleansing blood of the One who suffered it in your stead. In Christ, you are clean. For you, the old has gone, and you have been remade in the newness of life. Hear the prophet Isaiah as he speaks God's promise to you today:

Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours. (Isaiah 61:7)

And as you meditate on that beautiful Scripture, here's one more from the 34th Psalm:

I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. (Psalm 34:4-6)

Everybody, these things are trustworthy and true. God's love for you in Christ is total and complete. Your life is in Him. He is for you, and He is with you this very moment with more love, compassion, mercy, and grace than you could ever possibly shake a stick at. Remember that, won't you? Thanks for your time today; I'll see you again soon. Take care — and be unashamed!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's grace, mercy, and peace to each of you in Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. As we continue on today in our journey through the book of Genesis, we're coming now to Genesis 3. It's great to have you along; let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we thank you for this day and for this time to be in your Word, we ask that you would give us clarity of mind and openness of heart as we study. Fill us with all wisdom and spiritual understanding as we endeavor to learn from you today. In Christ's precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 3 comes out of the gate hot and heavy with the smell of peril in the air. Our focus: of craftiness and questioning.

Genesis 3:1

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

Two brothers were getting ready to boil some eggs to color for Easter.

"I'll give you a dollar if you let me break three of these on your head," said the older one.

"Promise?" asked the younger.

"Promise!"

Gleefully, the older boy broke two eggs over his brother's head.

Standing stiff for fear the gooey mess would get all over him, the little boy asked, "When is the third egg coming?"

"It's not," replied the brother. "That would cost me a dollar."

Now that's crafty...and as the youngest of four siblings, I've been subject to similar craftiness in my life over the years! Maybe some of you can relate!

What is craftiness? Craftiness is achieving your aims by indirect, deceitful, or misleading methods. Craftiness is doing whatever it takes to get whatever you want. Finally, craftiness usually means that in the process of getting what you want, you subjugate anyone who stands in the way of your goal. Crafty is as crafty does...which shows why *crafty* is the perfect word for God's Word to use when it describes the serpent as he comes to Eve on a very fateful day.

The serpent, of course, is Satan...a name which means "adversary." Though the text doesn't clearly identify him as such, every other place in Scripture that refers to this incident makes clear that the serpent is indeed Satan. Do we know the ins and outs of how our enemy used the body of a serpent to approach Eve in the Garden of Eden? We don't. But while we may not understand everything concerning the mechanics, we must understand that the narrative presented to us is true. A fable it is not. As Charles Surgeon wrote with characteristic bluntness, "There was a real serpent, as there was a real paradise; there was a real Adam and Eve, who stood at the head of our race; and this Adam and Eve really sinned, and our race is really fallen. Believe this."

We've stated several times already in our study of Genesis that the historicity of this book is attested not merely in other portions of Scripture, but even by our Lord Jesus Himself. Even in the face of hard questions with answers not always readily available, when we look to the whole of the canon of Scripture we are reassured. I especially like the way Pastor Matthew Harrison shares on the matter. He writes,

Why do I believe that the creation accounts are historical? I believe them because I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior. And I hear in the words of Jesus that He himself believes the creation accounts are historical (See Matthew 19:3–9.). I hear in the words of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, the voice of my Savior. And both He and the Scriptures bear witness to their absolute inerrancy and infallibility. With Luther, when I come to passages that are hard to believe, 'I doff my hat to the Holy Spirit and figure that He is wiser than I am.'

We could go on with this subject, and actually, we'll be doing so at length down the road a little bit. For now, however, let's simply move forward with this principle as our foundation: the Scriptures show themselves to be reliable, true, and trustworthy. They are presented to us as God-breathed, that is, inspired. And they are given to us as being useful in every area of our lives so that we can be a people thoroughly equipped for all that God has set before us as His people. What a wonderful gift that is...one that we can embrace with great confidence!

So — back to the craftiness at work in today's passage. What was it about the devil's approach here at the beginning of Genesis 3 that would ultimately make him successful against Eve? Interestingly, it all began with a question...one that asked Eve to consider the legitimacy of God's Word to her and her husband. "Did God actually say...?" "Did God really say...?" "Did God truly say...?" "Has God indeed said...?" Pick whatever version of Scripture you'd like, and the outcome is the same: Satan's first shot over the bow in his attack was leveled, not against Eve herself, but against the Word of God. That, in fact, has almost always been the devil's mode of operation: undermine people by undermining God's Word. In the case of today's text, if he could make Eve confused about what God said, or to doubt what God said, then his battle was already partially won.

There's one more element of craftiness utilized by Satan in this opening verse of chapter 3: Notice that Satan took God's positive command in Genesis 2:16-17 (Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat) and essentially rephrased it in a purely negative way: "God won't let you eat of every tree." This was craftiness in the form of twisting; of rearranging; of sowing dissension. And it commenced with a complete misrepresentation on the part of Satan about of the character of God and His love and commitment toward all that He had made — Adam and Eve most of all.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, "Did God really say...?" is Satan's opening of a Pandora's Box on the universe. And we all know that once things have gotten out, there's no going back to the way things were. When we come back next time, we'll get further into the conversation that began today in verse 1, and as we do, we'll continue to see craftiness on display in a devastating manner...something we'll need to talk about together as the people of God in Christ.

Have a great day everyone, do take care, and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to have you here on this last day of our study week together, and as we open our Bibles today, I especially pray that your heart is open and ready for the Lord to do His gracious work in your life — the ongoing work of transformation that comes through the continual renewing of your mind. Today we close our week together with more in the opening verses of Genesis 3. Let's pray.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day and we thank you for this time to have you come to us in your Word. As we study, we ask that you would enlighten us with all spiritual wisdom and understanding, and that you would help us in every way to live in you. We ask this in Jesus' precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we have more in the way of perilous, suspenseful reading as we see Satan at work on the woman God created. Our focus: the temptation of Eve continues.

Genesis 3:2-5

2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

My son and I went fishing on Jekyll Island, Georgia. We rented a couple of rods and reels, bought a bucket of mud minnows, and then, braving the marsh flies all around us, walked out to the end of the pier and set ourselves to the task. Since neither of us had any real fishing experience other than the pond fishing we'd done on the farm back in Missouri, we had no idea what we were doing, and I'm sure it showed to those who were around us. But we were having fun — and as it turned out, it wasn't long before things started hitting on our bait. Out of the several strikes each of us had that day, we never actually caught anything, because again, our technique was poor. We lost most of our \$5 worth of mud minnows to smart flounders and opportunistic crabs, but you know what? Just feeling the tug and watching the line race away each time we got a bite was thrilling enough for us.

I mention my son's and my hapless fishing trip today in a manner of contrast. As two guys enjoying some time together on a fishing pier during a relaxing weekend of father-son time, there wasn't much at stake for us. It didn't matter whether we caught anything. Even if we had, we wouldn't have known what to do with our catch, and in any case, we ended the day as we'd planned to from the beginning: at a seafood shack on the island eating fish and crab that someone else had caught.

But as we come back to God's Word today, we are not happening upon a clueless, inexperienced fisherman who has no idea what he's doing. We are not coming upon one content to feel a tug on his line, on one who gets giddy with excitement even over the fish that got away. What we are witnessing is a master angler at work.

He is not about having fun. He is not a casual weekend warrior who will go home with fish stories to tell his friends. For him, this outing is a most serious business. He has set himself to his task like white on rice. He is intent on his catch. And make no mistake: he is planning to not just to catch, but to kill, gut, and eat his take.

The hook has been baited.

The line has been cast.

And now? Now we see the angler working the current, toying with the line, manipulating the bait so that it twists and turns this way and that in a beautiful, tantalizing, mesmerizing way, drawing in its intended victim. All that's left is to wait for the bite — and then it will all be over.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, look at how the devil is working Eve. Watch how he's lulling her, dismantling her defenses, bringing her closer and closer to disaster. Admittedly, it's not a pleasant thing to watch, but it's an important thing to watch nonetheless. Why? Because the fishing techniques we see our enemy using in the Garden of Eden here in Genesis 3 are the

very same ones he still uses today on you and me. We'll talk about it in detail when we come back to the text on Monday. Blessings to you in our Savior Jesus, have a great Saturday and Sunday, and I'll see you soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's rich peace to you in Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. I'm happy to be with you today as we begin a new week of Bible Study, and I so love that you've taken the time to prioritize God's Word in your life. As we go to the Scriptures together over the next several minutes, we'll be moving back into Genesis 3 and the temptation in the Garden. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for another day to be called your children; another day to know the joy of forgiveness, the joy of belonging to your family; another day filled with new hope and the assurance of your presence and your guiding hand. Draw near to us as we study your Word today and teach us all that you desire for us to know. This we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today and come once more to Satan's conversation with Eve in the Garden of Eden, we'll be looking at the bait he uses to draw her in and set the hook. Our focus this session: the enemy's tackle box.

Genesis 3:2-5

2 And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” 4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

One thing I’ve recently learned about fishing is that though there are many well-known, even tried and true varieties of bait used to catch certain kinds of fish, every angler likes to put his or her own spin on what works best. Last week on a pier along the Georgia coast, for instance, I heard a good natured argument about the best way to attract redfish. Most guides would say that redfish especially like to go after live bait like minnows, shrimp, and crabs, but the man and woman I saw bantering back and forth were talking about the merits of hot dogs versus rotting chicken meat...things more typically used for crabbing, not fishing. The talk was loud and the oneupmanship was amusing, which also drew others into the conversation. One elderly gentleman who looked a little like Ernest Hemingway hopped into the the mix and insisted that dead bait worked the best, or barring that, plastic tail jigs. His wife shook her head and said everyone was wrong; fly fishing using streamers and poppers were clearly superior, and she backed her answer up with data showing that fly fishing had brought in more record-setting fish than any other technique. The end result of the conversation? No one’s mind was changed — but everyone agreed that however a person went about catching them, redfish were some of the best eating of any fish in the region. The moral of the story? Use what you know, work it the best you can, and take what you can get!

As we come back to God’s Word today, the devil is in the details...and he also could have been part of the angling banter on that Georgia pier last week. Why? Because his philosophy and methodology falls in line with the upshot of that conversation. As we see him baiting Eve in today’s verses, luring her in as it were, it becomes very clear very quickly that it’s not so much about finding the one thing that works, but finding anything that works — everything that works — and then using it to the hilt to reel in his catch.

What specifically do we see in play here in the text? Let’s mention the variety in Satan’s bait bucket just briefly, and then let’s close with the most dangerous and effective one of them all.

The first thing we saw in the opening verse of the chapter was the planting of the seed of doubt in Eve’s heart. Satan asked, “Did God *really* say...?”

The next thing we saw was that Satan encouraged the germination of that seed of doubt with an outright lie: “You will not surely die.” This was a complete and total contradiction of Divine declaration, and even though it was a fabrication, it was an effective one — one that set the stage for what came next.

What came next, of course, was incredibly tantalizing: if Eve would take of the fruit, not only would she not die, but quite to the contrary her eyes would be opened to the reality of the true state of things in the world, and in that she would, according to Satan, become more alive than she could heretofore have imagined. *And by the way*, Satan continued, *the reason God is putting this restriction on you is because He’s running scared. He knows that if you partake of this fruit, the enlightenment you’ll receive will make you just like Him.*

Can you imagine the power of a statement like that? Can you imagine how tantalizing it would be to think that you could be like God? That, after all, is really what Satan is saying here: in eating the forbidden fruit, Eve would be like God. Yes, a baldfaced lie...but a baldfaced lie that was extremely dangerous because it was tempered with a modicum of truth. It would, in fact, be just enough to push Eve and her husband — we'll talk about Adam more next time — over the edge; it would be the bait that worked best in the moment. This was Satan, our enemy, using what he knew, working it the best he could, and taking everything he could get. Take he would... to the great detriment of the whole of creation.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, think for just a moment about that final enticement. It was the most powerful of all the enemy's bait for a reason. What reason? It was an enticement that carried the promise of deification. It was a promise not just of divine favor, but of becoming divine. It was a promise that to Eve's way of thinking (and to Satan's way of deceiving) would equal the playing field and put her and her husband on the same footing as their Creator. True, in eating the fruit their eyes would be opened, and they would indeed know the difference between good and evil, and they would, in that sense, indeed become like God. But not in the way they envisioned. Instead, such knowledge would come with a horrible realization. And the knowledge that they would gain, far from preventing their deaths, would only hasten them.

Many of you are already remembering that this was how Satan himself fell...by wanting to be equal with God. Sadly, Eve and her husband are about to fall into the same prideful trap...trying to become *like* God by rebelling *against* God. The painful truth in this, not just for Adam and Eve but for all of us, is that in our desire to be gods, we actually become like Satan — something we'll talk about more when we come together next time.

Thanks for walking through God's Word with me today everybody; I'll look forward to being with you again tomorrow to have at this again. Until then, God bless you and yours in our Savior Jesus, and do take care.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's joy and peace to you in our Savior Jesus as we gather for Bible study today. As always, I'm glad to have you along as we open God's Word, where today we'll moving into a section of Scripture we've long been anticipating. Let's prepare our hearts, quiet our minds, and go to our Lord in prayer as we begin.

Prayer

Father, thank you for this time to come together around your Word, and thank you for the manifold blessings you pour out upon us as we study. Help us to grow today; help us to be challenged, encouraged, strengthened and equipped — all so that we may be a people ever more connected to you. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the moment we've known would come is now here — and though it's a singularly unhappy moment in holy history, it's also singularly important that we consider some of the details surrounding it. Today's session will be short...tomorrow's longer. Both will center on one issue: the fall. Our focus : Adam and Eve sin.

Genesis 3:6-7

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Righteousness, gone. Sin took it away.
Fellowship with God, gone. Sin brought separation from Him instead.
Perfect world, gone. Sin cursed the cosmos.
Immortality, gone. Sin inaugurated death in its place.

And that's just for starters.

Today in God's Word, within the space of just two verses, human mutiny occurs against the Divine. The narrative is stunning in its matter-of-factness...especially given that every single part of God's handiwork will now be marred by it. No part will come away unscathed.

What has happened today? We have come to the Fall. And what before was Very Good — such a simple, powerful descriptor of our Lord's creative brilliance and His love for all He has made — is about to be plunged into the chaos of spiritual darkness and the brokenness which accompanies it.

This is not just a watershed moment in the annals of the biblical record; it is the sea-change of all sea-changes. It is not to be minimized, and why? Because the information given to us in today's text will now affect and impact the very order of the universe itself. Order, in fact, will now be replaced by disorder. All of nature will now be turned on its ear. The whole house is about to fall in on itself.

With what we're given in these verses, not only do we learn to our great dismay that the communion between man and God is now broken, but in addition, that the communion between man and his fellow man, and yes, to complete the circle, man and the creation, is broken as well. Fruit is being eaten today in Scripture...fruit that will fracture life as it was once known into a thousand unfixable pieces.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, if we take the time to think this through and let it sink in, it truly hurts. And if we take the time to consider that the truth of this passage extends down through the millennia and directly into the midst of our own lives, it not only hurts, it leaves us hollow. This is more than mere history; as people who were born in sin ourselves, it is a great and bitter hashtag forever attached to our everyday. When we come back tomorrow, we'll be looking at the specifics of the passage before us. For now, this is a good time to pause —to let all mortal flesh keep silent.

Take care everyone — I'll look forward to seeing you soon to walk through this passage together. God's peace, and I'll see you then.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace to you in our risen Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being here midweek with me as we study God's Word together; as we begin our trek toward the summer months, we're steadily working our way through the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis, where today we'll be opening up again to Genesis 3. This is a seminal chapter in the Scriptures that describes a seminal moment in the history of the universe. As we turn there, would you join me for a word of prayer?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we want to say how much we adore you, how much we love you – and yet even as we do that, we are all too aware that so often our actions in life don't match the commitment to you that we voice so readily with our lips. Please forgive us, Lord, and cleanse us from our sin. We come to your Word now to learn and grow...to be changed and to be ever more established in your grace. We seek to be rooted and grounded in you, because we know that you are life, and life eternal. Bless us with hearts ready to embrace your truth today. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come back to the moment in time when everything everywhere changed for all time. Our focus this session: more on the Fall.

Genesis 3:6-7

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

It was a gathering of family and friends. There was a lot of food out that day, including dishes of candy for our guests to enjoy. A youngster at the time — no more than six or seven — I was told in no uncertain terms that said candy was off limits. I, of course, didn't listen, and I remember spending a lot of my time that afternoon pilfering what I could during what I thought were opportune moments.

As you might imagine, my actions did not go undetected. What might surprise you, however, was that rather than being reprimanded, I was set straight in a different way. I still don't know how it all went down, and I've never figured out how my family knew and prepared in advance for it (though past performance was probably a good indicator of expected behavior), but while I was busy trying to steal candy in one room, my mom — or my brother or my sister...I don't really know who it was — was busy in another room replacing the candy in one dish with prank candy. Made to look like chocolates straight out of a See's or Whitman's Sampler box, they were actually made of soap. It wasn't long before I made my way to what I thought was a fresh selection for my taking, and take I did — once. With the first bite I knew I'd been had, and I spent the rest of that gathering hiding out, knowing I'd been found out.

I knew what I'd been told prior to the party. But I loved candy. It tasted so good. I wanted it. Plus, it *looked* so good. Just seeing it sitting in a dish drew me in. And to be totally honest, there was something else going on as well, though at the time, my six year-old self wouldn't have been able to articulate it. What was it? The feeling that I knew something others didn't. The idea that my supposedly stealthy actions were benefitting me. The thought that I was getting what I wanted in spite of directions to the contrary...and that no one was the wiser concerning my behavior.

If you were to tell me a story about one of your own underhanded exploits in life, the scenario you would share would undoubtedly be different than my own, but chances are fully 100% that there would be similarities in our accounts. Why? Because what I have just described for you is universal in scope. It is an age-old pattern. It is the pattern of the path to sin.

As we come back to God's Word today to continue looking at the framework of the Fall, the very same pattern is in evidence. Look at the passage: as Satan tempted Eve, Eve looked to the tree and a myriad of things went through her mind, initiating a domino effect.

First, she gave in to the lust of the flesh: she noted that the tree was good for food.

Next, she gave in to the lust of the eyes: she saw that the tree and its fruit was pleasant, or delightful, to look at.

Finally, she gave in to the pride of life: she perceived that the tree was desirable to make one wise.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life: all things of the world, none of them things from the Father, as 1 John 2 reminds us. This was a bad deal all the way around.

One of the tragedies of this event, of course, is that while Eve looked and noted and saw and perceived that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was everything she could have ever hoped for, in the end it was all a ruse on the part of Satan. The tree wasn't good for food at all; she was simply deceived into believing it was so. The fruit was most likely pleasant to the eye — but only in the way that the prank candy at my family gathering was pleasant to my eye. And as for becoming wise, for feeling that in eating the fruit she would know something that others didn't? That turned out to be true...but in the most horrific way imaginable. Indeed, her quest for wisdom ended up being patently foolish.

So Eve took of the fruit and ate. Note, please, that she did so of her own volition. This was not a force-feeding in the least. The serpent, though certainly encouraging her all along, did not make Eve's choice for her. It was something she did on her own, and something she would have to own for herself.

Wrapping Up

Which brings us to one more point to make as we wrap things up for the day. Did you read the passage carefully? Did you see what I saw towards the end of verse 6? Eve, it turns out, was not in the garden that day by herself. Eve's husband was with her during this fateful exchange with the enemy. Adam was right there in the mix — and as far as we can see by what the Scripture says, he took the bait right alongside his wife, hook line and sinker. That opens an entirely new and extremely significant line of conversation on this subject, one that we'll approach in our time together tomorrow.

For now, I'd like to connect a final set of dots as we close. Remember the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life? A vicious triumvirate if there ever was one. No wonder Adam and Eve succumbed to it. No wonder you and I wrestle each and every day with the very same thing, often succumbing to it ourselves. There was One, however, who when hit with that unholy trinity did not succumb to it. Instead, He overcame it. You can read about it, in fact, in the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. Jesus, tempted by Satan in the same three-fold way that we saw outlined in today's text...Jesus, faced with an appeal to the physical appetites, an appeal to covetous and emotional desires, and an appeal to pride...withstood the temptation. He beat it. He emerged from the trial victorious — and He did it for you and for me as our Savior.

Jesus could only die in our place as an acceptable sacrifice *for* sin if He Himself was *without* sin. He could only *die* on our behalf in a way that would count if He first *lived* on our behalf in a way that would count. When the Scriptures declare that He who knew no sin became sin for us, they are telling us not only that Jesus died for us at Calvary, but that He also lived for us in a completely perfect manner before He ever got to the cross. That's how He was able to credit to us His perfect righteousness while taking upon Himself our iniquities. And that's how, by trusting in that astoundingly beautiful finished work, our Lord's victory over sin, death, and the devil becomes ours as well. It is truly the Great Exchange...and through faith, you and I are the great beneficiaries of it.

As I said, more on all of this tomorrow. I'll look forward to seeing you then. God's peace, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone — God bless you today as we come together for Thursday's edition of EDiBS! It's good to be with you, and always good to know that so many of you are clicking in and faithfully following along as we go God's Word and study each day. Right now we're chugging along through the opening chapters of Genesis, where today we'll be having a final look at a selection of verses we've been examining over the past couple of days. As you open your Bible let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please be gracious and merciful to us this day. We want to know you more. Understand you more. Learn of you more deeply. Be drawn closer to you as your children. Bless us, we pray, with wisdom and understanding as we go to your Word. We ask this in Jesus' precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Eve is with the serpent...and Adam too. Eve takes and eats the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil...and Adam too. In doing so, Eve and her husband literally get an eyeful. Our focus this session: new vision, new knowledge, new reality.

Genesis 3:6-7

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened,

and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

In His book *God Came Near*, Max Lucado talks about a man who, after a lifetime of blindness, was given the gift of sight. He writes,

For 51 years Bob Edens was blind. He couldn't see a thing. His world was a black hall of sounds and smells. He felt his way through five decades of darkness. And then, he could see. A skilled surgeon performed a complicated operation and, for the first time, Bob Edens had sight. He found it overwhelming. "I never would have dreamed that yellow is so...yellow," he exclaimed. "I don't have the words. I am amazed by yellow. But red is my favorite color. I just can't believe red. I can see the shape of the moon — and I like nothing better than seeing a jet plane flying across the sky leaving a vapor trail. And of course, sunrises and sunsets. And at night I look at the stars in the sky and the flashing light. You could never know how wonderful everything is."

That's always been a beautiful story to me, and since I'm a huge Max Lucado fan, let me encourage you to go get *When God Came Near* and read it. You'll see how Max weaves this illustration into a beautiful expression of the Gospel...one of his great gifts as an author to readers everywhere.

Today, though, I'm seeing that story in a different light. I'm looking at the other side of the coin, as it were. Because as overwhelming and wonderful as it was for Bob Edens to gain his sight and go on to experience life in what to him was a new and incomprehensibly joyful way, as we come to God's Word today and see Adam and Eve in their newly minted situation, their gaining of sight is overwhelming in an entirely different way. They see anew to be sure — but what they see is anything but wonderful. It is, in fact, incomprehensibly fear-inducing and sorrowful, and the change it brings means that Adam and Eve — and every other human being to come after them — will go on to experience life in a manner very different than what God intended.

The very first thing that happens when the eyes of our first parents are opened in the text today is that they see things differently. They see the world changed, and they see themselves changed. They know, suddenly, that they are naked...and with that new knowledge, they experience something else that is new: embarrassment and shame. This comes not from their nakedness, but from the brokenness that they have initiated with God.

Many commentators explain this very well, I think, when they talk about the fact that the foundation of Adam and Eve's covenant of love and trust for one another was based on the unbroken covenant of love and trust between them and God — God governing them for their good, and they enjoying Him in that security and relying on Him. When they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, that covenant was broken, and so the foundation of their own covenant-keeping collapsed as well.

They experienced this brokenness, and experienced it immediately following the eating of the fruit, in two ways...ways that, not coincidentally, continue to manifest themselves in the brokenness of relationships between men and women today. In the first case, the one viewing my nakedness is no longer trustworthy, so I'm afraid I'll be shamed. In the second, I myself am no longer at peace with God, and I feel guilty and defiled and unworthy — I feel I deserve to be shamed.

Let's expand on that a little bit. In the first case, I, Adam, am newly self-conscious of my body, and I feel vulnerable to shame because I know Eve has chosen to be independent from God. She has, after all, just made herself central in place of God, which means that she has essentially become a selfish person. From this day forward, she will put herself first...so she is not safe for me. I feel vulnerable around her, because she is very likely to put me down for her own sake just like she did with God Himself. Suddenly, then, my nakedness has become precarious. I don't trust her any more to love me with pure covenant-keeping love. That's one source of my shame.

The other source is that I, Adam — not just Eve, my wife — have also broken covenant with God by taking and eating the fruit. If my wife is now rebellious and selfish, and therefore unsafe, so am I. But the way I experience it in myself as a man is that I feel defiled and guilty and unworthy. And that, in fact, is what I am. Shame has entered my world, and there is no going back to what was before.

John Piper, building on this same theme, writes,

*Before the Fall, what **was** and what **ought to have been** were the same. But now, what **is** and what **ought to be** are not the same. I ought to be humbly and gladly submissive to God. But I am not. This huge gap between what I am and what I ought to be colors everything about me — including how I feel about my body. So my wife might be the safest person in the world, but now my own sense of guilt and unworthiness makes me feel vulnerable. The simple, open nakedness of innocence now feels inconsistent with the guilty person that I am. I feel ashamed.*

Here's a question for you: have you experienced this reality in your own sense of self, or in your relationship with your spouse, or in your dealings with the people around you as you consider things as basic as your body and your appearance and all your insecurities...the impression you feel people have of you and the impression you have of them? So much of it goes back to shame — which comes from our universal brokenness as human beings. It's no surprise then that, as we see in today's passage, shame was the first manifestation of the Fall.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the last thing we see in this portion of the text is that Adam and Eve try to cope with their new situation by making clothing. Fig leaves, of all things. I guess you work with what you have in the moment, but still, there's an air of foolishness about their actions, don't you think? And yet in truth, every attempt we make to cover our own nakedness before God is just as foolish. There's really no way to hide it. This act on the part of Adam and his wife...this act on the part of Eve and her husband...is nothing more than their sinful attempt to conceal what has happened at the base of the Tree. Their nakedness feels too revealing, and so they try to close the gap between (using John Piper's language again) "what they *were* and what they *ought to be*." They do that by covering what is. Their desperate hope here, of course, is to present themselves to God in a new way. But the only One who can truly make all things new at this point is God Himself. In our very next session, we'll see the first glimmer of that newness already coming to the fore. I hope you'll join in and embrace it with me!

Thanks so much for your time today, everyone — I had a bit of a blood sugar crash as I was editing this for publication last night, and that's why we're late today. All is well, and I'll look forward to being with you tomorrow at our regular time. God's peace, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's rich peace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. If you've been coming along for our sessions over the past several days, then you know that we've been working our way through the opening of Genesis 3, which brings us the account of the Fall of creation. As we move back into the text today, let's take a moment as we always do and go before the Lord to ask His blessing on our time.

Prayer

Lord, thank you once again for this daily time to be together with you in your Word. Guide us by your Spirit and continue to teach us, that we may be conformed to the image of Jesus and strengthened in our faith. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, following their eating of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve are justifiably and understandably shaken to their core over the change that has come over them and over the very world itself. They're also scared stiff, which explains why we see them hiding from God in today's passage. We'll be spending quite a bit of time on their actions here, but before we do, we need to make an important observation. Our focus this session: "But the Lord God called to the man."

Genesis 3:8-9

8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

As a person who pastored churches over a period of twenty-some years, there were some absolutely amazing, joy-filled, and memory-making moments along the way. I wouldn't trade them for anything, save for the return of Jesus Himself. Those heady times were an occasion to celebrate God's goodness, and with it, the spirit of His people who were joined together in mission and ministry.

There were also times over the years when less-than amazing things happened in some of those churches. Challenging times. Times filled not so much with joy but with the distinct absence thereof. In those instances, no matter what was going on or what the challenges were or who might be doing what, those not-so-heady times were an occasion for me to do something else: to take responsibility and own whatever the shortcomings might be.

It didn't matter whether I was personally involved in a given situation or not; by virtue of the fact that I was the pastor, the servant leader, the person having ultimate responsibility for what occurred in the congregation, the buck stopped with me. If someone was to be called out over something, I was to be the called out one. I knew that going in, and I accepted it, even when it was hard.

I mention that today for one reason: in the reading before us from God's Word, there is an individual with a similar responsibility in life, and though we've barely heard anything from him to this point in the biblical narrative, something big has just gone down. Because of his position, because he has been tasked with being a servant leader, and because he is the person having ultimate responsibility for what occurs on a daily basis in Eden, the buck stops with him. There is a calling out about to take place, and he is about to be the called out one. Did he know this going in? Of course he did. But the interesting thing, as we'll see when we go deeper into the passage, is that he does not want to accept it. Instead of stopping the buck, he will come to be known as the first person in history to pass the buck.

In today's passage, please notice just this one thing: after the disastrous incident at the Tree in the middle of the Garden, God comes for Adam, not Eve. Have you ever thought to ask why?

Our modern age tends to think of headship or leadership in terms of authority. Scripture, however, speaks of it far differently; almost always in terms of responsibility and service. We've already seen that idea clearly delineated for us in Genesis 1 and 2 when Adam was first given his charge by the Lord. In this case — the case of Adam and Eve in the garden — the headship and leadership of Adam as husband to his wife brings him to a place of responsibility for what has happened. This doesn't mean that Eve is without guilt in the Fall, but as one pastor I know puts it, headship means that the head has to answer for what happens.

This is why, when God comes to the Garden after these two have sinned, rather than saying, "Adam and Eve where are you?" He says, "Adam, where are you?" Again, it is Adam, by virtue of his role and responsibility, a role and responsibility given to him by God, who must render an account.

When we were together last time, we made the remarkable observation that during the entire time Eve was being put on the spot and tempted by Satan, Adam was there. Why then the silence? Where was the defending of Eve and her honor? Where was Adam's hand of protection? Why did he fail to step in and stand up to the enemy, fail to augment his wife's strength, fail to speak up when so many lies were being thrown down? When we look to hear

from Adam, there are only crickets chirping in the heat...and not long after, there is acquiescence as he joins Eve in her iniquity.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Adam had an obligation to rebuff Satan and guard his wife in the Garden. But for whatever reason — a reason we're not given — he was passive. As head and leader of the family, his responsibility was to defend his spouse. Eve should have never had to face the devil and answer him alone. Instead, Adam's silence served to give strength to Satan's arguments. Make no mistake: Eve was not without sin, not by a long shot, and God will soon be calling her out as well. But Adam was culpable here. He was complicit. His behavior... or lack thereof...was certainly integral to the Fall. That's one reason why we still talk today about the "Sin of Adam" rather than the "Sin of Eve," and that's also why Scripture declares that it was in Adam that all died....even as it will be in Jesus, the Second Adam, that all will be made alive.

As I said at the beginning of today's session, over the next several days we'll be delving into the details of the coming conversation that God will have with these two dearly loved, but now deeply flawed, human beings. His love for them will not be snuffed out...not even by their sin and rebellion. But there are changes coming; swift and hard and fast changes, because of all that has occurred. Be sure to come along as we discuss it.

Have a a great weekend everyone, and I'll look forward to seeing you again coming Tuesday following the observance of Memorial day. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm so glad to have you along today as we come to a new week of Bible study following the observance of Memorial Day here in the United States. Yesterday, citizens of our country took time to remember and to honor the memories of those who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of the nation they loved and served. It gave every person in our land the opportunity to pause and remember that freedom is never free — something that as God's people in Christ, Christians understand in a special way indeed.

As we work our way back into God's Word today, I continue to keep you in my prayers as we endeavor to grow together in the Scriptures, where this session has us returning to the third chapter of Genesis. Join me for a word of prayer, and let's begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your good gifts to us — the forgiveness of our sins, abundant life, and the promise of life forever with you. Please teach us through the Scriptures today, that we learn to know you more and grow more deeply in our faith. In your most holy name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we return now to Adam and Eve in the Garden...where things have suddenly, tragically, and forever changed. Our focus: Of hiding and seeking.

Genesis 3:8-10

8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he

said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

A telemarketer called a home one day, and a small voice whispered, "Hello?"

"Hello! What's your name?"

Still whispering, the voice said, "Thomas."

"How old are you, Thomas?"

"I'm four."

"Good, Is your mother home?"

"Yes, but she's busy."

"Okay, is your father home?"

"He's busy too."

"I see, who else is there?"

"The police."

"The police? May I speak with one of them?"

"They're busy."

"Any other grown-ups there?"

"The firemen."

"May I speak with a fireman, please?"

"They're all busy."

"Thomas, all those people in your house, and I can't talk with any of them? What are they doing?"

"Looking for me," whispered Thomas.

+++

"Where are you?" It's one of the great, age-old questions of mankind. These days it can be a rather innocuous inquiry thanks to the advent of cell phones — people are always asking one another about their whereabouts — but other times, "Where are you?" is a question with some built-in bite. There's a certain gravity to it...gravity such that it arouses fear on the part of the one of whom it is asked. As a parent, you know this question and the power thereof quite well. Chances are also pretty good that you remember this question from your childhood, when you were not the asker but the askee. Finally, as demonstrated so well by young Thomas a moment ago, "Where are you?" can also be a question that, in certain situations, people would prefer not to answer — regardless of their age.

As we come back to the Scriptures today in the immediate aftermath of the Fall but prior to our Lord's confronting of Adam and Eve over their transgression, we have come upon just such a scenario; in fact, the first ever scenario of its kind. Adam and Eve, experiencing shame, embarrassment and confusion over all that has changed since their eyes were opened by their eating of fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, are hiding. Who are they hiding from? God. Why are they hiding from Him? They're naked and afraid. Why is their nakedness suddenly an issue when it never was before, and what has prompted them to be afraid, especially when fear is something that heretofore they have never experienced? They're not sure, but whatever has happened to them, they know it's Not Good...and Not Good is new to them in a terrifying way.

There's one big question that comes up in today's passage, and many you have already asked it as you've turned this scene over in your head. What's that question? When God comes

walking through the Garden during the cool of the day and asks Adam, “Where are you,” what is the purpose of the inquiry? God obviously knows where Adam is; He’s God. God also obviously knows what has happened; again, He’s God. If God knows where Adam is and knows what Adam has done, why doesn’t He just come in with His omnipotent hand, get out His can of Divine whoop-heiny, and be done with this worthless, rebellious piece of His creation?

The answer, first of all, is that though Adam and his wife have indeed rebelled, in God’s eyes they are — still, even now — far from worthless. To Him they remain precious. The answer, second of all, is that though He could very well come in eyes blazing, nostrils flaring, and chest heaving to exact Divine retribution on these two, God’s character is not only one of justice, but of mercy. Thus He is already, even in these very first moments following the Fall, intent not on destroying Adam and Eve, but on closing the distance that has opened up between Him and them due to their sin. There is a gulf now, one that only He can bridge...and because He loves these two, because He loves all that He has made, He has already begun to set things in motion to that end.

This love is why, instead of immediately rocketing down to Adam and Eve on a fuel tank of holy anger to confront them with their iniquity, our holy God comes to Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. Walking. Calm. Measured. Purposeful. Patient.

This love is why God seeks out Adam and his wife personally and addresses them face to face rather than simply sending calamity their way as a consequence of their rebellion. The relationship between Him and them is currently a broken one because of the events that have just transpired, but it is still a relationship...and relationship is more important to God than almost anything.

Finally, this love is why God, in coming to this now-broken couple, will speak truth into the midst of their lives, even though He knows it is going to hurt them — because the truth is what they need in order to go beyond this new thing called hurt and get to an also-new thing called healing.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, God coming to the garden in the cool of the day to seek out His own? This, really and truly, is the beginning of the promise of the Gospel. This is the beginning of Good News, badly needed. This is the beginning of hope reborn. And you know something? This way that we see God coming to Adam and Eve in the aftermath of their sin is not unique...because it’s the way He comes to all the rest of us who are in hiding as well. He knows where we are. He knows what we’ve done. He knows our nakedness and fear and shame. But because He loves us, He has chosen to bridge the gulf that our sin has created between us and Him. The bridge He will use is His Son, Jesus Christ. And very soon, right here while we’re still in Genesis 3, the first promise of Christ’s coming will be given. Do stay with us as we walk into the midst of that promise — it will be light to you in the midst of darkness!

Thanks for your time today, everyone; I’ll look forward to seeing you again tomorrow. Until then, God bless you richly in His Son, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being with me today as we open our Bibles together, and thanks for your continued prayers and support for our shared ministry. Your prayers, your gifts, and your faithfulness in posting and forwarding these daily studies to your friends and loved ones enable EDiBS to reach new people every day with God's Word, and I'm grateful for your partnership! Let's pray as we go to the Scriptures together.

Prayer

Father, you are great and mighty, and we praise your holy name today as we come before you. Thank you for the gift of your Word and the gift of being able to study it as your people. We ask for wisdom today; wisdom and understanding, that we may embrace and appropriate by faith all that you desire us to learn. Thank you again for this time and for your presence with us now. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the Lord God has just called out to Adam and asked, "Where are you?" Adam's response? "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." Today, the conversation continues from where we left off last time. Our focus this session: playing the blame game.

Genesis 3:11-13

11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Pastor and author John Killinger once told a story about the manager of a minor league baseball team who was so disgusted with his center fielder's performance that he ordered him to the dugout and assumed the position himself. The first ball that came into center field took a bad hop and hit the manager in the mouth. The next one was a high fly ball, which he lost in the

glare of the sun — until it bounced off his forehead. The third was a hard line drive that he charged with outstretched arms; unfortunately, it flew between his hands and smacked him in the eye. Furious, he ran back to the dugout, grabbed the center fielder by the uniform, and shouted, “You idiot! You’ve got center field so messed up that even I can’t do a thing with it!”

Have you ever noticed that while blaming others over things for which we’re responsible feels good in the moment, it never solves anything? Because of that, blame, at its heart, is really nothing but a waste of time. Dr. Wayne Dyer, whose self-help books were in no way Christian but often spoke quite intelligently about the human condition, said it this way: “No matter how much fault you find with another, and regardless of how much you blame him, it will not change you.” He went on to say that the only thing blame actually does is temporarily keep the focus off of us when we’re looking for external scapegoats. We may succeed in making someone feel guilty of something by blaming him or her, but what the act of blaming can never do is change the fact of our personal responsibility for whatever it is that occurred.

As we come back to God’s Word today, we see the reality of that truth on full display as the blame game is played by the chief objects of the Lord God’s creation. Tumbling out of the heart first of Adam and then of Eve like a row of dominos being toppled, they each try to hold anyone responsible for their actions but themselves. And while the blame is tumbling, they are stumbling...stumbling in their answers to the Lord’s questions, giving complex but grossly inadequate replies to His simple queries.

“Who told you you were naked?”

“Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

“What is this that you have done?”

Their responses, we see, are a grand exercise in deflection. Their answers, such as they are, don’t even line up with the questions being asked. The words being spoken by these two, this man and this woman, are not admissions of wrongdoing at all, but accusations against others — an attempt to shift blame. Adam blames God for “this woman you gave me.” Eve blames the serpent, “who deceived me.” Everybody’s blaming Somebody, but Nobody’s taking responsibility for it.

How completely consistent with human nature. How completely tragic this denial...denial in the very presence of the Divine. And frighteningly so, how completely I can identify with the pattern being exhibited on the pages of Scripture today. As I write the words I’m writing and look into the camera to speak them, I would be an outright liar if I tried to come at this subject — or any other, for that matter — from a place of moral or spiritual high ground. I hope you never have, and never will, get the feeling that I’m one of those supposedly put-together pastors who has life well in hand and never struggles with sin. First of all, such a person doesn’t exist. Second of all, if there are spiritual leaders out there who tell you otherwise, that’s your first clue that they ought not to be your spiritual leaders.

As I write and speak to you each day, I’m a person who must cop to being an inordinately accomplished deflectionist, In fact, I’ll go out on a limb with you and admit that I’m a pretty good accusationist as well. I have a knack, it seems, for blaming others over things that plainly fall within the sphere of my own responsibility. I’m super skilled in the art of implicating others for sins that are clearly my own. Am I proud of it? Not in the least. Do I understand it? To a degree, yes — but Scripture reminds me that my heart is deceitful and wicked above all else, so much

so that I can't even know the depths of my own depravity — so to a greater degree, no. What I do understand is that as a fallen, sinful human being, I often stumble as I give complex and yet grossly inadequate answers to simple questions posed to me by my Lord. As a fallen, sinful human being, I often point a finger in the direction of others, forgetting that when I do that, there are always three pointing back at me. I'm a person who is very good at noticing the speck in the eye of my brother or sister while not seeing the log in my own. In short, I'm an expert at the blame game. And unless I can depend on someone or something to change that, I'm pretty much stuck.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, how about you? Do you ever struggle to take responsibility for things that you've done or left undone...things that are plainly yours to own and no one else's? Do you ever find it easy to attribute your missteps to the actions of others...pointing your finger in the direction of someone to call them guilty rather than raising your hand to say, "guilty as charged?" I'm asking these things in a bit of a rhetorical fashion today, and why? Because the truth is that the pattern we see playing out in the lives of Adam and Eve in the text is not one that is foreign to any of us — not you or me or anyone else. We are all experts at playing the blame game. Our sin and our desire to hide it, or at least to shift it, makes us so. And again, as I said a moment ago, unless we can depend on someone or something to change that, we're all, every one of us, pretty much stuck.

That's an unpleasant thought, I know...and yet as we close, I would remind you of one very important thing: in today's passage, it's not just Adam who is on the scene, and it's not just Eve. God is also on the scene. He is there in Person. He, in His perfect holiness, in His perfect justice, but also in His perfect mercy and compassion, has come to seek out that which He loves. And He has come to be the Someone who will change the plight of the man and the woman...and of all men and women...so that they won't be stuck. God has come to redeem, and redeem He will. That, incidentally, is what we'll be covering in tomorrow's session, so be sure to come along and join in the hearing of some very Good News!

Thanks so much for your time today, everyone — I'll look forward to seeing you again next time!

Greetings

Hello everybody — welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with each of you today. It's great to have you along as we study our Bibles together, and I pray that the Lord will richly bless you with knowledge, wisdom and insight as you give yourself over to His Word through these next few minutes. Let's pray as we prepare to study, and as we do so, let's remember that our God is always ready to lavish us with His gifts!

Prayer

Father, thank you for your love – lavished upon us to overflowing and never-ending because you are its source. We are grateful for the way you have come into our lives, and we pray now that you will draw us closer to you as a result of being in your Word. Bless our study time, we pray in Christ's holy name – amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, following the great tragedy of the Fall the Lord God begins to mete out consequences to all involved...and He starts not with Adam or Eve, but with the serpent. Our focus this session: "Cursed are you."

Genesis 3:14-15

14 The Lord God said to the serpent,
"Because you have done this,
 cursed are you above all livestock
 and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
 and dust you shall eat
 all the days of your life.
15 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
 and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
 and you shall bruise his heel."

A great friend of boxers over the years, American writer Wilson Mizner was a boxer himself, and a talented one at that. One night Mizner and boxer Billy Smith visited a San Francisco bar, where after having too much to drink Mizner started a fight with some longshoremen. At the end

only one longshoreman was left standing, but although Mizner kept throwing punches at him, the man stayed obstinately upright. Suddenly, Smith noticed what was happening. "Leave him alone, Wilson!" he shouted. "I knocked him out five minutes ago." It turned out that a punch from Smith had indeed knocked the longshoreman out cold, but it had also wedged him vertically between a table and the wall. He was propped up, standing tall, but when Mizner went over and moved the table aside, the man dropped like a rock. He had been down for the count for some time.

As we come back to God's Word today and look at the passage before us, the picture of that longshoreman wedged into an upright position is a fitting one for us to keep in mind as we begin to look at events in the aftermath of the Fall. There has been a great fight in the heavenly realms. There has also been a decisive victory. The Lord God Almighty has soundly defeated the devil, his works, and his ways. And while Satan, for the time being at least, still seems to be standing, even seems to be engaged in the fight, in actuality he has long been defeated. He's down for the count. And the time is coming when, courtesy of a final and decisive movement from on High, he will drop like a rock once and for all.

When we think of God and His triumph over the enemy, we naturally — and rightly — tend to think immediately of Calvary. We remember the life our Lord Jesus lived for us, the death He died on our behalf, and His act of rising from the dead on the third day, by which He declared with absolute authority that Satan was a defeated foe. What we sometimes forget, however, is that the very first promise of Christ's work for us as Redeemer and Deliverer was announced thousands of years before His birth — announced right here in Genesis 3. And this announcement is not couched in the language of uncertainty, but in the language of assurance. When God curses Satan in the two verses before us today, He is treating him not as one who will at some point in the future be conquered if all goes according to plan, but as one who is already conquered, and whose defeat will be sealed by the sinless life, substitutionary death, and resurrection victory of the Savior of humanity.

Remember the questions God asked Adam and Eve in our last session? Remember His interaction with them as He came to them in the Garden? Remember the way He intentionally engaged with them and sought to hear from them in the aftermath of their sin? It was uncomfortable to be sure, but it was still a beautiful witness to us of our Lord's ongoing love, care, and concern for His now-fallen creatures. Satan receives no such courtesy in today's text. He is merely spoken to. His future is decreed, not deliberated or debated. As a result, there is nothing for him to do but slither away into the bushes both literally and figuratively in the face of God's pronouncement of judgment. And just as God pronounces judgement against Satan, so He proclaims victory over Him at the same time, and He prophesies exactly how the seal of the enemy's defeat will come about.

God announces that Satan will wound our Savior (you shall bruise His heel), but that our Savior will crush Satan with a mortal wound (He shall bruise your head). Furthermore, through the way in which this is made known — with no time wasted between the the tragedy of the Fall and the announcement of the Fix — we are given assurance that deliverance through the One known as the Seed of the woman, even our Lord Jesus Christ, is certain...and it is even now on its way.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Genesis 3:15 has been called the *protoevangelium*, that is, the first gospel. It's the first promise of Jesus. It's the first declaration that all is not lost, but that

all will be redeemed...that as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. Martin Luther said of this verse: "This text embraces and comprehends within itself everything noble and glorious that is to be found anywhere in the Scriptures." And Charles Spurgeon added, several hundred years after Luther, that "This is the first gospel sermon that was ever delivered upon the surface of this earth. It was a memorable discourse indeed, with Jehovah himself for the preacher, and the whole human race and the prince of darkness for the audience."

When we come back tomorrow, I want to take a few minutes with you and come back to this 15th verse of Genesis 3, this *protoevangelium*. Why? Because it will give us the opportunity to flesh out anew the whole of the Gospel message in all its richness — something we all need, all the time! I'll look forward to being with you then — in the meantime, have a terrific day in the grace and peace of our Savior Jesus, and may the joy of His presence bless and keep you. Take care, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. It's my privilege to be with you today as we open God's Word and seek His wisdom and His will for our lives together, and as we continue on in our journey through the book of Genesis, we're returning to a very special verse we first looked at yesterday. Let's pray and go to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we thank you for this day and for this time to be in your Word, we ask that you would give us clarity of mind and openness of heart as we study. Fill us with all wisdom and spiritual understanding as we endeavor to learn from you today. In Christ's precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the amazing, life-changing, hope-giving message of the Gospel has come to God's creation — and that almost immediately after the Fall. We talked about it yesterday, and today we'll have at it again. Our focus this session: more on Genesis 3:15, the *protoevangelium*.

Genesis 3:15

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

I shared a story with you many years ago. I want to share it with you again today. It's about a moment in the life of George Herbert Walker Bush, not when he was our 41st president, but when he was serving as our vice-president during the Reagan administration. The moment was brief, but it stayed with him all the days of his life, and it has stayed with me as well.

Vice President Bush was representing the United States at the funeral of former Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, when Brezhnev's widow did something completely unexpected, deeply moving, and quite brave. In a way it was a silent protest. Standing motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed, Mrs. Brezhnev was somber and showed no emotion — fitting for her role as the wife of the head of the Soviet Union. But then, just as the soldiers touched the lid to lower it, she suddenly reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. It was an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that truly ranks as one of the most profound

acts of civil disobedience ever committed. Why so? There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all publicly declared her hope that her husband was wrong. She publicly declared her hope that there was another life beyond this one. She publicly declared that that hoped-for life was best represented by and found in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross, and that somehow, Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband...or at least bring His life, hope, and peace to the nation her husband was leaving behind.

A.B. Simpson is reported to have said that the Gospel "Tells rebellious men that God is reconciled, that justice is satisfied, that sin has been atoned for, that the judgment of the guilty is revoked, the condemnation of the sinner cancelled, the curse of the Law blotted out, the gates of hell closed, the portals of heaven opened wide, the power of sin subdued, the guilty conscience healed, the broken heart comforted, and the sorrow and misery of the Fall undone." All of that is true — and that's what brings us back to Genesis 3 today, specifically the 15th verse of the chapter, and more specific still, the message therein that we call the *protoevangelium*.

Again, what is the *protoevangelium*? We spoke briefly about it yesterday, and now today we'll speak of it one more time. Genesis 3:15 says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." This is known as the first gospel...and that's where we get the term, all gussied up in Latin clothing because theologians tend to do that kind of thing. Furthermore, as scholar Michael Houdmann explains quite well, this verse introduces two elements previously unknown in the Garden of Eden, elements that are the basis of Christianity: the curse on mankind because of Adam's sin, and God's provision for a Savior from sin who would take the curse upon Himself.

In this all-important verse, here's what is laid out for us: first, God curses Satan to be forever at war against humanity, described here as the seed or offspring of the woman. The woman in question is in a general sense Eve herself, whose offspring throughout time are continually harassed by Satan (which is one reason the ravages of sin and its consequences reverberates down to us today). This historic enmity — that is, this hostility and hatred — between us, the devil, and his demons, first begins here. So it is that Satan now wars against the people of God...and this has been the case ever since the tragic affair in the Garden.

More important today, however, is to know that the offspring of the woman in the text refers in a specific way to Jesus Christ, who was born of a woman, and that the enmity spoken of here in the passage is thus between Satan and Christ. The seed of the serpent struck at the heel of the Savior when Judas, the Pharisees, the rabble, and the Romans all conspired to condemn our Lord to be crucified. But His wound was not the final act. He rose the third day, having paid the price for the sin of all. The ultimate victory was His, and He crushed the head of Satan, removing forever his rule over man.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping up then, what does this mean? it means that the power of Christ would destroy Satan and all his principalities and powers, confound all his schemes, and ruin all his works. It means that the power of the cross would crush Satan's whole empire, strip him of his authority — particularly his power over death — and end his tyranny over the bodies and souls of men. All this would be done by the incarnate Christ when He lived, suffered and died for humanity. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, He "crushed" the devil's head, defeating him forever. The *protoevangelium* shows us that God always had the plan of salvation in mind...and it was in

His love, mercy and compassion that He informed us of that plan as soon as sin entered the world. As we're told in the 1 John 3, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." This is most certainly true!

When we come back next time, we'll be building on what we've seen here as the Lord continues to deal with a newly fallen world in the aftermath of sin's entrance into it. We will see law being spoken in all its severity to be sure...but we will also see Gospel being spoken in all its sweetness. Together they will provide a great declaration of hope — the greatest the world could ever hope to see.

Have a great weekend everyone; more on all of this when we gather on Monday! God's peace, and take care.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's peace, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, where today we're blessed to begin another new week of Bible study together as God's people in Christ. It's great to have you along, and as we turn our attention to God's Word these next few minutes, we'll be spending more time in Genesis 3 where we've been working our way through the aftermath of the Fall. I'm eager to get to it with you, and in fact, each of our sessions this week will have much for us to consider as we look to the Scriptures.

Before we jump in today and begin, our entrance into the month of June together means we're also entering our semiannual ministry funding period. A great many of you know that twice a year — each June and each December — we ask for help to keep EDiBS strong and sustainable. When we ask, we always ask cheerfully and unashamedly from a place of joy in our hearts, and we always pray that you'll give from a place of joy in your hearts — never under compulsion, never from a sense of guilt, and certainly never because you feel pressured. What we do here we do for free — we always have and we always will — and yet because there is a significant cost to keep it going, we ask for willing souls to come alongside us and partner together in this Gospel ministry. If our daily time in God's Word is helpful to you in your Christian faith, if it's a blessing to you, your friends, or your loved ones, and if you'd like to see us continue to grow and expand our reach with the Scriptures each day, then consider this month — the beginning of summer and traditionally a very dry time for nonprofit ministries — to be an especially great time to give a gift.

All through this month we'll have the Donate button active at the top of the daily email, and when you click it you'll find all the information you need in order to donate securely online or to send a check or money order via regular mail. You can always go to www.EDiBS.life and find the donation link there as well, and if you have any questions about giving a particular kind of gift to the ministry, you can always send us an email at pastorpaul@edibs.life. Over the next 30 days or so I'll be sharing with you about new ministry developments and ministry initiatives (we have a lot of exciting things going on right now!) and of course, we'll continue each day as we always do with the study of God's living, active, and always-enduring Word. Thanks so much for being such a big part of what we do here, everyone, and thanks for listening today!

Let's pray now, and ask God to bless us as we look to our Bibles.

Prayer

Lord God Almighty, as we come before you, we bless your holy name and we ask that your hand of mercy would be upon us. We confess to you our sins, and we ask that you would forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Open our eyes to your Word — and as we open our Bibles, give us hearts to seek after you with everything that is in us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, The Lord God, having pronounced a curse on the serpent for what it had done in tempting Adam and Eve to sin, now speaks to Eve. Our focus this session: The pain to come...in more ways than one.

Genesis 3:16

16 To the woman he said,
“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”

What do you think of when you think of pain? I asked myself that question, and I decided that the best way to answer it was with the voice of experience. I went back and catalogued moments of pain from my own life, and what I found was surprising. There were definitely moments of physical pain though the years...a bad bike accident, a broken collar bone, recovery from surgery. There was also pain from loss — loss of my grandparents, loss of a brother when I was 13, and loss of my other brother just this past summer. What surprised me, though, was that while those things certainly hurt, the greatest hurts I've experienced over the years — the greatest pain — has come from the brokenness of relationships. Whether it was a friendship, an extended family member, or even the dealings I had with one particular church many years ago, tension, conflict and ultimately, the termination of those relationships did more to break me as a person, did more to bring me agony, than anything else I can think of. When I think of pain, physical pain is certainly on my radar. But the emotional fallout from bonds torn asunder sits at the top of the heap.

Maybe you're someone who can relate to that today. Maybe you're someone who knows pain in just that way. If not, then you certainly know it in one of many other ways. As human beings we all experience pain on a multiplicity of levels because we are fallen people living in a fallen world. Why bring up that fact? I'm not wanting to prick your conscience or rip scabs off of any wounds; not at all. Rather, I'm simply bringing it up to introduce today's text in a very straightforward and concrete manner. This one snippet of God's Word — Genesis 3:16 — is a portion of Scripture that's very important for us to understand, particularly so because it tends to be a highly *misunderstood* verse. Some of you, in fact, have already been rushing to various Bible translations over the past minute or so to see how different versions render this passage, because something about the way the ESV — the version I'm using to teach through Genesis — seemed different or off to you when I read it aloud. Here's the sticking point I'm talking about, from the second part of the verse:

“Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”

We're going to talk about that portion of the passage in general today and in detail tomorrow, but before we can get there, we need to look at the first part of the verse, so let's do that now.

Today as God speaks to Eve, He speaks to her of pain. Pain as a consequence of sin. Pain as the curse of sin. Pain as a new reality in her life as a result of having rebelled against Him. The first aspect of pain being referred to, of course, is the physical pain of childbirth. It will now

surely be multiplied, says the Lord. And it's true, is it not? It has been well-documented that of all living things which bring forth offspring in this world, women bearing their children experience more pain than just about any other creature. This curse strikes at the very heart of Eve's distinctiveness as a woman, as a female, and why? Because she will be, as her very name means, the mother of all the living. Eve means "life-giver." Eve will be the propagator of the human race. From her line, in fact, will come the promised Savior. But each time she gives birth, as joyful as it will be, there will nonetheless be for her a reminder of her sin. There will be pain. And it will indeed be physical.

Now — what of the second part of the verse? I'll introduce it to you today by simply saying this: it too is about pain. But rather than pain of the physical sort, the pain being spoken of here is all about tension, conflict, and termination. Don't get me wrong: while physical pain most definitely hurts, and while physical pain is certainly on our radar as human beings, it is this second kind of pain — the pain that comes from the emotional fallout of bonds torn asunder — that sits at the top of the heap. That's what we'll take up and talk about in depth when we come back next time.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I know I've left you with a bit of a cliff hanger today, and I've certainly left you with lots to think about. Until we meet again, let me simply encourage you: if you're one who is experiencing pain of any kind today, whether emotional, physical, or spiritual, take refuge today in our gracious Lord Jesus Christ. He knows what you're going through, because He's experienced it in His life too, and He will not leave you alone in the midst of your hurt.

Much love to each of you in His name, and once again, do come back tomorrow so that we can pick this up again. Take care, and I'll see you then!

Greetings

Hello, everyone! Grace to you in our risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to be with you today, where as we come to the Word of God in our time together, it's my prayer that your life will be impacted and affirmed as a result. We're still in the midst of Genesis 3 right now, coming back today to the second part of what we looked at last time. Let's pray and open our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, please bless us by your Word today. Grant us mercy, lavish us with grace and peace, provide us with a renewal of hope, and sustain us with a reminder of your love, which never fails even though we are so often wayward and stubborn children who willfully sin against you. Clear our minds and prepare our hearts for all that you have for us now. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, We're back to the 16th verse of Genesis 3, where we're in the middle of a conversation about pain which is coming to Eve (and all the rest of us) in consequence of sin. Our focus this session: a contrariness of heart.

Genesis 3:16 (Part 2)

16 To the woman he said,
"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you."

There's an old family joke in our home concerning yours truly that the best way to get me not to do something is to tell me I have to do it. It harkens all the way back to my childhood where, while I was for the most part an obedient kid, I was also an obstinate one. The joke would be funnier if it was less true, but the reality is that when those words are spoken to me as a fun-loving poke or leveled at me in a not so fun-loving accusation, I have to raise my hand and say, "Guilty as charged!" I'm not proud of the fact that I tend to have a contrary streak in life. I'm not delighted to admit that I can be a jerk over silly issues. I'm not happy to tell you that I like to be the master of my own choices and that I don't like to be told what to do. But it's true; all true. And you know what? Sometimes those character traits in my life have been a cause for pain — pain for me, and especially pain for others. How many of you can relate?

The reason I bring up the concept of contrariness today, the idea of going against the grain, the attitude of wanting to be in charge of oneself and of others, is because it brings us squarely back to the passage in God's Word that we began to talk about in our time together yesterday. God, you'll remember, has been speaking to Eve concerning her transgression and the consequences thereof — which brought us to our dialogue about the nature of pain. Pain can in some instances be physical, and yes, physical pain is one of the consequences of the Fall. Our Lord specifically spoke to Eve about physical pain with respect to childbirth. But Pain —

sometimes the worst kind of pain — can be emotional and relational, and it's actually that kind of pain which is being spoken of in the second half of Genesis 3:16. You will experience physical pain indeed, says God to Eve, but wait, says our Lord...there's more.

“Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”

What is the Lord talking about when He says such a thing as this? What does it have to do with what we've been discussing? How does the idea of pain rise to the surface in this part of the text? The answer actually has everything to do with relationship...the marriage relationship. And the pain God is talking about is the pain that, because of the entrance of sin into the world through the transgression of Adam and Eve, revolves around the ongoing struggle between man and woman for leadership and control within that relationship.

Remember how things were for man and woman, Adam and Eve, in the beginning, prior to their eating of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? The perfection of their complementary relationship, ordained as it was before the Fall, was something that was beautiful and good to its core, something which worked wonderfully and harmoniously without conflict. Now, however, it has been damaged and deeply distorted. Sin has ruined what was, and what now is is bent and broken.

How does that brokenness play out? By the “desire” of the wife for her husband...not desire for him as an object of affection, faithfulness, or commitment, but the desire to oppose him, to take over his headship, and to lead in his place. That's what the word *desire* means here today's passage.

We find the same word — a rare word, by the way, and a seldom-used word in the Old Testament — with the very same usage in the next chapter. It pops up when God talks to Cain in the midst of his bitterness over the whole good offering/bad offering affair. God warns Cain prior to his murdering of Abel, saying, “Sin's *desire* is for you.” In other words, it wants to own him and overpower him (which it will tragically end up doing in the killing of his brother). In the same way, so it is that Eve's *desire* is for her husband, and this, incidentally, is why the ESV and several other translations of Scripture flesh out the meaning of the word more fully instead of simply letting the word “desire” stand on its own. The text is translated, and properly so, “Your desire shall be *contrary* to your husband.”

This makes a huge difference in our understanding of the passage, does it not? Many people have mistakenly assumed through the years that because of Eve's transgression, part of her punishment was that she would now be relegated to having a mousey, submissive, meek desire for her husband, who would now punitively rule over her because of her sin as the better and more noble half of the two. That's frankly a terrible interpretation, and it's also incredibly devaluing and dishonoring to the personhood of Eve — and of all women who would come after her. When God tells Eve that her desire will now be for her husband, He's not telling her that she will now be a barefoot-in-the-kitchen, subservient waif who falls all over herself doing her husband's bidding; He is simply explaining to her that with sin's entrance into the world, there will now be tension and conflict between her and her husband, conflict that brings bitterness and brokenness to the marriage relationship where before there was joy and peace.

And as for Adam now ruling over her? Here we have the other side of the same bad penny, and another tragic proclamation of a new reality as a result of the Fall. Not only will Eve now have the desire to oppose Adam and assert leadership over him, which is a reversal of how male and female were so graciously designed to work together in the original creative decree of our Lord, but because of sin, now Adam will also abandon his own God-given, pre-Fall role of leading, guarding and caring for his wife. What will come in its place? His own sinful desire to harshly rule and lord things over the one he was originally called and created to love and cherish.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, that's struggle. That's brokenness. And yes, that's real — and ongoing — pain, one of the most tragic outcomes of all in the terrible aftermath of the Fall of creation. Think of it: the rule of love founded in paradise has now been replaced by something very different: a mutual commitment to tyranny, oneupmanship, and the desire to dominate. It's a truly terrible thing, something that has touched us all to one degree or another in life. It's something that indeed causes us to cry out in pain, but also to cry out for redemption. The good news is that the redemption needed has come — and in time it will finally make all things new again. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. We'll talk about the reality of that hope more in the days ahead...please do come along and be part of the conversation. God's peace, my friends, and I'll see you again next time. Take care.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm Paul Stark, and I'm your host for the next 8-10 minutes as we go through our daily journey of exploring God's Word together. After twelve and a half years, I still consider this ministry one of the great privileges of my life, and I'm happy that you've chosen to join in with today's study. We've been going through the opening chapters of Genesis over the past several weeks, and today we find ourselves back in Genesis 3. Let's pray together as we go to the text.

Prayer

Father, we praise you for your goodness to us, and we call out to you today with thanksgiving in our hearts for all that you've done for us – chiefly for the way you've shown your love for us through the sacrifice of your only Son. Please bless the study of your Word today, in Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, From the serpent, to Eve, and now to Adam, God continues to call out the curses that have come upon His creation because of sin. Our focus this session: more fallout from the Fall.

Genesis 3:17-19

17 And to Adam he said,
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
19 By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

I've shared this with you before but it bears repeating based on the passages we've been going through over the past several days. David Breese, in his book *Living for Eternity*, vividly described the tragedy of the Fall, and toward the end of the last chapter he wrote, “Had Adam and Eve retained their original state, they never would have died. But Eve and then Adam yielded to the serpent's temptation, and death came into the world. Before that moment, they were in a beautiful, pristine state. They existed on a level far above the present condition of the human race. It is difficult to imagine what man was like then by viewing him as he is now. It would require something like trying to reconstruct the original version of an aircraft from its wreckage. If we knew nothing of flying, we would hardly suspect that it had once soared above the earth. The material would be the same; the capability of flight, however, would be lost.”

Everyone, this is precisely what we've seen in the Word of God thus far in Genesis 3: a once-beautiful and remarkable manifestation of our Lord's handiwork, once soaring in the highest heights of goodness, has become a crash site. Think about that today with the solemnity, and yes, even the sorrow, that befits it. But as you do, be awestruck at an even greater reality: already, God has promised a rescue. Amazingly, as He speaks Law on the one hand — we've just heard it again today — He also announces the Good News of One who will come to restore all that has been lost.

Look to the other books of the Old Testament and see over and over again the announcement that the promised Savior is coming. Look to the books of the New Testament and you'll see that promise come to fruition and made manifest in the Gospels. Look to the inspired writings of Peter and Paul and John and James and Jude and you'll see it there too. Paul in particular speaks of the power of the Gospel of Christ in an almost constant manner, and the way he talks about Jesus in Galatians 3, for example, is an especially wonderful picture of life that lines up in direct response to the portrait of death painted by the Fall here in Genesis 3. What does he say there? He says that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. And it's true: of all the curses we've seen here in the aftermath of the entrance of sin into the world — of all that has been announced here in Genesis 3 — Jesus bore each one in its totality through His own life and death.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, consider these points, and tomorrow we'll come back to them:

- Sin brought pain to childbirth, but no one knew more pain than Jesus did when He, through His own pain and suffering, brought many sons to glory (Hebrews 2).
- Sin brought conflict to Adam, Eve and all the world, but Jesus endured the greatest conflict of all to bring our salvation (Hebrews 12).
- Thorns came with sin and the Fall, and Jesus wore a crown of thorns to bring our salvation (John 19).
- Sin brought sweat and toil, and Jesus did all the work His Father gave Him to do — and even sweat, as it were — great drops of blood to win our salvation (Luke 22).
- Sin brought sorrow, so Jesus became a Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief, to save us (Isaiah 53).
- And finally, sin brought death...but Jesus tasted death for everyone that we might be saved (Hebrews 2).

Jesus Christ has come to be our Rescuer. Jesus is the One who has come to restore. And Jesus has come to bring life when, because of our sin, death was our lot. It's love in the most amazing way!

Blessings to each of you in His name today as you think on those truths...as you think on the fact that your Savior has come to the crash site of your life to put you back together again. You

may be nothing more than a crater strewn with wreckage for the moment — but the time is coming when you will soar.

Take care, everyone; I'll look forward to seeing you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, God's blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and thanks for joining in today for some time together in God's Word. Today we're continuing on in our look at Genesis 3, now nearing the end of this very important chapter, and I'm glad you've come along to be part of things. Let's go right to prayer and open our Bibles as we begin.

Prayer

Lord, we praise you today for the vast number of promises that you give to your people in your Word, and we're so thankful for the way they reach into every facet of our lives. We praise you for your love and for the way you never give up on your children. We ask that you bless the reading and the study of the Scriptures over these next few minutes. Use this time to shape your people; to fashion them into what you created, and indeed, recreated them to be. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we have not one, but two strong pictures of God's love and mercy in His Word, both directed towards Adam and Eve. We're actually going to focus on the last one first, which we'll talk about today, and the first one last, which we'll cover as we close out our week tomorrow. Our focus this session: Clothed.

Genesis 3:20-21

20 The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. 21 And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Yesterday I had the privilege to spend most of the afternoon with my now-21-year-old son. Normally it's one of my favorite things to do, partly because his being away at college makes our visits too few and far between. This particular occasion, however, did not rank among my favorite visits, and the reason? It was a visit about clothes.

Jacob, if he could get away with it, would live his life in basketball shorts, flip-flops, and t-shirts which may or may not have seen the inside of a washing machine in the previous 30 days. Ordinarily I would let it slide. He's in his last year of college, he's carrying a 3.9 GPA, he's kind and considerate, and he possesses all kinds of other lovely character traits that make his wardrobe choice a less-than secondary consideration in the big picture. The problem? Jacob's sister is getting married in two weeks. He's going to be an usher. He's going to seat his mama and do all kinds of other "ushery" things that go on at weddings...which means he's going to have to wear a suit for the occasion.

Since the word "suit" is not in my university-educated child's otherwise very large vocabulary, and since for 21 years he has steadfastly refused every attempt to be fitted for such an alien garment, yesterday was the day of reckoning. It was an exercise in frustration, exasperation, tedium, and exhaustion. In the end I did get him clothed, but it cost me a lot, and it's going to take both of us some time to recover from the trauma of it all. I think on our next visit we'll just hang together at the bookstore and go out to lunch!

In today's reading from God's Word, there is another visit about clothes going on. New outfits are being provided for a certain couple to wear...much different than what they've been used to up to this point. We could even go so far as to call the clothes in question alien garments, and yes, they are garments that have come to be in the aftermath of a day of reckoning. The events

that led up to this moment have been fraught with frustration and exasperation. They've been full of tedium. They've fomented exhaustion. Oh, and one more thing: these clothes? They cost a lot...and it's going to take everyone involved some time to recover from the trauma of it all.

This is Adam and Eve. This is their new wardrobe, a wardrobe given to them in the aftermath of the Fall. With nakedness having suddenly brought shame, and with fig leaves being just plain silly and wholly inadequate to cover what now needs to be covered, God, we see in today's passage, makes clothes...clothes of skin. Clothes of skin are significant, and why? Because clothes of skin require that an animal has to die. Blood must be shed. A sacrifice has to be made...and this sacrifice is the very first sacrifice in all of Scripture. This means that Adam and Eve are now clothed with a garment that has been purchased with the life of another; purchased at great cost indeed.

Notice, if you would, one additional thing about the unique wardrobe being described here. Verse 21 tells us that God is not only the *Clothier*, but the *Clother*. God, in the midst of the disappointment and despair and brokenness that has entered His creation due to the actions of His children, *still dresses His children*. How gentle. How caring...and how loving. This is God's gracious provision of a covering for His people. A covering for those to whom He is still fiercely committed. A covering that He sees to personally — and a covering He still provides today.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I just mentioned that Adam and Eve are now clothed with a garment that has been purchased with the life of another. We too are clothed with a garment of righteousness that was purchased with the life of Another; purchased at great cost indeed. You see, Jesus Christ is our Covering. He is our sacrifice. It is His blood that has been shed. And while an animal of God's choosing became the very first sacrifice for sin, Jesus, of His own free choice, is the very last sacrifice for sin — the final sacrifice for sin. That's good news I need today; good news we all need. Hold it close to your heart and mediate on it, won't you? What a great and mighty God we serve...the God who has come to serve us!

All glory laud and honor to our Redeemer...to the Lamb of God who was slain, and whose blood set us free to be people of God! Take care everyone — I'll look forward to seeing you again next time.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with each one of you. Thanks for coming along on this last day of our week together,

and thanks for all you do to make this ministry an impactful one as we seek to be a Christ-centered resource for new people every day. I've always said that none of what we do here could happen without your participation, your prayers, and your partnership, and that's just as true today as it was in the beginning days of the ministry — so please accept my gratitude as together we give God glory and ask for His continued blessing on the work of EDiBS. Let's pray as we prepare to go once more to the 20th-21st verses of Genesis 3.

Prayer

Almighty and Gracious Father, please draw near to your people today as they draw near to your Word. We long to be made more like you – to be conformed to the image of Christ. Bless the teaching of the Scriptures to that end. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we have a rather simple question to ask as we come to God's Word, one that will bring a brief, simple, yet very important answer. Our focus: what's in a name?

Genesis 3:20-21 (Part 2)

20 The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. 21 And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Names can say so much about a person.

Louis the Sluggard, for example, was noted for his self-indulgence. He ruled from 986 to 987 over the Franks.

Ethelred the unready (968-1016) was given that moniker because of his inability to repel the Danish invasion of England. At first he paid tribute to the Danes, but their raids continued and he was forced to abandon England for Normandy in 1013. Those who are more generous call him Ethelred the ill-advised.

Then there was another Louis, Louis the Fat. Like his father, Louis the Fat was obese. In fact at the age of 47, because of his extreme corpulence, he was unable to mount his horse.

Names can say so much about a person indeed.

Today we come to another name: Eve. "Eve the Life Giver" we might call her...or as Scripture itself says, "Eve, the Mother of All Living." We call her those things because that's what her name, *Eve*, means: *life-giver*. It's a beautiful name, at least to my way of thinking, but theologically speaking it's a peculiar name — peculiar because it seems to be a descriptor or a signifier of something very different from that which Adam's wife has heretofore been known. Why do I say that? because at this point in time, she has done no life-giving whatsoever. Rather, she has been a co-bringer, along with her husband, of death into the world. Why, then, would Adam give her such a name as Eve?

As I ask that question (and as you think it through), this is actually a good place to stop for a moment and do a bit of textual housekeeping. If you've been with us since the beginning of our study in Genesis, then you know that ever since the creation of woman was outlined for us in the second half of Genesis 2, I've been referring to her by her given name — I've been calling her Eve. We all know that's who she is, and it just seems natural for us to refer to her that way.

In truth, however, up until today's passage, a place that finds us post-Fall and looking at a fractured future as a result of Eve and her husband rebelling against God and plunging the creation into the brokenness of sin, the woman has never had a given name.

Go back and look: up until now, she has never been called Eve. She's been called a female (Genesis 1:27), a helper fit for Adam (Genesis 2:18), a woman (Genesis 2:22, 23), and a wife (Genesis 2:24, 25; 3:8), but never Eve. Never a life-giver. Never the mother of all the living. She doesn't get that name until now...which seems ironic for two reasons: first is the aforementioned point that she is at the moment a death-bringer instead of a life-giver, and second is the fact that she's not presently a mother at all. Which brings us back to our original query: why then would Adam give her such a name?

The answer is not based on Adam and his sensibilities; the answer is based on God and His promise to save. The answer doesn't have anything to do with the present nature of things; the answer has everything to do with future reality. Adam gives Eve her name in faith. He trusts what God has said about bringing forth a Deliverer from her to set things right again after all has gone so tragically wrong. He remembers that God said He would defeat Satan through the Seed of the woman...and that's why he gives her such a beautiful name even in the midst of such a burdensome time. Eve's name is a Gospel name. Eve's name is a name of promise. Eve's name is a name of hope. And Eve's name is a name that points to redemption and restoration. That Adam gave his wife the name Eve in the aftermath of sin's entrance into the world is a testimony to her and to himself...and to us all...that God can take what is old and make it new again; that God can take what is dead and make it alive. And not just that God *can*; but that God *will*...and God *has*.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, life and light would come through Eve by virtue of the promised Seed. Death and darkness would be put down. The Mother of All Living would be the one to set the stage for the entrance of the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Because He died and rose again, death has been swallowed up in victory. And because He lives, we can face tomorrow. I so love that song by Bill Gaither; let's close today with just a few of those wonderful lyrics:

God sent His Son, they called Him Jesus;
He came to love, heal and forgive;
He lived and died to buy my pardon,
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives!

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow,
Because He lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living,
Just because He lives!
Take care folks, have a great weekend, and God willing I'll see you again come Monday!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for coming along today for some dedicated time in the Word of God with the people of God, all of us joining together with one another from all around the world to glorify God, to learn from Him, and to be drawn to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's always a beautiful picture for me to envision as we gather each day, and I'm thankful that we have the opportunity to do so through this ministry

that we share. As we get back into our study time in Genesis today, we'll be finishing up our look at Genesis 3. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord, as we thank you for this day we also take time to thank you for new beginnings. We all need a fresh start each day, and we know that it is only in the name of your Son that we are assured of such ongoing newness of life. Bring us to your Word today in a way that causes it to be indelibly written on our hearts. Cleanse us, strengthen us, and equip us by your Spirit to walk boldly and steadfastly in your ways. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the third chapter of Genesis ends with what at first glance seems to be another punitive action on the part of God as He expels Adam and Eve from the Garden. However, there's actually just as much mercy present in the final verses of the chapter as there is justice. Our focus: Divine love, Divine compassion, Divine protection.

Genesis 3:22-24

22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" 23 therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

I've been in a part of the country lately where there are lots of small bodies of water...ponds, marshy areas, swamplands and the like. Some are out in the open and accessible; you can walk the shoreline right next to the water. Others are fenced off, and the only way you can get to them is by trespassing and going where you're not supposed to go. The one thing that all bodies of water in this part of the country seem to have in common, however — fenced or not — is that they're all posted with warning signs. Most of them say something like this: "Warning: do not feed or approach wildlife." Accompanying those words on the sign is a picture, usually of an alligator, usually with its jaws open, and usually in close proximity to the hand of a person who ostensibly did not heed said warning.

Those signs, of course, are there for a reason.

Are they serious about the message they convey? Yes.

Do they warn of dire consequences if the message goes unheeded? Yes.

Are they blunt, even stern, with the wording they employ? Yes.

Are they meant to keep people away from the area where they're posted? Again, yes.

But with all that said, the reason those signs are posted isn't to exact punishment on the people who read them; the reason they're posted is to keep people safe.

As we come back to God's Word today and see mankind driven from the Garden of Eden to lives of hardship and toil as a result of their sin, lives in which they will now work the ground from which they came by the sweat of their brow and fighting thorns and thistles to produce sustenance for themselves and their offspring, we also see one more thing: as Adam and his wife are expelled from paradise, the Lord God posts a warning sign.

What do we read? “At the east of the garden of Eden the Lord God placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” Why do such a thing? Because now that sin has entered the world, the tree of life has become exceedingly dangerous. Now that sin has entered the world, for Adam and Eve to take the fruit of that tree and live forever — now as sinners — would be a terrible fate. And because sin has entered the world, God, who still loves this man and woman He created, must now protect them against that fate.

To keep these two and all of their offspring from partaking of the tree and thus consigning themselves to an eternity of brokenness and pain and consequence for transgression, an angelic guard has been set. Not just any angelic guard, by the way, but the cherubim, who are always associated in Scripture with the presence and glory of God. What are they there for? To bluntly and sternly convey a message about a now-very dangerous place, a place where people may no longer come because of the dire consequences that would result from trespassing. The cherubim are there to keep people away.

It’s sad, yes, and it’s serious. But with all that said, the reason this warning, this sign, this guard, is posted isn’t to exact punishment on the people who come across it; the reason it is posted is ultimately one of mercy. It is to keep people safe.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, for mankind to live forever in a condition of sin was an unbearable thought to the loving God who created them. That’s why in the aftermath of the Fall He wasted no time in preventing that from ever occurring — and that’s also why He brought forth a different plan for eternal life; one that would be untainted with sin and sadness because of the salvific work of One who would come to bring life from death and make all things new again. When we come back next time, the long story of hope, renewal, and restoration of the human race, which will have many twists, turns and detours along the way but which will ultimately culminate in the coming of the Savior who would redeem us all from sin, will commence in a very special way, so be sure to join us as we launch into it!

Take care everyone, God’s peace, and I’ll look forward to seeing you then.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday’s edition of EDiBS, and God’s grace and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s my pleasure to be with you as we come to our Bible study time today, and I praise God for His grace and mercy in drawing us to His Word together. On this second day of the week we’re opening, in brief fashion, to the fourth chapter of Genesis...but we’ll be addressing more of a side topic today which for many of you may be a sensitive one. It’s something not often discussed, but I hope that by addressing it here in a

loving way, it will be helpful to some of you in our EDiBS family. Let's pray and go to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Father, we ask that you would draw near to us and touch our hearts with your precious Word today. Please give us a renewed and strengthened faith, and grow us up strong as your disciples. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 4 begins with the first birth in the Scriptures, the first child born to Adam and Eve. Our focus this session: Adam knew his wife.

Genesis 4:1

4 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord."

Years ago Father John Powell told the story of Norma Jeane Mortenson. Remember that name? Norma Jeane's mother, Gladys Baker, was periodically committed to a mental institution, and Norma Jeane spent much of her childhood in foster homes.

In one of those foster homes when she was eight years old, one of the boarders raped Norma Jeane and gave her a nickel. He told her, "Take this and don't you ever tell anyone what I did to you." When she went to her foster mother to tell her what had happened, she was beaten badly. She was told, "Our boarder pays good rent. Don't you ever say anything bad about him!"

Norma Jeane turned into a very pretty young girl, and people began to notice. Boys whistled at her and she enjoyed that, but she always wished they would notice she was a person too; not just a body or a pretty face, but a real person.

Not long after she became a teenager, Norma Jeane went to Hollywood and took a new name: Marilyn Monroe. The publicity people told her, "We're going to create a modern sex symbol out of you." Her reaction, recorded in her diary, was "A symbol? Aren't symbols things people hit together?"

At any rate, the publicity people were right. Marilyn Monroe was an overnight, smash success. But still she kept asking, "Did you also notice I'm a person? Would you please notice?" Instead, she was cast in all the Dumb Blonde roles.

Not surprisingly, in time everyone hated Marilyn Monroe. She would keep her crews waiting two hours on the set. She was regarded as a selfish prima donna. What they didn't know was that most of the time when she was late, it was because she was in her dressing room vomiting. For so long...in truth starting at 8 years of age in the room of a seedy boarding house, she had been sexualized, then minimized, and finally, vilified...and she was terrified. She hated her life. She felt trapped and helpless, and all the while she kept saying, "Will someone please notice I am a person. Please." But no one did.

Norma Jeane — Marilyn — went through three marriages. She never stopped her plea: "Take me seriously as a person." Everyone kept saying, "But you're a sex symbol. Why would anyone treat you otherwise?"

And so it was that on a Saturday night at the age of 35, Marilyn Monroe took her own life. She killed herself. When her maid found her body the next morning, she noticed that the telephone was off the hook; it was dangling there beside her. Later investigation revealed that in the last moments of her life she had called a Hollywood actor and told him she'd taken enough sleeping pills to kill herself. He answered her flippantly with Rhett Butler's famous line from *Gone with the Wind*: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." And it was true: He didn't. No one did. The last words she heard before she died tragically confirmed to her that her fight for significance was one she couldn't win. Marilyn Monroe was thoroughly marketed, objectified and used by those who handled her. But she was never truly known.

Author Claire Booth Luce, in a very sensitive article, once asked, "What really killed Marilyn Monroe, love goddess who never found any love?" Pointing to the dangling telephone found at her death, Luce saw it as the symbol of the actress's whole life. She wrote, "Marilyn Monroe died because she never got through to anyone who understood."

Today we have the first specific mention of sex in the Bible. The term used is "knew..." Adam knew his wife. That Adam knew his wife isn't just a polite way of saying that Adam and Eve had intercourse, though the term is used often in the Bible in that sense. In actuality, to "know" someone is a most powerful way to describe sex. It shows the deeply interpersonal and sacred terms in which the Bible sees the sexual relationship.

Pastor David Guzik remarks that most of the terms and phrases people use for sex today are either coarse or violent. He's right. There's a lot of objectifying and using. There's very little recognition or valuing of personhood. There's less and less significance attached to sex as a whole today than ever before. But the Bible sees sex differently. It's not simply an act. It's not merely recreational. It's not something cheap or lacking in meaning, not something to be crassly marketed or casually misused. Neither is sex couched in loveless duty or looked upon as something only to be endured or engaged in as a way to procreate. The Bible sees sex as a beautiful thing; as a means of knowing someone fully and completely in a committed, life-long relationship. It sets sex within the bond of marriage and nowhere else, because to experience the intimacy and power of sex outside of the sphere for which it was designed by a loving Creator is to cheapen it, and to damage one's self and one's partner in the process. To "know" someone, then, indicates an act that contributes to the bond of unity and the building up of a one-flesh relationship. To know someone is not simply familiarity...it is intimacy. It's not having a person's body memorized; it's embodying a person with understanding and value and dignity. It's something that many of us in today's world have lost...but that with God's help we can rediscover and hold sacred once again.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, I realize that sex is not the most important part of a marriage relationship. A Syracuse University survey underscores that fact. Researchers asked married couples to rank the 10 most important things in a relationship. Caring, a sense of humor, and communication came in first, second and third. Sex came in ninth — just ahead of sharing household duties. Sex, however, is important nonetheless. Our attitude towards it, the manner in which we engage in it with our partner, and the sacredness with which we hold it in our marriages can often make or break the relationship. We all so deeply long to be understood. We all so deeply long to be cherished. We all so deeply long to be cared for and valued...valued as real people whose lives carry real significance. Sex — to know our partner and be known by

them — goes a very long way in making those things a reality in our lives as married people...or not. It's just something I'd like you to think about today as the people of God in Christ.

When we come back tomorrow, we'll be back to the birth of Cain once more, along with the birth of his brother Abel, and there will be much for us to take in as we begin to track their relationship. I hope you'll come be part of the conversation! Until then, the joy of our Lord Jesus be with you, and do have a wonderful day. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's blessings to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to have you here today as we open our Bibles together, and in the time we have over these next few minutes, we'll be considering in earnest the opening verses of Genesis 4. Let's pray as we go to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord God, you are worthy of our praise and adoration...not just in words spoken by our lips, but in lives of worship lived in thanksgiving and service to you for all you've done. Thank you for the great salvation you have provided us in Christ, and thank you for the blessing of being able to

grow in our faith each day. Please bless us now as we study your holy Word. This we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the beginning of Genesis 4 brings us to the account of Cain and Abel, brothers who, by what we can see from the witness of God's Word, are very different from one another. Our focus this session: two brothers, two offerings.

Genesis 4:1-5

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." 2 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

I had a friend in college whose love for God and the things of God was very inspiring to me. This person was a deep thinker, someone who approached every decision he made with clear intention and considered devotion. His life was committed to Jesus Christ in a way that permeated just about everything he did, and while he would be the first person to tell you that he struggled every day with sin and selfishness and all manner of wickedness just like the rest of us, he had a peace about him that made his relationship with our Lord very clear. More than anyone I'd ever known to that point, he was a person whose life was truly a living sacrifice in the way that the apostle Paul talks about in Romans 12: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship."

I had another friend in college who was very religious. He knew a whole lot of theology, could talk about faith deep into the night, was dialed into all the goings on in his church, and never missed a Sunday service. Everyone knew what he was all about — or at least what he claimed to be all about. The reason I make that qualifying statement is that this friend was one of those people we all know in life whose actions spoke so loudly that they drowned out anything he ever said. In short, he talked the talk, but didn't walk the walk. His religion was skin deep, but it was his worldliness and his disregard for the things of God that oozed from every pore.

The contrast between my two friends is one that we've all witnessed, one that we all know, and if we're honest, one that we've struggled with ourselves in life. We all have times when the timbre of our lives fails to match the tenets of our faith; when the vibrancy of what we say we believe bears no resemblance to our zombie-like practice of religion. Which brings us, of course, to Cain and Abel.

One is a worker of the ground, the other is a keeper of sheep. Both do their jobs, both are successful in bringing an increase, and both give offerings to the Lord from their respective harvests. Abel's gift is the firstborn of his flock. All the fat portions are included. It's a lavish offering; the best of the best. Abel's gift is offered in faith. Cain's gift, however, is at best perfunctory. It's run-of-the-mill. It's given with an attitude not of joy and blessing and thanksgiving, but of compulsion. Cain's offering is one given not in faith, but in fickleness and fear. The attitude is not a want-to, but a have-to...and in the eyes of the Lord God, there's a big difference between the two.

Today's passage says that the offering of Abel was accepted, or regarded, by God, but that the offering of Cain was rejected; that it had no regard. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews tells us that by faith, Abel offered up a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Because that's the witness of Scripture itself, let's restate the point: the excellence of Abel's offering wasn't so much with respect to the quality and quantity of what was given (though that may have been part of it), but more than anything its excellence pertained to the state of Abel's heart as he gave it. Cain's offering? Cain's offering was the legalistic effort of dead religion. His heart was not in his gift at all.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the Bible tells us that Cain was very angry that God had no regard for his offering. Why do you suppose that is? Did he feel righteous indignation over the fact that he had given of himself and that God had rejected it, or did his anger arise from the fact that both he and the Lord knew that he had not given his best? And what about the Abel angle? Could it be that Cain was jealous of his brother because Abel enjoyed the Lord's favor while he did not? There are a lot of things in play here, and we'll talk about them over the next few days. What we can say for the moment, however, is this: the sin that Adam and Eve brought into the world with their rebellion against God has obviously taken root and grown in their offspring, and it will take an Offering of a completely different kind from a completely different kind of Giver to kill it off. God will have to provide the Lamb for that.

Do come back to have at this again tomorrow, won't you? Powerful things are ahead of us here in this new chapter! Take care everyone — I'll look forward to being with you then!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody — welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace to you in Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God! In our time together today, we're actually going to take a brief moment to talk about another lamb... one that points to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Open your Bible once again to Genesis 4, and then join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you have looked upon us and seen our need; and so you have sent a Shepherd to your sheep to gather us together and bring us home. The Good Shepherd has laid His life down for His sheep...and yet miracle of miracles, the Good Shepherd is also the sacrificial Lamb whose blood cleanses us all from sin. Thank you for the love you have so

lavishly poured upon us in our Savior Jesus, who died that we might live. Please grant your blessing to us today. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come back to Abel and his offering before the Lord...the offering of a lamb. Our focus: the true and perfect sacrifice to come.

Genesis 4:2b-4

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering.

When we were together last time, we talked about the difference between the offering of Cain and the offering of Abel. They were different in many ways, but especially different when it came to the heart with which they were offered. Today I want to take just one or two minutes of your time to talk about the offerings themselves...specifically Abel's offering. Why? Because while Abel never speaks a word in Scripture, his offering to God speaks volumes about that which God Himself would provide as an Offering for us.

We've talked about this together many times through the years, but let me say it again today in an explicit way: every sacrifice in the Old Testament anticipated the true and perfect sacrifice which the Lamb of God would one day offer. They were all shadows of that coming perfect sacrifice — a sacrifice for sin. It all started, in one sense at least, with the sacrifice that was made in order to provide a covering for Adam and Eve when the Lord made clothes for them from the skins of an animal. But now in Genesis 4 with the offering of Abel, the offering of a first-born lamb, we see things begin to take shape in a much clearer fashion.

Here in Genesis with regard to Abel, it was one lamb for a man.

Later, at the Passover, it would be one lamb for a family.

Then, at the Day of Atonement, it would be one lamb for the nation.

But finally, with Jesus, there would be One Lamb who took away the sin of the whole world.

Christ, of course, is therefore the end of all the sacrifices under the Old Covenant. Those sacrifices were originally a witness to the people that they were sinners and could be saved only by a substitutionary death offered on their behalf. A worshiper, through such an offering, was testifying that he or she lived only by virtue of the slain victim in his or her stead. Furthermore, the fact that the sacrificial system demanded a continual sacrifice of animals testified that the blood of said animals was not sufficient; it could not take away sin, but only provide a covering.

Ultimately, it was all a promise, prophecy and pledge that God would accomplish with His own Lamb what the continual shedding of the blood of animals could never do. Jesus would be our Sacrifice once and for all; the final sacrifice; the Offering for sin to end every offering for sin for all time. Jesus would be the once and final Offering — one for which the Lord God would have regard.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, so far the lamb, offered by the first shepherd. Tomorrow, we'll share another few moments together talking about even more powerful imagery: how Abel as the first shepherd points to Jesus, our Good Shepherd. How rich this all is — and how special to

know, as we prayed a little while ago, that the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God are one and the same Savior! God's peace, everybody — I'll look forward to seeing you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's peace, welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and thank you for being with me on this last day of our study week together. Over the past couple of days we've been spending time on Cain and Abel, brothers born to Adam and Eve, and today we'll be coming back to Abel for a stand-alone session on some special aspects of his life. I'm so glad you're here; take a moment and join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Almighty God, we are so privileged to come into your presence and to speak our hearts before you. We know that we are only able to do this because of the life, death, and glorious resurrection of your dear Son, who has become our great Mediator by that perfect life, by that sacrifice to pay for sin, and by that victory over sin, death, and the devil. Bless us as we open your Word today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we talked in our last session about the sacrifice Abel offered to the Lord as a foreshadowing of the once-and-final sacrifice for sin that Christ would offer at Calvary. Today we'll talk about Abel himself as a type and foreshadowing of Christ. Our focus this session: one shepherd points to Another.

Genesis 4:2b-4 (Part 2)

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering.

Nick Batzig, a pastor and author from Richmond Hill, Georgia wrote in one of his recent blog posts, "I continue to be amazed at the wisdom of God in giving us types and shadows of Christ throughout the pages of the Old Testament. There is perhaps nothing so faith-building in the Old Testament – apart from the explicit Messianic prophecies – as God's covenantal structuring of history that gave us people, places, and events to prefigure the coming Messiah."

I share Pastor Batzig's sentiment, and just as he expresses his amazement with respect to God's unsearchable and yet always on-point wisdom, I do the same. There's such grace and kindness given to us by our Lord in Scripture; God the Father always pointing us to God the Son by the illumining work of God the Holy Spirit.

Today we're going to take just a moment to look at a type and foreshadowing of Christ in Abel. Abel's life is a uniquely special gift to us from God for a couple of reasons in particular: first, his foreshadowing of our Savior comes very early in the history of the world after the tragedy of the fall, showing how quickly God began to paint the picture of His coming grace and mercy in His Son. Hell may have invaded creation in the moment of the Fall, but immediately after, from Genesis 3:15 onward, Hope came to quench the enemy's fire. Abel's life is one that even to this day gives witness to Hope's victory made manifest in our Lord Jesus. Second, Abel is also a special type of our Redeemer just because of the sheer the number of parallels between him and Jesus. I won't give them all to you today, but in order to get you started in your own exploration of messianic typology and to provide you with some things to meditate on and study further on your own, here are just a few of the most obvious connections:

Abel was a shepherd, Genesis 4:2.
Our Lord is the Good Shepherd, John 10:11.

Though giving no cause for it, Abel was hated by his brother, Genesis 4:8.
Jesus, though giving no cause for it, was hated by His brethren, the Jews, John 15:25.

Cain was jealous of Abel and killed him out of envy, Genesis 4:7.
It was because of envy that Jesus was delivered up to death, Matthew 27:18.

Abel did not die a natural death, but met a violent end at the hand of his brother, Genesis 4:8.
Jesus died the unnatural death of crucifixion by his Jewish brethren, Romans 9:5.

The offering Abel presented was an offering unto God, Hebrews 11:4.
The offering Jesus presented was an offering unto God, Ephesians 5:2.

The offering Abel presented was the firstborn of his flock, and a lamb, Genesis 4:4.
The offering Jesus presented was Himself, the Lamb, 2 Peter 1:19.

The offering which Abel presented is described as an 'excellent' one, Hebrews 11:4.
The offering Christ offered was an 'excellent' one, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God, Ephesians 5:2.

Abel's offering still 'speaks' to God, Hebrews 11:4.
Christ's offering now 'speaks' to God, Hebrews 12:24.

Wrapping Up

There's much more we could say here, and we could easily take 5-10 minutes and expound on every single parallel that I've just mentioned, but as we wrap things up today let's simply say this: Abel is shown to be a type of Christ for our hope, our joy, and our peace. He's a type of our Savior by way of comparison and contrast: compared with Christ in that he was martyred for righteousness; contrasted with Christ in that while his blood cried out for vengeance, Christ's blood cries out for mercy. Abel is a foreshadowing that we can appreciate and be thankful for today; a reminder that in our Lord Jesus comes the goodness, the righteousness, and the redemption that we all so desperately need to have applied to our account. Jesus, the Good Shepherd; Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

God's richest blessings to you as you consider these great truths today, and God's peace to you as you are comforted by them. Take care everyone, and I'll look forward to being with you again on Monday.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace to you in our risen Savior, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to have you back after a weekend away, and I'm praying that the days ahead will hold some great time for us together in God's Word. As we move back into our Bibles today, we're going to return to the 4th chapter of Genesis, so if you'll turn there and take a moment to prepare your heart, we'll go ahead and get things going. Let's pray:

Prayer

Heavenly Father, what a blessing it is to know that you are with us – that you are mighty to save through the gift of your Son our Savior, Jesus Christ. Draw near to us as we open the Scriptures in these next few minutes, that by them we will grow into maturity as your beloved people. We ask this in Christ's precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the passage we're about to read is a jarring one, yet one we can all readily understand...which is perhaps more jarring still. Our focus this session: counsel given, counsel ignored.

Genesis 4:6-9

6 The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." 8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

I have a friend who, when he was a youngster living on the farm, had the responsibility to care for his family's chickens each day. My own kids had chickens growing up, and it was a job they enjoyed, but this friend of mine? He hated it. He hated lugging food and water to them each day, hated gathering, candling, and crating the eggs so that they could be sold at market, and hated cleaning out the nesting boxes and the floor of the coop each week. But most of all? Most of all he hated the rooster. It was big, it was mean, and it was sneaky. It would come up from behind when least expected and send a flying kick into the backs of his legs with its spurs. Even today as a fifty year-old man, he has several scars that remain from that bird.

As my friend tells it, he used to bitterly complain about the situation to his parents. But then one day, the rooster didn't show up to antagonize him. Nor did it show up the next day, or the next one after that. Mysteriously, my friend didn't mention anything to his parents about its absence, and in fact, it was in staying quiet about it that his folks figured out not only that the rooster had gone missing, but that something was rotten in Denmark. You know what happened, of course: that big, mean, sneaky rooster met its end at the hands of the boy who had been tasked with caring for it. You can probably guess what happened next as well: when asked about it, he said something to the effect of, "I don't know; am I my rooster's keeper?"

Today's verses narrate an account with which we're all at least passingly familiar. Cain is jealous of his brother Abel. Cain is bitter over God's regard for his brother's offering while his own has been rejected. Cain, still loved by the Lord even through his petulant attitude, his anger, and his dark heart, is also counseled by the Lord: *If you do well you will be accepted, but watch out, because if you refuse that path, sin is right there crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, and you've got to master it.* God wants Cain to know and to resist the pull toward anger and violence, to resist the destructive power of sin, to master sin's desire to have him instead being mastered by it. God wants good for Cain.

And yet, Good is not what happens. Instead, the precise opposite occurs. Cain not only gives into, but partners with, the evil desires within him. Rising up against his own brother, he kills Abel with calculated cruelty and a coldness which is unsettling to observe even today.

Think about just a couple of things today as we introduce this section of God's Word, and we'll delve into it further when we come back together next time. First, consider that up to this point in time in the history of the world, no human has been killed...no human has even died, for that matter. Cain, however, extinguishes Abel's life. This is the first death. The. First. Death. Second, consider the brevity of the account of that death here in Scripture. Such a significant happening, but such a short description. Why is that so? Is there something we need to see in the way this is shared with us? Finally, consider the immediate aftermath of this heinous act. First we have a

Divine question put to our murderer, followed by an all-too-human answer in response. I bring this to your attention only because the reality is that when He asks where Abel is, God already knows what has happened. It harkens back to a very similar situation and a very similar question that God asked of Cain's father in the last chapter. It's something we'll need to talk about as we move forward.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, God didn't need to ask Adam where he was after the eating of the forbidden fruit; He already knew. Neither does God need to ask Cain where his brother Abel is; He already knows that as well. God already knows everything about every one of us. So why the question in the first place? Why this kind of engagement? What purpose does it serve? All of us, of course, know what it's like to be asked the kind of question that Cain is asked in today's text, just as we know what it's like to be asked the kind of question that Adam was asked back in chapter 3. We also all know what it's like to give an all-too-human answer in response. But guess what? It's in realizing these facts that we actually gain the first glimpse into why our great and mighty Lord is doing what He's doing. It's actually Fatherly. It's actually loving. It's actually the beginning of the coming of help...help in the midst of something that can only be called a truly horrible happening. When we come back next time, we'll unpack it together. Do come along and be part of it, won't you? Until then, God's rich peace to you in Christ Jesus, and have a great day. I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I hope you're having a great week so far, and I'm thankful that you've made the choice to join in for our time in the Bible together today. Over the next few minutes we'll be taking on more verses in Genesis 4, so let's pray and get right to it.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are to be praised and honored and glorified now and forever. You are great and mighty – there is none beside you, and all things are in subjection to your awesome power. Look with mercy on your people today – forgive us, renew us, and ignite us with a passion for your kingdom. Bless the teaching of your Word, in Christ name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with Cain having risen up against his brother Abel, murdering him, we saw the Lord approach Cain and call him to account...and to repentance as well. Cain's heart,

however, was hard to the voice of God. So it is that we now come to a familiar pronouncement of judgment. Our focus this session: “Cursed are you.”

Genesis 4:10-12

10 And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”

Many of you know that recently, I spent several months in Austin, Texas. While I was there I got the chance to familiarize myself with the Austin community, which is a place well-deserving of its reputation as a one of the great cultural hubs of the southwest. Known as the live music capital of the world, Austin also has a strong and ever-growing tech presence, a vibrant arts scene, and an unsurpassed assortment of dining options, from its famous food truck culture to its Michelin-starred restaurants.

In the midst of all that richness, I discovered that Austin is known for something else as well: its huge population of homeless people. Some of them are permanent fixtures and are well known to locals because they've been panhandling at the same intersections for years on end. Other folks, though, aren't settled in the least; instead, they're drifters. They pass through the city on their way to who-knows-what and who-knows-where. They don't seem to be from anywhere, and they don't seem to be going anywhere either...they just live their lives on the move, and you can see the restlessness of it all in everything from the clothes they wear to the things they carry to the dullness and exhaustion in their eyes as they walk along the road. They're people without a place in the world.

As we come to God's Word today and pick up at a very uncomfortable place in a very uncomfortable narrative — a narrative surrounding the first murder in history — we also come to a place of judgement. The Lord has engaged Cain in the aftermath of the killing of his brother Abel, but Cain has dismissed Him. Hard of heart and unwilling to accept responsibility for what has happened (or even to acknowledge that it has happened), Cain rejects God's overture and refuses to confess to what he has done. He also refuses to embrace any regard for his brother, as if their relationship had been of no importance and that its dissolution is of no consequence.

Herein is the attitude of a hardened sinner. Here, on exhibit for us all, is one who denies all responsibility for what he has done, one who even goes so far as to challenge the Lord with a bold lie: *I don't know where Abel is; am I my brother's keeper?* Here is sin, willfully, angrily, and callously committed, and here is a case wherein we see that all hope for repentance, for godly sorrow, is futile. What, then, is left? What is left is for Cain to receive in himself the just consequences for his actions against his brother. Cain will now be cursed.

Notice, if you would, something very interesting about today's text: as we look to the curse upon Cain, we see that it is very similar to the curse that was placed upon his father, Adam...only amplified. If bringing forth food from the earth would be hard for Adam (Genesis 3:17-18), it would be impossible for Cain (who was a farmer!). If Adam were driven from Eden (Genesis 3:24), Cain would find no resting-place on the earth at all. He would now be a fugitive and a vagabond...a wanderer. Think of it: the manner in which he has heretofore gained his livelihood will now be taken away. So the home he has made as his dwelling place; it will be taken from him as well. Essentially, everything that until this point has been an underpinning in his life will

now be gone. What will replace it all? A life on the move. A fearful, restless existence. Days — and eyes — dimmed by dullness and exhaustion. Cain will now be a person without a place in the world.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, the physical reality of that lot is bad enough, but as I think about the bigger picture, what jumps out for me is not just the outward fleeing, but the inward fear and trembling of being truly alone in the world. Being consigned to a life on the move, void of a permanent dwelling, also means being consigned to a life of utter aloneness...a life absent of any permanent relationships. From now on, not only will Cain's conscience refuse to give him rest, but no one else will give him rest either. From one city to another, he will always be, from this point on, the lonely pariah. His sin — but more so his refusal to repent — has now separated him not just from the places of the world and the people of the world, but also from the God who made every place and person. His road will now be a singular one, but not in the positive sense. It will be a horrible road to walk indeed.

Sin, unconfessed and unrepented, does that to a person. It is terribly isolating. It robs us of life. It places us on a path by ourselves where our existence is bleak and fearful and unsettled. It turns us into spiritual drifters without any place to call home. There is a fix, of course. It's the fix that Cain rejected. It's the fix that is of the Law to show us clearly that what we have done is wrong, but then of the Gospel to show us just as clearly that through God's kindness, which leads to repentance, there is mercy and forgiveness and a fresh start in our Lord Jesus Christ. In the days ahead we'll be talking about that very different road quite a bit, and walking it together as well...the road that is Jesus Himself — the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I hope you'll plan to be here for it all, because it will be talking and walking that brings refreshment to our dull and exhausted souls.

Have a great day everyone, and I'll look forward to seeing you next time. Take care!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich and abundant blessings to each of you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks for being with me today for another study session in the book of Genesis, where today we'll be continuing our look at Genesis 4 and the interaction that occurs between the Lord and Cain after the murder of Abel. Let's set our hearts, focus our minds, and come to our gracious God in prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Your Word speaks powerfully into our lives at every turn. Nothing you have said to us in it is insignificant, nothing is irrelevant, and nothing is without impact. We ask that by your Spirit you would turn our hearts to your message to us today. Give us wisdom and understanding, and move us to joyfully obey your Word in response to your good and gracious working in our lives. This we ask in Christ's name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the announcement of his punishment for murdering his brother still ringing in his ears, Cain cries out to God in protest over its severity. Our focus this session: Driven from the ground, departing from the Lord.

Genesis 4:13-16

13 Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14 Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." 15 Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. 16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

"You don't deal with it. You pretend it never happened." That's the statement of an Indy car driver on being asked how he felt about all the drivers who have lost their lives at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway through the years. In fact, the Speedway operators themselves encourage this approach. Consider the following: As soon as the track closes on the day of an accident, a crew heads out to paint over the spot where the car hit the wall. Through the years, a driver has never been pronounced dead at the race track. And a trip to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Racing Museum, located inside the 2.5-mile oval, has no memorial to the 42 drivers who have lost their lives there. I've not been there myself, but I've been told that for years, nowhere was there even a mention. Death is so unsavory. Being party to it in any way is unsavory as well. That's why when the prospect of facing such a thing comes up, people shut down. You don't deal with it...you pretend it never happened.

Here's a confession for you today: I hate to own my sin. Do you? That's pretty much a rhetorical question, because I know you do! We all hate to own our sin. We all hate to admit when we've been disobedient, when we've transgressed the bounds of God's will, when we've done what we ought not to have done or failed to do that which we ought to have done. The bottom line is that it's just hard to take responsibility for things sometimes, and in fact, we often don't. Rather than own what we need to own, rather than face it when it comes up, many times we just don't deal with it. We pretend it never happened.

Sin, of course, is a harbinger of death. It's so unsavory...especially when we're party to it. That's why there are times when our sin may be clear as day to everyone on God's green earth, yet we'll still deny that we had anything to do with it. Ironically, at the same time we're denying responsibility, we'll make excuses for ourselves about why whatever it is that we've done isn't our fault. It was the late, great, Dr. James Montgomery Boice who said so well, "One of the clearest marks of sin is our almost innate desire to excuse ourselves from it and complain if we are judged in any way."

As we come back to Scripture today to pick up again with the saga of Cain in the aftermath of his killing of Abel, Dr. Boice's words couldn't be any more apropos, because it's exactly what we see happening in the passage before us. Cain doesn't feel bad about his sin; only about his punishment. His sin has certainly caused him to pity himself, but he has exhibited no sorrow or contrition over what he has done in taking the life of his brother. Now, raising his voice before the Lord in a plaintive cry, there is still no remorse...only the cry that his sentence is too much for him to bear.

With all that has happened surrounding his transgression, and especially with the outburst we've seen in today's verses, at this point it would be easy for us to spend the rest of this session clucking our tongues over the depth of depravity and selfishness being exhibited by Cain. After all, he's really taken the cake here with his self-absorbed manner and his total lack of concern about about the baseness and severity of his actions. But the star of today's passage isn't Cain at all; it's God. Why? Though our Lord does indeed consign Cain to a life of loneliness

and difficulty and bitterness — all things that Cain has brought upon himself by his sin — the Lord is still consigning Cain to *life*. It could have been death. And not only that, the life that the Lord consigns Cain to is one that, in His mercy, He will also safeguard and preserve.

How does the Lord respond to Cain's new and very real fears about life as a fugitive, as a homeless wanderer consigned to live the rest of his days apart from the comfort and community of the rest of humanity? How does the Lord respond to Cain's concern that he will (irony of ironies) be killed by others because of who he is and what he has done? The answer is that the Lord promises to protect him.

To ward off all would-be attackers, God puts a mark on this wayward, unrepentant, hard-hearted son of Adam. We don't know what that mark was, or if it was even visual. What we do know is that it communicated in no uncertain terms to all who met Cain that God would take vengeance on anyone who killed the murderer of Abel.

Why would God do such a thing? Why not let Cain get what's coming to him? Later, in the establishment of the Law, God will build into it procedures both for bringing justice on wrongdoers and for helping murderers find sanctuary from those who would seek revenge. Scholars believe that perhaps God's purpose here is focused on preventing the self-perpetuating cycle of revenge to which humans are so prone. Rather than watch it leave the station and become a runaway train, God insists that He alone will be the One to take vengeance on injustice.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, there's certainly more to discuss with respect to this passage, certainly more questions to ask and answer, and most of all, certainly more to see with respect to God's justice, mercy, and yes — love and compassion — for even the most bitter and broken parts of His creation. We'll take those things up when we come back tomorrow, and I'm looking forward to getting into it with you. Until then, have a wonderful day, rest in the knowledge of God's love and compassion for you as His beloved child, and remember that He is always with you as your strength and your song. What a mighty God we serve indeed! Thanks again for your time, everyone — God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings everybody! God's rich blessings to you in our loving Savior Jesus Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! It's so good to be with you today in the aftermath of an eventful weekend outside of Columbus, Ohio, where my daughter got married this past Saturday. Many of you have been with me since Taylor was still a little girl, and it's amazing for me to think about all that's transpired through the years to bring her to this point. I'm thankful to our gracious Lord for the godly young woman she's become, for her new career as a music educator, and now, for the new life she'll be embarking on with her husband Steven. If I come across over the next few days as a little closer to my emotions than usual, you'll know it's because this old dad has just walked his little girl down the aisle!

As we get into the swing of our new week and come back to God's Word, one more quick reminder: we're fast drawing to the close of our summer ministry funding period, one of the two times each year that I come to you for help in keeping the work of EDiBS strong and sustainable. While the bulk of our annual donations typically comes during the Christmas season, we especially rely on all of you who give during the month of June, because those gifts carry us through the lean summer and fall months prior to the holidays. If you know me then you know that I seldom mention giving during the year because I never want it to be said of EDiBS that money is our focus. When I do ask for your help, I do it because help is needed, and I do it cheerfully from a place of faith. Thanks, then, for prayerfully considering a tax-deductible donation to EDiBS as we close out the month, and thanks also for always encouraging us with your kind words and for lifting us up in prayer. We're grateful for all that you do to partner with us here!

Today our time in the Scriptures has us continuing our examination of Genesis 4, so let's pray as we open God's Word.

Prayer

Father, thank you for this day, and thank you for your living, active Word and the impact it has had in my life and the lives of those who study with me each day. Please bless us today as we look to you for wisdom and guidance, and fan our hearts into flame with love for you and a passion for the work of your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming back once more to Genesis 4:13-16 to touch on a couple of additional points that we didn't get to in our last session. Our focus: life in the land of Nod.

Genesis 4:13-16 (Part 2)

13 Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14 Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." 15 Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. 16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

In first grade I was taking a test — some kind of standardized, state-mandated language arts inventory where the teacher was verbally asking questions to which we were supposed to write our responses. Evidently, I hadn't listened to a certain set of instructions that had been given from the front of the room, because all at once Miss McClellan descended upon my desk, told me I was too distracted, and took me by the arm to lead me to a new seat. I was confused because I didn't know what I'd done wrong, and I was ashamed because I thought that in being exiled into the corner of the classroom, I was being kicked out of the test completely. As I sat quietly at my new place while the other kids continued with the test, I began to daydream...only to be descended upon by Miss McClellan yet again. This time she angrily reprimanded me for not continuing to take the test. What happened? What happened was that I had missed Miss McClellan's intent. She had simply moved me to refocus my attention, but I thought she had removed me from the testing altogether. In making that mental jump, I threw the baby out with the bathwater — and in doing so, I made a bad situation much worse for myself!

Have you ever thrown the baby out with the bathwater? You know what I'm talking about: that time when you unwittingly eliminated something good while you were trying to get rid of something bad; that time when you went too far in your assessment of a difficult situation and scrapped the whole undertaking instead of sifting through it and holding on to what was worthwhile. Throwing out the baby with the bathwater is an idiom we've been using since the early 1500s. It even shows up in Martin Luther's writings. But long before it ever became an idiom recognized by most of the major western cultures of the world, throwing the baby out with the bathwater was something with which most people had intimate knowledge and understanding. Today in God's Word, in fact, we have what was perhaps the first-ever incident of the practice.

Downcast and stricken in his heart over being consigned to an existence of aimlessness and fruitless effort in all his endeavors, a life separated from his previous connection to the earth as a farmer, Cain — now Cain the wanderer and the fugitive — declares that his punishment from

the Lord is too much to bear. Look closely at what he says to God in verse 14: “Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden.” Why look closely at what Cain says here? Because of what it reflects....and what it *doesn't* reflect.

The first part of the verse is correct: Cain is indeed now cursed from the ground that he once tilled. From now on, when he works the soil it will no longer yield its strength to him. His agricultural acumen is caput. He's done. Instead, he will now be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.

The second part of Cain's declaration today, however, is *not* correct: nowhere did God say to Cain that He would hide His face from him. Nowhere did God, in punishing Cain for his sin, tell Cain that he would be bereft of God's presence, God's compassion, or God's mercy. In fact, reading just a bit further we see that God affirmed His mercy in Cain's life when He put a mark on him to prevent others from killing him.

Why is this an important observation to make? Because as he is being moved from one place and sent to another, Cain is missing God's intent. God has not left His wayward, bitter, hard-hearted child on his own; rather, He is seeking to refocus Cain's attention. Cain, though, makes a mental jump between the beginning of verse 14 and the end of it. It starts with a recognition that he has been driven from the ground, but it ends with him saying that he will now be hidden from God's face. The problem? God never said that. Cain has just thrown the baby out with the bathwater. He's just gone too far in his assessment of this difficult situation and scrapped the whole undertaking instead of sifting through it and holding on to what was worthy of salvage. Is it too late for Cain to escape this earthly exile? Yes. This God has decreed. But remember: God has also left Cain alive. God has left Cain with opportunity. God has graced Cain with the chance to return to Him. God has given Cain a chastisement, but God has also given Cain a choice. Cain, of course, does make a choice. Unfortunately, and tragically, by his choice he takes a bad situation and makes it much worse for himself as a result.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, in acknowledging the earthly judgment of God, Cain expands it himself into a spiritual judgment. “I shall be hidden from Your face,” he says in verse 14, and then fulfills that pronouncement himself in verse 16 when he goes out from the presence of the LORD and dwells in the land of Nod. God doesn't leave Cain; Cain leaves God. And by the way, the significance of his going out from the presence of the Lord is much more than simply moving into a unsettled territory away from other people. It also means that he gave up worshipping God and began worshipping man-made gods. The Lord exiled Cain away from acceptable society, but Cain exiled himself away from God. The baby with the bathwater. It's so sad...and again, something we can all understand on a host of levels. Come back and be with me tomorrow, won't you? When we gather together we'll pick this up again and drive it home, and we'll do so on a positive, rather than negative, note!

Take care everybody, God's peace to you in Jesus, and I'll look forward to seeing you then!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! The rich blessings of our great God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, be upon each of you today, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for coming along with me as we continue to study the book of Genesis; my prayer is that you'll be blessed with new insight from God's Word in our time together, and that as always, you'll find yourself growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus as a result. Let's pray as we begin:

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this time to be with you in your Word, and thank you for your promise to be with us through all things and at all times, the good and the bad. Thank you for sending your Son. Thank you for the forgiveness of sins and the newness of life that we have in His name. All that we do today, we desire to do in your strength and in accordance with your will. Please bless this study time. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come back a final time to a section of verses in Genesis 4 where Cain has been processing the consequences of his sin from the killing of his brother Abel. Our focus this session: the punishment Giver; the punishment Bearer.

Genesis 4:13-14a

13 Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14 Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden.

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech was playing Cal in the Rose Bowl. In that game a man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for Cal, and as many of you may know, somehow he became confused and started running: 65 yards in the wrong direction. One of his teammates outdistanced him and finally downed him just before he scored for the opposing team. When Cal

attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety, which was the ultimate margin of victory.

That disastrous play came in the first half, and everyone who was watching the game was asking the same question: "What will Coach Nibbs Price do with Roy Riegels in the second half?" The men filed off the field and went into the dressing room. They sat down on the benches and on the floor — all but Riegels. He put his blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner, put his face in his hands, and cried his eyes out.

If you're familiar with football, then you know that a coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during half time. On this day, however, Coach Price was quiet. We would only learn later that the reason for it was that he was, in fact, trying to decide what to do with Riegels. He seemed to know that there was more at stake for that young man than the game being played. When the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time, Coach Price had made his decision. He looked at the team and said simply, "Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second."

The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He didn't budge. The coach looked back and called to him again; still he didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second." Then Roy Riegels looked up and his cheeks were still wet with tears. "Coach," he said, "I can't do it to save my life. I've ruined you, I've ruined the reputation of Cal, and I've ruined myself. I can't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life." Then Coach Price reached out, put his hand on Riegel's shoulder, and said to him, "Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over."

As I said a few moments ago, Cal did lose that day to Georgia Tech. The margin of victory was that 2-point safety. From that day forward, even to this day some 90 years after the fact, Roy Riegels has been known as "Wrong Way Riegels." But to me, the great victory of that day is one we seldom hear about. You see, Roy Riegels did go back. He re-entered the stadium. He took the field. And those Tech men he played against? Every last one of them said they had never seen a man play football as Roy Riegels played that second half.

In God's Word these past couple of days, we've been looking upon a man whose life has been broken by sin. He has killed his brother. His punishment is severe. His undoing is complete. Sent into exile, he is facing the prospect of carving out a new existence in a catch as catch can manner, and life will never again be the way it once was. But in the exilic nature of his new life, his life is still precisely that: new. God has given Cain life instead of death. God has extended mercy to this sinful human being. God has made ready for Cain a promise of protection and a path to restoration and renewal. There is yet hope for Cain. But Cain? Cain does not see it. As we read in Scripture together just yesterday, when Cain goes away from Eden, he also goes away from the presence of the Lord. He removes himself from the Divine. He quits. The game is only half over — but rather than heed the voice of his Coach, rather than believe that there can be a different outcome and a brighter day in his future, Cain chooses to hang it up in the locker room. For him, there will be no going back. No re-entering the stadium. No taking the field again to play the second half. Instead, he has sentenced himself with a sentence God never decreed...and the tragedy will be far-reaching indeed.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, why go into all of this? I'm going into this because I know that on any given Monday through Friday when EDiBS goes out at 4:15 AM eastern time, it's going out to someone somewhere who's huddled in the corner of a locker room with their face in their hands, crying their eyes out. EDiBS goes out every day to people who feel like they've disappointed God to the point that there's no hope left for them and that they might as well just fade away into the ether somewhere. EDiBS goes out to people who have had a rough first half and who don't feel like they have it in them to go back out and finish the game. God says to them over and over in the truth and power of His holy Word, "Get up and go on back; the game is only half over." But sometimes that's a hard message to hear over the noise of our own self-condemnation, and so we start to go the way of Cain:

"I can't do it to save my life."

"My reputation is in tatters."

"I've made a mess of everything."

"I've ruined anything that ever mattered."

"I've ruined myself."

"It's too much to bear."

With daggers like that piercing our flesh, it's no wonder we feel that we can't go back out and face the crowd in life's stadium anymore. We can't face that crowd in the stadium to save our life.

But you see...that's the whole point of the Gospel. We don't have to save our life; there is One who already has. There is One who, because He loved us, faced on our behalf everything that needed to be faced by us. He dealt with all of the bitterness and brokenness and scorn and shame that is so much a part of who we are. He nailed it all to a cross at a place called Calvary. He entered the stadium of this world, played the game, claimed a stunning win over our opponent, and then went home to prepare the victory celebration for all of us. In fact, He's doing that right now, even as I write and speak these words to you.

Can I just say this one thing to you today? Because of Jesus Christ and His great love for you, it's not too late for you. Your sin is not too great. Your past is not too shameful. Your deeds are not too scandalous. Your mistakes and regrets and if onlys in life do not disqualify you from the team. You matter to Almighty God, and nothing can change that. The way of Cain is not your way; your way is The Way, the Truth, and the Life, even Jesus Christ our Lord, who says to you in this very moment, "Come to Me, and I will give you rest."

What is it that's keeping you off in a corner right now with your face in your hands? What is it that's been causing the tears to flow? What is that shameful thing in your life that the enemy wants you to fall on like a sword, but which Christ has already taken care of through His life, death, and resurrection? These are the things to talk to Him about. To confess. To cry through. And finally, to lay at His feet.

Our Great God is a loving, merciful God. He is for you, not against you. And I'm so glad to know that right now, in this very moment, He is taking some very big burdens off of some very heavy-laden shoulders. Lay it all down, everyone; let it go. And one more thing: get back out there on the field and play like you've never played before.

Take care, and I'll see you again next time. God's peace!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS! I'm happy to be with you today as we continue our way through another week of Bible Study, where as we jump into today's session, we'll be continuing with the 4th chapter of Genesis. Moving on from Cain, we now begin to turn our attention to his descendants. If you'll open your Bible and find your place, we'll pray and begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for another day to be called your children; another day to know the joy of forgiveness and the joy of belonging to your family; another day filled with new hope and the assurance of your presence and your guiding hand. Draw near to us as we study your Word today and teach us all that you desire for us to know. This we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our journey through Genesis now begins to wind its way down the path of Cain's line, starting with Enoch, continuing to Lamech, and then following Lamech's offspring through his two wives, Adah and Zillah. Our focus this session: Rapid human development, rapid human decline — a great paradox.

Genesis 4:17-22

17 Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. 18 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. 19 And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. 20 Adah bore Jubal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. 21 His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. 22 Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

As most of you know, I recently traveled to Ohio for my daughter's wedding. I'd been there a couple of times previously, but my visits were always brief, and since I didn't have much knowledge about our 17th state, I decided to spend some time expanding my horizons a bit in preparation for my trip.

In my reading, I came across an interesting bit of trivia. I haven't been able to independently verify this yet, but it is said by many that a certain courthouse in Ohio — county currently unknown to me — stands in a unique location. Raindrops that fall on the north side of the building go into Lake Ontario and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, while those falling on the south side go into the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. As a child who often traveled over the Continental Divide in the western part of the United States, I was familiar with the concept, but that unique, fixed place got me to thinking in a concrete way about how little it takes for something to change course in life. Consider this: at precisely the point of the peak of the roof of that courthouse, just a slight change in the wind can determine the destiny of countless raindrops — and it will ultimately make a difference of more than 2,000 miles as to their final destination.

As we come back to God's Word today and begin to look beyond the life of Cain and into the lives of his descendants, I think we can see a similar principle at work. By the things he thought, the words he spoke, and things he did in his life from one moment to the next, this man set in motion influences that would change not only the course of his life, but the lives of countless others as well. Moreover, those lives were changed not only in the moment, not only in the temporal sense, but even into eternity.

The most poignant example of that is one with deep spiritual implications. What do I mean by that? In the seven generations that are represented in today's reading, we could certainly spend a lot of time talking about the advances of the human race that came through Cain's offspring. Here we have the first building of cities. Here we see the first building of dwelling places. We see mention made of music and the arts and of metal working and the forging of tools. In addition, we can see that these things all came about and developed in a relatively short period of time. The emphasis in the text is clearly centered on the monuments of human accomplishment.

But what do we *not* see in today's text? What is missing? What is missing in every generation mentioned is any mention at all of the Lord God. When Cain departed from the presence of the Lord and settled east of Eden in the land of Nod, his choice to reject God was one that evidently impacted every one of his succeeding generations, and while advancement came in many ways that propelled civilization forward, parallel to it was a decline in all things moral and spiritual. In fact, by the time we get to Lamech we have a man whose name means "conqueror" and who by his own volition becomes the first bigamist in history by taking for himself two wives. Furthermore, his wives and daughter have names that point not to character or ability or dignity but only to beauty and physical appearance. So it is that the generations of Cain are not linked to the Divine, but to the profane. They are not connected to the Holy Trinity of the Godhead, but to the Unholy Trinity of humanism and hedonism — Money, Sex, and Power. In this way Cain's legacy has become most assuredly secure. Unfortunately, it is anything but sacred.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, some of you may be thinking, *What's the big deal? All of this happened so long ago. It doesn't matter anymore.* My response is that it matters a great deal, and it matters because the same passing down of things from generation to generation is happening today. The legacy of Cain, unsavory though it is, is alive and well. The rain of family falls in every household. And where those precious drops end up — their destiny, their final destination — can often be determined by just the slightest change in the wind. Our thoughts, words and deeds, our world view, our belief system — the things that we as individuals embrace in this present generation — are what, whether consciously or not, we will pass down to the next. Which direction will our offspring flow?

It was C.S. Lewis who said, "A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world — and might even be more difficult to save." My belief is that this is precisely where we are today. My prayer is that by God's grace, God's mercy, and the mighty working of God's Spirit, our tomorrow will be different.

Thanks for your time, everyone; I'll see you again next time to talk about this again. God's peace, and do take care.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks for coming along today for our time in God's Word. It's been a great several days together in the Scriptures, and as we wind things down prior to the weekend, this session has us moving toward the end of Genesis 4. If you have your Bible, take a moment to turn there and then join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Lord, thank you so much for this gift you have given us — the amazing gift of your Word, which is living and active and powerful as it brings us to the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Please bless our study for these next few minutes, and work in our hearts to the end that we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior. In His name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, two brief verses near the end of our present chapter show us the direction humanity has traveled since the tragedy in the Garden. Our focus:

Genesis 4:23-24

23 Lamech said to his wives:

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;

you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:

I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.
24 If Cain's revenge is sevenfold,
then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.”

Steven V. Roberts, husband to political commentator and journalist Cokie Roberts, is a highly respected author and commentator in his own right. Though not as well known to the casual reader as is his more famous wife, Roberts is known in academia and within his profession for his willingness to speak out on moral issues, even when he knows that his remarks will be a lightning rod for criticism or personal attack. An article he wrote for *U.S. News & World Report* way back in 1993 called "Leading the Faithful in an Age of Dissent" is so well known, in fact, that it's still making the rounds today, over 25 years after its original publication. In that piece, decrying the manner in which he saw society and culture devolving into an emphasis on individual wants and desires to the exclusion of any kind of greater good, he wrote,

In this Age of Self, our language is filled with phrases that glorify personal choice above all other values: self-determination, self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-help, even do-it-yourself. In this climate, no doctrine is safe, no dictate accepted without scrutiny. The touchstone of belief today is the individual, not the institution.

Roberts continues,

In religion, as in politics, the appropriate analogy for modern mores is to fast food. As the slogan for one hamburger chain puts it: "Have it your way." How do leaders lead when followers don't want to be led?

The reason that article continues to find a hearing today is, at least in my estimation, due to the fact that it speaks the truth — and everybody, critic or not, knows it deep down inside.

I'm thinking of Steven Roberts and that famous piece of his from *U.S. News* because of what we see today in God's Word as we finish up our look at Cain and his descendants. In a short, seemingly stand-alone and unconnected narrative describing Lamech's vengeance on one who had wounded him, followed by his boast about meting out retribution greater than what the Lord's sentence had been on anyone foolish enough to attack his ancestor Cain, what we are viewing here is nothing less than the devolution of the human race in action. Here we have not only murder, but the boasting thereof. Here we have not only pride, but the superabundance thereof. On display in all its ugliness is a progressive degeneracy occurring among the ranks of humanity; indeed, as one godless generation has passed into the next, by the time we come to the time of Lamech, the seventh in line from Cain, things are clearly worse than they have ever been. At the heart of it all? A focus on self to the exclusion of anything else.

When scholars look at this portion of the book of Genesis and consider the span of its timeline, most — whether conservative, moderate, or liberal — come to a similar conclusion: the time from Cain to Lamech represents an extraordinary period in the development of humanism and a man-centered, rather than God-centered, perspective. There is so much in the way of advancement during this time from a conventional point of view...but conventional wisdom isn't always the wisest thing. God, in fact, often destroys the wisdom of the wise, as the apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 1, and the discernment of the discerning He thwarts.

To that point, consider that with the conclusion of these two verses in the Bible, we are now done with Lamech and his prideful arrogance. We are now done with his self-assurance. We are now finished with his boasting. Why? Because with the close of Genesis 4:24, neither Lamech nor any of his descendants are ever heard of again in the Bible. Lamech and all he stood for ultimately came to nothing.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Lamech's arrogance here in Genesis 4 is something that will come up for us once more in our study, not as a comparison but as a contrast. Lamech himself won't be mentioned again, but when we come back on Monday and in many ways start our study all over again with the birth of Seth, we will be working our way toward the birth of Enoch, who happens to be seventh in line from Adam on Seth's line. Enoch, far different from Lamech, will be one who walks with God. In fact, so strong will his relationship be with Almighty God that he will be the beneficiary of one of the greatest and rarest blessings in all of history.

There is great distress in viewing the life of Cain and his descendants. But there is great delight in seeing God's faithfulness to redeem even the worst of times. The great fruition of that redemption, of course, will come in the sending of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ...who also has His own connection with Seth. Do plan to say with us as we get ready to move into the next ebb and flow of holy history, everyone; it promises to be a good and growing time for us in the Scriptures!

Have a wonderful weekend, do rest in the joy and peace of your Redeemer, and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon. Until then, take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Grace to you in our risen Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. As we come to a new week together I pray that the joy of the Lord is your strength, and that the endurance that comes from the Scriptures is sustaining you and keeping you focused on your heavenly Father as well as your heavenly home. I'm glad to be with you today as we finish up our look at the fourth chapter of Genesis; let's pray as we prepare to study God's Word.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we bless your name today. We worship you. We magnify you and ascribe to you glory and honor and power and might. You alone are worthy of those things, and we confess you to be the King of kings and Lord of lords, both now and forever. Speak to us through your Word today. Thank you – in your mighty, saving name we pray. Amen!

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 4 ends with a brand new beginning. Our focus this session: the introduction of Seth.

Genesis 4:25-26

25 And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him." 26 To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.

When I was living on the farm in Missouri, the time came to acquire another farm truck. My daughter had begun to drive, and the little old Dodge Dakota we'd been using for farm chores and hauling up to that point became her daily driver. I ended up buying a beat up 1991 F-150 4X4 with a tired engine but a great manual transmission. I drove it for about a year and subjected it to wet dogs on the front seats, loads and loads of manure and straw bales in the bed, and any number of chickens, turkeys, and guinea fowl hanging out and leaving their droppings all over the outside of it. Through it all, it did what it was supposed to do, but there was a growing sluggishness, a sucking of life, that gradually increased over time, until one day it happened: the old engine, pushing 300,000 miles, finally quit. I'd expected this when I bought it, and the plan all along was to pull an engine from another vehicle and replace it, which is what I had my local mechanic do.

With the new engine, the truck had new life. For a couple of weeks, it performed as expected. But one day, it wouldn't start. I quickly exhausted my meager mechanical aptitude in trying to diagnose and fix it and ended up calling the mechanic back. After a tow to the shop and a couple days of waiting, I got the news: the engine I'd purchased from our local pick-a-part yard turned out to be bad, and I was going to have to put a different one in. Disheartened, I had my neighbor, Veldon, take his flat bed over to the shop and bring the truck back to the farm, because I couldn't afford another motor at the time. But guess what? As Veldon unloaded the truck, he decided to pop the hood and have a look at things himself. What did he find? He found that the mechanic hadn't replaced the old engine at all; he'd just put a couple of new parts on top, cleaned it up, and made it look like he'd replaced the whole thing. I'd been swindled.

The story, fortunately, has a good ending: with Veldon's help, the "misunderstanding" with the mechanic was quickly cleared up, I got a brand new crate engine out of the deal, and my F-150 went on to serve me wonderfully well until I sold it when I moved to Georgia.

As we come back to God's Word today and have our last look at Genesis 4, I'm thinking about my old farm truck for a reason. After Cain murdered Abel, an ever-growing sluggishness and sucking of life began to take root in the heart of humanity. The Fall, of course, had ruined everything, but Abel had represented a new hope in the aftermath, the first glimpse of the promise that God had pledged when He said that a Deliverer would come. Abel's very own brother, however, evil of heart, snuffed it out.

Following Cain, descendant after descendant who followed him represented many things...but the one thing that none of his line represented was a return to, or a calling upon, the Lord. Yes, there were human advancements...business, industry, the arts, the expansion of agriculture. They were, of course, made possible by God Himself as the Giver of every good and perfect gift. But these things, while impressive in one sense, were ultimately empty without the acknowledgment of the Divine. They were like the sham dressing of a tired old engine, made to look new when in fact the motor was bad. The humanistic strides and vanity of men could only carry the charade so far before it all collapsed. And as we saw in our last study session, that's exactly what happened: after Lamech — the seventh generation from Cain — we never hear from any in Cain's line again. Their lives, absent a relationship with the One who created them and loved them, came to nothing.

Which brings us, now, to Seth. As we kick off our talking points on this new child of promise, let's begin by making something clear: Adam and Eve had many other children who were not

specifically named in the Biblical record. We know this to be true for two reasons. First, partial genealogies are the rule of the day in ancient literature of all types, including the Biblical record. Those of a family line who do get listed get listed for specific reasons. Genealogical records exist to show specific familial connections, to mark the generational continuation of family lines, and to showcase highlights in a given family record. We'll be seeing specific examples of that common practice when we open to Genesis 5. The second reason we know that there are many other children who were born to Adam and Eve is that it was the only way for the earth to be populated in the beginning. If you've ever wondered about it, yes — in the earliest days of humanity, siblings obviously married one another and had children. Cain's wife, for example, had to be one of his sisters, and so it went from generation to generation. We see this practice even up to the time of Abraham, who married his half-sister Sarah. In-family marriage is actually common in the early portions of the biblical record, and it's not specifically forbidden by the Lord until the time of Moses. By the time the law is given, there are practical, as well as spiritual reasons for it.

If partial genealogies are the norm and only germane or significant offspring are mentioned for specific reasons, why does Seth make the cut here at the end of Genesis 4? Seth makes the cut because in a manner of speaking, he's the brand new crate engine that has come to replace the broken motor from the line of Cain. Seth is worthy of mention because he replaces Abel. Seth will be the one to whom the promise of a Deliverer from the seed of the woman (which we saw in Genesis 3:15) will be passed. Before we can even get through to the end of the chapter, in fact, we see the long-dimmed spark of hope once again fanned into flame through Seth: once his son Enosh is born, it is at that time that people — finally — began to call upon the name of the Lord. It's a great sign of great things to come!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, with this brief introduction on the entrance of Seth and Seth's line into history, we'll come back next time to talk more specifically about Seth and the beginning of spiritual renewal that the Lord brings through him and his descendants. There are so many insights to glean from this beautiful move by our great God, all of which point to the coming of the One promised early on, longed for through the centuries, and finally revealed in the Person and Work of Jesus...our Savior from the line of Seth! I'll look forward to seeing you to get into it all; until then, have a terrific day, and the joy of our Redeemer be your abiding strength. Take care, and God's peace!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad you could join in for our time together today, and I pray that your week so far, whether up or down, has been one sustained by the presence of the Lord and the promises of His Word. Remember, He is with you through thick and thin, regardless of your circumstances! Today our study time has us transitioning between Genesis 4 and 5, so let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask that you would lavish your grace on each person opening your Word right now. Forgive our sins, for they are many; restore our hearts, for they are broken; give us new hope, for without you we are nothing. Bless the study of your Word today, in your precious name we pray. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today and move toward our time in the fifth chapter of Genesis, it's important that we spend a few more moments on the life of Seth before we go there. Our focus this session: a new, godly line.

Genesis 4:25

25 And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him."

There's a phrase I use sometimes when we're together as an EDiBS family, and you've probably heard me say it often through the years. What phrase am I talking about? "A new way for a new day." The first time I ever heard it, I was serving as a pastor in southern California, where my denomination's district president used it. In part he was talking about some administrative changes coming down the pike that would impact some of the day to day

business of the church, but more important, he used it as a theme for the renewed missional emphasis he wanted to see in our congregations. “A new way for a new day” immediately struck a chord with me. Not only did I see the power of the idea as being positive for the corporate life of the body of Christ, but I also saw the power of those words as they related to my own life. I’m a person who daily sins much. I’m a person really good at making things bad. I’m a man who desperately needs divine mercy with every breath I take. In short, I need a new way for a new day in my life every *single* day, and I’m grateful to know that just such a way — the one and only way — is provided for me in the cross of my Savior Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. A new way for a new day is my lifeblood...lifeblood which comes to me through the shed blood of the One who has saved me by His grace.

One of the beautiful things about a new way for a new day is that with the coming of something new, it means that there’s a putting away of the old. And as we come back to Scripture today to focus for just a few more minutes on one of God’s chosen instruments in His plan for the redemption of mankind, Seth is a wonderful representation of a new way for a new day in every sense of the word. He’s a fresh start and a promise of things to come, yes, but in the freshness of that new start he is also a replacement for something that had been spoiled, the results of which had spread decay. That, in fact, is what the name *Seth* means: “set in place of.”

How does all of this play out? Seth was *set in place of* Abel, because Cain had killed Abel. In replacing his deceased brother, Seth restored the promise of new life which would come through a promised Deliverer, and at the same time he put away the old order of things, which had been represented in the godless line of Cain. At the end of Genesis 4 when Seth gets to be 105 years old, we are told that his son Enosh is born, and it is Enosh who then continues what is often referred to as “the godly line of Seth.” Some scholars even call Genesis 4:26 the first revival, because it’s the first indication in history of a new spiritual resurgence after a period of clear and precipitous decline. Indeed, it will be through Seth’s family that organized, corporate worship of the one true God begins to enter the fallen world. As Scripture said to us in our time together yesterday regarding the birth of Enosh, “At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord.”

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, so it is, then, that Cain’s killing of the righteous “seed” — Abel — and God’s raising up of another “seed” — Seth — becomes the central and ongoing theme of our Lord’s divine plan of redemption. It’s a theme that will have new players in succeeding epochs, and there will be new details to go with those new players, but all will point forward to the ultimate fruition of that divine plan in the coming of Christ. Seth’s descendants prove faithful to God. Read your Bible and you’ll see that from Seth come the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and as we’ve said already, eventually Christ Himself — and it’s Christ who not only destroys Satan but also overcomes sin and death. How phenomenally good and gracious our God is that He would orchestrate such a wonderful chain of people and events, that through Seth the “Offspring of the Woman” would come — the Offspring who would finally crush the serpent’s head!

When we come back next time, we’ll be moving into Genesis 5, and in doing so we’ll be jumping headlong into an ocean of genealogy that will begin with Adam and move us all the way to Noah. We won’t be looking at every name and poring over every verse so much as we’ll be painting a picture of how it all fits together and what it all means. As I said previously, there’s a lot of good things ahead, but at the mention of Noah, many of you are already seeing the writing

on the wall with respect to some unequivocally bad things that will go along with it. Remember: holy history is an exercise in the ebb and flow of the life and times of people just like you and me: people who need a new way for a new day...every day.

Thanks so much for your time, everyone! I can't wait to be with you next time. Until then, God's rich peace to you in Jesus, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Joy to you in our risen Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you at the midpoint of another week, and I pray that you've been encouraged and established in your faith over the past several days as we've continued our way through the study of Genesis. God loves us so dearly and is always in the process of calling us to Himself. His mighty Spirit, working through His holy Word, is the the great means through which He does that, and I'm glad you've come along today to open the Scriptures with me. Let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Lord, we pray that as we work through another week together, you would continually put your hand of blessing upon each one of us, and that you would graciously guide and protect us as your dearly loved children in all that we do. Bless the hearing, teaching, and study of your Word today. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come to the fifth chapter of Genesis, and in doing so, we come to a book within a book on the generations of Adam. Our focus this session: Pattern and Purpose.

Genesis 5:1-5

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 2 Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. 3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. 4 The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters. 5 Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.

When I bought my first real tractor, a New Holland TD80, the man at the implement dealership who sold it to me talked to me like I was a lifelong farmer who knew the ins and outs of agricultural machinery. When he described its capabilities he mentioned things like its PTO

horsepower, its 12x12 transmission with shuttle, the number of hydraulic remotes it had, and its ag, rather than R4, tires.

If I were to describe that New Holland, I'd have told you that it was blue, had a comfortable seat and power steering, and that it was easy to get on and off of. At the time I didn't even know what a PTO or a hydraulic remote was, let alone how they were used or why they were important.

Here's the funny thing: inept though it was, my description of that tractor was just as accurate as the salesman's was. The difference was in what each of us focused on as we talked about it.

Why do I bring up that old memory from my hobby farming days today? Because the fifth chapter of Genesis is all about genealogy, and frankly, looking at genealogies can be a lot like looking at a tractor on an implement lot. What you see and how you describe it depends on what your focus is.

So it is that as we come to what Scripture calls the *Book of the Generations of Adam*, it's important for us not just to see it as a whole and walk away at the end of this chapter with an uninspired, 2-dimensional compilation of information questionable in its worth for our study of the Bible, but to focus on the whys and hows of its assembling and to understand the message being given to us through the way it has been put together. When we do that, we very quickly see a pattern develop in the 32 verses before us, and with that pattern, a purpose.

Rather than just phone things in with an information dump for this session and call it a day, let's wrestle with all that's before us a little bit and work our way into the meat of this chapter with a series of questions. We'll ask them today, then begin answering them tomorrow. Ready?

First, what is the similarity between Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 5:3?

Next, what is the difference between those two verses?

Third, what is the significance of that difference, and why does it matter as we begin our examination of the generations of Adam?

Here's another question: as you peruse this chapter of Genesis and read through each of the generations mentioned, what do they all, save for one, have in common? Once you have that nailed down, why do you suppose God chose to mention that commonality over and over again? After all, the pattern is definitely an intentional one.

Moving on, here's yet another inquiry worthy of attention: this chapter will be telling us that the men mentioned herein all lived, in the pre-Flood world, to remarkably great ages. Why was this so...and what was it that changed, post-Flood, to drastically decrease earthly lifespans? Furthermore, is that topic even an important one to ponder, or is it more important to talk about the fact that these men lived at all...and left a record of their lives for posterity?

Finally (though certainly not lastly!), here's one more in two parts: first, the generations of Adam here in Genesis 5 are chronicled for us starting with Seth, not Cain and Abel. Why? Part 2: the chapter ends with Noah and his sons. Again, why? What is it about the time from Adam to Noah that bears this special treatment in God's Word, and what can we glean from it?

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, there are many additional questions that we could pose here, but the ones I've asked all come from a particular perspective and point to a particular picture that I want to bring into focus for us. As I said last time, it's a picture with a lot of good in it...and some unequivocally bad to go along with it. There are spiritual highs to celebrate via certain names in this chapter, and there are also spiritual lows we'd rather slink away from than face up to. Make no mistake — the descriptions here are all accurate. What we end up seeing through them will all depend on our focus.

Do stay with us as we continue, won't you? I'm so glad you were here today, and I'll look forward to being with you again next time. Until then, have a great day, God's rich peace to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings everybody! Grace, mercy and peace to you from our great God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to have you here today – thanks for coming along so that we can spend some time in Bible study together. As we kick things off this week, we're going back to Genesis 5 to answer many of the questions that we posed in our introduction to this chapter, so let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, Bless, we pray, the study of your Word today, to the end that by your grace we may learn and grow in our understanding of your love and mercy...love and mercy you have poured out upon your people through your Son. In His precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the lengthy genealogy in Genesis 5 covering the time from Adam to Noah, there are several noteworthy things with which to familiarize ourselves. Our focus this session: An overarching theme.

Genesis 5:1-5, Part 2

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 2 Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. 3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. 4 The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters. 5 Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.

According to an old fable, a man made an unusual agreement with Death. He told the Grim Reaper that he would willingly accompany him when it came time to die, but only on one condition: that Death would send a messenger well in advance to warn him. Weeks winged away into months, and months into years. Then one bitter winter evening, as the man sat thinking about all his possessions, Death suddenly entered the room and tapped him on the shoulder. Startled, the man cried out, "You're here so soon and without warning! I thought we

had an agreement." Death replied, "I've more than kept my part. I've sent you many messengers. Look in the mirror and you'll see some of them." As the man complied, Death whispered, "Notice your hair! Once it was full and black, now it is thin and white. Look at the way you cock your head to listen to me because you can't hear very well. Observe how close to the mirror you must stand to see yourself clearly. Yes, I've sent many messengers through the years. I'm sorry you're not ready, but the time has come to leave."

Death. It's inevitable. It has a hold on every one of us. With the exception of two people in all of recorded history (we'll get to them in due course), it has laid claim to every one of its targets. In this realm, it seems to reign supreme, and nothing — not fad-driven nutritional regimens nor the ever-burgeoning dietary supplement market nor so-called immortality practitioners nor even most recent advancements in the field of modern medicine — can withstand or beat back its advance in the life every human being. In fact, when it comes to monopolies, Death retains controlling interest in the most powerful one of them all. Even more than taxes — though I know that's how the joke goes — Death is truly the one thing in life that is certain.

I realize that's not the greatest way to open a week of Bible study, but the reason I bring it up today is to put you in touch with something very clearly laid out for us this present chapter of Scripture; something our Lord is intent on showing to every generation that will ever read His Word. What is it? The simple and tragic truth that since the Fall, when the entire created order of the universe was plunged into the darkness of sin, every living thing dies.

This is brought out for us not only in the opening of Genesis 5, but finds emphasis over and over again all the way to the end. How does God's Word begin here? It starts with a recap of creation, specifically God's creation of man, male and female, made in His own likeness, in His image. God, we are told, also blessed man and woman when He created them. So far verse 1, but now look at verse 2 and notice, please, the immediate contrast: while Adam and Eve had been made in the likeness and image of God, when Seth was born it says that Adam fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image. Why this difference...and by the way, an intentional difference in that the same pattern is followed but with different results? The answer is that since Adam had lost the perfect image of God in the Fall, it was no longer possible for him to transmit the image of God to his offspring. Seth was not born in the image of God, but of Adam, and that meant that even though he was the beginning of something new, he was nonetheless under the curse of the Fall, and thus born into sin and death. All who would come after him, right down to you and me, would be born the same.

That fact, incidentally, is the second accent on mortality here in Genesis 5. After the marked contrast between Adam and Eve's creation in the image of God and the subsequent birth of Seth in the image of Adam, every single genealogical notation in the chapter, save for one, will end with these words: "And he died." Pastor David Guzik phrases things so very well when he writes, "And he died' reminds us of the fact that death had now entered the world, and that it is man's inevitable lot to become a prey of the king of terrors so far as the body is concerned." Why is this so? At the risk of beating a dead horse, it's because since the Fall, all people are conceived and born in sin, and thus all are subject to death and damnation. It's a sobering truth — but thankfully, one to which there is a solution.

God, remember, would indeed do new things through the line of Seth, in spite of the Curse. Those new things would all be focused on bringing rescue to humanity, because ensnared in sin, humanity was unable to rescue itself. The rescue to come would be a rescue from the sin,

death and damnation brought by the Fall...and the Rescuer would come through Seth's line in accordance with the redemptive promise of God's gracious and merciful hand.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Tertullian, one of the great fathers of the Early Church, wrote in the third century that "It is a poor thing to fear that which is inevitable." How true. Death, however, presents a challenge to that. How do we deal with it? In closing, consider these two brief illustrations, one which doubles down on fear, and the other which looks in faith to the promised Rescuer from the line of Seth.

Neil Simon, who wrote *The Odd Couple* and *Barefoot in the Park*, was asked on the Dick Cavett Show back in the day whether making a lot of money concerned him. The studio went dead silent when Simon answered, "No...what does concern me is the fear of dying." In contrast, consider John Wesley, who preached his last sermon of Feb 17, 1791, on the classic text from Isaiah 55: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near." The following day, a very sick man, he was put to bed at home. During the days of his illness, he often repeated the words from one of his brother's hymns: *I the chief of sinners am, But Jesus died for me!* Wesley's last words were, "The best of all is, God is with us!" He died March 2, 1791.

The Best of All. That's what I want for you and for me and for everybody everywhere...the knowledge that though we are indeed sinners under the curse of the Fall, far worse than even we ourselves can fathom, Jesus died for each one of us — and God is indeed with us! Trust Him today and allow your fear to be replaced with faith in the Son of God, who rescues us from sin, death and damnation — for all time!

Take care, everyone — I'll see you again next time to talk more about the great Redeemer who has come for us. Have a great day, and thanks again for your time!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's blessings of peace, joy and gladness of heart to each of you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to have you along today, and as we continue our study in the book of Genesis I pray you're continuing to find God's Word speaking to your heart in a powerful way. Our goal for these next few minutes is a faith-growing experience together, so to that end, let us pray:

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your great love for us, and we are mindful that it was through your perfect life, your sacrificial death, and your miraculous return to life that we were brought forgiveness, peace, and new life. Help us to live in the reality of your grace today, and may our study time today in your Word be a fruitful time for each one of us. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we return to Genesis 5 for a continuing look at some of the unique aspects of the book of the generations of Adam. There's no specific reading to gather around today, but our focus this session is all about the things we're seeing in this special chapter of Scripture: what genealogies tell us — more than anything.

My Uncle Wally, who died recently after a long and very rich life of adventure, learning, travel, and civic volunteerism, was one of the most interesting people you'd ever care to meet. He had an insatiable curiosity about the world around him, a kindly disposition that caused him to see everyone he met as a friend in-waiting, and an unbounded spirit of optimism that shaped pretty much everything he ever did. Uncle Wally was also quirky — really quirky — but his was a quirkiness of the delightful and brilliant kind, and while you might not want to be him, you couldn't help but admire him.

One of Uncle Wally's hobbies later in life was genealogy. He was a tireless researcher, and the things he uncovered about the history of our family's ancestors were amazing to me. Perhaps most amazing of all was how far back he was able to trace our particular family line. I never got all the details since he lived far away and I seldom got the chance to see him, but I do know that at the time of his death, his studies had taken him back several hundred years. To be honest, I had never cared much about my name or my family line in the past — or more accurately, I'd

never really thought about it. But I have to admit: Uncle Wally's passion helped me to understand the value and relevance of looking back.

The Bible, of course, contains multiple genealogical records, and in our time together over the past week or so, we've been having a look at the very first major genealogical entry in Scripture. That entry, and others like it, is every bit the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God...as much as any other portion of the Bible. Frankly, however, most of us don't really dial ourselves into texts like Genesis 5 when we come across them. Instead, we tend to browse through them if we look at them at all, and why? Because they're tedious to go through and we have trouble finding anything in them that seems worth our time. What, really, is the relevance of all those 'begats' anyway?

I said it a moment ago, but I'll say it again: the first thing we need to remember in instances like this is that the genealogical records in God's Word are precisely that: God's Word. They're part of His divine revelation to humanity, and thus, they're there for a reason. Since that's the case, there must be something we can learn from them when we see them. Today, I want to advance that point a bit, and to do so, I'm going to reference portions of an excellent article with you written by scholar S. Michael Houdmann. Dr. Houdmann shares most of the same points that other commentators do when this subject arises, but I think he does it with a level of clarity and accessibility to regular people like you and me that is very helpful. His premise is a simple one: in addition to the raw data they provide, genealogies in the Bible bolster the historicity of Scripture, and they also provide insight into the character of God and the lives of His people.

The article, titled "What is the relevance of the genealogies in the Bible?" makes the following points:

First, genealogies help substantiate the Bible's historical accuracy. These lists confirm the physical existence of the people in the Bible. By knowing family histories, we understand that the Bible is far from a mere story or a parable for how we should live our lives. Rather, it is authentic, historical truth. For example, an actual man named Adam had actual descendants (and, therefore, his actual sin had actual consequences).

These lists also demonstrate the detail-oriented nature of God and His interest in individuals. For instance, God never saw Israel vaguely, as some kind of nebulous group of people; He saw them with specificity, with precision and detail. To say it another way, there is nothing detached about such genealogies; instead, they show a God who is deeply involved in His creation. The inspired Word of God even mentions people by name, have you ever thought of that? Real people with real histories and real futures. In other words, God cares about each person and the details of his or her life.

Finally, we can learn a great deal about God's nature and character from those different individuals listed in various biblical genealogies. This is especially so when it comes to narrative portions of certain genealogies, which give us glimpses into the personal lives of the people they reference. For instance, the prayer of Jabez is found within a genealogy, and from this we learn about God's character and the nature of prayer. Other genealogies reveal that Ruth and Rahab were in the Messianic line. Here we see that God valued the lives of such individuals, even though they were Gentiles and not part of His covenant people. Soon we'll be looking at Enoch, who walked with God and never tasted death. We would never know that about him —

or the amazing nature of his relationship with our heavenly Father — if we didn't take time to read through the genealogical record that mentions it.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, on and on it goes. Indeed, it's not hyperbole in the least to say that example after example could be cited of spiritually significant people, places, principles, and promises that pop up within Scripture's genealogical records. Perhaps then...just maybe... rather than skipping over all those long lists of names when we come to them in our Bibles, it might be that a better bet is to hunker down and do some perusing. There are treasures to be found in those places, and we will be the richer for it when we take the time to do some digging! We'll be back with our shovels tomorrow to do just that here in the fifth chapter of Genesis, so do come along and join in the hunt. Until then, God's power, peace, and provision to each of you in Christ Jesus our Lord. Take care, folks, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's rich peace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being here today as we continue on in our study of Genesis, where right now we're working our way through Genesis 5. If these studies are a help to you, consider their helpfulness to others as well and remember that by design and from the very beginning, EDiBS was always meant to be shared. You're always welcome to post our sessions on your various social media accounts, and you can also forward them via email to as many people as you'd like each day. Beyond that, be creative! Many of you use EDiBS as a small group Bible study at church or at the office, others of you share the videos as devotions in nursing homes or with shut-ins via your smart phones or tablets, and I know that several of you even print out a week's worth of hard copies and take them to folks who don't have a computer or aren't online. As always, our shared goal is to share the Word of God with as many people as we can. Thanks for helping to do that! We have lots to talk about today, so let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, we want to say today that we love you, we worship you, and we adore you. You have rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into your marvelous light; you have made us alive in Christ, who gave Himself for us that our sins could be forgiven and that our fellowship with you could be restored. Thank you so very much! Please bless the hearing of your Word today. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 5 shows us a collection of people who lived remarkably long lives. Our focus this session: on age and aging in the pre-Flood world.

Genesis 5:6-32

6 When Seth had lived 105 years, he fathered Enosh. 7 Seth lived after he fathered Enosh 807 years and had other sons and daughters. 8 Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died.

9 When Enosh had lived 90 years, he fathered Kenan. 10 Enosh lived after he fathered Kenan 815 years and had other sons and daughters. 11 Thus all the days of Enosh were 905 years, and he died.

12 When Kenan had lived 70 years, he fathered Mahalalel. 13 Kenan lived after he fathered Mahalalel 840 years and had other sons and daughters. 14 Thus all the days of Kenan were 910 years, and he died.

15 When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he fathered Jared. 16 Mahalalel lived after he fathered Jared 830 years and had other sons and daughters. 17 Thus all the days of Mahalalel were 895 years, and he died.

18 When Jared had lived 162 years, he fathered Enoch. 19 Jared lived after he fathered Enoch 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 20 Thus all the days of Jared were 962 years, and he died.

21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. 22 Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

25 When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he fathered Lamech. 26 Methuselah lived after he fathered Lamech 782 years and had other sons and daughters. 27 Thus all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died.

28 When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son 29 and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands." 30 Lamech lived after he fathered Noah 595 years and had other sons and daughters. 31 Thus all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died.

32 After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Both of my paternal grandparents lived into their late nineties. My maternal grandmother lived almost to her ninth decade. My Mom and Dad, both of whom are still living, are 81 and 86, respectively, and they're still making the most of their days as they enjoy their later years. Longevity seems to run in my family — at least longevity as we describe it today.

While it's no secret that life expectancy in the developed world, with occasional little ups and downs, continues to increase overall in this day and age, what science is finding is that despite our best efforts, there seems to be a glass ceiling of sorts on how long we can live. In fact, doctors tell us that even if complete cures could be found for the three major killers in the world today — cancer, stroke, and coronary artery disease — the maximum life span of human beings wouldn't actually change that much. We'd still be in the mid-eighties on the high end, like in Japan and Switzerland, to somewhere down in the low to mid-seventies, like here in the United States. To be clear, more people would certainly bump up against the average maximum age with those cures in place, but those long-lived people would still become progressively weaker with age as critical components of their body continued to deteriorate. It seems that Scripture, yet again, has been proved right: Moses, in the ninetieth Psalm, wrote, "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Psalm 90:10).

In the antedeluvian, or pre-Flood, world, things were evidently quite different. People in that era lived for a very long time; time measured in centuries rather than decades. To that point, of all the people mentioned here in the fifth chapter of Genesis, no one lived less than 365 years (and

this was Enoch who, as we'll soon see, was a unique case), and Methuselah lived a whopping total of 969 years. Why was this so? As you might imagine, several explanations have been posited through the years, from sometimes-fanciful theories based on numerology that insist the ages are all symbolic rather than literal, to equally-fanciful theories based on pseudo-biology that try overly hard to discredit anyone who would deny a literal account.

While we don't know whether the changes that occurred post-Flood were cosmological or physiological, the evidence, so much as we have it, does suggest that people did in fact live much longer in the era before the Flood. Was it due to the fact that the degenerative effects of the Fall on the human gene pool hadn't yet accumulated to the point of curtailing life? Was it because the environment in the pre-Flood world was more protective and promoting of longevity with its blanket of water vapors surrounding the earth, as described for us in Genesis 1? The answer is that we really don't know, and even our best guess would only be conjecture. What we do know, however, is that the genealogical records provided for us here in Scripture require a literal reading of time as we know it if they are to make any sense. Furthermore, secular records from the same period of time — principally from the Sumerians — assert the same kinds of lengthy life spans among their populace prior to a global deluge. Finally, one more significant piece in the puzzle is that in the post-Flood world, written records show that life spans quickly came down to that with which we're familiar today.

The way this plays out in the biblical record, in fact, is quite telling: during the first 1,000 years following the Flood, Scripture shows a progressive decline in the life spans of the patriarchs, from Noah — who lived to be 950 years old — until Abraham, who lived to be 175. By the time we come around to Moses, his death at 120 years of age is considered quite old; a big change from the time before God destroyed the earth with water.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up, why bring these things up today? In part, I want you to wrestle with the text. I want you to ask questions. I want you to consider what God is saying to us through the inclusion of these verses in His holy Word and what the significance is with respect to life expectancy pre-Flood versus post-Flood. I also want you to consider the broader witness of Scripture with respect to sin and death and life and salvation — something that will be coming into ever sharper focus in the days ahead as we move into the era of Noah, the Flood, and its aftermath.

It was Ken Hamm, a man with whom many of you are familiar because of his organization's development of the Creation Museum in Kentucky with its massive Ark Encounter exhibit, who observed that one very important point in all of this is that no matter how you slice it, science offers no hope for eternal life...and not even the significant lengthening of life. Death is real, and as we talked about yesterday death is certain for all. The one solution for that has been revealed by the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. We'll talk more about that all-important truth when we come back next time. Until then, have a great day, and as always, the joy of the Lord be your strength. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm glad to have you along with me today as we open our Bibles, and I pray that you'll be richly blessed in these next few minutes as you place yourself under the authority of God's Word. Let's pray and then go right to the Scriptures together, where right now we're working our way through the ins and outs of Genesis 5

Prayer

Lord God, you alone are holy; you alone are true. We magnify your name today and seek to give you glory and honor, because you and you alone are worthy of it. Speak to us through your Word. Teach us. Rebuke us. Correct us. Train us in the ways of righteousness, that we may be men and women thoroughly equipped to do all that you have called us to do; all that you've prepared in advance for us to do. This we ask in the name of Jesus our Savior, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, much is made of a particular individual in the genealogical record of Genesis 5, and to that end, today and Monday we'll be talking about him. Our focus this session: Enoch...and a rarely considered observation.

Genesis 5:18-24

18 When Jared had lived 162 years, he fathered Enoch. 19 Jared lived after he fathered Enoch 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 20 Thus all the days of Jared were 962 years, and he died. 21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. 22 Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

I have long been an admirer of the writings of J.I. Packer. His words are profound, made all the more so by the fact that more than merely writing them, he tends to live them. His life of worship and service to God is one that shows thoughtfulness and selflessness. If anyone in the world of Christian academia could be listed as rock-star famous or be considered a modern icon, Packer would be near the top of the list.

Dr. Packer is 92 years of age now and still very actively engaged in the world around him. His theological mind remains very sharp. He even continues to write. Yet the reason I bring him up today is because of something he wrote nearly 35 years ago...at a time when he professed to be "getting older!" In His book *Your Father Loves You*, Packer said,

As I get older, I find that I appreciate God and people and good and lovely and noble things more and more intensely; so it is pure delight to think that this enjoyment will continue and

increase in some form (what form, God knows, and I am content to wait and see), literally forever. In fact Christians inherit the destiny which fairy tales envisaged in fancy: we (yes, you and I the silly saved sinners) live and live happily, and by God's endless mercy will live happily ever after.

We cannot visualize heaven's life and the wise man will not try to do so. Instead he will dwell on the doctrine of heaven, where the redeemed will find all their heart's desire: joy with their Lord, joy with his people, and joy in the ending of all frustration and distress and in the supply of all wants. What was said to the child — "If you want sweets and hamsters in heaven, they'll be there" — was not an evasion but a witness to the truth that in heaven no felt needs or longings go unsatisfied. What our wants will actually be, however, we hardly know, except the first and foremost: we shall want to be "always...with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

He concludes by saying,

What shall we do in heaven? Not lounge around but worship, work, think, and communicate, enjoying activity, beauty, people, and God. First and foremost, however, we shall see and love Jesus, our Savior, Master, and Friend.

I love Dr. Packer's words about heaven, especially his exhortation that we fix our eyes on the doctrine of heaven as revealed to us in the concreteness of Scripture rather than simply visualizing it in our minds. There are a couple of reasons for that: First, in our fallenness as human beings you and I are predisposed to see and imagine things through our fallen mind's eye, and thus we are prone to create an image of paradise far askew of God's holy and perfect design. Second, the Bible makes clear that due to the human limitations of our minds, we can't even begin to fathom the wonderful things God is preparing for us anyway. It's way beyond our pay grade. Remember how Paul phrased it in 1 Corinthians 2?

"But as it is written:

'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Which brings us, briefly today and by way of introduction, to Enoch.

Enoch was the great-great-great-great-grandson of Adam. He never tasted death. God took him. He was, and then he wasn't. Hebrews 11 gives us a little more detail: "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: 'He could not be found, because God had taken him away.' For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

Now — this being "taken away" is where all of Enoch's fame comes from. He draws a lot of attention due to all the mystery surrounding him. We love to mull over the circumstances of his home-going, and we enjoy thinking about the kind of person he must have been to receive that kind of blessing. It really gets our imagination fired up. But guess what? There's no need for our imagination in this instance, because the Bible tells us all we need to know in that regard: Enoch walked with God, and Enoch had faith, and Enoch was commended as one who pleased God. Thus God chose, for His own perfect and inscrutable reasons, to take him. That's an incredible narrative...one we'll definitely be coming back to after the weekend!

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, with those things being the case, there's one more thing worthy of note here: per the witness of Scripture, we know that Enoch is with God in heaven, right now. Enoch is with God, right now, experiencing in an amazing fullness all of those far-too-wonderful-to-understand things that I mentioned a moment ago. Right now, even as I write/speak, Enoch *does* see and hear and have in his heart all that God has prepared for those who love Him, because while Enoch walked with the Lord and enjoyed Him here, now he walks with and is enjoying God in the halls of heaven itself. To me, the most amazing aspect of Enoch's life isn't that he didn't die, but that he is now so truly and fully alive. Enoch, in so many ways, brings God and God's grace and God's heaven front and center as a topic of conversation — a conversation that's always worth having!

Have a terrific weekend everyone, and as you go about the business of working and worshiping and serving and resting over the next couple of days, allow the account of this great man of God and the blessing of his destiny to focus your thoughts — not so much on him, but on the doctrine of where he now resides; the doctrine of heaven. Take care, and I'll see you soon to talk about it some more!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings of love, joy, and peace to you in the name of our Savior Jesus, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. I pray that the abiding presence of the Lord is your strength today as you're going through your routine, and as we kick off a new week of Bible study today I pray that our time in the Scriptures together will be a blessing to you as God's special child. Let's pray as we go to God's Word.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the day you've given us, and thank you especially for the time you've given us today to focus on our relationship with you. Help us to set this study time apart as a special time of fellowship with you through your Word. We ask this in Christ's name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're back to a special and unique person in the Bible today whom we began to discuss at the end of last week. Our focus this session: more on Enoch, who walked with God.

Genesis 5:22-24

22 Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

I have never been especially good with maintaining friendships. It's hard to admit that, because I love people, and love them very much. I'm committed to the folks in my life and always want to see the best for them. Most people who know me, in fact, would characterize me as a people person through and through.

My friendship struggle through the years, and the attendant loneliness that has sometimes come with it, has never been because of the way I see another person; it almost always has more to do with the way I see myself. My sense of worth and value — or more accurately, the fact that I feel I lack worth and value — can cause me to turn in on myself and withdraw. I don't want to waste peoples' time or burden them with my presence. I don't want to be a bother.

Because of that, if I'm not careful and intentional and willing to fight against my natural inclination to be a wallflower, I tend to fade away over time. If I don't remember that as a child of God I am of inestimable value in His sight and that I can have confidence in who I am because of His imprint on my life, I can lose my sense of self as a person redeemed by Christ. It's ironic that as an individual who loves people, I have so often isolated myself from them — but that's part of the paradox of who I am, and who I always have been from my earliest memory. I wish it were not so, and I wish I had an easy fix for it — but 50+ years into life, I'm still fighting it.

The good news in this whole thing? While I'm not the best person in the world when it comes to maintaining friendships, I happen to be blessed with friends who are. I'm blessed with friends

who understand me and who don't write me off when I wander off. I'm fortunate to have people in my life who, though I fail them often, have never failed me. And when I do wander, they — amazingly and graciously and kindly and mercifully — continue to walk by my side no matter what.

Enoch, we are told, walked with God. That's a phenomenal statement. If we were to do a brief Scriptural survey of walking with God, 2 Corinthians would tell us that it's a walk of faith. 1 John would characterize it as walking in the light. The Old Testament prophet Amos would say that walking with God means walking in agreement with God. Each of these things almost certainly made up Enoch's walk. And miracle of miracles (in a time, by the way, when miracles were not an everyday occurrence), one day as Enoch continued his walk with the Lord, the Lord evidently told him, *Hey Enoch — you don't need to walk home today. Why don't you just come home with Me instead?* And he did.

Here, though, is something to remember today, everyone: though Enoch walked with God, he walked with God imperfectly, as an imperfect human being. He walked with God as a sinner in need of salvation. There undoubtedly were many times, countless times in the 300 years mentioned here in Scripture, where Enoch wandered away from the Lord more than he walked with the Lord. What does that mean? It can only mean that God likewise walked with Enoch.

God gave Himself in companionship and fellowship and company to Enoch. In a sense, in fact, we can go so far as to say that God, in his relationship with Enoch restored some of what Adam and Eve had lost. Remember when Adam and Eve walked in the Garden of Eden with God in the cool of the evening, and communed with God, and fellowshiped with God? Then they sinned and disobeyed. They were thrown out of the Garden and kept from the Tree of Life. They lost communion with the One who made them and had loved them. Enoch, though, is an illustration of that communion being restored. So intimate and so complete and so acceptable did this man become to God, in fact, that he bypassed death. God, walking by his side, walked Enoch right into heaven.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, that's good news. Why? Because while Enoch — fallen sinner Enoch, imperfect Enoch, unable-to-bat-1000-by-virtue-of-being-human Enoch — wasn't the best person in the world when it came to his walk, he was blessed with a Friend whose walk with him was. He was blessed with a Friend who understood him and who didn't write him off when Enoch wandered off. Enoch was fortunate to have a Person in his life who, though Enoch failed Him often, never failed Enoch. And when Enoch did wander, this Person — God Almighty Himself — amazingly and graciously and kindly and mercifully continued to walk by Enoch's side no matter what.

Enoch's God is your God. The God who walks with you no matter what. Can I tell you something? Sometimes you're going to be on point, hitting on all cylinders, and feeling groovy when it comes to finding your stride and keeping pace in life. A lot of times you're just going to be a wandering mess. The great truth of the Christian faith is that regardless of where your feet take you in a given moment, God's walk with you, and by you...and in Christ, *for you...* is faithful and true. Leave your feet, fall on your knees, and thank Him for that today...that indescribable gift of mercy and grace.

I'll see you again next time to put a cap on this discussion; until then, have a great day, God's rich peace to you, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's peace to you in our Savior Jesus Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to have you along today as we continue our study in the fifth chapter of Genesis, where for the past few sessions we've been talking about Enoch and his unique life as one who walked with God. As we prepare to leave him and move on to his great-grandson Noah, this session finds us briefly examining some of the non-biblical literature that is either attributed to, or about, Enoch. We'll discuss the reason for that in just a moment, but first let's take a moment to pray as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, we ask that in our time together today, you would draw close to us and give us wisdom. By the power of your Spirit, help us to learn and grow as we study. As always, and more than anything, please continue to strengthen us in our relationship with your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Scripture itself actually says very little about Enoch, but in some traditions there are other works which speak a great deal more about who he was, what he did in life, and what, purportedly, his role is in heaven. Our focus this session: reading outside the lines.

Over the past week, I've had not one, not two, but close to a dozen questions from people asking for more detailed information on Enoch. Does the Bible say anything more about him than we've already covered? Are there other documents that might provide additional snapshots of his life? Related to the documents question is the most common inquiry of all: what about the Book of Enoch, otherwise known as 1 Enoch? Is it on par with Scripture? After all, Jude references the Book of Enoch in his epistle, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church even accepts it as canonical. If so, why isn't it in our Bible, and what are we to make of its contents?

In trying to answer a question like this, we could very quickly go deep into the muck and end up clouding, rather than clarifying, the water. There are, for example, a few different ways we could come at the issue depending on how much time we wanted to spend and what points we wanted to emphasize. There are also differing ideas among scholars about how to frame the variant views that exist with respect to 1 Enoch in particular. With that in mind, I'm going to paint with a broad brush for the next few moments, not to intentionally leave anything out, but simply to give you a basic overview of the matter at hand in the limited time that we have. In doing so, I would also like to say that I'm particularly indebted to two pastor-teachers who have written extensively on this subject: John Calahan and S. Michael Houdmann. You can read much more deeply on the issue of Enoch from either of them if you so choose, and there are many other online resources to choose from as well if you want to go further.

Perhaps the clearest way to categorize, or place, the Book of Enoch is by laying out for you three major categorizations of theological literature:

The Bible

Both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches agree that the Old and New Testaments are inspired — that is, the 66 books of Scripture constitute what we refer to as God’s Word, penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Conservative churches, pastors, and theologians like myself hold to what Scripture itself says: that God’s Word is not only inspired, but also inerrant and infallible in the original autographs. All Scripture, writes the apostle Paul to Timothy, is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, that as Christian people we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Books not contained within our 66-book canon were, for various reasons, rejected by early church leaders as not having been written by God — something you can read more about by looking up articles on the Canon of Scripture.

The Apocrypha

Many of you know that the Roman Catholic Church accepts an additional group of books as being inspired. These books are called the Apocrypha, and include Baruch, Bel and the Dragon, Ecclesiasticus, 1 and 2 Esdras, The History of Susanna, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, The Prayer of Manasseh, Additions to Esther, The Song of the Three Holy Children, Tobit, and The Wisdom of Solomon. Protestants, while seeing value in some of the apocryphal books from a historical and spiritual perspective, reject them as being inspired because they were never endorsed by the apostles or the early church, and many of them contain demonstrable historical inaccuracies and what can only be called some very tall tales.

The Pseudepigrapha

All other books, books which we’ll include in one final category, are rejected by both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, and these are the books contained in what we call the Pseudepigrapha. The Pseudepigrapha contains a list of titles too long to present here, but among the Pseudepigrapha are the books of Enoch. I say “books” instead of “book” because there are actually three books associated with Enoch instead of one, and each is different. These books — especially 1 Enoch — recount how Enoch was taken up to heaven and supposedly appointed guardian of every celestial treasure, chief of the archangels, and the immediate attendant at the Throne of God. It’s a moving book, an emotional book, and a highly adventurous and engrossing book too — but neither the Roman Catholic Church nor the Protestant Church believes that it, or the other two books of Enoch for that matter, are inspired by God. It’s also interesting to note that no scholars — regardless of their theological leanings — believe that the Books of Enoch were written by the Enoch of the Bible. Enoch, remember, was seven generations from Adam, and lived prior to the Flood. The books of Enoch that exist today were written between the third century BC and the sixth century AD. That, plus a host of other difficulties, precludes them from being considered on par, or even approaching, the authoritative nature of Scripture.

Wrapping Up

Now — having said what I’ve said, I need to be up front and say to you as we wrap things up that we have barely scratched the surface of this topic today. We could do a week’s worth of sessions on the canon of Scripture all by itself, and we could spend the same amount of time explaining, then comparing and contrasting, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha. My purpose today hasn’t been to illumine those worthy topics, but to illustrate one simple point: what we can reliably know about Enoch, we can know only from Scripture. Only the Bible is authoritative. And only the Bible is reliable in its revelation. Thus, we should treat the Book of Enoch (and other books like it) in the same manner we would treat any other non-Scriptural

writings. Some of what they present is true and correct, but at the same time, much more of what they present is just a good story, usually containing falsehoods, historical inaccuracies, and even a few bonafide whoppers to boot. When you read these books, you have to treat them as interesting but fallible documents, not as the inspired, authoritative Word of God.

When we come back together next time, we'll be having our first look at Noah — an incredibly important person in holy history with a very interesting story! I can't wait to get into it with you, so do plan on joining in tomorrow as we take up the final verses of Genesis 5. Until then, God bless you richly in Christ Jesus our Lord, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being here today, especially after our tech hiccup yesterday. A frozen cursor and inoperable keyboard had me locked out of my computer and, consequently, my word processor, my video editing program, our archives, and my ability to upload and send EDiBS to you. Today we have a temporary patch in place, and we also have a new touch pad cable for the MacBook on its way from Amazon, so I think we're on our way to being fixed up for the foreseeable future! I appreciate your understanding, and since we didn't get back up and running until late afternoon yesterday, I decided to just re-film our introduction and bring yesterday's session to you now.

As we get going with our study time today, we're starting to wind down our look at Genesis 5, and to do that we're going to have a couple of brief sessions today and tomorrow that introduce Noah before we back up just a little bit to bring everything together with a chapter summary on Monday. I'm excited for what's before us today, and I hope it will bless you. Let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence, and we ask in this moment of quiet that you bless us with your Spirit and turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. It is life and salvation to us, and we are grateful for it. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the fifth chapter of Genesis ends by introducing us to Noah, the son of Lamech, the grandson of Methuselah, and the great-grandson of Enoch, who walked with God. Our focus this session: A sign of hope in hopeless times.

Genesis 5:21-32

21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. 22 Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

25 When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he fathered Lamech. 26 Methuselah lived after he fathered Lamech 782 years and had other sons and daughters. 27 Thus all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died.

28 When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son 29 and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands." 30 Lamech lived after he fathered Noah 595 years and had other sons and daughters. 31 Thus all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died.

32 After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Sometimes when I shoot an EDiBS session, I do so sitting on a bench in front of my piano, like I'm doing right now. It's an old British brand that's no longer around, a 6'8" Danemann baby grand. They actually call it a drawing room grand because size-wise it sits in no-man's land between a baby grand and a concert grand, and in fact, its ungainly size may be what hastened Danemann's demise. This piano isn't valuable; it has cost me more to move and store over the

years than it would cost to replace it. So why keep it? I've kept it because it has been a source of rest and comfort for me through thick and thin; a place in the house where I can sit, be quiet, disengage from the stresses and difficulties of the day, and remember that beauty is alive and hope is real and life is more than a compendium of all my failures.

Rest and Comfort: these are words of great significance and even greater consequence. Rest and Comfort are a welcome and important respite for us when things seem ugly and hopeless. Rest and Comfort bring grace and mercy into the midst of an existence far too riddled with failure. Rest and Comfort provide a quiet space to focus on a bigger picture of life than what's coming down the pike in the next 12 hours. The reason I bring those words up today is that as we come to the close of Genesis 5, a chapter full of great and fantastic, yet gravely flawed human beings, all of whom are under the curse of sin, it ends with a man named Noah...a man whose name means Rest and Comfort...a man whose life will be an instrument in the hands of God to save a small remnant of creation from destruction and keep hope alive in a world that's about to die.

Wrapping Up

Noah, you see, is a person of promise. He is one who will prove faithful to the Lord though thick and thin. He is one whose quiet obedience will be a counterpoint to the raucous and dissonant chords of a society that has become literally hellbent. Oh — and Noah is special in one additional way as well. As we wrap things up for the day, this is a good time to point out that just as Scripture tells us that Enoch walked with God, Scripture will say the same about Enoch's great-grandson. Noah is one who himself walks with God. We'll get to that as we move into Genesis 6, but it's certainly worthy of mention now.

When we come back tomorrow, we'll have more to say about this very special man, so do come along as we learn and grow together through our time in God's Word. I'm grateful for your time, everyone, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon. God bless you richly in our Lord Jesus, have a great day, and do take care!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for joining in on this first day of our study week together; I hope the sessions we've been doing in the opening chapters of Genesis are proving to be fruitful for you in your walk with the Lord, and my prayer is that God through His Word is continually speaking to your heart and bringing transformation into your life through the renewing of your mind. Today we're back in Genesis 5 with more to say about Noah, so let's pray as we go back to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have been gracious and kind to us, loving and compassionate, slow to anger and quick to forgive and restore. We thank you for your all-encompassing mercy in our lives, and as we come before you this day we do so mindful of our sin, mindful of the fact that we are but dust, mindful that we are deserving only of temporal and eternal punishment. But we speak to you in faith today, sure of your willingness to forgive, sure of the atonement made for our sins through your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Look upon us according to His perfect sacrifice, and speak your Word into our hearts and minds to strengthen and restore us. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started, having shared some brief, opening thoughts on Noah with you late last week, we'll go a bit further in the few minutes that we have today. Our focus: the end of a list, the conclusion of an era.

Genesis 5:28-32

28 When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son 29 and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands." 30 Lamech lived after he fathered Noah 595 years and had other sons and daughters. 31 Thus all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died. 32 After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Some of you may have seen a movie a few years ago that was purportedly about Noah. I say "purportedly" because it was a Hollywood interpretation which, of course, usually doesn't bode well for anything Judeo-Christian in nature. *Noah*, as the film was called, starred Russell Crowe and was directed by Darren Aronofsky. Pre-film buzz from industry sources predicted that it would be a blockbuster, and insiders said that it would take its place beside the likes of *The Ten Commandments*, *Ben Hur*, and *The Prince of Egypt* as a film of historical and theological integrity. Succeeding generations of movie-goers, they said, would see it as a high point in early 21st century filmmaking.

That's not what happened.

Instead, *Noah* was panned by viewers and critics alike. David Denby, writing in *The New Yorker*, summarized the movie as follows: "In a single sequence, Aronofsky combines creationism, Darwinian evolution, original sin, the end of days, and radical environmentalism." To Denby's points I would add that the movie contains numerous Biblical inaccuracies, so if you're motivated to watch it as a result of my having mentioned it today, be sure to have your own critic's hat on and understand that what you're viewing bears almost no resemblance to the Scriptural record. There is, however, one area that the movie portrays with some accuracy, and

it's actually the reason I've brought it up: *Noah* hits the mark in its presentation with regard to the growing state of wickedness and sin in the world at that time in history.

When we read through Genesis 5 and see the genealogy of the great patriarchs listed there, it seems at first glance like it must have been an ideal millennium of development and innovation in the world. So many families were increasing in number through the births of so many sons and daughters. People were living great lengths of time. Because of that, the population was rapidly expanding, and the land was filling up as time progressed. It harkens back to what God Himself had commanded of our first parents in chapter 1 when He told them to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it.

It's almost surprising, then, to see when we get to verses 28-29 that Lamech makes reference to a world weary from the Curse and pining for relief from the difficulty and toil associated with living in a fallen creation. It's as if we're being given a reminder that even with the honor and stature we associate with the list of names here in chapter 5, things by this time in history were far from what they should have been. Why? Because along with the ongoing growth of development and innovation and population in the world in those days came the growth of wickedness and ungodliness as well. More than ever, and more in evidence than ever, was the deep need of mankind to be rescued.

That, once again, is the entrance point for Noah into the narrative of divine redemption. As I mentioned last week, Noah comes onto the scene as a person of promise in the Messianic line. He is one whose quiet obedience and faithfulness as a preacher of righteousness will be a commentary on and counterpoint to the raucous and dissonant chords of a hellbent society. He will be the carrier of God's promise to bring a Redeemer to humanity.

So it is that even as God's Word gives witness to us that the patriarchs felt the misery of earthly life, damaged as it was by sin, Lamech, in explaining the meaning of Noah's name, showed that the Messianic hope would stay alive in his son. Noah would be the next genealogical step forward in the march toward the coming of the promised Savior...the One who would finally bring rest and comfort to a very broken world.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, with Noah, this genealogical table of the pre-Flood patriarchs closes. As for Noah himself? We'll be with him all the way through Genesis 9, and along with him, his family. Each of his three sons, in fact — mentioned at the end of our present chapter — will become ancestors to a separate branch of the human family after the Flood, and so in introducing them now, God's Word is setting the stage for what's to come.

When we come back tomorrow, we'll be having a final, summary look at the importance of this genealogically-laden fifth chapter of Genesis, and from there we'll be moving directly into Genesis 6, which leads us to the great Flood. I hope you'll join in each day this week, because there's much for us to learn together in the verses of Scripture that lie ahead!

Thanks so much for your time today, everyone — I'm grateful for each of you, and you'll be in my prayers this week. Have a great day, and I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! God's peace to each of you in Christ, and thanks for your presence today as we take some time to open God's Word together. If you've been studying along with us over the past couple of months, then you know we're in the Old Testament book of Genesis right now, and in this session we'll be finishing our look at Genesis 5. Let's pray as we go to the Scriptures, shall we?

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day and this time together to be in your Word, we ask that you would cause it, by your gracious Spirit, to penetrate into our lives and do that which you desire it to do within us. We place ourselves before you with humble, yet eager anticipation, because we know what a great privilege it is to open the Scriptures and learn of you and from you. Bless this time, we pray in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our final look at Genesis 5 is of the brief, summary variety. Our focus this session: one last look from Adam to Noah.

Here's a list of interesting facts for you to think about today from our time in Genesis 5:

Adam, from what we can see in this chapter, lived to see the birth of all his descendants except Noah.

This means that Adam would have also seen the terrible fruits of his sinfulness, with the human race just a generation away from destruction when he died.

Related to the first two points, the Scriptural record shows us that all of the pre-Noah generations in Adam's bloodline died out before the Flood.

And speaking of the days before the Flood, here's something I'd never considered before: Methuselah must have witnessed his grandson building the ark!

Another point of fact about Methuselah: as the last survivor of the pre-Noah generations (I say that because he outlived his son, Lamech) he most likely died in the very year God sent the Flood.

And what of Lamech? Lamech, the father who prophesied about his son Noah, apparently died just four years before the Flood.

I could go on with little tidbits like this for several minutes if that's where I wanted to take things today, but I mention the few things that I have for a specific reason: Genesis 5, seen from a broad perspective, is a list of men, women, and children that shows the flow of history across many generations in the earliest years of our world. It joins things at the beginning of everything — the account of Adam and Eve at Creation — with things near the ending of everything: the narrative of Noah and the Flood, which would destroy the created order. This fifth chapter of Genesis is a genealogical line which establishes a chain, linking together important events in history that may have otherwise ended up disjointed and unconnected to anything else. Through it, God shows us over and over again, from generation to generation, that He is in control. I mentioned it before, but let me reiterate one more thing that's extremely important about this chapter: eight times in Genesis 5 we're told, "and he died." Adam died. Seth died. Enosh died. Kenan died. Mahalalel died. Jared died. Methuseleh died. Lamech died. Only Enoch didn't die, and Noah's death will be coming a few chapters from now. Simply put, there's a drumbeat of death in this chapter that echoes across the generations listed, emphasizing what? Emphasizing that the entirety of mankind is under a death sentence because of sin.

Every now and then when I talk with my elderly parents on the phone or while visiting with them in southern California, they'll comment that they've been spending a lot of time going to funerals lately. The list of their now-deceased friends gets longer all the time, and now includes two of their own sons. Some acquaintances are tragically young while others are in their eighties and nineties like my folks, but young or old the truth remains the same: people they know die every day. And you know what? Sooner or later, if the Lord tarries, what was said of the patriarchs here in Genesis 5 will also be said of you and me: "And he died"... "And she died."

As death reigned in the earliest generations of world history, death still reigns today. Just open any newspaper and look at the obituary section. This morning I perused several papers, from the Chicago Tribune to the Atlanta Journal Constitution to the L.A. Times to the Washington Post, and guess what I found? Loads and loads of death notices. Obituaries abounded. Tomorrow there will be more, and more the day after that. Every day a brand new list with names that, for the most part, will never be mentioned again. Why? Because death reigns in Chicago and Atlanta and Los Angeles and in our nation's Capitol...and death also reigns over you and me.

Wrapping Up

Why bring that to your attention today? I'm not doing it to bring you down; I'm doing it so that you'll look up. I'm not doing it to speak words of condemnation over your life, but to remind you that the God who is in control from generation to generation, including this generation, has something to say to you through the witness of His Word. As we wrap things up for the day, Genesis 5 is a great snapshot of early world history, but it's an even greater snapshot of the effects of sin on that world. Without a Rescuer to seek and save the lost, death would continue to reign for all time. But the same God who is in control from generation to generation, including this generation, is also the God who has orchestrated your salvation from sin and your victory over death through the life death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said it this way when He was comforting Martha after the death of Lazarus in John 11:

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die."

After speaking those words, He said to Martha, "Do you believe this?"

How many of you remember Martha's response? "Yes, Lord," she answered, "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

What wonderful words of faith those are...words that, by faith, I pray you and I will speak as well should we ever be asked that question. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world...all to save sinners in need of rescue. Sinners like me and you.

May God comfort you and bless you with those words of truth today, and as we turn the corner now and get ready to move into Genesis 6, do come along for more on this topic of sin — and the greater topic of redemption in the name of Christ. Joy to each of you in our Lord Jesus, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS! As we get going with our Bible study time today we'll be entering the sixth chapter of Genesis, a book that in many ways has been hard and harsh thus far rather than soft and sweet, and yet even in the melee of the Fall, there has been mercy in the middle

of it all. As we move into this new section of God's Word, we'll be continuing on a somewhat difficult trajectory — but always and ultimately in a forward direction that points us to the promise of redemption in a coming Savior. Let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence, and we ask in this moment of quiet that you bless us with your Spirit and turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. It is life and salvation to us, and we are grateful for it. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis six begins with a time of increasing corruption in the world and an intermingling of two very different kinds of people. Our focus this session: The sons of God and the daughters of man.

Genesis 6:1-4

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. 3 Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

C.S. Lewis once said, "An open mind, in questions that are not ultimate, is useful." That's a noteworthy saying that can serve us well in almost every area of life, from the board meeting of the neighborhood condo association to the electing of the local school board to discussions surrounding various non-essential theological matters. The reason I'm leading off with that quote today falls into the "non-essential theological matters" category, and it's driven by the portion of Scripture we're about to engage in...a portion of Scripture where an open mind will be quite helpful. Before us today is a narrative that frankly leaves us with more questions than answers. The saving grace of the moment is that those questions are not, to borrow Lewis's language, "ultimate." Over the next few study sessions, we'll be spending some time talking about three things: the identities of the sons of God, the daughters of man, and the Nephilim. Just who were these people, and why would Moses use these designations to describe them as he wrote Genesis?

Bible interpreters, of course, have put forth several different views. Some have speculated, for example, that "sons of God" in this passage refers to angels, since Scripture uses that phrase elsewhere in describing them. This would mean that the "daughters of man" were human women who were taken as wives by the aforementioned angels, and it also assumes that their offspring would have been the Nephilim, those mighty men of old who were giants and men of renown. There are several reasons why people hold to this view today, and it's a rather popular one, but it has its share of problems as well.

Other scholars assert a view that borrows from the customs of the ancient Near East, where various cultures often described their kings and other rulers as sons of god. Thus, these scholars attribute the reference about "sons of God" here in Genesis 6 to a class of royalty or nobility who brazenly and without regard for anyone but themselves took the "daughters of man" as wives for their own pleasure— almost certainly from the population of commoners who

couldn't resist without grave consequences. This idea has been a minority position through the years, but it does have its adherents today. Just like the first view, however, it leaves many unanswered questions.

The third and most commonly held view on this subject is that the sons of God mentioned in today's text are actually the godly men from the line of Seth, and that the daughters of man are the unbelieving women from the line of Cain. The central theme of this position is that when such marriage unions began to take place between believers and unbelievers — an unequal yoking — rather than the Sethite men influencing the Cainite women for the good and glory of God, the influence went in the opposite direction and thus contributed to the growing perversion and wickedness in the world. Is this point of view bullet proof? No — and it's yet another reason why, for two millennia, Christendom has been wrestling with the questions surrounding the opening of Genesis 6.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, our task over the next couple of days will be, in part, to flesh out these points of view, discuss the merits and weaknesses of each idea, and finally, come to a place of conviction on the subject if we feel we can. But while it will certainly be interesting to pore over our Bibles and consider the various theories on this matter, my final word to you for today is to remember something much more important: for whatever reason and by whatever means it was happening, the world in the days prior to the Flood was growing more and more corrupt — and because of that, God would soon bring judgment. If we take care to keep the main thing the main thing here, then our study through this section of God's Word will be a profitable one indeed. Do come back next time for more on this topic, and don't be afraid to come with questions. Remember, this is one issue where an open mind can be useful as you work things out! Thanks for your time, everyone; God's peace, and have a terrific day!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody — grace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS Thank you for clicking in with us today as we continue to work through the Old Testament book of Genesis together. We remain today, and will for a few sessions yet, in chapter 6, so if you'll turn there in your Bible, we'll pray and get things rolling.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come back to the questions we raised yesterday surrounding the sons of God and the daughters of men. Our focus: weighing evidence, but still wondering!

Genesis 6:1-4 (Part 2)

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. 3 Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

When I lived out in the country, my dog, Robin, would sometimes go missing. Often it was for an afternoon or an evening, and once or twice it was an overnight jaunt, but that's life on the farm — especially when your animals are livestock guardians and watchdogs who live outside most of the time. Usually we didn't get too excited about such occurrences, but on one occasion, Robin disappeared for almost a week. We searched high and low, put up flyers, stopped by all the neighboring farms to ask about her, and even had our Amish friends on the lookout for her. After so long with nary a nibble as to her whereabouts, we had just about given up hope. Then one day, just as we were preparing to have the difficult family meeting to let the kids know she wasn't coming back, she came ambling down the driveway. Theories as to Robin's exploits were many. The dried mud on her body and the burrs in her collar provided some clues as to where she had gone, as did some superficial buckshot wounds on her hindquarters where she had been shot at, most likely because she had poked around one of the rabbit operations or egg farms several miles away. But while we were able to narrow things down and come up with a few plausible scenarios for what had happened, in the end the information was too scant and the possibilities too numerous to settle on a definitive answer. To this day, Robin is the only one who knows what really happened on her journey — and that's something that will never change.

When we were together last time with the first four verses of Genesis 6, we introduced the account of the sons of God and the daughters of men. Along with them, we talked about the Nephilim. As we talked about these three groups of individuals, we mentioned that several different ideas have been suggested through the years regarding their identities. The Bible, in fact, provides several clues as to who each group might be, but there is nonetheless a great deal of speculation regarding the true nature of their personage. Why? Because while scholars have worked to narrow things down and have come up with several plausible scenarios to work with, in the end the information is too scant and the possibilities too numerous to settle on a definitive answer.

The three main views we set forth in our last session are as follows: first, that the sons of God were fallen angels; second, that they were people who served as powerful human rulers; or third, that they were the godly descendants of Seth who intermarried with the ungodly descendants of Cain. I already mentioned that the second view isn't one given much consideration among scholars and commentators in our day, so what of the other two: the idea

that the sons of God are angelic beings, or alternatively, that they are simply godly descendants of Seth?

In many quarters today within conservative or evangelical Christianity, the assumption of Genesis 6 is that “the sons of God” refers to angelic beings. Why is this the case? Simply put, it comes down to language: the Scriptures sometimes refer to angels as sons of God, and so it’s automatically believed that the reference here in Genesis 6 means the same. As I said yesterday, this is certainly a possibility, but is it the most likely conclusion based on what we can glean from the context of the passage and normative hermeneutical principles? Here, my answer is no. In fact, since this view advances the idea that there can be sexual relations between angels and human beings — that is, between spirit beings, who have no permanent bodies, and people, who are corporeal — *and* that such unions can produce children, it falls outside our historical understandings of basic physiology and basic theology both.

Is the term “sons of God” used to refer to angels? Yes. Several places in Job have angels being described as such, and for that matter, so does the 29th Psalm. But Scripture, in places like Matthew and Romans and Galatians, also uses the term to talk about followers of Jesus. R.C. Sproul even makes the point that Jesus Himself is *the* Son of God, capital S...and that divine sonship in Scripture is actually an important thread which is woven in to the tapestry of our own relationship with our heavenly Father. What does this mean? This means that Genesis 6 could very well be talking about two regular, natural (as opposed to supernatural) groups of people: those who manifested a pattern of obedience to God in their lives and those who were pagans in their orientation. In other words, this text could easily be describing reprobate marriages between believers and unbelievers and the descent of humanity as a whole into wickedness as a result.

If you’re wondering whether this happens to be my personal point of view on the subject, it is... and the main reason I hold to it is that the immediate context of Genesis 6 supports such a conclusion. If you go back in our study to the Fall in Genesis 3 and move forward from there, you’ll see that with the beginning of Genesis 4, the Bible traces the lines of two families: the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth. Cain’s line is recounted in Genesis 4 and is characterized by wickedness, capped by Cain’s own son, Lamech. Lamech not only was the first polygamist, but a person who rejoiced in murderous, vengeful use of the sword as well. By contrast, the line of Seth, traced for us in Genesis 5, displays righteousness. Seth’s line includes Enoch, who walked with God, and Noah, who as we’ll see in just a few verses, was considered a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Thus we see two lines, one obeying God and the other willfully disobeying Him; the sons of God and the daughters of men.

From chapters 4 and 5, then, we now come to Genesis 6. Contextually speaking, it is describing not the intermarriage of angels and human women but something much more pedestrian, though no less evil: the intermarriage of the descendants of Cain and Seth. These two lines, one godly and one wicked, come together, and suddenly everyone is caught up in the pursuit of evil, such that “every intention of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually.” It’s a scenario that fits — and though it is not perfect, it does explain in a sound manner all that is coming down the pike.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, this, of course, is not the end of the discussion! We have one more session to go before we put this matter to bed, and several things to work through as we

go. I hope you'll join in to be part of the journey, and as always, I hope it will be a blessing for you in your walk with our great and mighty God. Have a terrific day everyone, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon. God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus. Thanks for being here today for our study time in God's Word; I pray that you'll be richly blessed in these next few moments that we have together. Today we're back in Genesis 6 for one final look at the opening verses of the chapter, so let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, have mercy on your children today. It's been a long week for many of us, and we are in need of your ministering presence in our lives. Thank you for your promise to be with us always; that you will never leave us or forsake us. We especially ask that you would draw near to us

now as we study your Word. Use it to transform us by the renewing of our minds. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we'll be doing just a bit more digging on some of the peculiarities that pop up in the opening of Genesis 6. Our focus this session: the Nephilim.

Genesis 6:4

4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

I have a young person in my life who's quite important to me. Jonathan is six, he's already a voracious reader, and it just so happens that for some reason, he's gaga over American history right now. He knows the name and highlights of time in office for every president from George Washington to Donald Trump, he has a working knowledge of The American Revolution, the War of 1812, The Civil War, and the Spanish American War, and he's recently been digging into WWII.

On the one hand, talking with Jonathan about these things is quite enjoyable. On the other hand, it often leaves me between a rock and a hard place, because he regularly asks me detailed questions about people and places that I've either never heard of or haven't studied since ninth grade. Take the Revolutionary War, for example. When I get an inquiry about Thomas Paine or George Washington or the battles of Saratoga, I'm okay...but when Molly Pitcher or John Dickinson or Nathan Hale comes into the conversation, or when he wants to know why General Cornwallis stayed in Yorktown instead of trying to fight his way out and ended up having to surrender, I'm pretty much useless. Have I read through that history myself? Some, but not all. Do I understand the ins and outs of the strategies that were employed by the Americans to defeat the British? Only a tiny bit. Do I know who the major players were on each side of the conflict? Again, some but not all. And finally, do I carry on the front burner of my brain a readily accessible catalog of the political issues that drove the two sides into combat? I don't...certainly not now, and to be honest, not before now either!

I bring up young Jonathan today because just as he regularly stumps me when it comes to the finer points of our nation's early military history, I have to admit that I, and many other pastors with me, sometimes feel the same way when we get questions on especially difficult or complex topics, subjects, or situations that arise in Scripture. Do we study to show ourselves approved? By God's grace, absolutely, and the vast majority of friends and colleagues I have in ministry take their study time in God's Word very seriously. That said, do we always have every answer to every question on the tip of our tongues, and moreover, do we even have what could be called a working knowledge of every conceivable topic, subject, or situation that might come up in conversation? The answer is that we just don't.

As we continue to talk about the opening of Genesis 6 today, this portion of God's Word is one of those frustrating sections where, as I've mentioned over the past couple of days, there aren't always easy, discoverable, black and white answers to the questions that arise. One of the all-time greats? Just who were the Nephilim, anyway?

As has already become evident, how that question is answered depends to a large degree on how we talk about the sons of God and the daughters of man. But having said that, allow me, in as basic and unfiltered manner as I can, to give you a nuts-and-bolts answer to that query.

First, the term *Nephilim* — as it's rendered in the more recent translations of the Bible — is found in two Old Testament texts: here in Genesis 6:4 and also in Numbers 13:33. In the King James Version, the original term is rendered “giants,” from the Greek Septuagint's use of the word *gigantes*. The word *Nephilim* is simply what we call a transliteration...that is, the Hebrew word spelled with English letters that sound similar. Why do the modern versions of Scripture merely transliterate the Hebrew instead of offering a concrete translation? Because in actuality, the root meaning of the Hebrew term is debated — which only adds to the uncertainty of the issue.

Some scholars suggest that the original word meant “to fall,” giving the sense of one who has fallen either morally or spiritually. Others view the term in the sense of “to fall *upon*,” as in attacking someone, which suggests a person of violence or one who engages in brutality and savagery against another. An additional possibility is that *Nephilim* comes from a Hebrew word which means to be awesome or full of wonder. And then there is the previously mentioned translation from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) which is the source for the idea that the Nephilim were giants. The truth, of course, is that the Nephilim here in the opening of Genesis 6 can easily be seen as having any, or even all, of these characteristics — which doesn't help us narrow the playing field as far as coming away with a definitive answer.

The bottom line, however, and one that most commentators agree on at least to a certain extent, is that rendering the Nephilim as “the fallen ones,” whoever or whatever they were, accurately captures the spirit of the passage. The Nephilim were fallen beings, mighty men, whose greatness — whether in size, wickedness, renown, or all of the above — was well known among the people of the day. It also seems that their presence in the world and the activities in which they engaged hastened the coming of divine judgment.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up, if we stick with the theory I advanced in our time together yesterday regarding the identities of the sons of God and the daughters of man, this would mean that the Nephilim were the offspring of male descendants of Adam and Eve through Seth (the dominant line of believers, or “sons of God”) who intermarried with female descendants of Cain (the dominant line of unbelievers, or “daughters of man”). Since those marriages were relationships unequally yoked and contrary to God's will, and since negative, ungodly influences in such relationships, appealing to the sinful nature, almost always end up trumping and then trampling upon what is godly, over time they greatly contributed to a growing perversion and wickedness in the world. This was made manifest not only in the deterioration of religious principle, but also in increasingly wicked and aggressive children who became strong in physical stature, deceitful in their accomplishments, and in fearsome in reputation. Did it happen overnight? Probably not. But by the time of the coming of the Flood, the Nephilim and their impact on the world stage was one widely known and keenly felt.

When we come back after the weekend, we'll be moving into just how keenly felt that impact was, and as we inch closer to the coming of the great Deluge which would destroy the world, we'll have much to say about God's patience, God's promise, God's power, and God's provision through it all. I do invite you to come along; it's sure to be a great time in God's Word! have a

wonderful weekend, everyone; grace, mercy and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, a ministry designed to help you study, interact with, and learn God's Word on a consistent daily basis! It's good to be with you today, and as you open up your Bible and ask the Lord to teach you and transform your life over these next few minutes, I know that you'll be blessed as a result. Let's pray right now and ask our Almighty God to do that in our lives together.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, always true to His Word, the Lord now moves forward with His intention to decimate the human race due to its ever-increasing wickedness in the world. Our focus this session: the plan to blot out man, and the finding of favor with Noah.

Genesis 6:5-10

5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. 9 These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. 10 And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

I was in the front yard doing some hedge pruning and other clean up a few weeks back when the emergency alert went off on my phone. When I dug it out of my pocket to see what was going on, I found that a tornado warning had been posted for my community. Looking up, I saw clouds, but nothing that would give me pause. It wasn't storming, there was no thunder or lightning, no greenish tinge to the sky, not even a breeze to speak of. In short, there was nothing I saw to cause me concern. Still, when I lived on the farm in Missouri I learned to take National Weather Service warnings seriously, and so I finished up the task I was working on and then began to take my tools and yard waste bin back to the garage. That's when it happened: seemingly out of nowhere, and without announcing itself at all, a wall of wind hit my street, knocking over trash cans, breaking small tree limbs, and blowing cardboard boxes, soccer balls, and anything else in its path down the middle of the road. With the wind came a suddenly dark and ugly sky, sheets of rain, and copious amounts thunder and lightning, all of which sent me and several of my neighbors scurrying indoors to take cover. In the end, there was no tornado touch-down that day, but the severe storm and the straight-line winds that came with it did do some damage, and two people were injured when they were struck by lightning.

Storm warnings. Do you know what the most common element surrounding them is? It's not their ominous tenor, not that they're overblown, and not that they often turn out to be of no accord. It's that they are seldom heeded. Every year in the United States and elsewhere in the world, thousands of people die when they did not have to, simply because they ignore orders to take cover, or to move to higher ground, or to evacuate. They ignore the warnings and the people who make them because they think they can handle what's coming. They think they can ride things out. They also tend to severely underestimate their preparedness for and imperviousness to whatever tempest might be on its way, and they continue to underestimate things until it's too late to escape.

Here in the sixth chapter of Genesis, storm clouds have been building. The world has been descending into an ever deepening wickedness. The Creator of the Universe has spoken His displeasure. In the opening verses of the chapter, the Lord responded to the growing corruption, saying, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." Those words were spoken not in regard to the lifespan of a man or a woman, but to the time left until the judgment of the flood. So — has mankind heard and heeded that warning? Has the crown of God's creation, humanity itself, taken stock of the wickedness that has become part and parcel of its identity? The answer is an unfortunate and resounding No. The witness of

Scripture is that the wickedness of man has now become so great in the world that every intention of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually. In this next section of verses, then, we come to the next step in the progression of this divine drama: God, in His just and holy determination, declares that He will blot out all that He has made.

The passages we'll be looking at in the coming days will actually afford us quite a bit of time to discuss this development, and in fact, the Lord will reiterate this declaration when He speaks to Noah, so we'll discuss it in more detail at that point. But what, incidentally, about Noah? What is his place in all of this, and how does he fit into God's plan? Consider just a couple of things today as we lay some groundwork for what's ahead:

1. The statement that "Noah was a righteous man" is actually the first mention of righteousness in the Bible. In that sense, Noah — long before Abraham — sets the standard that righteousness comes by faith, and also in that sense, this means that the biblical doctrine of imputed righteousness began before the Flood. God's grace and mercy is fully on display through His relationship with Noah.
2. Noah is also described as "blameless in his generation," which is a description of his character. Does this mean he was sinless? Of course not; all people sin, and Noah was a human being with iniquity in his life who needed forgiveness just like every other human being after the Fall. What this does mean, however, is that Noah was a man who walked with integrity before God and people. He believed in and lived in accordance with God's truth, which put him in a very different place than his contemporaries. As a person of faith, he was a bright light in a dark generation, and commentator Trevor Major reminds us that since this was the case, Noah would be God's choice to preserve and maintain the sacred Messianic lineage through the time of the Flood. Thus, Noah and his family would be spared. Noah's family would repopulate the earth. Noah's family would carry a new, merciful, promise-laden divine covenant into a new world. Noah and his family would ride out the storm...and they would do so under God's own blessing and protection.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what we've seen in today's passage is very, if you'll excuse the use of the word, stark. It's blunt. As Old Testament scholar Dr. Derek Kidner once wrote of these verses, "A more emphatic statement of the wickedness of the human heart is hardly conceivable." At the same time, however, we have such beautiful words concerning Noah. Noah found favor with God — and through Noah, God would keep hope alive for every succeeding generation through the promise of the coming Savior. There is law here to be sure...hard law, strong law, terrifying law. But the Gospel is here as well, and we will be seeing its bright rays shine into the darkness of the world over and over again in our sessions to come. Do stay with us as we experience its warmth together in the days ahead!

Have a wonderful day, everyone — God bless you richly with His joy and peace, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you for another day in the Scriptures together, and as we move deeper into our week, my prayers for you are that you're growing in Christ, growing in your knowledge of the Lord's love for you, and growing in your understanding of His holy Word, where today we're back in Genesis 6. I'm glad you're here; let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on this day we bless your holy name and ask that you bless the teaching of your Word. Help us to see in the Scriptures today your call for a steadfast heart that seeks you with everything it possesses. We love you, and we thank you as always for this time. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with a restating of the reason for the coming destruction of the world, God now speaks to Noah and instructs him to build an ark. Our focus: a modern description of Noah's ship.

Genesis 6:11-17

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. 14 Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. 16 Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. 17 For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die.

I was on the coast this past week watching cargo ships come into port here in Georgia. The most common type of vessel here is a car/truck carrier, or PCTC for short. The size of one of these boats is hard to fathom. Essentially, they're floating boxes with up to 12 decks, and they carry an average of 6,500 new cars. The largest of them can carry up to 8,500 vehicles. They're not fast; they have a top speed of about 22 miles per hour, or 19 knots, and they generally travel more slowly than that. Still, because of the vast amount of cargo they can transport, they're considered very efficient. To watch one of them cruise under the Sydney Lanier Bridge, meet up with a couple of tug boats, and be escorted dockside is really a sight to behold.

With today's study session, we've come to the beginning of the end, as it were, of the pre-Flood world. God has determined to bring an end to all flesh, and Noah is tapped by the Lord to build an ark in order to preserve himself, his family, and a remnant of the animal world for the purpose of repopulating the earth post-deluge. Which brings up a question: just what was the ark? Let's talk about it.

To start with, the word we translate as "ark" in our Bible is actually the Hebrew word for "box" — which gives us a good idea of what Noah's ark was: a box-like vessel, in actuality not much different than a modern car/truck carrier. Noah's ark, of course, was meant for carrying a very special variety of cargo, and it would need to be constructed in a precise manner to fulfill its mission.

Scripture tells us that the ark was 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high, and if we use the typical measurement for a cubit — 18 inches — the ark would have been 450 feet long by 75 feet wide by 45 feet high. Some scholars question those exact dimensions, pointing out that the Babylonians had a 'royal' cubit of about 19.8 inches, the Egyptians had a longer and a shorter cubit of about 20.65 inches and 17.6 inches respectively, and even the Hebrews had a long cubit of 20.4 inches and a 'common' cubit of about 17.5 inches. Regardless of what standard Noah may have used, however, the basic dimensions of the ark would have ended up very similar to the measurements I just shared.

What else do we know about the ark in the physical sense? It was three stories high; it had one window and one door; it was made of gopher wood (though we don't know what kind of tree gopher wood was from); and it was pitched within and without so that it would be watertight.

Furthermore, the ark's dimensions were just about perfect for seaworthiness, with a length to breadth ratio of 6 to 1. The car carriers I mentioned earlier, along with most modern oil tankers, have a 7 to 1 ratio...designs that make them very difficult to capsize.

Finally, let's talk just briefly about the ark's carrying capacity. While it can't compare to an 8,500 vehicle super carrier plying today's oceans, the ark's capabilities were still incredibly impressive. I remember reading in the *Ryrie Study Bible* some years ago that the cargo capacity of the ark, using the measurements I mentioned a moment ago, would have equaled that of 522 standard railroad stock cars...each of which, by the way, can hold 240 sheep. To carry 45,000 sheep-sized animals, you'd need 188 rail cars — but that would still leave you with over 330 cars to store food, house Noah's family, and give some room for the animals to move around a little bit. Meaning what? Meaning the ark was one big boat — definitely capable of handling the job for which it was being built.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, here we have God entrusting to Noah the task of building the ark. Here we have God giving him the necessary information to complete the task—size, layout, appropriate building materials, and so on. Here we have God giving, in a very real sense and in more ways than one, a plan for salvation with respect to Noah and his family — something we'll be talking about in detail in the days to come. Bottom line? Here we have God providing all that will be needed in the days ahead...days that will in one way be deeply burdensome, and yet in another way entirely, inordinately blessed. Do come along and be part of things as we work through the chapters and verses ahead, everyone — there's great learning ahead for us all as we study together! Have a great day, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings everybody! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich peace to you as you come to the table for another day of Bible study with your brothers and sisters in the faith from across the country and around the world. EDiBS is here, first to get you into God's Word, and then to nurture in you an increased hunger for God's Word so that our daily 8-10 minutes together becomes a jumping off point for you into deeper waters as you commune with the Lord. In today's session we'll be starting our wrap-up of Genesis 6, then closing off our week with a move into chapter 7. Let's get things going as we bow our heads to come before our heavenly Father.

Prayer

Almighty God, what a loving and compassionate Lord you are; quick to hear, quick to have mercy, always ready to forgive and restore. Thank you for that assurance — an assurance we have because you sent your only Son to live for us and die in our place; your Son who rose again from the dead to proclaim victory over sin death and the devil for all time and eternity.

Please draw close to us and bless our study time today, that we grow ever stronger in our most holy faith. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the 18th verse of Genesis 6 brings us to the first use of a very important word in the Bible. Our focus this session: The blessing of covenant.

Genesis 6:18

18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

Have you ever made a promise that you haven't kept...agreed to something where, in the end, you didn't keep your end of the bargain? I have. It pains me to say it, but it's true, and maybe it is for you too. If you've been party to that kind of failure, that breaking of trust in the life of another, then you know it can be a pretty lousy way to live. It makes you miserable and ashamed. It causes you to doubt yourself and to hold back when it comes to entering any kind of new agreement or relationship, because you're fearful of failure, of letting another person down. Unkept or broken promises, in fact, are one of the biggest contributors to problems in the business world, in marriages, in parenting, and in friendships. People don't want to be left holding the bag in their relationships with others, whatever kind they might be. Conversely, of course, when someone is faithful and true to an agreement that's been made within the parameters of a relationship, it's worth more than its weight in gold.

With that in mind, we come today to the important word I mentioned in our introduction a moment ago: *covenant*. The Hebrew word for *covenant* comes from the word meaning "to cut," and it's mentioned around 300 times in Scripture. Entering a covenant was a very big deal, and why? Because a covenant wasn't a conditional, "if you do this, then I'll do that" kind of scenario; rather, a covenant in the strict biblical sense centered more on the unwavering commitment one would make to another, regardless of anything else that might happen. To put it another way, a covenant was a relationship wherein the party making the covenant bound himself to fulfill certain conditions, no matter what and irrespective of the behavior of the other in the relationship.

Today in God's Word, we have the very first use of the word *covenant* in Scripture, and God Himself is the One establishing it!

Again, though in most of our Bible translations today people are described as "making" a covenant, the Hebrews actually described the establishment of this type of relationship as "cutting" a covenant. The cutting, symbolized by the slaughter of animals, indicated that each person in the covenant promised to give his or her own life to keep its terms. To break a covenant was to invite one's own death as a penalty, and as we all know, there are no more serious relationships than those that are a commitment of life itself.

That's why, as we see God's Word give witness to the fact that God Himself promises to cut a covenant with Noah, it should cause us to stop and think. God's use of a covenant to describe His relationship with His people is striking for several reasons. It shows that God wants to bond eternally with a people who persistently reject Him. It shows that God is willing to prove His devotion to the relationship by offering His own life. Finally, and probably most stunning of all, it shows that God is not only willing to offer His own life to keep the covenant, but that He is also

willing to pay the price for any covenant failure on the part of the human beings with whom He is in relationship. This promise certainly exceeds the limits of human covenant-making practices, and that's precisely why God's words to Noah in today's passage are so powerful and so important. Which is why, when we come back tomorrow, we'll be fleshing this concept out in more detail.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, pastor and teacher Ray Vander Laan often talks about the fact that God's choice of the concept of *covenant* to describe His relationship with His people highlights the degree of His love for us. Not only does the great Creator of heaven and earth descend to be in relationship with sinful human beings, but He offers His own life to provide escape for all of the covenant breakers...which is everyone, including you and me.

Understanding what a covenant was in ancient Near Eastern culture made a relationship with God an indescribable gift to those who believed in Him. The same is true for you and me today.

Do come along next time as we continue to talk about this profound revelation from God to His people here in Genesis, everyone. Grace, mercy, and peace is on the table, even in the midst of the dark days before the Flood. Take care, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! The Lord's blessings be upon each of you today in the name of Christ; welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS! Thanks for being with me as we gather for another day in the Scriptures, where right now we find ourselves at the end of Genesis 6. If you have your Bible handy go ahead and turn there as we prepare for our time. Will you pray with me?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to our Bibles today with hearts that are expectant... though the days have been difficult as we've gone through a sobering account of your righteous judgment, we have nonetheless seen your hand of mercy as well, and it is for that same mercy that we cry out in this time before you. Look upon us through the shed blood of your Son. Forgive our sins. Restore our hearts, and renew a right spirit within us. We ask with humble confidence as your beloved children that you would teach us now through your Word. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 6 ends with, as we saw yesterday, the Lord's promise to establish a covenant with Noah and his family. Along with that comes some instructions regarding all that Noah is to do once construction on the ark is complete. Our focus this session: a case of extraordinary faith.

Genesis 6:18-22

18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. 19 And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. 20 Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. 21 Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them." 22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

I want to draw a parallel for you today...a parallel between two men. While in one sense they are very different individuals from different times and different places, in another sense they share a very rare and special brotherhood: the brotherhood of the long view...the brotherhood of quiet obedience...the brotherhood of faithfulness to see something through, no matter the cost.

Clarence Jordan was a man of unusual abilities and commitment. He had two Ph.D.s, one in agriculture and one in Greek and Hebrew. It's generally believed that he was so gifted, he could have chosen to do anything he wanted. And he did; he chose to serve the poor.

In the 1940s, Jordan founded a farm in Americus, Georgia, and called it Koinonia Farm. It was a community for poor whites and poor blacks — an idea that, as you might imagine, didn't go over well in the Deep South of the '40s. Ironically, much of the resistance came from "good church people," who enthusiastically subscribed to and followed the laws of segregation as much as the other folks in town. People tried everything to stop Clarence. They tried boycotting him, slashing workers' tires when they came to town, and just about every other kind of harassment you can think of. Over and over, for fourteen years, they tried to stop him.

Finally, in 1954, the Ku Klux Klan had had enough of Clarence Jordan, and they decided to get rid of him once and for all. They came one night with guns and torches and set fire to every building on Koinonia Farm but Clarence's home, which they riddled with bullets instead. They also chased off all the people who lived and worked there, except for one black family that refused to leave. As the melee unfolded, Clarence recognized the voices of many of the Klansmen beneath their white robes and hoods, and as you might guess, some of them were those good church people. Another was the local newspaper's reporter. The next day, the reporter came out to see what remained of the farm. The rubble still smoldered and the land was scorched, but he found Clarence in the field, hoeing and planting.

"I heard the awful news," he called to Clarence, "and I came out to do a story on the tragedy of your farm closing." Clarence just kept on hoeing and planting. The reporter kept prodding, kept poking, trying to get a rise from this quietly determined man who seemed to be planting instead of packing his bags. So, finally, the reporter said in a haughty voice, "Well, Dr. Jordan, you got two of them Ph.D.s and you've put fourteen years into this farm, and there's nothing left of it at all. Just how successful do you think you've been?" Clarence stopped hoeing, turned toward

the reporter, and said quietly but firmly, "About as successful as the cross. Sir, I don't think you understand us. What we are about is not success but faithfulness. We're staying. Good day."

Beginning that very day, Clarence and his companions rebuilt Koinonia, and the farm is still going strong today. While they saw the farm as their primary calling in life, Clarence and his wife also started a housing ministry to provide decent, affordable homes to people in their community...which morphed into a little project you might have heard of called Habitat for Humanity. And for you lovers of literature out there who may have heard of or read a wonderful version of portions of the New Testament called *The Cotton Patch Gospel*, translated from the original Greek into south Georgia vernacular, yep — that's the same Clarence Jordan. It turns out that Clarence Jordan's focus on faithfulness rather than success ended up yielding a bountiful harvest of both — which brings us to the man with whom he shares such a special brotherhood.

Noah was a man called by God to build, of all things, an ark. Upon its completion, he was to bring two of every sort of animal from the earth into the ark in order to save them from an impending worldwide deluge. Saving them, of course, would entail keeping them alive while they were in his care...meaning that there would also be food involved in the endeavor. So along with building the ark, along with filling it with animals according to God's specifications, Noah was also to take every sort of food that was eaten and store it in the ark as well so that he, his family, and the animals could eat during the time of the Flood. This was an undertaking of gargantuan proportions...an undertaking that required a full century of work to bring together.

But there's more. Not only was the work of building the ark laborious, costly, tedious, and time-consuming, it also seemed foolish — and more than that, ridiculous — to literally every person who paused long enough to ask what in the world he was doing. Noah, in carrying out the work he was given to do, was the laughing stock of the ancient world. Think of it: a big boat in the middle of nowhere. Years of labor, seemingly for nothing. People everywhere making jokes at his expense. And yet, what does Scripture say to us today regarding all that God asked Noah to do? Verse 22: "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him."

I think it's amazing that when given this staggering job to do, Noah simply did it. We don't hear of him complaining or rebelling or even questioning the Lord; he simply obeyed. And while we can only surmise how Noah must have responded when people approached him to prod and poke and goad him over his activities, it was almost certainly similar to the response Clarence Jordan gave to that white supremacist newspaper reporter back in 1954: *You don't understand who I am or what I'm doing, but that doesn't mean I'm going to stop. I'm here to stay...good day.*

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, Noah's life was not about success; it was about faithfulness. It wasn't about living down the mockery of his detractors; it was about living up to his calling from Almighty God, regardless of the attempts of anyone or anything to sidetrack him. That's often the essence of faith: trusting in God and His Word in spite of the attempts of others to heap scorn upon His promises and our belief in them. Noah didn't abandon his calling. And in choosing to be faithful rather than trying to be successful, his choice would end up yielding a bountiful harvest of both to the glory and praise of God.

When we come back tomorrow, we'll be opening for the first time to Genesis 7, so I hope you'll make plans to join in as we go to what will be a momentous chapter in the Word of God. Thanks so much for your time today, everyone; God's peace, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, a day that sees us coming together as God's people redeemed in Christ, celebrating His love, and learning from His Word! It's great to have you along for the next few minutes as we go to the Scriptures, and as we do that today, we'll be opening for the first time to Genesis 7. Let's pray:

Prayer

Almighty God, as we move into our Bible study time today we ask that you, by your Spirit, would go before us: light the way, open our hearts and minds, and accomplish through your Word all that you have purposed for us. We know this is your good and gracious will, and so we ask these things with joy and confidence in the name of our risen Lord Jesus Christ, amen!

Getting Started

As we get started today, the seventh chapter of Genesis begins with God calling Noah and his family into the ark. Our focus this session: final preparations for the Flood.

Genesis 7:1-10

Then the Lord said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. 2 Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, 3 and seven pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth. 4 For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.” 5 And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him. 6 Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. 7 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood. 8 Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, 9 two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. 10 And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

When I was a kid, my mom subscribed to the *Ladies Home Journal*. I used to pick it up and flip through the pages to look for car ads or those little one-panel comics that magazines so often include to fill space. On one occasion when I was skimming through an issue — I must have been in eighth or ninth grade — I remember reading a blurb that really grabbed my attention. The editors asked their readers, “In whom do you trust?” Some of the responses were Walter Cronkite, Pope John Paul, and Billy Graham. To be honest, I didn't know who Billy Graham was at the time, and I only knew that the Pope was the leader of the Catholic Church. Walter Cronkite was the one name I had any real familiarity with, because I had watched him anchor the news every night growing up.

What I remember about that list these many years later is that Walter Cronkite got the most votes by far. What I also remember is that of all the names that were included, God was there... but at the very bottom. Only three percent of the respondents indicated that He had their trust.

As we come to the Scriptures today and embark on a new chapter in God's Word, one that sees Noah and his family entering the ark and preparing for the coming of the great Flood that will destroy the world, I can't help but think of those statistics from *Ladies Home Journal*. As surprising, confusing, and yes, troubling as they were to me as a young teenager who had been raised in the church and who had rather foolishly assumed that almost everyone was a follower of Christ, if we were to compare them to the witness of Scripture at the time of the flood, 3% would be actually be an incredibly high number. The biblical record, in fact, tells us that not even one percent, or a tenth of a percent, or even a thousandth of a percent of people in the world put their trust in God at that time. Only Noah, and by extension, his family — eight people in all — believed and were accounted as righteous.

So it is that the trust of Noah and his kin is on display for us today as they undertake the final preparations necessary to be ready for the coming deluge. The text first tells us *what* Noah is tasked with doing. Then it simply tells us *that* Noah does as he is instructed — in other words, more active obedience on his part, more evidence of his trust, more evidence of his resolute and unyielding faith in Almighty God and the revelation He has given to His servant.

What needs to take place in these last days before the rain? First, the animals must gathered — seven pairs of all clean animals, seven pairs of the birds of the heavens, and one pair each of all the rest. Why more animals in two of the categories? Because as we'll see in chapters 8 and 9 respectively, following the Flood some will be used for sacrifice and some will be needed for food — thus a higher count. With the animals heading into the ark, what's the second thing that

needs to happen? Noah, his wife, and his sons and their wives need to do the same — they need to go into the ark too. With that done, finally, after more than 100 years of their lives expressly focused on this one event, there's one thing left for this man and his loved ones to do: wait seven more days for the rains to come. That's when the Lord says the downpour will begin...and in the last verse of today's reading, that's what happens.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Noah has in so many ways been an unassuming person in the biblical narrative. We haven't heard a word from him. He's been a quiet laborer and a faithful follower of the things God has called him to do. Yet the Bible presents Noah as a great hero for the Lord. We're told that he was an outstanding example of righteousness (Ezekiel 14), a person of unwavering belief (Hebrews 11), and also, though we aren't told whether it was by word, deed or both, a preacher of righteousness in his generation (2 Peter 2). Perhaps the best way to summarize all we've seen of him thus far, then, is that Noah is a person with a vibrant, consequential, living faith. He is in the midst of fulfilling a profound role in salvation history. And though he hasn't been crowing about it or patting himself on the back or pontificating over the far-reaching impact his life will end up having on the whole of humanity in all the generations to come, his actions are speaking very loudly on the subject. It will be our privilege to follow him through the events to come, and it will be our great blessing to see the magnificence of God and His redemptive plan for mankind made manifest through this, His humble servant. Do plan to join in as we do that; it's sure to be a great time of learning and growing together as brothers and sisters in Christ!

Have a great day everyone...a great weekend...and God-willing, I'll see you again come Monday. Until then, blessings to each of you in our risen and ascended Savior Jesus, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and blessings to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a privilege to be with you today as we head into a new week together, and as we do that we'll be returning to the seventh chapter of Genesis and our ongoing look at Noah, his family, and the Flood. I'm glad you're here! Let's pray as we prepare for our time today.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, We thank you today for who you are and what you've done for us through your life, death, and resurrection. We have no words to express how grateful we are. We thank you. We worship you. We humbly bow before you. In the time we have over these next few minutes, we ask that you bless our study time in your Word. Help us through it to learn and grow in faith toward you, but more important, help us to understand in ever growing fashion your great faithfulness to us. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our time in Genesis 7 continues with a brief section of verses that finally inaugurates the beginning of the Flood. Our focus this session: And it came to pass.

Genesis 7:11-16

11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. 13 On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, 14 they and every beast, according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. 15 They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. 16 And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the Lord shut him in.

Sometimes I go back and read old journal entries from some of my stray composition books lying around the office...things written a decade ago or maybe even more. I don't journal prodigiously, and certainly not on any kind of a regular schedule, but I do jot down goals and dreams and, occasionally, write through various issues with which I might be wrestling. When I go back and read those old entries, there's nothing remarkable about them save for one thing: the things I was focused on accomplishing and the manner in which I thought they might possibly be accomplished usually came to pass, and when they did come to pass, it was usually in the precise fashion that I'd originally written them out — even if it was a gap of many years between the idea and the execution. To say it another way, the things I jotted down and the steps I outlined for how I might do what I wanted to do generally ended up being the roadmap for the project, which says, I guess, a lot about intention and purpose and the power of the mind to give something legs. A lot of you can relate to what I'm talking about, and because that's the case, many of you know that seeing things come full-circle like that can be an extraordinary experience.

The reason I bring that up today is to provide a simple illustration: as I look at my ponderings of old that ended up becoming projects brought to life, and when I consider the similarities between what I dreamed and what I ended up doing, it reminds me of how we've been seeing God work as He's detailed in His Word that which He would do to His creation as a result of the unchecked and growing wickedness in the world. Over and over we've been reading divine warnings about coming destruction. Over and over we've been given exacting details about how our Lord would bring an end to the corruption that had sullied the earth. For 120 years, as Noah built his ark and preached righteousness to a reprobate and wicked generation, God kept saying, "This is what I'm going to do, this is how I'm going to do it, and this is when it's going to happen."

Now, as we open to the verses before us today, what do we see? We see that the things God was focused on accomplishing and the manner in which He said they would be accomplished have come to pass, and they've come to pass in the precise fashion that He originally stated they would. There's been a gap of many years between the idea and the execution, but no matter: all that God solemnly promised as the righteous and holy Lord of the universe regarding the destruction of the earth, including the *modus operandi* thereof, has become the actual roadmap for the project. From the fixing of the day when the deluge would occur to the manner in which Noah, his family, and the animals of the earth would enter the ark to every little detail in between, here is the passage where it all commences. And what of us? We're in the process of seeing it all come full-circle, from promise to fruition — and if we determine to see it carefully, to learn all that we can from it, we'll find it to be a truly extraordinary experience indeed.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the Lord God Almighty is always faithful to bring into being the intentions of His heart, and to do so in exacting detail with respect to how He's announced them to be. The summary statements we find before us in God's Word today are a sterling example of that truth, and they'll be serving as a foundation for us as we work toward the end of Genesis 7 over the next couple of days. Do come along and be part of things; there really are some fantastic things ahead in the next 14 or-so verses!

God be with you today, and may His joy spring up within you and fill you to overflowing in Christ as you head out into your world. Take care everyone, and I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. Today in our study time we'll be continuing our way through the verses of Genesis 7, building on what we talked about yesterday — the commencing of the great Flood. God always desires to bless us as we come under the power and authority of His Word, so let's pray as we go to the Scriptures today and ask for open hearts and minds to receive what the Lord has for us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, We thank you for your mercy – for the truth that that though weeping may last for the night, with the coming of morning comes restoration and renewal and times of refreshing from you. Please bless us today with eyes to see and ears to hear as we open your Word. This we ask in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, on the day that the flood waters begin to come upon the earth, Noah, his family, and all the animals with them enter the ark. Our focus this session: the day, the deluge...and the door.

Genesis 7:11-16 (Part 2)

11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. 13 On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, 14 they and every beast, according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. 15 They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. 16 And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the Lord shut him in.

There are certain days in our lives that are fixed in time...moments marked in an indelible way in our memories because of their gravity or importance. There are good days, like graduation day or your wedding or the birth of a child. There are difficult days like the loss of a job or a home, the death of a loved one, the dissolution of a marriage. Those days, for better or for worse, are days notched in history, days marked by the calendar. We remember them because they're concrete...sometimes because we want to remember them, and other times because, in spite of our trying, we can't forget them.

As we come to God's Word again today and return to the section of verses we've been looking at in Genesis 7, please notice something: the day of the Flood is a day fixed in time. It's a day notched in history. It's a day literally marked by the calendar: the seventeenth day of the second month in the six hundredth year of Noah's life. This is a day of gravity and importance; not necessarily a good day, but a pivotal day nonetheless, a day that's crucial to remember, even if we'd rather forget it.

Some scholars talk about the fact that the exact fixing of this day by God in His Word serves to emphasize its importance for all time. I don't disagree with that notion at all, but when I see the plain-spokenness of Scripture on this matter, what I especially love is the mark of historicity. These verses provide for us a clear, divinely-given testimony that the Flood is not a fable. Most scientists today, whether they're theists or not, already attest to the clear geological evidence of a world-wide cataclysmic event in the form of a flood at some point in earth's ancient past. Here, we have God's own Word apprising us of its occurrence, telling us how it happened, and speaking about it not just in theological terms, but as a historical reality having a specific date. It's a remarkable witness when you think about it.

So: on that momentous day fixed in time...that moment in history marked in an indelible way in our memory because of its gravity and importance...what actually happened? First, as I alluded to a moment ago, the commencement of the Flood was the onset of a global event, a universal deluge, something that, before it was through, would cover the entire earth. Many liberal-leaning scholars today dispute the idea that the Flood spanned the entire globe, but historically, the Christian Church has always confessed the Flood as a worldwide event...something we'll talk more about when we come together next time.

Continuing on that subject from another angle, however, what does the Bible say regarding the cause, or source, of the many waters that brought the deluge? The first thing everyone thinks about is the forty days and forty nights of rain, and that's correct as far as it goes. The Scriptural record, though, mentions two additional sources of water that contributed to the great Flood: the fountains of the great deep, which burst forth — a reference to all of the subterranean springs,

rivers, aquifers, and other underground water on the planet that surged upward — and also all “the windows of heaven” that opened, which refers the waters in the firmament that existed at the time of creation, the huge, so-called blanket of water in the upper part of the earth’s atmosphere described for us back in Genesis 1. All of these waters, from each of these three sources, were now released to pour their masses over the earth, and together they brought about the massive and terrible event described for us in the Bible. Again, more to come on that subject in our next session.

There’s one more thing of note in today’s passage that we need to mention before we close, and I’ll do it just briefly. When all was made ready, when all that Noah had been tasked to do was complete, when all the people and animals and supplies were on the ark as the Lord had instructed, and when the rain began, what is the last thing we see in today’s passage? The Lord Himself shut the door. To me, that’s an astounding piece of information, and more than astounding, it’s also an incredibly loaded statement. What do I mean by that? When God shut the door, that was it. Not only would there be no exit for the occupants of the ark — a good thing for them — but neither would there be an entrance for anyone left on the outside — a horrific realization that for them would come too late.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, consider the way that Dr. Paul Kretzmann describes it:

All the clamoring of men for admission after the beginning of the predicted catastrophe would be vain; their repentance would come too late. Thus let no man be deceived: the same God that brought the Deluge upon a fallen race is living today, and He is not mocked. To continue in trespass in the face of the plain words of the Lord is a dangerous proceeding, to say the least. We know that a punishment, even greater and more terrible than the Deluge, is coming at the end of the world. The heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men. Then will the fire of divine wrath burn through all eternity.

In other words, the shutting of the door of the ark by the Lord was His final word on the fate of humanity. And though it will be manifest in a different manner when Jesus comes again to judge the quick and the dead on the Last Day, what transpires will be of the same substance. The finality of His actions on that occasion will be of no less gravity and permanence than what we have before us today in the text...and thus, it’s a message that bears solemn meditation for all people everywhere. Jesus is the Door. Let us enter through Him, and through Him alone.

Take care everyone, and I’ll see you again next time to continue. God’s peace, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS! I'm glad to have you here with me for Bible study today, where right now we're continuing our look at the seventh chapter of Genesis. Do you know someone who could benefit from these daily doses of Bible study? Why not share EDiBS with them! Remember, it's as easy as clicking the Share/Tweet/Forward buttons we provide for you at the top of the daily email, and by sending our daily study on to others, you're helping people to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus. It's a great way to encourage your friends and loved ones, so do be sure to make use of the opportunity! Let's pray as we turn our attention to the Scriptures:

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you have loved us with an everlasting love and have showered your grace and mercy upon us through your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. We thank you for the great gift of our salvation. We thank you that we are not under law, but under grace. We also thank you today for your Word, by which you have revealed that precious truth to us. Send now your Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts and minds as we study. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, God's Word gives witness to the totality of the earth's destruction wrought by the deluge He sent upon the world. Our focus this session: the global reach of the Great Flood.

Genesis 7:17-24

17 The flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. 18 The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. 19 And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. 20 The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. 21 And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. 22 Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. 23 He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. 24 And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days.

Critical thinking. It's a noun. It refers to disciplined thinking that's clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence. Good critical thinkers can draw reasonable conclusions from a set of information and discriminate between useful and less useful details to solve a problem or make a decision.

Today's study session is one I've designed to be brief. Instead of taking our usual ten minutes or so to work through the Scriptures, we'll be cutting things quite a bit for the purpose of positing some bullet points regarding the nature of biblical Flood. Once that's done, we'll simply close for the day. Why? I want you to use your critical thinking skills to consider what's been shared.

The reason I'm doing this is because of the move by many in conservative, evangelical circles today to see Old Testament narratives in Scripture as less than what the Bible says they are... as hyperbole, for example, or not completely factual, or even as "earthly stories to communicate heavenly truths," which is just another way of saying that they're myths. The Flood is one of those narratives that regularly comes under attack, and the usual way it's undermined is not through an outright denial of its occurrence, but through a lessening of its magnitude...through saying that while there was indeed a flood of some kind, it was almost certainly a localized crisis rather than a worldwide catastrophe.

I would submit to you, however, that the description of the Flood that the Bible gives — specifically the description we have before us today in Genesis 7 — is so complete and specific that it's frankly impossible to reconcile a local flood with the Biblical record. The reasons I say that are several, and as promised, here they are for your consideration. *Think about it.*

First, if this were not a global flood, then the ark itself would have been unnecessary.

Second, if this were only a local flood, then God's promise to never again bring such a flood was a false one.

Third, if this were only a local flood, the Bible is wrong when it traces all of humanity back to Noah's sons.

Fourth, if this were only a local flood, then the other passages in the Bible that speak of a universal deluge (specifically Psalm 104 and 2 Peter 3) are incorrect.

Finally, if this were only a local flood, the wording the Bible uses to describe it is uncharacteristically sloppy. As Charles Spurgeon once said, “If Moses had meant to describe a partial deluge upon only a small part of the earth, he used very misleading language.”

Wrapping Up

There’s more that could be said here on each of these points, and indeed, more points that could be added, but as we wrap things up for the day, the list I’ve given is sufficient to help you consider the Bible’s record on this matter. To me the witness is a clear one both theologically and historically, and to try and describe the Flood as something other than a global decimation necessitates far more twisting, pushing, and massaging of the text than is reasonable.

When we come back next time, we’ll be coming back to these points and building on them a bit, so do plan to join in for our time together as we wind down our look at this seventh chapter of Genesis. In the meantime, have a terrific day, and most of all? Happy thinking to you — critical thinking to be sure! God’s peace everyone, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Thursday’s edition of EDiBS, and God’s rich grace and peace to each you in our Lord Jesus. Thanks for being here today, and if this happens to be your first time clicking in, do know that I’m super glad to have you along! As we get ready to study together today, we’ll be working toward the close of the 7th chapter of Genesis, so take a moment, prepare your heart to come into the Lord’s presence, and let’s pray:

Prayer

Father, bless the hearing of your Word today, that all who come under its teaching will grow and change; that we would all learn more of your love for us in Christ; and that we would all become stronger in our faith. What a joy and privilege it is to ask for this, and we do so with confidence in Jesus’ name, amen.

Getting started

As we get started today, we’re back once again to the section of verses we looked at yesterday, verses that describe the far-reaching impact of the Flood upon the world. Our focus this session: a worldwide event, a worldwide remembrance.

Genesis 7:17-24

17 The flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. 18 The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. 19 And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. 20 The waters prevailed above

the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. 21 And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind.

22 Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. 23 He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. 24 And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days.

Have you ever sat and wondered about the Flood...its beginning, its duration, and its aftermath? Have you ever considered what the final moments were like as the rain started, the firmament began to release its water, and the water from the deep burst forth from under the ground? What was it like on the inside? What was it like on the outside? What happened with Noah, his family, and the animals once the Lord shut the door to the ark? What was the conversation when the boat began to rise as the water lifted it up? Have you ever sat and considered all that must have taken place within the ark during the time it floated upon the waters? And what about when it finally came to rest on the mountains of Ararat?

God's Word, of course, shares some of those details with us, but on others it remains silent. It's not necessary for us to know everything that happened, and in any case, Scripture wasn't given by God to be an encyclopedic testimony of every jot and little of the lives of His people. Still, we wonder about the gaps. We're curious about what happened "between the lines" of the Bible, so to speak. And that brings up an interesting side note today in our study of Genesis 7 and the commencing of the Flood: what about all the other Flood stories that exist? Where did they come from, what do they say, and how might they relate to what we have in the biblical record?

Many people have never considered this before, but in actuality, there are over two hundred distinct cultures around the globe today that have their own accounts or legends of the Flood. There are even some with which you may be familiar, like the well-known Babylonian account. People know that one because of its similarity to the Genesis account, and scholars tell us that the Babylonian account of the Flood is clearly drawn from the biblical narrative. But we could go on from there: Scholar James Montgomery Boice cited an astounding variety of different global flood accounts in his research, including people groups from New Guinea, Australia, Brazil, Peru, Greenland, Australia, Africa, China, Greece, Persia, Eastern Europe, and various Indian tribes from the American southwest. The Hawaiian people have their own Flood account as well, and so do the Egyptians and the Welsh, and even the inhabitants of Siberia. Dr. Boice actually mentioned even more cultures in his work, but for our purposes today we'll leave it at what has already been listed.

Here's what's especially interesting: of the more than 200 cultures that have their own account of the flood, the following aspects of the story are common:

- 88% describe a favored family.
- 70% attribute survival to a boat.
- 95% say the sole cause of the catastrophe is a flood.
- 66% say that the disaster is due to man's wickedness.
- 67% record that animals are also saved.
- 57% describe that the survivors end up on a mountain.
- Finally, many of the accounts also specifically mention birds being sent out, a rainbow, and eight persons being saved.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, why share information like this in our time together today? Just to make one simple point: since the whole of mankind after the Flood came from Noah's sons, it is completely in keeping with our roots that all mankind remembers the Flood....even to this very day. Since every culture has descended directly from the Flood's survivors, it is logical that stories of the Flood are both abundant and universal, having been passed down from generation to generation.

Now — are all correct? No. Have some mixed in pagan ideas and inserted legends and tall tales into their accounts? Of course. On the other hand, do some retain a modicum of the original details as they are explained to us in God's Word? Again, yes, and it stands to reason that this would be the case as some descendants, holding in their memories the oral traditions of their forbears, mixed in other elements to their accounts as they followed after false gods and over time engaged in different kinds of idolatry. Considering the length of time that has elapsed since the Flood, and the human tendency to embellish, exaggerate, and distort stories over time, none of this is surprising.

As we alluded to yesterday, however, while many skeptics wish to assert that there was, in fact, no Flood — or that if it happened, it was merely a localized event — the evidence that we have suggests otherwise. Virtually every existing culture in the world today attests to the fact that there *was* a catastrophic, *and worldwide*, deluge, and the veracity of the biblical account is attested to by these numerous similar ancient accounts. Furthermore, and again per our previous study sessions, in addition to abundant historical evidence there is a wealth of physical proof in favor of the Flood's historicity. Conclusion? The Flood of Noah's day was most certainly a real historical event. We can have confidence that the biblical account of what happened is trustworthy.

When we come together tomorrow, we'll have one final point to make regarding Noah, his family, and the ark in which they were saved. It's an especially important one that speaks deeply to our faith as followers of Christ, so I hope you'll come along and be part of it. Thanks for your time today, everyone; I'm always grateful to be with you, and I hope you have a wonderful day! God's peace, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everybody, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! Thanks for joining in on this last day of our study week together; I hope the sessions we've been doing in the study of Genesis have been fruitful for you in your walk with the Lord, and my prayer is that this portion of God's Word has helped you to grow in your faith. If you're online much and happen to follow EDiBS on social media, then you know that a few days ago, Facebook removed all EDiBS posts going back to the beginning of our time on that platform because someone reported our daily Bible studies as abusive content. Unfortunately, this is becoming a common occurrence among Christian ministries on Facebook and other online forums as people hostile to the Gospel file complaints, asserting that the teachings of our faith are intolerant and damaging to the public good. We're in the middle of appealing Facebook's decision and hope to have our posts back up soon, but in the meantime, would you please pray for our ministry? We only seek to share what has always been shared by God's people in every age: His Word in truth and purity, and the gift of a Savior from sin, who gives us the promise of new life through His life, death, and resurrection. We'll keep you posted as things transpire, but no matter what, we take heart. Why? Though in this world we may have trouble, we know that Jesus Christ has overcome the world! Thanks again for coming along; let's pray as we finish out the seventh chapter of Genesis.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have been gracious and kind to us, and we humbly thank you for your all-encompassing mercy in our lives. As we come before you this day we do so mindful of our sin, mindful of the fact that we are but dust, mindful that we are deserving only of temporal and eternal punishment. But we speak to you in faith today, sure of your willingness to forgive, sure of the atonement made for our sins through your Son our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Look upon us according to His perfect sacrifice, Lord God, and speak into our hearts and minds to strengthen and restore us. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, while we've worked over the past several days to establish the fact that the biblical Flood was indeed a historical event, there are additional things to say about the narrative of Noah, the ark, and the Flood that go beyond mere history. As we gather over the next couple of days, we'll discuss them. Our focus this session: the ark: a ship for the ages.

Genesis 7:13b-16

Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, 14 they and every beast, according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. 15 They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. 16 And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the Lord shut him in.

The church where I have the privilege of worshiping each week happens to have a very beautiful sanctuary. It's a newer building, but while modern in many ways, it's also quite traditional; in fact, one of its main architectural features is one that has been part of church construction for over a thousand years: it's very intentionally boat-like. For those of you who may be unfamiliar with the history, the ship is an ancient Christian symbol. Why? It's seen as the Church, tossed on the sea of disbelief, worldliness, and persecution, but finally reaching safe harbor with its cargo of human souls. Part of that imagery, of course, comes from the ark, which saved Noah and his family during the Flood. So it is that down through the centuries, the Church has often been portrayed as a boat on the sea of the world...most of the time with its mast in the form of a cross.

Any mention of Noah, the ark, and the Flood usually brings up thoughts of baptism before anything else, and rest assured we're going to take up that powerful subject when we come together next time. For now, though, let's just stick with the ark itself, because there's a lot to think about, and there's also a lot to see...even, perhaps, things we've not seen before.

One of my all-time favorite authors, whether secular or Christian, is Frederick Buechner. His gift as a wordsmith and his skill as a theologian come together in a way that has seldom been equaled through the years. His writing is of the "pull-no-punches" variety, full of color and emotion, of truth-telling and uncomfortableness...and also grace. Lots of grace. In his book of ABC's called *Whistling in the Dark: a Doubter's Dictionary*, Buechner takes up the subject of Church-as-ship. I'd like to share it with you today, because I think it will engage your mind, even as it touches your heart.

NAVE

*The nave is the central part of the church from the main front to the chancel. It's the part where the laity sit and in great Gothic churches is sometimes separated from the choir and clergy by a screen. It takes its name from the Latin **navis**, meaning ship, one reason being that the vaulted roof looks rather like an inverted keel. A more interesting reason is that the Church itself is thought of as a ship, or Noah's Ark. It's a resemblance worth thinking about.*

In one as in the other, just about everything imaginable is aboard, the clean and the unclean both. They are all piled in together helter-skelter, the predators and the prey, the wild and the

tame, the sleek and beautiful ones and the ones that are ugly as sin. There are sly young foxes and impossible old cows. There are the catty and the piggish and the peacock-proud. There are hawks and there are doves. Some are wise as owls, some silly as geese; some meek as lambs and others fire-breathing dragons. There are times when they all cackle and grunt and roar and sing together, and there are times when you could hear a pin drop. Most of them have no clear idea just where they're supposed to be heading or how they're supposed to get there or what they'll find if and when they finally do, but they figure the people in charge must know and in the meanwhile sit back on their haunches and try to enjoy the ride.

It's not all enjoyable. There's backbiting just like everywhere else. There's a pecking order. There's jostling at the trough. There's growling and grousing, bitching and whining. There are dogs in the manger and old goats and black widows. It's a regular menagerie in there, and sometimes it smells to high Heaven like one.

But even at its worst, there's at least one thing that makes it bearable within, and that is the storm without — the wild winds and terrible waves and in all the watery waste no help in sight. And at its best there is, if never clear sailing, shelter from the blast, a sense of somehow heading in the right direction in spite of everything, a ship to keep afloat, and, like a beacon in the dark, the hope of finding safe harbor at last.

Wrapping Up

That's not a sanitized version of your congregation or mine, or anyone's for that matter...but if you ask me, it's a pretty accurate one, and I say that as a person who's seen it from both sides of the pulpit. But you know something? As we wrap things up for the day, I'm grateful that even with all its real life grittiness and impurity and ankle biting and hypocrisy, that Ship is still the place to be. It's built solid. It bears up on the waters of a wicked and fallen world and floats on grace and mercy and a wing and a prayer. It's not a Ship for people who never get it wrong, but for people who are mostly always wrong. And the best thing of all? There's always room for one more.

Oh, and one more thing: the Captain? He knows what He's doing and where He's going. Everything has been charted out. We can trust Him to bring the Ship and all its occupants safely into harbor. And because that's the case, the Ship is where I want to be.

Have a great weekend everyone; God's peace, take care, and I'll see you again on Monday to pick this up again!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to get back to the table with you after a weekend away, and especially eager to get back into the Scriptures together. If you're joining in for the first time today, I'm certainly glad to have you along, and I pray that you will be richly blessed by your study time today. Today we have one final session related to Genesis 7 before we spend the remainder of our week Genesis 8, so let's pray as we open our Bibles together.

Prayer

Lord, you are the awesome, Almighty, everliving God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and the One who desires nothing greater than to be in relationship with the people you have made. Thank you for restoring us to a right relationship with you through your One and Only Son – and thank you for drawing us to yourself by your good and gracious Spirit. Teach us by your Word today, in Jesus' name we pray – amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our final observation with respect to the seventh chapter of Genesis actually centers on what the apostle Peter writes about it in his first epistle. Our focus this session: a Great Flood of another kind.

Genesis 7:17-24

17 The flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. 18 The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. 19 And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. 20 The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. 21 And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. 22 Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. 23 He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and

birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. 24 And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days.

When I was a youngster going to what our church called “midweek school” or “Wednesday school,” our pastor gathered all of us kids together one day and took us to the baptismal font in the front of the sanctuary. After explaining what it was and telling us that most of us had been baptized in that very spot, he asked us a question: “How many sides does it have?” We counted them up, and everyone shouted, “Eight!” Then he asked, “Why eight sides?” The answers we gave were creative, but not correct. Then we were given a challenge: “Go home, talk to your parents or grandparents, and see if you can learn the secret. The first one to bring the goods earns a prize for everyone!”

The next week, in spite of many valiant attempts, none of us had the right answer. “Keep trying,” Pastor Wolter said. “Come back next time and when you get it right, we’ll all celebrate!” I don’t remember how long it took us for someone to bring in the right answer, but it was at least a few weeks. True to his word, however, when that answer did come, Pastor had a celebration ready for us, complete with food, drink, and prizes for everyone. He called it a *Baptism Bash*, and while I can’t remember everything we did that day, I do remember why our baptismal font at church — and most baptismal fonts in traditional or liturgical churches — have eight sides! The answer, as many of you already know or have astutely figured out on your own, is that the baptismal font in the Christian Church traditionally has eight sides because it reminds us of the eight people who were saved in the Great Flood through the ark: Noah and his wife, and also Noah’s sons Shem, Ham and Japheth along with their wives. How does that connect with baptism? 1 Peter 3:20-21 tells us very plainly:

God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In one sense, of course, the water of the Flood was the water of death — the water in which all living, animate things with the breath of life in them perished. That same water, however, saved Noah and his family. It served as the means that lifted up the ark and preserved their lives. So too, we are told in Scripture, the water of Baptism delivers and saves us. We too are saved through a Great Flood of another kind.

Looking to Noah and the ark as a prefiguring, or type, of baptism, we can see the power of that symbol. As Charles Spurgeon wrote, “Noah underwent burial to all the old things that he might come out into a new world, and even so we die in Christ that we may live with Him.”

There’s one more point to make about this, and while it may seem minor, in my mind it’s extremely significant to note: Noah’s “baptism,” so to speak, didn’t merely symbolize the things we’re talking about today; it actually brought them about. Without the waters of the Flood, the ark wouldn’t have floated, and therefore couldn’t have carried Noah’s family to safety away from the world of the ungodly. Without the waters of the Flood, Noah and his family couldn’t have passed from the old creation into the new creation. In other words, Noah’s sojourn in the ark on the waters of the Flood and his landing on the mountains of Ararat in the aftermath didn’t merely symbolize new life; it caused new life. It brought about cleansing and ushered in a new creation

— and so it is in the sacrament of baptism today. It is no mere symbol; it brings about that which it says.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, think through this with me: by having Noah pass through the waters of the Flood, God did an amazing, gracious, merciful thing: He caused Noah and his family to be saved from death, He condemned the world of the ungodly and consigned it to destruction, and He caused Noah and his family to become heirs of righteousness. God used the Flood in Noah's life to bring His servant away from death and into life. Carried safely by the water, Noah left behind, in a very literal manner, the violent, corrupt world. He also became a new Adam of sorts, bringing about a new Genesis for the human race. The Great Flood was indeed great...not just in magnitude, but in the measure of its mercy. Once again, so it is in the great gift of holy baptism!

Have a great day everyone — tomorrow we're back at things another time, and we'll be opening to Genesis 8 to continue our look at Noah and his amazing journey. God's peace, and I'll see you then!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! God's grace and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus on this great day He's made! I'm so glad to be with you today, where over the next several minutes we'll be opening for the first time to the eighth chapter of Genesis. Grab your Bible, find your place, and let's go to the Lord in prayer as we begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, how wonderful indeed your promises are — and how manifold are they as well! Thank you for the power of your love, the promise of your presence, and the purposeful way that you work in each one of our lives. Teach us today by your Word and build us up in our faith. This we ask in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 8 begins with words of great consolation that also apply to us as His people today. Our focus this session: Promise, Perspective, and Presence.

Genesis 8:1-5

But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. 2 The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, 3 and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of 150 days the waters had abated, 4 and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5 And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

Have you ever pulled off to the side of the road on your life's journey and taken the time to look back at where you've been...where you've come from? There are ups and downs for all of us along the way, and at times the road can be steep or rocky...maybe winding or rutted...but as Christians, regardless of the general ease or difficulty of our travel, there's one thing we can always see when we take the time to stop and look in the rearview mirror: we can see how God has directed us by His faithfulness.

Frederick Edward Marsh, whose writings I've shared with you several times through the years, had a wonderful take on the blessing of looking back. Drawing from Scripture, he shared that when we take time to look back, we tend to see...

The deliverances the Lord has wrought (Deuteronomy 5:15);
The way He has led (Deuteronomy 8:2);
The blessings He has bestowed (Deuteronomy 32:7-12);
The victories He has won (Deuteronomy 11:2-7); and
The encouragements He has given (Joshua 23:14).

Marsh wrote that when we're in the midst of our difficulties, we sometimes forget God's perfect record of faithfulness toward us. When we're slogging through worry or trial or times of uncertainty, it's easy to see nothing but the detours and the dangerousness of the path. But when we take time to look back and see where we've come from and what we've come through, we don't just see the challenge of the journey; we see the joy of little victories along the way. We see beauty in the progress that we've made and the moments that we've marked, and most of all? Most of all, when we take time to pause and look back on our voyage in this life with all of its twists and turns, we see the presence of our traveling Companion — the One who is, in actuality, leading the way...the One who has promised never to leave us nor forsake us.

Which brings us, briefly today, to Noah. He's in the ark. At this juncture, he's been there many a day. He's been residing in this floating box with his family and a bunch of animals long enough to go more than stir-crazy, and he's had no indication, so far as we know, of when this season in his life will end. In fact, Noah — on the surface of things, at least — would be hard pressed right about now to muster up hope that things will be changing anytime soon, and if his focus is solely on his present circumstances and his current predicament, then life is no bowl of cherries at the moment.

Here, of course, comes the "but."

BUT...such a scenario is a highly unlikely one. Why? Because Scripture has given us enough of a backstory on Noah, his relationship with God, his obedience, and his faith, to offer a very different picture of how things likely are in his life at the moment. Yes, Noah and his family have been in the ark for several months at this point. Yes, there are unknowns for them at present. Yes, things seem tenuous right now, because even though the rain has quit and the firmament has stopped dumping water and the fountains of the deep have ceased their eruption to the surface, Noah and company are still trapped inside their temporary digs with water all around them and no place to which they can disembark.

Yet far from being in a dither about the ups and downs in his life over the past year or so, Noah has a few things to keep him going right now that are serving him quite well: *promise*, *perspective*, and especially, *presence*. What do I mean by that? Noah has God's promise —

and has had it all along — that in the end, all will be well. Noah has God’s perspective of faith, which is helping him to take the long view on this whole Flood thing. Finally, Noah has God’s very presence, which in today’s passage happens to be made manifest in the first four words of the text: “But God remembered Noah.” That’s an incredibly powerful statement if there ever was one!

One more point today before we close: right now is a great time for us to be reminded of the fact that none of the things going on in Noah’s life which are presented to us in Scripture have happened overnight. If you’ll take a moment to recall the narrative, this ark/flood/destruction-of-the-world/starting-over-again project has actually been going on for more than 120 years now. This means that from Noah’s place inside of the ark, he has a crystal-clear vantage point from which he can look back and see how God’s faithfulness has directed his steps. From his place inside the ark, Noah can see — and is living proof of — the Lord’s deliverance. From his place inside the ark, Noah can look back and see the way God has led. And from his place inside the ark, Noah can look back and see the Lord’s vanquishment and victory over the forces of evil and wickedness in the world.

As Noah contemplates his place in life right now sitting atop the mountains of Ararat with nothing but water all around him as far as the eye can see, as he considers the craziness of the events that have transpired on his journey in life up to the present time, what’s before him is not burden, but blessing. What’s coursing through him is not the fear of an ending, but the encouragement of a new beginning. All things considered — even the crazy, inconvenient, perhaps even frightening things that are part of Noah’s life for the time being — it’s a pretty good place to be.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, we’ll pick this up again tomorrow and continue forward from a textual point of view, but as we close, please allow me to do so with a final word of encouragement. There may be times — and maybe now is one of those times — when the crazy, inconvenient, and perhaps even frightening things that are part of your life can cause you to forget God’s perfect record of faithfulness toward you. The hard things you’re going through can cause you to feel shut out from the world and can make it hard to see your Savior... cause your gaze to be fixed solely on the detours and dangerousness of your path instead of God’s promises, God’s perspective, and God’s presence. But while in moments of duress you may momentarily forget God, guess what? In those moments especially, God doesn’t forget you. Charles Spurgeon said it this way:

“Noah had been shut up in the ark for many a day, and at the right time God thought of him... practically thought of him...and came to visit him. Dear heart, you have been shut out from the world now for many days, but God has not forgotten you. God remembered Noah, and He remembers you.”

God does indeed remember you today, everyone, so rest in that truth. After all, He is the One who is, in actuality, leading the way...and the One who has promised never to leave you nor forsake you.

Have a great day, and I’ll look forward to being with you again next time. Until then, take care, and the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and thank you for being here today as we take time to open our Bibles together as God's people. The Lord is always here with us as we get into His Word and seek His face, so as we go back to Genesis 8 today, let's pray and ask His blessing on our study over these next few minutes.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this time to be quiet, to rid ourselves of distractions, and to focus on you and your Word together. We ask that by it you would teach us and transform us, and that through it you would also encourage and sustain us. We do so need you in our lives, and we are truly grateful for your presence with us right now. May your name be glorified in all things, Lord! In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 8 continues to describe the earth's transformation from a watery grave during the Flood to a place of rebirth, fit once again for the habitation of life. Our focus: pressing on with the grand reversal.

Genesis 8:6-12

6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made 7 and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. 8 Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. 9 But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. 10 He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. 11 And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. 12 Then he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore.

My son, Jacob, who's just about to start his senior year of college, is an aspiring author. He's nearly finished with his first book, and I'm eager to see how it will be received by the publishing community when he starts to shop it around. Since school is his main gig for the time being, Jacob fits writing into his schedule by rising early each morning and being disciplined about achieving a specific daily word count. He also attends a weekly writer's group with like-minded

people who encourage one another and spend time talking about the craft of writing and all manner of other literary and publishing-related topics.

One thing Jacob loves to discuss in his writer's group is the idea of harmony and connectedness in a story — especially when it comes to how an author makes things begin and makes them end. What are the links? What theme or elements do they have in common? Is there a recounting or repeating of events, words, or phrases, and if so, for what purpose? What does the writer want the reader to see, and why?

My son asserts that many a good book has been ruined by the the way the author connected... or failed to connect...the beginning and end of his or her work. It's not that he thinks everything in a story should be neatly tied up and happily resolved by the time you get to the afterword, it's just that he believes that to be really good, there needs to be a corresponding association between the start and the finish.

As we come back to God's Word today, I'm going to do something that at first glance may seem a bit odd. Rather than jump into an analysis of the passage before us as we would normally do, I'm going to instead ask that you take some time on your own over the next little while to do some exploring in your Bible. What kind of exploring? Textual exploring. What manner of exploring? Exploration of the comparison/contrast variety. Where do I want you to focus? First on Genesis 1, and then on what we're currently studying: Genesis 8. And why, pray tell, do I want you to do this? Because I want you to look for the harmony and connectedness between what began in chapter 1 with what is now beginning all over again in chapter 8. What are the links? What theme or elements are in common? Is there a recounting or repeating of events, words, or phrases, and if so, for what purpose? What does the Writer — what does our Lord God — want us, the readers, to see between the two...and why?

For some of you, this will be a grand exercise filled with delight that will carry you far beyond our regular 8-10 minutes together. You're going to have a lot of fun discovering, or rediscovering and remembering, things that you haven't thought of in a long while. Kudos to you — proceed with my blessing, and enjoy yourselves!

For others of you, this exercise will grate on your nerves and frustrate you. In fact, you're already frustrated, and some of you are even getting ready to close the email or collapse the video because you've already decided that this is a ridiculous suggestion for which you have neither the time nor the inclination. Guess what? Before you decide to go, I want to say kudos to you too for staying to listen — and even if you do go, please sign off with my blessing and don't worry about things too much, because I promise that when we come together tomorrow, I'll be connecting some of the dots for you.

Wrapping Up

My simple point today — and I'll say this as a way to wrap up this rather uncharacteristic session — is to let you know that in many ways, with the commencing of our study of the eighth chapter of Genesis we've come to the turning point in the account of the Flood. With everything having been destroyed in the great deluge, everything will now be made new as the waters recede. And as we see God go about the process of making all things new again, we'll also be seeing a distinct echo of what He first did when He created the heavens and the earth. It's definitely worth looking into, and I think that whatever time we put into it, it will be time well-spent.

It's not that everything in the world is going to be neatly tied up and happily resolved by the time we get to the end of the chapter, it's just that the verses we'll be studying together here in Genesis 8 are really good...and all the more so because of the corresponding association between the start, the finish, and the *restart* of life by the gracious hand of our merciful God. That's what we'll be looking at together over the next couple of days, so come and follow it through with me! I promise that as you do you'll be encouraged, you'll be blessed, and your faith will grow as a result.

Have a great day everyone — God's peace, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. I pray that your week is starting off in a good way, and I'm also praying that our time together over these next few minutes will establish you more deeply in your faith and bring peace to your heart. I'm richly blessed to play the part I do in this ministry, and one of my greatest joys is to be able to come your way each day with God's Word. Thanks for being here today; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, you are indeed great and mighty — alone in your splendor and your glory! There is none beside you, and we proclaim you to be the only and all-wise God of the universe. Thank you for your love and mercy — thank you for your promise to never leave us or forsake us. Please bless us now as we look to you, and give us understanding and application as we learn today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we'll be taking some time to talk about the importance of standing firm as the people of God in Christ. Our focus: Rejoice and be glad!

Matthew 5:1-12

1 Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Author Irving Stone spent a lifetime writing novelized biographies...or maybe biographical novels...about people with whom we're all familiar: folks like Sigmund Freud, Vincent van Gogh,

Abraham Lincoln, and Charles Darwin. Once, in an interview, Stone was asked if he'd ever found a common thread running through the lives of so many exceptional people. His response was interesting, because he rejected the idea that any of his subjects were exceptional. Instead, he referred to them as common people who possessed uncommon determination. That, in fact, was their common thread. Stone said,

I simply write about people who, sometime in their life, have a vision or dream of something that should be accomplished, and they go to work. They're beaten over the head, knocked down, vilified, and for years they get nowhere. But every time they're knocked down they stand up. You can't destroy these people. And at the end of their lives they've accomplished some modest part of what they set out to do.

Most of you are aware of the fact that EDiBS has been having some challenges on social media lately with respect to how we share God's Word and the distinctives of the Christian faith. Early this month — it began on August 5th — we were actually censored by Facebook after someone filed a grievance against us. As a result, all of our existing Bible study posts were taken down, and all new posts were blocked. It turns out that we were reported for “abusive content” by a professional boycotting organization which targets groups who embrace traditional family values and a biblical worldview. Their complaint was that our views are toxic and contribute to an environment of hate and intolerance. The pinnacle of irony, of course, is that such an attack — especially since it was carried out anonymously, without warning, and with no opportunity for dialogue with our accusers — was itself the epitome of hate and intolerance. It was an old-fashioned act of bullying. It was also cowardly and unprofessional.

Tolerance — the great watchword of our times — has shown itself to be the birthright of every group today in the United States and other places in the world save one: the Christian Church. In the marketplace of ideas, God's people are being squeezed out in an increasingly militant and aggressive manner. More and more, Christian voices are being silenced — and not just the biggest voices with big influence, but also, like EDiBS, the littlest voices with little influence. Anyone who speaks out about the truth of the Savior of the world is fair game today, which goes to show, in a way our detractors would never intend, just how powerful, life-changing, and world-transforming the message of the cross really is. It isn't just foolishness to those who are perishing, it's also fearfulness. People who have hardened their hearts and set themselves in opposition to the Gospel are scared to death of Jesus. And yet while they hope Him away and wish Him away and mock His name and attempt to disbelieve Him into the dustbin of history, still He remains, and still His power is an intractable reality that gives witness to His supremacy over all things, no matter how vigorously He is damned by His enemies.

This is nothing new. It should not surprise us. It should not distress us. Nor should we — challenging though it may be — allow it to upset us. Let me say that one again:

Nor should we, challenging though it may be, allow it to upset us.

Rather, when we encounter instances such as these, they are holy invitations for us to redouble our petitions for the souls of men.

They are moments to be marked in our hearts which spur us to love those on the outside more intentionally and less conditionally.

They are also reminders for us of the blessing which is ours when others revile us, persecute us, or utter evil against us falsely on Christ's account. He has things well in hand, and we need not worry about His ability to take care of us as we labor in His harvest fields. A great reward awaits us.

But most of all, when instances such as these occur, they are a desperate cry to us from a dark and dying world to share the reality of our Redeemer, no matter what: His perfect life, His atoning death, and His resurrection victory over sin death and the devil — more and more and more. Why? Because the men, women, and children of this world need to know the truth of God's love for them in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, this ministry we call EDiBS began with a dream of something that should be accomplished: helping people engage with God's Word in a consistent, manageable, understandable way each day so that they could grow in their faith and live out Christ's love for them in a genuine, world-changing way. We went to work on that dream on January 1st, 2007, and we've been at it ever since. Though we've been very fortunate with the reception we've received through the years, there have indeed been times when we've been beaten over the head, knocked down, and vilified. There have been many occasions when, despite all that we were putting into the work, we didn't feel like we were getting anywhere. We still feel that way sometimes. But you know what? When we began this project, we made a commitment to see it through. We believed God was in it, and we still do. So every time we get knocked down — like what happened to us on Facebook a couple of weeks ago — we stand up. When our detractors come to destroy us, we won't allow it. When the roadblocks come, we'll patiently and winsomely — but completely — dismantle them. In short, we're just going to keep on keeping on. And our prayer is that, at the end of this whole thing, we will have accomplished some modest part of what we set out to do with this work. Does that make us exceptional? Not in the least. But by God's grace, we do count ourselves as common people with uncommon determination. And by God's grace, we pray the same for you!

These are challenging and changing times to be sure, but our great God, who does not change, will lead us through — and use us to lead others through as well. Have a great day everyone, and I'll see you again next time to head back into Genesis 8. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's blessings to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad you've joined in for some time in the Scriptures today, where in this session we're back to our ongoing study in the book of Genesis. Every day is a great day to invite friends and family to click in and be part of our study group, so be sure to forward these sessions to your loved ones and share them on your social media platforms. It just takes a moment, and it really does make a difference! As we begin today, let's prepare our hearts and go to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the day you've given us to live as your beloved children. Thank you for adopting us as your very own through the sacrifice of Christ at the cross and His victorious resurrection from the grave. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, open our hearts to wisdom and understanding as we hear from you today. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming back to Genesis with one more general session on the manner in which Genesis 8, and even the first portion of Genesis 9, harkens back to Genesis 1. Our focus: from creation to re-creation.

Genesis 8:1a

But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark.

When my children were young, our house was one overrun with Legos. My daughter loved them, my son loved them, and their mother and I loved them too. We built things constantly, creating make-believe worlds filled with all kinds of fanciful spacecraft, cars, boats, and homes — complemented, of course, by many different kinds of guns, swords, magic wands, and unicorn barns. Occasionally, one of us would come up with something that we really loved and wanted to keep, and for a time our prized creation would be given a special place on the shelf and treated with extra care. Inevitably, though, the day would arrive when it would fall and break, or more common still, be cannibalized for parts to complete some new project. We'd always go back and do our best to re-create it later, but it was never the same. The original just couldn't be duplicated.

In our first several sessions here in Genesis 8, we've been hopping around a little bit, talking in broad terms about the layout of the chapter and the things we can expect to see as we move forward from verse to verse and section to section. The biggest takeaway thus far? The assertion that as the Bible turns the corner on the days of the Flood and begins to describe a new world taking shape with the receding of the waters, our memory banks are being poked.

With everything having been destroyed in the great deluge, everything is now being made new again — and as we see God go about the process of re-creating things, we're seeing a distinct echo of what He first did when He created the heavens and the earth.

The last time we addressed this subject, I gave you a homework assignment of sorts, remember? I wanted you to go to your Bible and do some exploring. I wanted you to look for the harmony and connectedness between what began in chapter 1 with what is now beginning all over again in chapter 8. What are the links? What theme or elements are in common? What events, words, or phrases are being recounted or repeated, and for what purpose? Today I'll share what some of those connecting points are...and I'd love to hear what you came up with as well!

As we make this survey today, there's one caveat to it all, and you can already guess what it is: though the first creation wrought by the Lord was perfect in every way — something that Adam, Eve, and all the rest of us would have loved and desired to keep — there is unfortunately no going back to it. In one terrible moment in the Garden, something we saw back in Genesis 3, that prized creation fell from its special place and broke. No vows on the part of man to reform his ways and do better nor promises to treat God's original handiwork with special care going forward could ever restore it. So it is that even with a new world being created in the aftermath of the Flood, a world where God's blessings will still flow and where good things will still come to pass, it will nonetheless remain a world tainted by the Curse. One Day, capital D, God will create a new heaven and a new earth and Paradise will be restored forevermore. For now, we have this temporary and imperfect dwelling place. For the reasons stated, the original just couldn't be duplicated.

Keeping those things in mind as a proviso, here are some of the intentional similarities put into the the text of Genesis 8 that recall the work of our Almighty God in Genesis 1. We'll list them very quickly and then close for the day:

First, in verse 1, we have the most subtle and least apparent of the group, and it is simply this: with the words "And God *remembered* Noah..." we are being given a signpost of good things to come. In Scripture, when God remembers someone it's always a sign that His blessings are soon to arrive. Just as in the beginning God created everything and everything was very good, so now in His remembering of Noah we are tipped off that good things are coming once again.

The next thing we see in verse 1 is more obvious, and it's that God made a wind — the Hebrew word is *ruakh*, which also means *spirit* — blow over the earth to dry up the waters, which is a deliberate echo of when the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters in the second verse of Genesis 1. As the Holy Spirit was present in the beginning, so He is present in this new beginning.

Moving into verse 2 and going all the way through verse 14, we see another connection to Genesis 1: a reversal of the Flood waters from the time when they cover the tops of the mountains all the way to the time when they begin to recede, so that the land begins to dry out. So it is in chapter 1 as in the original creation, dry land began to emerge from the waters.

Finally — and we'll be approaching this portion of the text a few days from now — in verses 15-17 of Genesis 8 we have an instruction that is very familiar to us, because we first heard it in Genesis 1:28: just as the first living things in creation, led by Adam and Eve, were to be fruitful

and multiply, so now all living things in the new creation, led by Noah and his family, are to do the same.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, while there are distinct similarities between the first creation and the second creation, there are distinct differences as well. Most of those differences are a result of the Fall, and we'll begin to see some of them show up once we begin our look at Genesis 9. Nevertheless, with a new world to explore and populate and tend to for Noah and his wife, his sons and their wives, and all who will come after them, arriving with their task is a great promise from God to draw near and protect them in their new life. Because God is God, and because He is merciful and gracious, the new world will know His love in a special way — a way that ultimately points to the Coming One who will be the Way the Truth and the Life.

Do come along for tomorrow's time in God's Word, everyone; we have lots of great things to discover, and you'll want to be part of the group as we dig in. Have a wonderful day, and until then, God's joy and peace to each of you in Christ. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's rich joy and peace to you in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Today we're continuing our study in the eighth chapter of Genesis, and I'm so glad you've joined in for our time in God's Word! As we begin, let's take a moment to prepare our hearts as we go to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Father, you have given us every good and perfect gift to bless us and help us to grow in our faith. Thank you for the way you've poured out your grace in our lives through your Son. Our great desire is to know you more, and we pray that today's study time will help us in that journey. We ask this in the strong name of Jesus our Savior, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, we come back to our text to find Noah, still in the ark, currently sitting on a peak somewhere in the mountains of Ararat. Our focus this session: Active Waiting!

Genesis 8:6-12 (Part 2)

6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made 7 and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. 8 Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. 9 But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. 10 He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. 11 And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. 12 Then he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore.

I'm not the most patient person in the world. I get antsy if I have to wait for things. I was in line at the drive-thru yesterday, and when I pulled up to the screen to order, no one said anything. Since it was the lunch rush and things were busy, I figured the employees were running around multitasking and would get to me momentarily. After about a minute, however, I was still waiting, which in the drive-thru universe is a pretty long time. I let thirty more seconds go by, and then I attempted to talk into the speaker, but still — nothing. By this time there were several cars behind me, and because it was a two-lane kiosk, there was also a truck at the order screen to my right. In a moment of panic, I suddenly realized the horror of my predicament: I was about to be boxed in. I was about to be consigned to fast-food no-man's land with no way to move forward or back. I was about to be stuck for an interminable period of time waiting to order food that I shouldn't be ordering anyway, an order which would probably be cold or wrong or both by the time I got it. In that panicked moment, I made a split-second decision: throwing my trusty Honda into gear and cranking my wheel, I cut right, drove over the curb, passed in front of the truck that was next to me, and then drove over two more curbs and into the TJ Maxx parking lot to make my escape. By the time I turned back into the roadway the line I'd been in still hadn't

moved, which gave me a sense of affirmation — but it didn't make my actions right. They were rash, and I knew they were rash, and they reminded me that even at fifty-plus years of age, time has not brought maturity to that aspect of my life!

As we come back to God's Word today, the passage before us is all about waiting. Though some commentators like to get into deep weeds about the significance of the raven and the dove and the fact that one was clean and the other not, that's really not the thrust of the text. Other scholars like to spiritualize these verses and tell us that just as the raven and the dove found no place to land following their release from the ark — at least initially, that is — neither do we as sojourners in this world have a place to land, because there is no true home for us here, yada yada yada. Still other Bible teachers like to focus on the olive leaf that the dove brought back to Noah following its second release, and how ever since that time, a dove with an olive leaf has been a symbol of peace and goodness.

All well and good...but in truth, the text is still about waiting. Today's reading, save for one special point that we'll talk about in our next session, is a nuts and bolts one, and in it, Noah is waiting.

Waiting for the waters to recede.
Waiting for a sign that the land is habitable again.
Waiting for his next steps.
Waiting, really, on God.

God, after all, is the key to this whole thing...this whole ridiculous, unbelievable, wild journey he's been on for more than a century now. Noah was 500 years old when he was told to build his boat in preparation for the destruction of the earth. Now he's over 600 years old. That's a lot of time...a lot of which has been spent waiting. It's not surprising in the least, then, that here in Genesis 8 Noah is continuing to wait.

So — as he does so, what is he doing with himself? Is he sitting around the ark contemplating his navel and watching reruns of *I Love Lucy*? No. Is he pacing back and forth, muttering expletives under his breath and looking for a way out of his predicament? Also no. Noah is not a slacker living in God's basement just being passive and taking life as it comes; Noah is actively waiting on the Lord. Noah is patient and faithful. Noah is eager and anticipatory. Noah is hopeful and confident. With God's help he has seen his calling through, with God's help he has accomplished all that, up to this point, the Lord has given him to do, and with God's help, he is now looking forward to what's next. Noah is waiting. And you know what? That's a powerful, precious, promise-laden place to be.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, G. Campbell Morgan once said, "Waiting for God is not laziness. Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God means, first, activity under command; second, readiness for any new command that may come; and third, the ability to do nothing until the command is given." Like you, I can probably think of a dozen people off the top of my head within the pages of Scripture who exemplify those qualities. But I can't think of anyone who exemplifies them any better than Noah. What an amazing man with an amazing faith, and what a blessing it is for us to see that faith in action! We'll talk more about Noah and his faith when we come together next time, so

be sure to join in for tomorrow's Bible study time. Until then, take care, have a terrific day, and the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks for joining us today as we walk, verse by verse, through God's Word together. As we move into the last half of our study week, today finds us continuing on in Genesis 8, so take a moment, turn there in your Bible, and join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this special moment in time – a moment where we have the opportunity to dedicate ourselves to the study of your Word and bring it to bear it to our lives. We ask that you would mercifully grant us the ability to understand what we read, and that you would help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's in His name that we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, after what amounts to about a full calendar year in the ark, Noah receives word from the Lord to exit and begin anew. Our focus this session: out of the ark, into new life!

Genesis 8:13-19

13 In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. 14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out. 15 Then God said to Noah, 16 "Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. 17 Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." 18 So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. 19 Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark.

When was the last time you embarked on something new and significant in your life? Was it exciting? Was it scary? What about it was different from how things were before? How did doing the new thing change you? Finally, how long did it take before the newness wore off?

Sometimes we choose to do a new thing, while other times choice isn't part of the equation at all. No matter what, however, things that are new and different always make an impact on our lives, and the lives of people around us as well.

As we come back to God's Word today, Noah isn't so much embarking on something new and different as much as he is disembarking on something new and different. The time has come at last for him to leave the ark, and the world into which he now steps is nothing like the one he left behind when he entered the ark back on the seventeenth day of the second month of the six hundredth year of his life.

As Noah exits the ark — and along with him, the animals — is he doing so of his own volition? Is this action his choice? In one sense the answer would almost have to be yes, at least as far as putting one foot in front of the other goes. We can only imagine how eager he is to vacate the confines of that smelly boat and all of its trappings, and when it becomes clear that the land of the post-Flood world is finally dry enough to inhabit, Noah's got to be chomping at the bit to get outside and breathe in the fresh air of the newly created order.

In another sense, however — and this is very important for us to see — the more appropriate answer to our query is that far from taking matters into his own hands and doing as he pleases, Noah is taking the actions he's taking in today's reading in accordance with the Lord's instructions — just like everything else we've seen him do along the way in this saga. Waiting on the Lord has been a hallmark of this man's life, and it has served him well at every turn. In fact, I think it's telling that in all we've seen of Noah up to this point, he has never spoken. Instead, we've only witnessed him being quick to hear the voice of God...apparently without questioning Him. As far as the biblical record shows, here is an individual who is not a talker, but a listener and a doer.

Wrapping Up

But now Noah is entering the unknown. Everything is new. Nothing is certain, and nothing is the same as it once was. What will he do? How will he cope? And what, as he moves forward in faith, will he encounter as he steps into a new existence to fulfill the next daunting task that awaits him? As we wrap things up for the day, I want to let that question linger for a little bit, to hang heavy in our minds for awhile. Why? Because I think that at times when we read the Scriptures, we forget that the people we're seeing on the page are real people, and that the events we see happening are real events. We don't always connect the dots between holy writ and reality. In our minds we give assent to the things we read, but we don't necessarily consider them as existing in time and space. As we close, I want you to pause for a few minutes today and put yourself in Noah's shoes. Think of all he's facing right now. Ask yourself how you'd be feeling if you were in his situation...because it's a situation to be sure! How would you be talking to the Lord? How would you be listening? What would you be doing?

The account we're moving into right now — the post-Flood narrative — is something that for Noah is new and significant. It's exciting. It's scary. It's different from anything that was before, and it's going to change him in ways he never could have imagined. This new season of life is going to make an impact on him and the lives of people around him too...including the lives of all who will come after him down through the generations. Hard as it is to imagine, that extends to you and me as well! Think about that, and we'll pick it up again next time to have at it some more. Have a great day everybody, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon. Blessings to you in Christ, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's rich blessings to you in Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, where today we come to new week together fresh with the promises of God and the assurance of His abiding presence. It's always a blessing to remember that God never goes on vacation and never takes the day off, but instead is always at work on our behalf...always watching over us and always serving us with His grace and mercy. You are dearly loved by the Lord, and as He loves you, so He is with you this very moment...something to celebrate indeed! Let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, thank you for this new week that you've brought to us. You always keep us close to you, protect us, and bless us in more ways than we can fathom. Help us, Lord, to be aware of your presence, and help us to consciously place ourselves into your gracious, outstretched, all-powerful hand as we walk through this life. Today we pray that you would continue to teach us through your Word, and we ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're going to take this first session of the week to back up for a moment and answer a question that was brought up by many of you regarding the actual resting place of Noah's ark. Our focus: Why the mountains of Ararat?

Genesis 8:3b-4

At the end of 150 days the waters had abated, and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

How long has it been since you've taken time to consider the vastness of the world that we live in? I ask because when people talk about the scope of the physical nature of things, they almost always skip our immediate surroundings and gravitate toward the universe as a whole. That's completely understandable.

To help us grasp the vastness of our galaxy, one scientist suggests that we imagine a several-miles-long smooth glass surface. Shrink the sun from 865,000 miles in diameter to two feet and place it on the lefthand side. Are you with me so far? Now start walking along the glass, moving toward the planets. Using this scale, Earth would be 220 paces out from the sun, and would be the size of a pea. Mars, the size of a pinhead, would be 108 paces beyond Earth. But to reach Neptune, you'd need to step off another 6,130 paces from Mars. By now you'd be five miles from the sun. What about Pluto? There wouldn't even be room on the glass to plot poor little Pluto, which has been delisted as a planet by today's astronomers. But since I've brought it up, you'd have to pace off *6,720 miles beyond Pluto* on that glass surface just to reach the nearest star. Oh, and one more thing: this long, smooth glass surface I've just described represents only an itty-bitty, tiny *fraction* of the universe. To say these things are awe-worthy would be the greatest of understatements.

But back to my original question. How long has it been since you've taken time to consider the vastness of just *this* world...the majesty of the Earth? As the fifth-largest planet in the solar system, Earth is an amazing property. It has an equatorial circumference of 24,902 miles and a total surface area of about 197,000,000 square miles. Of this total surface area, 29 percent, or 57,000,000 square miles, is covered by land, and it happens to be the one and only planet in our solar system that teems with life of every form and function. Meaning what? Meaning Earth is, all by itself, an immense place. The scope of its physical presence is, all by itself, almost unfathomable. It is also worthy — again, all by itself — of our awe.

Add to all these facts one more point: geologically speaking, Earth has also gone through multiple cataclysmic changes over the course of its existence, including, and especially so, the cataclysmic changes wrought by the Flood. The Flood wiped out every living thing with the breath of life in it, save for those people and creatures which were on the ark. Following that worldwide deluge, the 50 million+ square miles of land I just mentioned was ultimately resettled and repopulated, and it all had to originate from the ark's inhabitants. This brings up an important question. Since the planet onto which Noah, his family, and the animals stepped from the ark was a drastically different one from that which existed prior to the Flood, and since the whole of the globe would need to be reestablished with people and animals over time, why were the mountains of Ararat such a significant landing site?

The mountains of Ararat, as many of you know, are in modern day Turkey, and Mount Ararat itself — the summit of the specific peak, that is — lies about ten miles west of Turkey's border with Iran and fifty or so miles south of its border with Armenia. What many of you may not know is that modern day Turkey also happens to be the geographical center of the earth. This was calculated and finally confirmed in the 1970s, and was reaffirmed by computer models as late as a couple of years ago. You can even plot out the coordinates using Google Maps!

The fact that Noah and his ark came to rest in the mountains of Ararat is not coincidental. On the contrary, this landing and disembarking place was one, like all aspects associated with the Flood, divinely appointed, and it was critically important to the reestablishment of the human race across the globe. It was essentially equidistant from the extremities of Asia, Africa, and Europe, meaning that it was a central locale from which people could disperse and colonize a new creation. So too with respect to the repopulation of the animal kingdom: just as with humans, the animals from the ark could migrate to the east, further into Asia, to the west, further into Europe, and south into Africa.

In short, Ararat was not only an ideal place for the ark to come to rest, but a significant part of the equation for the renewal of the earth. In the new beginning, Ararat became the divine restarting point for life as we know it today. We'll be talking about that in more detail when we get to the last half of Genesis 9, and we'll follow it all the way through to the end of Genesis 11.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, when we read in 2 Peter that the pre-flood world was destroyed, we have to remember that the judgment God sent on the earth wasn't merely a big rainstorm. It was nothing less than a total destruction of the whole of the earth. The rain was there, yes, but there was also the violence of the fountains of the deep bursting forth and the expanse of water from the sky falling down. The scene described for us is one of utter catastrophe, with the very nature and substance of the elements being forever changed. The ark, once grounded, was the place from which all things would begin again. As a vessel of

salvation, a carrier of divine promise, and a literal starter kit for the inauguration of a brand new world, its resting place, therefore, was just as important to God as was His original call to Noah that it be built. The implications of that are far-reaching, and it's yet another facet of the gem of creation and re-creation that we can stand in awe of as the people of God in Christ. More to come on that very soon, but in the meantime, have a great day, and know that the Lord is with you! Take care everyone, and God's peace!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's abounding, gracious love and peace to each of you in the name of Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to be with you today, where over the next several minutes we'll be turning our attention to the final several verses of Genesis 8. Thanks for being here; let's pray and open our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, please bless all who are studying your Word Today with peace, with hope, with joy, and with an ever-increasing knowledge of your love for them, which never fails. Clear our minds and prepare our hearts for all that you have for us now. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our wind-down of the eighth chapter of Genesis begins with a simple observation in the text...simple, but incredibly powerful. Our focus: Noah worships the Lord.

Genesis 8:20-22

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. 22 While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

On my farm in the Missouri Ozarks, in a thick oak and hickory stand at the back of my property, I once built an outdoor chapel so that I could go to a quiet place and worship. I mowed a long, winding walking path into a circular area about 20 feet in diameter, cleared the undergrowth, planted a carpet of daffodil and crocus bulbs, and brought an old bench in for a place to sit. Then I erected a cross between two trees, and in front of the cross I stacked the largest stones I could carry and fashioned them into a rough altar. Unfortunately, I only have one surviving picture of the space, the one at the top of today's email, and it's not a good one. It's actually a picture of everything in disrepair, with the forest floor overgrown, the original cedar cross replaced with a temporary one made of 2x4's after the original came down in an ice storm, and the altar in disarray after several stones were dislodged in that same ice storm. The photo was taken in the spring to document the things that needed attending to, and I often wish I still had shots of the space when it was as I had envisioned it.

I'm thinking about that old outdoor chapel and its altar today because as we come to God's Word and look to the verses before us, we see that the first thing Noah does upon leaving the ark is to worship the Lord. He builds an altar, prepares a sacrifice — a costly one at that — and gives it as a burnt offering. Obviously, there is gratitude in play here, and how could there not be? There's so much for which to be thankful after the harrowing experience of literally riding out the destruction of the world and emerging on the other side of it intact with his family. There is humility present too as Noah stands on solid ground and considers the profound journey he's just been on...as he takes stock of the fact that God has kept every promise He's ever made to His servant, from the announcement of the end of the world to the end of the world itself to this new beginning in a new world. What an astounding thing to consider, and how humbling indeed.

But there's another aspect to this sacrifice on Noah's part, a very important one for us to understand because of the picture it paints and the promise it prophesies: this offering is a burnt offering, which is actually an act of atonement.

Noah is thankful, yes. Noah worships and gives praise to God for the deliverance that He has wrought, yes. But Noah, the only survivor of the world-wide deluge along with his family and the animals present with him on the ark, also understands why the world was done away with. He understands the reality of sin — not just the sin of the world's inhabitants who were destroyed in the Flood, but his sin too. He understands that the Lord, who is holy and just, cannot look upon sin and simply dismiss it; there must be an appeasement. There must be something offered to restore the relationship between God and man which was marred and broken by iniquity. There must be a sacrifice. That's why Noah takes some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offers burnt offerings on the altar to the Lord. And while that act prefigures the whole sacrificial system which will be laid out in the giving of the Law, beyond even that it points to a greater sacrifice still: the once-for-all atoning sacrifice of the only begotten Son of God, whose blood will not only cover, but cleanse us from all iniquity.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th century Baptist pastor, said it so very well. Of today's text he wrote, "The sacrifice is the turning-point. Without a sacrifice sin clamors for vengeance, and God sends a destroying flood; but the sacrifice presented by Noah was a type of the coming sacrifice of God's only begotten Son, and of the effectual atonement therein provided for human sin." It reminds me of the wonderful hymn written by Isaac Watts, which we should sing more in these days:

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.

Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice
And sing His bleeding love.

More on Noah's sacrifice tomorrow, everyone; until then, have a wonderful day, and rejoice in the knowledge that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain, has set you free to be people of God! Take care, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's grace and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm happy to have you along for some time in God's Word over the next few minutes, and I'm always praying that our ministry here is helping you to learn and grow in your faith and become ever more consistent in your devotional time with the Lord. Today we're finishing up our look at Genesis 8, so let's pray and get to the text.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we know that we can do all things through you because you give us strength; and we remember also that apart from you, we can do nothing. We ask for your power and your gracious presence as we study today. Teach us and lead us, in your precious name we pray. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our second and final look at the last three verses of Genesis 8 takes up the issue of sacrifice once again. Our focus this session: God's great promise, God's great mercy.

Genesis 8:20-22 (Part 2)

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. 22 While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

"The more things change, the more they stay the same." So wrote French journalist Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr in one of his more famous epigrams, a saying with which most of us are familiar. A more literal translation of that pithy phrase, however, is a bit less pithy and a bit more descriptive: the direct rendering from the French would be "The more things change, the more they continue to be the same thing." If you think about it, that changes the meaning quite a bit, and that's actually the reason I've brought it up today.

While in many cases that saying may be true, and while in many cases it is spoken with an air of bitterness or cynicism, it is not always true. Sometimes, in fact, the precise opposite is true. Sometimes the more things change, the more *different* things continue to become — and rather than being something negative, steeped in bitterness and cynicism, they are incredibly, surprisingly — even miraculously — positive. Which brings us to today's reading from God's Word at the end of Genesis 8.

When we were together last time, we spoke about the fact that Noah, upon exiting the ark and stepping into a new world, had one thing on his mind: worship. Praise and thanksgiving were certainly on the front burner of his brain as a result of God's gracious deliverance from the Flood, and we would absolutely expect those things to be welling up and occupying his thoughts. But as Noah built an altar to the Lord, we saw that deliverance of another kind was on his mind as well...more on his mind, in fact, than anything else. Once Noah had built his altar, he prepared a sacrifice and brought burnt offerings before the Lord as an act of atonement for sin. That was the deliverance most needed, and Noah knew it in the deepest depths of his being.

Coming back to that scene today, let's take a moment and do a bit of inventory. In one sense, the words of Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr are on deck as we take stock of the state of the world. So much has changed:

The Great Flood has wiped out every living thing that had walked on the earth and had the breath of life. Only those people and creatures that were on the ark have survived the tumult of that catastrophe.

Then too, the earth itself is drastically different than it was prior to the Flood. What was is no more; the old had been destroyed, and now a new and different place awaits Noah, his family, and the animals which will be resettling the earth.

With a newly reconfigured planet, completely rearranged even to the point that virtually every ecosystem has been upended, not even the climate will be the same. From a world still enveloped by water and enjoying what was likely a uniformly temperate environment, there will now be, as long as the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and on it goes.

At the same time, however, as much as has changed in this new world, one thing has not: the presence of sin. It remains. What was broken is still broken, what was fallen is still fallen, what was cursed is still cursed...and yet here is where our Almighty God throws a wrench into the equation and changes everything. Here is where the more things change, the more *different* things become — and rather than being something negative, steeped in bitterness and cynicism, this change is incredibly, surprisingly — even miraculously — positive. In response to Noah's burnt offering, God is soothed. He is pleased. As the God of love, He is also moved in His heart to mercy. Thus, He makes a covenant: "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth."

Did you catch that? It's astounding.

God promises to never again visit the earth with judgment on the scale of the Flood, promises never to destroy every living thing as He did in the deluge...but God does this understanding full well that the intention of man's heart:

*remains evil,
is still evil,
and will not ever **not** be evil, from his youth.*

This is a promise overflowing with mercy instead of justice, so why has it been made? After all, it's a promise completely opposite the declaration of judgment God had pronounced on the human race back in chapter six. It would seem that man's evil would invite God's curse, not put it away. But there has been a change. It has made things different. There has been the offering of an atoning sacrifice...and that change makes things different indeed.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Dr. Paul Kretzmann once said that when it comes to the human heart and mind, what it imagines, what it thinks, and what it plans is evil from the earliest days of youth. He wrote, "Since the Fall, all men are naturally depraved and corrupted, inclined only to that which is evil. There is only one way of effecting deliverance from this inherited

disposition toward everything that is evil, namely, through the obedience and merit of Jesus Christ the Savior.”

Noah’s actions in today’s text, and God’s response to them, clearly points to that day — to the day when Jesus, in the greatest action of all time, would offer Himself on the altar of sacrifice to make atonement for the sins of the world. This was God’s great promise, showing God’s great mercy. And as I alluded to just a moment ago, it was a wholesale change that made everything different forever.

God be with you as you think about that today; I’ll look forward to seeing you next time as we continue on here in the book of Genesis. Blessings to you in Christ, everyone, and have a great day!

Hello Everyone,

Grace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Thursday’s edition of EDiBS. I want to share something I received late last night from a friend who’s going through a hard time in life right now. Her present season of trial is very challenging. Her future is uncertain. As a person of

deep faith, however, her relationship with Christ is sustaining her. In fact, our Savior's abiding presence in her life has been so comforting to her that she was moved to write a brief word of testimony to give witness to God's faithfulness. Her perspective is so rock-solid that I wanted to share it with everyone I could, including all of you in our EDiBS family. I hope it will encourage you, especially if you happen to be facing tough times yourself right now.

I'll send out our study covering the opening verses of Genesis 9 tomorrow morning. For now, please consider, think on, pray over, and share these words with others. I'm trusting my gut on this one, and I pray that my decision bears things out in a helpful way for you and yours!

Here's what my friend wrote:

What does Jesus do when you're at your moment of desperation? Mark 6:48 says,

"About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water."

Notice He didn't tell the disciples to come to Him; He knew they couldn't get to Him. He went to them.

When you're at that point of desperation, Jesus comes to you!

I love the fact that Jesus didn't stand on the shore and shout instructions. When you're in a storm, you don't need advice, you need a miracle. You need somebody to show up, and this is what Jesus did. He intervened in the disciples' storm.

This is the Gospel — that God doesn't stand on the shoreline telling us what to do. He comes out and meets us in our pain, our fear, our depression, our discouragement — our storm. He comes to us. What a God!

You may feel abandoned right now, but you're not. Jesus says to us in John 14, "I will not abandon you or leave you as orphans in the storm — I will come to you."

You can count on it.

Have a great day, my friends; I'll see you tomorrow. God's peace to each of you...especially as He comes to you! Take care.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's blessings of joy and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. One thing I always pray for when I think of our EDiBS family is that as you open your Bibles each day and place yourselves under the authority of God's Word, you're experiencing transformation, renewal, and new wisdom and insight about who God is and what He's done for you in His one and only Son. We've been given such a

great and wonderful salvation in Christ; more than anything I desire that we can grow together in our relationship with Him through this ministry. Let's pray.

Prayer

Lord, I'm reminded today of the vast number of promises that you give to your people in your Word, and I'm so thankful for the way they reach into every facet of our lives. I praise you for your love and for the way you never give up on your children. I ask that you bless the reading and the study of the Scriptures over these next few minutes. Use this time to shape your people; to fashion them into what you dreamed them to be. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the beginning of Genesis 9 comes a new beginning for Noah and his family. Our focus: blessings and boundaries.

Genesis 9:1-4

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. 2 The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. 4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

The first new car I ever bought was a 1992 Honda Accord. It was a beautiful dark blue sedan with a gray interior, and it had a five-speed manual transmission that made it feel sporty to drive, even though it was paired with a tiny four-cylinder engine under the hood. The cabin was quiet, comfortable, and well-designed, the sound system was superb, and I regularly averaged over 35 MPG in combined driving conditions. In many ways — and I don't think it's just nostalgia or sentimentality talking — that car was the finest one I ever owned. Automotive technology and innovation are certainly leaps and bounds ahead of where things were 27 years ago, but not automotive quality. Case in point? The four-year-old Honda Accord I drive today. It too is a fine vehicle, but there's a lot more plastic, a lot less attention to detail, far fewer creature comforts, and a whole lot of planned obsolescence engineered into it that would have been unthinkable back in 1992. It's the same with other cars I've owned as well: by most standards they've been just fine, whether Honda, Toyota, Ford, or Mitsubishi. But none have equalled that first Honda.

As we come to God's Word today and begin a new chapter in Genesis together, it's all good news...yet as we read, we do so with a certain sense of melancholy at the same time, and why? Because the Scriptures today echo, yet another time, a better time. The word of the Lord to Noah and his family is very much like the word of the Lord had been to Adam and Eve. The word of the Lord to Noah and his family is full of blessing and promise, spoken in love, just as it was to our first parents. But as we see these blessings unfold today, the similarities in pattern between Genesis 1 and Genesis 9 come with some distinct differences. In short — and it's definitely not nostalgia or sentimentality talking — the world before the Fall was perfect; the finest that could ever be. The new world, too, is a fine place, but it will never be what the first world was.

The reason, of course, is sin. Sin has entered the world. Sin has impacted the whole of creation. The Curse remains. Thus, while we do indeed see a new beginning in today's text with new

blessings and new promises, those blessings and promises are tempered by the reality that the world remains a fallen one.

Just briefly, let's continue with an exercise we started several sessions ago with respect to both the commonalities and differences of the pre-Fall, pre-Flood world and the post-Fall, post-Flood world. Here in Genesis 9, and there in Genesis 1...

...God blessed His creatures and told them to be fruitful and multiply.

...God prescribed the food man could eat.

There are differences as we follow those things through, however — differences which indicate that this new beginning is very unlike that which was from old.

For example, God pronounced the original creation to be good...very good, in fact. The new, post-Flood world of Noah's day receives no such commendation, because the men who will possess it are sinful.

In the first creation, Adam was charged to subdue the earth and to rule over the animal kingdom. Here in Genesis 9, Noah is given no such command. Instead, God places into all living things a fear of man, by which man can achieve a measure of control over them.

In related fashion, while Adam and his contemporaries seem to have been vegetarians, Noah and his descendants are given the all-clear to eat flesh. The one stipulation? They're not to eat the blood of the animal, for the life of the animal is in its blood. This, in one sense, is to teach man not only that God values life, but that He owns it. There are other reasons for it as well: on the one hand, it may be that conditions on the earth are now so changed that more protein is necessary for life. More likely, however — and this is what scholars tend to focus on — is that man must now be continually brought to an ongoing realization: because of his sin, he can only live by the death of another.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, there's one more point couched in the stipulation about eating flesh, but not blood, and it is simply this: through it, man is taught to reverence life. Men before the Flood had obviously become men of violence. God mentioned that fact back in Genesis 6, and prior to that in chapter 4, we of course had the examples of both Cain and Lamech, neither of whom had regard for human life. In verses 5-6 we'll see that point developed further, and it's something that we'll address when we come together again after the weekend.

It's always a joy, a blessing, and a privilege to be with you, everyone; have a terrific couple of days, and I'll look forward to seeing you again come Monday. Until then, God's peace, and take care!

Labor Day

Labor Day in the United States is a public holiday celebrated on this day each year...the first Monday in September. It's day which is observed in honor of the American labor movement. Those who belong to unions or other organizations that serve workers would remind us that it's also a day that we honor and celebrate the power of collective action by the people who are

laboring. In many different ways, they have become essential for the workings of our society, and in a very real way, the labor of those who work is for the good of all of us.

In his book *Written In Blood*, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease the boy had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

"Would you give your blood to Sarah?" the doctor asked. Jonathan hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. But then, after a moment, he smiled and said, "Sure, for my sister." Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room — Sarah, pale and thin; Jonathan, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Jonathan grinned. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Jonathan's smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube. With the ordeal almost over, his voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence. "Doctor, when do I die?" Only then did the doctor realize why Jonathan had hesitated, why his lip had trembled when he'd agreed to donate his blood. He'd thought giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. In that brief moment, he'd made his great decision. It was a true labor of love.

Jonathan, fortunately, didn't have to die to save his sister. Each of us, however, has a condition more serious than Sarah's, and it required Jesus to give not just His blood, but His life. This was His great labor for us...a true labor of love. And it's what I'm thinking about on this Labor Day.

It was J.C. Ryle who wrote, "Who can estimate the value of God's gift, when He gave to the world His only begotten Son! It is something unspeakable and incomprehensible. It passes man's understanding. Two things there are which man has no arithmetic to reckon, and no line to measure. One of these things is the extent of that man's loss who loses his own soul. The other is the extent of God's gift when He gave Christ to sinners. Sin must indeed be exceeding sinful, when the Father must needs give His only Son to be the sinner's Friend."

Christ crucified for sinners...the Great Work indeed!

Many blessings to you and yours on this Labor Day — I pray it will be a day of rest and recreation, and I also pray that it will be a day for you to think about the work of your Savior on your behalf.

God's peace, everyone, and I'll see you again tomorrow! Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and welcome to another great day to be together in God's beloved Word as God's beloved children. In our time today we'll be coming back to the opening of Genesis 9, where in this session we'll be taking up an issue that has become controversial in the world today. I'm glad you're here; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the chance to be together today under the authority of your Word, under the blessing of your teaching, and in the midst of the great promises attached to the Scriptures. Teach us by your Spirit in our time before you, that we may learn to walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name. Open our hearts to your gospel message and help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. In His precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, The Lord is in the midst of speaking new blessings and new boundaries into the lives of Noah and his family as they prepare to resettle and repopulate the earth. Our focus: I will require a reckoning.

Genesis 9:5-6

5 And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. 6 “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”

It happened to many of us during our childhood years. Outside on a hot summer day or warm summer evening, we caught a lizard, snake, frog, butterfly, firefly, or perhaps another of God's creatures. Putting it in a mayonnaise jar or shoebox with holes cut into the lid for air and an assortment of grass, rocks, dirt and twigs inside to create natural habitat, we promptly took it and proudly showed our mother, who responded by saying something like, “How would you like someone to put *you* in a mayonnaise jar with the lid on it?” Parental wisdom notwithstanding, we would go ahead with our amateur zoo project anyway, and then it would happen: the lizard, snake, frog, butterfly, or other unnamed creature of God would die in our custody. What did that make us? At the very least it made us irresponsible and guilty of poor judgment (not to mention guilty of ignoring our mother's admonition). But if we had an older sibling who had anything to say about it, our action made us nothing less than murderers. On one occasion, my older brother actually convinced me that I was going to be arrested and given the death penalty for accidentally killing a frog. It was something he held over my head for a long time!

Today in God's Word, we've come upon a topic that's almost constantly in the news these days: the issue of capital punishment. Obviously, it's not a subject to be treated lightly, and today's introduction is in no way meant to bring unnecessary levity to the table. The reason I've set things in motion as I have is a simple one: finding a way to talk about killing, death, and retribution isn't the easiest task in the world. Introducing it gently at first enables us all to get on the same page in the beginning and then move into deeper conversation as we go. From there we can approach things with an appropriate sense of gravity.

That said, it's important for us to get, as quickly as possible, to the heart of things today: according to God's command in the verses before us, when a man's blood is shed there must be an accounting for it. Why is this the case? Because God made man in His own image, and since man is made in the image of God, his life is inherently precious and can't be taken with impunity. To say it more bluntly, life is God's alone to give and His alone to take...which is why when a person commits murder — the willful, violent taking of a life without just cause — that individual's sentence, given here by God Himself, is death; the pronouncement is literally a life for a life. Notice that our passage even says that animals which shed man's blood must be put to death. Meaning what? Meaning God is serious about the sanctity and value of life, and after a

long period of unchecked transgression with respect to murder in the pre-Flood world, in the new post-Flood world He reveals to Noah a severe but appropriate sentence for those who would dare to bring the taking of a life into their own hands. To say it in the most basic way we can, God is declaring here that murder is much more than an act of hostility against man; it's an affront to God Himself.

We'll be talking about different kinds of life-taking and matters surrounding death when we come together tomorrow, but for the moment, let's look just at murder itself and the punishment God enacts for it here in Genesis 9. If you would, consider the following: we've just said that murder is sin because it's the willful, violent taking of a life, and life belongs to God. We've also said that one reason murder must be severely dealt with is because the victim is a person created in God's own image. It's for these two reasons specifically that God decrees capital punishment as the appropriate sentence in such a case. Is the death penalty also the taking of a life? Yes. But it's the taking of a life in accordance with the parameters that God Himself has decreed — and further study reveals that He carries this sentence out not only via the governance of man, but also for the benefit of man.

Wrapping Up

To address this very quickly — and I'll say this as a way to wrap things up for the day — the Bible teaches that the punishment of the guilty is one of the roles of human government... something you can read about in the 13th chapter of Romans. There we learn, for example, that punishment of the guilty is given as a way to restrain man's depravity. Martin Luther said regarding this passage that "God establishes government and gives it the sword to hold wantonness in check, lest violence and other sins proceed without limit." In fact, the sword which Paul mentions in Romans 13:4 is the sword used by the executioner to carry out capital punishment.

The bottom line? The Bible — here in Genesis 9 and elsewhere — does affirm capital punishment as a legitimate sentence for the crime of murder when applied under proper circumstances by the appropriate authorities who, during trial, have followed due process of law. That's a surprise to many people, and to others it seems like an oxymoron or at least a paradox. When we gather next time, we'll dig into it more deeply to sort some of that out, and I know that as we do, there will be good points for all of us to consider on the matter. I'm very thankful to have you all in my life, and I'm praying for your day to be a great one, everybody! God's peace to you in Christ, and God-willing, I'll see you again real soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's peace to each of you in our risen Lord Jesus Christ. It's great to have you along today as we open our Bibles together, where over these next few minutes we'll once again consider the verses we looked at yesterday in Genesis 9. Let's pray as we go to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord God, you are worthy of our praise and adoration...not just in words spoken by our lips, but in lives of worship lived in thanksgiving and service to you for all you've done. Thank you for the great salvation you have provided us in Christ, and thank you for the blessing of being able to

grow in our faith each day. Bless us now as we study your holy Word. This we pray for Jesus' sake, and in his name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come back to the reckoning God requires for the taking of a life. Our focus: more on the matter of capital punishment.

Genesis 9:5-6

5 And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. 6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

When we were together yesterday, we closed our first session on capital punishment by talking about its application with respect to murder. As we did so, we also mentioned the fact that there are means of taking the life of another that don't fall into the category of murder, and therefore the death penalty is not warranted. It's prudent, then, that we spend a brief moment or two on that in our time together today.

At this juncture, we need to make an important point: in its original languages, the Bible makes a very clear distinction between murder on one hand, and other actions that lead to the death of a person on another. Not all killing is murder. In fact, if you read through your Bible you'll find that there are several cases where someone may be killed for just cause: killing in self-defense, for example, or killing that occurs during a just war. In addition, some killing is accidental, where though the death of an individual may occur, it's a death that doesn't come close to broaching the category about which we're speaking.

It's plain to see, then, that there are nuances here — and these nuances are most often where matters of misunderstanding and debate arise both inside and outside of the Church due to oversimplified or undefined terms, blanket statements and generalizations, and charged emotions.

Scripture, as we said yesterday, is clear in showing us that God Himself ordained capital punishment. It is also clear in showing us that such a sentence, when handed down, is to be carried out in a measured and sober manner by the proper authorities. As Christians, we never rejoice when the death penalty is employed, but at the same time we understand that in certain instances, certain crimes fall within the pale of capital punishment's use as a just sentence.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, does this mean that as Christians we're conscience- and duty-bound to support the death penalty in every instance and by every earthly authority in every time and place? Actually, no. For various — and valid — reasons, many people of faith reject the usefulness and fairness of the death penalty as it is used today, because they feel that the parameters we discussed a moment ago are not properly followed or observed. Such individuals have a legitimate right to express their concern, and per that concern, it is not wrong for them to oppose capital punishment. Furthermore, though it's clear from Scripture that the government has the God-given right to use the death penalty, that doesn't mean it's a clear-cut, black and white issue where a cookie-cutter template is to be used in every instance. For example, the church body to which I belong has taken the position that while capital punishment is clearly sanctioned by God's Word, the government need not use the right and responsibility of

the death sentence if it determines that some other form of punishment would better serve society at large at a particular time and place. Many other Christian denominations teach in much the same way, and the truth is that no church or church body — and hopefully, no individual either — has arrived at a decision on this subject hastily or without careful study and prayer.

There's more we could say on this, and to be sure, the time will come when it will once again occupy our time together. For now, I hope that the overview we've shared over the past couple of days will help to answer some of your existing questions, and prompt some new ones as well! Have a great day everyone, and I'll see you again next time. God's peace, and take care.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ. As we begin our Bible study time this week we're drawing close to the end of Genesis 9, so if you'll take a moment, open your Bible, and join me for a word of prayer, we'll begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you have looked upon us and seen our need; and so you have sent a Shepherd to your sheep to gather us together and bring us home. Thank you for the love you have so lavishly poured upon us in our Savior, and thank you for the forgiveness and new life we have in His name. Please bless the study of your Word today, to the end that we grow in the

grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus and come to an ever greater understanding of and dependence upon you. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're looking at just one verse — a repetition of something we heard at the beginning of the chapter, and actually, a repetition of something we first saw back in chapter 1. Our focus this session: Be fruitful and multiply.

Genesis 9:7

7 "And you be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it."

My maternal grandmother was a colorful soul. Strong, energetic, and always busy, she had a love for life which oozed from every part of her...especially her ready wit and quick tongue, which never suffered fools. Grandma Hunt had raised three girls on her own and her life hadn't been an easy one, and yet she handled parenthood as a single mother with a mixture of toughness and tenderness, love and law. Even her grandkids could attest to her no-nonsense approach to childrearing: my brother and I, for instance, spent more than our fair share of time consigned to a locked bedroom listening to religious records on an old stereo after getting into trouble — one her favorite methods of discipline and reform!

In her later years after I had become a pastor and had young children myself, Grandma let her guard down with me one day when we were discussing her life. I'd asked her something about her own kids when, becoming uncharacteristically emotional, she suddenly quoted an old, well-worn phrase that we've all heard. The power in that moment wasn't so much in her words, but in the depth with which she felt them. Tearing up, but with a smile still on her face, she said, "The trouble with children is that when they're not being a lump in your throat, they're being a pain in your neck."

I'm thinking about Grandma Hunt and her frank honesty with respect to rearing children because as we read through the Scriptures today and come to the end of the blessings and commands that God gives Noah and his family here in Genesis 9, I can't help but think of the long-suffering of our Lord in rearing His own wayward children in this world. I can't help but see the truth spoken by my grandmother as being apropos to the manner in which God patiently, lovingly, but frustratingly and repeatedly, tends to the men and women that were originally the crown of His creation. In nine chapters of holy history, we've become all-too-familiar with a pattern, a cycle...a rhythm if you will...of people being given the blessings of God, then blatantly and scornfully disregarding those blessings to go their own way. And while God has begun again and again with them in different ways — Adam and Eve after the Fall, Seth after Cain and Abel, and presently Noah and his family following the Flood — over time we see a growing backdrop of hollowness to what God has made hallowed. Though God starts over, and starts over, and starts over again with His people, every time it's but a matter of time before the other shoe drops. So there's a bitterness in the sweetness. There's melancholy accompanying the marvelous. God is such a loving heavenly Father toward His children and indeed, we are His children. But the problem with children is that when they're not being a lump in your throat, they're being a pain in your neck. This is something to keep in mind as we come back, for the fourth time now, to a theme that God keeps resurrecting: "And you be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it."

This seventh verse of Genesis 9 actually wraps up the section of blessings and commands given by the Lord to Noah and his family on their exit from the ark, and if you'll recall the opening verse of this chapter, this is a repetition of that command. Noah, his sons, and all generations to follow are charged — just as Adam and Eve had been originally — with filling the earth and increasing upon it greatly. God's good gift to His people in this post-Flood world, with some key differences that we've already discussed, makes the blueprint of a flourishing and thriving world a true reality again. Though God had wiped out humanity because of its sinfulness, His intent is for the world to thrive again under a new and reestablished relationship with Him.

Now — if you've been studying along with us over the past few weeks, then you already know all of this, because this is a matter God has been addressing over and over again, first promising Noah that it would come to pass and now making good on that promise. The question we want to ask and answer today before we close is this: why repeat this combination of command and blessing here in verse 7 yet another time when it was already spoken in verse 1, and even before that back in 8:17? Put simply, the repeat of this command now is important because of what came immediately before it. If you'll remember our study of verses 5-6, that portion of the passage centers on God's specific call for severe punishment in cases of murder. In verse 6 specifically, God institutes a requirement that any man or animal who murders a human being is to be put to death, and the reason given is due to man's status as an image-bearer of God. By returning here in verse 7 to the issue of expanding the human race, we see both a reemphasis, along with a second reason, for God's harsh stance against murder: rather than allow the kind of violence which had ruined the pre-Flood world, God sets a new standard to protect and facilitate the resettling of the earth.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, this is all well and good, and it sets the stage for what, in tomorrow's session, will be a beautiful covenantal promise made by the Lord to all generations. But there's one more less-than stellar matter lurking about that I'd like you to keep in mind in all of this: that disturbing pattern, that cycle...that rhythm if you will...of God's people treating as hollow what He has made hallowed. All, for the moment, is looking good. But there's that other shoe...and as sure as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, it's going to drop. It's only a matter of time. Bad news? Yes. But it shows all over again our need for Good News, and that's a stage being set as well, the construction of which will continue throughout the narrative of the entire Old Testament. We'll talk more about that in a few days' time, so stay with us as we head in that direction. Thanks so much for being here today, everyone; God's blessings to you in our risen Lord Jesus Christ, and I'll see you again soon! Take care!

Greetings

Hello, everyone! God's peace to each of you in Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, a place where we gather to study God's Word together each weekday with people from all around the world. I'm so glad you're here, and on this day that the Lord has given us to be His children and to live in His love, we continue to be hard at work in the book of Genesis. If you'll turn once again to Genesis 9, we'll pray and ask for the Lord's blessings on our time.

Prayer

Lord, we praise you for this day and ask that you help us to make the very most of it. What a blessing to come to you and to receive your Word today. Write it on our hearts and by its great living, active power, transform us by the renewing of our minds. This we ask in the precious name of Jesus, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with so many positive things being spoken by the Lord to Noah and his sons following their exit from the ark and their preparation to resettle and repopulate the earth, today's passage brings yet more good news. Our focus this session: This thing I will do.

Genesis 9:8-11

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. 11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

I went to what, at the time, was a very new, very small Christian college on the west coast. Christ College Irvine, or CCI as it was then called, had just over 300 students when I was a freshman and just over 500 students when I graduated. Today, Concordia University Irvine, as it's now known, serves over 4,200 students.

One of the blessings of a small school is that the students and faculty get to know each other. They live in community. They interact on a much more personal level than is possible at a larger university. I mention that because while at its core my association with Christ College was a contractual one — the exchange of goods and services, specifically an education, for an agreed upon sum of money — the substance thereof was much greater. I started CCI as an immature 17-year-old kid with no clue about life, and today I can tell you unequivocally that had it not been for the personal investment of my professors, who were deeply devoted to my success; the encouragement of my college president, who knew each and every student, including me, by name; and the nurturing environment created by my academic advisors, who knew my weaknesses and shepherded me through all the ups and downs of my college career, I'd have never made it through.

For me, my post-secondary education may have been the fulfilling of a contract, but for everyone at Christ College who contributed to the person I became over the course of five years and helped me to finally earn that elusive degree, it was more. For them, I truly believe it was the fulfilling of a covenant. What do I mean by that? Let's talk about it, because it has everything to do with the text we've just read, and even more, everything to do with the great grace and mercy of our Almighty God.

As we come to the Scriptures today, the term *covenant* looms large. It is central to the whole of God's relationship with Noah, with his sons...and by extension, all the way down to you and me. *Covenant*, therefore, is a critically important Scriptural concept, and so as we begin to talk about it I want us all to make sure that we understand that which constitutes it...its nature and attributes, if you will.

Dr. Bruce Shelley, a dearly loved church historian who was deeply focused on how church history relates to and informs everyday life, wrote some of the best and most wonderfully understandable descriptions of technical theological terms I've ever read. As we begin to introduce God's covenant with Noah and all the generations that would follow him, I'd like to share how Dr. Shelley describes the idea of covenant. It will serve as a great jumping off point for us today and inform our upcoming sessions in the days ahead. Dr. Shelley wrote,

In modern times we define a host of relations by contracts. These are usually for goods or services and for hard cash. The contract, formal or informal, helps to specify success and failure in these relationships.

The Lord did not establish a contract with Israel or with the church. He created a covenant. There is a difference.

Contracts are broken when one of the parties fails to keep his promise. If, let us say, a patient fails to keep an appointment with a doctor, the doctor is not obligated to call the house and inquire, "Where were you? Why didn't you show up for your appointment?" He simply goes on to his next patient and has his appointment secretary take note of the patient who failed to keep the appointment. The patient may find it harder the next time to see the doctor. He broke an informal contract.

According to the Bible, however, the Lord asks: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (Isaiah 49:15) The Bible indicates that a covenant is more like the ties of a parent to her child than it is a doctor's appointment. If a child fails to show up for dinner, the parent's obligation, unlike the doctor's, isn't canceled. The parent finds out where the child is and makes sure he's cared for. One member's failure does not destroy the relationship. A covenant puts no conditions on faithfulness. It is the unconditional commitment to love and serve.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, that says a lot, doesn't it? No conditions on faithfulness. An unconditional commitment to love and serve. A parent to a child rather than a doctor to a patient. Covenant, not contract. This is what God is speaking into the lives of His people in today's text. When we come back next time, we'll begin to unpack the many promises therein — every one of them far-reaching and faith-building! Have a terrific day everyone, and I'll look forward to seeing you then. God bless you richly in our risen Christ Jesus, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! It's Wednesday, a gift-filled day that the Lord has made for you and me, and it's my great joy to welcome you to another daily edition of EDiBS. It's our privilege as God's people to come together and study the Scriptures each day, and through our time together my prayer is always that you're growing in your faith, growing in your knowledge of God's love for you in His Son Jesus Christ, and growing in your hunger and zeal for the Scriptures themselves. Today we're continuing to give our attention to the ninth chapter of Genesis, where for the past several days we've been looking at Noah and his family as they depart from the ark and prepare to go out into the world following the Flood. Let's pray and get to it, shall we?

Prayer

Father, we thank you from the depths of our hearts for the gift of your Word, and the gift of your Spirit as well to enlighten our hearts and give us wisdom and understanding as we read. Lord, teach us today. Help us to know you more. Help us to grow in maturity as your dearly loved children. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming back to the blessing of the covenant God is making between Himself, Noah, and all living creatures in the world. Our focus: a bow in the clouds.

Genesis 9:11-17

11 "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

What's the first thing you think of when you see a rainbow? Most of you — because I'm preaching to the choir here — will immediately say, "That's easy, Pastor Paul: I think of God's promise following the Flood. He said that He would never bring such a deluge upon the earth again, and the rainbow is the visible reminder of that promise." That, of course, is the right answer, the one that we all want to have in the forefront of our minds as the people of God in Christ. But in today's world, the significance of the rainbow is hardly associated with God's Word and promise at all — certainly not as it was a generation or two ago.

Even nonreligious people in the 1950s and 1960s knew the rainbow as a biblical symbol and could describe, at least in elementary fashion, the Judeo-Christian teaching regarding God's promise not to destroy the world again via a global flood. That narrative was an established, mainstream element in our national cultural milieu. Today, however, the biblical significance of the rainbow is far down the list of the typical person on the street, if it's on the list at all. People today ascribe beauty and wonder to the rainbow and think good thoughts when they see one, but they rarely see it and think of God and His mercy. In previous eras, children were commonly taught to stop and pray the Lord's Prayer when a rainbow appeared in acknowledgement of its divine origin and meaning. Contemporary associations have more to do with the LGBTQ platform and gay pride, leprechauns and pots of gold, and of course, the song from *The Wizard of Oz*. Let's see if, over the next few minutes, we can unpack and reclaim God's rainbow for what it really is.

In our previous study session, you'll remember that God announced a special covenant promise to Noah and his sons, to all living creatures, and to all future generations. It was the vow to never again destroy the earth or wipe out all living things with a flood. Now He reveals the sign — the visible reminder, as we said a moment ago — of that covenant promise: the rainbow. God's bow, set in the sky rather than being held in His hand, is a powerful picture for us on several fronts. First, the bow is a symbol of warfare, so the symbolism of it set in the clouds as a human might hang a bow on a wall is said to represent God's peaceful intentions. Here we have the symbolic hanging up of a battle weapon after war is done. The time for peace has come. God declares that He will show forth the rainbow as a symbol of His pledge to humanity and to animals to never again send a deluge as He had before.

Second, the rainbow's expansive reach from one end of the sky to the other is also symbolic, helping us to see that this covenant indeed pertains to all living creatures, not just human beings. As Dr. Thomas Egger says in his observations on this passage, "It manifests overarching heavenly restraint and mercy against the backdrop of divine judgment. The essence of the rainbow sign is this contrast: its brilliant, sublime radiance and beauty against the dark, threatening clouds in which it appears." Dr. Egger says further that in the Flood narrative, clouds recall devastating divine judgment. The rainbow's appearance, then, is not unlike the joy and splendor of the resurrection of the Son of God after the darkness of Good Friday and the tomb.

With such powerful images before us here in the text, there's an additional note we should make regarding this passage, and that's the fact that there's an incredible amount of repetition in it. Very few places in Scripture — especially Old Testament Scripture — show God repeating Himself as much as He does here in today's reading. Every time He does so, the covenant promise He has spoken and the covenant picture He has provided to go along with it floods our minds and gives emphasis to the importance and absoluteness of what is being said. On an even more practical note, Martin Luther attributed the repetition in this passage to something a bit more simple: he felt that Noah had such great need for assurance in the face of all the trauma brought on by his journey in the ark that God kept graciously repeating Himself to assuage His servant's fears. Something worth considering to be sure!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what else should we be considering in this portion of Scripture? What should we be taking away from the announcement of this covenant? On the one hand, we would do well to remember God's ongoing and supremely patient preservation of the world in these last days, something that will continue until the Last Day. The rainbow puts that into focus, because God speaks of a second world-wide catastrophe that will come at the end of history. The first time destruction came by water, but the second and final time will be with fire. According to Jesus, that time is coming soon, and Jesus also says that its suddenness and extent will be "just as it was in the days of Noah" (Luke 17:26).

At the same time, when we see a rainbow we should always be reminded of God's faithfulness and His amazing grace. We should remember that just as God provided a way for Noah and his family to be saved in the ark, He also has provided a way for us to be saved through Jesus Christ, buried as we are with Him in Baptism in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. Noah and his family were saved from the wrath of God that came in the Flood, just as we who are in Christ are saved from the "wrath to come."

More to come on this and other topics as we head toward the backend of our week together, so be sure to say with us as we follow things through. I'm deeply grateful for each of you; be assured of my prayers, and know, as always, that our good and gracious Lord is with you! God's peace, everyone, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad you're here today for our time together, where over the next few minutes we'll be heading down the final stretch of our look at Genesis 9. Once we get through today and tomorrow we'll be moving on to Genesis 10, and soon after that we'll actually be finishing up this first portion of our study series in Genesis by concluding at the end of chapter 11. I'll have a special ministry update ready for you in the next few days to outline what's coming next in our daily study time, and I'll also be releasing some additional news about EDiBS that I'm very happy about and excited to be sharing with all of you, so be looking for it! For now, let's go the Lord together and ask for His blessing as we open the Scriptures.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we know that in your Word you only speak truth. You speak in a way that separates light and darkness, that pierces the heart...that makes the hearer wise unto salvation. We are your hearers today, and we ask that you now graciously work in our hearts and minds and help us to receive the Scripture in a way that honors you and does its work in us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 9 begins to come to an end...but it's an ending that, following all the good through the bulk of the chapter, is a disappointingly bad one. Our focus this session: family — ups and downs, curses and blessings.

Genesis 9:18-22

18 The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) 19 These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed. 20 Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. 21 He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. 22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.

Every family has its tough spots. Every family has its secrets. Every family has a virtual file folder somewhere in the recesses of its members' brains filled with incidents that have occurred over the years...many of which they wish they could undo. Such incidents shape and form each family member, sometimes for the good and sometimes not, but for better or for worse they're there. Here in God's Word, we've come upon one such incident in the family of Noah, and while there's much about it that we don't know, we know enough to see it as a problem — and a big one at that. Briefly, let's talk about it.

As we get going today, Noah's sons — Shem, Ham, and Japheth — are reintroduced here. They've been mentioned before, but now they're named again, in part to set the stage for what follows. From these three sons will come the nations of the world, and their descendants will be listed in the table of nations in the next chapter. Notice, however, that in addition to the reintroduction of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, we're also introduced to Ham's son, Canaan...and actually, he'll be mentioned several more times before we get to the end of the chapter. The reason? He figures in this family incident as well, and in a rather surprising manner at that. More on him the next time we gather. At any rate, here's the situation at present: Noah, now a farmer, plants a vineyard, drinks some of its wine, and becomes drunk. In his inebriated state, he lays naked in his tent. Enter Ham — and at the same time, enter a certain amount of mystery.

If we take the time to read things straight without embellishing them, all that today's text tells us about this incident is that Ham sees Noah's drunken nakedness and goes and tells his brothers about it. In that light, some commentators suggest that Ham's sin here is simply one of omission: of failing to help his father by covering him in his compromised state, and thus dishonoring him by that lack of respect. Yet Ham's going straight out to his brothers to announce what he's seen seems to cast doubt on his character and makes things seem a little more disingenuous on his part. Furthermore, the literal translation of the Hebrew in this section has Ham actually "telling with delight" what he saw in his father's tent. If that's the case, then it looks as if Ham is determined to mock his father. Again, though the text doesn't explicitly say so, there are inklings here of an intentional undermining and shaming of Noah as a man of God.

Other scholars believe that "what Ham did to Noah" (that's the wording we'll see when we get to verse 24 tomorrow) was something more disturbing and personal. The extremely vague nature of the passage in its own way supports this idea, since ancient literature was famously shy about describing certain shameful acts in any detail. Moreover, Noah's reaction later in the passage definitely suggests a more involved offense. Some Bible teachers suggest that Ham took advantage of his father in some way, perhaps even sexually. As disturbing as that might

seem, it's not outside the realm of possibility, and in any case, in the next section of verses Noah will condemn Ham for — again — what he "had done to him."

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, though much before us in this section of verses is without detail, here's what we can say with confidence: Ham's actions, whatever they were, were disgraceful, disrespectful and dishonoring to his father. They would bring swift and terrible consequences. In fact, if Ham's intent was to improve his own status by somehow humiliating his father, we can say that without question, it backfired. When we come back next time, Noah will actually speak a curse — the first curse spoken by a human being in Scripture — against Ham's descendants. They'll become servants to the descendants of Ham's brothers, and the outworking of it all will be felt for generations and generations...and generations beyond that. A brokenness in this family has now occurred — and it is a brokenness that will find its way into the nooks and crannies and cracks and crevices of entire nations.

Be sure to come along tomorrow as we talk more about this, because as we've now become accustomed to in our study of God's Word, it's usually when things are at their darkest that the light breaks through — and the verses to come are no exception! Have a great day everyone, and I'll look forward to seeing you then. God's blessings to you in our Lord Jesus, and take care.

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings to you in our risen Lord Jesus, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be back with you one more time before the weekend, and I hope your EDiBS week has been a beneficial one for you in your walk with our Savior. Today we'll be finishing up our look at Genesis 9, and as we saw yesterday, this is a chapter that's not ending as it began. I'm glad you're here; let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Gracious Father, please grant your people new knowledge and increasing wisdom today as they seek to learn of you from your Word. Speak to their hearts. Fortify their minds. Make them bold and confident in you, for you are the Great Deliverer of your people — the One who protects and goes before us in all things. Thank you so much for this time — help us all to glean all that we can from our Bibles today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, Genesis 9 closes on a down note because of Ham's actions against his father Noah, but upon closer look, that's not all there is to the story. Our focus: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem.

Genesis 9:23-29

23 Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. 24 When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, 25 he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers." 26 He also said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. 27 May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant." 28 After the flood Noah lived 350 years. 29 All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.

You remember the story...it's one of Grimm's fairy tales. It's sad and it's sweet and it serves its purpose well. Once there was a little old man. His eyes blinked and his hands trembled; when he ate he clattered the silverware distressingly, missed his mouth with the spoon as often as not, and dribbled a bit of his food on the tablecloth. Now he lived with his married son, having nowhere else to live, and his son's wife didn't like the arrangement.

"I can't have this," she said. "It interferes with my right to happiness." So she and her husband took the old man gently but firmly by the arm and led him to the corner of the kitchen. There they set him on a stool and gave him his food in an earthenware bowl. From then on he always ate in the corner, blinking at the table with wistful eyes.

One day his hands trembled rather more than usual, and the earthenware bowl fell and broke. "If you are a pig," said the daughter-in-law, "you must eat out of a trough." So they made him a little wooden trough and he got his meals in that.

These people had a four-year-old son of whom they were very fond. One evening the young man noticed his boy playing intently with some bits of wood and asked what he was doing. "I'm making a trough," he said, smiling up for approval, "to feed you and Mamma out of when I get big."

The man and his wife looked at each other for a while and didn't say anything. Then they cried a little. They then went to the corner and took the old man by the arm and led him back to the table. They sat him in a comfortable chair and gave him his food on a plate, and from then on nobody ever scolded when he clattered or spilled or broke things.

In God's Word today, we're in the aftermath of a great act of dishonor. Ham has disrespected his father Noah by gazing upon his nakedness and blabbing about it to his brothers. More, perhaps, has also happened, and while the text is noncommittal about it, its very noncommittedness is telling. Though we can't say for sure what occurred in the privacy of Noah's tent during what was obviously a bad night, what we can say is that the actions of Ham give the daughter-in-law from our introduction a run for her money. He has gone beyond the pale of even the lowest standard of decorum, and the vastly different actions of his brothers Shem and Japheth in response to his tasteless announcement about his father show us the degree to which Ham has transgressed appropriate boundaries. Even worse, there will be no change of heart on the part of Ham in this instance. There will be no contemplation or crying, no move to change his ways or restore his father's dignity. That task will be left to his brothers, and that's where we pick up the text today.

After hearing from Ham about what he's done, verse 23 shows us that Shem and Japheth are spurred to action. Taking a garment (probably one of Noah's) upon their shoulders, they go backwards into the tent, and without looking upon their father, they cover him and leave.

In the morning when Noah awakens, he knows what has happened. We don't know how he knows, but he does, and regardless of his source of information, his response is one that will have a far-reaching and long-term impact: Noah proceeds to curse Canaan, the youngest son of Ham. Canaan will be, says Noah, the lowest of servants to his brothers down through the ages. But as for Shem and Japheth? The pronouncement upon them is one of blessing instead.

If you'll stop with me for a moment and look at this passage from a broad, or big-picture, perspective, you'll see that there's a clear correspondence between the activities of Ham, Shem, and Japheth and the curses or blessings which ultimately follow them. Moreover, they go beyond the immediacy of the present moment: the characters of these three individuals and their respective destinies will go on to be corporately reflected in the nations that emerge from them — something we'll begin to see in the next chapter. Shem and Japheth honor God when they act together to preserve the honor of their father; Ham dishonors both his father and God by relishing the humiliation of Noah. Ham's family, therefore, is cursed, while Shem and Japheth are blessed. When we come back on Monday we'll be spending a few minutes on why Canaan bears the brunt of the curse spoken by Noah in today's text rather than Ham, but for now we have an especially important point to get to as we close for the day.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up, in many ways these last verses of Genesis 9 are verses that bring with them a great sadness. In spite of the gift of a new beginning and the promise of divine blessing in a post-Flood world, things have already gone down the tubes again, compliments of — who else? — man. And yet in the midst of the sadness comes yet another assertion, somewhat hidden but wholly present, about some much-needed Good News: a coming Savior who will one day arrive to redeem humanity from its sinfulness.

How does that promise enter the picture today? While Ham's family line — specifically that which emanates from his son, Canaan — will now be under God's curse, Shem will be the line through whom the Messiah will come, and Japheth will find blessing in union with that line. Since Shem's line is the one that leads to Abraham and the Israelites, this is the first hint that God will make Shem's people His people. Meaning what? Meaning that this not only makes Shem the ancestor of the nation of Israel, it means that Shem's ancestral line will produce the promised Savior, Jesus Christ. There is yet a remnant. There is yet Light, shining in the midst of darkness. There is hope ensconced in the seemingly hopeless. Indeed, deliverance is coming, and God has seen to it with His own mighty hand.

Thanks again for being here with me today, everyone; have a wonderful weekend, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon. The joy of the Lord be your abiding strength; do take care.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace to you in our risen Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. On this opening day of our week together we're doing what we always do by working our way through the Word of God together, and today finds us in a brief transition session between Genesis 9 and 10 to connect some dots and prepare for what's coming up later in the week. I'm sure glad you're here today — let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father in heaven, we ask that today that you draw near to the cries of our hearts; cries for mercy and restoration, cries for healing, cries for provision, cries for comfort. We take heart in the promise that you are not a God far off, but that you have drawn near to us in your own Son, who loves us and gave Himself for us. Bless our study of the Scriptures, we pray in Christ's holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're opening our new week by spending some time delving into the reason Canaan — Ham's son — seems to bear the brunt of the curse spoken by Noah in the aftermath of Ham dishonoring him. Our focus: a prophetic pronouncement.

Genesis 9:24-25

24 When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, 25 he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers."

There's a book out there — out of print now and somewhat unneeded in the age of the Internet — called *The World's Worst Predictions*. It lists some of history's all-time worst prophetic goofs, and though you can find hundreds of such lists today through a simple Google search, I still like some of the ones mentioned in that book. You're probably familiar with most of them:

King George II said in 1773 that the American colonies had little stomach for revolution.

An official of the White Star Line, speaking of the firm's newly built flagship, the Titanic, launched in 1912, declared that the ship was unsinkable.

In 1939 The New York Times said the problem of TV was that people had to glue their eyes to a screen, and that the average American wouldn't have time for it.

An English astronomy professor said in the early 19th century that air travel at high speed would be impossible because passengers would suffocate.

Predictions, as we all know, are a squirrely subject. They're often just an educated guess on one end of the spectrum, while on the other end they can end up being nothing more than an exercise in dart throwing at a very big map on a very broad wall. Sometimes they turn out to be laughable in their prognostications. Other times, they can be eerily accurate. And then there are those very few predictions in a category all by themselves: predictions which in actuality are not predictions at all, but statements of impending certainty...statements in the realm of the prophetic. As we come to God's Word today, we are dealing in that last category — the category of the prophetic — and when we understand that fact, what in many ways can be a rather puzzling portion of Scripture is suddenly brought into much sharper focus.

Here, then, is the great, grand question of the moment: why did Noah curse Canaan for the sin of Ham?

Answer: Noah's words regarding Canaan are more of a prophecy than a curse (and in the case of Shem and Japheth, more a prophecy than a blessing).

What is Noah actually doing? He's painting a picture of the coming course of world history through his sons. He's speaking an oracle under Divine inspiration, foretelling the bearing and trajectory of the nations that will arise from Ham, Shem, and Japheth. Ham's sin against his father is not simply an action in isolation, but a mindset, an attitude, and a character trait that is continually on display — something that will not so much be taught, but caught by his offspring. Thus, when Noah says "Cursed is Canaan," he's not in the strictest sense targeting Canaan as an individual. He's not putting a voodoo-like spell on his grandson so that he'll live his life as a lost and subservient individual. But Noah *is* saying that in the case of Ham and Canaan, like for most of us and our family lines in life, the apple won't fall far from the tree. Noah *is* saying that, sadly, Canaan will reflect the moral flaws of his father. And Noah is *also* saying that down the road, the Canaanites as a people will manifest these same tendencies in their society. Ham's sin against his father, as many of you know, would eventually show forth in a broader sense. The corruption of the Canaanites through the generations would become well known through things

like their orgiastic, sensual idol worship, their cult prostitution, and yes, the practice of homosexuality.

Because of these things, the prophetic curse being pronounced in this text is that Canaan — and his descendants too — will become the lowest of slaves, or "servants of servants" to Shem, Japheth, and their descendants. And that, of course, is precisely what happens: much later in history, the people occupying the promised land — the Canaanites — will be routed by Israel. Many times throughout Israel's history, in fact, the Canaanites will be in conflict with and serve the Israelites — who are the descendants of Shem. And more to the point, the Canaanites will always, eventually, find themselves on the losing side of their conflicts with the people of Israel.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, we need to say one more thing about these two verses. In earlier generations, prejudiced, bigoted people regarded the descendants of Canaan as black people from Africa, and they used the curse on Canaan to justify slavery. But black people didn't come from Canaan at all; Canaan was the father of the near-eastern peoples. Canaan's descendants were those people dwelling in the land of Canaan when Israel conquered that land under Joshua. Far from the terrible misinterpretation and misappropriation of Scripture that many of our ancestors used in seeking to justify slavery, the prophecy of this text was actually fulfilled under Joshua and Solomon, both of whom put Canaan's descendants in forced service to Israel.

When we come back next time and move into our examination of Genesis 10, what we've learned today will help us as we look to the Table of Nations and begin fitting the pieces of our world together, and I'm glad we had the opportunity to talk this through a bit in our time together today. Thanks for your time, everyone; God bless you richly in our Savior Jesus, and I'll look forward to seeing you again tomorrow!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich grace and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to be with you as we come together to share the joy of God's Word, and as we head back to the Scriptures today we're opening to the beginning of Genesis 10. Take a moment, grab your Bible, and join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Father, we praise you for your loving-kindness and your deep, abiding love for us. Thank you for your goodness and mercy! Please bless us as we study your holy Word today. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

Getting things started today, Genesis 10 is an astounding portion of Holy Scripture greatly lauded by Bible scholars the world over because of the wealth of information it contains. It has a similar reputation in secular circles, being almost universally recognized as an astonishing piece of ancient literature in general. Our focus this session: The Table of Nations — an introduction.

Genesis 10:1

These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

When I lived on the farm in Missouri, I had two ponds on my property. On the smaller of the two I loved to stand on the bank and skip rocks. In fact, with the right stone, the right grip, and the right throw, I could skip a rock from one shoreline to the other. On the one hand, the pond was large enough to make that achievement a challenging one. On the other hand, it was small

enough that when a rock would bounce from spot to spot on top of the water and create those outward-moving, concentric ripples that slowly expanded and moved toward the shore, in time those ripples would all intersect and coalesce into one before they found their way to the pond's edge. After a half-hour or so of skipping — which was usually my limit because my arm would get sore — there wouldn't be any spot left on the water that was void of impact. The presence of each passing stone had left its mark, and the result was a shimmering surface full of movement and light and life.

I'm thinking of my rock-skipping pond in the Ozarks today for a specific reason. As we come to Genesis 10, to the post-Flood world and its repopulation via the sons of Noah and their descendants, to the pattern of resettlement that they created, and to the impact they collectively made upon the planet — an impact still being felt and ultimately perpetuated to this very day — what we have before us is a shimmering sea of humanity, circles ever expanding, paths ever intersecting, and people ever coalescing into this group and that group and still another group, on and on and on. Each one is making a splash. Each one is leaving his or her mark. Each one contributes to the movement of life in this world, and no corner of it has gone untouched.

It's a little befuddling to think about, but it all started, or more accurately, started again, with Noah, his family, and his family's family...and Genesis 10 is that very special chapter in the Bible that tells us the places and the people from which all those ripples began emanate so many years ago.

As we come to this new chapter, I want to say just a few things today for the purpose of laying a foundation, and then we'll spend the remainder of the week building on it.

Briefly, and in bullet form, please note the following:

First, chronologically speaking, Genesis 10 should actually be *following* Genesis 11 — the description of the confusion at Babel — rather than preceding it. It's a bit perplexing, but chapter 11 explains the *reason* for the dispersion of the nations, while chapter 10 describes the *results* of that dispersion. Why do we have the information in chapter 10 first? Because of the theological aim at hand: that of showing the reader of Genesis the narrowing down of the godly and Messianic line to Abram. We'll have more to say on that in a few sessions, but for now it's simply something to keep in mind so that we don't get tripped up.

Second, Genesis 10, as some of you have already noticed, will be listing Noah's sons for us in a different order than we've previously seen. Why? Because the order in which they're treated here reflects the purpose and the emphasis of the text. Japheth, for example, is dealt with first because he's least important to the theme being developed. Ham is discussed next because of the important part the Canaanites will play in Israel's history. And what about Shem? Shem is mentioned last because he's actually the principle person of the chapter. He's the one through whom the "Seed of the woman" will come; through Shem, the Messianic line will be preserved. Again, more on that in the coming days.

Finally, we should note one more thing as we come to this new chapter: like our first two observations today, the Table of the Nations as given here has a selectiveness about it which is subservient to the purpose of the account. In other words, not every nation that *could* be mentioned *is* mentioned. Instead, the only nations described here are those who will play a key role in the development and history of Israel.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, it's so interesting to me that scholars of every stripe and in multiple academic disciplines are in general agreement about so much in this tenth chapter of Genesis. It truly stands alone in ancient literature, and it truly stands up to scrutiny as an astonishingly accurate document. Nowhere else — not in sacred literature and not in secular literature either — do we have such a comprehensive treatment of the distribution of humanity in a genealogical framework...and the wise soul will see that God's hand is at work in it from top to bottom. When we come back tomorrow we'll delve into this some more, so be sure to come along and be part of the conversation. You're such a blessing to me, everyone, and I thank you. God's peace, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Christ's peace to each of you today, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. I hope your day is going well, that you're aware of the presence of our Lord Jesus in your life, and that you're knowing the blessing of being able to come to Him with everything that's going on in your world right now. What a gracious and loving Savior we have, and what a great reminder to know that we can cast all of our burdens upon Him because He cares for us. I'm glad to be joining you for Bible study today; as we pray together, let's ask that God's Word will do its good and gracious work in our lives so that we can be all we've been created to be.

Prayer

Almighty God, you are great and worthy of praise. You are faithful and true. You are the One who looks upon us with compassion and who comes to us in our time of need. As we pray today, we have such peace in knowing that there is nothing about us that you do not know, that you cannot handle, and that you will not forgive and make right. We confess our sin, Lord, and we ask to be made clean...and we also ask that through your Word today you will speak your power, your peace, and your strength into our lives. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Savior and Lord, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our first dive into the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 brings us to a rather startling, but extremely important, fact. Our focus this session: [Start Here](#).

Genesis 10:1 (Part 2)

These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

When my daughter, Taylor, was a youngster, she was the creator of many make-believe worlds. I've shared some of them with you over the years, and many of you have written to me about

them with knowing smiles and similar memories about your own kids (children always keep things interesting, don't they!). What was most interesting to me about my daughter's various creations was their intricate familial details. Every one of her 125+ stuffed animals, for example, not only had a name but a distinct family line several generations in depth. Everything in her room was somehow related to everything else, and she could tell you the genealogical history of each member of her menagerie in exacting detail. From the largest stuffed bear to the smallest polyester-stitched ladybug, her worlds were ultimately worlds of family, and the interconnectedness of the creatures that inhabited those worlds gave them an air of authenticity. To this day, we talk about many of the stuffed animals from her childhood days as though they were real — and I suppose that in a manner of speaking, they were.

As we move into the tenth chapter of Genesis today and begin to talk about the generations of the sons of Noah, we've come face to face with an astonishing fact...not about whimsical, imaginary creatures in a make-believe world, but about very real creatures in a very real world. Every ancient nation, its modern counterpart — truly, the lineage of all the earth's people to this very day — ultimately arises from this passage. Here is where the seeds of the nations are sown. Here is the point from which Noah, his sons, and his grandsons go forth. This is the chapter of God's Word that shows why and how everyone is in some way related. Indeed, the genealogical history of almost every major people group on the face of the earth, from the biggest to the smallest, starts here.

What do we find when we begin to examine these things? More than anything, we find that this world, our world, is a world about family. It manifests, whether people want it to or not, an unbreakable interconnectedness. What we have before us here in Scripture is incontrovertibly authentic. And while the records are not totally complete — remember, not every person or nation that *could* be mentioned *is* mentioned — the broad nature of the 32 verses in Genesis 10 achieves its purpose: it shows us the various tribes which came from the major descendants of Noah, and how those tribes spread to shape the world.

Wrapping Up

When we come back tomorrow, we're going to spend our time briefly going over the list of Noah's descendants that are mentioned in this chapter — especially Noah's son Shem and his offspring — along with the places they went and the nations they formed as a result. Chronicling and cataloging these men and their exploits will put quite a bit of meat on the bones of what we've been studying over the past couple of weeks, so you'll want to be sure and come along for the discussion.

Speaking of our previous study sessions, as we wrap things up for the day, this would actually be a great time to go to your Bible and back up a little bit. Re-read the narrative of the Flood from the beginning of Genesis 6 up to the beginning of chapter 10. There's a flow there that, if you missed it the first time through, you'll definitely see now. How amazing — and more than that, how wonderful — to see God leading His servant Noah in such a gentle, assuring, and encouraging manner through such a difficult time. How powerful it is to look back on promises given and see them now as promises fulfilled. And how telling it is that even after several stumbles along the way — because sin, of course, is ever-present since the tragedy of the Fall — the greatest Promise of all is still intact and on its way to being delivered. A Redeemer is coming; a Redeemer who will finally set things right. His way has not been blocked, nor will it be — and that's Good News, sorely needed in our world today.

Thanks for your time everyone! I'll look forward to seeing you soon, and in the meantime, God bless you richly with His peace in our Savior Jesus!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's peace to you in Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. It's a great day to be together as we head toward the weekend...a weekend of worship and service in our local churches, of dedicated and much-needed family time, and of continued remembrance of God's mighty presence with us as His children. Today we're back to our look at Genesis 10, but as we open our Bibles and go there, many of us may find ourselves put off by the long list of seemingly irrelevant, hard-to-pronounce names that awaits us. Because that's the case, I want to use our time together today to share some super-wonderful tips I learned from another pastor about how to get all we can out of such lists when they pop up in Scripture. These points have helped me a lot over the years, and I know they'll help you too — especially at this juncture in our current series! Let's pray and get to it.

Prayer

God, we ask with sincere hearts that you would speak to us today through your Holy Word. Grant us your blessing. Help us to genuinely meditate on the Scriptures, that we may be like trees planted by streams of water, with roots to go deep. We love you, and we thank you for this time. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, as noted we're preparing to look at an overview of the whole of Genesis 10, a big-picture snapshot of the text that will help us to make sense of all that's there. The question is, how do we do it? Our focus this session: names...lots and lots of names!

SO — Genesis 10. Have you looked at it lately? It's a chapter in God's Word that we've come to after several months of studying earlier chapters of the Book. Genesis 10 contains 32 verses. Not bad. Those 32 verses are divided into three parts. Also not bad — not bad at all. But wait a minute: within those three divisions and 32 verses, *seventy* names are given which describe the heads of families, tribes, or nations from Noah's three sons. Fourteen of the names are from Japheth, 30 are from Ham, and 26 are from Shem. That *is* bad. Bad, at least, if your tendency as a student of Scripture is one of preferring stories over statistics and narratives over names.

Lists of names in God's Word, whether of people, places, things, or any combination thereof, can be beyond boring. They typically read like a phone book, and are about as exciting. They dry out your eyes. They fog your brain. Instead of piquing your interest, they more often put you to sleep. They're a hard row to hoe. Worse still, such lists are found all through the Bible, like here in Genesis 10 for example. Sure, they're there for a reason, but they're just so tedious. That being the case, how should we read them...or should we even bother?

I'll be the first one to admit that lists of names are a less-than favorite topic of study for me as a pastor. Years ago, however, a fellow pastor spoke at a ministry conference I was attending and shared his own struggle — along with his eventual victory. Here are seven strategies that helped him, and ever since I wrote them down, they've helped me too. I pick one to use each time I encounter a boring people list. Are you ready? Here we go:

1. Scan the passage for familiar names. When I find a name I recognize, I stop and remember that person's story. Because we're both in God's family, that person is in my story too. The goal: celebrate the people I know in God's story.

2. Read a few verses slowly and go deep. Usually, I only choose two or three verses at a time. First, I have a go at saying each name. Then I check cross-references in the margins and notes of my Bible to learn where else those names turn up. The goal: discover something new about a person God wants me to remember.

3. Speed-read the whole thing; surf the text. When I use this method I don't actually read the names; I just slur past them and try to "feel" the flow of the passage. Some lists have little or no cadence, but some of the genealogies, especially, almost sing themselves. It's wonderful to experience that rhythm in the text! The goal: "sense" the poetry; "feel" the history.

4. Skim the section looking for an unexpected tidbit. For example, in Genesis 36:24 we're told of a certain individual: "... This is the Anah who discovered the hot springs in the desert while he was grazing the donkeys of his father Zibeon." How random! Why is something like that even in the Bible? That's a tidbit worth tackling in my opinion. If humble Anah is known and commemorated in God's Word for something that happened while he was faithfully tending his donkeys, it reminds me that with God a person can become a hero by just doing his or her job in the desert. The goal: find the unexpected and reflect on it.

5. Read with the aid of an expert. That is, check a Bible commentary. Scholars who study the names and make connections across the whole Bible often give me gems, gems which I usually then pass on to all of you. The goal: gain new insight.

6. Study one of the places named. I mentioned it a moment ago, but many of the lists in the Bible include geography. When that's the case, I'll choose the first place name I don't know and find it on a map, or sometimes I'll even Google Earth it. Barring that, I might pull one of my Bible dictionaries off the shelf and research it that way. The goal: become aware of a real place.

7. Pray it instead of read it. I don't do this quite as often when I approach a list as I might do some of the other things I've mentioned, but this is a wonderful way to approach a difficult or seemingly irrelevant portion of Scripture. Read the text, then stop and pray. Thank God that He loves people enough to preserve ancient lists like the one you're reading. Thank Him that you're

part of His family and that your name is written in His eternal book together with so many of the names you're reading on the pages of your Bible. Then, turn the page and keep reading. The goal: embrace the purpose of the text whether I read the words or not.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, these seven things aren't just great for lists in the Bible; adjusted for different settings, they're excellent things to do with all parts of God's Word! Anything that helps us to focus, to learn, to grow, and to more deeply appreciate the power of God's living and active Word is a win for us as followers of Christ, and my prayer today as we head into the weekend is that what I've shared with you today will help you the next time you encounter something in your Bible that gives you pause. On that note, happy list reading, everyone! I trust these tips will help you stay awake when we come back to Genesis 10. ;-)

God's rich and abundant blessings to each of you today in our risen Lord Jesus, and I'll see you again next time. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and God's blessings of joy and peace to each of you as we come to another week of Bible study together. It's always great to be with you as we gather in Christ's name and place ourselves under His Word, and today we'll be using our time to finish our look at Genesis 10 and the long list of names it contains. Let's turn there in our Bibles and go before our great God in prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your gracious presence – your promise to be with us always. We thank you for your strong right arm – for defending us and leading us through life with your strength and your protective covering. We thank you most of all today for sending your Son, our Savior – the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again to bring victory over sin, death, and all the powers of hell. We praise you for, and we are humbled by, your lavish, forgiving, saving love. Draw us into all that you have for us today in the Scriptures. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our final look at Genesis 10 will be something of an overview and a summary wrapped into one. While we'll be looking at the chapter as a whole, we'll just re-read verse 1 to get our minds moving and on track with the text. For time's sake (and to avoid the droning sound of an American pastor badly pronouncing dozens and dozens of Hebrew names) I've printed the entire chapter in the written section of the study for you to consult as we go. Our focus this session: the resettling of a post-Flood world.

Genesis 10:1-32, Final

1 These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

2 The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. 3 The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. 4 The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and

Dodanim. 5 From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations.

6 The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. 7 The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. 8 Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord." 10 The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. 11 From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and 12 Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. 13 Egypt fathered Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, 14 Pathrusim, Casluhim (from whom the Philistines came), and Caphtorim. 15 Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth, 16 and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, 17 the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, 18 the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites dispersed. 19 And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. 20 These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

21 To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. 22 The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. 23 The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. 24 Arpachshad fathered Shelah; and Shelah fathered Eber. 25 To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg,[c] for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. 26 Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 27 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 28 Obal, Abimael, Sheba, 29 Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. 30 The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. 31 These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

32 These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

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Here in the United States, my last name isn't all that uncommon, but it's not an everyday name either. Because of that, I've gotten used to questions about it through the years. In the church body to which I belong, for example, there aren't too many Starks serving as church workers, and so when I meet people in various congregations around the country I'm often asked if I'm related to "those other Starks." Then there are the questions I get about Stark City, Missouri. Since I lived in the Ozarks for 10 years, folks in my neck of the woods often wondered if I was from that far southwest corner of the state. The one other inquiry that comes my way on a regular basis is whether I have any connection to Stark Brothers Nursery, that great Midwestern company founded in 1816 and famous for its fruit trees. While having gone through its share of difficulties in the past 30 years, I'm happy to report that Stark Brothers is still in business today. So — am I related to those growers of trees, or those founders of cities, or those workers in churches across our land? The answer is that genealogy isn't one of my hobbies, and I've never spent much time researching my family name. But I've been told over the years by various members of my family who do engage in that kind of research that, far-flung and distantly connected though we are, most of us Starks in the United States do come from a common

family line. How fascinating to think that each of us, whatever our last name, has a similar kind of story to tell!

As we come back to God's Word one final time today in the tenth chapter of Genesis, we're doing so remembering that this is a chapter about families...and not just closely connected families who share names and cities and common parents, but truly, all families, including your family and my family. Why? Because every family that occupies a place in this world has lineage that ultimately goes back to what has been described for us in this chapter. The human repopulation of the earth in the days following the Great Flood started here with the generations of the sons of Noah, and in a way, it continues to perpetuate to this very day. Far-flung and distantly connected though we are, each of us has roots going back to one of these family lines.

This chapter is divided into three parts: verses 1-5, verses 6-20, and verses 21-31, with a postscript in verse 32. The structure here reflects what amounts to the three-fold division of humanity following the Flood, per the three sons of Noah and their offspring. Here's a rundown of how it all plays out.

Within these three divisions (excepting Nimrod, whom I'll do a brief sidebar about in a moment), seventy names are given to us in the text describing the heads of families, tribes, or nations from Noah's three sons. Seventy, by the way, is a significant number which symbolizes largeness or completion, something which helps us to see this list as comprehensive in its representation. At any rate, here — as I first mentioned on Friday — are the way the numbers are divvied up in the text:

14 of the names are from Japheth;
30 are from Ham;
26 are from Shem.

Why are there only 14 names in Japheth's line compared to about double the number of names in the lines of Ham and Shem? It goes back to what we talked about in an earlier session: the subdivisions are traced further in Ham and in Shem because those are the lines which are of importance as Moses writes and prepares us for the coming events in the history of Shem.

Remember also, if you will, that the names given to us here in chapter 10 are an intentionally selective list. This table of nations doesn't include every descendant of Noah and his sons; only those germane to the distinct and purposeful message that Moses is conveying to us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. While there's an incredible amount of material to wade through here, the main purpose as Moses puts it together for his readers — including you and me — is actually a very clear one. The divisions of the chapter, in fact, are laid out as they are to help us plot it out.

For instance, there's a break in the genealogy in verses 8-12, where Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord, is mentioned. Nimrod was not good people...and his inclusion here is of prime importance to Israel's history because it explains the racial and spiritual origins of Assyria and Babylon, who would later conquer God's people. Going further, verses 6-20 mention the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Canaanites, Israel's most bitter and influential neighbors. All of it, however, leads to the end of the chapter, where verses 21-31 list for us the elect line of Shem, which overlaps with the more specific lineage of the most prominent of Shem's descendants, Eber...the father of Peleg... *the forefather of Abram*. Shem's family is important because they

are *the* family, the focal family, of which the Bible is all about. From Shem's family line will come the promised Messiah — the very Savior of the world.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping up for the day, I know that what we have before us in this chapter is long and convoluted and difficult to comprehend. Hundreds of doctoral theses and more than a few books have been written detailing every single name and affiliation that's mentioned in this portion of God's Word, and all of those — or most of them, anyway — add to our understanding of how everything fits. But it's also easy to get lost in the weeds and miss the forest for the trees. So perhaps the best way to summarize this passage is simply to say that these divisions of mankind, recorded for us as they are here in Genesis 10, are designed to show us how God preserves the promise of the coming of His Anointed One to save the world from sin. The assurance that Jesus will come, and that He will come to find lost people and save them, is paramount here. This will be done through the line of Shem. To be sure, all of the different linguistic, genetic, and ethnic divisions that make up the diversity of our world today are wonderful aspects of the text to meditate upon as well...but the most important thing we can look upon and embrace here is the ongoing faithfulness of the Lord God Almighty to make a Way for His people. That's what makes this passage about families so sweet: God, all along, is planning to adopt us as His own.

I'll look forward to being with you again next time, everyone — I hope you have a terrific day in the embrace of our Savior Jesus Christ, and I'll be praying for you to rest in His peace. Take care, and the joy of the Lord be your abiding strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. Today is an exciting one for me, because it's a day for ministry updates...a day to share what's been going on with EDiBS behind the scenes, what's coming up in the days ahead with respect to our study schedule, and what new things you can expect in other areas of the ministry as we work to expand our reach with the message of Christ. Over the next several days we'll be coming to the end of the first part of our series on Genesis, so today is the right time to make the aforementioned announcements. I'm sure glad you're here to share the time with me today; I'll be trying to pack quite a bit into next couple of minutes, so let's pray and get to it.

Prayer

Lord, thanks so much for this day...for creating it and giving us a place in it to belong to you, to walk in your ways, and to know your love for us in Christ! Help us to see the hours that you give us as a gift, and help us by your grace to make the very most of each one. Bless us today as we speak of your kingdom, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, I'll be breaking our ministry news into three categories. Our focus this session: Place, Presence, and Practicality.

Psalm 127:1

Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain.

EDiBS, as most of you know, has always been a rather modest venture. We've never "gone big or gone home" so to speak. We're not innovators for innovation's sake. We don't have thirty-seven branches of ministry with thirty-seven staff members or a fancy office phone system with numbers you can press to reach different departments. We don't have different departments — and for that matter, we don't even have an office phone! While that's about to change (part of today's bundle of announcements), my point is simple: since January of 2007 when we began our work, we've always been focused on one thing, the thing we feel called to do — sharing God's Word in a way that's faithful to the text and sharing it in a way that will help people to grow in Christ.

That said, we do from time to time take steps forward in how we carry out the functions of our ministry, and we do take seriously the need to keep reaching out to new people and finding more effective ways to share the message of Christ with a world in need of hearing Him.

To that end, today I have a few new forward steps to announce, and as I said a moment ago, I'm excited to share them with you.

First and foremost, the biggest news of all is that EDiBS has moved — and not only have we moved, we've moved to our own permanent space! In late spring we closed escrow on a property in the city of Brunswick, Georgia, and over the past couple of months we've been in the process of repairing and outfitting the little house there for our ministry operations. Now, as we prepare to enter the month of October, EDiBS officially has a new home!

Brunswick is a small, working class, blue collar port town on the Georgia coast. Our new ministry headquarters sits right between the entrance to St. Simons Island on the north and Jekyll Island on the south, and we're located just outside the commercial district in Old Town Brunswick. As you can see by the Before and After pictures I've included today, our community is a changing one, still gritty with areas of blight, but also rich with opportunity. With the need for urban renewal here, there's the parallel need for spiritual renewal, and so I'm eager to find what God may have for me to do as I look to serve my neighbors in the name of Christ. I'll have more to say about our new ministry home soon — including address changes and new mailing instructions for gifts and correspondence — so be watching for information in the days to come.

The second piece of ministry news today is the announcement of a major refreshing and redesign of all our online platforms. Beginning in October you'll begin to see a new, robust social media presence with regular Facebook and Instagram posts that will encourage you in your faith and help you to share that encouragement with others. Soon after, we'll be rolling out a completely redesigned website, in part because our current iteration is the online equivalent of a bucket of rusty bolts, but mostly because we're seeking to make it better for you. It will have a cleaner look, be easier to navigate, and include new features to help you grow in and share your faith. The last piece of our online retooling is something I'm especially excited about: a new Youtube channel where we'll be uploading short, encouraging videos three times a week aimed at helping people focus on the higher things in life. It's a way for us to share Christ's love with a very different demographic than that which makes up our EDiBS audience, and so I'm praying for some great traction with that new endeavor. I'll announce the launch of our Youtube presence very soon!

With Place and Presence out of the way, let me close our time today by talking a little bit about Practicality, because we have several things coming down the pike in that regard that will be shaping the ministry, and your experience with the ministry, for the better.

First, I want to announce that following the conclusion of our present series in Genesis — chapters 1-11, or the "first fourth" of the book as it were — I'm thrilled to say that we'll be going back to the Gospels for the first time in a long time. As we launch into October, we'll also be launching into the Gospel according to John. The last time we studied John together was ten years ago, and I'm excited to go back to it and share both its familiar truths and many new insights with you along the way. John is one of the very best portions of God's Word to work through for people new to the faith or exploring the claims of Christianity, so this is definitely a series you'll want to be inviting your friends and loved ones to be a part of.

Second, on more of a housekeeping note but still in the realm of excitement (at least for me!), we've invested in new accounting and management software for the ministry, and while that's certainly going to help things on our end, it will be helping you too — principally with regard to

donor correspondence and receipts for your tax deductible gifts to the ministry. Beginning in October, all donations earmarked for EDiBS, whether by mail or via PayPal, will be generating receipts on the day they come in. If you give via the mail, the receipt will be mailed; if you give via PayPal, the receipt will be emailed. Along with that, we'll soon be announcing a new phone number for the ministry so that you'll be able to more easily get in touch with us. Again — watch for that special information, coming soon!

That's pretty much a wrap for our announcements today, everyone — there's a lot going on, and by God's grace and blessing, it's all good. I'm so thankful to Him and to all of you for the work I'm able to take part in through EDiBS, and as always, I promise to make every effort in presenting God's Word to you in truth, in purity, and with integrity. Have a great day, and I'll look forward to getting back to the Scriptures with you tomorrow. Until then, take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich peace to you in the One who was, and is, and is to come, and welcome to another daily session of EDiBS. Today is Wednesday (*NOTE: today is Thursday, 10 September 2020. This is an archival study session.*), and at this middle point in our week together we're opening our Bibles up to the 11th chapter of Genesis...the final chapter in this first portion of our series on the first book of the Bible. I'm so glad that you're here, and my prayer is that our Lord will strengthen your heart and quiet you with His love today. Take a moment, find your spot, and then join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you said to us that you would give us peace – peace not like the world knows or can give, but peace that comes from you and is not of this world. We desire that peace today with such longing. Have mercy and pour into our lives through and through, in our hearts and our minds, that perfect and abiding heavenly peace. Do so as you teach us today by your Word and Spirit. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 11 begins with one of the most well-known narratives of Old Testament history. Our focus: a people, a city, and a tower.

Genesis 11:1-4

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

During my childhood it was Tinker Toys, Lincoln Logs, those brightly-colored multi-shaped wooden blocks, and erector sets. By the time my kids came along, Legos had become the big thing. Today it seems to be a mixture of old and new, with Legos still holding court but all those other sets holding their own kind of sway. Regardless of the age or era, however, one thing common to almost every child in his or her growing up years is building — and usually, the bigger the better.

As a kid, I was always fascinated with the account that we have today in God's Word. What did that tower look like? How tall did they get it before God put the kibosh on everything and scattered the people? What on earth possessed them to try something so foolish? And yet, even with all those thoughts running through my head, I have to admit that my biggest and most consuming thought of all was, "Man, how cool it would be to go to the top!"

And that, of course, is today's problem in a nutshell!

As we come to the events before us in the text here at the beginning of Genesis 11, we're probably about 100 years or so post-Flood on the timeline. We can't be completely certain of the date, but if we plot things out and assume that what occurred here happened around the time of Peleg's birth, we're in that 100-year ballpark. What's the setting? The ever-multiplying descendants from the ark, slowly migrating west, have stopped on a plain in the land of Shinar — the land which will become known as Babylon — and have made a momentous decision. They have, all together as one unified human race, decided that in this place they will come together to build a great city and an even greater tower, stretching all the way to the heavens. They're serious too...no regular sun-dried brick or stacked stone here like would typically be used; only bricks that have been fired and then set with mortar. It's the strongest way to build... heavy duty stuff. The plans here are for permanence.

The stated reasons for this are made clear for us in the text. First, we're told that they want to make a name for themselves. Essentially, they want to declare their significance and importance as inhabitants of the earth. They want to assert their self-perceived sense of power. They're desiring a place in which they can fashion their own fame. There's a self-glory here.

But hold on a minute. Don't buy all the swagger hook line and sinker, and why? Because when we look at the second part of their stated reason for building this great monument to self, we're told that they're staking their claim here and putting down roots because they don't want to be dispersed over the face of the whole earth. Ohhhh. So that's it. And "it" changes everything.

Let's ask ourselves a few questions today. First, who is distinctly *not* mentioned anywhere in these first four verses of the chapter? God is not mentioned. Tuck that into your hat for a moment and we'll come back to it. Second, why the insistence on building with such strong materials? Perhaps to protect against attack...but who would attack them? Humanity is presently all together as one. Third, if these people are intent on making a name for themselves, for whom are they making it? Again, humanity is presently all together as one. And finally, if these people are so great as they say, so self-reliant and capable, why would they fear being dispersed over the face of the earth?

The answer to every one of these questions goes back the fact that God is not mentioned here. God is not mentioned here because the people are in rebellion against Him. It's not just that they've shrugged off His command from chapter 9 to spread across the earth and resettle it — which in itself is an act of willful disobedience — but in the years following the Flood, they've gone their own way and sought once again to excommunicate the Lord from every aspect of their lives. This planned public works project of wonderful buildings and parks and malls and trendy restaurants and whatever else they have in mind — including that really big tower that will reach to the heavens — is an intentional thumbing of the nose at the One who created them. They are desiring to replace Almighty God with themselves.

And yet if you read the text well, what you will clearly see permeating the whole thing is fear: fear that in spite of this grand plan to glorify themselves, in spite of the grand plan to exceed the standards of every existing building code once construction starts, and in spite of their perceived idea that there is power in numbers and that their unity as one people with one language will thwart God's divine will, God will still somehow come onto the scene and thwart their will

instead. They say they're preparing to make a name for themselves. But their actions show that what they're really preparing for, even if they don't quite realize it yet, is a holy siege — one that will break them and bring an end to their folly.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the opening of this chapter shows us the continuation of a pattern that we've seen throughout our look at Genesis. The same arrogant pride that inspired Adam and Eve to want to be like God back in chapter 3 and the same godlessness that propelled Cain to build his city back in chapter 4 and the same evil that gripped “every intention of the thoughts of man's heart continually” prior to God's sending of the Great Deluge in chapter 6 is once again in evidence here. Here we have a people who are filled with enmity toward God, whose stated purpose is to glorify themselves. What will come of it all? When we come back next time we'll talk about it!

Thanks for your time today everyone; Christ's joy and peace to you and yours, and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's joy and peace to you on this Friday in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to another edition of EDiBS. On this last day of our week together we find ourselves beginning to come down the homestretch of our time in the book of Genesis, drawing close now to the end of chapter 11 where we'll break for a period of time before picking up the next portion of the book in a future series. That said, we're steadily making progress as we zero in on the entrance of Abram onto the scene... the man whose life not only occupies almost a third of the entire book of Genesis, but whose family line will eventually bring to us the promised Messiah. It's great to have you along today; would you pray with me as we get things going?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we are weak but you are strong, and we take great comfort in the fact that we belong to you, having been redeemed by all that you've done for us in your life, your death, and your resurrection. Grant us the blessing of growth in our faith today as we open your Word. In your holy and precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Though the people on the plain of Shinar have given themselves over to the task of building their great city and their tower to the heavens, God — in His mercy — has other plans. Our focus this session: And God came down.

Genesis 11:5-9

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 6 And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

I've alluded to this before, but my neighbor, Richard, and I had a problem. We had dogs who were best friends...dogs who when by themselves were well-behaved, but when together tended to wreak havoc across the countryside. Separately, our canine companions were lap-occupying, sleepy-eyed models of domesticated animal bliss, content to spend their days sleeping next to the fireplace — visions straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting. When they got together and went gamboling through the fields and forests of southwest Missouri, however, they were more like Bonnie and Clyde. Sometimes Max and Robin would be gone for days at a time. More than once they were accused by neighboring farms of high crimes and misdemeanors. Their reputation grew to the point that it preceded them, which was an unfortunate development that put them in jeopardy with our kind but increasingly concerned neighbors who had livestock and food-stores to protect. What did Richard and I end up having

to do? We ended up coming down on our dogs. We put the kibosh on their antics. We permanently separated them...something we didn't want to do and something the dogs definitely didn't want us to do, but something that was necessary to do in order to save their lives. In the end it worked, even if the measures we took were rather drastic. Was it worth it? Yes!

As we come to God's Word today and continue our look into the midst of all that is brash, havoc-rearing, and distinctly *un*-Norman Rockwell-like about humanity as the people on the plain of Shinar go about erecting a monument to a life and a way of living life absent the presence and influence of a loving God, I've got Robin and Max and Richard and I on the brain for obvious reasons. God so loves His people. He wants the best for them. But grouped together as they are, one people with one language and possessing a reckless, Bonnie and Clyde-like mindset that will only lead to their destruction, God must act against their growing rebellion and hardness of heart. What does He end up having to do? He ends up, both literally figuratively, coming down...coming down on His people. He puts the kibosh on their antics. And yes, He permanently separates them. Is it something He wants to do? No. Is it something the people want Him to do? Definitely not. It's something, however, that is necessary to do in order to save their lives.

God knows His creation. He knows that the intention of man's heart because of sin, even in the post-Flood world, is evil from his youth. He knows that if He allows this mindset, manifested as it is in this present initiative, to go unchecked, the outcome will be terribly powerful and powerfully terrible. As God Himself observes in the text, this folly in Shinar is "only the beginning of what they will do." Does this mean that He fears their abilities? Of course not. What it means is that He knows the human race to be so corrupt that if left to itself, it will ultimately self-destruct.

That's why the Lord comes down. That's why He scatters His people abroad. This forced separation is not malevolence on His part; it's mercy. God, in dividing man both linguistically and geographically, acts to put a check on the power of humanity's fallen nature. It will also set the stage for the next part of His plan of salvation to come into being; something we'll talk more about when we gather together on Monday.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, this passage and this account ends, as we all know, with the naming of the place where all of this happened: "Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth." There's actually an irony in that name. Etymologically, *Babel* is derived from the Hebrew word meaning "confuse." But to the Babylonians, Babel meant "gate of god." The late Dr. R.C. Sproul summed up this account very well when He offered two observations about this portion of Genesis 11. First, he noted that ironically, instead of attaining significance and immortality (or godhood, to be more specific) as they desired and intended, the people on the plain of Shinar achieved only alienation and dispersal. Just as expulsion was the earlier fate of Adam and Eve and of Cain, so it would be with them. But Sproul also asserted that this judgment was also, ultimately, an act of grace. In isolation, the peoples would be less likely to believe in their own strength and more likely to turn to God. And though it would be a lesson needing to be learned over and over and over again...a lesson that we, in fact, continue to learn over and over and over again ourselves...so it would be.

When we come together again next week, we'll be exploring the wonderful reality of that grace in a special way as we conclude this part of our series in Genesis, so I hope you'll come along to be part of it all. God bless you richly in Christ, have a fantastic weekend, and I'll see you again soon. Until then, take care!

Greetings

Hello Everyone! Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our risen Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to a new Week of EDiBS! I'm so grateful to have you along as we come back to God's Word on this Monday, where we're presently in the midst of Genesis 11, the final chapter in the first of our four-part series on this first book of the Bible. As we finish up our initial look at Genesis this week, we'll be following that with a return to the New Testament and a time of study in the Gospel according to John. Right now is a great time to be inviting friends and loved ones to go through that portion of the Scriptures with you, especially those in your circle who may be unchurched or dechurched, and also people you know who are struggling and in need of some daily encouragement in their lives right now. John is a phenomenal book about the life and message of our Savior, and through its pages I know that God will work powerfully through His Word in the hearts of all who hear.

Thanks again for being here today; grab your Bible, find your place, and let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Gracious Father, whose grace, mercy and peace go hand in hand to forgive, renew, restore, and sustain us, please grant to us, your people, a blessing as we go to your holy Word in these next few moments. Show us the promise of your Son, our Savior, conform us to His image, and transform us by the renewing of our minds. Hear us as we pray in the precious and saving name of Jesus, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming to the last several sessions of our time in Genesis, and as we come to God's Word over the next several minutes, we're once again coming to an important list of descendants — another genealogical line. As we've done in the past, rather than read the whole of today's passage, I'll simply introduce it and leave you the printed text in the written portion of the study. I'll be treating the text in summary fashion. Our focus: The generations of Shem.

Genesis 11:10-26

10 These are the generations of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood. 11 And Shem lived after he fathered Arpachshad 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

12 When Arpachshad had lived 35 years, he fathered Shelah. 13 And Arpachshad lived after he fathered Shelah 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

14 When Shelah had lived 30 years, he fathered Eber. 15 And Shelah lived after he fathered Eber 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

16 When Eber had lived 34 years, he fathered Peleg. 17 And Eber lived after he fathered Peleg 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

18 When Peleg had lived 30 years, he fathered Reu. 19 And Peleg lived after he fathered Reu 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

20 When Reu had lived 32 years, he fathered Serug. 21 And Reu lived after he fathered Serug 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

22 When Serug had lived 30 years, he fathered Nahor. 23 And Serug lived after he fathered Nahor 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

24 When Nahor had lived 29 years, he fathered Terah. 25 And Nahor lived after he fathered Terah 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

26 When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Have you ever beaten a dead horse?

The phrase, as many of you know, most likely originates with horse racing. Riders, to spur their animal forward and drive them faster, strike them with a riding crop or a whip. Though most jockeys today would deny that any cruelty is involved and say that the horse sees it more as instruction and direction rather than punishment or correction, the horse-racing world right now, especially in California where I'm from, is engaged in a very heated and public debate over their use,

At any rate, the term "beating a dead horse" goes at least as far back as 1859, when it was first used in a London newspaper. What's the purpose of beating a dead horse? Obviously, there isn't one. It's pointless. Beating a dead horse isn't going to make it go any faster; it's not going anywhere anyway. To that end, the idea of beating a dead horse has come to be associated with bringing up an issue that has already been concluded; something that's considered to be pointless. If something is already done and over with, there's no point in still talking about it.

With that said, here's a question for you today: does God's Word ever beat a dead horse? Does God's Word ever speak things over and over again in a manner that's redundant? Is it possible that Scripture, on occasion, deals in needless repetition...or is the fact that the Bible repeats certain things multiple times in multiple settings to multiple audiences something that we should take as part of Divine inspiration? Not just the words themselves — the Word itself — but the number of times the Word speaks something? As we come to God's Word today, that's a question that some of you may be asking. Let's talk about it.

Following the account of the Scriptural narrative that has come to be called the "Tower of Babel," we now come in the text of God's Word to a detailed genealogy of the descendants of Noah's son Shem. We've learned, you'll remember, that Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. We've also learned that all the earth was populated from the descendants of those sons. But wait a minute: back in chapter 10, didn't the Table of Nations already provide us with an overview of the descendants of these three brothers? Yes, it did. Why, then, does God include yet another, more detailed genealogy of Shem here in chapter 11? A careful reading, in fact, will show that it actually — and mostly — overlaps with chapter 10's rendering. I say "mostly" because there's a divergence that happens late in the chapter, and that divergence is the important difference between the two accounts which, otherwise, are the same.

From Genesis 10:21-25 the line of Shem is traced just as it is here in 11:10-26. In Genesis 10:26ff, however, that genealogy traces Peleg's brother Joktan and speaks of his descendants and the territory in which they lived. Beginning in 11:18, the line of *Peleg* is followed instead, traced down to Abram. Why? Because it's through the line of Peleg, not his brother Joktan, that the line of the Messiah is traced. The reason we have the special genealogical attention given to Shem here in chapter 11 is because Abram, the next faithful servant with whom God will directly

deal, is going to directly descend from Shem's line — and Abram, who will become Abraham, will continue the line which will lead us to the birth of Jesus, the promised Messiah.

Now — as is common in almost every ancient listing of a family line, it's apparent that this genealogy contains gaps. Almost all of them do, because almost all genealogies are composed or assembled for reasons beyond the mere recording of familial histories. The purpose of this genealogy is not to record every single descendant of Shem; it, again — to beat a dead horse? — is to record for the reader the advances of the Messianic line.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, that, indeed, is the main point to take away from our time together. Yes, it's a point we've made here in our study of Genesis many times already, but it's a point that bears repeating...a point which can never be pointed out too much. The genealogies given to us in Genesis set the stage for God's purpose in redeeming a chosen people for Himself. First it was Adam, then Seth, and later Noah...then Shem and so on down to Abram — who was a Shemite, or *Semite*. God's plan of salvation will develop its next layer in the life and line of Abram, a plan that will ultimately find its fruition in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, each name up to and down from the line of Shem presents the Messianic line.

When we come together tomorrow, we'll move one step deeper, a final step deeper, in this very important listing of descendants, and with the conclusion of this next group of names will come both a grand introduction and a fitting farewell at the same time. Be sure to join in as we go about putting a cap on things this week, because there's still quite a bit to say before we press the pause button in the series.

Have a terrific day everyone, God's rich and abundant blessings to you in Christ, and I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in Christ, our hope and our peace, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you today for our daily time in God's Word together, and I'm confident, as I always am, of the Lord's blessing on our time as we come under the authority of the Scriptures over these next few minutes. Today we're beginning to wrap up the 11th chapter of the book of Genesis, so let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Father, bless the study of your holy Word today, to the end that we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior and in our strength to live as your beloved children. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the final genealogy that the Book of Genesis shares with us in chapter 11 is that Abram's father. Our focus this session: the generations of Terah.

Genesis 11:27-32

27 Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. 28 Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. 30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

31 Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

When my children were young readers, advancing from simple to slightly more advanced books as they got older and as their skills improved, in time they began to read titles that started with an introduction prior to the first chapter. Introductions, of course, are a big part of a typical book. They help you get the lay of the land, reveal important background information on the characters and setting of the storyline, and generally set the stage for all that's to come in the adventure ahead. I don't know if your kids were like this, but my children, in their eagerness to get going on the story, would often skip that all-important introduction and move straight into the first chapter of whatever it was they were reading. It might take a couple of days, but inevitably, it would happen: they'd come to their mom or me and say that they didn't understand something about what they were reading. When we'd point them back to the introduction, guess what? That usually solved their conundrum!

Today in this shorter session of EDiBS, I want to talk to you about something similar happening in this passage of God's Word.

As we've seen in this opening series on Genesis, the subject matter of the first eleven chapters of the book essentially concern themselves with the whole family of the human race. They also constitute an introduction to the whole of what we might call the holy history of Scripture. But

beginning with Genesis 12 (which we'll take up in the second part of our series on Genesis at a future date), the Bible begins to focus on one family in particular: *the* family through whom God will keep the promise He made to us back in chapter 3: the promise of the Seed of the woman who would crush Satan's head. Who is this special family that will occupy chapter 12 and beyond? It's the family of Abram, who lived in Mesopotamia, in Ur of Chaldea — the place where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers flow into the Persian Gulf. And what do we have here at the end of Genesis 11? What we have in the listing of the generations of Terah is the *Introduction* to all of what's to come in chapter 12 and beyond.

The names here are relatively few in number, and the passage isn't long, but these final verses in Genesis 11 are a big part of the book. They help us get the lay of the land, reveal important background information on the characters and setting of the storyline, and generally set the stage for all that's to come in the adventure ahead. Put simply, this introduction to the account of life of Abram in verses 27-32 identifies the main characters in his life: his father, his brother, his wife, his sister-in-law, and his nephew.

Here we learn about Terah and Haran. We learn about Lot. We learn about Nahor and Milcah. We also learn about Sarai, who will of course become Sarah, Abraham's wife...and we even learn in this listing that she's barren. All of these these people are mentioned here at the end of Genesis 11 because they are stage-setters for the extraordinary things that will be coming in the succeeding chapters. They are put here as markers, and their presence anticipates some of the most well-known Old Testament events in Scripture. Their arrival on the scene will actually be a fitting end to this first part of our series on Genesis, and when the time comes to launch into part two down the road a bit, we'll be starting right back here at the end of chapter 11 to kick things off. I'm already looking forward to it!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, with the naming of these people in the text now out on the table, we'll spend our next couple of sessions putting some meat on the bones of it all, and we'll also take some time to retrace a few very important steps in our study series before we say goodbye and move on to our next book. I sure hope you'll come along and finish strong with me over the next few days — there are some great observations and application yet to make before we press pause! Thanks everyone; have a wonderful day in our risen Lord Jesus, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon. God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. As we approach the latter part of our week together, I hope that you've continued to find our study in the book of Genesis helpful to you in your walk with God and in your understanding of His love for and commitment to you. Even though we're coming to the end of our first foray into Genesis this week, I'm continuing to pray that you're gaining new insight as God's child through our study time each day, and I know that the Lord's desire for you every time we meet is to grow into ever deeper maturity as His beloved child.

Some of you have written me over the past couple of days to ask why we're pausing this week at this stage of our work in Genesis, and you're wondering why we're not tackling the whole book in one series as we typically do. The answer is actually pretty basic, so let me take a moment and explain. Put simply, Genesis is an extensive book with 50 chapters, some of them very long. At 8-10 minutes a day, five days a week, spending the time to go through it in one stretch would be close to a three-year journey. While I wouldn't mind that at all, our research shows that we start losing listeners in large numbers when we stay on one book for too long. Their interest and stamina begins to wane and they need a break and a switch-up. This is especially true with the books of the Old Testament.

Since Genesis naturally divides into four sections, we'll be making Genesis a four-part series, much like we're doing with other larger books (like the book of Psalms). So far, for example, we've completed the first book of Psalms, numbers 1-41. In our next series on the Psalms we'll cover Book Two, numbers 42-72, and so on, until we get through all 150 of them.

Rest assured that Lord-willing, the time will come to return to Genesis, and when I get to the point in my writing schedule that I place it on the calendar again I'll be sure to announce it well in advance so that everyone can be part of it. In the meantime, please enjoy these last couple of days in our present series on the opening of the book, and also be planning for our upcoming time in the Gospel according to John by inviting your friends and loved ones to study along with you.

Let's pray as we move into our time with the Scriptures.

Prayer

Almighty God, we praise you because there is no god but you; you alone are worthy of our worship, and you alone are to be magnified and lifted up. Open our eyes as we study today; give us ears to hear, minds to understand, and hearts to embrace all that you would teach us. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're doing things just a bit differently in that I'll be referring you to a map for much of our time together. Our focus this session: the post-Flood world and the nations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Genesis 10:32

32 These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

It's the topic about which I've received the most emails from all of you in this opening series on Genesis. It's a subject that grabs ahold of folks and sets them to thinking. It's a question that people love to ask, and I guarantee that every pastor has heard it at least a few times in his career. That said, it's also a puzzle...one for which many different solutions have been proffered by various scholars, ministers, and laypeople down through the years. But aside from a few basic generalities, broad in scope, the rather frustrating truth of the matter is that this topic, this subject, is one without a wholly definitive answer. Too little information is given to us in God's Word, and too much time has passed for us to piece everything together in a conclusive way. What am I talking about?

"Pastor Paul, how were the races developed and distributed from Noah's sons after the Flood, and which countries relate to which son and his respective descendants today?"

When we went through the tenth chapter of Genesis together a few weeks ago, I didn't sidestep this issue, but I did tread very lightly...evidently too lightly for many of you! Since that sentiment has been so well represented across our study family, let me explain why we covered this subject as we did. While we certainly know the general geographic areas to which Shem, Ham, and Japheth migrated, and while we can attribute certain people groups to each one, in my role as a pastor I sincerely believe that it's both irresponsible and an exercise in conjecture to go much further than that. The preponderance of theories you can find via an online search proves my point. Don't get me wrong; there *are* some sensible ideas out there about which modern nations may correspond with certain descendants of these three brothers. At the same time, however, there are far more in the way of laughable ones. And while it's true that some of the nations listed are easily identifiable, it's equally true that some remain obscure. Numerous scholars have attempted to identify these unknown nations, but again, due to the archaic nature of the source material, ambiguity often ends up being the order of the day.

Today, let's do what we *can* do with respect to answering this question. To do that, I'm going to put a map up on your screen, and for just a couple of moments, we'll walk through what we *do* know and what we *can* say with respect to Shem, Ham, Japheth, their migration, and the migration of their descendants.

Shem (Asia, the yellow/gold color on the map)

Shem's line produced the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Elamites, Arameans, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Arabs, and Hebrews. Shem's name is the origin of the word *Semitic*, and Shem's great-grandson Eber was the father of those who were eventually called "Hebrews," including Abram.

Ham (Primarily Africa, the green color on the map)

Ham and his wife had four sons who became the fathers of the nations there. Ham's story is an interesting one, because as you'll remember, Ham's fourth son, Canaan, was prophetically cursed by Noah because of Ham's disrespect. You can review our study session on that incident in the Recent Study Archive on the EDiBS website, but for our present purposes, let's simply remember that this curse would mean that later, Canaan would lose his land to the Hebrews and would end up being subservient to the descendants of Shem. The Bible doesn't clearly spell out how Canaan ended up serving Japheth and Shem, but we do know that much later,

Canaan's line experienced enslavement at the hands of Shem's descendants, the Israelites. Israel, of course, decimated and subjugated Canaan during the conquest of the Promised Land. In any case, when we look at the overall line of Ham, we see that he became the father of the Canaanites, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, the Cushites, and the Egyptians.

Japheth (Europe)

Japheth fathered seven sons: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. The descendants of Japheth included various maritime peoples, as well as the Persians, Greeks, Romans, Scythians, and Macedonians. Japheth's descendants would spread out over much of Asia and especially Europe, and many commentators today make the point that through colonization, they eventually spread to North America as well, thus fulfilling Noah's prophetic blessing of "expansion" for Japheth.

In summary, this Table of Nations, as it has come to be called, along with this representative map, presents us with the geographic as well as ethnologic information that all nations descended from Noah through his three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. As we said several weeks ago, there are 70 names in this particular genealogy, and it's a genealogy that is almost certainly *not* exhaustive, but selective, as most ancient genealogies are due to various foci of their compilers. Moses' writing and the theological emphasis he was focused on was the Messianic line, which is why Shem and his line figures so prominently in the text.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping up for the day, I'm going to repeat what I originally said when we first worked our way through Genesis 10: I know that what we have before us in the Table of Nations is long and convoluted and difficult to comprehend. As I mentioned before, literally hundreds of doctoral dissertations and more than a few books have been written detailing every single name and affiliation that's mentioned in this particular portion of God's Word. We're always working to add to our understanding of how everything fits, and that's a good thing. But as I also said before, it's easy to get lost in the weeds and miss the forest for the trees. That's why the best way to summarize the Table of Nations and its connection to today's world is to focus on its theological and spiritual emphasis, as was the original intention of the text.

These divisions of mankind, recorded for us as they are in Genesis 10, are ultimately designed to show us how God preserved the promise of the coming of His Anointed One to save the world from sin. The assurance that Jesus would come, and that He would come to find lost people and save them, was the paramount purpose of the passage, focusing as it did on the line of Shem.

To be sure, all of the different linguistic, genetic, and ethnic divisions that make up the diversity of our world today are wonderful aspects of the text to meditate upon as well...but the most important thing we can look upon and embrace here is the ongoing faithfulness of the Lord God Almighty to make a Way for His people in the One who came to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Thanks for allowing me to talk about this again today, everyone — when we come back tomorrow, we'll have just a few more things to say about our time in Genesis, and I hope you'll plan to be here as we do. I'm looking forward to sharing with you! Have a terrific day in our loving Savior, and I'll see you then. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Grace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. We've come together today to wrap up another week of Bible study, and with it, the first of our four-part series in the Book of Genesis. I've so enjoyed working through these early chapters of God's Word with all of you, and as we say goodbye for now to this first book of Scripture, I'm already looking forward to the time when we'll come back to it. My prayer is that you've not only grown in your faith, but that you've enjoyed yourself too as we've studied together each day. That's certainly been the case for me!

As always, thanks for your ongoing commitment to this ministry and for your faithfulness in sharing God's Word with others through it. I consider it such a privilege to bring EDiBS to you each day, and as the Lord leads and allows, my commitment is to walk through the whole of it with you before we're through! Thanks for coming along today; let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to you today in the strong and saving name of your Son to give you thanks and praise for keeping us through another week. As we place ourselves before you, we ask that you would use this time to strengthen us and encourage us in our walk with you, that we may shine the light of your love more and more into the darkness of a world in need of salvation. Thank you for this time. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we'll be looking back one final time at Genesis 1-11 to do a brief rundown of some of Scripture's early — and major — themes. Our focus: Nature and Need.

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

I was spreading mulch yesterday in the backyard...the bagged kind that you pick up at your local big-box store. About a quarter of the way into it, I realized that I was creating quite a mess with all the plastic bags, so I paused my work to pick them up and throw them away. The problem? There were a lot more bags than I had room for in my garbage can, and since our local trash service is very persnickety about their customers not overfilling their containers, I had to get creative. In the end, I managed, through a lot of pushing and stuffing and compressing, to get all of the bags shoved into one larger bag — and while it wasn't a perfect solution, it worked just well enough to get everything into the can.

Today we've come to our first pausing point in our work together on the book of Genesis. We've been through 11 chapters so far — meaning that we're a little less than a quarter of the way into it. Even though we have a long way to go yet before we eventually get to our ending point, we've still encountered a lot at this early stage. It's as if we have a backyard full of plastic bags from which we've emptied a treasure trove of spiritual and theological truths, truths we've spent the last several months spreading around our hearts and minds. It's been a great journey and a wonderful exercise, but here we are at a stopping point, and guess what? Though it would be nice to tidy things up and put everything back in its proper place before we move on, no amount of pushing, stuffing, or compressing of the material we've covered is going to fit in the space

that we have today. Still, though there's no perfect solution when it comes to wrapping all of this up in one sweep of the yard, let's at least take a few minutes and get what we're able into the can. The way to do that, of course, is to streamline and summarize, so here we go.

Over the past 11 chapters of Scripture, we've seen a host of beginnings. *Beginnings*, of course, is the Hebrew name of the book, and so it's fitting that we've been witness to most of them, many of them glorious and beautiful and, well, *good*. There's the origin of the world. There's the origin of the human race. There's the origin of marriage and of family. If we wanted to be more specific and a bit more exhaustive in our listing, we could name other beginnings as well.

Were we to do that, however, we would also have to list some much less auspicious beginnings along with the those of the more beautiful variety. We'd have to list the bad along with the good. In Genesis 1-11 we've seen the beginning of sin. We've seen the beginning of the judgment of God upon a sinful world. Nonetheless, we've also seen the beginning of, the first preaching of, the Gospel...and as such, from Genesis 3 all the way through to our present stopping point we've seen the promise of a coming Savior, an Anointed One, a Deliverer, a Redeemer. With that promise we've also seen the beginning, through Abram, of the chosen race that will be the conduit through which the promised Redeemer will arrive.

In short, God — supremely almighty and holy and righteous and just — has also shown Himself in these early chapters of His Word to be supremely merciful. In the face of a fallen creation, He has already given us a glimpse of grace, already put into play His promise of redemption and of His victory over sin, death and the devil, already birthed hope into the lives of a wayward people, already given help to those who have been caught in the thick of iniquity. There has been an abundance of Law thus far in Genesis to be sure, but more than anything, there has been a superabundance of Gospel, proclaimed to a people with a superabundant need for news that is good.

Wrapping Up

Now — is it true that, looking into these opening chapters of the Bible, we find abundant evidence of the providential working of God in His creation? Of course, and it's thrilling! It is, truly, beyond wonderful, and we can rejoice in the magnificence of the manifestation of the divine here — something we've seen over and over again together as we've studied. But as I've said time and again, in spite of the awe that comes with any consideration of God's power and might, the *very* greatest thing that we've seen in the opening chapters of the Bible is an early, and ongoing, focus on the Messianic. It's just as Dr. Paul Kretzmann said in his own observations about this first portion of Scripture when he wrote, "Just as the entire New Testament looks back to Christ, thus the entire Old Testament looks forward to Christ. Jesus is the center of all divine revelation." We have seen that here with perfect consistency indeed.

With that, we'll wrap things up for the day, everyone! I hope you've been blessed by our study time in Genesis, and as we close today I just want to remind you one more time of what's coming next: on Monday, we'll begin our time in the Gospel according to John, something I'm very excited to get to as your study partner and as your brother in Christ! Have a wonderful weekend in the grace and peace of our Savior Jesus, and I'll look forward to seeing you again come Monday. Joy to you and yours, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone – God’s joy and peace to you on this Tuesday, welcome to another edition of EDiBS, and welcome to a brand new study series today as we launch into part two of our time in the book of Genesis! It’s great to be with you as we continue our look into this deeply foundational portion of the Bible, one which not only apprises us of the beginning of all things, but most assuredly points us to the New Beginning that is ours in the coming of our promised Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. This second section of study, in fact, will bring that promised Savior into explicit focus as we look to the life and times of Abraham and his journey as a person called into relationship with the Living God.

As always, thanks so much for coming along today! Let’s pray as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, Father Son & Holy Spirit, we proclaim your great worth this day as we bow in your presence. You are high and lifted up, so far beyond our thoughts and so far above our ability to grasp the true sense of your holiness and righteousness. We declare your perfection – knowing even so that we cannot fully comprehend the vast nature of what that truly means. And yet we are in awe of you, and we worship you, and we stand amazed at your love for us – a love so great that you would send Jesus to us in order that we not perish but have everlasting life. Please bless the hearing of your Word now. May it find its mark in our hearts. In Christ’s name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, we’ll be transitioning back into Genesis by returning to where we left off at the end of chapter 11 and connecting it with where we are now at the beginning of chapter 12. Our focus this session: from mostly events to mostly people.

Genesis 12:1

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

I want to take you back to Monte Cristo today. Not the island in the Mediterranean, but the sandwich in your local diner which, if you remember my first mention of it a year or so ago, happens to be one of my son’s favorite meals. Back then, we talked about what makes a Monte Cristo sandwich so good, and the answer we found was a relatively simple one: ingredients that come in two sets of four.

In the first foursome you’ve got the foundation: smoked ham, smoked turkey, and two different cheeses. The second set of four ingredients is a little more nuanced, but it enfolds the first set to bring everything together. First there’s the sweet white bread, which is paired with the meat and cheese. Second is the rich egg batter, in which the bread, meat and cheese is dipped before it’s deep-fried. Once the sandwich comes out of the fryer, the third ingredient is added: a dusting of powdered sugar. And finally, completing the second set of four ingredients is the side of raspberry preserves served as a condiment. Put it all together and you have a tour de force of decadence that, surprisingly, is neither too heavy nor too sweet. I’m not sure how it happens with so many rich ingredients, but at the end of the day the sandwich is a balanced one that really works...and it’s really good!

So why in the world did we spend time at the beginning of a Bible study a year ago talking about a Monte Cristo sandwich, and why are we talking about it again now? It's all about those two sets of four — a formula that works. Two sets of four, each complementary to the other. Two sets of four, fashioned into a carefully ordered recipe that together bring richness and balance. That's the Monte Cristo, to be sure...but it also happens to be a helpful template for something far greater: the general structure of the book of Genesis!

The reason I originally likened the structure of this first book of the Bible to a popular restaurant sandwich was to give you a strong visual that you could immediately call to reference no matter where you might be in the text. Once you've got that in place, the world is your oyster: you can feast as deeply, as elaborately, and for as long as you want on any portion of a given passage.

What, specifically, are the two sets of four connected to Genesis? The first set has to do primarily with events, and the second has to do primarily with people. Let's look at them just briefly, because as we do, we'll see that as we've come to the next section in our study of the book, we've come to a transition.

The first set of four is, again, a set of four events. Are there people involved? Yes, but as a whole the events take precedence over the people.

Event number 1: Creation (Genesis 1-2).
Event number 2: The Fall (Genesis 3-5).
Event number 3: The Flood (Genesis 6-9).
Event number 4: The Rise of Nations (Genesis 10-11).

We covered these primary events in our look at the first 11 chapters of the book, and at the time we called them foundational events, marked moments in the history of all that has happened since God spoke the universe into existence.

Now, as we begin the next leg of our study in Genesis, we're moving into that second set of four. Are there events which take place? Of course, but once again, there are four particular people who take precedence over any series of events.

Person number 1: Abraham and his great journey of faith (Genesis 12-24).
Person number 2: Isaac, and along with Isaac, his family (Genesis 25-26).
Person number 3: Jacob and his topsy-turvy, knock-down drag-out life (Genesis 27-36).
Person number 4: Joseph and his own perilous, but ultimately powerful, journey. (Genesis 37-50).

The lives of these four men, beginning here in chapter 12 and going through to the end of the book, are definitely a more nuanced grouping with more ins and outs and pandering and positioning than the event-centered section we saw in chapters 1-11. But the lives and stories of these four men — as well as all they represent and point to with respect to types and foreshadowings of the coming of Christ — enfold and bring together the overarching message not just of Genesis itself, but of the whole Bible: A Redeemer is needed, a Redeemer has been promised, and indeed, a Redeemer is on the way. That's a powerful thought — and it's something we'll be coming back to over and over again as we study each day.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, you've probably already surmised that here in Part Two of our study series, our focus will be almost exclusively on Abraham. Things are going to start off

with a bang and we'll hit the ground running, with lots of things to challenge us as we go through chapters 12-24. Later, in Genesis Part Three we'll work our way through the lives of Isaac and Jacob, and finally, our fourth and final installment of the series will follow the life and times of Joseph.

As we begin this new section this week, remember that there's a richness of ingredients here in Genesis. The Four Important Events which we covered in our initial time in Genesis now lead us into the lives of four important people. What's the big deal? In all of them, brought together as they are in this special way, we are shown both our need for and the promise of a Savior.

Genesis is a book that, in showing us the reality of who we are, warts and all, also shows us the hyper-reality of the love of God in Christ, who has loved us and made us His own in spite of it all. That's rich indeed...really good!

Have a great day everyone, and God-willing, I'll see you again tomorrow to pick things up in earnest. Until then, the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS! Thanks for being here today as we take time to open our Bibles, where right now we're working our way into the twelfth chapter of Genesis as we come back to this book after a year-long hiatus. I love that as we gather around God's Word and seek His face, He gathers with us, and I'm eager to go to the Scriptures today mindful of His presence. Let's pray and ask the Lord's blessing on our study time over these next few minutes.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this time to be quiet, to rid ourselves of distractions, and to focus on you and your Word. We ask that by it you would teach us and transform us, and that through it you would also encourage and sustain us. We do so need you in our lives, and we are truly grateful for your presence with us right now. May your name be glorified in all things! In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our reinsertion into the text of Genesis continues with one more day of remembering the past. Our focus: Yet another New Beginning.

Genesis 12:1

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

Sometimes it's hard to begin again. It can be frightening. It can be painful. It can feel like a hopeless venture, destined to fail. But when your history is hanging around accusing you, when your present is pummeling you, when an unplanned-for and unwanted change in life suddenly thrusts itself upon you, sometimes you have no choice. You have to begin again whether you want to or not.

Over the first 11 chapters of Genesis, we saw a host of beginnings. *Beginnings*, of course, is the Hebrew name of the book, and so it's fitting that we witnessed so many of them, several of which were glorious and beautiful and good. There was the beginning of the world. There was the beginning of the human race. There was the beginning of marriage and of family, and of course, we could name other beginnings as well. Were we to do that, however, we would also have to list some much less auspicious beginnings along with those of the more beautiful variety. We'd have to list the bad along with the good. In Genesis 1-11 we saw the beginning of sin, as well as the beginning of God's judgment on a sinful world. We saw extreme examples of pride and self-centeredness and ungodliness. Beyond ungodliness (as if that weren't bad enough), we even saw what can only be described as anti-godliness...a wholesale rejection of the things of God and even the very idea of God. Indeed, by the time Genesis 11 ends and Genesis 12 begins, people are mostly living for themselves and acting as their own gods...that, or fashioning gods from things like wood and stone to worship as they so choose.

Amazingly, however, in the very midst of this ongoing, sad, and sullied state of humanity with all its failings and follies and foibles, we've seen something else in evidence as well: the beginning of, the first preaching of, the Gospel. From Genesis 3 all the way to where we presently find ourselves at the beginning of chapter 12, we've seen the promise, regardless of the depths of human depravity — or more properly, precisely because of it — of a coming Savior. A Deliverer. A Redeemer. And it's as we pick things up with the life of Abram and Sarai in Genesis 12 that we see the beginning of a family line which will be the conduit through which our promised Redeemer will arrive. Through Abram and Sarai, contrary to all the bad that has happened thus far in the history of the world, all the families of the earth will be blessed. People everywhere will experience God's favor. Hope is being born anew. It's a fundamental change, a huge shift. It is literally a new beginning.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, what is it that we're laying out as starting blocks for this second part of our study in Genesis? In short, God — supremely almighty and holy and righteous and just — is also continuing to show Himself as One who is supremely merciful. Think about it: in the face of a fallen creation, He has already given us a glimpse of grace, already put into play His promise of redemption and of His victory over sin, death and the devil, already birthed hope into the lives of a wayward people, and already given help to those who have been caught in the thick of iniquity. There has been an abundance of Law thus far in Genesis to be sure, but more than anything, there has been a superabundance of Gospel, proclaimed to a people with a superabundant need for news that is good. With Abram's arrival on the scene, that message of grace, mercy, and peace is about to be amplified in a significant and powerful way, and we'll be highlighting it wherever we can as we study through this portion of Scripture.

When we come back tomorrow, we'll finally be getting to the text proper here in Genesis 12, and when we do, guess what we're going to find? It all starts with Abram beginning again! Do make plans to join in, won't you? I appreciate your time, everyone; do be assured of my prayers for you and yours. God's peace, and take care!

(Thursday and Friday were reviews from chapter 11)

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's grace, mercy, and peace to each of you today in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to be with you for another session of Bible study, where today we'll be returning to the opening of Genesis 12 to begin following the life of Abram and Sarai. While we've started a bit on the slow side as we've come back to Genesis following our long hiatus, we'll be upping the pace pretty rapidly in the coming days, so be sure to click in each Monday through Friday as we ramp things up!

Having said that, I do want to say something on a related note that may be timely for some of you. I often receive emails from people here in the EDiBS family apologizing because they find themselves behind where we happen to be in our daily studies. Those emails are often tinged with a sense of guilt as folks share with me that circumstances or plain old busyness have prevented them from keeping up. If you're in that camp, hear me well: first, there is no need to apologize, and second, one of the designs of EDiBS from the very outset of the ministry was to provide a platform where you could study at your own pace. That means there's no expectation or requirement that you "keep up" with where we happen to be. Yes, we're here each weekday, and we do have people who are able to, and do, follow along each day, but we have many more who might click in once or twice a week for several study sessions at a time, and an even greater number still who are a book or two back and are working through the sessions in their own way. My greatest hope with EDiBS has always been that our time together would open up God's Word for you and make it an accessible, regular part of your life in a way that would help you to grow in Christ. Beyond that, however you choose to fit it into your day is up to you, so please know that I'm definitely on your team, whatever that may look like!

As always, I'm glad you're here; let's open our Bibles today and take a moment to pray.

Prayer

Gracious God, you are great and mighty – alone in your splendor and your glory. There is none beside you, and we proclaim you as you are: the only and all-wise God of the universe. Thank you for your love and mercy, and thank you for your promise to never leave us or forsake us. Please bless us now through the hearing and study of your Word, and give us understanding as we learn. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the call of God on Abram's life is sudden in nature...and we might call it startling as well. Our focus this session: Leave...everything.

Genesis 12:1

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

When we were scouting out a permanent spot to anchor our EDiBS operations, we really had no idea where we would end up. There were a few parameters in place, mostly having to do

with the affordability of property and access to quality high-speed internet, but beyond those qualifiers, the slate we were working with was a blank one. While we obviously did some formal research, I personally spent time wandering through Texas, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Florida, visiting places I had never been and talking with people I had never met to try and get a feel for how EDiBS might fit into the fabric of various communities. When we made our initial offer on a small building in Florida, I thought we had found our place, but when that transaction fell through, it seemed we were back to square one. It was surprising, then, that on the long drive from the panhandle of Florida back to Peachtree City, Georgia, I happened upon the town of Brunswick — and though it wasn't on the original list of places to visit, it's the place where everything unexpectedly came together. Today, our ministry headquarters has its home in this gritty-but-pretty little port city, and it has turned out to be the ideal location for all that we do. To find it, however, we had to leave all that we knew...and we had to be open to all that was new.

Now — for EDiBS, that wasn't such a tall order. We knew what we were searching for, and we were trusting God to show us the way. But just for a moment, put yourself in a different pair of shoes. What if you were a person, very established in life, very planted in your place and very invested in your people...in short, very comfortable with the status quo...when suddenly, a completely unknown Entity called you out of the blue and told you to pull up roots, leave everything and everyone important to you behind, and go to a place *not* that you knew or had ever been shown, but to an unfamiliar place that at some point in the future you *would* be shown? Crazy, right? And yet, that's precisely what happened to Abram, son of Terah, while he was living an extremely comfortable and prosperous life in Haran.

Keep in mind that until the moment of his calling, Abram has no knowledge of the One true God. Quite to the contrary, he's living in a land steeped in idolatry, and he and his entire clan — indeed, the whole of the culture in which he lives — worships false gods. Thus, when the Lord reveals Himself to Abram, it's not just divine revelation, but divine reorganization...which is why this soon-to-be patriarch, rich and powerful and connected though he might be, is told to leave behind everything that to this point has defined him in life. Did you notice the threefold call to renunciation here in the text? Country, culture, and kin: the land that he loves, the people and the way of life that he loves, and even the very household of the father that he loves. In other words, Abram is to let go of every source of personal identity and security that he has. He's to leave it all behind and — as we alluded to in our time together last week — begin all over again. His new identity will be found not in anything he does, but in everything that God will do in and through him. God, of course, is also the One who will be shepherding all of this, and as we consider the momentousness of that fact, it's critical that we understand something: with this call comes a complete reordering, a complete reset, of the entire agenda of Abram's life. He will never be the same again, and in truth, the world will never be the same again either. Through him and his descendants — and One Descendant in particular — the reality of hope and the promise of a future will break through the darkness of a sin-sick creation and bring light, life, and life eternal to people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. When we come back next time, we'll see the Lord begin to explain that to Abram — and we'll have quite a bit to talk about as a result!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, at this present moment Abram has no knowledge whatsoever of God's plans to choose a special people for Himself, no knowledge whatsoever that he is going to be God's instrument of blessing to that end...and certainly no knowledge whatsoever that the very Savior of the world will be among his offspring. What does Abram know? In truth, Abram knows precious little. Still, by faith he will obey this call from God. By faith he will indeed pick up and go to — literally — God-knows-where. And by faith he will put his trust in all that God has told him, which will have far-reaching implications not just for

millennia to come, but for eternity itself. I'm excited to get into it all with you, everyone — so many good things to come as we study together!

Thanks for your time today, be sure to come back next time with a friend or two, and until we meet again, the joy of our risen Lord Jesus be your strength. Have a great day, and God's peace!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad you could join in for our time together today, and I pray that your week so far has been one sustained by the presence of the Lord and the promises of His Word. Remember, He is with you, and He has promised never to leave you or forsake you...regardless of your circumstances! Today our study time has us moving deeper into Genesis 12, so let's pray and go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask that you would lavish your grace on each person opening your Word right now. Forgive our sins, for they are many; restore our hearts, for they are broken; give us new hope, for without you we are nothing. Bless the study of your Word today, in your precious name we pray. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've come to what can only be called an astounding Word from God to Abram, not only for its far-reaching implications but also for its shocking brevity. Our focus this session: Abram is chosen.

Genesis 12:2-3

2"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

I want to do some setting up with you today. I want to get you thinking about what makes someone great. Is it about achievement or attitude? Both or neither? Is it about laud and honor and the glory of men or is it something on the quieter side that doesn't care much for accolades? Here's another question: does greatness come from within, or is it something poured in from the outside? And lastly, at the end of the day, does it come down to perception or reality?

What makes someone great?

What I'm about to say, I say with a great amount of embarrassment, the wisdom of years, and the benefit of hindsight...and I also say it with a heart that has often been humbled. When I was a very young pastor, I entertained visions of greatness.

Allow me, if you would, to qualify that statement.

Without question, I was absolutely committed to my call. Without question, I was serious as serious could be about the need to preach Christ. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, I loved the Lord, loved His people, and loved those yet to become His people. I was all in. But you know

what? In those early years I also had a lot of youthful idealism — and that idealism often crossed a line from me focusing on what was true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable to me just focusing on me.

I was going to make a name for myself (with the air of proper humility, of course), and as such, I was going to be the go-to preacher, the much sought-after conference speaker, the best-selling author, and the well-known minister everyone wanted to have as their own pastor. I was going to be and do all of those things because I thought I was really good at what I did — good enough to hold my own in the rarified air of all the other quasi-celebrity denominational preachers and evangelists of the 1990s.

How foolish I was. How full of myself. How grotesque.

Today, 25 years later, I've learned a thing or two on my journey. I don't mind telling you, for example, that my days as a go-to preacher never seemed to materialize. Shocking, I know. The same goes for the whole "sought-after conference speaker" idea. I did do a few keynote presentations over the years, but I bombed just about every one of them, and after a while, the invitations dried up. When I received an offer to write a series of books, I was initially very excited because it was the realization of a long-held dream, but I ended up declining it, and why? Because at that particular point in my life I was finally growing old enough and finally gaining enough wisdom and self-awareness to realize that I didn't really have anything to say, and that I probably shouldn't be writing until I did. Finally, as for being that well-known minister that everyone would love to have as their own pastor? Not only did I learn very quickly the painful double edged sword which fills that space, I eventually learned that no such minister exists.

These days, those early, grand visions of greatness from my youth are pretty much gone, and so is the prideful striving and spiritual angst that went with them. These days, my life as a person who shares Christ is a pretty simple one. These days, I'm far from any kind of pulpit, stage, or book cover. I'm still committed to my call, I'm still serious as can be about the need to preach Christ, and I still so deeply love the Lord, His people, and those yet to become His people. I'm still all in. But you know what? Over the years I've had to learn to be content with what God desires to make of me instead of what I desire to make of myself. And over the years, the fearsome faux pas and foibles of my humanity have served to keep my visions of grandeur in check.

Do you remember what the people on the plain of Shinar said back in Genesis 11 when they decided to build a tower to the sky? "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves..." What were they doing? Entertaining visions of greatness. What were they doing? Focusing on themselves. What were they distinctly not doing? Following the instructions which had been given to them by the Lord to go and repopulate the earth. Here was a people more intent on making something of themselves than being made into what God, for their good and for the good of the whole world, had designed them to be and do. As we all know, things did not end well.

Now, however, fast forward back to Abram here in chapter 12. Don't you find the language here fascinating in light of what we just recalled from chapter 11? Once again, greatness is the topic, yet this time it is being promised from on high instead of proclaimed from the haughtiness of the human heart. Abram won't make Abram great; God will make Abram great. Thus, instead of Babel, there will be blessing — and because of that blessing, things, quite contrary to what we saw on the plain of Shinar, will end very well indeed.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, what makes someone great? It's such an important question. Come along with us next time as we begin to peer into the life of Abram, because the answers awaiting us there will open our eyes to God's mighty power in a fresh new way. Have a great day everyone; thanks for your time, and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon. God's peace!

(Wednesday internet outage)

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. Today we're covering what we were slated to cover on Wednesday, but with lots of rain, wind, and service outages here in Georgia yesterday afternoon and into the overnight hours, we've had to wait a bit for things to go back online. At any rate, as we get going with our Bible study time today we'll be continuing on with our study of Genesis, a book that in many ways has been hard and harsh in its opening chapters. Still, while there's been little in the way of soft and sweet thus far, there *has* been mercy in the middle of it all, and as we move into these new chapters we're beginning to see a change. Yes, we're continuing on what will sometimes be a somewhat difficult trajectory, but we're ultimately moving in a forward direction that points us more and more to the promise of redemption in a coming Savior. I'm glad to have you along today, everyone! Let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence, and we ask in this moment of quiet that you bless us with your Spirit and turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. It is life and salvation to us, and we are grateful for it. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've already seen that the Lord's coming to Abram, calling him into a new existence, and promising him untold — and frankly astonishing — blessings, has marked a fundamental shift in the narrative of Genesis. But as we begin to look at the larger picture of his life, we need to ask a question: for what purpose did God choose Abram? That's our focus today.

Genesis 12:2-3, Part 2

2"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Here in southeast Georgia where EDiBS' new home is, I've been gobbling up the local history since settling into the community. One subject I've been unendingly fascinated with is the fact that John Wesley spent time here in the early days of the colony. Though His home base was in Savannah, he made five rather significant trips to St. Simons Island, which is just across the causeway from where our ministry office is. Wesley ultimately spent several months here preaching, teaching, and exercising ecclesiastical oversight over the colonists — none of which was very good in quality, and none of which was appreciated by the people! At that time in his life, Wesley was more of an academic than anything else, and he was by most accounts dry, longwinded, and more than a little harsh. In short, he was exceedingly unpopular, and his days

here in the Golden Isles were mostly marked by misery and mishaps. When he returned to England, he was an extremely disillusioned clergyman, and he was even a wanted man: jilted by a young woman he had courted on St. Simons — a woman who chose to marry another man instead — he put her under church discipline, publicly named her sins, and refused to serve her Communion. As a result, he was criminally charged with slander and causing public embarrassment without cause, and he departed for his home country with a sullied reputation.

But here's the thing: those difficult experiences were part of what caused a crisis of faith for John Wesley. Those experiences were part of what caused him to question, on a deep level, his relationship with the Living God. Those experiences, combined with other circumstances in his life, moved John Wesley into a period of searching and contemplation and self-examination, and they became seeds which down the line would sprout and grow into an entirely new understanding of God's grace. It was a journey (and I'm leaving out a lot of the story due to time constraints), but John Wesley's time in the then-British colony of Georgia was a big part of what God used to move him from a life of Law to a life of Gospel, and it ended up transforming not just Wesley's theology, but the entire Methodist movement that would sweep through the United States some years later.

As we look back on things today, it's clear that God had a purpose for that Oxford-educated, high-handed, often boring cleric...but for that purpose to come to the fore, there first had to be a dismantling of that which hindered it. Over time, that's precisely what happened. John Wesley became a person completely changed. The once distant, stuffy, and angry man of the church became a man of God, one who would famously go on to proclaim his life's purpose with these words: "I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship and the whole world for my mission field."

As we begin to follow the life of Abram here in Genesis, what we're seeing, right from the get-go, is a similar kind of dismantling, reorganizing, and reassembling of a life so that God's purpose for His servant may be fully realized. That's why Abram has been called away from his country, his culture, and his kin. That's why Abram has been called to a new land, one which he has yet to see and has yet to know about. More than anything, though, let's remember that chief among these sudden shifts occurring in Abram's life is that he is being called from a life of pagan idol worship to a life of following the One True God. So it is that in very short order, Abram is becoming a person completely changed. But, for what purpose?

Some would say that God chose Abram to be His own so that his life of faith, which would come to be memorialized in Scripture, would be a suitable example for us to follow in our own relationship with God. To be sure, Abram's faith *is* offered to us as an example in Scripture — he's prominently featured in Hebrews 11, which we call the great Faith Chapter of the Bible — but that's not the purpose of God's choosing of Abram.

Some would say that the Lord chose Abram and ordered his life in such a way as to remind us that God is the God of promises kept, and that just as Abram did, we should in a similar way be ever looking for God to fulfill His promises in our lives. Once again, God is absolutely the God of promises kept, and He is most certainly at work in our lives to bring His promises to bear in each one of us. But that's not the reason God chose Abram either.

Why did God choose Abram? The reason is a very specific one, the purpose of which is clear. God chose Abram both to make him a blessing...first to the nation that would come from him, the Israelites, but ultimately to all the people of the earth. What is the specific nature of that blessing? It has everything to do with salvation. God chose Abram to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. God tapped Abram's life and told him that his offspring — which is a singular reference, *offspring* as opposed to *offsprings*, as Paul explains to us in Galatians 3 —

would be the One through whom all the world would be blessed. The offspring being spoken of is Jesus Christ. He is the Seed of Abram. In His time, the fullness of time, this Jesus would bring life and salvation to a lifeless, sin-stained world in desperate need of being rescued. That's the true blessing of Abram. And that's the precise purpose, the real reason, for which Abram was chosen by God

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, with these things now laid out for us, it's finally time for us to pack our bags, join Abram's caravan, and plod along with him as he traipses through the wilderness to, through, and beyond Canaan. Significant trips and side trips await us, adventure will be everywhere present, and not surprisingly, there will be some long stretches in the journey marked mostly by misery and mishaps. What, however, will remain constant, no matter what? Mercy in the middle of it all. Be sure to click in and join us each day as we travel through this portion of God's Word, everyone — we'll have so much to learn, so much to take to heart, and so much with which to be comforted and encouraged as we see the promise of Christ over and over and over again on these precious pages. Have a great day; I'll look forward to seeing you soon.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus. Thanks for being here today for our study time in God's Word; I pray that you'll be richly blessed in these next few moments that we have together. Today we're back in Genesis 12, following Abram as he breaks camp and heads into a brand new existence. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, have mercy on your children today. It's been a long week for many of us, and we are in need of your ministering presence in our lives. Thank you for your promise to be with us always; that you will never leave us or forsake us. We especially ask that you would draw near to us now as we study your Word. Use it to transform us by the renewing of our minds. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, having heard and now heeding the call of God on his life, Abram sets out for a new home, and a new land, and a new life. Our focus: An undertaking not to be underestimated.

Genesis 12:4-9

4So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. 5He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. 6Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the

Lord and called on the name of the Lord. 9Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

Take a moment and go on a little trip with me...

For three quarters of a century now, you've been at it in this world. You've lived a pretty full life. You've amassed great wealth. You're super influential among your peers...in fact, some would call you the walking, talking definition of clout. You've also got a pretty close connection to your family. You and your father have a relationship based on mutual love and respect, and you're one of those very rare, deeply fortunate people in the world whose spouse is your biggest fan and greatest supporter. As you survey all that you've done and all that you've become during your time on earth, you've got to hand it to yourself: all in all, things have been, and are, pretty good. What more could you want in life?

That's a question you've been asking yourself a lot over the past few days. Why? Because at the age of 75 with nothing left to prove and nothing left to accomplish in life beyond stacking up more wealth — which isn't really a challenge anymore because you already have so much it's become self-perpetuating at this point, *a la* Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and Warren Buffet — you nonetheless find yourself preparing for a change. Not the replacing your shower curtain kind of change, and not even the remodeling your kitchen kind of change. The change you're presently preparing for is of a magnitude that you've never considered before — and one that you never even would have thought of had it not been for that...Encounter.

God, it seems, has called you.

Not some wooden, stone, or metal idol made by the minds and hands of men, but God, capital G; God, the Only; God, the Almighty Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all that is....*He* has called you. Stopping what you're doing for a moment, you pause and try to take that in again. *God...has called you.* With that realization, unsettling and thrilling and terrifying as it is, comes another realization, equally unsettling and thrilling and terrifying: this change you're undertaking? It doesn't have anything to do with you wanting more in life; instead, it has everything to do with what *God* wants *for* your life.

Over the past several days, or weeks, or whatever it's been (your mind has been such a whirlwind of activity that you've lost track of the time), you've been preparing to completely uproot yourself from your former way of life. You've gathered all your belongings, all of your holdings — the whole of your estate, really — you've said goodbye to the people you love and the places with which you were comfortable and familiar, and now you're about to set out on the mother of all road trips. Where are you going? Well, the best answer you can give is that you'll know when you get there. And once you arrive, what are you to do then? Well, that's not really clear either. As far as you can tell, you're just going to have to take it a day at a time.

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Everyone, the shoes you've just walked a mile in are Abram's. The circumstances you've just had to uncomfortably navigate are his circumstances. The list of questions without answers and all the attendant emotions that go with turning them over and over in your mind belong to him. And one more thing: all those people who think you've gone nuts for doing what you're doing and going where you're going? Abram's got more of those folks laughing at him and whispering behind his back than he can probably even count.

This is the situation...the setting as it were...as we come to God's Word today to find Abram, a man well on in years, putting his trust in the living God and leaving all that he knows for the

sake of a promise...one that has been given to him by what to him is a heretofore unknown Deity. Oh, and by the way: this promise? The promise that God will make Abram a great nation and that all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through him? There's just one small problem: He's old, and Sarai his wife is barren...not exactly the jumpstart one needs to become the progenitor of a chosen and dearly loved people.

For all of these reasons and more, this is why the passage before us today is so phenomenally powerful. This is why the beginning of Genesis 12 is such a watershed moment in this first book of the Bible. As crazy as all of these things would seem to any normal person, as ridiculous as we think it would be for any of our own friends, neighbors, or family members to do something so outrageously foolish as we see Abram doing, Abram is doing it anyway. Why? Because in spite of how unusual or unwarranted or illogical it may seem, Abram knows what he knows. He didn't get to where he is in life by being stupid. Abram is a man of character and a man of wisdom, and Abram is a man strong enough and sure enough in his convictions to hold course when the weaker among him would waver. That's why in the face of what most people would label as dubious, Abram believes God nonetheless.

Wrapping Up

So it is that as we wrap things up for the day, Abram does pick up and leave his old life behind. Abram does come to the new land which the Lord God is giving him...the land of Canaan. And in today's passage we see this newly minted man of God traveling through this place of inheritance, exploring and surveying, building altars, calling on the name of the Lord, and pitching his tent. It's a beautiful scene...and it's also a scene that foreshadows something even more beautiful to come! How blessed Abram is to be a blessing — and how blessed we are to be recipients of that blessing in our Lord Jesus Christ, Abram's promised Seed! More, of course, to come as we move forward!

Until we meet again to do that, have a wonderful weekend, everyone...you're such a joy to me, and I'm grateful for the time we've had this week. God's peace, and I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! It's good to be with you today, and as we open our Bibles and ask the Lord to teach us and transform our lives through His Word, I know that we'll all be blessed as a result. We're back in the 12th chapter of Genesis as we begin this new week, following Abram and Sarai as they traverse the land of Canaan and familiarize themselves with all that the Lord has promised to them. Let's pray and ask God to lead us as we study.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, things have started off so beautifully with Abram, a man obviously full of faith and trust who has exhibited an extraordinary capacity for obedience. Now, however, we see his extraordinary capacity for something else. Our focus this session: preservation of a promise...or plain and simple seediness?

Genesis 12:10-16

10Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. 11As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. 12When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. 13Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." 14When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman. 15And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. 16He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels.

Have you ever told a lie before? Here are some of the most common ones among Americans:

- The check is in the mail.
- I'll start my diet tomorrow.
- Give me your number and the doctor will call you right back.
- One size fits all.
- Your table will be ready in a few minutes.

One notably absent listing from that group? "Oh, her? She's my sister."

They say that necessity is the mother of invention, and while that saying may be true, it doesn't mean that every invention is a good one. In today's passage from God's Word, Abram comes up with one of the worst of all time: lying about his wife and allowing her to be taken into another man's household in order to save his own skin.

So — what's going on here? Beyond the simple telling of events we don't have too much to go on, but what we do know is enough to leave a pretty bad taste in our mouths. A famine has spread across the land of Canaan, and so Abram takes his caravan and heads south toward Egypt. Why Egypt? Probably because the area surrounding the Nile River has plenty of food, water, pastureland, and other supplies to support Abram, his people, and his flocks.

Remember, this entourage is a whole lot more than a few head of sheep and a smattering of support staff. Rather, there are hundreds of people and thousands of animals with Abram — plus all the accoutrements associated with taking care of them all. Envision less of a large family campsite and more of a sprawling, traveling village and you'll begin to get an idea of the size. It's an operation of legitimately grand scale.

At any rate, as they get ready to cross the border into Pharaoh's land, we come to the dilemma that shapes the entire passage: Sarai is an exceptionally beautiful woman. So beautiful that Abram is sure he will lose her to the Egyptians, who will want her for their own — and if they find out he's her husband, most likely kill him in the process so he'll be out of the way. Never mind the fact that God has just very recently promised Abram that he will be the father of a great nation. Never mind the fact that in order for that to happen it will be necessary that Abram live, not die, and that he will need the partnership of his faithful wife to bring it about in any case. Finally, never mind the fact that God has already shown Himself to be worthy of Abram's trust, having faithfully led him and his people into the land promised to him and his future descendants. None of these things seems to mean anything at the moment. None of them have penetrated his obviously fearful heart or straightened out his obviously incomplete

thinking. Why do we know that? Because for want of a better term, Abram, looking at his situation and considering his options, essentially sells Sarai down the river, sullies her honor, and places her in great danger so that he can save his own neck. God's faithfulness doesn't appear to be on his mind in the least, and God's promises don't seem to be making much of an impact either. Abram decides that he's going to settle this in his own way — and that's how this portion of the passage concludes.

Initially, things seem to work out okay, don't they. Sarai — almost certainly hard pressed and probably without any real say in the matter — agrees to go along with the ruse, and things transpire just as Abram figured they would. Playing the role of her brother rather than her husband, Abram ends up being treated favorably by Pharaoh and his officials as Sarai is taken to be Pharaoh's wife. No harm, no foul, right? Everyone is happy, and all is well.

Or are they...and is it?

That's a question which demands our attention, and not just with regard to the surface issues, which are frankly shocking and terribly disturbing no matter what you might say about the times, the prevailing culture of the day, or anything else. Yet there's a great deal more to talk about as we address the question *behind* the question, which we'll do when we gather next time. Things, as we'll learn, won't actually be turning out so well after all, and in the aftermath, we're going to need to parse them out in our quest to learn and grow from the text.

Wrapping Up

For now, as we wrap things up for this session I'm going to close by disclosing one more piece of information related to what we've covered today. It's hard to believe, but this is not the only time Abram will do this to Sarai. He'll pull the same stunt again with a different king in a different land in Genesis 20, and in fact, that passage makes it rather plain that this was Abram's M.O. *whenever* he encountered similar situations. He had all kinds of excuses as to why and how it was okay, and we'll cover some of them when we're together again tomorrow, but for now, how does that make you feel as you consider his actions? Is wisdom at work here, or williness...or is it just worry and weakness? Is God and His promise to Abram being honored here or is it being abhorred...and perhaps more important still, is it being skillfully safeguarded or stupidly squandered? There's lots to discuss here for sure, so be sure to come along for the conversation next time!

Have a great day, everyone, Christ's peace to you and yours, and I'll see you again soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! I'm glad to be with you for another day in the Scriptures together, and as we move deeper into our week, my prayer is that you're growing in Christ, growing in your knowledge of the Lord's love for you, and growing in your understanding of His holy Word, where today we're finishing up our time in Genesis 12. I'm thankful to have you along; let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on this day we bless your holy name and ask that you bless the teaching of your Word. Help us to see in the Scriptures today your call for a steadfast heart that seeks you in all things. We love you, and we thank you as always for this time. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with Abram pretending that Sarai is his sister rather than his wife and allowing her to be taken by Pharaoh rather than defending her and holding fast to his responsibility as her husband, we'd think that the first unraveling we'd see in this debacle would center on Abram. Surprisingly, that's not the case. Our focus this session? Chaos in Pharaoh's house.

Genesis 12:17-20

17But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. 18So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? 19Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" 20Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

A couple of months ago, I got scammed on a purchase I made. I was so irritated that I not only opened a claim against the company in order to get my money back, but I also took the unusual step — for me at least — of reporting said company to the Better Business Bureau and the Federal Trade Commission. What was my purchase supposed to be? A vacuum...but not just any vacuum. This vacuum was, according to the 4,500 five-star reviews it had garnered, a stunning cutting-edge wonder of scientific research and development that used NASA locomotion technology, advanced grid-mapping capabilities, and next-generation rechargeable batteries that would power my gutsy little cleaning machine through all 1,200 square feet of my home in no time at all. Plus, there was a really cool video on Facebook that demonstrated it at work and backed up all of its claims. In short, it was absolutely amazing. What could go wrong?

You already know the answer...and on the day it finally arrived, two weeks late because of a purported delay in shipping, I very quickly came to know the answer as well. The first hint at the disaster awaiting me was the weight of the package. The whole thing came in at about 10 ounces, far too light to be the thing of substance it was supposed to be. Things only went further downhill from there, and to cut to the chase, I'll just say this: I don't know what was more embarrassing, the joke that the product was, or the joke that was on me as a consumer who'd been had.

As we come to God's Word today, we're coming to another kind of scam, aren't we — one different in nature from what I've just shared with you, but one similar in method and scope. It has everything to do with something grand in promise which turns out to be wholly different than what was advertised, so to speak. Everything looks up-front and above board in the beginning, but the jilted party very quickly comes to know the truth of the matter, and things only go further downhill from there.

Abram has lied about his very beautiful wife, Sarai. Afraid he'll be killed if Pharaoh and his officials find out that he's Sarai's husband, he passes her off...literally, by the way...as his sister instead. The goal? To save his own skin. Now — at this juncture we could stop and do some hoop-jumping on Abram's behalf if we wanted to. We *could* say, for instance, that Abram isn't so much attempting to safeguard himself as he's wanting to safeguard God's promise to him; the promise that says he will be the progenitor of a great nation which will be greatly blessed (possible, but highly doubtful!). We could also say, if we really wanted to stretch things and give Abram the benefit of the doubt, that in telling Pharaoh's men Sarai is his sister, he's technically telling the truth. Sarai *is* actually Abram's sister...his *half*-sister. They share Terah as their father, but have different mothers. Still, though, however we might try to slice it, the reality of this situation is that there has been a grave misrepresentation of the truth, and as we can see from today's reading, Pharaoh and all his household are paying a steep price because of it.

As we consider all of this, there's certainly a moral issue here, but there's a spiritual issue here as well. The issue on the one hand is Abram's dishonorable treatment of his wife, made all the worse because he has treated her so in order to protect himself. He's essentially used Sarai as a human shield, and that's not excusable under any circumstances. Indeed, everything Abram has done here goes against that which God established in the marriage covenant, and we shouldn't give him a pass just because he's Abram. And yet at the same time, that's not ultimately the focus of this moment. The connected issue here, the underlying issue...the *deeper* issue...is one of trusting in the thoughts, ways, and purposes of man versus trusting in the thoughts, ways, and promises of God. What we have before us today is an issue of taking matters into one's own hands rather than trusting the hand of the Lord.

How, then, do we read this? It's tough, but if we had been the first audience of this narrative — specifically, the Israelites after the time of Moses — our focus here would be on how God was faithful to keep His promise to Abram, not just through the threats Abram faced from the Egyptians, but also through his own morally unacceptable actions. Even though Abram royally screwed up, God would redeem this situation in the end. He would rescue Sarai from Pharaoh, and rescue Abram and Sarai both from the situation Abram had gotten them into through his fearfulness, his self-centeredness, his lying, and his foolishness. God does this merciful act in spite of, not because of, Abram's human interference, and though we as readers are left to wrestle with some of the ethical questions surrounding this incident, we are not left wondering about God's character or God's commitment to carry onto completion that which He has ordained.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, as uncomfortable as this is — perhaps *unsettling* is a better word — this is actually just the first of what will be many instances where we'll see Abram — a man of faith, a man who most certainly believes — act in a decidedly faithless and unbelieving manner before God, who has called him to be His very own. Should it surprise us that this patriarch seems to have a penchant for exhibiting feet of clay? Not in the least...nor should it surprise us that God chooses to work through Abram's weaknesses to show forth His own great strength and power — His power and might to save.

More to come on this in our next session, everyone...do plan to make time and be part of the journey as we carry on! God's peace, have a terrific day, and I'll look forward to seeing you then!

(Wednesday-Friday Sick)

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! The Lord's blessings to each of you today in the name of Christ; welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! I've missed you over the past few days, and while I've been anxious about getting back to you, I've deeply appreciated your patience and your many kind words as I've taken a few days to deal with the health issues that have been nagging at me over the past month or so. Thanks so much, and thanks also for coming back and being with me again today as we begin a new week together in the Scriptures. Right now we find ourselves at the beginning of Genesis 13, so if you have your Bible handy, go ahead and turn there as we begin. Let's pray:

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to our Bibles today with hearts that are expectant. We know you are the God of mercy, and we know that as you look upon us, you look upon us through the shed blood of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Forgive our sins this day. Restore our hearts. Renew a right spirit within us. Finally, we ask with humble confidence as your beloved children that you would teach us now through your Word. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the first section of Genesis 13 is one part travelogue, one part scene-setting as the narrative of Abram's life and that of his nephew Lot continues to develop. Our focus this session: Extensive traveling, fateful choices.

Genesis 13:1-13

So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. 2Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. 3From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier 4and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the Lord . 5Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. 7And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. 8So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. 9Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." 10Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord , like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: 12Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. 13Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

I've wandered a lot in my life. I don't know if I get it from my folks who, as many of you know, have wandered quite a lot themselves, or if it comes from another place. What I do know, however, is that as much as I love wherever I happen to be in a given moment, in my heart of hearts I'm looking for a different country. I'm looking for, yearning for, my true home — my heavenly home. To put it bluntly, I'm longing for the Promised Land. And to be honest, I think that as much as any of us may love — temporally at least — our current earthly abodes, if we belong to Jesus there is within each one of us a quiet restlessness that knows our true state: we are sojourners, not settlers.

Verses 1-13, Summary:

As we come to God's Word today, there's quite a bit of positioning and repositioning going on in the movements and decision-making of Abram and Lot, but the big picture shows us something more basic. What is it? One man knows he is sojourning; the other is seeking to settle.

As we pick things up from the end of chapter 12, Abram, kicked out of Egypt, returns to Canaan with his wife Sarai and all his possessions, and his nephew, Lot, continues to accompany him as well. Moving from place to place within the land, Abram ultimately ends up back where he started, between Bethel and Ai where he had built an altar to the Lord. Once there, we're told that he again calls on the name of the Lord as he had done before.

Enter, at this juncture, an interesting note in the text regarding Abram, Lot, and the vastness of their holdings. Each man has become so wealthy over time in livestock and other possessions

that the land can't support them both. It's come to the point that their herdsmen have begun to quarrel over grazing areas and other issues, and so to head off a growing conflict and bring peace to the situation, Abram presents Lot with what can only be described as an incredibly magnanimous offer. *Consider the vastness of the land*, Abram says to Lot. *Look about and see what you can see, and in so doing, choose which way you wish to go. Whichever way it is, I will go the opposite direction.*

There's a great deal to unpack in this gesture by Abram...and yes, there's an equal amount to unpack in the choice that Lot makes, as well as why he makes it. What is it in Abram's heart that enables him to extend such a gracious offer to his nephew? What is it in his thinking...or to be more exact, what is it in his *understanding*...that enables such generosity on his part toward his brother's son? On the other hand, what of Lot? Lot, taking Abram up on his offer and looking around to weigh the relative merits of all that he sees, ends up choosing the land on the plain of the Jordan, which seems — at least in the short term — to promise all kinds of benefits over and against going the other direction.

But is that all it will bring?

Yes, there's an abundance of green grass and water on the plain of the Jordan, but that's not all there is. There are also cities, and one city in particular, whose people are so depraved that they epitomize evil and wickedness. We're talking, of course, about Sodom, and almost immediately upon separating from Abram, we see a rather ominous creeping begin to occur in Lot's life. That creeping has to do with his proximity to Sodom, and it's something we'll be addressing in detail as we move forward in this chapter and the next.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, many of you already know that Lot's choice will prove to be less than wise. In fact, it will end up being an unmitigated disaster. Before we get to that point in the narrative and follow it through, however, let's make sure we see how this portion of God's Word is setting the stage and preparing us for it. So much about this incident comes down to one thing...settling versus sojourning. And you know what? So it is for you and for me as well. Do we truly recognize the fact that this world is not our home...that we are literally just traveling through...or have we pitched a tent, then ditched a tent, built a house, and finally, put down roots in this place that was never meant to be more than temporal? That's a lot to think about as we close for the day, but be sure to come back for tomorrow's session, because we'll be talking about these things again as we continue.

Until then, do have a terrific day everyone — God's peace, and the joy of the Lord be your abiding strength. I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's blessings of joy and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to have you along today, and as we continue our study in the book of Genesis I pray that you're continuing to find God's Word speaking to your heart in a powerful way. This portion of the Scriptures is a bit different than much of what we study due to its heavy focus on the history and development of God's chosen people, but that doesn't in the least mean that it's bereft of benefit to us. On the contrary, the history-focused books, especially in the Old Testament, show us the blessing and promise of our Savior in a manner that helps to anchor our faith in an especially meaningful way. That's one of God's good gifts to us here in Genesis, and that's something we always want to have in our minds as we move from chapter to chapter. To that end, let's pray and begin today.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your great love for us, and we are mindful that it was through your perfect life, your sacrificial death, and your miraculous return to life that we were brought forgiveness, peace, and new life. Help us to live in the reality of your grace today, and may our study time today in your Word be a fruitful time for each one of us. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the first 13 verses of Genesis 13 have given us a big-picture view of Abram, Lot, and their parting of ways in Canaan. Yet before we move on from that passage to see what happens next, there are a few issues in the text for us to get under our belts, things that will help us now and especially help us a little bit down the line as we continue to study. Our focus this session: Of people, of places, and of the pitching of tents.

Genesis 13:1-13, Part 2

So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. ²Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. ³From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier ⁴and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the

name of the Lord . 5Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. 7And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. 8So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. 9Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." 10Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord , like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: 12Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. 13Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

I used to have a dog with a very highly developed sense of taste. As with many pets, she was used to one particular brand of food, and any time I tried to change it on her she'd rebel and refuse to eat whatever new thing I'd bought for her at the store. But to be fair, the only reason I tried new food in the first place was because of what she did with her regular offering, which consisted of four different shapes in four different colors, signifying four supposedly different flavors. Now - all of that food was good. But no matter what I did to try and get her to eat all of it together, the first thing she'd do with each newly poured serving would be to pick out the dark brown pieces of kibble and drop them on the floor next to her bowl. Only when every last one of them was removed would she start in on the light brown, red, and orange'ish pieces that remained. Those she would happily gobble down, leaving comfortably full as she moved forward with the rest of her day.

I bring up my persnickety, choosy canine and her eating habits today for a reason: as we come back to the opening section of Genesis 13 one final time, we have our own bowl of sorts to consider. Make no mistake: all of the food is good! Unlike my dog, there's no reason for us to discard any of it. There are, however, a few things we want to focus on in the meal before us at present, because once we've finished, we'll be set to leave the table comfortably full and ready to move forward in our study. Specifically, I want to draw your attention to three verses in the text, and because what I'm going to share is brief and to the point, the best way to use what we cover today is as an addendum to what we covered in our time together yesterday.

The first of the three verses is verse 7, in particular the second part of the verse where we're told about the Canaanites and the Perizzites. Here's the verse in full:

7And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

The comment to make with respect to this part of the passage is simply this: when it's explained to us that the Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at the time when Abram and Lot were struggling over adequate space to coexist, it give us as readers one of two things (or perhaps both) to grab onto. First, historically speaking it's an anchor point. It gives us a general time period for the events taking place — one with which, admittedly, the original readers would have been more intimately familiar than we are today. Second, this comment in the text may also be providing a partial explanation as to why the land couldn't hold all of Abram's and Lot's holdings at once. With the Canaanites and Perizzites living in and using the land at the same time, things may have been even more tight and resources more scarce. At any rate, it's good for us to think through the nuts and bolts, because it helps us to put ourselves in their shoes as we consider the choices they were making.

The second verse we want to single out today is verse 10, again, in particular the second half. Verse 10 in full reads,

10Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)

Why point out this verse today? Not so much to provide commentary on Lot's choice to go east and settle on the plain of the Jordan, but to signpost and make note of what is said about Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, in one sense this is a historical marker for the reader, helping to place this event into its proper setting. Much more important, however, is the fact that we're being told *why* the land Lot is going to is well-watered and fertile: it's because it has not yet been subjected to the horrific desolation it will suffer when Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed. Later on, Genesis will make clear for us that when the Lord destroyed those two cities, the impact went far beyond their walls. Crops and livestock could no longer be sustained in the region — and this verse gives us the first hint of how things would be different there in the aftermath.

Wrapping Up

Finally — and I'll mention this as our wrap-up for the day because I already alluded to it in our last session — I just want to point out what's shared with us in verse 12:

12Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.

What's significant here? That when Lot entered the plain of the Jordan, he chose to live among the cities there, and specifically, that he pitched his tents near Sodom. Remember the creeping I mentioned in our time together yesterday? Here's where it starts....and before it ends, we'll see that Lot will end up leaving his tents behind altogether, setting them aside to take up residence in Sodom itself. There's a pull there — and unfortunately, it's one that will ultimately bring disaster. We'll definitely be talking about it as it comes to pass.

With that, I think our bowl is empty for this session, everyone! I'm glad you came along today, and I hope you'll be taking away some good food for thought as we close. Tomorrow we'll be finishing out our look at this 13th chapter of Genesis, and I hope you'll make plans to join in as we study together. God bless you richly in Christ as you go about your day, and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's rich peace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being here today as we continue on in our study of Genesis. Right now we're coming to the end of Genesis 13, where we'll be seeing a beautiful reaffirmation of God's promises to Abram. I'm glad you've come along for the discussion! Just a reminder today as we begin: please remember that you're always welcome to post our daily sessions on your various social media platforms, forward them via email to as many people as you'd like each day, or share EDiBS in any other manner that the people you love and care about might find helpful. As always, our goal is to bring the Word of God and the sure hope of Christ and His love to as many people as we can, and also as always, you play a huge role in meeting that goal! Thanks so much for helping out in that way, and thanks also for being here today! Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, we love you, we worship you, and we adore you. You have rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into your marvelous light. You have made us alive in Christ, who gave Himself for us that our sins could be forgiven and that our fellowship with you could be restored. Thank you so very much! Please bless the hearing of your Word today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 13 ends with, as I said a moment ago, God reaffirming His gracious promise to Abram as he sojourns through the land of Canaan. Our focus: All that you can see...and all that you can't!

Genesis 13:14-18

14The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. 15All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. 16I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. 17Go, walk through the length and

breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." 18So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord.

In my neighborhood there are many vacant, dilapidated houses and overgrown lots that have been problem spots for years. They attract drug and other criminal activity, they're fire and vector control hazards, and they contribute to an overall look of unkemptness from block to block even as they serve to diminish property values in the area. The sad thing is that most of the properties in question were, in a previous era, absolutely beautiful. Their Victorian and Queen Anne architecture, along with their spacious lots and lovely southern gardens filled with camellias, azaleas, and roses, were the pride of the community. For the people who built and lived in them, they were the products of hard work and the realization of long-held dreams. They weren't simply houses, they were *home*. Today they're anything but. What happened? Over time, the people who treasured those homes left, or grew old and died — and in some cases, with the leaving or the dying, the sense of pride and place left and died as well. Today the dreams associated with those old home-places have deteriorated; their beauty has become blight. Very little is left.

As we've been following the narrative of Abram and Lot over the past several days, one thing we've begun to see very clearly during our study time is the difference in character between the two men. This became especially clear for us at the beginning of the present chapter when conflict arose because Canaan didn't have enough space for both families to dwell together in peace. Do you remember what happened? After Abram graciously offered Lot the first choice of the land as they separated, Lot immediately took advantage of said offer, and he chose what seemed to be the best and nicest portion of the land for himself. In doing so, he left Canaan, because he felt in his heart that the plain of the Jordan was a better option. So it was that he settled there among the cities of that plain — and especially near to Sodom. In Lot's mind, this was home. Here he had a sense of pride and place. Here he would realize many of his long-held dreams. Here he would create for himself a beautiful existence...or so it seemed. Unfortunately, it wasn't long before Lot's dreams would begin to deteriorate. Unfortunately, his sense of pride and place would not be long for the world. Very soon, in fact, Lot's idea of a beautiful existence would become blight...and by the time it was all said and done, there would be very little of anything left.

In today's passage, however, we see that Abram, staying in Canaan, rather ironically ends up having a very different experience than that of his nephew. Following Lot's departure, the Lord makes, yet another time, an incredible promise to His servant:

"Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. 15All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. 16I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. 17Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

So it is that Abram continues to traverse the land, moving from place to place. In time he comes to the oaks of Mamre in Hebron, where he pitches his tent and builds another altar to the Lord.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, do you know what's beautiful here? *Mamre* means "fatness," fat with the fullness of supply. *Hebron* means "association with" or "having fellowship." Abram, then, builds this altar to the Lord in the place of *fatness and fellowship*, an incredible foreshadowing of the great blessings in store for him, not just as an "exalted father," as he is now known, but as the "father of many," which he will indeed become in the fullness of time. Right now he's a man in waiting — a man standing on a yet-still unfolding promise — but as he

waits for the permanence of possession that he has been promised, as he waits for the time when there will be a place to settle and descendants to fill the earth, he nonetheless finds contentment with his sojourner's tent and with his place at the altar. Contrary to Lot, who is in possession of nothing but a quickly dying dream, Abram is enjoying the blessings of all that God is giving to him and his descendants forever...by faith right now, and yet in full anticipation of a glorious fulfillment to come. As you think on all of this, keep one thing in mind: at this stage, Abram still has no children! Which means, of course, that we have lots of adventure ahead of us as we continue to follow this through!

Thanks for your time today, everyone; it's always great to be with you, and I'll look forward to seeing you again next time. Have a great day, and God's joy and peace to you in Christ!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. As we get going with our study time today, we're having our first look at Genesis 14, an important passage that, while a little on the tedious side to read through, nonetheless provides us with some important information regarding the narrative of Abram and Lot. I'm excited for what's before us today, and I know it will bless us as we put our minds to it. Thanks for being here, everyone — let's pray as we open our Bibles:

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence, and we ask in this moment of quiet that you bless us with your Spirit and turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. It is life and salvation to us, and we are grateful for it. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with Lot having established himself on the plain of the Jordan River in the region of the Jordan valley, there have been some changes to his way of life — and as we'll shortly learn, changes to *where* he's living as well...which has suddenly put him in a place he does not want to be. Our focus this session: wrong place, wrong time.

Genesis 14:1-12

At this time Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). ³All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (the Salt Sea). ⁴For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

⁵In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emites in Shaveh Kiriathaim ⁶and the

Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert. 7Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazazon Tamar.

8Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim 9against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar — four kings against five. 10Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills.

11The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. 12They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

I was trying to get a cozy little blaze going in the outdoor fire pit last night. It wasn't the best idea, though, because it's been raining like crazy here in coastal Georgia this week and my wood pile is more than a little on the damp side. Still, I wanted to take advantage of what in this neck of the woods is a rare opportunity: a cool evening with little humidity and a relative absence of mosquitos. Unfortunately, my venture was unsuccessful. Every time I'd get a bit of flame going, it would end up fizzling when it came into contact with a wet log. I tried to force it with more kindling, but that ended up burning my hands, and every time I tried to rearrange things to get the outcome I was looking for, I just made things worse. I finally gave up and went back inside.

Have you ever found yourself playing into that kind of a scenario? A scenario with a hoped-for outcome that in reality doesn't have a chance? A scenario where forcing the situation doesn't work, and no matter how you try to arrange things, you just end up getting burned? Those kinds of no-win incidents in life are common to the human condition, and as we come to God's Word today, we happen to see one of them playing out. The passage before us is a rather wordy one with lots of hard-to-pronounce names and a hard-to-follow chain of events, and while we'll unpack that a little bit and try to bring some clarity to all that's going on, the most important thing for us to see here today as we get into the text is that all we'll be seeing in the first 11 verses is actually a set-up for the what we learn in verse 12. Let's talk about it!

As you'll remember from earlier study sessions, our setting at this point in Genesis is in the Bronze Age and centered in the ancient near east. During this period of history in this part of the world, small tribal or cultural groups often constituted their own kingdoms — thus, the reason for all of these interesting sounding places in the passage today, each with its own leader and each exercising its own political and governmental functions. It just so happens that Kedorlaomer, king of Elam, is a big dog in this Bronze Age world of regional monarchies. Known for being a powerful and ruthless leader as well as a formidable opponent to his enemies, he is a ruler in the area of what today is Iran. As we pick things up in the text, we learn that Kedorlaomer and three of his Mesopotamian allies have been reigning over a group of less powerful kings in the Jordan Valley for a dozen years. We also learn, however, that tired of the subjugation, those kings rebel. So far so good.

Now — while the kings in the Jordan Valley seem to shake themselves free of Kedorlaomer's coalition for a year or so, the text next lets us know that their freedom is short-lived. In the 13th year, Kedorlaomer and his allies launch a campaign to reassert their control over the region, and verses 6-7 tell us that they begin by defeating the Rephaites, the Zuzites, the Emites, the Horites, the Amalekites, and the Amorites. In other words, they've taken out a can of whoop-heimie and are essentially mowing down every little province in the land.

With things at such a critical stage and with their own lands now facing imminent invasion, the kings of the Jordan Valley — including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah — assemble themselves in the Valley of Siddim to fight. What happens? In the end, they are unable to withstand the onslaught. Routed, they flee to the hills in disarray, the victors seize and plunder all the cities in their raid, including the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and — here it is, verse 12 — as part of their spoils, they also carry off Abram’s nephew Lot, his family, and all of his possessions. Why? Because he was living in Sodom at the time of the invasion. Sodom? Really? How did he end up there? I think we all know the answer to that question. That creeping we talked about the other day? That creeping has continued — and now Lot finds himself in a situation that’s no-win, no matter what he might try in hopes of turning things around.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, here is a picture of the life of Lot unraveling. Here is a picture of a man whose hoped-for outcomes in life didn’t, realistically speaking, ever have a chance. Lot has painstakingly arranged things in his world just so, but now he’s getting burned, and there’s nothing he can do about it. In short, the consequences of Lot’s selfish and foolish choices are catching up with him. All that can save him now is a miracle...which is what we’ll be talking about tomorrow as we come together to close out the week! Do make plans to join in for the next installment of this drama, because there’s going to be lots for us to discuss! Thanks for your time today, everyone...take care, and I’ll look forward to seeing you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Friday’s edition of EDiBS! God’s peace to each of you in Christ, and thanks for being here today as we take some time to open God’s Word together. If you’ve been studying along with us over the past several weeks, then you know we’re in the Old Testament book of Genesis right now, and in this session we’ll be continuing our time in Genesis 14. Let’s pray as we go to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day and this time together to be in your Word, we ask that you would cause it, by your gracious Spirit, to penetrate our lives and do that which you desire it to do within us. We place ourselves before you with humble, yet eager anticipation, because we know what a great privilege it is to open the Scriptures and learn of you and from you. Bless this time, we pray in Christ’s holy name. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with Lot having been carried away as a captive of Kedorlaomer with no way to escape and no one to whom he can turn for help, it would seem that he’s come to the end of the road. Thankfully, however, things are not always what they seem! Our focus this session: A most impressive rescue.

Genesis 14:13-16

13One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. 14When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. 16He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

For some reason, over the past week or so my YouTube feed has been flooded with those “animals in the wild” type videos, especially videos from African safaris where crocodiles attack gazelles at the watering hole or leopards go after baby wildebeests. As you might imagine, things hardly ever go well for the gazelles or wildebeests, but every once in a while the tables get turned. One video this week showed a croc grabbing hold of a baby zebra’s leg and trying to pull it into the water, when all of the sudden a huge hippo lunges into the scene and violently stomps the croc, which enables the zebra to scamper away. In another video, a clan of hyenas begins to surround a young water buffalo, but just when they start to move in for the kill, a whole group of adult water buffalos charge, coming in so fast and furious that several of the hyenas end up being trampled to death.

The most amazing scenes for me, though, are when animals very small in stature but very fierce in disposition take on their enemies and come out the victors. The best example I can give of that is a video where an adult lioness gets into a honey badger den and has a cub by the throat. All at once in a blur of speed, the momma badger — all of about two and a half feet long and a foot tall — appears from the left side of the screen and hits that lioness with such force that it literally lifts her into the air and flips her over, at which point the momma badger next attacks the intruder with her teeth and claws. Not only does she end up rescuing her cub, but she does severe damage to the lioness in the process. Thanks solely to her courage and her commitment, her family stays intact and lives to see another day.

I bring up those heart-stopping, action-packed animal videos today for what at this point is probably an obvious reason: as we come to God’s Word here in Genesis 14 and find ourselves looking in on what can only be called a hopeless situation for Lot, suddenly, out of nowhere, comes Abram to rescue his nephew. It’s a bold and daring attempt for sure. Abram’s got a contingent of just 318 men, and they’re pursuing the armies of four kings. Not only that, but when night falls he actually divides up those 318 men into smaller units still in order to commence a comprehensive attack. You’d think he’d have no chance. You’d think it’s curtains for Lot. You’d think that Abram and his ragtag band of fighting men would end up being devoured by their much stronger opponents. Instead, they hit the armies of Kedorlaomer, Amraphel, Arioch, and Tidal so hard that it’s a total rout. Not only do they decidedly defeat them, they also go home having achieved their objective: Lot is rescued, and not just Lot, but all of his possessions and all of his people too. They’re all brought out safely, and thanks solely to his courage and his commitment, Abram’s family stays intact and lives to see another day.

Or...*is* it solely due to Abram’s courage and commitment? His sense of duty and loyalty to Lot is certainly laudable, and so is his bravery. Those things aren’t in question, and indeed, we can commend Abram for his actions. But is it possible that it’s something else? Is it possible that more is going on here than what is immediately discernible? How did Abram accomplish what he accomplished here with only 318 men against several kings and their armies...led, you’ll remember, by Kedorlaomer, who was a king known to be fierce and mighty in battle?

Wrapping Up

When we were together last time, we ended our session by saying that with Lot’s predicament, the only thing that could save him would be a miracle. That assessment was, in actuality, a correct one...and we’ve seen it come to pass in today’s passage. As we wrap things up for the day, there’s a clear answer to the question of how Abram has pulled off this stunning feat, and it has little to do with his valor or the skill of his fighting men, great though those things are. When we come back together next time, we’ll see that answer in black and white as we continue forward in the chapter...and as we do that, we’ll be opening up to a fascinating and faith-building section of the Scriptures that many people never take the time to explore — but I promise, it’s a real “wow” moment in the study of this book! I hope you’ll plan to join us!

Blessings to each of you in our Lord Jesus for a great weekend, everyone. Stay safe, be encouraged by your standing in Christ, and do take time to rest and be renewed. God-willing, I'll see you again come Monday as we return to our time in God's Word. Until then, the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you today, and as we open our Bibles and ask the Lord to teach and transform our lives over these next few minutes, I know that we'll be blessed as a result. Today we're back in the 14th chapter of Genesis, where we're approaching a fascinating passage. I'm glad you're here; let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, following Abram's stunning defeat of Kedorlaomer, Amraphel, Arioch, and Tidal, two kings come out to meet him — two kings having attitudes and agendas very different from one another. We'll talk about the king of Sodom a little later in the week, but our focus for this session? Melchizedek, King of Salem.

Genesis 14:17-20

17After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. 20And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

In 1963, on the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, an unknown woman was present on the ground. According to witnesses and film from that day, she wore a headscarf and appeared to capture the shooting on her own camera. After the shooting, however, she melted into the crowd and disappeared, and she never came forward despite repeated requests from the FBI. In every photograph or video where she can be seen, she's either facing away from the camera or has her face covered with her own camera. Who that person was and why she never came forward is still a question. Today, we simply call her "The Babushka Woman."

On November 24, 1971, a man who called himself Dan Cooper hijacked an in-flight Boeing 727, warning the captain and crew that he possessed a bomb in his briefcase. He demanded \$200,000 and four parachutes, and after having his demands met via negotiations with officials on the ground, the plane landed for refueling and delivery of said ransom. At that point the passengers were released, and then the aircraft took off again. During that second flight, the man parachuted from the plane and was never found or seen again. While many have claimed to be the infamous hijacker through the years and while several documentaries have been made regarding his supposed origin and his conjectured destiny, nothing definitive has been proven; both are still a mystery. The media bungled his name, but it stuck, and today, we simply call him D.B. Cooper.

On the morning of June 5, 1989, when the Chinese military had suppressed the Tiananmen Square protest, a lone man stood up to the Communist regime's crackdown in what has become an iconic and symbolic photo. Standing by himself in the middle of the square facing a column of 18 tanks, his courageous defiance temporarily halted the military — and in the process inspired the world. Eventually a group of fellow protesters came and dragged him back into the crowd to keep him from being detained, and he was quickly lost in the sea of faces. While a newspaper claimed to identify him and declared that he had been arrested by police, there's never been any corroborating evidence to support that, and all these years later there's still no reliable information available about that person or his fate. Today we simply call him Tank Man.

In the ancient near east, circa 1900 B.C., an unlikely battle with an even more unlikely victor commenced. In the aftermath, seemingly out of nowhere, a king arrived on the scene. Neither his territory nor his army had been involved in the battle, but he was there anyway, and in a peculiar act of friendship, fellowship and hospitality, he presented bread and wine to the victor and his weary troops. More than just a king, however, this man was also a priest. His title, specifically, was "priest of God Most High." And finally, to top off the mysterious nature of this individual, the historical record shows that as quickly as he appeared, this king and priest disappeared. Before he did, however, he spoke a word of blessing to the man he had come to visit, and with that blessing, an important word of prophecy as well. Who was this king/priest/prophet? It has been hotly debated for centuries. Today we call him Melchizedek...but there is nothing simple about him!

Just who was Melchizedek...and what was he all about? To be sure, there's certainly mystery surrounding his sudden appearance in the Old Testament as the king of Salem and priest to God Most High. (*Salem*, incidentally, is the Hebrew word for *peace*...and Salem would eventually be known as *Jerusalem*...and so we can rightly call Melchizedek the "king of peace.") Furthermore, a quick look at the etymology of Melchizedek itself tells us something else: his name means "king of righteousness." Holding that thought and digging even deeper, in today's passage we note that Abram presents Melchizedek with a tithe, or tenth, of all the items he has gathered from the battle just fought. We know that through this act, Abram is indicating his recognition of Melchizedek not just as a priest, but as one who ranks higher than he, both spiritually and otherwise...and it's not going too far to say that Abram's offering is

actually an act of worship. With these these words and this quickly developing description, you can already see where we're going with this today.

If we take a brief survey of Scripture, the first thing we see is that Melchizedek only appears in three books of the Bible: here in Genesis, in the 110th Psalm, and in chapters 6-7 of Hebrews. In Psalm 110, a Messianic psalm written by David (which we know from the 22nd chapter of Matthew), Melchizedek is presented as a type of Christ. That theme is repeated in the 6th-7th chapters of Hebrews, where both Melchizedek and Christ are considered kings...of what? Of *righteousness* and *peace*. Moreover, by citing Melchizedek and his unique priesthood as a type of the Messiah, the writer to the Hebrews shows that Christ's new priesthood is superior to the old Levitical order (and to the priesthood of Aaron as well).

With all of this information on the table, many scholars, pastors, and lay people — myself included — have come to the conclusion that the true identity of Melchizedek is none other than a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ, otherwise known as a Theophany — or more precisely in this case, a Christophany. The manner in which things line up checks all of the boxes, and the so-called coincidences are too exacting to be taken as merely symbolic. In fact, if we include two more observations in our treatment of this topic today, things become even more clear.

First, the sixth chapter of Hebrews says that Jesus “has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” The term *order* ordinarily indicates a succession of priests holding the office. But in this case, no succession can be traced, nor is one ever mentioned...not in the entirety of the interval from Melchizedek to Christ. That's a peculiarity of massive proportions, and the one way it can be resolved is by concluding that Melchizedek and Christ are really the same Person.

Second, and finally, Hebrews 7 tells us that Melchizedek was “without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, and that resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.” The question is whether the author of Hebrews means this literally or figuratively, but as I consider that question, my mind immediately recalls the point that since time immemorial, the Hebrews, and the Jews after them, are a people all about genealogies— yet no genealogy is given for Melchizedek, *because he has none*.

So. If the description in Hebrews is literal, then it's frankly difficult to see how it could be properly applied to anyone but the Lord Jesus Christ. No mere earthly king “remains a priest forever,” and no mere human is “without father or mother.” If Genesis 14 is indeed describing a Christophany, then what we've seen in the text is that God the Son Himself came to give Abram His blessing, appearing as both the King of Righteousness (Revelation 19) and the King of Peace (Isaiah 9)...not to mention as the Mediator between God and Man (1 Timothy 2). On the other hand, if the description of Melchizedek is merely a figurative one, then the details of having no genealogy, no beginning or ending, and a ceaseless ministry are just mysterious statements that showcase the mysterious nature of the person who met Abram...something that doesn't seem tenable, given the weight of the witness of Scripture.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, are Melchizedek and Jesus indeed the same Person? While a case can be made that Melchizedek is merely a type of Christ, prefiguring the Lord's ministry, the greater likelihood is that Abram, after his battle to rescue Lot, actually met, gave honor to, and worshipped the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Himself. As for the reason for His appearing to Abram, that will be our topic for tomorrow's session of EDiBS.

Thanks for hanging in there with me as we discussed this today, everyone! Have a great Monday, God's joy and peace to you in our Lord Jesus, and I'll see you again for more on this next time. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you for another day in the Scriptures together, and as we move deeper into our week, my prayers for you are that you're growing in Christ, growing in your knowledge of the Lord's love for you, and growing in your understanding of His holy Word, where today we're back in Genesis 14. As always, I'm happy to have you along — let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on this day we bless your holy name and ask that you bless the teaching of your Word. Help us to see in the Scriptures today your call for a steadfast heart that seeks you with everything it possesses. We love you, and we thank you as always for this time. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the king of Salem has come out to meet Abram. He has not arrived empty-handed; instead, he has brought bread, wine, and blessing. He has also brought something else. Our focus this session: a message from Melchizedek.

Genesis 14:17-20, Part 2

17After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High,

19and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. 20And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

John Paton isn't a name we hear much of in Christendom today, and it's a shame. Born and raised in Scotland, he was a man of deep faith from a family of deep faith, and during his early teen years he sensed a call to enter the mission field. After his formal theological training, he was ordained in the Reformed Presbyterian Church and soon after became a missionary to the New Hebrides Islands, the archipelago that we know today as the Republic of Vanuatu.

Almost from the beginning, Paton suffered terrible personal hardships as he served. Three months after he and his young wife, Mary, arrived to begin their work, a son was born to them — Peter Robert — but just 19 days later, Mary died from tropical fever, soon to be followed by newly born Peter. Paton buried his wife and child together, close to their house in Resolution Bay. He spent nights sleeping on their grave to protect their bodies from the local cannibals. Still, he continued unflinchingly with his missionary work — even though he was heartbroken, alone, and contending with constant animosity from the natives that included many attempts on his life. In time, Paton returned to Scotland for a period of furlough. While home he met a woman and eventually remarried, but not long after, he and his new wife returned to continue sharing Christ in the South Pacific — with all the same hardships and dangers which had been there before.

If these details about Paton's life don't ring a bell for you, it's understandable. But what I've shared with you thus far has set the stage for an account that many of you *will* find familiar...in fact, it's one of the more famous incidents in modern missiological history. One night, hostile natives surrounded the Patons' mission station, intent on burning them out and killing them. Paton and his wife prayed all through that horrific night that God would deliver them. When daylight came, they were amazed to see that their attackers had departed...many of them having dropped their weapons as they dispersed. It was inexplicable.

A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ. Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing him and his wife that night. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men with you there?" Paton knew no men were present — but the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station.

That night wasn't inexplicable after all — it was Divine. God had delivered His servants.

That's a long introduction to what will actually be a very short session today. When we were together last time, we asked a question about Abram — do you remember what it was? How in the world did he, with just 318 men, rout the armies of four kings and rescue his nephew? In fact, how did he survive an encounter with even one of those armies? It's inexplicable...or it seems to be at first glance. A deeper look, however, one which includes a careful reading of the passage before us today, shows us that there's nothing inexplicable about Abram's victory over those four armies at all. Why? Because rather than inexplicable, it's Divine. God has delivered His servant.

And not coincidentally at all, that happens to be the very message that Melchizedek delivers to Abram following His word of blessing. "Blessed be Abram by God Most High...and Blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." There's a distinct reason for this message to be delivered in this way at this time, and yes, by this Person. It goes beyond mere assurance to Abram that God is indeed with him. It's a declaration, an affirmation, and an unmistakable call on his life to fix his gaze heavenward. God, not man, is the Deliverer. God,

not the foibles of human wisdom, is the One who provides what is needed in a given moment. And God, not kings or armies or strategic battle plans (no matter how skillfully executed), is the One who brings victory to His people for His purposes and His glory.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, that's a thought we'll be developing further in our next session as we begin to contrast the king of Sodom's words to Abram with what we've looked at today from Melchizedek. I said it earlier on in our study and I'll say it again here in closing: here are two kings having attitudes and agendas very different from one another. For Abram — and for all of us too — knowing the difference is quite literally a matter of life and death. I'll see you again next time to talk about it. Have a great day everyone — the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings everybody! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich peace to you in Christ as we come to the table for another day of Bible study together. In today's session we'll be working our way to the end of Genesis 14, looking at some distinct differences between Bera King of Sodom and Melchizedek king of Salem. It's good to be with you today; let's bow our heads before our heavenly Father, and as we do, let's humble ourselves and ask for His guidance as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, what a loving and compassionate Lord you are; quick to hear, quick to have mercy, always ready to forgive and restore. Thank you for that assurance — an assurance we have because you sent your only Son to live for us and die in our place; your Son who rose again from the dead to proclaim victory over sin death and the devil for all time and eternity. Please draw close to us and bless our study time today, that we grow ever stronger in our most holy faith. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Melchizedek's words to Abram focused on God's glory and Abram's well-being. Bera's words to Abram? Not so much! Our focus this session: Bera and Melchizedek...a great contrast in messaging, a great contrast in Abramic response.

Genesis 14:21-24

21The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."
22But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord , God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath 23that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' 24I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."

Samuel Leibowitz, a criminal lawyer and later a judge, saved 78 men from the electric chair during his career. Not one ever bothered to thank him.

Andrew Carnegie, the great industrialist, left \$1 million to one of his relatives in his will (the equivalent of over \$15.5 million in today's money), who in turn publicly cursed Carnegie's memory because he had left considerably more — \$365 million — to public charities. Rather than being thankful, he was incensed.

A man behind the desk at the post office was approached by an older gentleman who had a post card in his hand. The old man said, "Sir, could you please address this post card for me?" The man smiled and gladly did so, and he also agreed to write a short message, which the older man dictated to him in a soft, halting voice. Handing it back, the postal employee said to the older man, "Is there anything else I can do for you, sir?" The old man looked at the post card, thought about it for a minute, and he said, "Yes, at the end just put 'P.S. Please excuse the sloppy handwriting.'"

Have you ever given something of great value to someone, provided a special service, maybe poured out your time, energy, and effort for the benefit of another, only to have it go unacknowledged or disregarded? It was the great churchman, W.C. Bennett, who said "Blessed is he who expects no gratitude, for he shall not be disappointed."

Notice, if you would, what's happening as we look at today's text here in Genesis 14. Abram, fresh off a mission to rescue his nephew Lot, has in the process rescued an entire kingdom as well. Lives have been saved. Territory has been restored. Leadership has been protected. In short, Sodom and its king have just managed to avoid an almost inescapable fate, and it's all due to Abram. So marked is this moment — for a lot of reasons, which we'll be talking about later in the week — that Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, has come out to meet him. He's brought bread, wine, and blessings to Abram from the very throne room of heaven. Bera, king of Sodom, has come out as well. And what has he brought? Bera has brought nothing but a heavy dose of ingratitude.

This king accords Abram no honor and offers no thanks. He speaks arrogantly, as one used to being in charge and accustomed to getting his way. Some commentators note that in the Hebrew his words ring of surliness and small-mindedness. It's not surprising, then, that he treats Abram condescendingly, dismissively, and transactionally — as though he's doing him a favor and acting with largesse by dictating what should happen in the aftermath of the routing that has just taken place. The reality, however, is that Bera is attempting to do no favors for anyone but himself. He's attempting to make Abram beholden to him as a result of his seeming generosity. But this is no generosity at all; it's merely a calculated effort to put Abram under his thumb.

With all of this going on under the surface, as it were, we have to take our hats off to Abram as he responds to Bera. Not only does he reject the king's offer — a bold stance all by itself, one that takes courage as well as principle — but by his words he also reveals in no uncertain terms that he understands what's going on. Most important of all, however, is the reason

Abram gives for turning Bera down. It's not a matter of dollars and cents, but of faith and conviction: "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'

What's the point here? Abram, remember, has been given a promise by the Lord that he will become a great nation and acquire a great name. In this moment, despite what may *seem* to be an easy path in that direction, despite what may *seem* to be, compliments of this pagan king, a convenient way to up his wealth and influence and move him toward what God has declared over his life, Abram isn't buying in. Instead, he makes a conscious choice that he will depend on God alone, not on human power — whether it be kings, their gifts, or their decrees — to become all that God has promised he will be. To be sure, it's a choice that shows the depth of Abram's continually growing faith.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, this is a moment of profound strength on Abram's part...of profound wisdom and of the exercising of restraint. And it's more than a just moment: in actuality, the statement he makes here is one that sets an anchor for the whole of his life going forward. We'll see very soon that, being all too human, there will be fits and starts and incidents of abject stupidity on his part along the way, but overall, the big picture of this future patriarch's life has been cast, and the stage has been set for an exciting journey powered by the assurance of God's great promises. More on this to come next time as we head into Genesis 15 — until then, have a terrific day and know that God and His great promises in Christ are accompanying your journey as well. Blessings to each of you, rich and abundant in our Savior, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! The Lord's blessings be upon each of you today in the name of Christ; welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for coming along as we gather for another day in the Scriptures, where right now we find ourselves at the beginning of Genesis 15. If you have your Bible handy, go ahead and turn there as we prepare for our time. Let's pray:

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to our Bibles today with grateful and expectant hearts, knowing that your hand of mercy is upon us and knowing that your Face is toward us, not against us. Look upon us through the shed blood of your Son this day. Forgive our sins. Restore our hearts. Renew a right spirit within us. We ask as your beloved children that you would teach us through your Word as we gather to learn and grow. Thank you Lord God. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, fresh off the taking of a very bold stance with regard to Bera, king of Sodom, the Lord now comes to Abram in a vision. Our focus: *Do not be afraid*.

Genesis 15:1

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

At about the time many of you will be sitting down to watch today's video or read today's study here in the EDiBS world, I'll be sitting in a court room waiting for a trial to begin. I'm a little nervous. I've been subpoenaed by my city as a witness in their case against a homeowner whose property has become severely blighted. That property happens to back up to my own, and apparently there's a long history of problems there that the city has given more than ample time for the owner to correct — which he has ignored. As an example of that person's scofflaw attitude, this is actually the second time I've been summoned in this particular case. When I answered my subpoena the first time and showed up for court last month, he didn't...and being that it wasn't the first time it had happened, the judge made the decision to issue a bench warrant for his arrest. Though I'm not the one on trial here, my fear comes from the fact that I'm being called on to testify against a neighbor. I'm the one that will have to navigate that relationship going forward, not the city....and even though I'm not the one who brought suit (in fact, I don't even know the owner), I imagine there may be some hostility to work through once this is all said and done. Fear can be an uncomfortable feeling indeed!

As we come to God's Word today here at the beginning of Genesis 15, God speaks to Abram in a vision. The subject matter? Fear...or rather, the call *not* to fear. "Don't be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great (or exceedingly great) reward."

Why do you suppose God would say this to His servant right now? After all, Abram has just come off of an incredibly successful military campaign to rescue his nephew. He's just received blessings from On High courtesy of Melchizedek. He's just conducted himself with great wisdom and integrity in his dealings with Bera king of Sodom. All in all it's been a great couple of days, and he should be on top of the world. But consider this: while it's true that Abram has just defeated a much larger army...made up, you'll remember, of a partnership of four kings... and while it's true that he has just been uber bold with Bera, king of Sodom in stating his allegiance to God rather than men, those very things are what may come back to bite him. The truth is that he has good reason to be afraid. There may be an attack of retribution on the horizon, or something even worse. In taking his stand for God, Abram has drawn a line in the sand that has set him apart from his fellow men. And sometimes, being set apart sets you up for being singled out.

It's significant, then, that God says what He says to Abram at this juncture. The promise here is twofold: first, He will be Abram's shield. Abram needs a shield right now, because he's set himself up for danger by rejecting the earthly authorities in his midst and aligning himself with the Lord. In addition to that, however, God says that He will be Abram's very great reward. Though Abram doesn't need reward per se (he's already quite wealthy in earthly goods), God isn't speaking in that context. Rather, He's assuring Abram of provision on an entirely different level, reminding him of the overarching promise he's been given with respect to his name and the nation that will come from him. In other words, though Abram has sacrificed for the Lord's sake, choosing what is holy over what is profane and trusting in what he cannot yet see as opposed to what has been placed, tantalizingly so, before his very eyes, God declares that Abram will not be the loser for it. God will more than make up what Abram has given up.

Because of these divine assurances, so graciously given to Abram by the Lord, we can end our observations today by going back to the issue of fear, and it's a simple equation: with God giving Abram promises that clearly relate to his future, that's reason enough to put away his fear and proceed with faith in the now.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, we'll be developing this point further as we proceed deeper into this new chapter, because as it was so with Abram, it is certainly so with you and me as God's dearly loved children: having received the incredibly gracious divine assurances that are ours in Christ, we too are a people who can put away our fear and live in faith instead. Dr. E. Stanley Jones once said it this way:

I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath--these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely--these are my native air. A Johns Hopkins University doctor says, "We do not know why it is that worriers die sooner than the non-worriers, but that is a fact." But I, who am simple of mind, think I know; We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue, brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against divine reality.

Profound thoughts, to be sure...and most surely worthy of our meditation as we carry on with the day! Thanks for being with me today, everyone; the joy and pleasure is all mine, and I'll look forward to continuing the conversation again next time. Until then, have a great day, and God's rich and abiding peace to you in our living Lord Jesus!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and blessings to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a privilege to be with you today as we gather around God's Word together, and as we do that today we'll be continuing in the 15th chapter of Genesis with our ongoing look at Abram and God's promise upon his life. I'm glad you're here! Let's pray as we prepare for our time today.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, We thank you today for who you are and what you've done for us through your life, death, and resurrection. We have no words to express how grateful we are. We thank you. We worship you. We humbly bow before you. In the time we have over these next few minutes, we ask that you bless our study time in your Word. Help us through it to learn and grow in faith toward you, but more important, help us to understand in ever growing fashion your great faithfulness to us. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, God continues to speak in a vision to Abram, again reaffirming His promise to give Abram the land of Canaan and to make him into a great nation. Our focus this session: But how?

Genesis 15:2-3

2But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord , what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

Have you ever wrestled with doubt? In different ways, at different times, and regarding different issues, we all have. Today we see that even the great patriarch, Abram himself, struggled with doubt.

Just briefly, let's flesh it out: God comes to him in a vision, speaking blessing and promise and assurance into his life...but Abram, looking at his circumstances and gauging the status quo, can't reconcile the gap between how things are and how God says they will be in the future. We can almost hear the desperation in his voice: *How can I know for sure, God?* It's the age-old question, isn't it: How can I know for sure?

In this world in which we live, broken by sin, doubt is human. Doubt is natural. It may be unwanted, but our not wanting it doesn't make it go away.

When Pastor Norman Shirk was still a seminary student in Dallas, Texas, he too wrestled with moments of doubt. One day, he penned what to me is one of the most beautiful expressions of earnest, heartfelt longing that I've ever read. My heart so resonates with his words, and I believe Abram's heart would resonate with them too. Perhaps your heart will as well.

Let me meet you on the mountain, Lord,
Just once.
You wouldn't have to burn a whole bush.
Just a few smoking branches
And I would surely be...your Moses.

Let me meet you on the water, Lord,
Just once.
It wouldn't have to be on White Rock Lake.
Just on a puddle after the annual Dallas rain
And I would surely be...your Peter.

Let me meet you on the road, Lord,
Just once.
You wouldn't have to blind me on North Central Expressway.
Just a few bright lights on the way to chapel
And I would surely be...your Paul.

Let me meet you, Lord,
Just once.
Anywhere. Anytime.
Just meeting you in the Word is so hard sometimes
Must I always be...your Thomas?

God is not afraid of your doubt. Nor is He offended by it. He is more than big enough to handle your questions and your concerns and even your dark-night-of-the-soul cries of the heart that

sometimes come to torment you. God is not only big enough, but He is also loving enough and patient enough and merciful enough to walk with you through your doubts. He is the God who takes the bleakness of uncertainty and turns it into blessed assurance.

When we come together tomorrow, we'll see how God answers Abram's uncertainty and doubt. We'll see how He comes alongside His servant, takes his hand, and leads him from the dark night of the soul into the light of eternal day. As we do that, we'll be seeing something else: we'll be seeing how God takes our hand and leads us as well.

If you need to call out, to cry out, to admit your wrestling over God, His ways, or His will, then do it. Now is a good time. Write it down, compose it in a poem, shout it into the night sky... however you need to express it, express it. But would you do this one thing? Let it come out as a prayer, raw and unvarnished and simple and true — just like Abram does in today's text. Then, having prayed your prayer, leave room in your heart for God to work.

You are dearly loved, everyone...beloved of God, the Father Son and Holy Spirit. May His blessing rest on you as you go through your day. I'll see you again tomorrow to pick this up again; until then, have a terrific Thursday, and God's peace!

Friday was archived.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, a day that sees us coming together as God's people redeemed in Christ, celebrating His love, and learning from His Word. It's great to have you along for the next few minutes as we go to the Scriptures, and as we do that today, we'll be continuing our time in the 15th chapter of Genesis. Let's pray as we begin:

Prayer

Almighty God, as we open the Scriptures today we ask that you, by your Spirit, would go before us: light the way, open our hearts and minds, and accomplish through your Word all that you have purposed for us. We know that this is your good and gracious will, and so we ask these things with joy and confidence in the name of our risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the word of the Lord comes to Abram in response to Abram's lament over the fact that he has no children and does not understand how God's promise to him will be fulfilled. Our focus: Divine assurance...and reassurance...and reassurance some more!

Genesis 15:1-5

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." 2But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." 4Then the word of the Lord came to Abram: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

I don't need to tell you, because you've experienced it yourself: Covid-19 has done a number on us all. It's affected us, our families, and our friends in different ways — some expected and some unexpected. While we were prepared for some of the fallout, other things have crept up on us and caught us off guard.

For me, one of the unexpected impacts on my day-to-day life has been the uncertainty surrounding my ability to see and meet with the people who are closest to me in life. I was supposed to visit my parents in southern California over the summer, but with the pandemic making travel difficult and my being around them questionable as far as their health goes, we've had to hold off. I know the time will come when we can see each other again, but there are days when disconcerting feelings of doubt creep in and cause me to wonder if the scenario is an "if" rather than a "when." I don't like it.

It's the same with my board of directors here at EDiBS. We've had to postpone a long planned-for face-to-face meeting, and as of right now, seven months have passed since the originally calendared date. Though we can certainly do the business we need to do via Zoom or a conference call, my longing to see those godly friends and mentors in person — to break bread, to plan and pray and prepare for the future — sometimes seems as though it won't happen after all. Again, I know that it will at some point, but the doubts come anyway.

Have you ever experienced doubt in that way...doubt over something that in reality is a certainty, but due to circumstances doesn't feel like it? As we come back to God's Word today and return to Genesis 15, that's exactly what we've happened upon as we continue with the life and times of Abram. God, you'll remember, has given Abram an astounding and far-reaching promise. It's a promise that his name will be great. A promise that from him will come a great nation. A promise that, in spite of his wife's barrenness, his family line will continue and his descendants will be many. God has also called on Abram not to be afraid as he sojourns, because not only is God Abram's shield, but his very great reward as well.

One more thing to make note of as we begin to follow this new arc in the text is that we actually began to see these promises all the way back in chapter 12, and we've continued to see them right up through the beginning of this chapter. Abram, then, is standing in good stead. He should be riding high. Confidence should be his middle name...only it's not. Instead, directly on the heels of God's latest declaration of grace and favor, directly following God's assurance that He is Abram's very great...exceedingly great...reward, the Bible showcases a *But*. Go back and look at verses 2-3:

But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord , what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

Now, one part of me — the idealistic, filled with faith, extra-spiritual part of me — wants to find this surprising. But the all-too-human part of me understands this scenario all too well to be surprised in the least. The simple truth here is that as much as God has promised Abram that He will guide and direct his steps, as much as God has promised Abram a hope and a future that will unfold through untold generations of descendants to come, and as much as God has done to anchor Abram in the assurance of His protective hand, Abram still needs shoring up. He's still needing to be convinced. He's still in doubt of God's promises.

In light of this rather disturbing and somewhat embarrassing fact, what does the Lord do? Condemn Abram? Scold him? Withdraw His blessing and forsake him? The Lord does none of those things. When Abram cries out and voices his uncertainty, the Lord responds by saying, "Come outside." There, He has Abram look up into the heavens and says, "Count the stars —if indeed you *can* count them." And finally, He says to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, God does not condemn; God confirms. God does not grow tired of saying the same things over and over and over again; God gladly traces and retraces His word on the heart of His servant to establish him in his faith. God does not blame Abram over the dilemma *in* his heart; He blesses Abram by banishing doubt *from* his heart. We'll continue to talk about this next time, but in preparation for that, there's one thing I'd like to ask of you as we close: Go back and read today's verses...in fact, go back and start at the beginning of the chapter. As you read, put yourself in Abram's shoes, and as you begin to put yourself through his paces, take a moment and listen again to what God says in the face of his fears. Note the patience and compassion. Note the assurance... the *reassurance*. And finally, look and see how, in spite of Abram's weakness, the strength of God's promise remains.

I don't know about you, but there's a message in there for me...one that in these current times of doubt and uncertainty stands as a reminder of my Lord's power and serves to re-anchor me in the reality of His goodness and grace.

Have a great day, everyone...the Lord is with you, and you know what? He is your shield and your very great...your exceedingly great....reward. God's peace, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. Today in our study time we'll be considering and building on what we talked about yesterday in Genesis 15 — taking the promises of God on faith, even when circumstances seem to militate against it. God always desires to bless us as we come under the power and authority of His Word, so let's pray as we go to the Scriptures today and ask for open hearts and minds to receive what the Lord has for us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, We thank you for your mercy – for the truth that that though weeping may last for the night, with the coming of morning comes restoration and renewal and times of refreshing from you. Please bless us today with eyes to see and ears to hear as we open your Word. This we ask in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, God has been reassuring Abram that the promises He has given him are trustworthy. In His perfect time and in accordance with His will, they will surely come to pass. In truth, such is the case for you and me as well. Our focus this session: the God you can depend on.

When we were together yesterday, we spent some time talking about doubt...specifically, Abram's doubt over God's promises to him. We also spent some time talking about how easy it is for us to understand Abram's struggle — namely because we've all been there ourselves. It's true, isn't it: sometimes it's just hard to believe, even though we know our Lord is with us and that He can be counted on to make good on all that He has proclaimed. With the father of the demon-possessed boy in the ninth chapter of Mark, we often find ourselves saying "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

But one additional and very important thing we touched on yesterday was God's response to Abram and his doubt. Rather than excoriate him for it, our Lord reassured him in the midst of it. Rather than chide him for his faithlessness, God chose to bolster Abram's belief. In short, in Abram's moment of great need, God provided exactly what was necessary.

While we're going to get into the amazing depth of that provision to Abram in our time together tomorrow, for today I want to take a few moments to do something different. Just as God was with Abram in the midst of his doubt and uncertainty, so God is with you and me when those times come our way. And just as God provided Abram with what he needed in order to carry him through, God does the same for us.

A promise from God is a statement we can depend on with absolute confidence. There are over 3,500 of them throughout Scripture, but today I've chosen just four of them for you to meditate on...one for each of the remaining days of our week together. If you need shoring up in the area of your faith, if you need a reminder that the Lord has not left you out in the cold, if you need reassurance that what the Lord has spoken into your life as His dearly loved child will indeed come to pass, then these short declarations from God's Word are for you. They all start with a P so that they'll be easy to string together in your mind. I've picked short ones so that you can easily memorize them and repeat them to yourself as you go through your day. But most of all, the promises here are both relational and foundational...in other words, they're a testimony of God's grace, mercy, peace, and love for you as one who has been redeemed from sin by the blood of His Son.

God's Presence — "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Hebrews 13:5

God's Protection — "I am your shield."

Genesis 15:1

God's Provision — "I will strengthen you and help you."

Isaiah 41:10

God's Plan — "For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

God's Presence, God's Protection, God's Provision, and God's Plan. These things are for you. And in these times in which we're living — times clearly beset by doubt and uncertainty about the future — knowing that the presence, protection, provision, and plan of the living Lord of the Universe is being brought to bear in a personal way upon your life is a good and comforting thing to have in your pocket.

God's peace to you today, everyone; when I see you again next time, we'll begin to overlay these things on Abram's life in a way that will take us even more deeply into the power of God and His promises, so be sure to come along and be part of things. Until then, have a great day and the joy of the Lord be your strength. I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks for being here as we take time to open our Bibles together as Christ's holy and dearly loved people. I pray that you're finding peace today as you spend time meditating on God's Presence, God's Protection, God's Provision, and God's Plan for your life! The Lord is always with us in the opening of His Word, and as we go back to Genesis 15 today I know His blessing is upon us. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this time to be quiet, to rid ourselves of distractions, and to focus on you and your Word. We ask that by it you would teach us and transform us, and that through it you would also encourage and sustain us. We so need you in our lives, and we are truly grateful for your presence with us right now. May your name be glorified in all things, Lord! In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our return to the opening of Genesis 15 brings us to another look at the heart of God's promise to His servant Abram. Our focus:

Genesis 15:1-5 (Part 2)

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." 2But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." 4Then the word of the Lord came to Abram: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

I love watching the night sky here in southeast Georgia. It isn't quite the same compared with my old farm in rural southwest Missouri, but the display is still pretty amazing. On dark, moonless nights, I like to drive over to Jekyll Island, just across the Sydney Lanier Bridge from my home on the mainland, and sit on the beach. When I look up, it almost seems like I could reach out and touch the Milky Way if I wanted to. The number of stars is so vast and their light so vivid that I'm usually moved quite deeply by the experience.

These days, even with advances in research, understanding, and diagnostics, scientists still can't pinpoint the number of stars in our galaxy — most believe it's somewhere between 100-400 billion. And today we know that the Milky Way is not alone: photographic data from the Hubble telescope has revealed an additional 100 billion *galaxies* in the universe, all with billions and billions of stars of their own. Truly, it's beyond what we could ever count.

Take a moment and walk with me through a bit of review:

In Genesis 12, God promised Abram several things, but three things in particular:

*I will show you a land, Canaan, which I will give to your descendants;
I will make you a nation; and
I will bless you.*

God continued to make those promises clearer as the narrative continued. In Genesis 13, God said:

*I will give the land, Canaan, to you and your descendants forever; and
I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.*

To this point, however, God hasn't revealed to Abram *how* these things will come about, only that they *will* (and that God Himself is going to be behind it all).

Now — we all know as we enter Genesis 15 that Abram still has no children. There are no offspring. There's no heir. Furthermore, Abram's getting older, and so is Sarai, his wife — who's barren in any case. In looking at context today and considering what things must look like from Abram's point of view, it's really not surprising to see what he says to the Lord here at the beginning of the chapter in response to the Lord's promise to protect and prosper him. Abram's not being caustic or ungrateful, it's just that the way things look right now, all the promises that God has been laying out don't seem to be lining up with reality. In fact, since he has no son, rather than his own flesh and blood continuing the family line a servant of his — Eliezer — is going to inherit his estate. Thus, Abram is essentially saying to the Lord, "You're going to have to show me how all of this is supposed to come together, because I'm just not seeing it."

So it is that verses 4-5 of today's passage now take center stage in the ongoing drama of Abram's life. In response to Abram's distress, God *does* show Abram how everything's going to come together, and this is what He says: "This man (Eliezer) will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." After that, God takes Abram outside. And God says, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars...if you are able to count them." And finally, God says, "So shall your descendants be."

What has just happened? God has just further specified His great promise to Abram. First we had

*I will show you a land, Canaan, which I will give to your descendants;
I will make you a nation;
I will bless you;*

Then we had,

*I will give the land, Canaan, to you and your descendants forever;
I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.*

But now we have,

*I will make for you an heir of your own body;
I will make your descendants number greater than the stars you can count.*

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what's the upshot of all of this? It's that in this passage God not only tells Abram of His promise yet another time, but now He says how it will occur: Abram will have a son that comes from his own seed — from his own body — and from that seed will come a great nation with countless descendants. How does the Lord bring the enormity of this moment home? He confirms it with the powerful illustration of the night sky. Standing in the wilderness, looking up into the heavens, it must seem to Abram that he can almost reach out and touch the Milky Way. The number of stars is so vast and their light so vivid, he must be moved.

The stars in the sky show how vast the number of Abram's descendants will be. And One of those Descendants — the greatest of his descendants — will be the Bright and Morning Star, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Another brush stroke in the beautiful painting of salvation history has just been laid to the canvas. It is a vivid one to be sure!

Have a great day everyone; I'll see you again next time to continue. Until then, God's joy and peace to each of you in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks for joining in today as we walk, verse by verse, through God's Word together. I'm glad you're here as we move into the last half of our study week, where today finds us continuing on in Genesis 15. Take a moment, turn there in your Bible, and join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this special moment in time – a moment where we have the opportunity to dedicate ourselves to the study of your Word and bring it to bear it to our lives. We ask that you would mercifully grant us the ability to understand what we read, and that you would help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's in His name that we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming to one of the most famous verses in all the Old Testament, and because of that, we'll be giving it a brief, stand-alone treatment. Our focus this session: Abram believed.

Genesis 15:6

6Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

It's been said that the African impala, in one jump, can soar to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. They're some of the most graceful animals on the Serengeti Plain. Yet it's also said of these magnificent creatures that they can be kept in any zoo enclosure with a 3-foot wall. How so? Impalas won't jump if they can't discern where their feet will land. They don't trust what they can't see. Created to be agile, fleet-footed, and free, all that's needed to cut them off at the knee, as it were, is to take away their ability to know what's in front of them.

In this session, we've come to a wonderful example not of distrust, but of trust...an instance where, though very little in front of Abram is discernible or knowable or seeable, he chooses to believe God for what he has been promised. In one way, we might be tempted to think that the potential barriers to Abram's belief far exceed any 3-foot wall, and to be honest, we wouldn't be too far off. Still, however, here is a marked moment in time where Abram's faith is exercised in a most beautiful way. Faith, in the biblical sense, is the act of trusting what we can't see...of moving forward and following after God even if we don't necessarily know what's in front of us. Faith puts its sure hope in a promise, and because it rests in a place of certainty rather than a place of fear, faith frees us to live with confidence as God's people in Christ. The popular phrase, though now quite cliché, remains as true as it ever was: we may not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.

Today the Scriptures show us Abram's response of faith to God's great promises in his life, and regarding what's here I just want to say two things. First, we'll be talking about this moment over and over again in the chapters and verses to come, because it's truly formational in the grand scheme of things. The second thing I want to say — and this might surprise you — is that this is one of the clearest expressions in the entire Bible with respect to the truth that salvation comes by grace through faith. This verse is the first time the word "believe" is used in the Bible, and it's also the first time the word "righteousness" is used. Both words are in the realm of God's operation, not man's...and thus it's not too much for us to say that this is actually the New Testament gospel, given to us in the Hebrew Scriptures. This is indeed a transformational text, and again, we'll have the blessing of referring to it often in the days and weeks to come

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, many of you know that Martin Luther said, "God our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing." Does Abram have faith in spades? Not by a long shot, as we'll soon see! But does Abram have faith nonetheless? Yes he does. And God credits it to him, accounts it to him, as righteousness. So it is that in the Lord God Almighty,

Abram truly does have everything. It's all grace...all gift...all God's goodness and mercy as it shapes the life of this future mega-patriarch of whom we still speak today.

Do come back for tomorrow's session as we continue to talk about Abram and his faith — there's lots of learning and life application on the way to be sure! Have a great day everybody, and I'll look forward to seeing you then. God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus. Thanks for being here today for our study time in God's Word; I pray that you'll be richly blessed in these next few moments as we introduce a new section in Genesis 15, one that in many ways is complex, but overall quite understandable. Abram, his faith, and God's faithfulness are all on the table as we turn to today's verses, so let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, have mercy on your children today. We are in need of your ministering presence in our lives. Thank you for your promise to be with us always and that you will never leave us or forsake us. We especially ask that you would draw near to us now as we study your Word. Use it to transform us by the renewing of our minds. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, God continues to bolster Abram's faith as he struggles with doubt and fear over the divine promises that have been spoken over his life. God, in fact, now brings things to a whole new level in His relationship with His servant. Our focus this session: the initiating of a covenant.

Genesis 15:7-21

7He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." 8But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" 9So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." 10Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. 11Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. 12As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. 13Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. 15You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. 16In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." 17When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. 18On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates- 19the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

In modern times we define a host of relationships by virtue of contracts. They usually revolve around goods or services, and they can be big, little, or in between. For example, I have a contract with the bank that holds my mortgage. That contract is a legal agreement between the two of us. It serves to define, specify and constitute what both success and failure is in that relationship. In my contract with my bank, we both have aspects of the agreement that we're bound to keep. If one side or the other defaults on any part of it, there are consequences — again, established, agreed upon, and put in writing — which will result.

Many people today, both in and out of the church, tend to hold to that kind of contractual idea when it comes to God. They think of faith as "If I do X and Y, then I'll get Z," or conversely, "If I screw up the equation, then I'll have to face the consequences." Such ideas seem quite reasonable to the minds of men and women, but their seeming reasonableness doesn't make them right. God, in fact, is very different...far from contractual...in His nature, His attributes, and the manner in which He deals with His creation. And while we've already seen that difference on display here in Genesis through some of the earlier relationships He's had with His people, we've now come to a rather watershed moment regarding the Lord and His relationship with His servant Abram.

The Lord does not establish a contract with Abram in today's text; instead, He creates a covenant. There is a difference. As I said a few moments ago, contracts are broken when one

of the parties fails to keep his or her promise. Think of what would happen to me if I failed to pay my mortgage. Or think of it another way: imagine that you fail to keep an appointment with your doctor. The doctor isn't obligated to call you at the house and ask, "Where were you? Why didn't you show up for your appointment?" She simply goes on to her next patient and has her admin make a note of your having skipped. Depending on the what the policies of your doctor are, you may very well be charged for the missed appointment, or barring that, you may find yourself waiting a bit longer for an opening the next time you want to see her. You broke a contract (whether formal or informal), and again, depending on the policies agreed on beforehand, it's left to you to pay the consequences. That's a contractual relationship.

According to your Bible, however, God is different — and thankfully so! One verse in particular comes to mind for me when I consider our Lord and His dealings with His people. It's from Isaiah 49 when He says, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" God's Word shows us that this is what He is like: not contractual, but covenantal, more like the ties of a mother to her child than you and your relationship with your doctor's office. If your child fails to show up for dinner, your obligation, unlike the doctor's, isn't canceled. You don't make a note of it, move on, and issue an invoice. Rather, because you love your kid you find out where he or she is and make sure they're okay. Your child's failure may dismay you or anger you, but it doesn't destroy the relationship; you love them just the same or even more in the aftermath, because they were lost but have been found again.

Take a moment and roll that last statement around in your head a little bit, because that's actually one of the important marks of God's divine covenant with Abram: it puts no conditions on faithfulness; instead, it is the unconditional commitment on God's part to love, to serve, and to bring to fruition in Abram's life all that He has promised.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, in having our first read-through of this final section in Genesis 15 today, I want you to begin thinking about contract versus covenant. I want you to examine Abram, his heart, and his endless questioning of Almighty God...and then I want you to consider God's response. When we come together again on Monday, we'll be taking these verses apart and getting into some of the nitty-gritty of it all, but for the moment, take some time to see the big picture. This is a priceless moment in Abram's life, and it foreshadows that which would become a priceless moment in our own lives...not via the Abrahamic Covenant, but through the New Covenant brought by Abram's seed, even our Lord Jesus Christ!

Have a great weekend, everyone — God's rich peace in our Savior to you and yours, and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon. Until next time, take care!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for joining in on this first day of our study week together; I hope the sessions we've been doing in these opening portions of Genesis are proving to be fruitful for you in your walk with the Lord, and my prayer is that God through His Word is continually speaking to your heart and bringing transformation into your life through the

renewing of your mind. Today we're back in Genesis 15 to finish up that chapter, so let's pray as we go back to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have been gracious and kind to us, loving and compassionate, slow to anger and quick to forgive and restore. We thank you for your all-encompassing mercy in our lives, and as we come before you this day we do so mindful of our sin, mindful of the fact that we are but dust, mindful that we are deserving only of temporal and eternal punishment. But we speak to you in faith today, sure of your willingness to forgive, sure of the atonement made for our sins through your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Look upon us according to His perfect sacrifice, and speak your Word into our hearts and minds to strengthen and restore us. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today. We'll be closing out Genesis 15 with one more look at the covenant God initiates with Abram. Our focus: Making the cut.

Genesis 15:7-21, Part 2

7He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." 8But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" 9So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." 10Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. 11Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. 12As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. 13Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. 15You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. 16In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." 17When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. 18On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates- 19the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

You're walking through the woods in back of your house, or maybe it's an open field. If you live in town, perhaps you're taking a stroll in the park or along the riverside. Suddenly, you come upon a scene that looks absolutely macabre. There are several dead animals laid out on the ground, and it's obvious that they've been precisely arranged. Worse than that, some of them have been cut in two. There's no way to describe it other than what it is: a disturbing, bloody mess. How do you react?

While I'm sure we'd all be quite alarmed and react in a variety of ways ranging from fear to anger to panic, in Abram's time, to come across such a scene would be less than menacing. In fact, it wouldn't even raise an eyebrow. Instead, it would be instantly recognized for what it was: a place where the cutting of a covenant had taken place.

As we've been following Abram's life through the last several chapters of Genesis, one of the primary things we've been seeing over and over again is God patiently pronouncing His promises upon Abram and then taking pains to reassure Abram that they'll come true. Abram is

a man who believes God, but Abram is also a man who wrestles with fear and doubt. Abram is a man who trusts God, but he's also a man who feels like perhaps God needs some help from time to time to ensure that things work out the way they've been planned. Significantly, in each instance of Abram's wavering or questioning, God hasn't condemned His servant, but confirmed him — and now in this fifteenth chapter of Genesis, God finally brings things as far as they can be brought: Appearing to Abram, He cuts a covenant.

Instructing Abram to find and kill a heifer, a ram, a goat, a dove, and a pigeon, Abram is to cut them in half (except the birds) and lay the pieces in two rows, leaving a path through the center. In the ancient Near East, this type of ritual was often performed to seal promises being made between two parties. Through the "cutting" of a covenant, also known as a blood covenant, those entering into agreement with one another were communicating an oath: as each person walked the path between the slaughtered animals, they were in effect saying, "May this be done to me if I don't keep my promise." Cutting a covenant, then, was deadly serious business.

As we observe God's blood covenant with Abram, however, there's an important difference in the fashioning of the oath here than what would normally take place when such an agreement is being made. It's the one critical thing that we absolutely need to see today. Did you catch it? When all has been made ready and evening comes, we see that God appears in the form of a smoking fire pot and flaming torch and passes between the pieces of the animals. But while this is happening, Abram is in the midst of a deep sleep — a thick and dreadful darkness. Thus, he never passes through those dead animals; God passes through them alone, and thus the covenant is sealed by God alone. In other words, in this agreement, in this covenant, nothing depends on Abram and everything depends on God...and God has done this of His own accord. No matter what, He will be faithful to His covenant...a powerful thing to consider, and as I'm sure many of you have already grabbed onto, something that has a direct bearing on who we are as God's people today...God's people Christ!

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, what then might we say about this incident? While we could enumerate many things here, the most important thing of all to say is that, like so many things in the Old Testament, this covenant is but a foreshadowing of another covenant to come... another blood covenant. It's a foreshadowing, a type, a signpost, of the New Covenant that would come to fruition in Christ, who fulfilled this and all of the other Old Testament blood covenants with His own blood. As believers in Jesus, we can be confident now, just as Abram could be confident then, that every promise spoken by God is one that can be taken to the bank. That means that the gift of eternal life God gives in His Son is true; it's a promise He has been faithful to keep. We can say that because though this Abrahamic covenant was originally for Abram's physical descendants, it was later extended in a spiritual way to all those who, like Abram, believe God. Paul says it this way in the third chapter of Galatians: "All who are in Christ are spiritual heirs of these promises." So then, in Christ you are blessed. In Christ you are chosen. In Christ you are a somebody instead of a nobody. And in Christ you will most surely come into possession of the Promised Land. You are sojourning here now, but because of Christ and His blood sacrifice for you, heaven is your home!

There's so much here to say! So much that we could jump into and run with for miles and miles and miles! For the moment, though, suffice it to say this as we close: Because of God's Covenant with you, sealed with the blood of His One and Only Son, you are heir to the promise of promises. You are God's child. He has done this of His own accord. And your future is secure!

Have a great day everyone — tomorrow we'll be back to head in to Genesis 16, and I'm looking forward to it a whole lot! Until then, God bless you richly, and may His joy be your abiding strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! God's peace to each of you in Christ, and thanks for your presence today as we take some time to open God's Word together. If you've been studying along with us over the past couple of months, then you know

we're in the Old Testament book of Genesis right now, and in this session we'll be opening our look at Genesis 16. Let's pray as we go to the Scriptures, shall we?

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day and this time together to be in your Word, we ask that you would cause it, by your gracious Spirit, to penetrate into our lives and do that which you desire it to do within us. We place ourselves before you with humble, yet eager anticipation, because we know what a great privilege it is to open the Scriptures and learn of you and from you. Bless this time, we pray in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 16 begins with a change. Our focus: the cutting of a covenant...and lost hope.

Genesis 16:1-4

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; 2so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

When I was a young teenager, I remember waiting by the phone for a call from a certain girl from school. Her name was Becky, and I was smitten. Somehow, through a sea of adolescent nerves, I'd managed to strike up a conversation with her before math class one day. As we got to know each other over the next several weeks, I started to think about her all the time, and on the Friday afternoon before spring break of 1981, I got my nerve up again and casually, very cool-like, asked her for her phone number. At my age I'd never dated anyone before and had no idea why I'd even need her phone number, but I'd heard that that's what you were supposed to do when you liked someone, so I did. Becky told me that her parents didn't allow her to share that information with boys, but she asked me for my number instead and promised she'd call me sometime. And so I waited...and waited...and waited some more. All through spring break I stayed by the phone, and in fact, if I still had any skin in the game, I'd still be waiting — because Becky never did call! She was my first crush, and crushed I was when it turned out that I'd struck out.

How long do you wait on a promise before you give up? How long do you hold on to something before you stop believing that it will come to pass? Barring that, to what lengths do you go to try and help something along...to hope something into being when hope seems to be slipping away?

For Abram and Sarai, those are not hypothetical questions, but searching questions. Anxious questions. Painful questions...maybe even bitter questions. As we come today to the 16th chapter of Genesis and continue the narrative of their lives, time has passed since the cutting of the covenant that happened at the end of chapter 15 (which we finished talking about yesterday). Specifically, it's been more than ten years since the promise was made to Abram about a son and about descendants ultimately as numerous as the stars in the sky. You'd think, following such a dramatic action on the part of the Lord — His appearing and speaking to Abram, His initiation of a unilateral covenant, His detailed messaging to Abram regarding the future of his family — that the promises which were spoken would begin to transpire very quickly. That hasn't been the case, however, not by a long shot. In fact, if anything, everything seems to be the same, with life going down the same old track. Abram keeps getting older, and

with increasing age comes increasing angst. Sarai is still barren, which has been a source of great pain for her throughout her life, but especially so in the past decade as her womb has remained closed despite anticipation that it would be otherwise. So — ten years? Ten years is a long time. Longer than most of us have ever waited for anything, much less a promise from God to break forth into our lives and change us from top to bottom.

We can understand, then, the discouragement and sense of resignation that seeps from the text today. We can see the hurt in this couple as they try each day to fight off a rising hopelessness in their lives regarding their legacy. We can also understand the vulnerability here ...vulnerability that may cause them to look away from God and His promises and look to themselves instead. *Maybe it's time*, so their thinking goes, *to work this whole having a family thing from our own angle*. And of course, as we've just read together, that's exactly what they do.

When we come back tomorrow and start to unpack all that's going on here, we'll see on the one hand that the new direction in which Abram and Sarai decide to go isn't uncommon in their day, nor is it considered especially illicit. On the other hand, however, we'll also see that for a whole host of reasons, this new course of action is decidedly outside of God's plan for these two. While their intentions may be noble, their thinking is far from wise — and there's a definite difference between the two.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, it can be terribly hard to wait on God, I know. It can be enormously difficult to exercise patience for a promise from on High. It's so easy to lose heart and lose hope. But the truth is that, as we'll continue to see in the case of Abram and Sarai, our Lord has things well in hand with regard *to* our lives and His purposes *for* our lives. He will always bring light to the dark; He will always come through for us, even though we so often fail to come through for Him. If you're in a time of discomfort, uncertainty, or flagging hope today, don't give up. Don't give in to the temptation to take things into your own hands. Cast your burdens on to your Lord Jesus, because He cares for you, and you know something? No matter where you happen to be on your journey right now, He knows how to turn your restlessness into rest. Again, more on all of this tomorrow, so do make plans to come and be part of things, won't you? Thanks so much for your time today everyone — God bless you richly in Christ, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and thank you for being here today as we take time to open our Bibles together as God's people. The Lord is always here

with us as we go to His Word and seek His face, so as we go back to Genesis 16 in today's session, let's pray and ask His blessing on our study time.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this time to be quiet, to rid ourselves of distractions, and to focus on you and your Word together. We ask that by it you would teach us and transform us, and that through it you would also encourage and sustain us. We do so need you in our lives, and we are truly grateful for your presence with us right now. May your name be glorified in all things! In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we'll be taking a second look at the opening of Genesis 16 to peel back some of the layers of what's happening there. Our focus this session: senseless surrogacy, masterful mercy.

Genesis 16:1-4 (Part 2)

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; ²so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

Many years ago in a church I served, there was an unusual blended family situation in the congregation that caused quite a bit of consternation and hurt feelings. The situation was already in place before I ever became the pastor there, but it only grew worse as time went on. A couple — both of whom had previous spouses — got married and began attending Sunday services. In an odd and unlikely twist, the husband's former wife began attending a few months later with her new husband. Both couples were friendly with one another, particularly the women, and all seemed to be okay...until one day it wasn't.

What happened? When the husband and wife in the original marriage had been together, they were unable to have children. In fact, it was one of the stressors that led to the dissolution of their union. When the former husband remarried, however, his new wife became pregnant within the first year of their life together — which just happened to be about three months after the former wife began attending church with her new husband. As I'm sure you've already surmised, when the new wife found out she was pregnant, guess who she made sure to tell? The former wife — who was still childless. From that moment on, what had started out as a cordial and amicable relationship between two couples doing their best to coexist in a new normal became a savagely bitter and contentious relationship. Their growing cruelty toward each other became a cross that the entire church family had to bear, and it impacted every part of the ministry.

Why do I bring that memory up today? Abram has been living in Canaan for over ten years now. He's around eighty-six years old...about a decade and a half older than his father was when he and his brothers were born. God, as we know, has told Abram that he's going to have a son — an heir from his own body rather than a stand-in like his servant Eliezer. In fact, Abram won't simply have a son, he'll have a vast multitude of descendants, and he'll be known in perpetuity as the father of a great nation. That's great news, exciting and hopeful news... except that God hasn't told Abram *when* this heir will arrive. And given that time and opportunity seems to be steadily slipping away as the years go by, the excitement and hope that originally accompanied this divine promise seems to be slipping away along with it.

As this sixteenth chapter of Genesis begins, then, we find Abram and Sarai making the choice to try and bring about God's promise in their own way. If Abram is going to be the father of a great nation, then he needs to get cracking — and it just so happens that Sarai has the perfect idea to jumpstart things. Employing a common practice of the day — surrogate parentage, often with the use of a servant or slave as the carrier — Sarai tells Abram, *Though I'm barren, maybe I can have a family through Hagar*. In such an instance, the child will legally belong to her rather than her servant; Hagar will merely be a substitute for Sarai. Yet in this way, Abram and his wife are attempting, through the exercising of misguided wisdom and understanding, to do on their own that which they have no power or right to do. The truth is that only God can make Abram into a great nation. Whether it's frustration, impatience, or a waning belief in God's promise, Abram's vanity is to think that he can do it himself. In any case, and not surprisingly at all, this whole charade spectacularly backfires, doesn't it. Hagar does get pregnant via Abram, but once she's found to be with child, what at first had seemed like a good idea now turns into consternation, hurt feelings, and a savagely bitter and contentious relationship on all sides.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, while we're obviously in the midst of the muddying of many waters in the text right now, there is, nonetheless, a stage being set for something much greater than the human foibles currently on display. Over the course of this chapter and the next, we're going to be seeing that God works despite the misguided and even flat out wrong actions of His people. Sarai has no business offering Hagar to Abram, and Abram has no business sleeping with Hagar. Sarai is also wrong to mistreat Hagar as she does. This whole passage is filled with ick to the nth degree. Yet God is going to work through these situations. Hagar is going to be blessed. Abram and Sarai are still going to be the recipients of God's promise. Meaning what? Meaning that God's mercy is incredibly great, and God's will is accomplished regardless of human brokenness and frailty. There are days when I especially need to remember that, and I'm sure you have those days too. Let's agree to make today one of them!

I'm so thankful for you, everybody...God's rich blessings to you in Christ, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks for joining in today as we walk through God's Word together. As we move into the last half of our

study week, today finds us continuing on in Genesis 16, so take a moment, turn there in your Bible, and join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this special moment in time – a moment where we have the opportunity to dedicate ourselves to the study of your Word and bring it to bear it to our lives. We ask that you would mercifully grant us the ability to understand what we read, and that you would help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's in His name that we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, any semblance of homey, domestic bliss in Abram's household has flown the coop with things being the way they are between Sarai and her servant Hagar. Things, in fact, are going from bad to worse very quickly, close to the breaking point, and so Hagar flees. In doing so, however, something extraordinary happens. Our focus this session: The Angel of the Lord.

Genesis 16:5-8a

5Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me." 6"Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. 7The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

Sometimes when you've had enough you've had enough. You can only take so much, right? You have boundaries, of course — and boundaries always get crossed by other people, and you learn to live with that because it's part of being human and we all have to deal with it in life. But beyond boundaries, you have limits. And being pushed beyond your limits is very different than having your boundaries crossed. Being pushed beyond your limits can break you. It can irretrievably and irreparably change you. It can even kill you. Boundaries are one thing, but limits are another category entirely. And when you've been pushed beyond what you can bear, God is very often the only One who can help.

As we come to the Scriptures today and see the continuing deterioration of Abram's household due to choices he and Sarai have made with regard to having a child, boundaries have been crossed all over the place, and we could write a deeply engrossing case study on all of the dynamics in play thanks to the relationship triangle that has arisen since Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as his wife. The goal, of course, was to have Hagar carry a child that would then be counted as Sarai and Abram's. But now, with growing hostilities between Sarai and Hagar over Hagar's pregnancy, and with Abram in the midst of it all not helping one tiny bit, push comes to shove. Sarai mistreats Hagar — the sense in the Hebrew is that she deals harshly with her and humiliates her — and Hagar ends up fleeing.

What can we say about Hagar in her present circumstances? One thing we can say is that she is now a runaway slave...a dangerous thing to be in the ancient near east. Another thing we can say is that she is a pregnant woman wandering by herself through the desert...also not the safest thing to be. But a third thing we can say — and perhaps, the most dangerous, most unsafe thing of all — is that Hagar is literally alone in the world right now. She's a person without a plan. Her life is one big jumbled mess. Hagar has been pushed beyond her limits.

It's at this moment that the extraordinary happens. In a moment where Hagar is so alone, so without hope, and so beyond the reach of anyone's help save God Himself, that's precisely who shows up on the scene. The angel of the Lord appears to Hagar and says, "Where have you come from, and where are you going?"

So — who is this angel of the Lord? While his exact identity isn't given in the Bible, there are many important clues to who he is, and as you've already heard, I just referred to Him as God. But why have I done so? Let's look at this for just a moment before we move on.

Specifically, there are Old and New Testament references to *angels* of the Lord, *an angel* of the Lord, and *the angel* of the Lord. In the third example, when the definite article *the* is used, the Bible is referring to a unique being, separate from the other angels. In fact, when you do a little bit of studying with regard to this title, one thing you'll find right away is that whenever the angel of the Lord shows up, He speaks as God, identifies Himself with God, and exercises the responsibilities of God. We see that not just here in Genesis, but also in Exodus, Judges, 2 Samuel, and Zechariah, among other places. Furthermore, in several of His appearances, those who see the angel of the Lord fear for their lives because they have "seen the Lord." The angel of the Lord, then, is what we call a theophany — an appearance of God in physical form. And most often, He is identified by commentators, scholars, and pastors as Jesus Christ prior to His incarnation.

This topic is a great one for deeper study at another time, but for now I want to mention one more especially significant thing about the angel of the Lord's arrival in today's text: it happens to be His very first appearance in Scripture. Think about it: Jesus Christ, pre-incarnate, the second Person of the Trinity, doesn't come to hang with the big guns...not Adam or Noah or Enoch or Abram. No, the angel of the Lord chooses as His first visitation an enslaved, single mother-to-be who has come to the end of herself. He's come to a person who has been mistreated and maligned and abused. He's come to a woman without hope.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, do you know where my mind goes as I say that? It immediately jumps to the New Testament, where in John 4 Jesus reveals Himself as the Messiah for the very first time. To whom? Not to the big guns around Him, but to the least of the least: a Samaritan woman who's been married five times, is currently living with someone not her husband, and who is such an outcast in her own community that she's been reduced to drawing water by herself in the heat of the day because no one wants to have anything to do with her. This is God's love for the unlikely. His care for those who cry. His delight in the disenfranchised. This is God's love for a world pushed beyond its limits.

When we come back tomorrow to finish out our week, we'll be listening in on what the angel of the Lord says to Hagar, and as we do that, we'll also be tying some things from the text in with our own lives as God's people, so I hope you'll come along and be part of things. Until then, have a great day in our Lord Jesus, everyone — He is with you, He is for you, and His love for you, demonstrated in His coming to be an atoning sacrifice for your sins, is truly without end. Take care, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. I pray that your week is ending in a good way today, and I'm also praying that our time together over these next few minutes will establish you more deeply in your faith and bring peace to your heart. I'm so richly blessed to play the part I do in this ministry, and one of my greatest joys is to be able to come your way each day with God's Word. Thanks for being here today; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, you are indeed great and mighty – alone in your splendor and your glory. There is no one beside you; we proclaim you to be the only and all-wise God of the universe. Thank you for your love and mercy, and thank you for your promise to never leave us or forsake us. Please bless us as we look to you this day, and grant us understanding and application as we learn from your Word today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the angel of the Lord makes several declarations to Hagar regarding her life and her legacy. Our focus: the God who both hears and sees.

Genesis 16:7-16

7The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. 9Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." 11The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. 12He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." 13She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." 14That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi ; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. 15So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne.16Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

As I get a bit older, I find myself having more frequent appointments with certain kinds of doctors, doctors I never really thought about before. Two of the new physicians in my life of late are an audiologist and an ophthalmologist. My hearing isn't bad, but it's a little weaker than it used to be (cue the remark about too many years of loud rock music when I was young). As for my eyes? Those have been of more concern to me. The doctor tells me that they're just fine and that I shouldn't be concerned about needing stronger and stronger readers from the drugstore. My brother-in-law, a retired optometrist, says the same. When I tell people I'm up to 1.75 on the strength scale they usually laugh at me and tell me they're wearing 3-somethings. Still, I don't like needing glasses to read. I don't like having to put on glasses each day when I sit down and share the Scriptures with you. I don't like the fact that though I have 27 pairs of specs littered throughout the house and my truck, I can never seem to find them when I need them. And during the present pandemic, I definitely don't like wearing them when I have a mask on, because they steam up with every breath!

I'd like to present you with one thought today – just a brief thought – that will carry you into the weekend and set things up for our time together on Monday. The thought is simply this: the passage before us right now presents God to us as the One who hears and the One who sees.

God hears not only my words, but the cries of my heart as well.

God sees all things, but He especially sees me.

When God tells Hagar to name her son Ishmael, it's because He has heard her in her misery. That's what Ishmael means...God Hears.

When Hagar, in turn, proclaims the angel of the Lord to be the "God who sees Me," she is confessing a wonderful and comforting truth: it's not just that God has her in view, but that He looks into her very being and truly sees her...pays attention to her...knows her.

I don't know about you, but to me that's profound...profound and powerful. Why?

Because when God hears, it's not just Hagar in her misery, but you in your time of trial as well.

When God sees, it's not just Hagar, who marveled that He would take the time to visit and minister to one as lowly as she, but you also, whatever it is that you might be facing in life right now.

Your gracious God hears you. He sees you. And just as He came so lovingly and compassionately to Hagar in a theophany so long ago — the second Person of the Godhead, Christ preincarnate, visiting a nobody, runaway slave girl from Egypt with no pedigree and nothing to offer but her brokenness — so God has come to you with the same love and compassion in the incarnation of Christ.

When we come back next time, we'll be seeing how God puts Hagar back together and refocuses her life. Boy, does that resonate with me! If that's something that you or someone you know and love could use as well, then be sure to come along and join in on Monday.

You're a great blessing to me, everyone — thanks so much for being with me in God's Word this past week. God's peace, take care, and I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ! It's good to get back to the Scriptures with you after the weekend, and as we come back to God's Word on this first study day of the week, we'll be finishing our time in Genesis 16. Thanks for coming along today; let's pray as we prepare to study.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are good and just and right in all you do. We praise you today for your mercy, which you have poured into our lives through the sacrifice of your one and only Son. We are grateful and we give you thanks for the salvation which you have brought us. Open our hearts as we look to your Word, and teach us by your Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 16 ends with God's special pledge to Hagar. Our focus this session: another family line; more descendants too numerous to count.

Genesis 16:7-16, Part 2

7The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. 9Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." 11The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. 12He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." 13She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." 14That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi ; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. 15So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. 16Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Gracie Allen, George Burns' wife, fellow comedian, and all-around partner in life and work, was known for her jovial spirit and her quirky, pragmatic way of doing things. That personality trait often led to others being surprised. Once, for example, she received a small, live alligator as a gag from a fan. Not knowing what to do with it, she placed it in the bathtub and then left for an appointment. When she returned home, she found this note from a maid she had recently hired: "Dear Miss Allen: I'm sorry, but I've quit. I don't work in houses where there's an alligator. I'd have told you this when you hired me, but I never thought it would come up.'

As we've worked our way through this 16th chapter of Genesis, we've happened upon something of a surprise...something we never thought would come up. It's almost as jolting as finding an alligator in a bathtub, but it's no gag. Hagar is in a pickle. She's run away from Sarai her mistress, she's wandering aimlessly through the desert, and she has nowhere to turn. Resting by a spring in the wilderness, she has her very first encounter with God — Abram's God, the One true God — and she finds very quickly that this God is much different than any of the idols with which she's familiar from back home in Egypt. This God is real. He knows her, knows her situation, and also knows the desperate state of her heart and the brokenness of her spirit. Moreover, this encounter, unique as it is, yields an equally unique result: rather than suffer punitive measures for running away from her master (which is what Hagar would expect), God has instead come to speak blessing into her life. The son she will bear, though not the child of promise that Abram and Sarai are wanting, will be great nonetheless. And through this

son, Hagar's descendants in the world will one day be too numerous to count, just like God has declared to Abram with respect to the true child of promise still to come for him and Sarai.

As you know, we've already talked about this passage once, and what we've noted along with its general messiness is that it's both an unlikely family story for the time (even if not so farfetched in today's world) and most definitely one we would expect to end badly. But here's the thing: even as squirrely and unsavory as this triangulated relationship has become between Abram, Sarai, and their slave girl, even as faithless and disobedient as Abram and Sarai have been toward God in instigating this whole mess, and yes — even as frightened, alone, and utterly without options as Hagar is because of her lowly station in life, her isolation in a country not her own, and her powerlessness to change her situation, through it all God is graciously making and keeping some very special divine promises.

As far as Abram and Sarai go, there's still going to be son for them born through Sarai's own womb. This, of course, is Isaac, about whom we'll be talking just a few study sessions from now. Isaac will become the son of promise through whom the tribes of Israel will come. At the same time, however, Hagar's son, Ishmael, will also become a great leader — reminding us that regardless of how a situation looks from a human perspective, God is always at work both to accomplish His will and to fulfill His purposes.

Now — while we can rejoice in the Lord's compassion for Hagar in her time of need, and while we can appreciate His blessing upon her life via His promise regarding Ishmael, that doesn't mean we can completely understand it in terms of the bigger picture. In truth, there are several aspects to this portion of Scripture that are just hard to square up, and to be honest, I often find myself wondering about why things happened here as they did.

Abram and Sarai's choice to use Hagar as a surrogate, for example, has resulted in millennia of angst, enmity, and bloodshed. The descendants of Isaac are the Jews, and the descendants of Ishmael are the Arabs — and they've been mortal enemies pretty much from the time they came into being. Scholars often ponder over how things might have been different had Abram simply trusted God to bring about His promise without any attempt at "help" from him and Sarai.

Still, the life and times of Hagar is one full of God's goodness, and we can all learn from the way God worked in her life. She was a nobody, a foreign slave girl. Yet the Lord saw her in her distress, provided for her need, and blessed her son because he was the child of Abram. As I alluded to last week, Hagar also gave us the term *El Roi*, which means "the God who sees," and her story reminds us that no matter who we are, where we've come from, or what we're going through, the God of the universe sees us and cares about us. He will comfort and provide for anyone who turns to Him, regardless of who they are, what they've done, or what their standing is in life. God always keeps His promises.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, there's one more thing we should say here as we prepare to move on. We'll talk about it more in a week or two, but I want to put it out on the table now so you can begin thinking about it. In Galatians 4, Paul uses the narrative of Sarai and Hagar to illustrate the results of two different covenants: the New Covenant, based on grace, and the Old Covenant, based on the Law. In Paul's analogy, believers in Christ are like the child born of Sarai: free, the result of God's promise. Those who try to earn their salvation by their own works are like the child born of Hagar: slaves, the result of human effort. How has human effort been working out thus far in this saga? I think we all know the answer to that...and it points us

to a most important truth regarding our lives as God's people in Christ. For it is by grace we have been saved, through faith...not by works. Never by works!
Have a great day, everyone; we'll continue this discussion next time as we open to a new chapter here in God's Word. I'm looking forward to it, and I hope you'll click in and join me. God's rich peace to you in Jesus, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's peace, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. As we get into the swing of this new week it's good to have each of you here to gather around God's Word, and today we're opening for the first time to the 17th chapter of Genesis. Almost the whole of our study in this current portion of Genesis has been about the life of Abram and the promise that rests upon his life, and that subject will continue to occupy our time and attention as we move forward. Just a reminder that it's still a great time to be inviting your friends and family to join in for this series; there's always so much to learn in this first book of the Bible. Let's pray as we open the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Thank you for this day to belong to you and to be called your own. We ask for your blessing as we look to your Word in this next little while. Teach us and grow us up into maturity as we study, and continue your transforming work in our lives throughout this day. We ask this in your precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, more time has passed between the end of Genesis 16 and the beginning of this new chapter. When we last left Abram, he was 86 and welcoming Ishmael into the world, his son by Hagar. Now Abram is 99, and more major changes are about to take place in his life. Our focus this session: What's in a name?

Genesis 17:1-7

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty ; walk before me and be blameless. 2I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." 3Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 4"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. 5No longer will you be called Abram ; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 7I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

This past July I marked the 25th anniversary of my ordination into the pastoral ministry...or at least my calendar did. Actually, I didn't remember the day at all. I'm not really the celebrating type, and birthdays, anniversaries, and other yearly dates that come and go with each trip around the sun are hard for me to keep track of. The things I do remember are usually more attuned to the Church Year calendar than anything else, and so July 9th was a day just like any other day.

Today, though, I'm revisiting those 25 years, and why? I'm revisiting them to try and get a sense of time. I'm remembering them to conjure up the chunk of life that 25 years encompasses. For almost half my life now I've been serving, in one capacity or another, Christ's church. And as I sort through all the memories of different congregations and parishioners and the issues that have come and gone, there have been good times and bad, successes and failures, times when I felt affirmed in my calling, and times when I questioned why in the world I was doing what I was doing and wondering if God was in it at all.

Now — to be sure, I know that I've been shaped for this in life. I know God's hand is in my vocation. I also know that come hell or high water I'm not going to turn my back on what I'm doing, because Jesus Christ is my all and sharing Him with others is my everything. It's my reason for getting out of bed in the morning. But in replaying some of the past 25 years, I'm realizing something: as much as I know that this has been the right path, and as much as I know that God has been and is in the midst of it, it's been a long haul. I also know that just about every one of you out there right now can say very similar things about your own life's journey.

I've brought these things up today not to talk about myself, but to use my experience as a lens through which to view what we have before us in God's Word right now. Here's what I mean: as I think about the last 25 years of my life...as you think about the last 25 years of your life...keep in mind that as we pick up the text here in Genesis 17, 25 years is the approximate length of time that Abram and Sarai have been sojourning in the land of Canaan. 25 years is the approximate length of time that they've been waiting for God to bring to pass the promise He's made regarding Abram's life and legacy as a man whose name will be great...as a man who will be the father of a great nation.

25 years, and still no child to be a proper heir.

25 years, and only the misstep of a now-13 year-old Ishmael to show for it.

25 years of people, places, and things; of issues come and gone; of good times and bad; of successes and failures; and yes...

25 years of sometimes feeling affirmed in God's calling and other times questioning why in the world they're doing what they're doing and wondering if God is in it at all.

This is Abram and Sarai. It's been 25 years. It's been a long haul.

Today then, coming to the opening verses of this new chapter, the fact that God is visiting Abram is significant. As far as we know — at least so far as Scripture goes — Abram hasn't heard from God for a long, long time. Years of divine silence, especially in the aftermath of the Ishmael fiasco, have almost certainly weighed on Abram's heart and caused him to question many things. But now God appears...and what does God say? He says that the time has finally come.

Confirming His covenant with His servant, the Lord says a momentous thing, which is recorded for us in verses 5-6:

No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

Notice that though God says He *will* do these things, He speaks to Abram as though it's already a finished proposition: "*I have made you a father of many nations.*" It's been a long time coming, an exceedingly long haul, but now in one fell swoop Abram — "exalted father" — now becomes Abraham, or "father of a multitude."

Now the wheels are being set in motion.

Now the promise begins to stir.

Now what was declared years before is about to arrive in beauty and fullness...and as we'll soon see, even in laughter.

Wrapping Up

Working our way through the upcoming verses in the chapter, what we'll be finding as we go is that the Lord spends this time of visitation both reviewing for Abram (now Abraham) what was originally promised to him, as well as preparing and instructing him for what's to come. As we wrap things up for the day, you might find it helpful to do a little bit of advance reading to prepare and instruct yourself for the unique things we'll be discussing this week. Take a few moments and read this 17th chapter of Genesis through from start to finish...perhaps a couple of times, just to ensure that you're tracking with all that the Lord says. As usual, we'll be unpacking things section by section, and we'll also make sure to connect it all to the bigger picture with respect to the bigger promise surrounding Abraham's life and legacy. While kings will indeed eventually come from his line, in the fullness of time it is the King of kings who will come through Abraham — and that grand truth is what will have our focus as we move forward.

God bless you richly in Christ this day, my friends...thanks for your time, and I'll see you again tomorrow to dig deeper into this rich and beautiful portion of the Scriptures. Joy to you, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich blessings to you in Christ, and welcome to another session of EDiBS, our day by day journey through God's Word together as an online ministry family. On this Thursday we're opening again to the 17th chapter of Genesis, a book that has been serving to teach us and to help us order our thoughts in special and significant ways during the time we've been studying. I'm glad you're here; let's pray as we open our Bibles.

Prayer

Almighty God, speak to us now through your precious Word. Help us to do more than simply read it; instead, help us to take it into the depths of our hearts, where it can do its transforming work in us. We thank you and ask these things in the great and saving name of our Savior Jesus, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, this new section of Genesis 17 will be speaking more about God's gracious covenant with Abraham, and what we'll be seeing is, perhaps, a bit on the startling side. Our focus this session: This you are to do.

Genesis 17:8-14

8The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." 9Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. 10This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. 13Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. 14Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

I'm a fan of French chef Jacques Pepin. My first exposure to him was the cooking show he did with Julia Child for Public Television starting in the late 1990's, and I've been following him ever since. Whether doing up fast food in his own way or preparing a formal menu for a large dinner party, his humble demeanor, his deep knowledge about food, and his skill in preparing it is inspiring to me. One of the things Jacques Pepin is most known for is his flawless technique. His critically acclaimed book on the subject is regarded as one of the finest modern tutorials available, and it covers everything from how to properly peel a vegetable to the right way to cut up a chicken to preparing a French-style omelet, plus a hundred other things besides. Among the topics he spends the most time on? Knife skills. A sharp knife well used is a safe knife. A sharp knife rightly used saves time. A sharp knife handled properly makes food prep easier and cooking more enjoyable overall. In short, a knife — its quality and the use thereof — can make or break your life in the kitchen.

As we come to God's Word today, the subject of knives is dancing around in my head for a reason, and admittedly it's a bit of a squeamish one: as the Lord speaks to Abraham about the

covenant He has cut with him and what Abraham is now to do in order to keep it, the answer is a cutting of an entirely different kind...one that will make or break his life and the lives of his descendants. The answer is circumcision.

Briefly, what is circumcision? It's the cutting away and removal of the foreskin from the male penis. These days in the United States the majority of males, of Hebrew heritage or not, are routinely circumcised, and it's done mostly for hygienic reasons. There's always been a spirited debate over the practice (I was even confronted by an anti-circumcision activist when I took my son to the hospital for his circumcision over 20 years ago), but even so, the circumcision rate in our country today stands at over 80%.

Hygiene notwithstanding, however, what's the deeper significance of circumcision? Why would God come up with such a seemingly strange way for Abraham and his descendants to show that they were His covenant people?

In discussing this, the first thing we should say is that circumcision wasn't unknown in the world during the time Abraham was alive. It was actually a ritual practiced among many different people groups, and it signified different things at different times depending on how it was used. Abraham, then, would have been familiar with it already, at least in passing. But when God called *him* to be circumcised — and to circumcise every male born in his house as well, slave or free — it was to be a special sign that marked their relationship.

On the one hand, circumcision was a cutting away of the flesh as an appropriate sign that those of the covenant, sinners in need of redemption, were to put no confidence in the flesh. Rather, their confidence was to be in God alone. In addition, because circumcision was centered on the organ associated with reproduction, it was also to serve as a lasting reminder to them of the special seed of Abraham — the seed which would ultimately bring the Messiah into the world.

The cutting and removal of the foreskin of every male among Abraham and his descendants would mark them as those belonging to God. That means circumcision was to be seen as a blessing, not a curse. It was to be seen as a sign of security, not a ghoulish exercise designed to induce squeamishness. Circumcision was a means, and a very effective means at that, of remembering God's grace...and not only God's grace, but His mercy and His loving compassion as well. Circumcision was a sign of God's commitment to His own.

Just briefly, what of those who rejected circumcision? The text today tells us that those who rejected circumcision were effectively rejecting the covenant itself and would therefore be cut in a different way: they would be cut off from their people, and ultimately, their peoples' God. Their rejection of circumcision was a rejection of God's gift and promise.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, while a lot about what we see in today's passage is straightforward, I realize that the concept of circumcision itself is a little esoteric! It's not every day that we talk about the cutting away of sensitive body parts, and no matter how much it makes sense in principle, it's still a bit "out there" in the overall scheme of things. Therefore, when we come back tomorrow we'll spend one more session on this topic, talking about circumcision in both the Old and New Testament eras as well as in Old and New Covenant theology. Circumcision was indeed a special blessing for Abraham, his household, and his descendants, and when we gather together next time we'll see how that special blessing extends to us via another exceedingly gracious connection.

Until then, have a wonderful day, know you're in my prayers, and most important of all, know that the Lord is with you! Take care everyone — I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Hello everyone — God's grace and peace to you today in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! I'm glad you're here today for Bible study, and prayerful as always that these next few minutes we'll be spending together will be profitable minutes for you — profitable for your growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's our unending goal here at the ministry, and as we do that today, we're still chugging our way through Genesis 17. Let's pray as we open the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord, you have been a great blessing to your people. You have called them from darkness into light; you have washed their crimson stain of sin away through the blood of your Son; you have taken those who were nobodies and in Christ have made them somebodies. Your people have a hope and a future because of your grace and your mercy. Bless the hearing and learning of your Word this day, and use it in our lives to build us up and grow us deeper in the knowledge and love of our Savior. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

Getting started on this Friday, we'll be having one more brief look at circumcision and the manner in which God delivers the practice to Abraham. Our focus: for you and your descendants.

Genesis 17:10

10This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

I want to tell you a story today. It's a true story, and the reason for my telling it will become clear in a few moments. Rather than being a chiefly textual commentary on what we've been reading in Genesis over the past two days, this story instead addresses and intersects with the practical implications of the text we've been looking at. My goal today is that it will carry you into the weekend thoughtful and reflective...that it will give you something to meditate on and wrestle with for a little while. When we come together again on Monday, we'll return to it and take some time to pull everything together with respect to what we've studying thus far here in Genesis 17.

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Ivan the Great was Tsar of Russia during the Fifteenth Century. As you history buffs out there know, he brought together the many warring tribes in that part of the world into one vast empire and became a formidable leader. As a fighting man he was courageous. As a general he was brilliant. Over time, he systematically eliminated or drove off those seeking to be at enmity with him, finally establishing peace across the nation.

Ivan was so busy waging his campaigns, however, that he never got around to having a family. His aides and advisers were quite concerned about the matter, and they took pains to remind

him, over and over, that there was no heir to his throne. Should anything happen to him, his hard-won union would surely shatter into a thousand pieces.

Strongly encouraged to take a wife who could bear him a son, Ivan insisted that he didn't have the time to look for a bride, but understanding the concern, he did give his blessing for a search committee. If his men could find a suitable woman to become his wife, he promised to marry her.

Ivan's advisers searched cities throughout Europe to find an appropriate wife for him, and find her they did: the beautiful dark-eyed daughter of the King of Greece. She was young, brilliant, and charming, and the Tsar agreed to the marriage without having met her. The King of Greece was delighted, but there was one nonnegotiable condition that must be met: "He cannot marry my daughter," the king said, "unless he becomes a member of the Greek Orthodox Church." Ivan agreed to the stipulation. With great haste then, a priest was dispatched to Moscow to instruct him in Orthodox doctrine — which he actually quite liked and of which he was a quick study — and following that, Ivan made his way to Athens, accompanied by 500 of his personal palace guard.

Ivan was to be baptized into the Orthodox Church by full immersion, as was the custom of the Eastern Church, and his soldiers, ever loyal, asked to be baptized also. The Patriarch of the Church assigned 500 priests to give the soldiers a one-on-one crash course in baptism, and the plan was that all 500 of them would be immersed at the same time, along with their leader. Crowds gathered from all over Greece for the occasion. What a sight: 500 priests and 500 soldiers, a thousand people at once, all walking into the blue Mediterranean. The priests were dressed in black robes and their tall black hats. The soldiers, however, showed up in their battle uniforms with all their regalia — ribbons of valor, medals of courage, and their weapons of warfare.

Suddenly, there was a problem. One of the priests balked and refused to proceed. Why? The Church had always prohibited professional soldiers from being members because of the fact that they took the lives of others in their work. The priest, courageously pressing the Church Patriarch on the matter, said it would be wrong to allow the administration of the sacrament in clear violation of the historical practice of the church. After hearing his priest speak, the Patriarch agreed. If the men were to be baptized, it was insisted that they give up their commitment to bloodshed; they could not be both killers and church members. They had to choose. As you might imagine, this sudden change threw a wrench into things...so what ended up happening?

After a hasty round of diplomacy, the problem ended up being solved quite simply. As the words were spoken and the priests began to baptize them, each soldier reached to his side and withdrew his sword. Lifting it high overhead, every soldier was totally immersed - everything baptized except his fighting arm and sword.

The 'un-baptized' arm is, as I said a few minutes ago, a factual story. The incident really happened. Which got me to thinking. Which, when I began to examine my own life, got me to fretting...which, finally, caused me to ask a rather broad and uncomfortable question, not only of myself, but of all of us. How many other un-baptized arms might there be out there...or unbaptized lips, perhaps? Just how many un-baptized ears and other appendages are represented among us — hearts, minds, wills?

Since the time of Abraham about 4,000 years ago, circumcision among those who are Jewish hasn't just been a private, inward reminder that they are a people belonging to God, but an outward sign of the same — a unique distinction marking them as having been cut away from the world and the flesh and an identifier showing the world that their dependence is on Almighty God and His promises. Abraham was given the command of circumcision for those reasons. But what's the good of circumcision as an outward sign of a covenant relationship if nothing's really happening on the inside? I bring that up today because unfortunately, in the centuries following the original command from God and the reasons for which He gave it, God's people began to trust more in the sign of the covenant (circumcision) than in the God of the covenant. They began to believe that circumcision by itself was sufficient to be considered "right" with Creator of the universe, and so the external aspect of the ritual began to overshadow the covenant relationship it was meant to represent.

That's why by the time we get to the book of Exodus we start hearing the Lord speak to His people about their uncircumcised lips. He talks in Leviticus of uncircumcised hearts. In Jeremiah we hear of uncircumcised ears. In other words, people who had this external mark on their body representing their connection to the living God were nonetheless people whose lips were not committed to God. They were full of gossip, foul language and deceitful words. People who had this external mark on their body representing their connection to the living God were nonetheless people whose hearts were not committed to God. They were full of evil and wickedness — darkness. People who had this external mark on their body representing their connection to the living God were nonetheless people whose ears were not committed to God, because frankly, their ears were closed to Him.

What happened? Why did it happen? And...does it still happen today?

When we come back on Monday, this is the conversation we'll be having, and while in some ways it won't be the most comfortable time for us, I think we'll find that once we get through it, what starts out uncomfortably will lead us to something deeply comforting in the end. Be sure to join in, won't you?

You're in my prayers, everyone — have a great weekend, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody — God's peace, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you as we enter a new week of Bible study together, presently continuing forward in our study of Genesis. As always, I'm glad to know you've joined in for our time in God's Word, and also as always, I invite you to take a moment and pray with me as we begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are the bringer of joy to our lives and the bringer of joy to all the world, because you have sent your Son Jesus Christ to us as Savior. We thank you for the redemption we have because of Christ and His cross; because of the sacrifice He made to bring us forgiveness and reconciliation. It's in Jesus' precious name that we come to you this day, asking for your blessing as we open the Scriptures. Speak to us Lord God, and do your work in us. Amen.

Getting Started

Getting things started on this Monday, let's take some time to bring a temporary closure to the issue of circumcision, a topic we introduced at the beginning of chapter 17. Our focus today: The Old Covenant foreshadows the New.

Genesis 17:10 (Part 2)

10This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

When we were together this past Friday, I left you with the story of the Un-Baptized Arm. It was all about how, when Ivan the Great and his men were baptized via immersion by priests from the Greek Orthodox Church, every part of the men went below the water save for their arms and the swords attached to them. If you'll remember, it was a compromise: the soldiers desired baptism but couldn't become part of the Greek church since their profession involved killing, and the priests desired to baptize them but couldn't go against established ecclesiastical practice. They ended up meeting in the middle, and the end result — to any reasonable, thinking person at least — was dubious at best.

That story was true, and the sell-out it showcased represents another, greater truth that we all contend with each day: how often it is, when it comes to our human way of thinking and our manmade idea of religion, that we're willing to give *almost* all of ourselves to the things of God, and yet hold back one important part...and how often that one, important, un-given part becomes our complete undoing. It's easy to engage in religious activity and submit to a ritual; it's another thing entirely to submit to God and live out the relationship that the ritual represents.

This was indeed the case in the story of the unbaptized arm. It is also the case, however, in the story of Abraham and his descendants, and in my story and your story, and in the story of the entire human race. It's a universal story — and yes, the story is true.

As we've been studying in Genesis 17, we've seen that Abraham was given the command of circumcision. It was a sign. It was a mark. It was his and his descendants' duty to keep as both

a physical and spiritual reminder that they had been set apart for the things of God. But to many of Abraham's descendants, that's as far as it went, and in truth, it wasn't long before that mark became more or less meaningless among his people. While the ritual remained, the relationship it represented waned. That's not what, nor how, circumcision was supposed to be.

Today there is baptism. It is a sign. It is a mark. The popular conception — again, under our manmade idea of religion — is that we undergo it as both a physical and spiritual reminder that we have been set apart for the things of God. But is that all there is to it? And if so, then how do we power through and keep the relationship that it represents from waning?

The answer is that we don't...and we can't. Because that's not what, nor how, baptism is supposed to be.

The overarching problem in all of this comes from our place of understanding...or more specifically, our lack of understanding. And what it is that we fail to understand? That we, by our very nature, are dead: dead in trespasses and sin. Dead means that we are helpless to contribute to any kind of rebirth, no matter how hard we try. Dead means that there is no spark of true life within us, regardless of how we try to delude ourselves and say that there is. Dead means no hope, no future...no anything but judgment, the judgment merited by our transgressions.

Again, however, when it comes to us and our manmade idea of religion, we have this self-delusion that we can give almost all of ourselves to the things of God, and God will be satisfied, and all will be okay. But that's the problem with our idea of religion: we think it begins with us. We think we're operating from a place of strength at the negotiating table. We think that we can be arbiters in the presence of the Almighty. We feel like on the whole of it we're pretty decent people, and that by adding some form of God to the mix of who we are and what we do, we're really just adding value to who we are and what we have. That attitude is our complete undoing.

Circumcision for Abraham, and now baptism for us, is different. Both circumcision and baptism are in actuality all about how we can't, but God can. They're about how we aren't, but God is. When it comes to Almighty God and the gift He gives, the mark — the thing we undergo (Circumcision in the Old Covenant, Baptism in the the New Covenant) — is not one where God only says, "I am doing this to you so you remember how to live." If that were the case we would all be miserable and lost forever. Rather, the gift that God gave in circumcision to Abraham and his descendants and later in baptism to all of us was chiefly given to say, "I am doing this to you so you remember you are Mine." Circumcision, and now baptism, have everything to do with what we formerly had been, and who, in Almighty God, we have now become. This is the way the apostle Paul explains it in the second chapter of his letter to the Colossians:

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:9-15)

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, it's important that we join these two things together in our understanding (which, by the way, is the reason I started our discussion of circumcision with a story about baptism). Circumcision was given by God for cleansing from sin and to bring people into a covenant relationship with Him, a covenant that made them part of His family and partakers of His divine goodness and mercy. It was an act of God's grace toward a people in need of redemption. In the New Testament, when we see circumcision being referenced again by the apostle Paul, the "circumcision made without hands" that Paul is speaking of is wrapped up not in the Old Covenant, but in the New Covenant. It's wrapped up in Christ. We were buried with Christ in baptism and raised with Him through faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. So — what role does baptism play in the New Covenant? It is given by God for cleansing from sin and to bring people into a covenant relationship with Him, a covenant that makes them part of His family and partakers of His divine goodness and mercy. It's an act of God's grace toward a people in need of redemption.

Circumcision, given to Abraham by God, and Baptism, given to us by God, are both marks of a covenant established by our Lord for the blessing of His people. Circumcision (Old Covenant) gave way to baptism (New Covenant), with both having to do with the same thing: a relationship marked by forgiveness and redemption; a relationship initiated and held fast by God Himself.

When we come back tomorrow, we'll find God continuing to speak to Abraham with wonderful words of grace and mercy, and you'll definitely want to be part of things as we work our way toward the end of our current chapter. Thanks for your time today, everyone — God's grace, mercy and peace to each of you in our Savior Jesus, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich blessings to each of you on this Tuesday, and welcome to another edition of EDiBS. Thanks for coming along today, and thanks also for inviting your friends and loved ones to come along with you as we walk through the Scriptures together. Right now in our study time we're in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis, so let's pray and ask for our Lord's hand of blessing as we open our Bibles.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for this time to draw near to you through your holy Word, and we ask that in our reading and meditation over today's passage, you would grant us all that we need to understand it, learn from it, and live out its truth in our own lives as your redeemed, restored, dearly loved people. We are grateful for the salvation you have brought to us – and we ask that you would help us to walk in that gratitude. In your precious name we pray, amen

Getting Started

As we get started today, having given Abraham the command of circumcision as a sign of the covenant He has established, God now continues to speak, this time with respect to Sarai, Abraham's wife. Our focus this session: another new name, another great blessing, and a new age for the aged.

Genesis 17:15-22

15God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. 16I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." 17Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" 18And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" 19Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. 20And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. 21But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year." 22When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

Do you ever feel old? Are you old? It's okay if you are...in fact, age is a beautiful thing with beautiful blessings attached to it, in spite of what ignorant people often say about it. Age, of course, certainly has a chronological aspect to it, and we can't turn back the clock or slow things down as time goes by. But age very definitely has a mental and emotional component to it as well, and that's something very often within our control as we live each day. Life can be lived fully or falteringly — that's true at every age. The opportunity to make the most of it is there for everyone. Yet for those who are older, that choice can become an increasingly difficult one to manage from day to day.

As we come to God's Word here in Genesis 17 and see the Lord continuing to speak to Abraham about his life and his legacy, we have quite a bit to get to in the text, and I'm excited for what we'll be seeing together. Today, though, I want to spend a just a moment or two homing in on one thing: Abraham and Sarah's age. All kinds of amazing things are about to happen in their lives. A new era in their marriage and family is on the horizon. God's promises, after many years of seemingly lying dormant, are suddenly rushing toward fulfillment. There's a definite buzz in the air surrounding everything that's going on, and what's one of the most beautiful and blessed things about it all? One of the most beautiful and blessed things about it all is that Abraham is 100 years old, Sarah is 90, and God doesn't think a thing of it. He's putting their lives on the fast track.

I know that old age is dreaded by some people. It can mean loneliness. It can mean physical decline. Those things can in turn cause a retreat into inactivity, and when that happens, folks tend to lose their enthusiasm for life and end up spending their time in fruitless reminiscing and self-pity.

And yet here's what I'd like you to think about today: history records that many people made some of their greatest contributions to society *after* the age of 65. The Earl of Halsbury, for example, was 90 when he began preparing a 20-volume revision of English law. Goethe wrote *Faust* at 82. Galileo made his greatest discovery when he was 73. And we don't have to stop there. At 69, Hudson Taylor was still vigorously working in the mission field, opening up new territories in southeast Asia. Caleb, at 85, took the stronghold of the giants, which you can read about Joshua 14. And then, of course, there is the couple before us today. Abraham and Sarah, the centenarian and nonagenarian, respectively, are about to change the world as faithful servants of the Most High God.

Wrapping Up

My point today is simply this, and I'll say it as a way to wrap things up: God never intends for you, or me, or any of His people, to retire from life — spiritual or otherwise. The Bible, in fact, quite pointedly says in Psalm 92 that we can still bring forth fruit in old age. In an old *Our Daily Bread devotion*, I remember it being likened to Jesus at the wedding in Cana. Just as He kept the "best wine" for the last at the feast, in the same way He seeks to gather the most luscious clusters of the fruit of the Spirit from the fully ripened harvest of our lives. Translation: you can be sure that if you're watching or reading this devotion right now...if you're breathing and have a heartbeat...then God has a reason for you to be alive and kicking. He wouldn't keep you in this world if He didn't have an important and worthwhile ministry for you to engage in. You matter in His plan. You are His hands and feet, even on days when those extremities feel a bit on the feeble side. It's never too late — and you're *never* too old — to be present and productive as a faithful servant of the Most High God. Don't forsake the hours — recognize the opportunity God has given you to live fully, and then go seize the day!

God's power, peace, provision, and joy to each one of you in Christ Jesus our Lord, my friends — I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings folks! Grace and peace to you today in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. It's so good to be with you today as we come to God's Word...and we come knowing that He is with us, that He will not leave us, and that He will be faithful to lead us through all that's coming up in the day before us. Put your trust in Him in a fresh new way today, and purpose in your heart to temper the noise and chaos of the world with faith in Christ and the quiet strength that He provides. Let's pray as we open our Bibles again to Genesis 17.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, open our eyes to the truth of your Word today, that from it we grow in our faith, grow in our walk, and grow in our witness to a world that so desperately needs your love and forgiveness. You are our sure hope, and we thank you from the depth of our hearts for all that you have done and continue to do for us. Please bless our study time, in your precious and saving name we pray. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come one more time to yesterday's section of verses where the Lord speaks to Abraham about the coming blessing of a son to him and to Sarai — Sarai, who is now to be renamed, just as Abraham was. Our focus this session: a clear and definitive pronouncement.

Genesis 17:15-22

15God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. 16I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." 17Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" 18And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" 19Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. 20And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. 21But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year." 22When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

It's been said that to welcome change equals a willingness to grow in life. By definition, it means a distaste for ruts. Welcoming change is the act of eagerly standing on your tip-toes for a better view of what tomorrow might bring. Not everyone, however, finds it easy to put out that kind of a welcome mat. Grady Nutt, the famous Christian humorist who died back in 1982, once told about a man who bought a new radio, took it home, plugged it in, turned it to WSM in Nashville (home of the Grand Ole Opry), and then pulled all the knobs off. Why would he do such a thing? Once he was tuned in to all he ever wanted or expected to hear, that was good enough for him.

It's true, isn't it: some lives get stuck in ruts because people bow to the tyranny of sameness and refuse to look beyond what they can see or explore that which they don't know. They accept the idea that "what has been will still and always be." It's the exact opposite of what it means to welcome change, and it's an attitude that all too often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Of course, change comes whether we want it to or not, and it also comes whether we adapt to it or not. Some people do change when they see the light, but others? They don't change until they feel the heat.

As we come back to God's Word today and continue our look into Abraham's life — the saga of his life to be more specific, because a saga it has surely been — one thing we can say about Abraham and change is that throughout his journey, at different times and in different situations, he's experienced a little of both. To be sure, change has been a huge part of his life from the moment God called him. But while he has often seen the light, at times he's had to feel the heat in order to get with the program. Considering what he's been through, I think that's entirely understandable, and I think that if we look at our own lives, we can empathize with him. Sometimes we're eager to welcome change and the newness and unfamiliarity that comes with it; other times we drag our feet; and still other times we stamp our feet in protest.

In today's passage, we have still more change being announced to Abraham by the Lord. It's in the same vein and related closely to all that God has been telling him from the beginning, but the verses before us now show the next level of specificity with respect to both the when and the how of God's promises. Let's look at them briefly.

Verses 15: The first change we see in the text is in verse 15, and it has to do with Sarai and her name. Just as was the case with Abram becoming Abraham, from this point forward Sarai will be known as Sarah. While the difference between the two names is subtle, it's nonetheless an important one. Both derivations of the name mean *princess*, but while "Sarai" relates to her role or dominion in the context of one family, "Sarah" raises that standing to include many families — indeed, even entire nations. From now on she will be known as the princess of a multitude.

Verses 16-17: How shall that be so? It shall be so thanks to the next big change that comes to us in the passage, starting in verse 16. Here God declares to Abraham that, much different than the ill-fated surrogacy that he and Sarai concocted in an effort to procure what they thought would be God's child of promise to them, now another child — the actual child of promise — will be born to the two of them. Notice that God is explicit: He will not just bring the two of them a child, but they will have a child *through Sarah herself*. Yes, Sarah — 90 years old — will give birth to a biological child from her own womb, and Abraham — himself 100 — will be the father.

At this, Abraham falls on his face and laughs, not so much in unbelief as with incredulity. The news is astounding, especially after so many years — remember, Ishmael is 13 at this point — of wondering when, if, and if so, then how God would finally fulfill the promise He had made. But here it is, straight from the Lord's mouth: "Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac." (Isaac, as many of you know, means "laughter," and we'll have more to say about that a few sessions from now!)

Verse 18: When we come to verse 18, we get a glimpse of Abraham as the father that he already is; a father who, though overjoyed at the divine news he is receiving, nonetheless loves and is concerned for his son Ishmael in the face of this development. "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" he says to the Lord, and as we see in the rest of the passage, God assures him that Ishmael will indeed be blessed. God will answer Abraham's heart's cry for this son, making him fruitful and multiplying him exceedingly. Nevertheless, the covenant and its

promises will pass only through the son to come — the son of promise who will be named Isaac. Again, much more to come on that front!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what shall we say about this portion of God's Word? How do we parse it out? What sense can we come away with regarding Abraham and his reaction to all of this new change coming into his life? The best way forward is to see what Scripture itself has to say on the matter, and we find a wonderful summary of this period in Abraham's life from Paul in the book of Romans. Romans 4 says it this way, starting at verse 18:

18Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 19Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead — since he was about a hundred years old — and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." 23The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness — for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

When we come back for tomorrow's session, we'll be finishing up our time in here in Genesis 17 by following Abraham's faithful, belief-filled response to this change-announcing visitation from the Lord. As we do, we'll be seeing a wonderful example of faith in action, so I hope you'll make time to come and be part of it. Christ is with you, everyone — lean on Him and learn from Him today, and as you do, you will find rest for your soul! Have a great day, and I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you today, and I always appreciate that you take the time to come along and draw near to God and His Word with me each day. This session finds us continuing on with Abraham and the new revelation he's received, so let's take a moment, prepare our hearts, and get ready for our time together. Will you pray with me?

Prayer

Father, thank you for this time to be with you in your Word today, thank you for the blessing of the Internet and new media that enables this kind of study time in the Scriptures, and thank you most of all for all the promises of your Word, which are always alive and full and free to us in the name of Jesus. Please help us to grow today in our walk with you. We ask this in Christ's name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming to the end of Genesis 17, and as we do so we'll be seeing an extraordinary display of faith and obedience on the part of Abraham with his reaction to the Word of the Lord. Our focus this session: God's love, Abraham's response.

Genesis 17:23-27

23On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him.

24Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, 25and his son Ishmael was thirteen; 26Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day. 27And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

Roger Thomas Staubach, born February 5, 1942 — nicknamed "Roger the Dodger", "Captain America" and "Captain Comeback" — was, as many of you know, a professional football player who played quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys. He attended the U.S. Naval Academy where he won the 1963 Heisman Trophy, and after graduation he served in the U.S. Navy, including a tour of duty in Vietnam. Staubach joined Dallas in 1969 and played with the team during all 11 seasons of his career. He led the Cowboys to the Super Bowl five times, four as the starting quarterback, including victories in Super Bowl VI and Super Bowl XII. He was named Most Valuable Player of Super Bowl VI, becoming the first player ever to win both the Heisman Trophy and Super Bowl MVP. He was also named to the Pro Bowl six times during his 11-year NFL career. He's regarded as one of the best NFL quarterbacks of all time.

For all that, however, there is something many people don't know about Roger Staubach. While he played his position with what even today is considered to be astonishing skill, and while his

giftedness on the field was legendary, Roger Staubach did not call his own signals. Instead, head coach Tom Landry sent in every play. He told Roger when to pass, when to run, which players to engage, and so on...and only in emergency situations could he change the play on the fly (and he'd better be right when he did!).

Staubach admitted that his position as a quarterback who didn't call his own plays was a source of trial for him. Even though he considered coach Landry to have a genius mind when it came to football strategy, pride told him that he should be able to run his own team. Years later he said, "I finally had to face up to the issue of obedience. Once I learned to obey and follow through, there was harmony, fulfillment, and victory." And how!

In today's passage here at the end of Genesis 17, we see a man who has himself faced up to the issue of obedience. In response to the loving actions of Almighty God toward him in the form of a lasting covenant, in response to God's announcement to him that the child of promise for whom he and Sarah have waited so long will soon be conceived in her womb, and in recognition of the greatness of God's mercy and the depth of His compassion wrapped up in His manifold and far-reaching promises, Abraham now takes definitive action himself. Obeying God's call to be circumcised — a command not only for him but for every male in his household along with him — Abraham shows both his belief in the covenant promise that God has given him and his faith in the manner in which God will see things through.

There are three brief things to see about Abraham's actions here that merit our attention:

1. First, his obedience in this case is complete: every male among the men of Abraham's house is circumcised, just as God has commanded. No one is left out or overlooked.
2. Second, his obedience is prompt: he takes action in the immediate aftermath of the Lord's appearing to him, that is, on the very same day.
3. Finally, we should note something less obvious but still quite important: Abraham's obedience here is also incredibly trusting. The fact that all of the men in his household are circumcised on the same day means that all of them are also temporarily incapacitated — meaning that there is no one available to rise up and defend Abraham's large tribal entourage should someone come in and attack them. Abraham is not only believing God for His promises in this instance, he is believing God for his protection as well.

Wrapping Up

We'll get into this further as we pick things up in the next chapter, but for now, let's wrap things up for the day with one more observation: Notice that when Abraham rises up from his time with the Lord and sets out to do what He has been told to do, there is a distinct absence of what we so often see in the church today. Abraham doesn't talk about needing to pray through the matter. He doesn't give a monologue about taking baby steps of faith or growing into the right decision or taking time to transition from his old way of looking at things to the new. There is simply prompt and literal obedience to the command of God...and that's it. Abraham faces up to the issue and follows through, and as a result, there is harmony, fulfillment, and victory — and how!

We don't often talk about obedience to God these days for fear of crossing a theological threshold into the realm of legalism or works-righteousness when it comes to our salvation. That's understandable, but even so, today's passage shows us that there's more to it than that...and in the mercy of God, this is a subject that bears our meditation as His beloved people. More to come on this in the days ahead, so do stay tuned!

Have a great day, friends — God's peace, and the joy of the Lord to each of you in Christ. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you as we end another week together, and as we prepare our hearts to go before God and His Word today, I do pray that you're benefitting from our journey through the book of Genesis and that you're being encouraged in your faith because of it. If you're still waiting for the video of yesterday's session to post, it should up by Monday morning, so be looking for it in its customary spot the Vimeo queue after the weekend. Today, however, we're moving forward in our study of Genesis, opening for the first time to chapter 18. Let's bow our heads and seek the Lord's blessing as we begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for a new day to praise your name, to live in your grace, and to rejoice in your mercy. Our desire in this moment is to have our hearts and minds engaged in your Word, to the end that we learn to embrace you more and more, even as you have so lovingly embraced us. Teach us by the Scriptures today, for your Word is truth. We ask this in your precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, following the Lord's appearance in chapter 17, we now see Him come to Abraham again in chapter 18, and what we'll soon come to understand is that the Lord's purpose in doing so is twofold...twofold in a startling manner. Our focus this session: of laughter and loss.

Genesis 18:1

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

When I moved from kindergarten up to first grade, my ride to and from school each day changed. In kindergarten I'd ridden in a little yellow van with six or seven other small children. It was positively delightful. Once I hit first grade, however, I hit the big time: I started riding a big, tandem-wheeled, stretch-into-forever, legitimate *school* bus. And it wasn't only big in size: it also happened to be full of big kids. It was exciting, and it was terrifying — a dichotomy that only became more pronounced as time went on, mostly because the big kids, 4th-6th graders, tended to be on the mischievous side.

My one saving grace in that situation (unbeknownst to me at the time) was that my mom happened to be good friends with Mrs. June Adams — the bus driver. June looked out for me. She made sure I got to where I needed to go, she ran interference for me when the big kids got a little too rambunctious towards me, and on one occasion that I still remember these many years later, she also vouched for my character and kept me from getting in trouble.

One day, the boom got lowered on the whole bus full of us for the behavior some of the kids had been engaging in. We were held back in the parking lot before leaving school in the

afternoon, and in the ominous silence that accompanied the confusion of the moment, suddenly the principal — Mr. Dollahan — stepped onto the bus, planted himself in the aisle, and got out a can of absolutely fearsome whoop heinie. He began calling out students by name, one by one, dressing them down for their disrespectful attitudes and their general lawlessness, and when he got to me, I was sure I was going to be vaporized on the spot. Instead, Mr. Dollahan looked at me and said, “Now Paul. I want to congratulate you on *your* behavior, young man. Mrs. Adams tells me you’re the kind of bus rider we need here at Trapp Elementary School, so keep up the good work!” At that, he moved on to the next scolding. In one stunning moment, the man who had come to deliver a blistering rebuke to one group of people delivered a blessing to me. It seemed impossible that such a thing could happen, but happen it did, and I won’t ever forget it.

I’ve told you that story from my childhood today because as we come to Genesis 18 and introduce the chapter, here’s what you need to know as we go into it: the next 30-or-so verses that we’ll be looking at are divided just about equally between two distinct messages being given by one Person. One is a great blessing, the other is a blistering rebuke. Verses 1-15 will be all about the reaffirmation of God’s covenant promises to Abraham, this time for the express benefit of Sarah; verses 16-33 will bring the announcement of the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In bringing these two messages at the same time, that is, on the same occasion, the Lord is setting forth some dramatic contrasts for us — contrasts that are in the text of our Bible for a reason. The narrative that begins here will actually carry us just about all the way through to the mid point of chapter 25, and so we’ll have ample time to connect things and talk about them as we go, but for the moment consider the following:

In the coming several chapters, we’ll be celebrating the long-awaited birth of Isaac, an event full of joy and hope. But we’ll also be observing the births...unheralded, unwanted and unholy...of Moab and Ben-Ammi to Lot’s daughters.

In the chapter before us, we’ll be seeing that when God and two of His angels appear before Abraham with words of promise, it’s in the light and warmth of the day. When those same angels approach Sodom not long after in preparation to destroy it, it will be in the darkness of night.

Here in chapter 18 we’ll be learning that Abraham’s tent is a place of honor and righteousness, of generous and delightful hospitality. But in chapter 19 we’ll see that in contrast, Lot’s house sits in the midst of a place of lustful and violent wickedness. On and on these things will be continuing in the upcoming passages, but it all begins for us now: this one stunning moment in chapter 18 when One Man who has come to deliver a blessing to Abraham goes on to deliver a blistering rebuke to the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. It seems impossible that such a thing could happen, but happen it did, and God would not have us to forget it.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what’s the big picture here, the overarching theme? It’s the contrast between the blessings of God upon Abraham and his descendants and the summary judgment and punishment of God upon the wicked who have set themselves against His reign...upon those who are outside of His covenant. When we come back together again on Monday we’ll start taking all of this apart to examine things a little more closely, and I’m looking forward to getting into it with you. Until then, I pray that you have a great weekend! Stay safe, get some rest, and take joy in the redemption you have in Christ Jesus our Lord! Take care, everybody, and I’ll see you next week!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's grace, mercy, and peace to each of you in Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. As we open the new week with a return to our journey through the book of Genesis, we're coming in earnest now to Genesis 18. It's great to have you along; let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we thank you for this day and for this time to be in your Word, we ask that you would give us clarity of mind and openness of heart as we study. Fill us with all wisdom and spiritual understanding as we endeavor to learn from you today. In Christ's precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today Genesis 18 begins (as we saw the last time we were together) with another visitation from from the Lord to His servant Abraham. Our focus this session: a very holy hospitality.

Genesis 18:1-8

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ²Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. ³He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." ⁶So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread." ⁷Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

Once or twice over the course of my years in ministry, I've had encounters with individuals who caused me to wonder, in the aftermath, if I'd been entertaining angels unawares. I can't explain why I feel that way, and I may very well be wrong about those incidents, but it's entirely within the realm of possibility...and actually, that holds true for all of us who know the love of God in Christ. As people who belong to Him, redeemed by the blood of our Savior, one thing Scripture exhorts us to do is to practice hospitality, especially toward strangers. The first two verses of Hebrews 13 say it this way:

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

I'm thinking about the entertaining of angels unaware and all the interesting considerations that go with it in our lives as Christians for a specific reason today: scholars believe that the Hebrews 13 passage is most likely a reference to what's before us in Genesis 18 today — a reference to Abraham's experience when the Lord and two angels appear to him near the oaks of Mamre in the land of Canaan.

As we pick things up in this new chapter, the setting is very soon after the previous visitation from the Lord that we marked in chapter 17. Some commentators feel that chapter 18 is actually an expansion and a deeper-in-detail account of the chapter 17 event, but my sense is that this is yet another appearance by God, and another theophany at that, outside of Abraham's tent.

Incidentally, I love that the Bible lets us know Abraham's location at this particular point in his life. For him, Mamre was about as permanent a place as he ever knew during his semi-nomadic, sojourning life. It was important to him spiritually and otherwise. He built an altar to the Lord there. He bought land there (the first reported real estate transaction in the Bible, by the way) to bury Sarah after her death (the first reported burial in the Bible). He himself would be buried there as well, as would his son Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and Later, Jacob and his wife Leah. It was in this place, this significant place, that one hot day — in the heat of the day, says the Bible, which would probably be early afternoon — the Lord and two of His angels appear to Abraham.

God, of course, will have much to say in this particular instance, and we'll spend several upcoming days talking about it all. Before we get to that point, however, we should spend just a bit of time on the details concerning Abraham's welcoming of the Lord and His companions. The first thing to make note of? It would appear that Abraham isn't, at least at first, aware of the heavenly status of his guests. While he does seem quite happy to see them, and while he does honor them by bowing in welcome and insisting that they receive his hospitality, none of those things are out of line with the normal practice of the day. In fact, when it comes to ancient near-eastern cultural protocol, to generously receive visitors is almost a necessity, a non-negotiable. Thus, as we see Abraham doing his best to provide for his guests, what we're seeing first and foremost is a man of integrity making a conscientious effort to be kind and generous.

The one thing that may give us pause with that assessment, however, is that Abraham does seem to know that these men are "special" visitors of some kind. He himself is a man of great power, wealth, and influence, and so the manner in which we see him defer to the three seems to denote an understanding on his part that there's more here than meets the eye. The same holds true with regard to the sumptuous meal — not to mention the size of the meal! — that he and Sarah prepare. First of all, Sarah takes flour to bake bread, which would be in the form of unleavened flatbread...maybe a little bit like naan. A measurement of one seah would be almost nine quarts of flour, and nine quarts of flour are enough to make way more bread than you and I could eat over the course of an afternoon, even if we were slathering fresh butter over the top of each slice to keep us going. Yet Sarah's using *three* seahs...and that's a lot of bread for three people, no matter how you slice it! The same is true with respect to the calf, a choice calf, which, even if you're wealthy like Abraham, isn't something that you butcher for just any old occasion. Plus, even though it's a calf, it's still quite large for such a small entourage. Finally, the text lets us know that as the three men eat the meal that has been prepared for them, Abraham doesn't send one of his servants — of which he likely has several hundred — to wait on them; rather, he himself stands nearby under a tree, ready to serve whatever need they may have.

Wrapping Up

So — as we wrap things up for the day, the lavishness here does seem to go beyond a typical hospitable offering. Abraham does seem to understand, on some level, that there's something special about these three visitors. As of yet, he's not operating at full understanding, but soon he will be...and that's when things will become very interesting and a little intense to boot. Do come along and see what happens as we work our way through the week!

Thanks for being here today, everyone — if you've been waiting for last Thursday's video to post, it's finally been approved and is now in the queue, where you can check it out at your leisure. I hope you have a great Monday — joy to you in our Lord Jesus, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! God's peace to each of you in Christ, and thanks for your presence today as we take some time to open God's Word together. If you've been studying along with us over the past two months, then you know that we're currently in part two of our series in the Old Testament book of Genesis, and in this session we'll be moving deeper into our look at Genesis 18. I'm glad you're here; let's pray as we go to the Scriptures, shall we?

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day and this time together to be in your Word, we ask that you would cause it, by your gracious Spirit, to penetrate into our lives and do that which you desire it to do within us. We place ourselves before you with humble, yet eager anticipation, because we know what a great privilege it is to open the Scriptures and learn of you and from you. Bless this time, we pray in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the Lord and His two angelic companions, having appeared to Abraham outside his tent in Mamre and having partaken of a meal that Abraham and Sarah have prepared for them, now get to the business for which they have come. Our focus: the time has arrived!

Genesis 18:9-15

9"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. 10Then the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. 11Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?" 13Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" 14Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." 15Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

G. Campbell Morgan once said something beautiful, if rather idealistic, about what it means to wait on God. "Waiting for God," he said, "is not laziness. Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God means, first, activity under command; second, readiness for any new command that may come; third, the ability to do nothing until the command is given."

I think the beauty and profundity of those words is obvious, but let's be honest: if you've ever had to wait for anything — much less wait on God and His timing — then you know why I said that Campbell's words are idealistic! It's hard to wait, isn't it...and it's hard not to worry while you wait. It's difficult to go through days, or weeks, or even years of waiting for something because of the wondering that inevitably creeps in to accompany it. The longer things drag on

without resolution, without fruition, the more you begin to ask yourself, *Will that thing for which I'm waiting really come to pass or should I just give up and move on?*

This exercise is one with which Abraham and his wife, Sarah, are intimately familiar. For 25 years now, they've been waiting on God. Way back in Genesis 12 when Abram was 75 and Sarai 65, God said, *Even though Sarai has spent her life barren, and even though both of you are old in years, I'm going to bless you to be a blessing to the world. Your name will be great. You will, in fact, become a great nation. I'm going to bless you with a son.*

God, of course, has revisited and reaffirmed that promise several times through the two and half decades that have passed, and He's done that in part because while Abraham and Sarah have believed, their belief has understandably been afflicted with bouts of doubt along the way. As we've said many times since we began our look at their life back in chapter 12, it's been a long, fraught road for them, a road with pitfalls and potholes in the midst of the promises to which they've been clinging. So it is that God now comes again to assure Abraham that His promise will be kept — and in fact, just as He said in His previous visitation, He repeats here that the time for the long-longed for, long-awaited promise to be fulfilled has come. In a year's time, Isaac will be born to Sarah and him.

Let me ask you a question: if you were a person who'd been waiting around for a quarter century for some promised something-or-other to happen and hadn't seen anything come of it, how likely would you be to believe that *this* time, with *this* announcement, with *these* assurances, things were finally going to come together? That things would finally be different? And what if, even if you *did* believe in that possibility, everything about your situation from a physical standpoint militated against — no, made impossible — the thing from happening anyway? If it were me, I'd probably shake my head and laugh. I'd probably be dismissive. I'd probably take it all with one big grain of salt. I'd definitely maintain my yearning and my hoping, but I probably wouldn't hold my breath.

That, essentially, is where we find Sarah today as she listens to the Lord and His companions speak to Abraham from the entrance of the tent. This news of a child? It's wonderful news, yes, but from a human standpoint, from an experiential standpoint, from a “past performance is no guarantee of future results” point of view, maybe it just seems too good to be true. And so to herself, on the inside but not outwardly, Sarah laughs.

Think about this with me for a moment: This has been the one thing that Sarah and Abraham have most wanted for their entire married life: to have a child of their own. They've experienced so much heartache over this issue, Sarah in particular, since being barren in her culture was considered to be a curse. A woman's fertility — her childbearing ability — was of great importance in the ancient near east. Women enjoyed the honor and respect of the community and felt a strong sense of self-worth if they could conceive, give birth to many children — especially sons — and grow their family. On the other hand, a woman who was unable to conceive was often an outcast and an object of scorn, and that's to say nothing of her own heartache in the matter. Sarah knows this truth in a starkly painful way. So at this juncture, let's walk just a few steps in this dear woman's shoes. To have God promise a child, to wait so long for that child but see nothing on the horizon for years and years and years, and now to be told at last that very soon the child will be conceived — it's the best news in the world, yes, but at this point in time, it may also be the hardest news in the world to believe. I think we can all empathize with Sarah's heart.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, our Lord, of course, hears Sarah's laughter, even though it isn't of the out-loud variety. His response? Not anger, nor accusation, nor even disappointment. It's a more cut-to-the-chase kind of statement, and in actuality, it's one that has resonated with countless faithful-but-needful hearts and untold numbers of believing-but-broken lives down through the ages. Here is a divine response overwhelming in both simplicity and power — so much so, in fact, that we'll be spending all of tomorrow's session discussing it.

God said: "Why did Sarah laugh?" And, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

Do you know the answer to that second question? I think we all do. I wonder, though, how often we take it to heart in life. Do make plans to join in tomorrow for some time that will help us all to embrace that wonderful truth with a little more oomph!

Until then, God bless you richly in Christ, and the joy of the Lord be your continuing strength. Have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and thank you for being here today as we take time to open our Bibles together as God's people in Christ. The Lord is always with us as we go to His Word and seek Him, so with that as our sure and certain confidence, let's return to our study in Genesis 18 today and ask for God's blessing on our time.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this time to be quiet...to focus on you and your Word. We ask today that you would teach us and transform us, and that you would also encourage and sustain us. We do so need you in our lives; need the forgiveness and newness of life that you have purchased for us with your own blood at Calvary. We thank you for that indescribable gift, and as we remember you in this moment we are truly grateful for your presence with us. May your name be glorified in all things, Lord — in your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Just as Abraham had laughed when God announced that a son would be born to him and his wife Sarah, now Sarah has done the same, which has prompted a question from the Lord. Our focus this session: *Why laugh? Is anything too hard for the Lord?*

Genesis 18:13-14

13Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" 14Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son."

The average child laughs 150 times a day. That's according to researchers at the University of Michigan. In the same study, those researchers found that the average adult only laughs 15 times a day. I suppose you can interpret the data any way you want, but what it suggests to me is that in general, grownups aren't always the best at embracing the joy and mirth of life's simple pleasures. The longer people live, the more world-weary they tend to become. Take a look at your Facebook or Twitter feeds on any given day and you'll have trouble keeping up with the number of sour/angry/pessimistic/accusatory posts. They far outweigh anything on the lighter side. When grownups do laugh, many times it's a bitter laugh, a sardonic laugh, a sarcastic and cynical laugh. In some ways it's understandable, but still — oh, for a return to the laughter of childhood...a return to finding the good in life's moments instead of glorying in the gloom.

As we've been following the lives of Abraham and Sarah through the text of Scripture over the past several weeks, one thing we've found is that in spite of their wealth and privilege, in spite of their power and influence, life for them hasn't been a bed of roses. They've had their share of longing and heartache. They've suffered loss and disappointment. They've experienced doubt and disillusionment. In short, they're the kind of people we might describe as world-weary. We

see it in the un-quietness and discouragement they exhibit over the still-unrealized child God has promised to them...and we also see it in their laughter.

Sarah, most recently — and not long before her, Abraham as well — laughed at God's words to them announcing that the child of promise would at last come to be. It was an incredulous laugh, perhaps even an unbelieving laugh...a laugh that, while acknowledging good news, wondered if the news was too good; too good to be true. It was a glorying in the gloom.

In today's reading, God calls that reaction out with a burning question: "Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too hard for God?" The amazing thing here is that even as God asks the question, He Himself is showing forth the answer. Let me explain.

If you remember our time together way back in Genesis 11, one thing you'll recall is that Sarah had always been barren — even during her childbearing years. Now, of course, she's not only *still* barren, but also beyond those childbearing years, and so any idea of a baby coming from her womb at this point in her life is double-whammy ridiculous. That, however, is why now, and *only* now, the long-awaited child of promise is finally set to come to her and her husband. It's only now, when all human resources have been exhausted, when Abraham and Sarah are reduced to laughter at the sheer incredulity and unlikelihood of it all, that God comes and speaks the fulfillment of all that He said would come to pass: "I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son."

Why does God do this? Why does God wait until it's humanly impossible for a child to be conceived — the child who will be Isaac — before He has Sarah and Abraham end up pregnant? And why does God reject the efforts that Sarah and Abraham had put forth (the whole Hagar disaster) in hopes of expediting His promise to them? God does these things to show forth His power and His plan. God does these things in order to show that it's not by human effort that His promises come to pass, but by the work of His divine grace and mercy. God also does this, in the larger sense, to show Abraham and Sarah that the formation of a people for Him from all the families of the earth won't be, can't be, a human creation. That's why Ishmael doesn't qualify as the covenant child that God had promised to these two: symbolically he stands for the work of the flesh instead of the work of the Spirit, the product of Abraham and Sarah's presumption and unbelief instead of their trust in God's work, God's way. God has brought these two to the end of themselves to focus them on a new beginning with Him.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, it's been said that the greatest single distinguishing feature of the omnipotence of God is that our imagination gets lost when thinking about it, and it's true, both for Abraham and Sarah, and for you and me. When it comes to understanding our position before the Lord and His gracious work on our behalf, especially at Calvary, we can't begin to comprehend the vast greatness of His Being and the unsearchable wisdom of His ways. One thing we can do, however, is look to Him and be reminded — through everything He's done down through the ages and everything that He's doing now — that indeed, nothing is too hard for Him. Sometimes we have to be brought to the end of ourselves to realize that, but when that happens, it's always to focus us on a new beginning with Him.

Have a great day, everyone — God's rich peace to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and I'll see you again next time.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS! As we gear up for our Bible study time today we'll be entering the second portion of Genesis 18, where a complete shift in focus is about to take place in the text as the Lord turns His attention to Sodom and Gomorrah. As we move into this new section of God's Word, we'll be following a somewhat difficult trajectory — but ultimately, and as always, we'll be moving in a forward direction that points us to the promise of redemption in a coming Savior. Let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence, and we ask in this moment of quiet that you bless us with your Spirit and turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. It is life and salvation to us, and we are grateful for it. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, following the reaffirmation of His promise to Abraham and Sarah, the Lord now turns His attention in another direction. Our focus this session: Sodom and Gomorrah.

Genesis 18:16-22

16When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. 17Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 18Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 19For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." 20Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know." 22The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord .

I was going through some of my files last week, reviewing research on cultural, societal, and ecclesiastical attitudes toward sex and sexuality in the United States. As you might imagine, a lot of the material I was looking at centered on homosexuality, because I knew we'd soon be coming to that topic in our study time here in Genesis.

One of my files included a collection of reports from different denominations regarding their approach to homosexuality, ostensibly from a biblical perspective. A few documents espoused plain, straightforward scriptural principles — what many today would call “traditional” views on the subject — but many others were decidedly outside the box, far afield of those traditional mores.

As I read, a pattern emerged. Most of the material penned by different denominational leaders urged readers to examine, with an open mind, different views about marriage, promiscuity, and homosexuality. Furthermore, most of the documents questioned biblical passages concerning homosexuality and suggested that scriptural references to same-sex relationships needed to be re-interpreted in light of modern theories about sexual orientation.

One church study said, "We must distinguish between moral judgments regarding same-sex activity in biblical times and in our own time." The report went on to say that the members of that particular church body should be challenged to evaluate their prejudices against homosexuals, insisting that "What we personally find offensive is not necessarily sinful."

Another denomination I read about had no definitive stance on the issue of homosexuality, because their panel of theologians couldn't agree on whether homosexuality is a sin. They generated a 14,000-word report on the matter and referred their findings to their church's national policy-making body for an official decision. In their work, however, those theologians did agree on two key points: they recommended the striking down of any church doctrine stating that homosexual practice and Christianity are incompatible, and they asserted that biblical references to sexual practices shouldn't be viewed as binding, quote, "just because they're in the Bible."

If you look around today, it's easy to see the erosion of what, until recently, were considered almost universally held viewpoints on issues surrounding ethics and morality. Fifty years ago, the average man or woman on the street, whether they were Christian or not, religious or not, would have given you a disdainful look if you asked them whether homosexuality or any other alternative sexual lifestyle was acceptable. Today it's the opposite: the look of disdain comes when a person dares to assert that such things are unacceptable. And though it may come as a surprise to some, that attitude is becoming as common within the church as it is outside of it.

Though these issues aren't primary to the text that we'll be covering over the next several days, they're issues that need, nonetheless, to be acknowledged and addressed. So along with the historical narrative that God's Word will be presenting to us here in the second half of Genesis 18 and into Genesis 19, I want you to prepare to engage with the Scriptures on another level as well — one that involves not just your mind, but your heart; one that involves not just your intellect, but your wisdom. That's something I always ask you to do, but it will be of particular importance in the passages coming up, so consider this your heads up as we move forward.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, it's no secret that in these last days, we are living in a world of moral and spiritual relativism. It's also no secret that when it comes to buy-in and adherence to Judeo-Christian values in American society and most other societies in the developed world, the trend is not waxing, but waning. In the coming days, we will be yielding ourselves to the clear teaching of God's Word as we always do. We will be doing so without apology, as we always do, proclaiming its inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, and historicity as we go. But also as we always do, we will be doing these things without an agenda. We will refrain from using the Scriptures as a club, a crutch, or a convenient way to set up, then knock down, straw men. In talking about Sodom and Gomorrah — even as briefly as we'll be doing — emotions can run high, especially for the person who has a personal stake in the matter. Is there law on the way as we step into this subject? Yes. But there's a whole lot more than *just* law, and there happens to be a message in the midst of it all that each of us very much needs to hear, regardless of where we stand or how we feel about this subject.

When we come back tomorrow, we'll be jumping in with both feet, and I do pray you'll come along for our time together to be challenged, comforted, and cared for by the God who loves you so deeply in His Son! Have a terrific day, Christ's peace to you and yours, and I'll see you again real soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to each you in our Lord Jesus. Thanks for being here today, where as we get ready to study together we'll be working our way into the second half of Genesis 18. Take a moment, prepare your heart to come into the Lord's presence, and let's pray:

Prayer

Father, bless the hearing of your Word today, that all who come under its teaching will grow and change; that we would all learn more of your love for us in Christ; and that we would all become stronger in our faith. What a joy and privilege it is to ask for this, and what a joy to know that we can do so with confidence in Christ. Hear us as we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting started

As we get started today, God speaks to Abraham about the great outcry that has come to Him against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Our focus this session: a sober revelation.

Genesis 18:16-22

16When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. 17Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 18Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 19For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." 20Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know." 22The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord.

I had been out with a good friend. We shared a great evening together...lots of laughter and shared blessings. It was a stellar night, definitely one for the ages, especially since we didn't get to see each other very often. When it was time to part ways and head home, we were walking toward our cars in the parking lot when he suddenly looked at me and said, "I need to tell you something." As wonderful as the previous hours had been, what he shared in 15 seconds was almost enough to wipe it all away. He had been to the doctor and there had been a diagnosis — one a long time coming. It was not caught early, but late. The prognosis was not good, but bad...it was terminal. As I stood there with him trying to digest what he'd just said, I had trouble grasping the reality of the moment. The shift from joy to a feeling that was anything but joyful was very abrupt. Things didn't compute. And I guess, even as I remember that moment today, it still doesn't compute, even though it's been many years now.

As we come to God's Word today, Abraham is having one of those parking lot moments himself. He's just coming off of an incredible time with the Lord and two of His angels. He's just been told that within a year, he and his wife Sarah will finally have a son — the child that had first been promised to them some 25 years ago. Abraham is giddy with joy. He and his wife are full of laughter. He's in awe of the blessings raining down on his life. But as the Lord's angels get up to leave Abraham's presence and turn their faces toward Sodom, as Abraham, ever the hospitable one, walks with them to give them a proper send-off, God suddenly looks at Abraham and says, *I need to tell you something*. And guess what? As wonderful as the previous hours have been...the visitation, the meal, the message...what God shares in the course of several seconds is almost enough to wipe it all away. A diagnosis has been made. It has been a long time coming. It is not early, but late. And the prognosis is not good, but bad... it's terminal.

As we can see from the text today, the issue at hand is the grievous sin of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The cry against them is great, so much so that God, speaking in an anthropomorphic way, says to Abraham, *I'm going down to see for Myself, and if it's as bad as has been reported, I'll know*. God already knows, of course, and God doesn't need to do any of what He's just told Abraham in order to make His judgement. His words are for Abraham's benefit and ultimately, for ours as well. Genesis doesn't report things in this manner because God doesn't know what's happening; Genesis reports things in this manner to demonstrate to us, the human readers of the text, the untainted and holy character of His knowledge and integrity. God judges justly according to the evidence, and this is His way of revealing that to us.

In following this through, however, we're left with a question, and it's actually a rather concrete one: just what is the grievous sin of these two cities? Historically, the most common response to that question is that the issue at hand is homosexuality. That's how, for example, the term "sodomy" came to be used to refer to anal sex between two men. And clearly, as we track with the text in the days to come, we'll see that indeed, homosexuality *is... part...* of why God will go on to destroy these two cities. At the same time, though, we need to take a deeper look at this, because it's not biblical to say that homosexuality is the *exclusive* reason that God will be raining down fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. Truth be told, they're not the only game in town when it comes to such practices, and they by no means have a corner on the market. So — what, then, besides homosexuality...what, in addition to homosexuality...constitutes the grievous sin that God has come to confront?

If we look at other places in Scripture that reference the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, we get a fuller picture of the situation. The 16th chapter of Ezekiel, for example, declares,

Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me.

The Hebrew word translated "detestable" in that verse refers to something morally disgusting, and it's actually the same word used in Leviticus 18 that refers to homosexuality as an abomination. Likewise, in the New Testament Jude 7 reminds us that Sodom and Gomorrah — *and also the surrounding towns* — gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. So, again, we do see, prominently mentioned, the issue of homosexuality here, and yes, there's probably an abundance of deviant heterosexual behavior going on as well. But at the same time, what of those other things that Ezekiel mentions? When we think about Sodom and Gomorrah, do any of those things typically come to mind? Should they? What about their spirit of arrogance? What about their gluttony and lack of concern for others? What about their neglect of the least among them? What about their pride? Homosexuality is definitely there too

— but interestingly, Ezekiel mentions it last. And though that doesn't at all mean that it's to be considered a lesser sin than those other things, it does mean that perhaps we need to give those other things more of a look when we ponder the reasons for God's wrath upon those cities. Sin is sin. And though we tend to grade it and categorize it and weigh it, God does not. An important thought to end on today as we head into our weekend.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, we'll have so much more to say about this in the week to come, so do plan to join in on Monday when we'll pick this up again. In the meantime, please remember this: God is with you. He is for you. He sent His only son, Jesus the Christ, to die for you, taking the penalty of your sin — including, by the way, all of the ones on the list we've just mentioned — upon Himself. There is forgiveness, a fresh start, and new life in His name, and He so wants you to know and embrace that truth by trusting in Him — something that comes by grace through faith in His finished work at the cross. If you're struggling today, don't give up or give in; instead, lean into the mercy of the God who loves you, and cry out to Him for help. He *will* hear, and His help *will* come in just the right way.

Have a great couple of days, everyone — I'll see you again soon. Christ's peace!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! Thanks for clicking in with me today as we continue to work through the Old Testament book of Genesis together. We'll be finishing up our look at chapter 18 today, so if you'll turn there in your Bible, we'll pray and get things rolling.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the Lord has revealed to Abraham that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are to be destroyed. In response, Abraham begins to intercede on their behalf. Our focus: Far be it from you, O Lord!

Genesis 18:23-33

23Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? 25Far be it from you to do such a thing-to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" 26The Lord said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." 27Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, 28what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it." 29Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it." 30Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?" He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?" He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it." 32Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." 33When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

It's a well-known illustration, one of Luther's most famous I suppose, and it's famous for a reason. One day when Luther's puppy happened to be at the table, he was begging, as puppies are wont to do. He was doing it in that quiet, passive, earnest-but-not-annoying way that dogs are so good at, with motionless head, open mouth, and laser-focused eyes. That posture prompted Luther to say, "Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat! All his thoughts are concentrated on the piece of meat. Otherwise he has no thought, wish or hope."

The reason this illustration has gained such traction through the years is that it has captured the imagination of God's people. We know of its truth. We know that Almighty God is not simply holy and just, but also gracious and merciful. We know that He has invited us to come to Him and to express our heart of hearts, from our deepest needs and desires to the needs and desires of those around us, even to our world as a whole. Through the simple witness of Scripture and through the example of many so-called "dogs" in our midst who have known the blessing of such prayer in their own lives, we long for the same laser focus, the same concentration, and the same single-mindedness when it comes to our own prayers.

As we come to God's Word today, we're coming, in the person of Abraham, to one of the greatest, most stellar examples of focused prayer in all of Scripture, and while the passage covers more than 10 verses, the theme running through it can be boiled down to one thing: here is a man of faith, humble and yet bold before God, daring to speak to Him on behalf of others. Though there's not a hint of arrogance in his demeanor, he nonetheless pours out the fullness of his heart and mind and doesn't stop pressing his case until he's said all he feels the need to say.

As we look at Abraham's demeanor before the Lord today, I'd like you to notice several things, and though we'll just briefly "list them and leave them," as it were, I encourage you to spend some time thinking through them later on when you have the time to roll them over in your mind a little bit.

Where shall we begin? Let's start with the fact that the very first thing the text mentions in verse 23 is that Abraham *approaches* the Lord. He draws near to God in order to make his request.

The second thing to make note of is that once Abraham begins speaking, the first words to come out of his mouth in verses 24-25 are essentially reminders to the Lord of who He, the Lord, actually is. Abraham is reminding God of His divine nature and attributes. As righteous Judge He will never go against the very nature of His being and punish someone who's innocent along with someone who's guilty, and Abraham humbly points out this fact: that as the Lord, He would never kill the righteous with the wicked or treat the two alike. The Judge of all the earth will certainly do right!

The third thing we might take the time to mentally mark today is the "otherness" of Abraham's prayer. He has genuine compassion for others; genuine sorrow over the situation at hand; true concern over the fact that a great and tragic judgment is about to occur. We see this throughout the passage as he asks over and over again for the sparing of Sodom, with ever-decreasing numbers of righteous to be found as a threshold. We'd expect him to be focused on his nephew Lot, who lives in Sodom, but Lot isn't even brought up. Abraham is asking the Lord for the city.

The final thing for us to make note of and think about today is, of course, the persistence of Abraham. Here he is, standing before the Lord Himself. Here he is, asking for a great show of mercy. But wait a minute...here he is again....and again...and again...and again...and still once again after that. Abraham keeps on praying and doesn't stop until he's used up every last ounce of courage and said every last word he needs to say. Each time, the Lord hears and agrees to Abraham's compassionate, righteous request...and with each affirmative response, Abraham is emboldened to pray for even more.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Abraham prays, God hears and grants his petitions, and Abraham goes home to his tent. It's a simple thing, a beautiful thing, and also an instructive thing: Humbly but with certain assurance approach God. Remind Him of His goodness and the goodness of His ways. Pray from the depth of your heart for the blessing of others. And then? Keep doing it — not in vain repetition but in the confidence and boldness of faith. There's much more to this passage that bears our meditation and discussion, and we'll be folding some of it into our introduction of Genesis 19 tomorrow. But for today, just ponder these points of prayer — and then proceed! Have a great day everyone; God's peace to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's blessings to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad you've joined in for some time in the Scriptures today, where in this session we're back to our ongoing study in the book of Genesis. Every day is a great day to invite friends and family to click in and be part of our study group, so be sure to forward these sessions to your loved ones and share them on your social media platforms. It just takes a moment, and it really does make a difference! As we begin today, let's prepare our hearts and go to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the day you've given us to live as your beloved children. Thank you for adopting us as your very own through the sacrifice of Christ at the cross and His victorious resurrection from the grave. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, open our hearts to wisdom and understanding as we hear from you today. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're opening to Genesis 19 for the first time, and as we do, there's something in the text that seems to be nothing, but is actually something — a great big something. Our focus this session: Drift.

Genesis 19:1-7

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. 2"My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." 3But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. 4Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. 5They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." 6Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing.

I'm more careful now, but when I was younger I wasn't as self-aware or self-regulating as I needed to be. Driving down the road, either too late in the evening or too early in the morning, my eyes would grow heavy. The blaring of the radio wouldn't be enough, the coffee in the travel mug wouldn't add anything to the trip but an acid stomach, and the old "roll down the window for fresh air" trick wouldn't do the trick at all. Inevitably, my car would begin its slow veer toward the shoulder, where the only thing between me and disaster was the rumble strip or the SNAP, those grooves at the edge of the pavement designed to wake you up just before you careen off the roadway. How short-sighted of me to drive while overtired. How dangerous, not only for me but especially for others. And yet — and this is the scary part — how easy it

was to think that I was fine, that I could handle myself...only to slowly fade into that warm, fuzzy, unaware zone where everything begins to drift.

As we come to God's Word today, there's a whole lot going on in the text. It's a rather distressing read, to be honest, and the opening verses of this new chapter in Genesis are only going to get more difficult as we proceed. We will most certainly address all that's being set forth here, because it's something that we need to discuss as God's people. But before we get into the nitty gritty of Sodom and its forthright, over-the-top immorality, before we get into Lot's response to it, we need to take some time to talk about something here that's less forthright and — seemingly, at least — not so over-the-top. We need to take a moment to make an observation about Lot himself...because we need to talk about drift.

It begins for us today right here in verse 1. The Lord's companions, that is, the two angels who had been with Him when He appeared to Abraham in the previous chapter, have now come to the city of Sodom. It's evening, and as they arrive, our Bible tells us that Lot is sitting in the gateway of the city. With that description, we now come to a full stop. How come? Because though that opening sentence comes in at under 20 words, it gives us a picture that's worth a thousand.

Back in Genesis 13 when Lot and Abraham parted ways for the sake of space and to keep things peaceful between them and among their respective workers, Lot, in choosing his portion of the land, looked toward the plain of the Jordan River...the place where the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were.

Later on in chapter 13, we see that upon his arrival in the region, Lot pitched his tents near Sodom.

Just a chapter later in Genesis 14, the Bible tells us that Lot went from having his tents near Sodom to actually living in Sodom itself.

At that point, of course, there was the interlude wherein Sodom was attacked, Lot was taken captive, and Abraham had to come to his rescue...something we'd think would prompt Lot to reconsider his residency there and make some other living arrangements.

And yet today as we open to Genesis 19, we find that not only has Lot remained in Sodom, Lot is actually sitting in the city's gateway, meaning what? Meaning that far from being a mere resident of this reprobate place, he is now one of its civic leaders.

From looking to Sodom to pitching his tents near Sodom. From pitching his tents near Sodom to settling in Sodom itself. From settling in Sodom to becoming a leader in Sodom. To borrow from the opening verse of Psalm 1, here is a man who over time has gone from Walking to Standing to now, in a very literal sense, Sitting in company with the wicked — sitting with sinners whose lives make a mockery of the things of God. Here is a man whose life has slowly but steadily veered toward the shoulder of the road, and at this point there is very little between him and disaster.

How short-sighted of Lot. How dangerous, not only for him but especially for others, most notably his family. And yet — and this is the scary part — how easy it has been for him to think all along that he's been fine, that he's been able to handle himself...all the while slowly fading into that warm, fuzzy, unaware zone where everything begins to drift.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, in a way this is a prequel of things to come later in the chapter when Lot will be faced with some terrible choices directly related to the fact that he lives where he lives and holds the position that he holds. But more generally speaking, it's also a vivid picture of how even people who love God and love the things of God — like Lot did — can be lulled into a false sense of security that places them in great danger spiritually. The Bible tells us in 2 Peter that Lot was indeed a righteous man and that he was genuinely grieved by the sin he saw around him. But Lot, though he was a righteous man, did not seem to be a careful man...not very self-aware or self-regulating. In the end, his life was in many ways marked by compromise, and the resulting drift would become the undoing of many.

When we come back tomorrow, we'll be working through this some more, so be sure to make plans to come along and be part of things. Drift is real...but God has made a declaration about drift that undoes its undoing. If you need that like I do, stay tuned!

Have a terrific day everyone, and God-willing, I'll see you soon. Until then, do rest in His power, His provision, and His peace in Christ Jesus our Lord. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's rich joy and peace to you in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Today we're continuing our study in the nineteenth chapter of Genesis, and I'm so glad you've joined in for our time in God's Word. As we begin, let's take a moment to prepare our hearts as we go to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Father, you have given us every good and perfect gift to bless us and help us to grow in our faith. Thank you for the way you've poured out your grace in our lives through your Son. Our great desire is to know you more, and we pray that today's study time will help us in that journey. We ask this in the strong name of Jesus our Savior, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the sin of Sodom comes back into view as the men of the city, both young and old, descend on Lot's house in an attempt to sexually assault his guests. Our focus: wanton carnality, futile pleading.

Genesis 19:1-7 (Part 2)

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. 2" My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." 3But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. 4Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. 5They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." 6Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing.

At a church I once served, I was invited to a gathering of men not long after I had arrived in town. It was draft night for their Fantasy Football league, and there was going to be a Barbecue. Football, food, and new friends...what could be better? I was excited to go and get to know some of my new parishioners.

Unfortunately, when I arrived it was clear that the party had been going on for some time already. Several men had had a lot to drink, and the language, coarse jokes, and general demeanor of the group was uncomfortable and disconcerting. I heard things being talked about that no human being should share with another save for his or her spouse. I saw the few women who were there being objectified and subjected to crude comments — and they were workers in the church. Things continued to devolve, and I knew I needed to say something, even though it would be the mother of all "getting things off on the wrong foot" situations for me as the new pastor.

Just as I was about to speak up, the host of the get-together, quite drunk by this time, came out of his room with several guns. He wanted to show off his collection to the group. That's when another man, who had just arrived and who happened to be one of the elders in the church, came to me directly, put his arm around my shoulder, and said "Pastor, I know what you're thinking and you're right, but this has become a personal safety issue. Guns and alcohol don't mix. We can address this another time, but for now we need to go." He walked me out the front door, escorted me to my car, then got into his own vehicle, and we left.

Out of that one evening, many negative outcomes occurred over time — from staffing situations at church to relationship issues within marriages in the church to professional fallout in the community because word got out about the host's irresponsible handling of his firearms. It was one night, and yet it was a tragic night. Unfortunately, I would come to learn that it was not a unique night, but a night patterned like many before it. It was sad to see, and as you might imagine, the destruction that resulted was far-reaching and long term.

In Sodom, Lot is entertaining his guests, guests that have come into the city at eventide. Yet he's not merely entertaining them; not merely offering hospitality. In actuality, he has strongly insisted that they come into his home rather than spend the evening in the town square. What's going on? Lot, at this point, doesn't know that the men in his presence are angels. That will come shortly. But Lot does know something about his community, and being a man with a heart for what is right, his aim is to protect these visitors from what will surely be a terrible night.

We all know what happens. Prior to bedtime, the men of the city — young and old from every sector — surround the house and demand that Lot turn his guests out so they can have their way with them. There's no sugar-coating to be done here: the demand is essentially one that will allow for them to be homosexually gang-raped. Lot, however, is determined to prevent it.

In a show of what can only be called courage on his part, Lot goes outside himself to try and reason with the crowd. In an effort to protect the two men, he shuts the door behind him so that the group can't access his living quarters. Lot's actions here are telling, as are his words to the mob: "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing."

Out of this one evening, many negative outcomes are about to occur. Yes, it's just one night, but it's a tragic night, and quite importantly, we need to understand that it's not a unique night in Sodom. What we are seeing here is not a normally moral and upright group of men who happen to be on a rare sexual bender; what we are seeing here is a group of men, a city full of men, immersed in a culture of wanton pleasure-seeking and vice. What we are seeing here is a community that for a long time has been carried away by every kind of lust, including, and especially so, same-sex sexual activity. The destruction that results from this night has also been a long time coming. It will be far-reaching and long term.

You may not be aware of it, but many in the homosexual community often argue about this narrative in Genesis. They contend that the "wicked thing" of which Lot speaks in verse 7 has nothing to do with homosexual practice, but only with the fact that the men in the mob are seeking to assault Lot's guests. In other words, their assertion is that the problem here is one of rape, not homosexual activity. In similar fashion, similar treatment is given to other passages regarding homosexuality by this group. In their advocacy efforts, there's always a workaround to bring the Bible's teaching into line with what they espouse instead of the other way around.

The time has come in our study, therefore, to lay out the counterpoint to such assertions. In the days ahead — starting on Monday as we return from the Thanksgiving holiday — we will do so directly, we will do so lovingly and in a spirit of friendship, and we will do so with no agenda

other than to be faithful to the Scriptures and to let God's Word speak. In some ways it will be easy and in other ways it will be hard, but I'm looking forward to it, and I hope you'll join in for what will be a heartfelt and helpful time together!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, with Covid-19 giving so many family gatherings a different look and feel this year — if indeed those gatherings are happening at all — I've decided to break for tomorrow and Friday, which is a departure from previous years. I know that we usually power right through Thanksgiving and the day following, but right now, just like so many of you, I'm sensing the need to pause and take time to reflect on things in a different way this season. I hope you'll understand the decision for some focused rest and refreshment tomorrow and Friday, and I hope you'll be taking the time for those things yourself. That said, we'll definitely be back in the saddle come Monday, and as I said a moment ago, I'm looking forward to returning to God's Word with you, just like I am with each new week.

To each one of you and yours, a most Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving! May your time of remembering the Lord and His goodness be extra special this year, and as you celebrate tomorrow, please know that you'll be in my prayers and on my heart as I thank God for all of you in the EDiBS family. Joy to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, my friends — have a wonderful couple of days, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's abounding, gracious love and peace to each of you in the name of Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to be with you today, and it's also great to be returning to the Scriptures together after yesterday's Advent greetings. I hope you've had time to explore a little of what I shared with regard to Chad Bird and his ministry; I truly love the way he shares, in his own special way, the restoration and renewal that's found in Christ. My prayer is that in introducing his work to you, many of you will be blessed in your walk with Christ. As for today, over the next several minutes we'll be heading back to Genesis 19, so if you'll take a moment to open your Bible, we'll pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, please bless all who are studying your Word today with peace, with hope, with joy, and with an ever-increasing knowledge of your love for them in Christ, which never fails. Clear our minds and prepare our hearts for all that you have for us now. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're currently in a spot just prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Men in Sodom, consumed with lust for the male visitors who have come to Lot's home, are demanding that Lot turn them out, while Lot is attempting to reason with them — quite badly, as we'll come to find out. Our focus for the moment, however: the wickedness of sin, including the sin of homosexuality.

Genesis 19:4-7

4Before they (Lot's visitors) had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. 5They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." 6Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing.

I read last week about a school teacher in Savannah, Georgia, who recently lost her life savings in a business scheme that had been pitched to her by a scam artist. We've all heard it a million times: it sounded too good to be true, and it was. Here, though, is what caught my attention about the story: when her investment disappeared without a trace and her contact had skipped town, she went to the Better Business Bureau. "Why didn't you come to us first?" they asked. "Didn't you know about the Better Business Bureau?" The teacher responded by saying that she was actually well aware of the BBB and that she'd known about the organization since her college days. So — why didn't she check out the supposedly legitimate business opportunity with them beforehand? Her answer, and I'll quote it verbatim, was the epitome of human nature at work: "I didn't contact you," she said, "Because I was afraid you'd tell me not to do it."

Isn't it amazing how, when it comes to determining things of great importance in life, we often don't turn to where we know the answers are for fear of what they will say? It might be our refusal to go to the doctor because of the changes we'd be asked to make in order to improve

our health. It might be letting a past-due bill sit unopened in a stack of mail because we don't want to face the reality of a deteriorating financial situation. Sometimes it's something as simple as refusing to listen to a voicemail on our phone because we know the message from the person who called contains something we don't want to hear. We are human beings. We are smart. We are not easily fooled. But because we — sometimes desperately so — desire our lives to be consistent and untroubled, we often go to great lengths to ignore or avoid messages that we don't want to hear. And if ignoring and avoiding them doesn't work, we're equally good at the next step: flat out rejecting them as wrong. To say it another way, we'll go to great lengths to reject a message that implies *we're wrong*...and that brings us to the issue before us today.

The Bible is a beautiful book, but it can be a hard book. It's beautiful and hard for the precisely the same reason: God's Word is truth, and it speaks truth plainly and straightforwardly in a manner that in most instances is black and white with very little gray. The Bible becomes a hard book when its proclamations butt up against our sensibilities; when it calls out our actions and attitudes as sin.

Sexual sin is one of the most difficult categories of all. On the one hand, the Bible speaks of sex as one of God's greatest gifts. It champions sex, advocates sex, and even describes the intimacy of sex in startling detail, and it's presented to us as free and glorious and creative and beautiful when engaged in as God intended. And what is God's intention for sex? According to Scripture, it's that it be enjoyed in the marriage relationship between a woman and a man. Outside of that relationship, that is, in any other context, sexual activity is a sin. That includes things which today are still universally seen as taboo, like incest and bestiality, but it also includes things that society and culture the world over has begun to accept and embrace: things like heterosexual fornication and adultery, and yes, homosexual activity of all kinds as well.

As we walk through this rather stark and difficult text in Genesis that will see Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed for its sin, one of the reasons given is the moral depravity of its people, and the chief expression of that depravity in this case is the practice of homosexual sex.

As recently as 20 years ago, most of what I'm about to say regarding human sexuality and homosexuality in particular was still the accepted, mainstream cultural and societal position, whether coming from a religious perspective or not. As I express it today, however, many would insist that it's no longer mainstream in the least, and that in fact it is archaic, intolerant, and homophobic. There are many reasons for that, including political correctness, an ever growing moral relativism, and to be frank, calculated and well-organized lobbying from the LGBTQ community. Regardless, however, here is what Scripture speaks, and nature affirms, no matter how we might try ignore, avoid, or outright reject it:

First, both the Old Testament Scriptures (Leviticus 18 & 20 in particular) as well as the New Testament Scriptures (especially Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1) plainly condemn homosexual conduct.

Second, Jesus Himself affirms the Old Testament's condemnation of all sin, including homosexual conduct, in Matthew 5 when He says, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

In Luke 17, Jesus directly references Sodom and Gomorrah as representative of the way people will be living in the last days, unmindful of the things of God and uncaring of His statutes, when sudden destruction will come upon them in the Second Coming.

Finally, in related fashion Jesus in Matthew 19 also affirms the Biblical ideal of marriage as consisting of one man and one woman, joined in an exclusive monogamous relationship. In the same passage He also affirms that we were created male and female, and that a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I know that there are those who would accuse a study session like this one as being an attack on a particular kind of people who have chosen to live a particular way of life. It's not. Instead, it is a simple witness to the clear teaching of God's Word, which says that sin is sin, including sexual sin, no matter what kind it may be... homosexual or heterosexual. God's Word also condemns all sin, regardless of the kind, and calls all people to repentance. But finally, God's Word is also clear that in Jesus Christ, we have a Savior from sin — a Rescuer and a Redeemer who, though our sins were as scarlet, has through His own blood made us white as snow. We all need that Rescuer. We all need to be redeemed. We all need the cleansing that the blood of Christ provides. And none of us dare judge or hate another just because their sin — whether they are struggling with it or steeped in it — may happen to be different than our own.

There are hundreds of publications and websites today dedicated to discounting the specific teachings of Scripture that I've laid out today. There are even churches and clergy who have chosen to set aside or "reinterpret" what God's Word says in order to lessen the blow or salve the consciences of those in the LGBTQ community. But no matter how much we may attempt to adjust the Bible's proclamations regarding sex to fit our personal proclivities or desires, and no matter what we may do to try and deflect or reject a statute with which we disagree, the truth, regardless of the spin or the angle or the focus, still shines through. There's a whole lot of black and white, with very little gray.

When we come back tomorrow, we'll continue this conversation in yet another direction, because as some of you have already surmised by reading ahead, we have more to muddle through in this section of Scripture before we can call it a day!

God be with you, my friends — Have a great day, and Lord-willing, I'll see you again next time.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's grace and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm happy to have you along for some time in God's Word over the next few minutes, and I'm always praying that our ministry here is helping you to learn and grow in your faith and become ever more consistent in your devotional time with the Lord. Today we're continuing our look at Genesis 19, where Lot is caught between a rock and a hard place. Let's pray and get to the text.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we know that we can do all things through you because you give us strength; and we remember also that apart from you, we can do nothing. We ask for your power and your gracious presence as we study today. Teach us and lead us, in your precious name we pray. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, in a completely misplaced effort to protect his house guests, Lot attempts to prevent one sin by committing another — something both terribly grievous and completely ineffectual, and which only further riles the mob outside of his home. In the end, only supernatural intervention carries the day. Our focus this session: From bad to worse — speaking the unspeakable.

Genesis 19:4-11

4Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. 5They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." 6Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. 8Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof." 9"Get out of our way," they replied. And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door. 10But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. 11Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

How many of you remember Vinko Bogatej? The name probably doesn't ring a bell, but when I tell you who he was most of you will immediately recognize him. Vinko was a ski-jumper from Yugoslavia who, while competing in the 1970 World Ski-Flying Championship in Obertsdorf, West Germany, fell off the takeoff ramp and landed on his head. What's significant about that? Vinko's accident was caught on camera, and the footage was so dramatic that it ended up being used in the weekly opening credits of ABC's very popular weekend program called "Wide World of Sports." If your TV happened to be tuned to ABC on a Saturday afternoon during

most any weekend of the 1970's, chances are you saw Vinko. Host Jim McKay's voice would ring out,

Spanning the globe to bring you the constant variety of sport... the thrill of victory... and the agony of defeat... the human drama of athletic competition... This is ABC's Wide World of Sports!

The agony of defeat? Yes, that was poor Vinko's ski jump crash being featured as Jim McKay said those words. Vinko was hospitalized after his spill, but in time he recovered and went on to live a quiet, unglamorous life as a foundry worker, far removed from the fame, wealth, and status he had once enjoyed. The kicker of it all? Many years later, Doug Wilson, a producer for ABC, interviewed Vinko for a special anniversary edition of the show. When he was told that he'd been on the program ever since 1970, appearing to viewers 130 times a year, Vinko couldn't believe it; he never knew. It brought "the agony of defeat" home for him in a whole new way.

In God's Word today, we are witnessing a crash of historic proportions. It's been a long time coming — a long, downward slope toward the bottom, if you will — and the slip which has led to the fall is almost too much to fathom. Lot, though described to us as a righteous man because of his belief and trust in Almighty God, has nonetheless been on a continually descending trajectory for many years now. He's held onto his faith, and he's also maintained his moral and spiritual integrity in the midst of a wicked environment, but his choices in life — like where he's made his home and the people with whom he's chosen to associate — have left him compromised. To say that he hasn't been affected by his life in Sodom or by the people who live there is to miss the obvious. The scene before us, in fact, brings us to what in many respects can be called the beginning of his hapless end. While he'll recover, at least to some degree, from this wreck of a decision, this horrific, indefensible moral nosedive, this is the event which begins Lot's fade into a quiet, unglamorous life. Whatever fame, wealth, and status he once enjoyed as a pillar in his community is about to become far removed from him, never to be regained. And the kicker of it all? Lot will never know that for millennia afterward, this incident in his life will be replayed over and over again by generation upon generation of God's people...people who will see this sad moment as the epitome of the agony of defeat.

As we look to today's narrative, Lot hasn't been successful in his pleadings with the mob of deviant, lust-filled men crowding around his home to get to his two visitors. And really, why should he be successful? Though he's enjoyed a position of leadership and authority in Sodom, probably in part because of his uncle's rescue of the city from invaders years before and also due to his own significant wealth and influence as a person of means, at the heart of things Lot has been and always will be an outsider. Dr. James Burton Coffman said it this way: "Oil will not mix with water. The events of this dark night prove that Lot does not belong in Sodom. As is always the case, any respect or popularity that sinful men may give to the followers of the Lord is always tentative and uncertain and sure to disappear on the slightest pretext." Dr. Coffman is right; this is precisely what happens to Lot when he tries to overlay his own values as a man of God onto the template of the godless. It doesn't work, and in actuality makes the situation worse.

And yet, just when we expect Lot to turn heroic and take one last uncompromising stand to defend his guests, he turns despicable and offers his two daughters to the mob in place of his guests. He presents his own girls — both virgins — as sacrificial offerings to appease the lust of the crowd. *Do with them whatever you want, he says, but don't bring disrespect on my home and my hospitality by taking these men.*

How incredibly disgusting. How completely deplorable. How absolutely unjustifiable.

How sinful.

Is it true that the men of Sodom have shown a shocking demonstration of depravity in the course of the past several verses? Certainly. Yet we are bound as God's people, it is demanded of us as human beings created in His image, to be just as shocked at the depraved willingness of Lot to give up his daughters to the mob in an effort to quell their uprising. Lot's actions here are reprehensible. They're heartless. And his feeble overture about his obligation of hospitality to his guests as an excuse for doing this terrible thing is stupid, weak, and again, sinful. There is no excuse that can be given to lessen the travesty of this moment.

Wrapping Up

Thankfully, as we wrap things up for the day we find that while Lot has just fallen down in spectacular fashion by means of his terrible decision, his two guests — who will now reveal themselves to be the supernatural beings that they are — rise up and come to the rescue. Pulling Lot back inside, closing the door behind them, and striking the crowd outside with blindness so that they can't find the entrance, the Lord's angels turn to Lot to speak — and the next time we come back to this passage, we'll hear them inform him of the impending doom of the city. There's so much here to take in. So much to talk about. So much to parse out and unpack. So much for us to learn as God's people in Christ. By God's grace, learn we will in the days ahead, and I hope you'll plan to be part of it as we continue.

Thanks so much for your time today, everyone — it's always my joy and privilege to be with you, and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon. Christ's peace to each of you, and do have a wonderful day!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings to you in our risen Lord Jesus, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be back with you one more time before the weekend, and I hope your EDiBS week has been a beneficial one for you in your walk with our Savior. Thanks again for your time yesterday; I appreciate your prayers and your willingness to walk with me as I present the needs of the ministry here at year's end. Today we'll be continuing our look at the fraught events before us in Genesis 19, where the Lord's angels are preparing to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. I'm glad you're here; let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Gracious Father, please grant your people new knowledge and increasing wisdom today as they seek to learn of you from your Word. Speak to their hearts. Fortify their minds. Make them bold and confident in you, for you are the Great Deliverer of your people – the One who protects and goes before us in all things. Thank you so much for this time, and as we thank you, help us also to glean all that you have for us in the Scriptures. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the lust-filled, violent crowd outside of Lot's home confused and blinded by the Lord's angels (that is, the two men who have been Lot's guests), we now arrive at the pivotal moment of the crisis. Our focus this session: A call to hurry unheeded.

Genesis 19:12-16

12The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, 13because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it." 14So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking. 15With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." 16When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them.

It's a well known anecdote from days gone by, but we don't hear about it so much these days. A New York family bought a ranch out West where they intended to raise cattle. Friends visited and asked if the ranch had a name. "Well," said the would-be cattleman, "I wanted to name it the Bar-J. My wife favored Suzy-Q, one son liked the Flying-W, and the other wanted the Lazy-Y. So we're calling it the Bar-J-Suzy-Q-Flying-W-Lazy-Y." "But where are all your cattle?" the friends asked. The man replied, "None survived the branding."

There are times when, in trying to make everything work, in trying to please everybody, in attempting to cover every base and in striving to satisfy every demand, the end result is that nothing works, no one is pleased, no base is covered, and no demand is satisfied. In trying to be all things to all men, it's very easy to end up with nothing to show for what you've done and nowhere to go to escape the consequences. Like a massive branding, it can be hard to survive the burn.

In returning to God's Word today where we find ourselves on the cusp of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, part of what we're seeing today is, to be sure, the effect and result of sin, which we've been talking about for several days now. And yet another part of what we're seeing is a series of consequences that are resulting from one man who has spent years trying to be all things to all men; a man who's tried to please everyone as a way to stay above the fray, but who, by accepting everything, has now come to nothing. His lack of wisdom and his absence of principled decision-making, in fact, has now put him on the cusp of destruction himself. Who are we talking about? Lot, of course...and with Lot, his family as well.

As we pick things up today, the Lord's angels have revealed, first by their actions and now by their very specific message, their true nature as God's messengers. The time has come, they say, for Lot and his family to flee the city, because God has sent them to destroy it. What are Lot's instructions? Simple: to gather everyone in his household and flee in order to escape destruction. Simple instructions, however, prove not to be so simple in practice, because when Lot goes to his sons-in-law — meaning, according to ancient practice, the two men who are legally and bindingly betrothed to his daughters but who aren't yet actually married to them — these men think it's a joke. This is the first signal to us that Lot's influence as a man of God in his own family has been lacking. On one hand, it's surprising that he would allow his daughters to be joined to ungodly Sodomite men in the first place. At the same time, their scoffing at his warning shows that they don't respect his faith, nor have they been influenced by his example or his witness to them. These things show not an abject sinfulness on Lot's part, but again, a willingness to compromise and to accept things around him in an uncritical manner. He's been going along to get along, blending in instead of standing out, and now as he speaks with utmost seriousness to his sons-in-law about God's imminent judgment, they don't believe him; he doesn't have the moral or spiritual high ground to be taken seriously. Tragically, this means that rather being rescued from God's judgment, Lot's sons-in-law receive it, along with the rest of the city.

This tragedy, however, isn't the only evidence in the text today of Lot's compromise in life. If we look at what happens next, we have an even stronger and more direct line of sight into how his spiritual viewpoint has weakened and grown dim. First, when the angels initially tell Lot to take his family and go, it's still night, and the command is notably urgent. *Take your family and get them out of here, because the Lord has sent us to Destroy this place.* Now, though, dawn has come, and guess who's still in town? So the angels come and urge Lot again, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." We'd think that would be enough, right? Wrong. The Bible says that in response to this instruction, Lot hesitates. Is his hesitation due to unbelief? Doubtful. He's already seen enough in the action of the angels to know that things are going down and going down soon. It's far more likely that when today's passage tells us that Lot hesitates, he's hesitating because too much of his heart is in Sodom. The urgency of the angels and their message to flee isn't enough. Lot's looking at his home, his possessions, his lifestyle, and a 100 other things that he loves...his whole existence in a way. And you know what? It puts him in the worst of all possible places: he has too much of the world to be happy in the Lord, and too much of the Lord to be happy in the world. In the end, we see that it's only God's mercy that saves him, his wife, and his two daughters. The angels literally grab them by the hands and lead them out to safety. Unfortunately, as we'll soon see, in many ways even that won't be enough.

Wrapping Up

For now, and as we wrap things up for the day, what do you see in the actions of Lot that speaks to you as a child of God? What is your heart telling you about compromise? How does the order of your life — the priorities of your life and the loves of your life — shape you when it comes to the things of God versus the things of the world? And finally, with all that you may be seeing and thinking about with respect to Lot, don't forget about the other Person in the text today...the main Person...the One whose mercy saves. What does this passage say to you about Him? When we come back next time we'll talk about it, and I hope you'll make plans to join in. Have a wonderful, restful, worshipful weekend, everyone — the joy of the Lord be your strength, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace to you in our Advent King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. On this opening day of our week together, we're kicking things off with a bang as our time finds us in the midst of a big moment, one that for those involved is filled with fear, shock, and a sense of impending doom. If you'll open your Bible to Genesis 19 where we'll be picking up the story, we'll pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, we ask today that you draw near to the cries of your people. Cries for mercy, cries for healing, cries for provision, cries for a fresh start. We take heart in the promise that you are not a God far off, but that you have drawn near to us in your own Son, who loves us and gave Himself for us. Please grant your blessing on our study of the Scriptures today, and help us to see that in you there is hope. We ask this in Christ's holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, it is solely by God's mercy that Lot, his wife, and his two daughters have been brought out of Sodom prior to its destruction. It is solely by God's mercy that they have been rescued from their own hesitancy to depart...their slowness in forsaking the remains of their old life. It is solely by God's mercy that they have been provided a place to which they can flee in order to be safe and escape the coming calamity. Today, however, we see God's mercy come yet again. Our focus this session: Imminent destruction, but frozen with fear.

Genesis 19:17-22

17As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" 18But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, please! 19Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. 20Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared." 21He said to him, "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. 22But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoar.)

Recently, a woman in our community was hailed as a hero for rescuing a little boy in dramatic fashion. If it hadn't been caught on a local business's security camera, chances are it never would have gotten around as it has.

It was that classic, almost cliché situation every parent dreads: playing with a ball in the park, the boy's buddy kicked it over his head and it went rolling into the street. Without stopping, looking, or listening, he dashed out to retrieve it — straight into the path of an oncoming car.

The heartbreaking thing about the incident is that while there was zero opportunity for the car to stop in time, there were probably one to two precious seconds that the boy could have used to get out of the way before he was struck. Yet what the video shows is that when he saw the car, he froze. He was petrified. Fear gripped him and turned his body to stone. It was a “deer in the headlights” scenario, and from that point on, he was essentially without hope.

Here, though, is what happened. At the last moment, brakes locked, horn sounding, car barreling toward the motionless child, a blurry, fast-moving shape suddenly appears from the left-hand side of the video and literally body-slams the kid, knocking him out of harm’s way and into the side of the curb. The fast-moving, blurry shape? Our local citizen, who somehow saw and acted on the situation in what couldn’t have been more than a few milliseconds of calculation on her part. The outcome was miraculous. The little boy ended up with a bruised cheek and a chipped elbow from where he was slotted against the curb. The woman who saved him? She had her legs run over by the one of the car’s front tires and a nasty set of scrapes from where she hit the pavement, but no broken bones. In the end, both were fine... one who was fast frozen by fear, saved by one who was just plain fast.

Have you ever been frozen by fear? Locked into a state of paralysis over something terribly frightening, something coming at you too fast and shutting off your routes of escape? Have you ever been seemingly fine one minute, enjoying life and not thinking about too much other than what’s happening in the moment, only to find yourself facing headlights of destruction the next? If you have, then you know that it’s a terribly scary, helpless place to be.

As we turn to God’s Word today, that’s exactly where we find Lot. Frozen by fear. Paralyzed by the perilous. Up until a day or so ago, things had been fine...at least seemingly so. He’d been living his life in Sodom, enjoying his wealth, his status, and his influence as one of the elders of the community. He had two daughters pledged to be married to men in town. He wasn’t happy about the sin and wickedness around him, but he’d found a way to, in his mind at least, coexist *with* it rather than partake *of* it. All was okay. Until suddenly it wasn’t.

As we come upon Lot in today’s text, we find that everything has changed. So shaken is he over what’s transpired in the last 12 hours or so that he’s become almost immovable — not because of defiance, but because of a sense of shock and disbelief over what’s happening. Not only is he not acting wisely, he’s not thinking clearly either. Why do I say that? First, while he initially followed the angels’ instructions to muster his family and get all who belonged to him out the city after being told it was about to be destroyed, his urgency faded rather quickly. His sons-in-law thought he was joking when he told them to hurry and go, and who knows — maybe their attitude influenced him and caused him to second-guess himself, because when dawn rolled around, he was still dawdling around his home and had to be chided by the angels to get moving. But even with that, he *still* didn’t go. The Bible states that instead of listening to the angels, Lot hesitated, and hesitated to the point that they had to take him and his family members by the hands and physically lead them out.

Where is it that we find Lot, his wife, and their two daughters today? Still not acting wisely, and still not thinking clearly. They’ve just been told by the angels who have mercifully rescued them from Sodom that they’re now to flee the plain of the Jordan and head for the mountains, the one place that they’ll be safe. They’re not to stop anywhere on the plain whatsoever, lest they be destroyed — and what does Lot do in response to these very clear instructions? He argues with the angels of God. He points to a town not in the mountains, but on the plain, and says, “this will be better.” And while I tend to believe that Lot’s request here is not one made rationally, but reactively, and while it’s clear in many ways that he’s operating on fear instead of faith (something that we can totally understand given the circumstances), once again we find

that if left to his own devices and his own decision-making, Lot will indeed be destroyed, and his family with him.

Wrapping Up

So it is that as we wrap things up for the day, God is merciful to Lot yet another time. Whether it's divine compassion or divine pragmatism we don't know, but in response to Lot's pathetic and faithless blathering, the angels acquiesce and one of them basically says, "Okay, I'll grant your request — but again, you need to hurry." Don't you find it interesting that with all of these calamitous things going on, things which are only going to get worse in the next several hours, the Lord's angels seem far more intent on rescuing Lot and his family than Lot and his family seem intent on being rescued? The reason for this is that Lot and his family are clearly unable to extricate themselves from this situation. They're clearly not up to the task of making right decisions. They're simply not able to see as they need to see or act as they need to act to protect themselves. If God doesn't do everything needful for their rescue Himself, their hope is lost — even if at the moment they don't realize it.

When we come back next time, we'll be exploring that mindset and the way it plays out, not only in their lives, but truly, in the lives of all people everywhere. Without God's mercy, we are all undone. But with His mercy, our rescue is secure; we will be saved from the great calamity to come. God's peace, everybody — have a terrific day, and I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich grace and peace to each of you in our soon and coming King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS! I'm glad to be with you as we come together to share in God's Word, and as we head back to the Scriptures today we're opening again to the 19th chapter of Genesis. Take a moment, grab your Bible, and join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Father, we praise you for your loving-kindness and your deep, abiding love for us. Thank you for your goodness and mercy! Please bless us as we study your holy Word today. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

Getting things started today, Lot and his family, great recipients of God's mercy in multiple ways throughout the quickly building calamity surrounding Sodom and Gomorrah, now reach the town of Zoar, Lot's chosen place of refuge. But as the Lord's angels finally move to complete the task for which they've come, we see that not even their extreme patience with Lot can save his entire household. Our focus this session: Lot's wife looks back.

Genesis 19:23-26

23By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. 24Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens. 25Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. 26But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

People often ask me if I miss my little farm in the country. For those of you who may be newer to EDiBS, when the ministry was born back in 2007 I was living in the Ozark Mountains of southwest Missouri, enjoying life with my family, our three dogs, and an ever-changing menagerie of farm animals — goats, geese, turkeys, chickens, and ducks, plus the occasional pig or two. For a guy who grew up and lived almost his entire life in the suburbs of southern California, it was a huge change from what I'd always known, but it was a change I've never regretted.

Do I miss the farm? Yeah...sometimes a lot. Do I look back on it as the pinnacle of my life and the place I never should have left; the place to which I might even aspire to return? No. The truth is that when I think of the farm, I recall some really great memories and once-in-a-lifetime experiences that I'm glad to have had. But when those remembrances come, they come as momentary glances in the rearview mirror. I never turn and look back. Why? There's too much

going on in my life out the windshield to be concerned with what's behind me...and I would never want what's in my past to cause me to crash in the present.

As we return to God's Word today, we've come to what should be the mother of all windshield moments in the life of Lot and his family. Unfortunately, what they've left behind beckons so strongly that Lot's wife ends up turning and looking back. In that moment, the mother of all windshield moments becomes an epic crash and burn instead.

Picking things up in verse 23, Lot brings his family into the town of Zoar, the place of refuge which he has pleaded with the angels to use as his safe haven rather than traveling all the way to the mountains. The town is called Zoar because of its size: it means "small" or "insignificant." What happens there, however, is anything but.

First, as Lot enters Zoar, the Lord's angels finally commence the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and pretty much everything else on the plain of the Jordan River. They've waited for him to reach safety primarily because of the Lord's promise to Abraham back in chapter 18: God, bound by His own righteousness and honor, would not bring judgment on Sodom until the few righteous people living there — namely Lot and his household — were rescued. Now that that has happened, the devastation is swift.

Why are these cities being treated in this way? We've already talked about it at length, but let's take just a moment and remember that this God-wrought destruction isn't coming suddenly or without due warning. While it's true that Sodom and Gomorrah are being judged severely and yes, completely, it's important to remember that this is happening only after God's confirmation of their great wickedness, and only after He has given them opportunity after opportunity to see the truth and turn to Him.

We know, for example, that long before this time of destruction, the area surrounding Sodom had been unbelievably beautiful and productive (like the garden of the LORD, according to Genesis 13). Yet the glory of creation along with God's bestowal of fruitfulness on the land wasn't enough to turn the hearts of the people to Him. Later, God gave the people a righteous, if flawed, witness in Lot himself. He was a man of righteousness and a witness to the things of God, but when push came to shove, he was hated rather than emulated. Finally, though they were quick to reject Lot, the people had also seen the power, grace, and mercy of God in one more place: their deliverance from ruin through Abraham's rescue of the city years before, not to mention their witness of his encounter with Melchizedek in the aftermath. In short, they had the great blessing, and on multiple occasions, great evidence, of God's love, care, and compassion for them...yet they rejected it all. They did not change their ways. They refused to turn to the Lord in repentance. So it is that judgement has now come.

As the cities (and again, the whole of the region) are being destroyed, we now come to the second great event of the passage. While Lot and his household have been called away from their old life and have been warned not to look back but to be steadfast and resolute in going forward toward what is new, Lot's wife looks back anyway. Not in a "Wait! I forgot the photo albums!" kind of way, but in a mournful, pining, longing kind of way. Scholar Leon Morris wrote that the Hebrew word used here for "looking back" has the connotation of looking intently, and possibly even looking with the intent to return. In other words, her act of looking back shows her continuing love for Sodom and her regret over its destruction. It shows where her heart still resides, even though her person has moved on.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, some scholars think that as Lot's wife lingered behind and gazed back at what she was losing, she was somehow caught up in the cataclysm and was

overtaken by the fire and brimstone being rained down on the cities. That, they say, explains in a logical way the visual of her being turned into a pillar of salt. Others teach that her turning into a pillar of salt was simply a unique, supernatural judgment by God. Either way, the impetus and the outcome is the same: because of the state of her heart, Lot's wife perished.

Once, when He was referring to the end times, Jesus said something very telling and very important. It was in Luke 17, where He remarked to His disciples, "Remember Lot's wife." What did our Lord mean? In these last days, as we see the impending and ever more quickly approaching end of the age, why are we to remember this nameless woman? Could it be that we are to be careful not to cultivate a heart like hers? Could it be that, rather than looking back longingly at a corrupt and passing world ripe for judgement...one of which we are not a part and one *from* which we have been called out of in any case...our gaze is instead to be one resolutely forward in focus? Do we need to be looking forward to our deliverance? Do we need to be looking forward to the new Day? Are we to be windshield people in a rearview mirror kind of world? I think so. And I think this is also true: God would never want what's in our past to cause us to crash in the present.

Here's a closing verse for you today from Romans 15: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Look resolutely forward today, everyone...and as you do, have hope. Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, is coming soon, and He will make all things new! I'll see you again next time; until then, have a great day! God's peace!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Christ's peace, a blessed Advent to you, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. I hope your day is going well, that you're aware of the presence of our Lord Jesus in your life, and that you're knowing the blessing of being able to come to Him with everything that's going on in your world right now — which in these final days of 2020 is probably quite a bit. That's one reason I'm so glad to be joining you for Bible study today, because when we open the Scriptures I know that God comes to us with grace, mercy, and the reassurance that He is with us no matter what. As we pray together, let's ask that God's Word will do its good and gracious work in our lives.

Prayer

Almighty God, you are great and worthy of praise. You are faithful and true. You are the One who looks upon us with compassion and who comes to us in our time of need. As we pray today, we have such peace in knowing that there is nothing about us that you do not know, that you cannot handle, and that you will not forgive and make right. We confess our sin, Lord God, and we ask to be made clean...and we also ask that through your Word today you will speak your power, your peace, and your strength into our lives. We pray these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the episode of Sodom and Gomorrah comes, on the one hand, to a rather anticlimactic close — and yet in another sense it ends with a powerful reminder of God's great goodness to His people. Our focus: God remembered Abraham.

Genesis 19:27-29

27Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. 28He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. 29So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

I want to confess something to you today, and my confession starts this way: I'm a great believer in prayer. I'm an unworthy, yet grateful servant of the Lord God Almighty, always in awe over the access He gives me — and indeed, you also — to the throne of grace. He never tires of hearing us, whether our petitions are big or small. He never forgets the cries of our hearts. He never discounts even the most feeble utterings that come from our lips, because at the end of the day, even those feeble utterings are precious to Him, just as we are precious to Him.

My confession continues with another statement, maybe a somewhat surprising one: as thankful as I am for the gift of prayer, as often as I make use of it, and as sure as I am of its blessings, I'm not always so good at looking back and recounting the manner in which God so graciously *answers* my prayers. I know that He does because His Word says He does, and my life bears the evidence thereof in big ways. But more often than not, I get so caught up with what's next in life that I fail to stop and intentionally think through just how much God is directing my steps and answering the cries of my heart each and every day. And yet, here's the beautiful, mind-blowing thing: God remembers my prayers, even when I don't.

In today's reading, I'm struck not so much by the final description of the the end of Sodom and Gomorrah — that's actually the anticlimactic part of the text for me. What does strike me is the simple and faithful act of Abraham...followed by the equally simple and faithful act of God. Early in the morning, Abraham gets up and returns to the place where he had entreated the Lord for the city of Sodom. He goes back to his place of prayer. He goes early, because Sodom is on his mind. He goes early, because the earnest petition he made before the Lord on behalf of the city has probably been bouncing around in his head all night long. But Abraham also gets up and goes early because he is a man who knows, remembers, and trusts the goodness of the God who hears the heart cries of His people. So Abraham goes with anticipation, seeking an answer...and he goes in faith and humbleness of heart, ready to accept whatever the Lord has done.

Can you imagine his thoughts as he sees the smoke rising from the plain?

Sadness, perhaps, because evidently, not even ten righteous souls could be found in Sodom.

Worry, perhaps, not knowing what has become of Lot and his family.

Curious, perhaps, wondering how complete the devastation might be.

And what of awe? Awe over the righteous judgment of God upon evil.

Whatever the answers may be, they're all wafting up in that terrible cloud of smoke. But as Abraham stands in his place, awe-struck, stunned, speechless, and doubtless grieving over the fate of a city that he'd sought to save through prayer, he stands nonetheless. His presence shows his own remembrance of all for which he had asked. His presence, likewise, shows his faithful expectation that God will not forget him.

That, of course, is precisely what we see in the passage today. As the tragedy of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the plain of the Jordan becomes evident, something else is equally evident: in that hard moment, God remembers Abraham.

It's true, is it not? Abraham's prayers have not been in vain. Though the city of Sodom, the city of Gomorrah, and the region of the plain could not be saved for lack of people whose hearts were turned to God, Lot and his family were mercifully spared and brought out. The Lord, in a different way than Abraham had perhaps expected or hoped, nonetheless very graciously remembered his intercessions.

Like He did with Abraham, God remembers us. He remembers our prayers. He remembers our hearts and our minds and the concerns that consume them. And though He is the God who doesn't always answer our prayers in the way we might expect or hope, He very graciously answers them in the way that is best — especially when it comes to mercifully bringing out what needs to be spared.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I'd like to invite you to take a moment, pause what you're doing, and go to your place of prayer. Stand in that place before the Lord. Stand, voicing that petition that's been bouncing around in your head all night long. Stand with anticipation, seeking an answer...and stand in faith and humbleness of heart, ready to accept whatever the Lord so chooses to do with you. As you stand in that place, take a moment to do one more thing: take a moment to remember that God remembers. He remembers you — and even in those times when you get so caught up with what's next in life that you fail to stop and intentionally think through it, God is still directing your steps and answering the cries of your heart each and every day. It's a beautiful, mind-blowing thing.

We'll talk about this more next time, everyone — until then, have a terrific day in our Lord Jesus, and may His joy fill your heart. I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and God's blessings of joy and peace to each of you as we come to another week in Advent and another week of Bible study together. It's always great to be with you as we gather in Christ's name and place ourselves under His Word, and today we'll be using our time to finish our look at Genesis 19. Let's turn there in our Bibles and go before the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your gracious presence – your promise to be with us always. We thank you for your strong right arm – for defending us and leading us through life with your strength and your protective covering. We thank you most of all today for sending your Son, our Savior – the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again to bring victory over sin, death, and all the powers of hell. We praise you for, and we are humbled by, your lavish, forgiving, saving love. Draw us into all that you have for us today in the Scriptures. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've come to the aftermath of Sodom and Gomorrah. At this point, those cities, and indeed the whole region, is gone – but their influence remains. Our focus: Lot and his daughters.

Genesis 19:30-38

30Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave. 31One day the older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man around here to lie with us, as is the custom all over the earth. 32Let's get our father to drink wine and then lie with him and preserve our family line through our father." 33That night they got their father to drink wine, and the older daughter went in and lay with him. He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up. 34The next day the older daughter said to the younger, "Last night I lay with my father. Let's get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and lie with him so we can preserve our family line through our father." 35So they got their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went and lay with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up. 36So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. 37The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab ; he is the father of the Moabites of today. 38The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi ; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

About six months ago I came across a podcast about honesty in America. It was a six-part series: one session to introduce the topic of honesty, three sessions to talk about the different

issues surrounding honesty, and two final sessions for analysis and commentary. It was an excellent production, but one thing stuck out like a sore thumb: the main focus of the series was actually more about dishonesty than honesty, and furthermore, the three episodes dedicated to the core subject matter were actually about three kinds of excuses people use to justify dishonest actions.

What are those three groupings? The first is outright denial, or a rejection of any involvement. Researchers found that often, this excuse is employed even though a person is obviously guilty of having done something wrong. They simply won't own up to it. The second of the three is the "It's not my fault" excuse. Rather than taking responsibility, a person looks around for a scapegoat on whom to put the blame. Usually it's a loved one — a husband, wife, or parent — and in a work environment it's usually the boss. The third common form of excuse people use to justify actions that are indefensible is the "I did it, but..." approach. In this instance the person blames circumstances for his or her actions, and says that under those circumstances, the actions taken were warranted.

As we come to God's Word on this Monday and finish out our look at Genesis 19, the events before us are shocking, or if not shocking, at least extremely distasteful. In any culture, in any era, irrespective of religious convictions and per most any world view across the globe, the actions we've just read about in today's passage are considered to be taboo, immoral, and indefensible. The episode here is a tragic one — one which shows that while you might take a family out of Sodom, after a time it can be too late to take Sodom out of the family.

As we pick things up in the text, Lot has picked up and moved — from the little town of Zoar up to a cave in the mountains. The only reason we're given for his trek is that he's afraid to reside in Zoar any longer. Scripture doesn't tell us why Lot is afraid. Perhaps it's because he feels unwelcome in his chosen place of refuge. Maybe there are threats from the residents there. Then again, it might simply be that he continues to be so badly shaken over his narrow escape from Sodom that he doesn't feel safe anywhere. It's understandable, don't you think? Here is a man whose life...whose world, really...has unraveled in stunning fashion, and he will never be the same again.

And yet, it's once Lot and his daughters are residing in their mountain cave that things grow, if it were possible, even bleaker than they had been before. It's here where more sin is entered into, and it's sin that will have far-reaching, generational implications that will impact not just people, but nations. There will be no denial on the part of Lot or his daughters that this has happened. Neither will there will be any blame-shifting, though we might think that would be the case. Instead, this wrongdoing will fall under that third common form of excuse which people use to justify actions that are indefensible: the "I did it, but..." approach. In this instance, Lot's daughters will blame circumstances for their actions, and their assertion will be that under those circumstances, their actions are warranted.

While some scholars suggest that Lot's daughters believed the whole world to have perished with Sodom and Gomorrah, and that they further believed it was now their responsibility to repopulate the earth through their father, it's a point of view that doesn't hold much water.

First, their brief time in Zoar would have shown quite clearly that there were still other people remaining in the world besides them and their father. Their assertion that Lot was the only man left in the world through whom they could procreate seems more like an excuse for them to do what they wanted to do than as a selfless, heroic deed to preserve humanity.

Second, that Lot's daughters understood the action they initiated was wrong is proved by the fact that they knew their father wouldn't willingly participate in such an arrangement unless he was in some way compromised, which is why they plied him with strong drink in order to carry

out their plan. The simple truth is that anything we might say to put the actions of Lot's daughters in a favorable light disappears in view of the fact that they clearly knew their plan was steeped in immorality, that they were devious in planning it behind their father's back, and that they knew they must employ deceptive means in order to bring it to fruition. Will we ever understand the whole of their motives this side of heaven? No. But what we do understand and can see from history is that their actions brought about untold consequences for generations to come.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what became of this situation? The older daughter's son by Lot was named Moab. He became the father of the Moabites. Moab is a symbolic name that carries with it the degrading circumstances of his birth: it means *from a father*. The younger daughter's son by Lot, Ben-Ammi, became the father of the Ammonites. His name is also symbolic and descriptive: it means *son of my kinsman*. In regard to both of these men, the nations that arose from them would in time become obstacles for God's people. Long afterward, in fact, both nations would become bitter enemies of Israel, both politically and religiously. It was, again, a consequence both gestational and generational, and in the end, just plain awful.

As we come to the end of Genesis 19, we essentially come to the end of Lot's life — one which ended in a ruin whose root was compromise. Will we have more to say about him later? Yes. For now, though, we lay him aside.

When we come back next time we'll be having our first look at Genesis 20, a chapter that will bring us back to the exploits of Abraham — some of which we'll find unsettlingly familiar! Do make plans to join in; I'm eager to get to it with you! Have a great day, everyone, and do remember that the Lord is with you — not just for the moment, but for the duration. He will never leave you or forsake you! Take care, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Hello everyone — blessings to you in our soon and coming Advent King, Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! Thanks for joining in today for our time in God's Word together, where over the next few minutes we'll be having our first look at Genesis 20. I've been so enjoying our journey through this first book of the Bible, and my prayer is that in walking through this portion of Scripture, we're all being more deeply rooted and established in the great foundations of our faith. Our sin, yes...our need to be saved from that sin, indeed...but in light of that, the gracious and merciful assurance of rescue in a promised Messiah, a Savior whose way is being paved and planned for even in these very early days of Old Testament history. In fact, as we open to this new chapter we'll be seeing that very thing in evidence, so why don't we open our Bibles and begin. Will you pray with me?

Prayer

Lord God, our gracious Father, thank you so much for this day...for creating it and giving us a place in it to belong to you, to walk in your ways, and to know your love for us in Christ. Help us to see the hours that you give us as a gift, and help us by your grace to make the very most of each one. Bless us today as we learn of your kingdom, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're making a shift back to the life of Abraham and Sarah, now expecting a child together and now venturing back into the region of the Negev, a place they had traveled to and through when they had first come to the Promised Land. After dwelling there for a time, a now-familiar issue crops up. Our focus this session: the thorny matter of trust... again.

Genesis 20:1-2

Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.

Some years ago, James Brown — not the singer, but the seminary professor — was learning to fly, and on one outing his flight instructor told him to put the plane into a steep and extended dive. He was totally unprepared for what was about to happen: in short order, the engine stalled and the plane began to plunge downward in sickening, uncontrolled silence. Worse still, it soon became evident that the flight instructor wasn't going to help correct the situation. After a few seconds, which seemed like an eternity, Dr. Brown's mind began to function again. In the end, he ended up rather quickly handling the issue. Back on the ground, angry and shaken, he immediately turned to his instructor and began to vent. But the instructor very calmly

responded, "Dr. Brown, there's no position you can get this airplane into that I can't get you out of. If you want to learn to fly, go up there and do it again."

At that moment Dr. Brown had an epiphany. He said it was as if God was saying to him, "Remember this, James: as you serve Me, there's no situation you can get yourself into that I can't get you out of. If you trust me, you'll be all right. Now go." That moment stayed with James Brown throughout his career, and as he would often recount, those words proved unfailingly true in his ministry time and time again through the years.

Trusting the Lord. It's a phenomenal thing, but it can also be a phenomenally difficult thing. Believing people — that is, people like you and me who are believers in Almighty God, Father Son and Holy Spirit — love to talk about trusting the Lord and pray about trusting the Lord and reminisce about times in life when we did trust the Lord. But even the most trusting among us will admit that when things are in an uncontrolled nosedive with no perceptible help at the ready, trusting the Lord isn't so much our go to until it becomes our have to. Sure, we usually come around to it eventually, but we'll exhaust every humanly possible solution to our problem in the interim. And the crazy thing? We do it over and over and over again.

This is what we find happening today in God's Word as we come back to Abraham and Sarah. Abraham and Sarah, riding on a high. Abraham and Sarah, flush with the joy of God's promise kept. Abraham and Sarah, waiting on the arrival of a little boy who will make their name great and in the process, change the world and alter the course of eternity. The Lord has shown Himself unfailingly faithful in everything He has ever declared to this man and this woman. God is trustworthy, and thus this couple has put their trust in God...

Except for those times when they haven't. Except for those times when one or the other of them has gotten scared and taken matters into their own hands. Except for those times when, despite the magnitude and the weight of divine favor upon their lives, they haven't believed Him for His power or His provision or His protection. Times like now.

Arriving in the region of the Negev, living among a pagan people, the time comes when a king by the name of Abimelech takes notice of, and eventually sends for, Sarah. She's beautiful, even at her advanced age. She's part of Abraham's entourage — probably the wealthiest and most influential man within a radius of several hundred miles. Abimelech wants her, and why? To have her in his harem or to take her for his wife won't just be about pleasure, but about politics. It's all about networking and deal-making and strategic alliances; it's about the leverage of power. This will be good for his rule and good for his ego, but it will be supremely dishonoring to Sarah and subject her to the whims of someone who will treat her as property instead of as a person. Put simply, this is a straight-up engine-stall; an uncontrolled nosedive in the making. Nothing good can possibly come of this.

So — how does God intervene and save the day? How does He prove Himself gracious and merciful in the midst of this mess? How does the power of the Lord triumph over a profligate pagan who has no idea of what — of who — he's dealing with? The answer is that we don't know yet. Why? Because instead of trusting the Lord to act in this situation, Abraham and Sarah pull out the Sister Act instead — and if it seems vaguely familiar to you, as if they've done this before at some point, it's because they have, and we talked about it way back in chapter 12. In essence, rather than trusting God to keep them together and to protect them from harm, Abraham and Sarah have concocted their own scheme to protect themselves. The problem? Their idea is about as stupid as they come, and by its very nature it is destined to fail them. Trusting the Lord isn't so much their go-to at the moment. Soon it will become their have-to, but in the meantime we're left to follow them as they exhaust every humanly possible

solution to their problem in the interim. And the crazy thing? Even though they've already been through this before, they're back, doing it over and over over again.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Christian journalist Bob Sutton once wrote about a program preceding the 1988 Winter Olympics that featured blind skiers being trained for slalom skiing, impossible as that sounds. Paired with sighted skiers, the blind skiers were taught on the flats how to make right and left turns. When that was mastered, they were taken to the slalom slope, where their sighted partners skied beside them shouting, "Left!" and "Right!" As they obeyed the commands, they were actually able to negotiate the course and cross the finish line, depending solely on the sighted skiers' word. It was either complete trust or catastrophe. Analyzing that amazing human interest story and turning it into an illustration, Sutton wrote, *What a vivid picture of the Christian life! In this world, we are in reality blind about what course to take. We must rely solely on the Word of the only One who is truly sighted — God Himself. But when we do that, His Word gives us the direction we need to finish the course.*

When we come back tomorrow, we'll add another section of verses to today's passage as we continue to look at this moment of crisis. The good news? God will indeed show up, and God will indeed intervene. God will indeed have His way. As we'll soon see, there's too much at stake for Him not to. And as we'll also soon see, the same is true when it comes to God and His intervening ways with you and me — even, and especially, when we do the same things over and over and over again.

Do come back and follow this through with me; I think you'll be glad you did! Have a great day, everyone...be well, and I'll see you soon.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich peace to you in the One who was, and is, and is to come, and welcome to another daily session of EDiBS. Today is Wednesday, and at this middle point in our week together we're opening our Bibles again to the 20th chapter of Genesis. I'm so glad that you're here, and my prayer is that our Lord will strengthen your heart and quiet you with His love today. Take a moment, find your place, and then join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you said to us that you would give us peace – peace not like the world knows or can give, but peace that comes from you and is not of this world. We desire that peace today with such longing. Have mercy and pour into our lives through and through – in our hearts and our minds – that perfect and abiding heavenly peace. Do so as you teach us today by your Word and Spirit. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Abraham and Sarah have once again used a ruse in the presence of a king to try and protect themselves from harm. Our focus: God responds.

Genesis 20:1-7

Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, ²and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her. ³But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman." ⁴Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? ⁵Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands." ⁶Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. ⁷Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die."

Here's a true story, and in its own special way it's among the loveliest that I've come across in a while:

In southwest Missouri, MoDot, the state's department of transportation, was building a new road through a rural area. As is common in such a project, the construction crew had to remove many trees as it carved the road bed through the countryside. One day, the lead engineer on the project noticed that a certain tree the crew had come upon had a nest of birds who couldn't fly yet. Looking at the plans and the project's timeline, he decided to mark the tree to temporarily save it.

Two weeks later the engineer came back to the tree, and he got into a bucket truck to see what was going on with the birds. When he was lifted up so that he could peer into the nest, he saw that the fledglings were gone — they'd obviously learned to fly. Coming back down, he got on his phone and talked to the construction superintendent. It was now safe to take the tree.

If the story ended there, it would be enough — enough to warm our hearts and shine a light on the kindness, the mercy, and the compassion of that lead engineer. It might even be something we'd post to our social media accounts or share with our friends over coffee. But that's not the end of the story. Instead, the ending goes like this: after the lead engineer's phone call to the construction superintendent, a bulldozer came to take down the tree. As it crashed to the ground, the now-vacant bird nest fell clear, and some of the material that the birds had gathered to make it was scattered among the fallen leaves and branches. A worker who was examining it picked up a scrap of paper that had been woven into the twigs, pine straw, and other bits. It turned out to be part of a child's Sunday school paper, and on that scrap of paper were these words from 1 Peter 5:7 — "Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." Now that's an ending!

I'm sharing that story with you today for one reason: to show that in the big picture, little things are important. To show that while life's ins and outs may sometimes seem to be random and unconnected, very often there is an unseen but intricate design pulling them all together. Sometimes our time here feels like one long and aimless road-building venture, a path being indiscriminately carved through the countryside of our existence. But the truth is that nothing is indiscriminate. Every leaf, every rock, and every tree along the way matters. And the greater truth is that when it comes to what things will look like in the end, there is One who already has the both the plans and the project's timeline all worked out. His kindness, mercy, and compassion isn't simply enough; it's more than enough.

As you look at God's Word today, there's one nest in one tree that stands out. Do you see it? There's one thing that needs to be protected. Can you discern it? There's one issue at hand that, while seemingly small and insignificant at first glance, is actually huge in the big picture — a little thing that is of great importance. It has to do with the line of the coming Messiah. It has to do with God's fledgling plan of Salvation for the world, one which, in its early stages, has yet to take flight and so must be safeguarded.

As we continue to follow Abraham, Sarah, and their hapless decision to lie to Abimelech the king about the nature of their relationship, things progress today via an interesting turn of events. At this point, Sarah has been taken into Abimelech's household. As a result, one of the first things that would normally happen in a situation like this would be his taking of her as his wife, which would of course include sexual relations. For some reason, however, Abimelech hasn't slept with Sarah thus far, and in the course of our reading we find out what that reason is: God hasn't allowed it. Through His divine power and in accordance with His will, the Lord has kept her from him.

Is this to protect her and her honor? In a sense, very much so. Is this also to protect her and her husband Abraham and the relationship they share? Again, yes. But there's a larger issue in play here, a much larger issue indeed, and it is this: God has protected Sarah and kept Abimelech from her because of the child she carries in her womb. That child, Isaac, is the child of promise through whose line the Savior of the world will come. If Abimelech were to take Sarah and engage in intercourse with her, what would keep him from claiming any child born to her as his own, as coming from his seed? As the great scholar Donald Barnhouse wrote, "Suppose Abimelech had taken Sarah and God had not intervened? Two seeds would have been at the door to Sarah's womb, and to this day an element of doubt would cling to the

ancestry of our Lord.” So it is that God warns Abimelech away, and so it is that Abimelech will now quickly divest himself of any claims to Sarah...and so it is, finally, that the integrity of the Messianic line will remain unclouded. Far-reaching and eternally significant are the plans in place, and they must be protected. The project at hand is one whose timeline is set, and it must not be altered. God — again, in His kindness, His mercy, and His compassion — will see to these things. And His actions will indeed be more than enough.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what good news this is, that despite Abraham’s failure to trust God in this situation, God doesn’t abandon his servant to his own weaknesses. What good news this is, that despite this complete human crash and burn, God doesn’t abandon His divine plan of rescue for a world in need of redemption. If anything, this incident only underscores the urgency of that plan. Sarah’s womb will yet bring forth the son of promise, who will eventually bring forth God’s Messiah. The impact will be a forever one, stretching down through the millennia, stretching even to you and to me in these last days. God will have His way, in spite of it all. The nest will fall clear as the tree crashes down, and the message of life in Christ, who showed His care for us through the giving of His own life on our behalf, will be writ large on every scrap of paper scattered among the leaves and branches of our weary world. Since that’s the case, cast your anxiety upon Him today. Everything will be alright — and that’s an ending you can count on.

Have a great day, everyone — I’ll see you again next time to continue. God’s peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. Coming together as we do each day for our time in God's Word, I'm confident of the Lord's blessing as we place ourselves under the authority of the Scriptures, and today we're beginning to wrap up the 20th chapter of Genesis, so let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Father, bless the study of your holy Word today, to the end that we grow and are strengthened to live as your beloved children. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, upon hearing from the Lord in a dream that Sarah is actually Abraham's wife and that having brought her into his household he is in danger of divine judgment, Abimelech immediately takes action to right the situation. Our focus this session: "Why would you do such a thing?"

Genesis 20:8-10

8Early the next morning Abimelech summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. 9Then Abimelech called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done." 10And Abimelech asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?"

The dog lives in the lap of luxury. The dog is treated like a prince. The dog lacks for nothing and is loved and cared for by its master to the nth degree. The dog has also been taught what is and what is not to be done in its master's house...but sometimes the dog deliberately chooses to do its business in the corner behind the easy chair and mocks its master in the aftermath. When the dog is asked for an answer, there is no response; only an earnest look and a gently wagging tail. Why would he do such a thing?

The master is the one who has to pick up the mess. The master is the one who has to pay for the carpet to be cleaned. The master is the one who has to set things right again. Then, when it's all said and done, the dog just walks away — and does it all over again.

When we look at the situation, we have to laugh. We shake our heads. We roll our eyes. *Pets*, we say. *Can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em*. And it *is* funny, to a point. Yet for some people, a few instances like that bring them to the point of no return. After one too many hapless incidents on the part of a furry friend whom they've welcomed into their world and for whom they've sacrificed, they decide that they *can* live without them — and once that decision

is made, there will be nary a dog or cat or hamster or rabbit or any other such living creature in their domicile ever again.

Consider, if you would, our friend Abraham. Abraham, a man of extreme wealth who knows more about the lap of luxury than just about anyone you can imagine. Abraham, who's seen as royalty by most who meet him and is accustomed to be treated as such. Abraham, who lacks for nothing and whose life bears superabundant evidence of the love and care of his Master. Abraham has also been taught what is and what is not to be done in his Master's house...and yet today we find him off in the corner doing his business, not just where he ought not to be doing it, but also in a way he ought not to be doing it. And oh — this isn't the first time. What will his Master do?

When we look at the situation that way, the laughing stops. On the one hand, as we consider God's Word today and follow the sordid and self-protective nature of the events that are transpiring, we wonder to ourselves, along with Abimelech, "Why would Abraham do such a thing?" But on the other hand, we know exactly why he would do such a thing — because we've done the same kinds of things in our own lives, not once but many times over. We know what it is to have a Lord and Master in whom we have absolute security and the assurance of His loving care. We know what it is to have His promises and His protection. But we also know what it is — sometimes quite willfully — to bypass those blessings and go our own way for our own self-invested reasons and for what we think will be our greater benefit. Though it never works, that doesn't stop us from thinking that it will. It's something that we have to learn over and over again.

When Abimelech confronts Abraham over the transgression that he's committed, both by lying and by his willingness to compromise his own wife for his personal protection, there's a telling moment in verse 9 where the king says, "You have done things to me that should not be done." Why is it a telling moment? Because it's Abimelech, the pagan, who's in the right, and it's Abraham, the man of God, who's in the wrong. It shows us just how far afield Abraham's thoughts and actions have gone, not just as a servant of the Lord, but as a member of the human race in general.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, how will this be solved? We'll see it in our time together tomorrow, but suffice it to say that what happened way back in chapter 12...when this same thing occurred with Pharaoh in Egypt...will happen again now. The Master will come to pick up the mess. The Master will clean the carpet. The Master will set things right again. When it's all said and done, will we find that the point of no return has been passed? Will the dog be gotten rid of? No. He will be treated mercifully, and he will remain, as most dogs are, a beloved member of the Family.

There's a picture inside of that picture, everyone, and guess what? You and I are in it! Do come along next time as we talk it through! Have a terrific day, and the joy of our Lord Jesus be your abiding strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's joy and peace to you on this Tuesday in the name of our Advent King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to another edition of EDiBS. It's great to be with you today, where in this belated first session of our week together we'll be drawing to the close of Genesis 20, a chapter in which we've been following Abraham and Sarah in the presence of Abimelech the king. This was originally to be this past Friday's edition of EDiBS, but I wasn't able to edit and upload it properly during my brief time of travel, and I do apologize for the delay.

We have quite a bit to get to in the next few minutes, so if you'll open your Bible and find your place, we'll pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are strong — and in our great weakness we take comfort in the fact that we belong to you, having been redeemed by all that you've done for us in your life, your death, and your resurrection. Grant us the blessing of growth in our faith today as we open your Word. In your holy and precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, in a portion of God's Word where we might expect Abraham to offer an apology to king Abimelech in light of the deceitful manner in which he has acted, we instead get something very different. Our focus: Abimelech gets the runaround.

Genesis 20:11-18

Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' 12Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. 13And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."' 14Then Abimelech brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. 15And Abimelech said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like." 16To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated." 17Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again, 18for the Lord had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah.

When you're looking at properties that are 40, 50, even 60 years old in the sub-\$100,000 category, you've got to do your homework. That's what we were doing about two years ago during our search for a permanent, dedicated ministry space here at EDiBS. The structure

would need to be fundamentally sound and in an area where high speed internet was available, but aside from those stipulations everything else was negotiable. We knew that as long as we found the right place we could fix it up over time, so cosmetic issues didn't concern us too much.

In the end, it was harder to find our footing and get settled than we had anticipated — not because we couldn't perform, but because many properties we looked at ended up having major things wrong with them...and usually, the issues we found weren't listed in the property disclosures. One building we looked at was advertised as having been re-plumbed, but the inspection showed the job was only half complete and that there were multiple leaks. On another property we went through, the listing agent told us that some recently replaced fascia and soffit along the roofline was due to age, but the home inspector found evidence of a fire. When we confronted the agent with the inspection report, we got a very intricate song and dance routine from him about how he had just taken over the listing from another agent and was only passing along what had been passed onto him. The list goes on, but the bottom line is that by the time we finally closed on what would become the EDiBS ministry office, we knew a whole lot about excuses, half-truths, and the blame game — which brings us directly to today's text.

Picking up from where we left off last time, Abimelech has called Abraham into his presence to confront him about deceiving him with regard to Sarah. Abraham, we remember, has told Abimelech that Sarah is his sister rather than his wife, and as a result, the Lord has brought hardship to Abimelech and all his household for his taking of Sarah. *Why*, Abimelech says to Abraham, *would you do something like this?* In today's reading, we get the answer, but it's not one we would hope for from a man of Abraham's standing.

The first thing we see, coming to us in verse 11, is an excuse: *The reason I employed such a ruse, says Abraham, is that there is surely no fear of God in this place, and I thought I'd killed because of my wife.* Here, Abraham is seeking to justify his actions. A simple review of events, however, shows the real problem to be the opposite of what he has said: it's not that so much that there's no fear of God in the land, but that the fear of God isn't in Abraham. If Abraham had believed God's promise, honored His commandments, and trusted Him for protection, then he'd have never put trust in his own efforts to keep his family safe and together. God was in control, but Abraham wrested it from Him.

Next, in verse 12, we see the offering of a half-truth: *Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother.* While this is technically correct, when looked at in the context of Abraham's actions, this is simply another attempt to justify his lie. And as we all know, a half-truth, said with intent to deceive, is always a whole lie.

Finally, having already used both an excuse and a half-truth in his blustering speech before the king, Abraham finishes up by playing the blame game. While it's a little subtle as he introduces it, his intent is clear. Look at verse 13 and you'll see it: Abraham says, *When God called me to wander from my father's household...* The phrase seems innocuous enough, but in actuality it's an attempt to shift responsibility. Abraham is saying, "This isn't my fault, it's God's fault." He's claiming that because God sent him out on this journey in life to new places and to new people, he's had no choice but to use any means necessary to protect himself.

Listen as Donald Barnhouse discusses the Hebrew word for "wander" that's used here in the text. He writes, "There is a terrible meaning in this verb *wander* which Abraham uses. The Hebrew word occurs exactly fifty times in Scripture and never in a good sense. It is used of animals going astray, of a drunken man reeling or staggering, of sinful seduction, of a prophet's

lies causing the people to err, or of the path of a lying heart. Six other words are translated *wander*, any one of which Abraham might have used, but he used the worst word available.”

King Abimelech is in trouble not because he’s unable or unwilling to perform what’s necessary before the Lord to be honorable in the case of Sarah; he’s in trouble because many of Abraham’s actions as a sojourner in his territory have been majorly wrong...and there is much that he hasn’t disclosed. It’s understandable, then, to see that this pagan king dresses down this patriarch. It’s understandable to see the reprimand. And it’s understandable to see that while Abimelech follows the Lord’s command, gives gifts, makes amends, and gives Abraham and Sarah permission to go on living in his land, these actions are not taken out of respect, but merely out of recompense. There is no joy or friendship here; only distaste and distrust. There is no parting pronouncement of blessing; only an awareness on the part of both men — a cold awareness for Abimelech and an uneasy awareness for Abraham — that what’s going on is in reality backwards. Abraham should be giving gifts to Abimelech for his sin instead of the other way around.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, perhaps the best way to close this passage off is by sharing another quote from Donald Barnhouse, where he imagines, and then pens, what Abraham could have and should have said in this instance instead of what he did say. Barnhouse writes, “Abraham should have said:

‘Forgive me, Abimelech, for dishonoring both you and my God. My selfish cowardice overwhelmed me, and I denied my God by fearing that He who called me could not take care of me. He is not as your gods of wood and stone. He is the God of glory. He is the living God, the Creator, the most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. He told me He would be my shield and my exceeding great reward, and supplier of all my needs... In sinning against Him, I sinned against you. Again, forgive me, Abimelech.’”

We find it odd that this event ends as it does, and we question why things *do* seem so backwards here. But when we come back to this text as we transition into Genesis 21, we’ll be connecting some dots to other things that are going on, and when we do that things will begin to make more sense for us as we study.

For now — or actually, beginning tomorrow — the time has come for us to move into our traditional EDiBS focus on Christmas! Each day this week, from tomorrow up through Christmas Eve and Christmas Day on Thursday and Friday, we’ll be taking time for a brief daily devotion to set our hearts toward Bethlehem and all that happened there for our salvation. I hope you’ll join in for a few minutes each day — 3-4 minutes to be exact — because I know that as you do your heart will be filled with wonder and love and your thoughts will be centered on Christ and His amazing, life-giving, life-saving work for you. Everything about the cross begins at the cradle, and I’m praying that each of us meets Jesus there in a powerful way this year.

God’s peace to each of you, friends — thanks so much for your time today, and I’ll look forward to seeing you again next time. May the joy of the Christ Child sustain you and give you strength. Take care!

Greetings

Hello, everyone! God's blessings to you in Christ, a very happy New Year to each of you, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! I'm glad to be with you today, where in this first full week of 2021 we're returning to our series in the book of Genesis. Today we'll be spending our time transitioning between chapters 20 and 21 as we continue to follow the life and times of Abraham and Sarah. There will be quite a bit going on in the text this week, and I'm excited that we'll be going through it together. Take a moment to find your place, and let's begin today with prayer.

Prayer

Gracious and Eternal God, Merciful Father, thank you for this day to be in your holy presence as your holy and dearly loved people. We know this day that our holiness does not come from us, but from you. We know that our standing before you resides not in our own righteousness but in the imputed righteousness of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us. We come to you today as a people preparing to open your Word, and as such, we come to you asking for wisdom. For understanding. For the blessing of your Spirit. Guard our hearts and guide us as we study today. In Christ's precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the move from Genesis 20 to Genesis 21 is an interesting one because of how much contrast there is between the one chapter and the next. Our focus: the the guilt of man, the grace of God.

Genesis 20:9

9Then Abimelech called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done."

Genesis 21:1-2

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. 2Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

Have you ever gotten the opposite of what you deserved? When I was 8 years old, I took a candy bar from the local five-and-dime store. I don't remember what kind it was anymore, but I do remember that I got caught...not by the store, but by my mom. When I came home with my loot half-eaten, she immediately noticed, and being my mother, she also knew that I didn't have money to buy any candy on my own. One more thing Mom knew was that the older boy I'd

been hanging out with from the neighborhood probably wasn't the best influence on me, and she quickly put two and two together and figured out that he and I had been in the store together and that he had cajoled me into it.

Once she got to the bottom of my transgression, my mother unceremoniously deposited me in the back seat of the station wagon, drove me back to the store, and placed me in front of the store manager so that I could confess what I'd done. When the manager heard what I had to say, I fully expected the shaft. What I got instead was a shift: a shift in perspective, a shift in understanding, and a shift in expectation. He was kind instead of cold. He was forgiving in the face of my foreboding. And when all was said and done, I walked away from the experience having learned an important lesson and having gained a new lease on life. To be sure, he could have come down hard, but perhaps because he was a father himself, he chose the way of mercy instead.

Today we're in a rather interesting spot. Abraham is coming off of a doozy of a transgression — and it's a repeat offense. The events of Genesis 20, in fact, have given us a reminder that in spite of who he is as God's servant, Abraham is a fallen and frail servant nonetheless. Just because Abraham is Abraham doesn't mean that he's above a life of sinful self-interest, and just because Abraham is Abraham doesn't mean he never stumbles in his faith. On the contrary, over the time that we've been studying him, we've learned that one of the most engrossing and fascinating aspects of his life is that he *does* stumble — over and over again. And yet who is there with him? God, who over and over again picks him up and sets his feet back on solid ground.

The latest faux pas, as you'll remember, was actually ripped from Abraham's existing playbook, something he had already done once before back in Egypt with Pharaoh. Abraham and Sarah, settling in a foreign-controlled land as aliens, ran into a potential problem when the king of that Land, Abimelech, saw Sarah and wanted her for his own. Rather than rejecting Abimelech's advance and defending the honor of his wife, Abraham lied about his relationship with Sarah and told Abimelech she was his sister. Sarah, for her part, went along with the ruse and said that Abraham was her brother. You can go back and reread chapter 20 to recall the resulting chaos and stream of rebukes that came in the aftermath of that stunt, but the bottom line is that it brought the same results that it had the first time around. Was this a right course of action? Absolutely not. Abraham and Sarah's decision to lie was both an act of deceit against Abimelech and his kingdom as well as a failure to trust in God's promise of provision and protection for them as they sojourned. Though the Lord had proven Himself to them time and again by making and keeping much larger promises, they chose to trust in themselves rather than in His providential care.

Yet when all is said and done with this episode, what do we see happening as we move into a new chapter of the text? We see God dealing with Abraham and Sarah graciously, treating them with kindness, and yes, continuing to be faithful to His great promises — even His greatest promise of all — in spite of their acts of unfaithfulness as His servants. He is kind instead of cold. He is forgiving in the face of their foreboding. And when all is said and done, Abraham and Sarah walk away from their latest experience having relearned an important lesson and having gained yet another new lease on life. To be sure, the Lord could have come down hard, but because God is a loving Father, He chooses the way of mercy instead.

God intervenes in order to keep His covenant. God protects and blesses, despite the stumbling of His servants. God reaffirms His love for Abraham and Sarah and shows Himself yet again to be the One who forgives, restores, and gives good things to His children...not because they are good, but because He is good.

This fact leads to an observation today. It's not anything we don't already know, but perhaps it's something we need to be reminded of, especially as we look back on this past year and look forward to what's ahead:

Abraham's God is our God.

The God who keeps His covenant.

The God who protects and blesses.

The God who continually reaffirms His love.

And the God who forgives, restores, and gives good things to His children...not because they are good, but because He is good.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, how has Abraham's God — our God — chosen to be those things and bring those things and do those things in these last days? Through the sending of His Son, who would be for us all that we could never be and receive in Himself the penalty for all that we unfortunately are.

We who are fallen and frail servants, we who are not above a life of sinful self-interest, we who over and over stumble in our faith, are not alone. Who is there with us? Our great and mighty God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, who over and over again picks us up and sets our feet back on solid ground.

I'm praying that 2021 — however long our Lord tarries — will be a year marked by solid ground beneath your feet. God is faithful, and He will do it...over and over and over again!

Have a great day everyone — tomorrow we'll head in earnest into Genesis 21, so do make plans to come along and be part of it. Until then, God's rich peace to you in Christ, and may His joy be your strength!

Greetings

Hello, everyone! Greetings to you in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad you're here today as we gather for our daily time in God's Word, and here in January we've kicked off the new year by returning to our ongoing series in the Old Testament book of Genesis. Over the next several minutes we'll be having our first look at Genesis 21, so if you'll take a moment to find your place, we'll pray and begin.

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for your great love today. We thank you that in your holy desire to be in relationship with us — a fallen, wayward people — you made a way for us to have fellowship with you in your Son Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We stand before you grateful for your grace, and we bow before you humbled by your mercy. In this moment we are here to open the Scriptures. Guide our hearts. Grow us stronger. Teach us. Increase our faith. You are faithful, and we know that you desire these things for us. Thank you; come now and do your gracious work in us. We ask these things in the name of Christ, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, a day that Abraham and Sarah have wondered about, worried about, and even tried to bring about on their own has finally arrived. Our focus this session: a promise fulfilled.

Genesis 21:1-7

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. ²Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." ⁷And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Elisabeth Elliot, whose first husband, Jim Elliot, was one of the five missionaries killed in Ecuador by the Auca Indians in 1956, and whose second husband died of cancer, tells of visiting a shepherd in the mountains of North Wales. One by one, he would grab the rams by their horns and fling them into a tank of antiseptic. They would struggle to climb out, but the sheep dog would snarl in their faces to force them back in, or barring that, just as they were about to climb up the ramp, the shepherd would catch them by the horns with a wooden implement, spin them around, and force them under again, holding them completely under for a few seconds. The sheep didn't have a clue about what was happening.

Thinking back to that visit, Mrs. Elliot said, "I've had some experiences in my life that have made me feel very sympathetic to those poor rams — I couldn't figure out any reason for the treatment I was getting from the Shepherd I trusted...and He didn't give me a hint of explanation."

I don't know if you have any familiarity with Elisabeth Elliot, her life and ministry, or her faith in Christ, but while in her own estimation she was just an ordinary person quietly serving God as He enabled, the reality is that she was an extraordinary servant of the Lord whose impact on the Christian world is still being felt today. Not long after her husband's death, she spent two years as a missionary to the very tribe members who killed him. After her service, she returned to the United States and became widely known as an author, writing over twenty books. She held a professorship and served as writer-in-residence at Gordon College in Massachusetts. She remained in high demand as a speaker well into her seventies, teaching, encouraging, and inspiring thousands of people and always placing the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of everything she did. I could go on for a long time about her work, but the bottom line is that she was really something.

Yet Elisabeth Elliot struggled. Elisabeth Elliot had many hard days and many dark nights of the soul. Elisabeth Elliot, a tested, proven, unflinching servant of the Lord who was really something, found out something that all of us have learned by experience — and not coincidentally, it's something that we've been watching Abraham and Sarah learn too as we've been following their lives. What am I talking about? I'm talking about the fact that a life of faith and the act of trusting God isn't always, or even usually, easy. Sometimes fear, doubt and unbelief crash the doors of our hearts as we wait, and wait, and wait some more for the promises of God to be fulfilled...as we struggle to understand the whys and hows of God's work and God's will in our lives. We pray and we believe to the best of our ability, but sometimes there are long delays in the fulfillment of our Lord's divine promises and long bouts of silence when we simply can't tell what He's doing or if He's even working at all.

That's why the narrative we have before us today is so important. It's a beautiful passage and a joyful passage too, but I use the word *important* for a reason, and here's why: the birth of Isaac to Sarah, the bringing of this special son into the world at just the time God said it would happen, is a testimony to the fact that the Word and promises of God are reliable. In other words, when God speaks, what He says will come to pass. When the Lord decrees that something will be, it will be. God is always faithful to His Word, and He will always accomplish that which He proclaims. Yes, He often works in unexpected and unexplainable ways, and yes, His ways often come via a process or timeline that we don't understand. But when the process is complete and the time arrives, nothing will hold it back.

In today's passage we see that truth in the birth of a long-promised baby boy. We've known all along that this would happen because we have the big picture with everything laid out before us. But for Abraham and Sarah? It's been 25 years of waiting and wondering. 25 years of struggling to understand. 25 years of hoping, then despairing, then hoping again that God would do what He had said He would do. Now, it's here. What took so long? Why the heart-wrenching delays? Those aren't really the questions of the moment. In fact, the focus in this moment isn't a question at all; it's an answer.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, there's a lot here to take in. There's a lot to think about. It's necessary for us, on the one hand, to see this passage for what it is: another marvelous brushstroke in the grand painting of redemption as the line of the promised Messiah continues

its way forward — as God continues, even in these very early days of salvation history, to prepare for the time when Jesus will come into the world. Additionally, and as we've already said, this is a text that affirms the trustworthiness of God's promises to His people and which shows us, as Scripture does time and again, that God and His Word stand true.

But on the other hand, I know that this moment in Abraham and Sarah's life, happy as it is, is also prompting some questions in many hearts today. Some of you are in your own time of waiting and wondering and struggling to understand. Some of you are asking "when" kinds of questions. *When, Lord?* Others of you, discouraged and losing hope, have slidden from "when" to "if." I understand. I've been there too. Just like Abraham and Sarah have been there. And Elisabeth Elliot...and every person everywhere.

Please don't give in today to the feeling that you're alone in the darkness of uncertainty. God is with you. He has you in the palm of His hand. He is for you. God also hears the cry of your heart, and He knows what you need and when. Can I tell you something? When the process is complete and the time arrives, nothing will hold it back. Be assured and take comfort in that truth today. God's got this.

Take care, everyone — I'll see you again next time to continue. God bless you richly in our Lord Jesus and have a terrific day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. As we come to our study time today we'll be moving deeper into the twenty-first chapter of Genesis, where we'll be talking about Isaac, who has just been born to Sarah and Abraham. I'm glad you're here; let's quiet our hearts and begin today with a word of prayer.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence. You are gracious to be so near. Your care and compassion are great, and we take comfort in knowing that your love for us is mighty and unfailing. We ask in this moment that you bless us with your Spirit, and that you turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. It is life and salvation to us, and we are grateful for it. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the joy surrounding the birth of Isaac, now is the perfect time for us to spend the first of what will be many moments discussing this child of promise as a foreshadowing, a type, of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our focus this session: Isaac — a picture of the Messiah to come.

Genesis 21:1-3 (Part 2)

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. ²Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.

Signposting. It's a term I'd never heard anyone use...a term I'd never heard of, period...until I walked into Dr. Lisa Putnam's social ecology seminar back in the late 1980s. On the first day of the semester, she handed out the syllabus and proceeded to say, "Just tuck this away so that you can read it later. Right now, I want to do some signposting for you on how I'll be running class." She went on to give a roadmap of sorts: what we could anticipate as far as lectures, how she would be structuring exams, what her expectations were as far as assignments, and so on. It was an exercise in futuring, and at the end of the hour, I and my fellow students walked out of the room with a clear understanding of what was coming and when. Dr. Putnam's signposting... her "posting of signs," as it were...enabled us to look ahead and prepare, and those of us who took heed were the better for it — not just at the end of the course, but all the way through it.

Yesterday we introduced the opening verses of Genesis 21, the entire first seven verses of which deal with the birth of Isaac. We walked through the joy of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah fulfilled. We saw Sarah's precious reaction to her little boy's arrival in the world, still an almost unbelievable, incomprehensible event. With the coming of Isaac, many things will now begin to fall into place, things that we'll be building on each day as we work our way through the text. Today, in fact, is the laying of a cornerstone of sorts, because with the birth of this promised son comes some wonderful signposting; signposting of the Messianic variety. In Isaac we're going to see many foreshadowings of the coming Savior, and as such, we'll be enabled to look ahead and prepare. We'll be able to take heed. And yes, we'll be the better for it — not just at the end of our lives, but all the way through them.

As I said, over time we'll be seeing quite a few types or foreshadowings of Christ in the life of Isaac, but as we introduce things today, let's simply start with a brief list of similarities between the two. Later, we'll revisit the list and add to it as we go along. Here we go:

- Both were specially promised sons.
- Both conceptions were miraculous, albeit in different ways.
- Both were born after a period of delay.
- Both had mothers who were given divine assurance that a child would be born to them.
- Both were given names rich with meaning before they were born.
- Both births occurred at God's appointed time.
- Both births were accompanied by great joy.

Wrapping Up

With these first seven points of commonality, we'll stop things there for now and wrap up for the the day. But as we do so, be sure to tuck one important piece of information away for future recall: as Isaac grows, and as we begin to follow his life, the general points of commonality that we've mentioned today will quickly be superseded by some astoundingly specific typology that will leave us awestruck and move us to bow down in worship as we consider it. I hope you'll make plans to join in as we work this through, because the material ahead of us holds much for our hearts as the people of God in Christ.

Thanks for your time today, everyone — joy to you in our risen Savior, and I'll see you again next time. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody — welcome to Monday’s edition of EDiBS, and God’s abiding peace and joy to you in Christ. Thanks for clicking in with me today as we begin our new week by continuing to work through the Old Testament book of Genesis together. We remain today, and will for a few sessions yet, in chapter 21, so if you’ll turn there in your Bible, we’ll pray and get things going.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, it turns out — unsurprisingly so — that joy over the birth of Isaac doesn’t end up being a universal emotion in the household of Abraham. Our focus: a bitter parting of ways.

Genesis 21:8-13

8The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. 9But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, 10and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." 11The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. 12But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. 13I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

There are times in life when you know things are headed for a crash. You’ve got two different things, opposite things, riding side by side on parallel lines. You’re doing your best to keep them separate, doing your best to keep the integrity of those lines, doing your utmost to keep them from crossing. You’re doing that because you know that if and when they do cross, you’re going to end up with a tangled mess. And for the record, you also know in your heart of hearts that the whole “if and when” scenario is a pipe dream. Why? Because in a situation like what you’ve got going on, it’s never “if;” it’s always “when.” It’s an uncomfortable, unenviable place to be, and the hardest thing about it is that no matter what you do and how hard you try, the the piper will eventually come, and he will have to be paid.

I’ve just described what could be any number of different kinds of events. I’ve said it generically enough so that you can slot in almost any scenario from your own life and

immediately understand what I'm talking about. I've done that for a reason: if you can look at your own life and understand those no-win situations from a personal point of view, then you can also understand a long-simmering issue that we've been following here in the book of Genesis since way back in chapter 16.

What a wonderful day it is in Abraham's house. In a time where the infant mortality rate is so high, the fact that a little child would live until the time of weaning — about three years of age in Abraham's day — is cause for great celebration. This is what we're happening upon in the text today, and we can imagine the feast and the smiles and the general sense of joy permeating the household of this great and powerful man. It means so much to him, and it also means so much to his future and all of the promises that God has made to him regarding that future. And yet for years now, even prior to the time of Isaac's birth, there's been another narrative playing out in parallel: Abraham's other son, born to him by Sarah's slave girl, Hagar. Ishmael is that son, and now around 16 years of age, he has been what we might call a tenuously held line in the family that Abraham has struggled to keep straight, struggled to keep from intersecting with other things...a struggle that started almost from the very moment of Sarah's own decision to give Hagar to Abraham for the purpose of bearing a child. Though it worked as far as the biology went, Ishmael was a child born of the flesh and not of God's promise. As such, the problems between Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar began even while Ishmael was still in the womb. In today's reading those tenuous parallel lines of opposites, the lines of Ishmael and Isaac, cross. The tangled mess is un-untangleable. The only way to set things right is to get rid of what's wrong. The piper has come, and he must be paid.

We'll get into the specifics and some of the deeper issues of this moment when we gather next time, but in introducing it to you today, I want to remind you of how this incident in the lives of Abraham and Sarah is used elsewhere in Scripture, because that's going to be key to our greater understanding of what's really going on here.

Many of you may remember that the apostle Paul actually uses this time in the lives of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar to teach a critically important spiritual truth concerning our salvation. In Galatians 4, Hagar represents the Old Covenant, based on the Law and human works. Sarah, on the other hand, represents the New Covenant, based on grace and the saving work of God. In Paul's analogy, we believers in Christ are like the child born of Sarah — we are free, products of the Spirit. But those who try to earn their salvation by their own works are like the child born of Hagar — they are slaves, products of the flesh. Paul says that in Christ, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman (Galatians 4:31), and he further counsels us as believers to “get rid of the slave woman” — that is, to cease attempting to earn our salvation through our own efforts. Just as we're finding to be the case with the intersected, tangled up mess in Abraham's family regarding Isaac and Ishmael, so it is in the family of God when we try and co-mingle the idea of works-righteousness with salvation by grace through faith in Christ: the inheritance of the children of promise can never be shared with those who live under the dictates of the flesh.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, this is an uncomfortable, unenviable place for Abraham to be, isn't it, and the direction he receives from God, while clear and decisive, doesn't make things any easier on him. Ishmael may be the result of an ill-conceived plan to “help God along” in His promise of a child to Abraham and Sarah, and it may have made things difficult in the household as a result...but Ishmael is still Abraham's son. The passage today plainly tells us that Abraham is distressed by this familial crash that he's experiencing. Even though he's known in his heart for a long time that it would come sooner or later, I think we can understand his heartache nonetheless.

So it is that obedience is coming on Abraham's part. He will do as Sarah has told him and as the Lord has confirmed. But when we come back next time, we're going to see some agony in that obedience...and in that, there's going to be something important for us to discuss. I hope you'll join in as we do.

Thanks again for being here today, everyone; it's always my joy to share the Scriptures with you, and it's always my prayer that our Lord Jesus is using this time each day to encourage you and affirm you in your faith. God's blessings to you in Christ, have a great day, and God-willing, I'll see you again real soon!

Greetings

Greetings everybody! Grace, mercy and peace to you from our great God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to have you here today – thanks for coming along so that we can spend some time in Bible study together. As we continue with our week, we're going back to Genesis 21 to delve a little deeper into the matter we saw unfold yesterday, so let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, bless, we pray, the study of your Word today, to the end that by your grace we may learn and grow in our understanding of your love and mercy...love and mercy you have poured out upon your people through your Son. In His precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, having seen the family strife related to Isaac and Ishmael finally reach the point of no return, Abraham is faced with a difficult but very clear decision as he seeks to put things right in his household — and more importantly, do what is right in the sight of Almighty God. Our focus this session: Hagar and Ishmael are sent away.

Genesis 21:14-22

14Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba. 15When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. 16Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob. 17God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. 18Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation." 19Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. 20God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. 21While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

My dogs were always pretty good dogs. I loved them so. I miss them now that they're gone, and I remember them often. I remember their faithfulness and their unconditional love. I remember their unique personalities. What I don't usually remember — because it wasn't a quality any of them possessed in great measure — was their obedience! Many of you with wry smiles on your face right now can relate, and I think that's one reason so many of us admire the dog who *does* show uncompromising obedience to its master. It's a rare thing indeed.

Today I'm remembering the account of a man whose dog had been killed in a forest fire. Because he worked outdoors, he often took his dog with him to his jobsite. One morning, he left his faithful canine friend in a clearing in the forest and gave him a command to stay and watch his lunch cooler while he went into the woods. The dog understood, and that's exactly what he did. When a fire started nearby and the blaze began to spread, it eventually reached the spot where the dog had been left...but he didn't move. Instead, he stayed right where he was, in perfect obedience to his master's word. With tearful eyes, the dog's owner said, "I always had to be careful what I told him to do, because I knew he would do it."

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Ishmael had mocked Isaac. It was a jeering laughter, a sneer. Jealousy and pride were aroused in him by the fact that Isaac was the heir of the household and he was not. Sarah saw it, and it was the straw that finally broke the camel's back. "Out with the slave woman and her son," she demanded of Abraham, "for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son." On the surface, it was Sarah's virulent anger that finally boiled over. On a much deeper level, however — even if she wasn't aware of it in the heat of the moment — the words that Sarah spoke were in lock-step agreement with the promise and command of the Lord. That's why God said to Abraham, "Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

So it was that Abraham was called on to renounce all connection with Hagar and her son...his son. His personal affection for his own flesh and blood was of no account; God had decided the matter, and He did so both in Sarah's favor and in accordance with His own perfect will. What, then, was Abraham to do? Set aside his personal feelings and considerations. Heed the voice of his wife. Trust God. Move on.

As we see from today's reading, Abraham did indeed obey the Lord. He did so trusting the Lord for the promise made to him regarding Ishmael back in chapter 17...the promise that even though Ishmael would not be the covenant son, he would nonetheless be a great nation in his own right. Though we can't know for sure, it's very possible that after this parting, Abraham would never see Ishmael again. The next time we see Ishmael is at Abraham's burial in Genesis 25 — and after a brief history of his offspring and his descendants (just seven verses in total), we never hear of Ishmael again.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Abraham's sending away of Hagar and Ishmael may seem cruel from our perspective, but in truth, the Bible doesn't allow us to hold that view. Abraham's love and concern for Ishmael is very clear; it's simply that God's wisdom and His overarching plan to bring the world a Savior through Isaac supersedes Abraham's fatherly affections for his first-born. Please understand: God is careful. He knows the magnitude of what He's asking of Abraham, and He also knows that Abraham will do it. But hard though it is — terribly hard — this will not bring a burning, but a blessing. So while Abraham rightly expresses compassion for his son, it's also right for us to see that when all is said and done, his obedience to his Master's Word comes before anything else. Abraham hasn't by any means been a perfect example for us in that regard as we've studied his life, but here he models faith, humility, and a hope for the future that surely resonates with us as God's people to this very day.

When we come back next time we'll explore this a bit more as we prepare to move on, because while it's all well and good to talk about Abraham as we close today, our Almighty and gracious God is the beginning, the middle, and the end of this extraordinary event. I hope you'll

make plans to join in as we discuss that very wonderful truth! Have a great day, everyone; joy to you in our Lord Jesus, and God willing, I'll see you again soon.

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's blessings of peace, joy and gladness of heart to each of you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to have you along today, and as we continue our study in the book of Genesis I pray you're continuing to find God's Word speaking to your heart in a powerful way. Our goal for these next few minutes is a faith-growing experience together, so to that end, let us pray:

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your great love for us, and we are mindful that it was through your perfect life, your sacrificial death, and your miraculous return to life that we were brought forgiveness, peace, and new life. Help us to live in the reality of your grace today, and may our study time today in your Word be a fruitful time for each one of us. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've come at last to the end of the road in our look at Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar; come to a stopping point with regard to all the bitterness and heartache surrounding Isaac and Ishmael. Our focus this session: summarizing a saga.

It's a not a very well-known story, but it's a significant one — significant, at least to me, and significant enough that I've shared portions of it with you in the past. Abraham Lincoln and his partner were broke. Their business, a little country store in Illinois, had gone bust. "It looks as if our time has just about winked out," Lincoln said. Then, in a rather wistful way, he said to his partner, "You know, I wouldn't mind so much if I could just do what I want to do. I want to study law. If we could sell everything we've got and pay all our bills and have just enough left over to buy one book — *Blackstone's Commentary on English Law* — my heart would be happy."

It was a few minutes later when a rickety wagon came up the road and stopped in front of the store. The driver angled it up close to the porch, looked at Lincoln and said, "I'm trying to move my family out west, and I'm out of money. I've got good barrel here that I could sell for fifty cents." Lincoln's eyes moved along the wagon and came to the man's wife, looking at him pleadingly, her face thin and emaciated. Lincoln stuck his hand into his pocket and took out his last fifty cents. "I reckon I could use a good barrel," he said, and he gave the man his money. All day long that barrel sat on the porch of the store. Lincoln's partner kept chiding him for doing such a foolish thing. But late in the evening Lincoln walked out and looked down into the

barrel. When he did, he saw something in the bottom of it: papers that he hadn't noticed before. His long arms reached in to draw them out, and as he fumbled around, he hit something solid. He pulled out a book and stood petrified: it was *Blackstone's Commentary on English Law*. Lincoln later wrote, "I stood there holding the book and looking up toward the heavens. There came a deep impression on me that God had something for me to do and He was showing me now that I had to get ready for it. Why this miracle otherwise?"

Lincoln did study law. In time, he became a lawyer, a profession which he would use as a springboard to move into politics. Eventually, he would serve for eight years in the Illinois legislature, and later on, for two years in the House of Representatives. Twelve years after that, Lincoln would finally become president. Scholars will tell you, rightly so, that Lincoln's journey to the highest office in the land was far more complex than what I've just outlined. But Lincoln himself pointed to his find in that second-hand barrel on the porch of his failed country store as a marked moment — a moment that pointed him toward his God-ordained destiny in life.

Now — why have I spent time today on an obscure story about the life of Abraham Lincoln? I've done so because just like we can observe many things in Abraham Lincoln's journey — unlikely, counter-intuitive things that served as individual notes in what would become the grand symphony of his life — many similar observations can be made regarding the Abraham of Scripture, and along with him, those in his household...people like Sarah and Hagar. Indeed, as we've studied this first of the patriarchs and followed his life through God's Word, we've seen many things — unlikely, counter-intuitive things — that have shown us a symphony of another kind: the divinely composed symphony of Salvation, and that in the very midst of its writing.

When I think about the amazing events that were part of God's plan carried out through His chosen servant, I can't help but shake my head. Abraham miraculously became a father at almost 100. His wife, Sarah, was barren and far beyond child-bearing age in any case. Still, God used these and other seemingly impossible situations in their lives to make Abraham the father of the Hebrew people, the one from whose line the Savior of the world would come. It was all just as the Lord had promised it would be...even though Abraham and Sarah tried to co-opt that promise in a creation of their own image — which brings us to our next point.

Both Abraham Lincoln's life and Abraham and his family members' lives also show how God works His will among His people, even when they're meandering, even when they're twisting and turning and directionless, and even when they're going down rabbit holes of human effort and ambition. Lincoln started out working on a ferry boat, moved on to farming, and failed as a dry goods proprietor before he finally pursued the study of law and moved into the political life that would pave the way to his presidency. Abraham and Sarah, given the promise of a son, took matters into their own hands in trying to bring God's promise to fruition and ended up with Ishmael before they were finally given the gift of Isaac. Did Sarah have any business in offering her servant to Abraham? No. Did Abraham have any business sleeping with Hagar? Also no. Sarah, furthermore, was wrong to mistreat Hagar as she did. It was all a big mess. Yet God worked even through these situations, didn't He. Hagar ended up blessed. Ishmael became a great leader and the progenitor of a nation in his own right. And Abraham and Sarah? Abraham and Sarah were still the recipients of the original, divinely given promise — something which showed both the greatness of God's mercy as well as the power of His will and His ability to accomplish it regardless of human faux pas and frailties.

Wrapping Up

In fact, as we wrap things up for the day, while the unlikely family story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac is one readers would expect to end badly, that's (mostly, anyway) not the case at all. From the beginning God made, and remade, and remade again His great and

gracious promise to Abraham and Sarah. All through the twists and turns and meanderings and crash-and-burns along the way, He steadfastly held to His promise and kept it on track. And finally, in the end, Isaac arrived and became the son of promise through whom the tribes of Israel and the Messiah Himself would arise. Even Hagar's son, Ishmael, was not forgotten by the Lord...something we'll be talking more about down the line a little bit. In the final analysis, here's what we want to remember: God is faithful to His people and to His purposes. Regardless of how a situation may look from a human perspective, our Lord is always at work both to accomplish His will and to fulfill His promises...something that holds true even when that which He's working through is the abject weakness of His people!

Do come back tomorrow for more on this subject; there will be a new section of Scripture to read and new things to talk about when we gather. Have a great day everyone, thanks for your time, and I'll look forward to seeing you then. Take care!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who was and is and is to come. It's great to be with you today; welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. As we begin our week together, you'll notice that we've had to make a temporary move for our video shoot, which is the result of some ongoing electrical issues in our studio setting. Our electrician is back at it today to replace some wiring and to install a new sub-panel — something we're excited about because it will enable all of the office, filming, and lighting equipment for EDiBS to be plugged in at the same time! Hopefully you'll only have to put up with my kitchen for a day or two, and then we'll be back to our regular digs. At any rate, I'm glad you're here, and as we come back to God's Word today we're nearing the end of our time in Genesis 21. If you'll take a minute to open your Bible and find your place, we'll pray and begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for another day to be called your children; another day to know the joy of forgiveness and the joy of belonging to your family; another day filled with new hope and the assurance of your presence and your guiding hand. Draw near to us as we study your Word today and teach us all that you desire for us to know. This we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the end of our current chapter looming, our view shifts once more from the inner workings of Abraham's family to that of his dealings with the wider community. Our focus this session: A treaty at Beersheba.

Genesis 21:22-31

22At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do. 23Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you." 24Abraham said, "I swear it." 25Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized. 26But Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today." 27So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty. 28Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, 29and Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?" 30He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a

witness that I dug this well." 31So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there.

No matter what's going on inside the world of your own family, there's always a larger world outside that requires your participation and navigation. While at times you can put one on pause to deal with the other, generally speaking you have to learn how to coexist in each at the same time. When my family went through the death of one of my brothers the summer before I started high school, I definitely saw the private pain of my parents, but at the same time, I saw something else: I saw Mom and Dad getting up in the morning, going to work, and dealing with the ins and outs of things like meetings and projects and deadlines. I saw them quiet and hurting and clearly mourning the loss of a son, but I also saw them staying engaged with the community. There were groceries to buy and cars to gas up. There was church to attend and a dozen other things besides. In a lot of ways, life changed after Jim died, but life didn't stop. It had to go on, and my folks powered through to ensure that it did.

As we come to the Scriptures today in the aftermath of what has been a very difficult event in Abraham's life — the sending away of his son, Ishmael, and his mother, Hagar, at the insistence of Sarah — Abraham is surely in mourning. There is private pain, a quiet hurt. And yet for Abraham, a man of great wealth and influence, a man who has responsibility for a household and entourage that probably numbers in the hundreds, and a man whose movements in and about various lands prompts the attention of the rulers of those lands, there is much outside the world of his family that requires his time and attention. Abraham has to stay engaged in his community, and that's what we see happening in today's reading as Abimelech comes to him for the purpose of proposing a treaty. What kind of treaty? One of mutual respect and non-aggression. Will Abraham put Abimelech on pause to tend to his own grief? No. Instead, he will power through and tend to that which needs tending.

What's the background here? Abraham, of course, is still living in the land that Abimelech controls, and as Abimelech has watched Abraham's life and the divine blessings so clearly in evidence on all that he does, he's moved to propose a covenant between himself and Abraham in order to secure a long-term relationship...one, by the way, that will be binding not just through his own reign, but extend even to his descendants. Because God has blessed Abraham, and because he's a man of great wealth, power, and influence, Abimelech knows that having and keeping Abraham on his family's good side is of great importance.

As we can see by the text, Abraham agrees to the proposal. But what's fascinating and in a way, beautiful, is that immediately after swearing his oath, Abraham brings up a dispute that has arisen between his men and Abimelech's men over a certain well. Why is a dispute beautiful? Because the manner in which he and Abimelech resolve things is actually representative of the mutual respect and non-aggression to which they've just agreed. A well is an important asset in a desert land with no significant water source other than sparse seasonal rains, and so this issue is one that might quickly lead to conflict. Yet in speaking frankly with one another, providing appropriate compensation, and coming to agreement on how things are to be moving forward, they end up testing and proving their ability to keep covenant with one another from the get-go. Words are one thing, but actions are another thing entirely.

The place where all of this happens becomes a significant place because of the significant agreement that has just been made, and so it is that it gets a significant name as well: Beersheba. Beersheba is a word that means "the well of the seven" or "the well of the treaty" in reference to the ewe lambs that Abraham gives Abimelech as part of the resolution they strike over the well. However, this is really just the beginning for Beersheba, not just literally but figuratively too, because this special place will become more and more special over time. When we come back next time, we'll talk about it.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I'm thinking about how, in a situation like this, Abraham's heart could be both broken and fortified at the same time. I'm thinking about the strength he exhibited in doing the things he had to do, even as he was going through a rough patch in his marriage and family life. Here was a man who couldn't just disengage from the world around him in the midst of personal tragedy; to do so would have put too many other things at risk. He had to press forward, and so he did. What made it possible? Abraham *did* have God's promise that Ishmael would live and become strong, and that he would grow to father a nation of his own one day. It was something comforting to which he could hold. Abraham *did* have the additional promise regarding Isaac, who would be the carrier of the great covenant, the son from whom a great people — and the greatest Person ever — would ultimately come. It was something he could remain focused on as he lived his life under God's hand. And finally, in a very related fashion, Abraham *did* have the assurance of God's abiding presence with him through it all as he participated in and navigated the ups and downs and ins and outs of his very human life. Abraham Believed God. He trusted God. He knew that with God, all things were possible...and he knew that with God, everything would be okay.

So it was. So it is. And So it will be!

Thanks so much for clicking in today, everyone — I'll look forward to being with you again tomorrow to have at this again. God bless you richly in Christ, and have a terrific day!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Blessings to you in Christ Jesus our Lord — our sure Hope and our true Source of peace — and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. It's always a great day when we have the opportunity to gather around God's Word for a time of learning and growing, and I'm thankful for your presence today. As we come to the Scriptures over the next few minutes, we'll be focusing on a particular place — one that we happened across during our time together yesterday. Let's pray and get into it.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask that you would lavish your grace on each person opening your Word right now. Forgive our sins, for they are many; restore our hearts, for they are broken; give us new hope, for without you we are nothing. Bless the study of your Word today, in your precious name we pray. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, Abraham and Abimelech have made a treaty, and the place where they've sworn their oath to one another has been given a name: Beersheba. Our focus this session? The storied history of a special place.

Genesis 21:31

31 So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there.

It was springtime, or maybe early summer, in the year 2000. I was 33 years old. I had gone from my first call in ministry, a place where by God's grace I did good work and was very fortunate to be loved and supported by my congregation, to my second call — a church where in the course of less than two years I had been chewed up and spit out by leadership that was angry and disappointed in what I brought...or rather, didn't bring...to the table as their pastor. I had clearly been in over my head. I was clearly too green for the role I had been asked to fill. The stories I could tell you about my experiences in that congregation and all the stupid things I did as I tried to shepherd the people there would keep you entertained for hours, and if it were ever produced for television it would be a top-10 reality show. But for our purposes today, let's just go back to the "chewed up and spit out" portion of the narrative, because after the spitting out part, I was suddenly a young husband and father of two with no job, a mortgage, a Honda,

and nary an opportunity on the horizon. It was a low point in my life...perhaps my first real wilderness experience as a child of God.

After several days of quiet, brooding panic and a sense of total paralysis about what to do next, one morning I got in the Honda and began to drive. I ended up deep in the Sonoran Desert, far away from cars and people and any other semblance of civilization. Totally alone, I did something that I had never done before: walking down a pitted, deteriorating two-lane road, I began to pray out loud. Talking, weeping, riddled with anguish and pinned down by fear, I poured out my heart to God in a way that I didn't, until that moment, even realize was possible. It wasn't planned or calculated, it just happened, and I think I must have spoken to the Lord until I was literally out of words. While I don't remember how long it went on, I do remember that when I finally got into the car to drive home, I was exhausted — but I was also at peace. I knew God had heard my prayers that day, not because I felt like He did, but because Scripture assured me that He did. I also knew that my times were in His hands, and that somehow, because of Him, things were going to be alright.

That day in the Sonoran Desert didn't yield a mailbox stuffed to the brim with offers from churches seeking a pastor when I got home; it didn't result in a sudden reversal of fortune at all. What that day in the desert did bring was an authentic encounter with God and the kindling of a passion to seek Him in ways that prior to that, I had not. It brought a renewed reliance upon my Savior and settled my heart; a state of being I hadn't known in a long time. All of those things would ultimately change me over time.

Though I was surely praying that day in the desert, I realized very quickly that it wasn't about me reaching up; it was about God graciously reaching down and caring for His battered and weary servant. To this day, every time I go through that desolate, arid corner of southern California, I remember that day...and remembering, I give thanks.

I share that story today to point you to another arid corner of a desert wasteland in another part of the world. It too is a place where people, over the course of millennia, have encountered God and have returned over and over again to remember His great works. It's also a place where moments of notable significance in Salvation history have taken place. I'm talking, of course, about Beersheba.

When we spoke of Beersheba in our last study session, we learned from the Bible that it was a place named so because of the oath that Abraham and Abimelech swore to one another regarding an agreement they'd hammered out. All well and good, and the descriptive term fits. But as I said a moment ago, Beersheba would go on to become, and remain, a notable place in Israel's history. In fact, in one sense we can say that it continues to be notable even today as an important city in modern Israel, known now as Beer-Sheva.

So — just how does Beersheba figure into a larger narrative?

Just like his father had done, Isaac would end up spending time in Beersheba too. While there, he would actually re-dig Abraham's well and re-up on a treaty with Abimelech. Also like his father, Isaac would build an altar in Beersheba and call on the name of the Lord (something we'll be seeing Abraham do in tomorrow's study session). The Lord Himself would appear to Isaac — again, just as He had done to Abraham — and extend to him the same promise He had given his father: that of a multitude of descendants. And it continues: Abraham's grandson, Jacob, would stop in Beersheba when he left the Promised Land, and the Lord would appear to him as he had to his father and grandfather. Why? To give him a great promise and to strengthen him for all that was set before him.

Not only were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob met by the Lord at Beersheba, but so was the prophet Elijah while he was fleeing Jezebel, and as we've already seen, so was Hagar as she wandered in the region of what would become Beersheba after being sent away by Abraham. Beersheba, therefore, was very much a place where God graciously reached down to care for and encourage His servants, often when they were battered by and weary of life.

Finally, a couple of additional notes to tuck away: Beersheba would become the territory of the tribes of Simeon and Judah when Israel took possession of the Promised Land. Israel's less-than-wise cry to the Lord for a king would emanate from Beersheba, chiefly because Samuel's wicked sons were judges in Beersheba and were terrible in the administration of their duties. King Saul fortified Beersheba in his battles against the Amalekites. We could say more, but the upshot of it all is this: Beersheba, over time, became an important place in the lives of God's people. It was marked by moments of great spiritual significance. It played host to significant developments. It became a place of remembrance, and a place to give thanks.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, why spend so much time on a geographical locale in Scripture? Once again, it's not so much the place per se as what the place brings to mind. It's not so much the place as much as the significance of the events that *took* place there. I don't often draw analogies or symbolize Scripture, because it's very easy to find one's self far afield of the text, so much so that the intended meaning of the passage ends up completely obscured. On this occasion, though, I'll make an exception:

For many people of faith, Beersheba, in addition to its concrete description in Scripture, has for a long time been embraced as a symbol of those times in our lives that have caused us to call upon the name of the Lord. Tragedy strikes, heartache happens, sin is committed, or help is needed, and suddenly the Lord comes and shows Himself strong on our behalf. The date or place where we experience a turning point like that becomes a memorial in our hearts, a place where we remember God's mercy and grace as He reached down to embrace us in our time of great need. When God reveals His will to us or rescues us in some way, and when we mark that moment, it's like a mini Beersheba in our hearts. It's place where, when we need to remember God's promises or God's power or God's provision, we can return over and over again to remember...and remembering, give thanks. Do you have any personal Beershebas in your life? I'd love to hear about them!

Thanks for coming along today everyone — God's peace and joy to each of you in our Lord Jesus, and I'll see you again next time.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessed be the name of the Lord our God, the Father Son and Holy Spirit, and joy to each of you in Him today! Welcome to another daily edition of EDiBS, where on this Wednesday we'll be spending our time together closing out our look at Genesis 21. I'm glad you're here; let's open our Bibles, pray, and begin.

Prayer

Lord, we pray that as we work through another week together, you would continually put your hand of blessing upon each one of us, and that you would graciously guide and protect us as your dearly loved children in all that we do. Bless the hearing, teaching, and study of your Word today. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're about to move into the next major event in Abraham's life in Genesis 22. Before we do that, however, we have one more thing to look at in chapter 21 as Abraham marks, in a tangible way, the significance of the place called Beersheba. Our focus this session: looking to the future.

Genesis 21:32-34

32After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines. 33Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the Lord, the Eternal God. 34And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Florence Dodson was one of the kindest women you could ever meet. When I knew her she was a widow in her seventies, and she was a bonafide force of nature. She and her husband Warren had worked their entire lives on ranches. They ran spreads for wealthy land owners, properties that were hundreds and even thousands of acres in size, and wherever they worked at any given time, they knew every blade of grass, every tagged cow and its calf, and every ranch worker down to his bunkhouse number and boot size. Florence usually cooked for the workers, and whether it was pork roast with mashed potatoes and gravy for 50 or a full cowboy breakfast for 100, she did it better than just about anybody for the better part of four decades.

The reason I know so much about Florence's life on the ranch, even though I didn't meet her until well after she had retired from that life, is because I spent a lot of time with Florence in her garden. It was beautiful just like the gardens of many people who hailed from her era, but what made it unique is that it also served as a living memorial to just about every special person she had ever known and every special place she and her husband had ever worked. Every time we went outside there were stories to hear. There were citrus trees from the last property she and Warren had run. There were dozens of rose bushes, each and every one planted in memory of fellow ranch workers who had passed on. Her herb garden was planted in honor of her mom, and near the back fence, almost overrun with star jasmine and clematis, was an old single-bottom hand plow that her dad had used on the farm where she grew up. Florence's garden wasn't just a living thing; it was full of a whole different kind of life because of all that its various plantings represented. It was truly something she treasured, and it was something else too: It was something that she made sure to share so that others could know and appreciate the people and places that made her the person she was.

I'm thinking of Florence today as we come to God's Word because of a singular action taken by Abraham at the conclusion of his dealings with Abimelech at Beersheba. After Abimelech and the commander of his forces departed to head home, the Bible tells us that Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in that place, and there he called upon the name of the Lord, the eternal God.

Tamarisks are considered an invasive species here in the United States. In the deserts spanning southern California, for example, they've compromised native habitat, and many states have actually labeled them as noxious weeds, meaning that if you find one on your property, you're legally bound remove it. In the middle east, however, the tamarisk is a native plant. It's not especially beautiful, but it's appreciated for its shade and its cooling properties. Yet here's the thing: Tamarisks have an exceedingly slow growth rate. Those who plant them know that they're not doing it for themselves, but for those who come after them.

That's an important point to make note of as we see Abraham do what he does in today's text, and why? Because it shows us that in planting that tamarisk tree, Abraham is looking ahead to the coming decades and to future generations. Abraham knows that a tamarisk tree takes a long time to grow, but because he also knows that God has promised the land on which he's standing to him and to his descendants forever, a tamarisk is the perfect choice as a marker... the perfect choice for a living memorial...the perfect tree that will be there to tell of an event from times gone by and to share the greatness of God's promises through the ages.

It's also important for us to see that after planting that tamarisk, or really in conjunction with it, Abraham stops what he's doing to worship the Lord. He calls upon the name of the eternal God. He takes time to be intentional before his Creator and bows down in His presence to acknowledge that the Lord is God and that he, Abraham, is the Lord's servant. What's additionally notable, at least to me, is that this takes place not just in the aftermath of his agreement with Abimelech; not just in the aftermath of a deal gone good; it also takes place in the aftermath of all the ick that's just gone down in his family with Hagar, Ishmael, and Sarah. It's striking to me, and I think very critical for us all to grasp, that even through the busyness of his responsibilities as a wealthy and influential statesman and even through times of conflict and heartache in his family, Abraham knows, understands, and prioritizes his walk with God. Come hell or high water, that relationship permeates every aspect of who he is, and we are inordinately blessed to be able to see it so plainly.

Wrapping Up

So it is that as we wrap things up for the day, we're left once again with a clear understanding that Abraham is a man who keeps it real. In fact, one thing time we've seen time and again in our following of his life is that while he has just as many fits and starts and foibles and failures as the next sinner, when conflict comes it tends not to drive him away from God, but draw him closer. Abraham, even with all of his power and influence, is a person who recognizes his need. He has left everything to follow the Lord, and when the tough times inevitably come along the way, the Lord continues to be his hope and stay. In a way, the tamarisk in today's text is what tells us that story. How special that it serves as a living memorial still!

Thanks for your time today, everyone — God-willing I'll see you again tomorrow, where our focus will be shifting to Isaac. Until then, Christ's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's blessings of peace, joy and gladness of heart to each of you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to have you along today, where as we continue our study in the book of Genesis I continue to pray that you're finding God's Word speaking to your heart each day. Over these next few minutes we'll be doing our first dive into Genesis 22, so if you'll take a moment to open your Bible, we'll pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your great love for us, and we are mindful that it was through your perfect life, your sacrificial death, and your miraculous return to life that we were brought forgiveness, peace, and new life. Help us to live in the reality of your grace today, and may our study time today in your Word be a fruitful time for each one of us. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the opening of Genesis 22 we've now come to what is easily the best-known incident concerning Abraham's life. Our focus: the call to sacrifice Isaac.

Genesis 22:1-3

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.
2Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."
3Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

Not long ago I lost a friend to cancer — but the manner in which things transpired wasn't what anyone expected. The tumor had been caught very early, treatment had been aggressive, and long-term prognosis was good. Officially in remission, my friend rejoiced in bouncing back and

welcomed the chance to return to a semblance of normalcy in his daily life. Then it happened: At a regularly scheduled six-month scan, something showed up...but not where the original cancer had been. Instead, it ended up being a new malignancy in a new place with a totally different name and a totally different treatment regimen. Hope rallied briefly, but in the end — an end that came less than a month after the new diagnosis — my friend went home to Jesus. It was hard. Just when I thought he was out of the woods, he was dragged back into the darkness of the forest. Just when I thought that everything was going to be okay, it wasn't. The only thing I could do was bow before the Lord and worship as I mourned. God, I knew, was good, and I understood that in His wisdom and in His mercy, God allowed things to be as they were for a reason.

In essence, these are Abraham's circumstances today as we come to the opening verses of Genesis 22. Here is a man who had waited twenty-five years for God to deliver on the promise of a son. Here is a man who had been through countless ins and outs and ups and downs along the way as he waited for that promise to come to fruition. Here is a man who has finally realized the joy of that promise fulfilled. But now it happens: something new shows up, and it doesn't seem to be part of the original plan at all. God, it seems, wants that child back.

Can you imagine how hard this must be? Just when Abraham thinks he's finally out of the woods with respect to his longing for a son, he feels like he's being dragged back into the darkness of the forest. Just when he thinks that things are finally going to be okay, they aren't. It had been said to him that he would receive, via the gracious hand of the Almighty, a child of promise. Now, though, it seems like that child of promise is about to become a promise broken. What can Abraham do? Where can he go? How is he supposed to respond to such a call from the Lord? Sacrifice his son, whom he loves? Unthinkable! And yet there it is, plain as day: Abraham is to give up — offer up — that which he has given by the Lord.

Wrapping Up

So far the opening of this new chapter in Scripture. It's a shocking read. It's not at all what we would expect as people who have walked with Abraham through the trials and tribulations he's endured in his longing for this son. Obviously, we have much to talk about as we head into this portion of God's Word, and there will be much that, frankly, will leave us in awe as we see God's hand at work through the course of this incident. But for now, as we wrap things up for the day, perhaps the best thing we can do for the moment is simply meditate on these first three verses of the chapter. Let's read them through. Then, let's read them again...and again after that. Let's put ourselves in Abraham's shoes. Let's try and imagine what he must be feeling as he hears this Word from the Lord. This isn't part of a fairytale in a book of stories; this is a real event in the life of a real man. It actually happened. The reality here is that there's a wrenching humanity in this narrative, one that we dare not discount. Why? Because if we miss the human drama surrounding this divine call, we'll miss a big part of the power in the outcome. When we come back next time, we'll start parsing all of this out, and I hope you'll come along and be part of it. In the meantime, do take some time to let this text steep and seep into the depths of your being. You'll be the better for it in the end!

Have a great day everyone, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm glad to have you along with me today and grateful to be opening God's Word with you.

As you can tell from both yesterday's and today's sessions, I'm currently on the road and shooting video on the go because of a brief trip to Atlanta to see my son. If I may, I'd like to ask that you pray for him today. Jacob is a great young man who's recently started out on his own following college graduation this past summer, and he's hitting some bumps in the road that have left him discouraged and a little directionless at the moment. I know he'll be okay and I fully trust the Lord's plans for him, so if you have a moment to lift him up, I'd be grateful. Thanks!

In our study through the book of Genesis, we've just begun to follow Abraham and his son Isaac down what seems like a very dark path. Let's pray and begin, where right now we're returning to the opening of Genesis 22.

Prayer

Lord God, you alone are holy; you alone are true. We magnify your name today and seek to give you glory and honor, because you and you alone are worthy of it. Speak to us through your Word. Teach us. Rebuke us. Correct us. Train us in the ways of righteousness, that we may be men and women thoroughly equipped to do all that you have called us to do; all that you've prepared in advance for us to do. This we ask in the name of Jesus our Savior, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're heading back to the first three verses of Genesis 22 to re-read the beginning of a new saga in Abraham's life and a new picture of things to come. Our focus: Sacrifice.

Genesis 22:1-3 (Part 2)

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

2Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

3Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

I have the distinct pleasure of having a very smart eight year-old boy in my life. He likes a lot of typical eight year-old things, like running and jumping and bothering his big sister. He likes playing with army men and reading about history. But one of the things he loves most of all is asking questions. They're usually "why" questions, and they usually come with at least a hint of challenge to them. Why challenge? Because when he asks "why," he usually already has his own answer in mind — and it's probably going to be different than the one you provide. Sometimes, though, the "why" questions are genuine. They're questions which truly seek an answer. And when those questions come, they often require a time of careful thinking before an answer can be given.

As we come to God's Word today and consider for a second time God's call for Abraham to sacrifice his only son, it's still as astonishing to read now as it was yesterday. Isaac is the son of promise. God has assured Abraham over and over again that Isaac will be the one through whom a nation of chosen people will rise, descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens. Isaac represents hope for the future and promises fulfilled. But now God has given this new command. And the simple question, genuine and earnest, is this: Why?

Why does God command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?

This is an inquiry that demands some careful thinking before an answer can be given. It's one, in fact, that we'll be thinking about a lot in the days ahead. But here's my promise to you: as we think together, we'll also be answering together, and the answers that will be forthcoming will be incredibly faith-forming. Here, just briefly, are three initial responses to that great, grand Why to take you into the weekend. When we come back on Monday, we'll get into them further.

The first answer that can be given as to the reason for God's command to sacrifice Isaac is one that Scripture itself gives: it is to test Abraham's faith. Faith is more than just an inner spiritual attitude; faith acts; faith works. This is a call to faithful action.

The second answer that can be given as to the reason for God's command to sacrifice Isaac is that it provides an example of what obedience looks like. Note in today's passage that after God gives Abraham the command, there is no delay, no protest, and no request for amendments. There is just simple obedience. While we're here asking "why" questions, it's significant to see that one person not asking them is Abraham.

But the third answer that can be given here — and the most important one theologically speaking — is also the most profound: God's command to sacrifice Isaac is given to foreshadow God's sacrifice of His own Son. This incident in Abraham's life will prefigure the New Testament teaching of the atonement: the sacrificial offering of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of the world. When we come together next week, we'll talk about some of the detailed connecting points between those two events, and I think we'll be astonished by how many of them there are. I look forward to getting into them with you!

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, there are indeed many whys to wade through as we wind our way through this portion of Scripture, and to be sure, we've only scratched the surface today. As we work our way deeper into the narrative, however, we'll soon have the joyful and faith-affirming experience of seeing all those whys become wherefores instead. Do make plans to join in as we do that! Have a super weekend, everyone; God's rich peace to you in Christ, and God-willing, I'll see you soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings of joy and peace to you in the name Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. I pray that the promise of God's abiding presence is giving you strength as you're going through your day, and as we kick off a new week of Bible study today I also pray that our time in the Scriptures together will be a blessing to you as you grow in the grace and knowledge of your Savior. Thanks for being here; let's pray as we go to God's Word.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the day you've given us, and thank you especially for the time you've given us today to focus on our relationship with you through the truth of the Scriptures. Help us to set this study time apart as a special time of fellowship — a time that moves us to worship. We ask this in Christ's name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, God has called to Abraham and instructed him to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, the son whom he loves, as a burnt offering in the region of Moriah. It's now the third day of the journey, and Abraham, looking up and gazing into the distance, realizes that they've arrived at their destination. Our focus this session: A time to make ready.

Genesis 22:4-8

4On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." 6Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

There's a famous poem by Jo Ann Heidbreder about fathers. It goes like this:

A dad is a mender of toys,
A leader of boys.
He's a changer of fuses,
A healer of bruises
He's a mover of couches,
A soother of ouches.
He's a pounder of nails,
A teller of tales.
He's a dryer of dishes,
A fulfiller of wishes
Bless him, O Lord.

I'm sure there are dads out there like that. I myself would love to have been one. Oh, to be a mender and a leader, a healer and a soother. Oh, to be a fulfiller of wishes. Oh, to be that father who could fix things. Oh, to know the blessing of the Lord.

On my better days, I'm able to see that there have been times when I've been that father to my children. On other days, I remember the less effusive aspects of the dad that I've been. The dad who, though I never wanted to be, was sometimes a breaker and a taker. A yeller and a seether. A bringer of burdens. The father who could fix nothing. The dad who quenched the blessing of the Lord.

If you're a father yourself, then you're probably tracking with me right now, but it's also probable that you're waiting for me to say that one "other" thing about fatherhood that we've all experienced, so here goes: In addition to the times of bringing joy and blessing, and in addition to the times where we're worthy of the World's Worst Parent Award, there is a third part to being a dad. It's the part where in certain instances, though we know we're doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason, it hurts our children in the moment...and in hurting them, we hurt too.

On the three-day journey to the region of Moriah, this has been Abraham's plight. This is what has been pressing — probably very painfully — on his heart. Isaac isn't aware yet of all that's about to proceed, but Abraham is all too aware. The recent words from the Lord are still careening back and forth off the walls of his brain, words that we saw back in verse 2: "Take your son, your only son, whom you love — Isaac — and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." (By the way, God calls Isaac Abraham's "only son" because of the fact that Ishmael has been sent away from the family as the child of the slave woman, Hagar. Ishmael is Abraham's flesh and blood, but he is not the child of promise, not the child of the covenant, not the child of inheritance. Thus, for all intents and purposes, Isaac is indeed Abraham's only son.) At any rate, upon hearing the Lord's command, Abraham has obeyed. It's the right thing at the right time for the right reason. But it's something that will hurt Isaac — and thus, as any loving father would, Abraham is hurting too.

However — and this is a big "however" — while Abraham knows a lot right now that Isaac doesn't, there are also some things at the present juncture that Abraham doesn't know...can't possibly know. And much of it is connected to an incredible picture that's being painted through his actions. Many of you are already anticipating what I'm about to say, but your knowledge of it doesn't make the fact any less astounding: All that Abraham is being asked to do by the Lord in this moment is actually a foreshadowing of what the Lord Himself would

ultimately do for us through Christ. We won't look at them all today, but consider just a few of the parallels between the impending sacrifice of Isaac and the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus:

- “Take your son, your only son, whom you love” (verse 2); “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son” (John 3:16).
- “Go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there” (verse 2); this is same region where the city of Jerusalem would be built many years later. Jesus would be crucified in the same area that Isaac would be laid on the altar.
- “Sacrifice him there as an offering” (verse 2); “We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10)
- “Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac” (verse 6); Jesus, “carrying his own cross,” walked to Calvary (John 19:17).
- “But where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (Verse 7); John the Baptist said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).
- “God Himself will provide the lamb” (verse 8); Jesus is not only called the Lamb of God in John 1, but He is also the spotless Lamb in 1 Peter 1:18–19 and the slain Lamb in Revelation 5:6.

Wrapping Up

There's much more involved here, of course, and we'll be digging into it all over the next several sessions as we follow this portion of the text through to its conclusion. But as we wrap things up for the day, what a powerful and emotional scene we see unfolding before us, don't you agree? What an impactful series of actions we see beginning to transpire. And what a providential purpose there is in all of it — a purpose extending through the pages of Scripture from Old Testament to New and reaching right to the center of our hearts: the hearts of a people who need an offering made in our stead so that we can live instead of die; an offering of One who will die so that we might live.

As I said, more to come next time; do make plans to join in as we move forward! Have a great day, friends, and I'll see you again soon.

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's peace to you in our Savior Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to have you along today as we continue our study in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, where for the past few sessions we've been talking about Abraham, Isaac, and God's command that he be sacrificed at Moriah. Today our session brings us directly to the point of that impending sacrifice, so let's take a moment to pray as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, we ask that in our time together today, you would draw close to us and give us wisdom. By the power of your Spirit, help us to learn and grow as we study. As always, and more than anything, please continue to strengthen us in our relationship with your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the drama surrounding God's call that Isaac be sacrificed comes to its pivotal moment. Our focus: God provides.

Genesis 22:9-14

9When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." 13Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a

burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

I was dreading the exam. It's not that I wasn't prepared; I'd done my best to be ready for it. It's just that the material, for me at least, was incredibly difficult. For weeks I agonized over what I knew was coming, and when the day finally arrived, I did my best. In the end, I made the grade, but just barely...and to this day I believe it wasn't so much my achievement as it was my professor's merciful disposition. The exam? My final for college algebra. It was a course I took three times before I finally passed it. It was the only academic discipline I ever struggled with, and I still struggle with it today. Dr. Mangels, if you're watching or reading this right now I can only say that had you been the one teaching the course, I surely would have done better!

Have you ever been tested? Tested to the edge of your limits? Filled with dread over what you were facing? Have you ever been in a situation that, for you at least, was incredibly difficult...so much so that you agonized about it day in and day out until the moment came to do what had to be done? If so, then you can identify, at least a tiny bit, with what Abraham is going through right now as we come to God's Word today. A moment he has been dreading, a task about which he has agonized, has now arrived. The time has come to sacrifice Isaac to the Lord. Isaac, his only son. Isaac, the son whom he loves. Isaac, the son for whom he had waited a very long time.

Abraham makes preparations to do this act not because he is callous and uncaring about the plight of his child. The Scriptures are clear that his obedience in this matter in no way lessens the emotional upheaval that goes with it. No, Abraham simply makes preparations to do this act because the Lord God Almighty has commanded it. Abraham is a man of faith. He believes God. He also continues to believe on the promises of God...including those He had made regarding Isaac. In fact, Abraham's faith at this point is so strong that his mindset is this: if God calls for Isaac to be sacrificed, then He will also provide a way for him to be raised again. We know this is Abraham's thinking because of what the New Testament book of Hebrews says in chapter 11, the great "faith chapter" of the Bible:

17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 19 Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death (Hebrews 11:17-19).

The build-up for this moment has been intense. It has been three days in the making. And yet, we know how things go in the end, don't we: at the last moment, the moment when Abraham's hand is raised, clenching the knife, ready to plunge it into the heart of his son, the Angel of the Lord suddenly calls to him and puts a halt to the proceedings. "'Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.'" Looking up, Abraham sees a ram caught in a thicket, and he proceeds to sacrifice it as a burnt offering instead of Isaac. Just as Abraham had assured Isaac, God does indeed provide the lamb. That's why Abraham ends up calling that place Jehovah-Jireh — The Lord Will Provide.

So it is that in the end, Abraham makes the grade — perhaps just barely, but he makes it all the same. In the end, Abraham keeps his resolve. In the end, his faith is proven. And in the end, we're left to gaze at him in awe for that astounding achievement. But let's be clear: in truth, this isn't so much Abraham's achievement as it is God's merciful disposition toward Abraham — and that from beginning to end. God has known how this would go from the very start. God has known what Abraham would need to follow through. God has known that absent His

sustaining strength, Abraham would never come close to getting through this. If we look back on his life, one thing we can see is that Abraham's journey of faith has, by this point, been one forged and strengthened step by step through multiple trials and seasons of waiting. In every one of them, the Lord has shown Himself to be trustworthy and true. The measure of Abraham's maturity in this instance is in many ways the cumulative result of God's manifest goodness and grace to him, from the moment of his calling from Haran until now.

Many centuries after God's command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Jesus would say to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). This is a reference to Abraham's joy in seeing the ram caught in the thicket here in Genesis 22. That ram was the substitute that would save Isaac's life. Seeing that ram was, in essence, seeing the day of Christ, the Lamb of God, who would become the Substitute for us all.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, it has been said that Abraham displayed his heart toward God through his willingness to give up his only son. God displayed His heart toward you and me in the same way: by giving up His only Son for us. To say it another way, when God asked Abraham for the ultimate demonstration of love and commitment, He asked for Abraham's son. When God the Father wanted to show us the ultimate demonstration of His love and commitment to us, He gave us His Son. He is Jehovah-Jireh; He is the God who provides!

When we come back next time, we'll be spending just a bit more time anchoring ourselves to this all-important truth, because there are a few very special things yet remaining in this portion of the passage that show us the promise of Jesus and the amazing work He would do for us at Calvary. I hope you'll join me for the conversation; until then, God bless you richly in our Savior. Do have a terrific day!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS! God's peace to each of you in Christ, and thanks for your presence today as we take some time to open God's Word together. As most of you know, we're in the Old Testament book of Genesis right now, and today and tomorrow we'll be finishing our look at Genesis 22. I'm always glad that you're here; let's pray as we go to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day we ask that you would have your holy Word penetrate our lives and do that which you desire it to do within us. We place ourselves before you knowing what a great privilege it is to open the Scriptures and learn of you, and we are grateful. Bless this time, we pray, in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the saga of the sacrifice of Isaac comes to an end, and with its ending comes a wonderful reiteration of God's promise to bless Abraham and his descendants. Our focus this session: More than meets the eye.

Genesis 22:15-19

15The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities

of their enemies, 18and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." 19Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

I don't think it would be so easy for a teacher to do in today's public schools, but when I was a junior in high school my English teacher, Mr. Roper, did it all the time: when assigning a book for us to read — *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck, *Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee — one thing he always challenged us to do was to look for the Christ figure or other Christian symbolism in the novel. Sometimes it was very subtle, other times it hit you over the head with a 2x4, but it was always there in one form or another. Mr. Roper's desire for us as his students was that we always be on the lookout for the deeper message...the message beyond that which was on the surface.

When we approach the Bible, we are not approaching mere literature, of course, but something much greater: the very Word of the living God. When we approach the Bible, therefore, our focus isn't usually on various literary devices or different genres that might be there (though they are certainly there in great measure). Our focus, rather, is on the text itself: the message it speaks and the meaning it holds for us as the people of God. Yet, that doesn't mean that there is never anything beyond the immediate. On the contrary, Scripture often speaks prophetically. It often gives a message that is both for the "now" and also for the "not yet." God's Word is always pointing us, in one way or another, to His message of life and salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the New Testament we see Jesus plain and simple, the fulfillment of all that was promised regarding His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. In the Old Testament, however, Jesus is very often shown to us in types and shadows and references that may or may not be plain at first glance.

A perfect example of that truth is what we've seen here in Genesis as Abraham, commanded to sacrifice his only son as an offering to God, was faithful to the task, following through up to the moment the Angel of the Lord called out for him to stop. We've already talked about several points of connection between both the fatherhood of Abraham and the Fatherhood of God as well as the sonship of Isaac and Sonship of Jesus. But before we leave this conversation behind and move forward, there's one more detail to touch on.

Today's passage, as we can readily observe, is a wrap-up of sorts to the narrative. In the aftermath of Abraham's show of faith, the Lord now speaks once again of all that He will do...of all that He has ordained...for Abraham and his descendants. The promise is lavish in both content and expression, and after hearing these words of blessing, Abraham departs with his servants and returns to Beersheba. So far so good. But if we back up several verses...to verses 9-10 specifically...there's one aspect of this event that we haven't discussed yet.

After three days of journeying and coming to the place of sacrifice, and after placing the wood to be used for the burnt offering on Isaac's own back for the final trek up the mountain, verse 9 tells us that Abraham then bound Isaac and laid him on the altar. Does anything about that fact strike you? Scholars are quick to point out that if Isaac — most likely a teenager or young man at this point in his life — was strong enough to carry the wood up the mountain, then he was probably strong enough to fend off his 100 year-old father and avoid being sacrificed. The fact that Isaac allowed himself to be bound and placed on the altar shows us that even in these extreme circumstances, he continued to trust his father.

Why do I bring this up today as we prepare to step away from this portion of God's Word? I bring it up because looking at that detail of the event completes a powerful picture that we began painting several days ago: the remarkable picture of the work of Jesus at the cross... *thousands of years before it happened*. The son of promise wasn't merely sacrificed; the son

of promise went willingly to be sacrificed in obedience to his father. And while we don't know what father and son shared with one another in those moments before Abraham bound Isaac and raised the knife in his hand, we can surmise, based on what we know of Abraham's thoughts as shared with us in Hebrews 11, that their words centered on God's power and ability to do anything needed to keep His promises...even raising someone from the dead.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, here then is what that powerful picture — that prophetic, now and not yet painting pointing to the message of life and salvation in Christ — looks like in its finished format: Isaac's life was one that foreshadowed the life of Jesus.

- Both were loved by their father.
- Both offered themselves willingly.
- Both carried their own wood to their sacrifice.
- Both were delivered from death on the third day.

It's always good to be on the lookout for the deeper message...the message beyond that which is on the surface.

Have a great day, everyone; God-willing, I'll see you again next time.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody — grace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! Thanks for clicking in with me today as we continue to work through the Old Testament book of Genesis. Today in our time together we'll be finishing up our look at Genesis 22, so if you'll turn there in your Bible, we'll pray and get things rolling.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the 22nd chapter of Genesis closes out with a brief family note regarding Abraham's brother, Nahor. Our focus: laying groundwork for what's ahead.

Genesis 22:20-24

20Some time later Abraham was told, "Milcah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor: 21Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel (the father of Aram), 22Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel." 23Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milcah bore these

eight sons to Abraham's brother Nahor. 24His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also had sons: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah.

I know very little about my family of origin. My mom's growing up years were hard ones and she never talked about them much, and while we were close with her extended family through the years, I was very young at the time and have very few memories of anyone. The same holds true with my dad's side of the family. I had an uncle who was deeply into genealogy and could talk a lot about the broader history of how we Starks came to America from the Russian frontier and became established, but as far as immediate family goes, there are gaps — and even a few mysteries. It's fascinating to me that even in my fifties, I'm still learning things about both sides of my family that I never knew before, and usually they come out as casual incidentals in conversations with my sister or my folks who assumed that I already knew what they were talking about. It all adds to my knowledge base — and it contributes to my overall understanding of how and why things are the way they are.

As we come to God's Word today, we have before us a brief section of Scripture filled with all kinds of funny names that are hard to pronounce and which seem to have no real reason for being included in the sacred text. They're the offspring of Abraham's brother, Nahor, and with the exception of Buz and Maacah who show up in a couple of additional places in the Bible, we never hear about any of these children again. There is an exception, however, and as I'm sure you've already ascertained, that exception is really the whole reason — both historically and theologically speaking — that we've been given this bit of family lineage.

The one name that sticks out? It's not a son at all, but a granddaughter. Nahor's son Bethuel becomes the father of a girl named Rebekah — and yes, Rebekah will in time become the wife of Isaac. This inclusion is another one of those signposts for us as readers of God's Word. It's there to tip us off to what's coming. It's an information marker to keep us from being left in the dark about how and why things are going to be as they are moving forward. We won't hear about Isaac and Rebekah until we come to Genesis 24, because chapter 23 is going to lead us through the death and burial of Sarah. But when we do get to chapter 24, guess what? We'll be ready to dive in, partly because of this little snippet being shared with us here at the end of chapter 22.

Wrapping Up

Now — there are other aspects of today's passage that we could spend some time on, particularly if we were to talk about Reumah, Nahor's concubine. This is actually the first time in Scripture that a concubine is mentioned, and we could very easily follow that topic down a rabbit hole and get into some worthy study time together. That, though, is subject matter of another kind for another time, and beneficial as it would be to go there, it's really not the focus or the trajectory of where God's Word is presently leading us. When it comes up again, and it surely will, we'll definitely address it then.

For now, let's wrap things up for the day. To do that, let me simply say that it's been a privilege to go through this momentous, action-packed, and spiritually powerful portion of God's Word with you. Genesis 22 is one of those sections of Scripture that bears reading over and over again, because as we familiarize ourselves with both the big picture and the small details of Abraham's call to sacrifice Isaac, it adds to our understanding of Jesus' sacrifice for us...and at the end of the day, that's what it's all about! I hope you've been encouraged as you've seen the connections between the two, and my prayer is that through it you've grown in your awareness of God's great love for you in Christ.

Have a great weekend, everyone! Take care, and I'll see you again next week!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you today, and as we open up our Bibles and ask the Lord to teach and transform our lives over these next few minutes, I know that we'll be blessed as a result. Let's pray and ask our Almighty God to do His work in us today.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our first look at Genesis 23 will be a brief one as we introduce this chapter about the death of Abraham's wife, Sarah. Our focus this session: The deep chasm of loss.

Genesis 23:1-2

Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. 2She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.

Mr. Thompson, my driven, energetic, kind-hearted 88 year-old neighbor who still gives tennis lessons most mornings of the week, hasn't been outside much in the past few weeks. Usually I hear him before I see him. Beginning at about 7:30 when his first student of the day arrives, his strong voice mingles with the sound of balls being struck by a racquet. His coaching is part cheering, part cajoling, and part patient instruction, and you can't help but be drawn in by his enthusiasm. He's a legend in our community, and I love watching out my front window as he holds court with men and women half his age, helping them to become better players of the game to which he's dedicated so much of his life.

But like I said, Mr. Thompson has been scarce lately, and recently I learned why: in early January, while I was in Atlanta on a business trip, his beloved wife of over sixty years died. If you've been through that yourself, then you know that in many ways, life — temporarily at least — screeches to a halt. There aren't words to adequately explain the pain. It doesn't seem possible to keep functioning, and yet that's what you do because what else *can* you do? It's difficult to describe, and my heart breaks for what my neighbor is going through.

Though he's been scarce, I did see Mr. Thompson outside this past Saturday. He wasn't out on the tennis court, but standing on his side porch with his son, a doctor who happens to live just down the street. His son had his arm around his dad. Dad was crying. But even in his weeping, you could hear his clear, strong voice cutting through the stillness. He missed her, he said, and yet he knew he would see her again. And then he cried some more.

A mom who was mourning over her severely brain-damaged daughter's death talked about her pain this way, and I think it's a lot like what Mr. Thompson is going through. She said,

I can hardly bear it sometimes. My most recent wave of grief came just last year before what would have been her sixteenth birthday. As the day approached, I found myself brooding over all the things that she was never able to do. What did I do? What I've learned to do again and again: I did what I believe is the only thing to do to conquer grief, and that is to embrace it. I cried and cried and cried, and faced the truth of my grief head on, because I know it's only when I face my feelings and express them freely that I can begin the journey toward hope.

Today in God's Word, Sarah dies. She's 127. I know it's not polite to talk about a woman's age, but 127 is impressive, and besides that, she happens to be the only woman in the Bible whose age at her death is recorded — a significant measure of how highly she is regarded. What's more, this woman, whose trials and tribulations are openly recorded, whose temper and wrath is not hidden from us, whose love was fierce and whose anger could be fearful, is someone held up to us in Scripture as an example of a godly person. In both the Old Testament book of Isaiah and the New Testament book of 1 Peter, she is mentioned as one who, though by no means was without sin, was nonetheless a person of great faith. She is held up to God's people from generation to generation as one who believed in His promises and entrusted herself to His loving care. Her death, therefore, is a special moment for us to mark in our study time. And while we'll have several days to work our way through this — and as we follow Abraham through the ins and outs of securing his wife's burial place — it's fitting that as we begin the week together we pause and make note of just one very telling and powerful thing:

When Sarah dies, Abraham weeps.

It's difficult to describe. There aren't words to adequately explain the pain. But the tears say more than words could ever say.

Tomorrow we'll be diving into some very strategic, long-range, big picture things that Abraham does in the aftermath of his beloved's passing. But for now, he cries. If you need to cry with him, please allow yourself that time.

Christ give you His peace today, everyone — I'll see you again next time.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you for a new week in the Scriptures after a brief time away, and as we move into the coming days together, I'm grateful as always for your presence and praying as always for your growth in Christ and in your understanding of His Word. Today we're back in Genesis 23 to follow the aftermath of Sarah's death, with several important things happening along the way. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on this day we bless your holy name and ask that you bless the teaching of your Word. Help us to see in the Scriptures today your call for a steadfast heart that trusts and acts upon your gracious promises to your people. We love you, and we thank you as always for this time. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, after a brief introduction last week marking the death of Abraham's wife, Sarah, we now move forward with what in one sense might be considered the nuts and bolts of her burial, but which in actuality is far more significant. Our focus this session: Abraham seeks a burial site.

Genesis 23:1-9

Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. 2She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her. 3Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, 4"I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead." 5The Hittites replied to Abraham, 6"Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead." 7Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. 8He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf 9so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you."

Kenneth Brown, in his book *Inventors at Work*, tells a remarkable story about Nat Wyeth, the famous engineer and inventor, and an experience he had with his far more famous brother, Andrew Wyeth the artist.

Andrew had painted a picture of Lafayette's home near Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and in that picture was a sycamore tree rising up behind the building. Nat recounted, "When I first saw the painting, Andy wasn't finished with it yet, and he began showing me a lot of drawings of the trunk and the gnarled roots of that old sycamore. I said, 'But Andy, where's all that in the picture? You have the base of the tree set behind the building.' Andy replied, 'It's not in the picture, Nat. But for me to get what I want in the part of the tree that's showing, I've got to thoroughly know how it's anchored in back of the house.'"

Nat Wyeth always found that remarkable. He marveled over the fact that his brother was able to paint a tree up high just so because he knew it intimately from the roots up.

As we come to God's Word today, we're embarking on a rather brief chapter here in Genesis that in many ways is transactional in nature. The big picture is one in which we see Abraham negotiating, in the culturally appropriate and accepted manner of his day, for a piece of land that he can use as a burial plot for his beloved wife. Before us are gracious words, kind words, words spoken between two parties with genuine respect, warmth, and compassion. As a sojourner in this foreign land, one he's been traversing for the better part of six decades now, Abraham is looking to his longtime hosts for help. He has no place in Canaan that he can call his own. He owns no land. He holds no deed. His stated desire, then, is a simple and understandable one: just a place, a field, a cave, that he can purchase so that he can do honor to his late wife and give her a proper resting place.

As I said, that's the big picture. But as with Andrew Wyeth's painting of Lafayette's quarters in Chadds Ford, there are some important, if unseen details here in Abraham's dealings which will ultimately contribute to the genius of the finished work. All of the things evident at the moment — the opening of these good faith negotiations for a parcel of land — are actually informed by a much deeper knowledge on the part of Abraham; knowledge which has its foundation...its roots... in the great promises of God that were given to him regarding the future of his people.

We'll have quite a bit to say about this as we go through the text this week, but in short, by acquiring this plot of land, Abraham will do far more than gain a burial site for his wife. He will also be establishing future rights to it for his family, and even more than that, he will be putting down a marker that directly connects his descendants with the land of Canaan. The Lord, of course, has promised this to Abraham and his offspring, and Abraham's actions here are like a

deposit of sorts: a placeholder that, not just from a spiritual perspective, but from a legal one as well, ensures the ownership of this land by his descendants in perpetuity.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, we're certainly seeing a lot of the "tree" that's showing, as it were...but in Abraham, we're also seeing a person who thoroughly knows how it's anchored in back of the house. Abraham is painting this tree up high just so because he knows it intimately from the roots up. These are the actions of a man of wisdom. These are the actions of a man of faith. And these are the actions of a man confidently walking in concert with the revealed will of the living God.

When we come back next time we'll return to the negotiating table to see how all of this plays out, and as we do, there will surely be more insights for us to collect along the way. Do plan to join in, won't you? Until then, have a terrific day, everyone. God's peace to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everybody! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich peace to you in our Lord Jesus as you come to the table for another day of Bible study. In today's session we'll be moving through the midsection of Genesis 23, continuing to track with Abraham as he speaks with the Hittites about procuring a burial plot for Sarah. I'm glad you're here; let's bow our heads to come before our heavenly Father as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, what a loving and compassionate Lord you are; quick to hear, quick to have mercy, always ready to forgive and restore. Thank you for that assurance – an assurance we have because you sent your only Son to live for us and die in our place; your Son who rose again from the dead to proclaim victory over sin death and the devil for all time and eternity. Please draw close to us and bless our study time today, that we grow ever stronger in our most holy faith. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, in his quest for ownership of land to use as a place to bury Sarah, Abraham engages Ephron the Hittite regarding his field and the cave at the end of it. Our focus this session: "Listen to me, if you will."

Genesis 23:10-16

10Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city. 11"No, my lord," he said. "Listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead." 12Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land 13and he said to Ephron in their hearing, "Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there." 14Ephron answered Abraham, 15"Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver, but what is that between me and you? Bury your dead." 16Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants.

Pro golfer Raymond Floyd is nearing 80 now, and though he retired from competitive play in 2010 he had an amazing run that people still talk about. He had 22 wins on the PGA Tour, including four Majors. Another 14 wins came on the Champions Tour. He was elected to the World Golf Hall of Fame in 1989. For all that success, however, one of the things he's most remembered for is a moment when success eluded him.

One day, high up on the leaderboard and getting ready to tap in a routine 9-inch putt on the second-to-last hole of a tournament, Floyd stepped up and addressed his ball. As he did so, however, he caused it move — just ever so slightly. According to the rule book, in such an instance a golfer must assess himself a penalty stroke. Floyd, in that moment, had a choice to make. He was the only one who had seen the infraction. He was also just one shot off the lead, and the winner that day would collect \$108,000 — a very large sum for the time. To acknowledge that the ball had moved would mean he might very well lose his chance for big money.

For some golfers in that situation, a temptation might arise...one too great to pass up. The coast being clear, they'd simply tap in and continue as though nothing was amiss. Raymond Floyd, however, didn't do that. On that day, he assessed himself the required penalty stroke, wound up with a bogey on the hole, and lost the tournament by one shot. While his game came up short, he was long on integrity — and today that moment is universally remembered and lauded as a victory on an altogether different plane.

Over the course of time, there have been many different definitions of integrity proffered by ethicists, wordsmiths, and philosophers of various stripes. Integrity, they say, is being the same person in private as you are in public. Integrity is who you are when no one is watching. Integrity is doing the right or acceptable thing in a given instance. Some definitions are succinct and uncompromising, some are a little loose and mealy-mouthed, and others still are just plain off the mark. But one thing integrity is that a lot of people don't think about very often, especially when we consider it in a Scriptural framework, is this: it's not just doing the right or acceptable thing, but doing the best thing. It's not just doing what is passable, but what is proper. Integrity for the Christian is having the mind of Christ and acting in accordance with it.

In today's reading, which is really nothing more than an account of the agreement that Abraham and Ephron come to regarding the cave of Machpelah and the field connected to it, what we are witnessing on the part of Abraham is integrity — a divinely informed kind of integrity — in action. Here is a man who, even though he is a sojourner in a country not his

own, is nonetheless a person with an extreme amount of wealth, possessing an equally extreme amount of power and influence to go with it. Abraham is a living legend in the land of Canaan. The people there highly esteem him. It would be very easy for him to use that cache of goodwill to his advantage in a way that would *take* advantage of his neighbors. This man can write his own ticket, and if he wants to do it on the backs of the little people, no one can stop him. As we look at the text, however, that's not what Abraham does at all. Let's unpack this just briefly today to see how the Lord's servant treats his fellow man.

Things begin with Ephron — that is, Ephron the Hittite — following a time-honored cultural custom in the ancient Middle East with respect to buying and selling: that of bargaining. Here's how it works: As the seller of the property in question, he first graciously offers to give it up for free — confident that Abraham, the buyer, will also follow custom and refuse that ceremonial offer. When Abraham refuses to receive the field as a gift, Ephron's next move is to suggest a price, one he claims is modest but which in actuality is probably quite high. This would normally be understood as the starting point of the real transaction, and it's from this point that the bargaining would begin in earnest.

Abraham, however, does something quite unusual here. Rather than responding to Ephron's opening offer with a counteroffer of his own, he simply accepts the suggested price of four hundred shekels of silver and moves forward to seal the deal. In doing so, some might accuse him of being a pushover, but quite to the contrary, he has considered the stakes, knows the true value of what he will be receiving, and is also cognizant who he is ultimately representing. That's why, though courteous, prudent, and fair, Abraham as God's servant can also choose to be remarkably generous in his dealings with Ephron. And that's exactly what he does.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, is that a common combination of attributes in a business deal? No. But neither are God's people common. And God's people, by God's grace, have a great power and privilege that is foreign to the world: the power and privilege not to merely do the right or acceptable thing, but the best thing...not to merely do what is passable, but what is proper. On the surface, it may look like Abraham's game comes up a little short here. The truth, however, is that he shows himself to be long on integrity — and that's a victory on an altogether different plane.

Have a great day, everyone — God-willing, I'll see you again tomorrow to finish out our look at this important event in the life of Abraham. Christ be your comfort, strength, and joy, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, a day that, like each day we gather, sees us coming together as God's people redeemed in Christ, celebrating His love, and learning from His Word. It's great to have you along for the next few minutes as we go to the Scriptures, and as we do that today we'll be opening for the last time to Genesis 23. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, as we move into our Bible study time today we ask that you, by your Spirit, would go before us. Light the way, open our hearts and minds, and accomplish through your Word all that you have purposed for us. We know this is your good and gracious will, and so we ask these things with joy and confidence in the name of our risen Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 23 ends with a summary of all that has occurred in the preceding verses of the chapter and brings us to the closing of the real estate transaction between Abraham and Ephron the Hittite. Our focus: sweet closure.

Genesis 23:17-20

17So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre — both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field — was deeded 18to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city. 19Afterward Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan. 20So the field and the cave in it were deeded to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site.

Rudyard Kipling once wrote about families, "All of us are we, and everyone else is they." In a very real sense, that's true. A family shares almost everything. They share possessions. They share hopes and dreams and memories. They share gladness and sorrow. They also share anger and irritation and annoyance, sometimes more than any of us would like to admit! Yet all of these things...possessions, experiences, emotions...are things that hold a family together. Sometimes the binding agent is like glue and other times it's like a knot, but guess what? Whether stuck together or tied together, a family is family no matter what. You can spend your whole life fitting in with it or fighting against it, delighting in it or disavowing it, but the bottom line is that it's there, and it's part of what makes you you.

As we come to the end of Genesis 23, Abraham — now 138 years old — prepares to bury his beloved wife. Acting with a combination of good judgment and a gracious spirit, he settles with Ephron over the purchase of the field and cave at Machpelah, receives the deed to the property, and proceeds to lay Sarah to rest. We don't know what goes through Abraham's mind as he goes about this solemn task, because Scripture doesn't tell us. We do know, however, the kind of spouse Sarah was to her husband, and so today it's fitting for us to take a moment and remember this woman of God one more time before we move on.

Let's remember today that Sarah was a woman who willingly left her home and stepped out into the unknown to follow Abraham...a man who was following the directions of a God with whom she — not to mention Abraham himself — was completely unfamiliar at the time.

Let's remember today that Sarah was a woman, barren, who endured much to try to provide an heir for her husband. There were missteps along the way, yes, but they were taken in earnest and with a desire to see God's promises brought to fruition in her and her husband's life.

Let's remember today that Sarah was also a woman who, though she struggled and had fits and starts and flailings and failings along the way, in the end had faith to believe that she and Abraham, even at the ages of 90 and 100 respectively, would yet produce that promised heir, their son Isaac.

Sarah did all of these things having no permanent home. She did all of these things, over a period of six decades, wandering through a land not her own and living in tents. Sarah was hard core. She was awesome. She was tough as nails. She was long-suffering...and she never gave up.

We could go on, of course. We could give example after example of her character and fortitude from what God's Word tells us about her life. But perhaps the best way we can sum up Sarah is to say that although she lived in a world of danger and confusion, and although she was a person very much like you and me in her human fallenness and frailty, Sarah was a woman of faith who stood firm in her commitment to her husband and to God. We can never forget that with Abraham, she was the progenitor of the people of promise, God's chosen ones, the nation from whom the Messiah Himself would finally come. Sarah, with Abraham, made a family — one to which, by faith, you and I belong even today. Indeed, she's part of what makes us us as the people of God in Christ.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up today and say goodbye to this special person, I think it's good for us to remember one more thing about Sarah: though Abraham, then Isaac and Jacob, and even Rebekah and Leah would all be buried in the cave of Machpelah, it was Sarah who would be the first one in the family laid to rest in the land of Canaan — a fitting distinction for this woman who exhibited such steadfastness and faithfulness through the years.

On that note we'll close, and as we do, I hope that you've found our time in this chapter of Scripture to be a blessing in your life. When we gather next time, we'll be having our first look at Genesis 24, which means we'll be making a bit of a generational transition in the narrative of Abraham's family life. I hope you'll join in as we turn our attention toward — you guessed it — Isaac!

Have a great day, everyone — Joy to you in our Savior Jesus, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and blessings to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a privilege to be with you today, where in our time together we'll be opening to the beginning of Genesis 24. With this new chapter we're marking a shift in focus from one generation to the next as we begin to follow the life of Abraham's son, Isaac. Let's pray as we prepare to open the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, We thank you today for who you are and what you've done for us through your life, death, and resurrection. We have no words to express how grateful we are. We thank you. We worship you. We humbly bow before you. In the time we have over these next few minutes, we ask that you bless our study time in your Word. Help us to learn and grow in faith toward you, but more important, help us to understand in ever growing fashion your great faithfulness to us. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with Abraham now getting quite old, his thoughts begin to turn toward putting his house in order before he dies. One thing requiring his attention is the acquisition of

a spouse for Isaac, which is the common cultural practice of the day. Our focus this session: the long road to Rebekah.

Genesis 24:1-4

Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. ²He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh. ³I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, ⁴but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."

Many of you know, because you've been with EDiBS for a long while now, that if you were to take a lazy Sunday drive through my old stomping grounds in the Ozarks, my particular slice of the countryside would take you through several Amish communities. Amish farms are simple and beautiful. They all have similar layouts with similar homes and outbuildings. But on some of those farms, you'll see not one farmhouse but two...or barring that, one farmhouse and a much smaller building that looks like a bunkhouse for a couple of ranch hands.

Those second homes are actually built by the father of the family for his oldest son to use when he's first married. The son and his new bride start their lives together in that second house, and once they save enough to buy their own land and build their own home, they leave to start the next chapter of their lives apart from the rest of the family. That second house then goes to the next son who marries, and so on. It's a practice that works quite well among the Amish, and it's actually considered part of a father's responsibility. It's something he plans for, saves for, and works toward to ensure that his son and his future daughter in-law will get a good start in life.

As we come to a new chapter in God's Word today, we've come to a father having a similar responsibility for his son...a father who wants to do all he can to see that his son and his future daughter in-law get a good start in life. Housing for Isaac and his future spouse, however, isn't what's on the mind of Abraham; instead, it's the future spouse herself.

In opening to the 24th chapter of Genesis, we've just opened to one of the longest accounts of connected events in the whole first book of the Bible. In opening to Genesis 24, we're about to follow, on the one hand, an epic journey of hundreds of miles that will be undertaken for the purpose of finding Isaac a wife (the "what" of the text), but which on the other hand will be undertaken for a much farther-reaching and significant reason (the "why" of the text). More than anything, however, Genesis 24 is going to showcase for us an exceptional storyline containing instances of extraordinary faith, asked and answered prayers, and testimony after powerful testimony of the fact that God is who He says He is: the God who is intimately involved in the lives of His people, who ordains and orchestrates things for their good, and who is always at work in advancing the bigger picture of His redemptive plan for humanity.

One of the special things we'll be taking time to delve into in this portion of Genesis is the kind of reaction the original readers of the text would have had to this account. As people living in the last days, we're blessed to have a clear picture of God in both His transcendence and His immanence. We see God through the lens of both Old and New Testaments, looking to Him not just as the Creator, but also as the Redeemer and Sustainer who holds all things together and upholds all things with His strength and power. He is the God who knows us and is for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. The ancients, however, didn't have that picture or that level of understanding about God's nature at that time in history; it was all still unfolding, and they were still learning about the vast differences between the impersonal, man-made gods of paganism that were all around them and the One True God who would be faithful to work in them; the God who would will and act in order to fulfill His good purposes (Philippians 2:13). Yet here in

Genesis 24, God shows Himself to be at work in *such* a personal way that when His people of old read about it, they would have marveled. Who was this God, that He would deign to lovingly involve Himself in the mere creatures of His making? It was an astounding and awe-inspiring thought...and of course, that was the point.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for this session, my prayer as we go through this chapter in the coming days is that you and I will see the things in the verses ahead and find them to be as astounding and awe-inspiring in these last days as they were to God's people of old. There's much here to teach us, to strengthen us, and to encourage us as people who belong to Christ, and I know that God is going to use our time for the good. Thanks for your time today; God's peace, and I'll see you again next time. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. I'm happy to have you along for some time in God's Word, where today in our study time we'll be coming back to the opening verses of Genesis 24 to start building on what we introduced yesterday. God always desires to bless us as we come under the power and authority of the Scriptures, so let's pray as we begin and ask for open hearts and minds to receive what the Lord has for us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, We thank you for your mercy – for the truth that though weeping may last for the night, with the coming of morning comes restoration and renewal and times of refreshing from you. Please bless us today with eyes to see and ears to hear as we open your Word. This we ask in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today and come back to Abraham's concern over a wife for Isaac, we find him delegating this important task to his most trusted servant. Our focus: a most serious matter.

Genesis 24:1-4

Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. 2He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh. 3I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, 4but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."

"Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye." Many of you will remember that turn of phrase (and the motions that go with it) from your growing up years. It actually comes from the first line of a rather obscure poem, and though the verses are rather forgettable, those opening words have stood the test of time. Kids speak them as an oath, a vow...they speak them as a promise to their friends when a serious subject is at hand.

"You won't share my secret, will you?"

"No! Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye!"

"Cross my heart and hope to die" is a way to say, "Woe to me if I should ever betray you," and for a kid, it's one of the more sacred lines in the canon of childhood. It's a ritual, in fact, that still holds sway today.

But it's not just children who speak in ritualistic oaths when something important is on the line; adults do it too, and today in God's Word, Abraham happens to be providing us with a classic example of one, straight from ancient middle-eastern culture. To his chief servant, the most trusted of his workers — probably Eliezer, based on what we know from back in Genesis 15 — Abraham does something that to you and me is most unusual and maybe a bit creepy, but which was common in his day. "Put your hand under my thigh and swear by the Lord..." he says. What's going on? Abraham is telling his servant to make him a promise. A most serious promise. Abraham is saying to his servant, "Cross your heart and hope to die, stick a needle in your eye" if you don't follow through with the task I'm about to give you. Promise that you'll do it. Promise that you won't fail in this most serious matter." The matter being spoken of? That of acquiring a spouse for Isaac.

Abraham, well on in years and knowing at this stage of his life that he's been blessed by God in every way, is intent on protecting the legacy of those blessings. A big part of that legacy — really, the whole of it — is wrapped up in Isaac, the child of promise, the one through whom Abraham's descendants will be numbered as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the ocean shore. Isaac is a treasure to be protected and nurtured, and thus one whose path Abraham is to help establish so that his son will know the Lord, walk uprightly, and fulfill his God-given destiny.

A big part of the playbook, of course, is the woman with whom he will spend his life. She will be his partner, his confidant, and a voice of influence in all that he does. Finding the one who is right for him, therefore, is of paramount importance.

Why not a Canaanite woman? A Canaanite woman, along with members of her extended family, would be apt to bring the influence of her pagan religion into the household, diluting and polluting the spiritual life of Isaac and their offspring. This is the most important area of protection of all when it comes to walking in the promise that the Lord has brought to Abraham

and his family, and so it is that the instruction given the servant is that he journey north to Abraham's own kin to find a suitable bride.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, such a journey will be long and arduous. It will be filled with uncertainty, and as we'll see in our next session, those uncertainties immediately rise to the surface in the mind of Abraham's servant as he questions his master about the specifics of the task before him. But in the midst of that conversation, a promise of another kind will arise and be spoken — one ensuring that all about to undertaken goes according to the desires of Abraham's heart and in accordance with the will of Almighty God. Do make plans to be part of it all when we gather to talk about it! Have a terrific, extended Presidents Day weekend, everyone — we'll be back first thing Tuesday morning to open God's Word. Until then, take care, and the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Joy to you in our risen Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you at the beginning of another week, and I pray that you're ready to be encouraged and strengthened in your faith over the next several days as we continue our way through the study of Genesis. God loves us so dearly. He's always in the process of calling us to Himself, and His holy Word is one of the great means through which He does that. I'm glad you've come along today to open the Scriptures with me; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Lord, we pray that as we work through another week together, you would continually put your hand of blessing upon each one of us, and that you would graciously guide and protect us as your dearly loved children in all that we do. Bless the hearing, teaching, and study of your Word today. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, after Abraham tasks his chief servant with the job of traveling north to Abraham's home country to find a wife for Isaac, an obvious and natural question arises in the servant's mind. Our focus this session: dealing with the "what ifs" in life.

Genesis 24:5-9

5The servant asked him, "What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?" 6"Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said. 7"The Lord, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land' — He will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. 8If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there." 9So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter.

An older gentleman who had never traveled more than 75 miles from the farm where he was born was preparing to take his first ever plane ride to see his first great-grandchild. He was excited about the trip, but more than a little apprehensive about the flight. In the end his worry was for naught, and everything turned out just fine. After his arrival back home, his friends — most of whom were just like him and had never flown before — were eager to hear how it went, and they asked if he enjoyed the flight. "Well," commented the man, "it wasn't as bad as I thought it might be, but I'll tell you this: I never did put all my weight down!"

Have you ever been afraid to "put all your weight down" on something that you were unsure about? Have you ever struggled to see how something you'd been worrying about would ever work out and that in the end, all would be okay? Have you ever been asked to do something and thought to yourself that there was no way on God's green earth you could ever provide the result the other person was expecting? If so, you're in very good company. People of every station in life in every era of history have wrestled with those feelings. Sometimes trust is a hard row to hoe.

At the same time, however, we should be quick to say that there have also been people of every station in life in every era of history who have shown the way of faith in the midst of faithlessness; who in the face of challenge have been examples of trust-placing instead of sand-pounding; who have exhibited confidence in themselves and encouraged confidence in others, reassuring the strugglers and the doubters among them that what was spoken would come to be and what was promised would come to pass.

Today in God's Word, Abraham — now a consummate veteran of the road of faith with all its ruts and potholes and one-lane bridges — happens to be one of those people: a person of a certain station in a particular era that shows the way to one who's not so sure...to one who, though willing to make the trip as it were, doesn't know if he's ready to put all his weight down during the ride. Abraham's chief servant, who's just been instructed by his master to go and acquire a wife for Isaac, responds to this call not by saying "no;" instead, he answers by asking "what if?"

If we were to paraphrase things a bit and fill in some blanks based on the information available to us in the text, we might ask the servant's "what if" inquiry this way: *What if I go all that way up to Haran, up to Mesopotamia — almost 550 miles, by the way — and the woman I find for Isaac refuses to come back?* It's a reasonable question. This servant will be going to a people in a land Abraham left nearly a century ago. This servant will be asking a woman he doesn't know to come and marry a man she doesn't know...has never even seen, for that matter. This servant will be subject to the scrutiny of the potential bride's family as they consider his efforts

on behalf of his master. We could keep going here, but the point is that even with cultural customs being what they are, even with arranged marriages being commonplace, and even though this kind of journey encompassing this kind of mission isn't exactly rare, the outcome is anything but a sure thing. It's not a surprise, then, when Abraham's servant offers a reasonable alternative: should the woman he finds for Isaac not want to come, what if the servant simply takes Isaac there?

Abraham's answer for this "what if" question and its follow-up is an answer of confidence. It's an answer of assurance. It's an answer given in faith, and more than that, an answer meant to encourage faith on the part of his struggling, doubting servant. Abraham's answer? "The Lord, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land' — He will send His angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there." Here is a man of God sharing with his servant one of the great truths about God: namely that when He makes a declaration, He keeps it. What is spoken will always come to be, and what is promised will always come to pass.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what of the servant's suggestion that, if necessary, Isaac change locales and head back to Haran? That's a non-starter of the highest order. Isaac is not to go to Haran because his God-ordained future is in Canaan. Abraham forbids the action on those grounds, and yet as we'll see going forward, it's a directive that won't end up needing to be enacted in any case.

There's an old saying that goes, "Where God places a period, let no man put a question mark." Today, Abraham is affirming that divine punctuation in a simple, but powerful way — and as we'll see in the coming days, Abraham's servant will be learning very soon just how powerful such a period can be! Do come along as we study together!

Have a great day, everyone, and let me leave you with this: Hear God's Word, receive His promises...and put all your weight down. He will always bear you up! Take care, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings of love, joy, and peace to you in the name of our Savior Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. I pray that the abiding presence of the Lord is your strength today as you're going through your routine, and as we come to the midpoint of another week of Bible study today I pray that our time in the Scriptures together will be a blessing to you as God's child. Let's pray as we go to His Word.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the day you've given us, and thank you especially for the time you've given us today to focus on our relationship with you. Help us to set this study time apart as a special time of fellowship with you through your Word. We ask this in Christ's name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, having sworn a very specific and detailed oath to seek a wife for Abraham's son, Isaac, Abraham's servant now sets out to accomplish his task. Our focus this session: a prayer for success.

Genesis 24:10-14

10Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and left, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor. 11He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. 12Then he prayed, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 13See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. 14May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too' — let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

I want to put forth a theological disclaimer as we begin today. Before us is a rather eyebrow-raising passage on prayer. It's not a common form of prayer in Scripture; in fact, one of the only similar examples of the kind of praying we see today is the case of Gideon's fleece in the sixth chapter of the book of Judges. The manner in which Abraham's servant entreats the Lord is, at the very least, not the "normal" way people ask for guidance from or pray to Almighty God in Scripture. It's not the usual pattern or example that we see on the pages of our Bible. Some, in fact, would go so far as to say that in the verses we've just read, Abraham's servant is being rather presumptuous in the way that he dictates the scenario in which he seeks the Lord's help.

At the same time, however, as rare as it is in Scripture, it is in Scripture nonetheless — and as much as we might call Abraham's servant presumptuous, looked at plainly and without bias we can just as easily see this prayer as simple, childlike, full of faith and expectation, and spoken in innocence. Here is a man who knows he needs help in fulfilling his master's wishes to his master's satisfaction, and so he boldly entreats his master's God to facilitate the desired outcome.

We'll unpack this passage verse by verse when we gather for tomorrow's EDiBS session, but for today, I want to do something just a bit different than usual: I want to share three brief accounts, all things that actually happened, of times when people entreated God's help or hand of blessing in rather nontraditional ways, and saw God very graciously answer their requests. Powerful things do indeed happen because of prayer — not because there is power in the one praying, but because there is power in the One hearing.

The first incident on my heart today is the case of famous Baptist pastor F.B. Meyer. One morning while crossing the Atlantic on an ocean liner, Dr. Meyer was asked to address the first class passengers. At the captain's request, he spoke on Answered Prayer. An agnostic man who was present at the service was asked by his friends, "What did you think of Dr. Meyer's sermon?" He answered, "I didn't believe a word of it." That afternoon Dr. Meyer went to speak to the steerage passengers, that is, those with the cheapest accommodations on the voyage. Many of the listeners from his morning address went along, including the agnostic gentleman, who claimed that he just wanted to "hear what the babbler had to say." As he was leaving his room for the service, the man put two oranges in his pocket. On his way, he passed an elderly woman sitting in her deck chair fast asleep. Her hands were open. In a spur-of-the-moment spirit of fun, he put the two oranges in her outstretched palms and went on to the meeting.

After Dr. Meyer had finished speaking and as his audience filed out of the room where the gathering had taken place, the skeptic saw the old lady happily eating one of the pieces of fruit. "You seem to be enjoying that orange," he remarked with a smile.

"Yes, sir," she replied, "My Father is very good to me."

"Your father? Surely your father can't be still alive!"

"Praise God," she replied, "He's very much alive!"

"What do you mean?" pressed the man.

She explained, "I'll tell you, sir. I've been seasick for days. I was asking God somehow to send me an orange. I suppose I fell asleep while I was praying. When I woke up, I found He'd not only sent me one orange but two!"

The man was speechless. Spurred on by the woman's testimony, he went to hear Dr. Meyer yet another time during the ship's journey across the ocean. As a result, he was converted to Christ, and he went on to serve the Lord with zeal for the remainder of his life.

The second instance of God working both miraculously and mysteriously has to do with well-known Christian apologist Josh McDowell. When he was a young man attending seminary in California, his father went home to be with the Lord. His mother had already died years earlier when Josh was very young, and as such, he wasn't sure of her salvation. He became depressed, thinking that she might be lost. Was she a Christian or not? The thought consumed him. "Lord," he prayed, "somehow give me the answer so I can get back to normal. I've just got to know." It seemed like an impossible request.

Two days later, Josh McDowell drove out to the ocean. He walked to the end of a pier to be alone. There sat an old woman in a lawn chair, fishing. Striking up small talk, she said, "Where are you from originally?"

"Michigan — Union City," Josh replied. "Nobody's heard of it. I tell people it's a suburb of..."

"...Battle Creek," interrupted the woman. "I had a cousin from there. Did you know the McDowell family?"

Stunned, Josh responded, "Yes, I'm Josh McDowell!"

"I can't believe it!" said the woman. "I'm a cousin to your mother!"

After a bit more conversation, McDowell hesitantly asked, "Do you remember anything at all about my mother's spiritual life?"

"Why sure," the woman said. "Your mom and I were just girls — teenagers — when a tent revival came to town one summer. It was the fourth night, and after the preacher spoke about Christ and shared the Gospel, we both responded to the message and became followers of Jesus. She was a Christian her whole life."

"Praise God!" He shouted. In that moment, God, in His great mercy, provided Josh McDowell with the answer he was seeking.

Finally, one more occasion in which God answered a rather untraditional prayer in a rather untraditional way was when James Gilmour, a missionary to Mongolia, was asked to treat some wounded soldiers. Although he wasn't a doctor, he did have some knowledge of first aid, so he didn't feel he could refuse the request. He dressed the wounds of two men, but a third had a badly broken thigh bone. Gilmour had no idea what to do for such an injury, and so kneeling beside the man, he asked the Lord for help. He didn't know how God would answer his prayers; he simply believed that somehow, his need would be supplied. Unfortunately, he couldn't find any books on physiology in the primitive hospital, and there was no doctor on duty either. To complicate matters, a crowd of beggars came to him asking for money. He was deeply concerned about his patient, yet his heart went out to the paupers who were surrounding him. Hurriedly, he gave them a small gift, plus a few kind words of spiritual encouragement.

A moment later, he stared in amazement at one weary beggar who had remained behind. The half-starved man was little more than a living skeleton...and it was then that Gilmour suddenly realized the Lord had just brought him a walking lesson in anatomy. He asked the elderly man if he might examine him, and after carefully tracing the femur bone with his fingers to learn how to treat the soldier's broken leg, he returned to his patient and was able to set the fracture.

Years afterward, Gilmour often related how God had provided him with a strange, yet sufficient response to his earnest prayer. It wasn't what he would have ever expected, but it was better than he could have ever hoped for.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, that's a good way to put an end on things for the session: so often when we pray, the answer and the manner in which it comes isn't what we would ever expect, but in almost every instance it's better than we could ever hope. Prayer, offered in faith, is a mighty thing, and the God to whom we pray is the One true God, the God who is in the business of lovingly and mercifully hearing the heart's cry of His people. When we raise our petitions to Him — even in ways that might be a little uncouth — we can be certain that the Lord is with us. He will always make a way for His people! We'll be talking about this more next time, so be sure to join in and be part of things. Thanks for your time today everyone; the joy of the Lord be your strength, and I'll see you again soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being here today, where as we get going with our study time we're continuing our look at Genesis 24. I'm glad for what's before us in the text, and I hope it will bless you as we work through it. Let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence, and we ask in this moment of quiet that you bless us with your Spirit and turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. It is life and salvation to us, and we are grateful for it. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're back to what we first looked at yesterday, where Abraham's servant has gone to the city of Nahor to see about finding a suitable wife for Isaac. Our focus: a faithful servant's faithful journey.

Genesis 24:10-14, Part 2

10Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and left, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor. 11He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. 12Then he prayed, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 13See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. 14May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too' — let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

Have you ever heard of Maryann's Law? It states, "You can always find what you're not looking for." Related to Maryann's Law is the Law of the Search, which states, "The first place to look for anything is the last place you'd expect to find it." Sometimes, though, even those tongue-in-cheek platitudes can't help a person who's in trouble. Former Senator Dwight Morrow once searched in vain to find his railroad ticket as he was on a train leaving New York City. "I must find that ticket," he muttered. The conductor, who stood waiting beside him, said, "Don't worry about it, Mr. Morrow. We know you had a ticket. Just mail it to the railroad when you find it." "That's not what's troubling me," replied the Senator. "I need to find it to know where I'm going."

As we come to today's reading in God's Word, the themes of journey-making, searching, and finding are all present. The one both taking the journey and doing the searching is Abraham's servant. Fortunately, his efforts yield much greater success than those of Senator Morrow. Abraham's servant knows exactly where he's going, knows exactly what he's looking for, and knows exactly how to go about finding it — and in the few minutes that we have in today's study session, we're simply going to flesh out the details of how it all comes together.

First, the journey. Our Bible tells us that Abraham's servant takes ten of his master's camels laden with all kinds of good things and sets out for Aram Naharaim, that is "Aram of the Two Rivers," which in English we would describe as the northwestern region of Mesopotamia. Once there he comes to the city of Nahor, which is named for Abraham's grandfather.

Question number one: Why does the servant take ten camels? First, the journey would be a long one of several hundred miles through the wilderness, which would require animals of great stamina which could carry many supplies. As a wealthy man, Abraham has many camels, and these would be the most suitable of his holdings for the task at hand. Camels, because they could carry such heavy loads, would also be able to transport the many good gifts carried along to be lavished upon a potential wife for Isaac. And finally, though Abraham's chief servant would lead this journey and have charge of it, there would be many other servants who would come along as well to provide general labor and protection during the trip. Ten camels, then, was evidently the number needed to outfit the caravan. This trip would be no small endeavor, and the large number of both people and beasts needed to support it would be designed not only to be practical, but present a show of Abraham's wealth and influence to the family of the young woman his servant would find.

Which leads us, incidentally, to the search at hand. Coming to the outskirts of Nahor, what does Abraham's servant do? Being that it's the end of the day, he stops near the well and waits for the women to come and draw water. What a clever idea, and how so? Setting things up in

this way gives him the opportunity to see all of the eligible maidens in the community at once. It's also in this place that Abraham's servant prays, and even here his cleverness comes through via the idea of the sign he comes up with. Should a woman not only offer to give him a drink, but offer to water his camels as well (an arduous job that we'll discuss more in our next session), it will help him to see that she possesses noble and desirable qualities; a woman who is hospitable, capable, industrious, and compassionate.

These wise actions on the part of Abraham's servant show us, at least in part, why Abraham finds him to be so trustworthy. Remember, Abraham has placed this man in charge of all that he has. He knows that his interests are being built up and protected at all times, and that's why he's sent him on this very important mission with such confidence. And yet as impressive as all that is, nowhere do we see this individual's wisdom and integrity more clearly than in his petition before the Lord, and before we close today we need to take a moment and address the significance of what's happening in his prayer.

First, note how he addresses God: "O Lord, *God of my master Abraham.*" Isn't God the God of this servant as well? Of course. But more to the point for the servant is that he's going on this mission on behalf of Abraham. Furthermore, he knows the nature of the relationship between Abraham and God – it's a relationship of covenant. That's why he asks for success based not on his own merits, but on the basis of that relationship. "Give me success and show kindness to my master Abraham," he says. The Hebrew word used here for kindness is *chesed*, which means mercy or steadfast lovingkindness. Why the use of this term? It's intentional: *chesed* is the kind of love that's based on and expressed in God's covenant relationship with His servant – which, not coincidentally at all, is another one of those incredible Old Testament pictures that points to something showing forth at its most incredible in the New Testament.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, this passage isn't one about asking for signs, *per se*; more than anything it's about asking God for help and guidance. Abraham's servant has asked this of the Lord based on the Lord's covenant relationship with his master. And though I won't spell it out in full today because I want you to chew on it a little bit yourself, guess what we do when we pray? We come to God based on a covenant relationship. Not an old one, but a new one, mediated by His own Son. When we come together tomorrow to close out the week, we'll get into that a bit more, but in the meantime, be thinking about your relationship with your Master and all that it means for you as you mark your journey in this world...your journey toward home.

Have a great day everyone, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon. Take care!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for joining in on this last day of our study week together; I hope the sessions we've been doing in this mid-section Genesis are proving to be fruitful for you in your walk with the Lord, and my prayer is that God through His Word is continually speaking to your heart and bringing transformation into your life. Today we're back in Genesis 24 with more to observe as Abraham's servant seeks a wife for Isaac, so let's pray as we go back to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have been gracious and kind to us, loving and compassionate, slow to anger and quick to forgive and restore. We thank you for your all-encompassing mercy in our lives, and as we come before you this day we do so mindful of our sin, mindful of the fact that we are

but dust, mindful that we are deserving only of temporal and eternal punishment. But we speak to you in faith today, sure of your willingness to forgive, sure of the atonement made for our sins through your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Look upon us according to His perfect sacrifice, and speak your Word into our hearts and minds to strengthen and restore us. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, even as Abraham's servant is still praying about a wife for Isaac, a young woman named Rebekah comes onto the scene and shows herself as one fitting the sign with which Abraham's servant had entreated the Lord. Our focus this session: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham!"

Genesis 24:15-28

15Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. 16The girl was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever lain with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again. 17The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar." 18"Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. 19After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking." 20So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. 21Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful. 22When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. 23Then he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" 24She answered him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor." 25And she added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night." 26Then the man bowed down and worshiped the Lord, 27saying, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives."

In the frigid waters around Greenland are countless icebergs, some little and some gigantic. If you'd observe them carefully, you'd notice that sometimes the small ice floes move in one direction while their massive counterparts flow in another. The explanation is simple. Surface winds drive the little ones, whereas the huge masses of ice are carried along by deep ocean currents.

As we go through life, it's helpful to see our lives as being subject to the same two forces — surface winds and ocean currents. The winds represent everything changeable, unpredictable, and even, at times, distressing. But operating simultaneously with these gusts and gales is another force that's even more powerful: the sure movement of God's wise purposes, the deep flow of His unchanging love.

As we look to God's Word today and see the unfolding outcome of the journey Abraham's servant has taken in a quest to find a wife for Isaac, we see those forces at work here as well. The winds have been steady and have doubtless taken him and his traveling companions every which way. Day to day tasks have been fluid and ever-changing. Nuts-and-bolts aspects of the trip have doubtless required flexibility and a willingness to make changes along the way to keep everyone together and to safeguard the caravan. In the end, though, Abraham's servant arrives where he had always planned to arrive — where he was meant to arrive. In the end, he

has come to fulfill the task for which he has been sent. In the end, regardless of the natural twists and turns along the way and the momentary gusts which may have turned him this way or that, here is a man, directed by the sure and steady hand of God, who has been moved by the deep current of Divine grace. There are little things, surface things, that have driven him in sometimes differing directions for a time. But through it all the Lord has been faithful to bring him to where he needs to be. And that's an incredibly comforting thing to know.

If you're feeling blown about today, or harried, or without a clear sense of direction in your life to lead you from where you are to where you're meant to be, take heart. Things on the surface may give you windburn. They may disorient you. They may even distress you in the moment. But as God's dearly loved child, purchased with the cleansing blood of His own Son, there is a greater force at work in your life right now. God is moving you — perhaps slowly, and maybe imperceptibly, but moving you just the same — in the sure direction of His will for your life. Don't let the natural twists and turns along the way or the momentary gusts which may be turning you this way or that distract you. Your Lord is control. He has you in the palm of His hand...and the deep flow of His unchanging love for you will never let you down or leave you stranded on your journey.

We have lots to talk about with respect to today's passage, and we'll follow it through when we're together next time, but today I felt the need to remind you of a more basic truth. Keep the faith, everyone, and remember to keep your eyes fixed heavenward. Jesus is coming soon! Have a great weekend, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon. God's peace, and the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for joining in on this first day of our study week together; Today we're back in Genesis 24 with more to say about Abraham's servant and his interaction with Rebekah. I'm happy to have you along; let's pray as we go back to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Almighty God, We thank you for your all-encompassing mercy in our lives. We bow before you in faith today, confident of your presence, confident of your willingness to forgive and restore us as we confess our sins, confident of the atonement made for us through your Son, our Savior,

the Lord Jesus Christ. Speak your Word into our hearts and minds to strengthen us in the moments ahead. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

Getting things started today, as Abraham's servant is in the midst of prayer asking the Lord for help in accomplishing that which Abraham has sent him to do, things begin to happen very quickly. Our focus: a life-changing day for Rebekah.

Genesis 24:15-28 (Part 2)

15Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. 16The girl was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever lain with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again. 17The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar." 18"Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. 19After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking." 20So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. 21Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful. 22When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. 23Then he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" 24She answered him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor." 25And she added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night." 26Then the man bowed down and worshiped the Lord, 27saying, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives." 28The girl ran and told her mother's household about these things.

When my kids were growing up on our little hobby farm in the Ozarks, one of their least-favorite chores was watering the animals each morning. Giving your poultry and livestock fresh drinking water is tedious, time-consuming, and just plain hard work. Water is heavy to carry, hard to balance, and easy to spill — plus, it gets you wet! Today my children retain some fond memories of farm life, but I can guarantee that they'll never wax poetic about their days of carrying water. It's a job they'll never miss.

As you might imagine, I'm thinking about my kids and their morning chores today because of something in the passage we've just read. We'll get to Rebekah and her amazing water skills in a moment, but as we kick things off and turn our attention back to the text after a weekend away, let's remember the setting: Abraham's servant is at the end of a 500+ mile journey from the deep south of the Negeb to the northeast corner of Mesopotamia. He's come to the edge of the city of Nahor in Haran, Abraham's original home place, where we currently find him in prayer over a matter of great importance. Sent by Abraham to find a suitable wife for Isaac, he's entreating the Lord for help and asking Him to reveal the right young woman to him via a detailed sign. It's as he's still in the midst of this prayer that, along with the other young women who have come out from town to draw water at the end of the day, Rebekah shows up. Why does she stand out? The text makes no bones about it: she's stunningly beautiful.

If mentioning beauty seems a bit politically incorrect in this day and age, so be it, but the simple truth is that Rebekah stands out, and this kind of description in Scripture is rare enough that its mention is notable. In sixty-six books written by forty human authors on three different continents over a time span of over 1,500 years, there are only ten women in all the Bible who are mentioned as being particularly beautiful. Along with Rebekah, the others are Sarah (Genesis 12), Rachel (Genesis 29), Abigail (1 Samuel 25), Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), Tamar (2

Samuel 14), Queen Vashti of the Persians (Esther 1), and Jemimah, Keziah, and Keren-Happuch, the three daughters of Job (Job 42). It's Rebekah's beauty that first captures the attention of Abraham's servant, and so he hurries to her in order to test his plan.

At this point, it's worth pointing out that while Abraham's servant is surely excited and intent on this meeting, if we look at it from Rebekah's side of the coin it's very much the same thing. Remember, Abraham's servant is not here solo. He's not a faceless little old man who just happened to show up on the edge of town like so many other sojourners do at this spring. No, Abraham's servant is leading a caravan. He has ten camels with him, all laden with riches beyond what the average person would see in a lifetime. He's a servant with servants, and make no mistake: the presence of this man and his men, the presence of these camels — indeed, the sheer size of this traveling group — is a spectacle. Everyone is whispering, wondering who this could be...and why, of all places, they're here in Nahor. It's like when I go home to southern California and spend the day at Laguna beach; every time a Ferrari or a Bentley or an Aston Martin drives by on Pacific Coast Highway, I and all the other people with me on the street wonder what famous movie star or musical artist might be inside. Rebekah is wise and astute. When approached by Abraham's servant, she clearly ascertains that there's more going on here than meets the eye. This is a moment, perhaps a marked moment, and more than that, a moment that she's about to be part of in a remarkable way. So when asked for a simple drink of water, she responds by going the extra mile. *Happy to oblige*, she says, *And while I'm at it, why don't you let me take care of your camels too.*

And what about taking care of those camels? Not to belabor the point, but the average camel can drink over 50 gallons of water in as little as three minutes. If it's not especially thirsty, it will drink more in the neighborhood of 30 gallons. For Rebekah to take care of ten camels, that means that at the very least she'll be drawing 300 gallons of water, and closer to 500 gallons on the high end. Considering that her water jar is most likely the typical size of 2-3 gallons, carried either on her shoulder or the top of her head, and considering further that one gallon of water weighs somewhere in the neighborhood of eight and a half pounds, this job is no small task. Yet she offers to do this of her own accord — and once again, I think the context of the current circumstance helps to explain why. This is not merely an ordinary act of hospitality on her part; this is the act of a young woman who has evaluated this situation and seen it for the extraordinary moment that it is. Rebekah has not only done what is right, she has done what is best. Her physical beauty may have given rise to this meeting, but the beauty of her character is what has truly risen to the occasion.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, from this point on everything is straight forward in the text. The exchange between these two is just as Abraham's servant had prayed it would be. Presenting Rebekah with gifts and asking about her family, he sees that the Lord has orchestrated that detail as well. Falling to his knees in thanksgiving, Abraham's servant worships the Lord for the manner in which He has led him to success and honored his master. And as for Rebekah? She hightails it to her mother's house to share all that has happened!

When we come back tomorrow to put a cap on this, what will we talk about? Will it be God's goodness as the Answerer of prayers? Will it be Abraham's servant and his faithful heart? Will it be Rebekah and her quiet, genteel wisdom? It might be a little of each...and it might be something that goes in another direction entirely before we're through! Do make plans to join in, and in the meantime, do have a great day in our gracious Lord Jesus Christ. Take care everyone, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! God's peace to each of you in Christ, and thanks for being here as we take some time to open God's Word together. As we come back to the 24th chapter of the Old Testament book of Genesis today, in this session we'll be considering some summary thoughts with regard to Rebekah and her impending life with Isaac, the man she's soon to marry. Let's pray as we go to the Scriptures, shall we?

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day and this time together to be in your Word, we place ourselves before you with humble anticipation, because we know what a great privilege it is to

open the Scriptures and learn of you and from you. Bless this time, we pray in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, it looks as though things are beginning to fall into place so far as the task given to Abraham's servant is concerned. His meeting of Rebekah, her fulfillment of the sign he had asked of the Lord, and the revelation that she is indeed of Abraham's kin checks all the boxes that need to be checked. These things give us a chance to look into the future just a bit, allowing us to make a few observations about all that's to come for Isaac and Rebekah. Our focus this session: An auspicious beginning...but will it hold?

Genesis 24:26-28

26Then the man bowed down and worshiped the Lord , 27saying, "Praise be to the Lord , the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives."
28The girl ran and told her mother's household about these things.

I've been reading quite a bit lately about the upcoming — or hopefully upcoming — summer Olympics. Jen Kirby, who writes for Vox, recently penned a piece that asked, and attempted to answer, the question on everyone's mind: *Will the 2020 Tokyo Olympics happen in 2021?* If you've been following the news, then you know that this has been an exceedingly difficult decision to make in light of the pandemic and the attendant health and economic issues that have gone along with it. The plan as of the end of January was to go ahead — but with the coronavirus still raging in many parts of the world, and with the reality that the global vaccination campaign will take time, the question of whether it's possible to safely go forward with the games is reemerging. If the International Olympic Committee is able to clear the many, many hurdles standing in the way of a safe gathering of the world's finest athletes, it will truly be one of the greatest Olympic victories of all time.

The challenges facing the IOC right now remind me of a unique event that the ancient Greeks had in some of the earliest Olympic games. It was a foot race where the winner wasn't the one who finished first, but the one who finished with his torch still lit. It wasn't so much about beating everyone in the field, but about getting across the finish line in tact. The contest was a long one and the challenge was surprisingly difficult. But the honor and accolades given to the victor were among the greatest prizes of the games.

Today we see the beginning of just that kind of race. A torch has been lit. It's about to be placed into the hands of a young woman preparing to leave the starting blocks. Her future is bright, and all eyes are upon her. In the heady excitement surrounding the beginning of the event, she's considered a shoo-in for victory. But this contest, so to speak, will be a long one. It will be rife with challenges. And while her flame is burning bright and strong at the moment, the finish line is far beyond the horizon. Rebekah will have many strides to take before she gets there.

As we'll see in our next session, everything regarding the present course of events regarding Rebekah's future will be settled agreeably and amicably between Abraham's servant and Rebekah's father and brother, and she will soon be going south to the land of Canaan to marry Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah will have a marriage characterized by Isaac's love for his wife...but there will be problems along the way. For many years, Rebekah will be barren; she will be unable to have children. Isaac will intercede on her behalf, and in answer to his prayers, God

will ultimately open Rebekah's womb. She'll become pregnant with twins: Jacob and Esau. From these twins, however — the first twins in the Bible, by the way — will arise two nations deeply at odds with one another. Jacob, whose name will later be changed to Israel, will become the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Esau will become the father of the Edomites, who will war against Israel for years upon years...for literally ages upon ages.

It's in that portion of Rebekah's race that she will begin to stumble. It's there that her torch will begin to flicker. Though Esau will be born first, younger Jacob will be Rebekah's favorite. Though Esau will be due the birthright, Rebekah will help Jacob deceive Isaac so that the blessing will fall to him instead. When Esau discovers Jacob and Rebekah's deceit and plans to kill Jacob, Rebekah will devise a plan to help save her favorite son, but it will again involve deceiving Isaac. Today we commonly, and rightly so, call Jacob the supplanter, the deceiver, the "ankle grabber" of the Bible. But the truth is that deceit is a family trait, and Rebekah, at some of the most critical junctures in her life, will employ it for the sake of the outcomes she desires. The question is, do those things serve to extinguish her torch?

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the question is an honest one, and a solemn, sobering one as well. I don't know about you, but when I look at my own race, I can select any number of stretches where my actions have caused me to stumble and where my flame has been dangerously close to flickering out. It's called sin. I'm an expert at it, and so are you. We all stumble in the race. We all fumble with the torch. We've all had moments in time and seasons in life where, looking back, we are supremely un-proud and ashamed; times where we have played favorites or walked as deceivers or manipulated things for the sake of the outcomes we have desired. And they're not just in the past; we contend with them almost every day. These are hard things. Challenging things. Life-robbing things. We'd rather not wear them on our race jersey, but there they are, like a number across our chest.

But for a moment, let's consider something:

Rebekah's marriage to Isaac was the result of God's providence. Her pregnancy was an answer to prayer. The lives of her sons fulfilled prophecy. Rebekah's playing of favorites with her children and her choices to lie and deceive her husband were wrong, and there were long-term consequences that came from them, but through it all God was still in the picture. Through it all God was still exercising His will. And through it all God's redemptive plan for humanity continued to move forward, in spite of (and un-ironically, *because* of) the unfaithfulness of those through whom He was working. This is one of literally dozens of examples we can point to from Scripture that shows how the real Carrier of the torch in our lives is our wise, kind, and compassionate Lord. Though we are masters of going off course and would never complete the race on our own, we have a Master who has run the race before us. Though we would thwart His strides to bring us across the finish line, God is not "thwartable," and despite our sin, through His mercy, and by His grace, in His Son He has sent us the One in whom we have won...the Victor in and through whom we ourselves have victory. When we come back tomorrow to continue our foray into the start of Rebekah's great "race," as it were, be thinking about all that's to come for her. Think of the sorrow, but also think of the joy. Remember the deceit, but remember also the blessing in spite of it. God was so good to her. He loved her so. And so He is good and loves us as well! Have a great day everyone, and I'll see you again next time. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to be with you today, where as we get going with our Bible study time we're working our way toward the end of Genesis 24, a lengthy section of the book that describes the coming together of Isaac and Rebekah. In moving through this section of God's Word we've observed a lot about Middle Eastern culture and customs common in the days of Abraham, but more important, we've been marking all the different ways God has shown

Himself to be in the midst of Abraham's search for the woman who will become his son's wife. Thanks so much for being here; let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence, and we ask in this moment that you would bless us with your Spirit and turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. We are grateful for it, knowing that it speaks truth and gives life. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His holy name this day, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've come to a rather unique portion of Genesis 24...unique because all of what Abraham's servant speaks in these verses to Laban and Bethuel is an almost verbatim retelling of what he said at the beginning of the chapter. Though we would never skip over a section of God's Word in our daily EDiBS time, sometimes in an instance like this the best thing we can do is simply give ourselves to its hearing and ask God to bring our hearts and minds to a place of deeper insight and understanding. That's what we're going to do today — with no attendant study remarks save for a very brief introduction to explain that this entire sequence is the opening of a traditional back-and-forth conversation between two families as they discuss the potential marriage of their children. We'll get into that subject more in tomorrow's session, but for now, please join me as we give our attention to the Word of the Lord.

Genesis 24:29-49

29Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. 30As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. 31"Come, you who are blessed by the Lord," he said. "Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." 32So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet. 33Then food was set before him, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say." "Then tell us," Laban said.

34So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. 35The Lord has blessed my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, and camels and donkeys. 36My master's wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. 37And my master made me swear an oath, and said, 'You must not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live, 38but go to my father's family and to my own clan, and get a wife for my son.' 39"Then I asked my master, 'What if the woman will not come back with me?' 40"He replied, 'The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey a success, so that you can get a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father's family. 41Then, when you go to my clan, you will be released from my oath even if they refuse to give her to you—you will be released from my oath.' 42"When I came to the spring today, I said, 'O Lord, God of my master Abraham, if you will, please grant success to the journey on which I have come. 43See, I am standing beside this spring; if a maiden comes out to draw water and I say to her, 'Please let me drink a little water from your jar,' 44and if she says to me, 'Drink, and I'll draw water for your camels too,' let her be the one the Lord has chosen for my master's son.'

45"Before I finished praying in my heart, Rebekah came out, with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water, and I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' 46"She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too.' So I

drank, and she watered the camels also. 47" I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' "She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.' "Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, 48and I bowed down and worshiped the Lord . I praised the Lord , the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son. 49Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn."

So far God's Word this day — God's Word which shows very clearly God's hand in all things great and small!

Spend some time thinking through this passage. Consider the specificity and the details. Put yourself in the shoes of Abraham's servant as he recounts — surely with a sense of awe — his journey to his hosts, and then put yourself in the shoes of Rebekah's family as they listen to this fascinating story. This is nothing less than a narrative for the ages, and when we come back next time to see the final outcome and connect some important theological dots, we'll have the opportunity to experience our own sense of awe as we see the imprint of Almighty God throughout this account...indeed, from beginning to end.

Have a terrific day everyone — God's peace, and God-willing, I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks for being here today for our study time in God's Word; I pray that our next few minutes together will be profitable for you as we open the Scriptures together. As we close out Genesis 24 and move through the first several verses of Genesis 25 this week, we'll be coming to the end of Part 2 in our four-part series in the book of Genesis. Over the past 13 chapters we've covered the life of Abraham. With his death at the beginning

of chapter 25, we'll say goodbye for a time to this first book of the Bible and return for Part 3 of this series in the not-too-distant future. I'll have more to share about all that's coming up as we go through the week together, but for now, let's open our Bibles and return to Abraham's servant and Rebekah's father and brother as they discuss the framework of the impending marriage between her and Isaac. Take a moment, prepare your heart, and let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Father, have mercy on us today. As always, we are in need of your ministering presence in our lives. Thank you for your promise to be with us always; for the promise that you will never leave us or forsake us. We especially ask that you would draw near to us now as we study your Word. Use it to transform us by the renewing of our minds. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Abraham's servant, having recounted in the presence of Rebekah's family the events leading up to his meeting with her, now receives the reaction of her father and brother. Our focus: "This is from the Lord."

Genesis 24:50-51

50Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. 51Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has directed."

Christians say it often: what God ordains, He orchestrates. In other words, if God wills something to happen in a given situation, He will make a way and bring it to pass. These days, many Christians call such instances "God Moments."

God Moments are special times when it's clear to us that God has intervened and shown Himself in an exceptional way. When they come, we marvel at them and rejoice in them. We often bow in worship and give thanks. Perhaps it's a clear answer to prayer, a sudden revelation of His will, or provision for a need; perhaps it's something entirely different. Every moment is unique.

God Moments are, I believe, important for us to recognize. Scripture is chock-full of them, and today's brief reading is just one example. Here we see the Lord both ordaining and orchestrating the events that lead to Abraham's servant finding Rebekah. Here we see God's will being brought to bear in a matter which is very important not only to Abraham as Isaac's father, but to Abraham as the exalted father of the people whom God will raise up through him. As such, this thing which will shortly be brought to fruition — this clear and divinely wrought thing — will prove to be a monumental moment not just for Abraham's family, but for God's entire family of faith. The joining together of Isaac and Rebekah will be yet another step forward on the path of God's redemptive plan for humanity in a Savior that will come through this very line.

God moments, in so many ways, become special teaching moments that our gracious Lord uses to minister to us and to others through us. They increase our faith. They cause us to pause and consider the greatness of our Creator Redeemer and Sustainer. They move us to deeper worship.

In modern Christendom especially, however, there's a weakness that sometimes shows itself among God's people when it comes to God Moments. That weakness is a tendency to see only extraordinary things as being divinely ordained and orchestrated...to limit "God moments" to only those special events we notice and appreciate. The truth, though, is that God works all

things together for good...every thing together for good...to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. Every event and occurrence is special in His eyes, and so that opens wide the door for us to see things in that very same way. It's just that we don't.

It's a fair question: How many of God's activities bypass our recognition because they don't seem out of the ordinary enough for us to see them as coming from Him? As you ponder that, I think a quote from Luther might help us to recenter our thinking on this matter — help us remember that indeed, every activity and every event in our life is a God moment. Here's what the great reformer wrote:

God's wonderful works which happen daily are lightly esteemed, not because they are of no import but because they happen so constantly and without interruption. Man is used to the miracle that God rules the world and upholds all creation, and because things daily run their appointed course, it seems insignificant, and no man thinks it worth his while to meditate upon it and to regard it as God's wonderful work, and yet it is a greater wonder than that Christ fed five thousand men with five loaves and made wine from water.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, many years ago a pastor by the name of Jerry Schmoyer was meditating on how to help Christians be more mindful of God's great acts in their midst, and he came up with the following questions and suggestions which I've found to be helpful in my own thinking and praying. I think they will be for you too. Schmoyer wrote,

Think of some of the recent, clear God moments in your life. Why did God provide them for you? What will your response be?

How can you use these God moments to teach and encourage others?

Where has God been working in your life that you may have forgotten to give Him the credit?

What difficulties are you experiencing that God has willed or allowed for a purpose?

Finally,

Take a day and make a very conscious effort all that day to notice how and when God works in your life — in both obvious and subtle ways. Carry a paper and pencil to write them down so you can read over them at the end of the day. This will help keep your eyes on Him rather than of the world around you.

So far Pastor Schmoyer, and so far our time together for today! Have a terrific Monday everyone, and when we come back tomorrow we'll begin to wind down our time in Genesis 24 by taking a bit of a magnifying glass to the final verses in the text. Until then, Christ's peace, take care, and do take joy in knowing that your Lord is with you. I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everybody! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich peace to you as you come to the table for another day of Bible study. In today's time we've come to our second-to-last session of Genesis 24, and we'll soon be moving into the opening of Genesis 25 to say goodbye both to Abraham and to what's been the second part of our four-part series in this first book of the Bible. While Genesis-Part 2 is quickly coming to a close, Part 3 is

currently in research and note-taking mode, and I'll begin the writing phase later this year — so do be looking for it at a future date! Our next steps will be taking us back to the New Testament for a time, and I'll be sharing more with you about that tomorrow and on Thursday. For now, thanks so much for coming along today; let's begin as we bow our heads and come before our heavenly Father.

Prayer

Almighty God, what a loving and compassionate Lord you are. Thank you for the assurance that because you sent your only Son to live for us and die in our place, because your Son rose again from the dead to proclaim victory over sin death and the devil for all time and eternity, we are now a people with a hope and a future. Please draw close to us and bless our study time today, that we grow ever stronger in our most holy faith. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Rebekah's family has recognized the hand of the Lord in the journey of Abraham's servant, his meeting of Rebekah, and the sign he's received indicating that she's the one God has chosen to be Isaac's wife. Our focus this session: the return to Canaan.

Genesis 24:52-61

52When Abraham's servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground before the Lord . 53Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother. 54Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night there. When they got up the next morning, he said, "Send me on my way to my master." 55But her brother and her mother replied, "Let the girl remain with us ten days or so; then you may go." 56But he said to them, "Do not detain me, now that the Lord has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master." 57Then they said, "Let's call the girl and ask her about it." 58So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said. 59So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men. 60And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies." 61Then Rebekah and her maids got ready and mounted their camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

I've mentioned many times over the years to those of you in our EDiBS family that Walter Wangerin, Jr. is among my favorite writers. Many years ago, he took some heat for something he wrote about marriage. Why? Because he had the gall to say that some of the nuts-and-bolts aspects of marriage can, at times, be more important and carry more weight than its more emotional or sentimental parts. In part, Wangerin wrote,

Marriage is not romanticized in the creation account. Its ideal purpose is not one of sweet feeling, tender words, poetical affections or physical satisfactions — not "love" as the world defines love in all its nasal songs and its popular shallow stories.

If that wasn't scandalous enough, he went even further by asserting that

...Marriage is meant to be flatly practical. Moreover, marriage is not an end in itself, but a preparation. We've accomplished no great thing, yet, in getting married. We have completed a relationship (though many a fool assumes that the hard work's done with the wedding and turns attention to other interests). Rather, we've established the terms by which we now will go to work.

Wangerin's assertions certainly aren't dripping with honey, and they're not the kind of thing to bring up in a casual conversation with no context. But as any of you who are married can attest, there's truth to his words nonetheless. A marriage does have many cherished moments, and to be sure, there's also the sharing of deep emotions and tender words. But it isn't all sweetness and light; there truly are aspects of the marital relationship that, out of necessity, focus on the practical, the mundane, and the everyday. At times, marriage is indeed about going to work.

As we come to God's Word today, it's understandably hard to muster any feelings of romance as we read about the sealing of the marriage agreement that takes place between the family representatives of Isaac and Rebekah. It all seems so transactional. In fact, it frankly feels like a business deal, complete with all the attendant back-and-forth haggling over details that one would expect with a real estate contract or when purchasing a vehicle. In one sense, of course, we simply need to understand that what we're witnessing here is the common cultural practice of a certain people from a certain era. Arranged marriages, complete with things like gift-giving, the negotiating of dowries, or even the forming of political or military alliances, are *de rigueur* for the time. What we're seeing, therefore, is not out of the ordinary in the least.

One striking and very significant anomaly in this passage, however, is that when things get a bit dicey towards the end...when Rebekah's mother is perhaps having some second thoughts or when Rebekah's brother Laban is perhaps rethinking the terms of the agreement and hoping for a bit more favorable financial outcome, thus pressing for a delay in Rebekah's departure... it's Rebekah herself who is given the final say in the matter. God's Word does not show her to be a pawn in the hands of others; rather, she is the queen of the chessboard, and whether to stay or go is her decision.

Yet in another sense — and an extremely important one at that — there's far more going on here than the sealing of your regular, garden-variety, ancient Middle Eastern marriage agreement. On the contrary, and as we've already said, this is a moment in time ordained and orchestrated by the Lord Himself. This is a moment where the joining together of two people — Rebekah and Isaac — will serve to further and to bring closer to fulfillment God's plan of salvation for the human race through the coming of the promised Messiah. This is one special event in what will be a long string of special events that shows the gracious and merciful hand of God at work — even as He brings two people together whose marriage will go to work for His good purposes.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, is this union going to be one void of the more emotional and sentimental parts that are part and parcel of a good marriage? Will this partnership be one absent love and tenderness? Not at all. One of the very first things Scripture tells us after Isaac and Rebekah marry is that he loves her, and she comforts him. There will most certainly be a bond. And though their union will also most certainly have its ups and downs just like any other marriage, their life together will be one of passion and purpose in addition to the seasons of the punitive and the painful. Their marriage will be one with God in its midst. We'll talk about that more next time, so do make plans to join in for tomorrow's study time.

Thanks for being here today, everyone; I'm grateful for each one of you, and as you often are, you'll be in my prayers as I go through the day. Take care, and may the joy of our Lord Jesus be your hope and peace!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody — grace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for clicking in today as we continue to work through the Old Testament book of Genesis together, where over the next few minutes we'll be finishing out our time in Genesis 24. Having arrived at the midpoint moment in our week, now is a good time to let you know that as we wind down our current series in Genesis and close things off on Friday, come Monday we'll be going back to the New Testament for a season, this time in a trip through the

book of 2 Corinthians. Full of all the richness of Christ and the reality of the reconciliation that comes to our lives through Him, 2 Corinthians will challenge us, encourage us, and comfort us as God's people in Christ, and it will also anchor us in an ocean of forgiveness and mercy — from our Lord Jesus to us and from us to one another. Be sure to invite your friends and loved ones along as we step into what I know will be a powerful and practical time in God's Word!

We have several important points to make note of in today's session, so let's pray and begin. I'm so glad you're here!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Abraham's servant, returning to Canaan with Rebekah, comes upon Isaac, who is meditating in a field. Our focus: a meet-up and a marriage.

Genesis 24:62-67

62Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. 63He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. 64Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel 65and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?" "He is my master," the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself. 66Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. 67Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Back when it was still the *San Diego Union*, prior to its merger with the *Evening Tribune* and its subsequent renaming as the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, there was Michael Grant. If you're a person of a certain age, you may very well know of him. He was a writer extraordinaire, a columnist with few equals, and whether he was writing about a potato chip or a tennis tournament, the joys of work or the dastardly nature of disobedient pets, he was a thrice-weekly destination for thousands of readers for over fifteen years. He died a couple of years ago now, but I still go back and read his archives. He was that good.

Recently, doing just that, I ran across an ode he composed for his wife and the marriage they shared. He wrote,

We continue to adjust to each other, an adjustment that started 19 years ago and will never stop because we each continue to grow and change. We will always be different. I think of anniversaries as a time for roses and dinner; she prefers Mexican food and a movie. For Halloween she thinks apples are a good treat; I say, since when did Halloween have anything to do with nutrition? Don't mistake it for a solid marriage. There is no such thing. Marriage is more like an airplane than a rock. You have to commit the thing to flight, and then it creaks and groans, and keeping it airborne depends entirely on attitude. Working at it, though, we can fly forever. Only she and I know how hard it has been, or how worthwhile.

In today's reading from God's Word, we are spectators standing alongside a runway. A plane is about to lift off. A new plane. A marriage plane. Its occupants are Isaac and Rebekah, and we have happened upon them just as they're committing their relationship to flight. Like many relationships, here is a marriage that through the years will have more than its fair share of creaking and groaning. In fact, keeping it airborne will be a challenge for the ages. And yet...

and yet as hard as it will be, in the end it will be more worthwhile than either of them could have ever imagined. There's plenty of turbulence ahead for this couple to be sure, but make no mistake: Isaac and Rebekah are about to fly.

Today's passage is in many ways a simple telling of how these two finally meet and marry. Abraham's servant, faithful in his task to bring a suitable bride home for Isaac, now presents her to Isaac, and it just so happens to occur in the field where he's meditating at eventide. After hearing his father's servant recount all that has occurred, the text explains what happens next: Isaac takes Rebekah into the tent of his late mother Sarah, and the two marry. So it is that they become husband and wife.

While we could spend time today talking about the reasons for Rebekah's veil, or the significance of Isaac taking Rebekah into Sarah's tent, or even discussing the nature of Isaac's meditation, there's something else present in all of this that calls for our attention over and above those other details. What is it? Scholars are quick to point out that in a subtle but very clear manner, the entire story arc of Isaac and Rebekah is in reality a remarkable picture — a remarkable foreshadowing — of the coming together of Jesus and His people. Consider this:

A father desired a bride for his son.

That son was accounted as dead and then raised (one figuratively and the other literally) from the dead.

A servant was sent forth to get the bride for the son.

The bride was divinely met, chosen, and called, and then lavished with gifts.

The bride was also entrusted to the care of the servant until she met her bridegroom.

Consider further that as Isaac loved his bride, Jesus loves His Church. We can summarize the pictures of Isaac, Rebekah, Jesus, and the Church this way:

Both Rebekah and the Church:

- Were chosen for marriage before they knew it.
- Were necessary for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose.
- Were destined to share in the glory of the son.
- Learned of the son through his representative.
- Were called to leave all they had once known to be with the son.
- Were loved and cared for by the son.

Similarly, both Isaac and Jesus:

- Were promised before their coming.
- Finally appeared at the appointed time.
- Were conceived and born miraculously.
- Were given a special name before birth.
- Were offered up in sacrifice by the father.
- Were brought back from the dead (again, one figuratively and the other literally).
- Prepared a place for their bride.

While we don't ever want to allegorize God's Word and have it say something that it clearly doesn't say, there are nonetheless many times when, with sure clarity, certain pictures and patterns and pathways emerge in Scripture that point us from prophecy to prophecy fulfilled;

that move us from the promise of a Messiah who will come to save the world from sin to the very Person and work of the Messiah Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wrapping Up

So it is that as we wrap things up for the day, in this portion of Genesis through the narrative of Isaac and Rebekah, the picture, the pattern, and the pathway to Jesus and His coming are all plainly seen. That, in my estimation, is a supremely beautiful thing...and when we come back tomorrow to pick things up again, we'll delve into it some more.

Thanks for your time, everyone — God bless you richly in our loving Savior, and God-willing, I'll see you then. Take care, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you today, and as you open up your Bibles and ask the Lord to teach you over these next few minutes, I know that you'll be blessed as a result. Because of yesterday's one-off session about God picking up the pieces in our lives when we break, we're picking up at the beginning of Genesis 25 a day later than planned. Still, I trust that yesterday's time was helpful for many of you, and I pray that you were both encouraged and able to send

encouragement to others through it. Thanks for being here; let's pray and ask our Almighty God to go before us as we open His Word.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we do ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 25 begins with a rather surprising aside that catches many people off guard when they come across it. Our focus this session: Abraham's wife...not Sarah, but Keturah.

Genesis 25:1-6

Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. 3Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan; the descendants of Dedan were the Asshurites, the Letushites and the Leummites. 4The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoah, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah. 5Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. 6But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.

Jeremy Taylor was a bishop in the Church of England in the 17th century. Remembered today not just for his theological acumen but especially for his skill with the pen, he once wrote beautifully about the blessing of a good wife:

If you are for pleasure, marry. If you prize rosy health, marry. A good wife is heaven's last best gift to a man; his angel of mercy; minister of graces innumerable; his gem of many virtues; his box of jewels; her voice, his sweetest music; her smiles, his brightest day; her kiss, the guardian of innocence; her arms, the pale of his safety. She is the balm of his health; the balsam of his life; her industry, his surest wealth; her economy, his safest steward; her lips, his faithful counselors...and her prayers, the ablest advocates of heaven's blessing on his head.

Many people who read those words would understandably think of Proverbs 31, but perhaps because of what we've been studying together over the past several months, my mind fixes on Sarah. Was Sarah perfect? Of course not...just as Abraham was also far from perfect. Did she always counsel her husband rightly? Again, no...just as Abraham on many occasions did a disservice to Sarah by his own unwise counsel. But Sarah was an incredible woman. In a wild, unpredictable up-and-down life, she stood firm in her commitment to her husband and to God, and her commitment was rewarded with blessing. As we've mentioned before, Scripture holds her up to us in places like 1 Peter and Hebrews as an example of a holy woman who hoped in God and as an example of faith. Let me say it one more time: Sarah was indeed an incredible woman.

Sarah, let's be clear, is not replaceable. Her long life with her husband was special and unique. No one could ever take her place or her position, never erase Abraham's memories of her, never cause him to forget her. But as is sometimes the case when one's spouse dies, after a time another relationship may develop. Another person may bring the spark of love and joy to one's life...not ever in the same way as before, but in a different and special way of its own. And yes, sometimes the end result of that kind of relationship is another marriage. Today, God's Word shows us that this is what happens in Abraham's life when he remarries following Sarah's death.

Who is this woman? Her name is Keturah. We hardly ever hear of her in Scripture or talk about her in our Bible classes, and it's frankly pretty easy to forget that Abraham ever even had this second wife. But here she is on the pages of our Bible, and here we see that, far from being a mere footnote in Abraham's life, Keturah and he have six sons together — sons who would ultimately become the progenitors and founders of nations, specifically the Arabian tribes east of Israel.

Now — concerning Keturah, there's a bit of a mystery. What kind of mystery? There's been some debate as to her status...that is, whether she was truly Abraham's wife or more of his concubine. The reason for the discussion is that she's actually described each way in different parts of Scripture. Here at the beginning of Genesis 25, God's Word very clearly says that Keturah is his wife. In the first chapter of 1 Chronicles, however, she's called his concubine. Verse six in today's reading also hints at the idea that Keturah may have been more in the category of a concubine — at least legally speaking.

We've talked about this more in-depth in other study sessions over the years, but for our purposes today let's remember just briefly that a concubine in those ancient times was a woman who willingly entered into an exclusive relationship with a man for two main purposes: that of meeting his sexual desires, and/or that of providing children for him. In return, such a woman would receive care, protection, and enjoy special privileges as part of the household, even though she was not a spouse. Sometimes such a woman was a servant. Other times she might be a single female without any male protectors in her family, something considered very culturally important in that day. Depending on the nature of the relationship, a concubine may have been truly loved and may have enjoyed a deep, genuine, emotional and physical intimacy with the man — and in such cases, she would often be referred to, and be similar in status as, a wife. When it came to children, however, the legal difference between a concubine and a wife was clear: any offspring coming from the womb of a concubine were given gifts and sometimes other special favors, but they would never, ever be part of the family's inheritance.

This is what makes Keturah's case so difficult to parse. The six sons born to her and to Abraham were given gifts and sent away as if Keturah was a concubine instead of a wife. But the waters become muddied when we remember the spiritual importance connected to all of this. The main reason Abraham treated the six sons born to him by Keturah the way he did wasn't because he considered his sons' mother to be his concubine rather than his wife; it was to protect Isaac's inheritance as the child of promise, and it was to keep the integrity of God's declaration regarding the land of Canaan intact. God's Word doesn't give us enough information about the life these two shared to make a judgement regarding their closeness or the kind of partnership they had. To be sure, it does seem clear that Abraham and Keturah enjoyed their connectedness and the nature of their relationship. But it also seems clear that in the bigger picture, Keturah held a lesser rank than Sarah had enjoyed as Abraham's first beloved.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, to our sensibilities as God's people living in the 21st century, much of this may seem rather gauche and distasteful, and I completely understand the bad taste being left in some of your mouths at the moment. The truth, though, is rather plain and uncomplicated: these were very different times with very different cultural norms and very differently structured relationships than what exists in the world today. Did God approve of such things? Implicitly, the answer would be a resounding 'no,' and while that's another topic for another time, suffice it to say that God's original plan for marriage — to be between one man and one woman — didn't include things like concubinage or polygamy. Again, we'll discuss this subject at a later date, because it's an important one to address. For now, we'll close things off and head into the weekend, and when we return on Monday we'll have one

final session in Genesis together before moving back to the New Testament for our study time each day. Have a great couple of days, everyone! God's peace, and I hope to see you soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you for a new week in the Scriptures together, where today we'll be saying goodbye to one series — for the time being, at least — and tomorrow we'll be saying hello to a new one! My prayers for you are increasing in these days where we see so much that reminds us of our need — and

indeed, the world's need — for that which only Jesus Christ can provide. My heart's desire is that you're growing in Christ, growing in your knowledge of His love for you, and all the while growing in your understanding of His holy Word as well. Thanks for coming along today; I'm glad you're here for our last session in Genesis. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on this day we bless your holy name and ask that you bless the teaching of your Word. Help us to see in the Scriptures, through your servant Abraham, your call for a steadfast heart that seeks you above all else. We love you, and we thank you as always for this time. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, after a life full of challenges, adventures, and untold blessings, Abraham's time in the world comes to a close. Our focus this session: Passing on...and passing on.

Genesis 25:7-11

7Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. 8Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. 9His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, 10the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. 11After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.

A man I deeply loved and from whom I learned a great deal in life — my choir director in college — was a bright, cheerful person with a huge heart and a very generous spirit. Fastidious in his work, his attention to detail was legendary. He missed nothing. Of his students, he expected nothing short of their best efforts, and when they were lacking in that regard, he didn't hesitate to let them know. Before Lexus was ever a brand...before its first commercial ever hit the airwaves identifying its automobiles with the slogan "The Relentless Pursuit of Perfection"...Professor Bisbee had us as his students "Striving for Excellence." That was our motto for the first couple of years we were together at Christ College Irvine. Those of us in choir were shocked when, at the beginning of our third year together, he gave us a new motto: "Serving through Excellence." He never said it out loud, but it wasn't lost on any of us: he was proud of us and how we had matured and developed. He believed in us. And because we knew he was a man who never cut corners, we also knew that he never would have used those words of us if he didn't believe them himself.

Those words were made all the more powerful for me when I'd remember something else Professor Bisbee told us on occasion. As much importance as he placed on personal development, high achievement, and an uncompromising commitment to being one's best, there were also times when, looking at us in rehearsal from his place at the piano, he would simply say, "No one is indispensable." Not us. Not him. Not anyone. Any of us could vanish from the face of the earth on a Monday, and on Tuesday the world would keep going as it always had. It was his gentle way — he always said it gently — of reminding us that above all else in this world, as God's people we are servants and vessels. We do what we've been given to do for as long as we're given to do it, and when our time is done, the baton will be passed and others will take up the work.

On this last day in Part Two of our four-part series in the book of Genesis, we've come to the place of bidding Abraham goodbye. After sojourning in the world for a hundred and seventy-five years, his time has come. The Bible describes him as old and full of years...a "good old

age,” in fact. Here is a man whose life has most certainly been one lived to the full as a servant and vessel of Almighty God.

A brief survey of Scripture will tell even a casual researcher that after Abraham passed from the scene, he didn't fade away. Quite to the contrary, he remained one of the most important men both of the Bible and of salvation history as a whole from generation to generation, a position he holds to this very day. When we look to the New Testament, for example, we see Abraham mentioned 70 times. Only Moses is mentioned more. And while we've discussed continually during our study of his life and times that by many measures Abraham's life was far from perfect, he was nonetheless a man of great faith who had a close relationship with the living God. In both the Old and New Testaments, in fact, Abraham is actually called the friend of God — and so he's remembered and honored for good reason.

Something to remember, however, is that this friend of God was still just a man. This friend of God was a sinner in need of salvation, like every other person born into the world — the exception being our Lord Jesus Christ, who would one day come onto the scene through Abraham's line. In so many ways we can call Abraham a great man...but still, at the end of the day he was only a man. That's why we see that at the end of his life, beyond a few words in memoriam the Bible simply says, “After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.” Translation: Abraham did what he had been given to do. He did it for as long as he was given to do it. And when his time was done, the baton was passed — this time to the next generation: now his son would take up the work. What work? That of being a servant and a vessel of Almighty God and His redemptive plan and purpose for the world.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, eighteenth century scholar Adam Clarke, a Methodist clergyman, is known for a eulogy of sorts he once prepared on Abraham's life as part of a sermon he was preaching about faith. It's a great character summary of the man we've studied over the past thirteen chapters, but in its pithy, old-school manner, it also leaves us with a wonderful devotional thought — a fitting way for us to end. He wrote, “Above all as a man of God, he stands unrivaled; so that under the most exalted and perfect of all dispensations, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he is proposed and recommended as the model and pattern according to which the faith, obedience, and perseverance of the followers of the Messiah are to be formed. Reader, while you admire the man, do not forget the God that made him so great, so good, and so useful. Even Abraham had nothing but what he had received; from the free unmerited mercy of God proceeded all his excellences; but he was indeed a worker for God, and therefore did not receive the grace of God in vain. Go thou, believe, love, obey, and persevere in like manner.”

That will do it for today, everyone; I'm so glad you clicked in, and I hope that this second part of our Genesis series has been a blessing to you! Part three will be coming down the line soon! God's rich and abundant blessings to each of you in our Savior, and I'll see you again next time for more time in God's Word. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome, and God's peace to you on this Monday edition of EDiBS! Here at the beginning of a new week we've come to a new place in our continuing study of God's Word — part three of our four-part series in the book of Genesis. As we get into this new portion of the first book in the Bible, I want to take a moment and say how glad I am to have

you coming along, and as always, if you know someone who would benefit from this time in the Scriptures each day, be sure to let them know. It's a great way to share your faith! Thanks for your time today, everyone; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you once again for the blessing to be in your presence. We are grateful for you, grateful to be here together with you, and grateful to know that we can confidently for your gracious leading as we go about the business of preparing to hear your Word now and in the days ahead. Equip us as your people through our study of Genesis, to the end that we all grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we'll be doing the briefest of reviews, followed by the briefest of set-ups in order to get up to speed on where we've been and where we'll be going in the days to come. Our focus this session: Beginning again!

Did you know that the first electric light was so dim that a candle was needed to see its socket? It's true! Were you aware of the fact that one of the first-ever steamboats took more than 32 hours to make its way from New York City to Albany on the Hudson River, a distance of just 150 miles? Also true. Some of you who remember your elementary school days might recall learning that the Wright Brothers' first airplane flight only lasted 12 seconds, and the super trivia-minded among you out there might be able to correctly note that the first automobiles only traveled 2 to 4 miles per hour. (They also broke down a lot, and when carriages would pass them on the road, their passengers would shout, "Get a horse!")

Beginnings aren't always auspicious ones, are they. They're usually not accompanied by much in the way of public fanfare or big corporate rollouts. When something has its beginning, it might be celebrated a little bit...but in truth it's usually a blip on the screen and its formation goes on to be quickly forgotten. Part of the reason for that, blunt though it is, is that most beginnings fade into obscurity without ever developing into much of anything. More beginnings *end* than continue. But for some things...a few things...for seemingly inauspicious things that wind up becoming exceedingly auspicious in the long run...those are the beginnings we remember. That's why people like Thomas Edison, Orville and Wilbur Wright, Robert Fulton, and Henry Ford are names with which most people today have at least a passing familiarity.

Today we're returning to a book that, at its core, is all about beginnings. Its name, in fact, means just that: in Hebrew, בְּרֵאשִׁית, or *Bereshit*, means "in the beginning." The Greek word, also meaning "beginning," is Γένεσις, which, from the Greek Septuagint, then borrowed by the Latin Vulgate, is ultimately where the English title of this first book of the Bible comes from: *Genesis*. Genesis is indeed a book about beginnings, isn't it. And not just *The Beginning*, but many beginnings: the beginning of the world, the beginning of the human race, the beginning of sin, and after that, the beginning of hope, hope that would come in a Savior from sin...and all that's covered in just the first three chapters!

Genesis tells us about the beginning of nations and about the entrance onto the scene of significant people and their succeeding generations. In fact, while in part one of our series in this book we principally covered events (chapters 1-11), once we got to part two (chapters 12-25) we began, for the most part, to cover people — beginning with Abraham and Sarah and their amazing journey with God.

Today as we begin part three of our time in Genesis, we'll be continuing our emphasis on people as opposed to events, and in actuality, that focus on people will take us all the way to the end of the book. How will things start? We'll spend just a bit of time on Ishmael, and then

we'll move to Isaac and Rebekah and their sons, Jacob and Esau. Many of you know that the mere mention of those names means there's high drama to come, and we'll have a great deal to talk about when we get to the story of their lives. But more than anyone, this third part of Genesis will see us spending our time with Jacob. He'll show up quickly — before we get to the end of chapter 25 — and by the time we get to the early portion of chapter 28 the narrative will transition fully into the account of his life and times as one chosen by God.

There's one more thing we should say today: while we'll certainly be winding in and out of a whole host of fascinating and extremely imperfect lives over the next several weeks, and while we'll be seeing a great deal of very interesting history being played out as well (history many of us remember principally from our days as children in Sunday school), it's extremely important that we remember the ultimate and overarching plot that's going to be playing out before us as we read and study together: the plot of God's plan to save a fallen world from sin through a Savior, and the manner in which He'll be moving that plan forward from generation to generation through the people of His choosing: people like Abraham, Isaac, and yes, even — and especially — Jacob. Even here in the book of beginnings, we ultimately have in our hands a book about the promise of a *new* beginning, and why? Because even way back here in Genesis, there is Jesus. In both the beginning and the end, it's all about Him.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I just want to say how excited I am to be coming to this great section of Scripture with you, and my prayer is that it will bless you in a special way as you become more rooted and grounded in the truth and power of Scripture and its message of redemption in Christ. Have a terrific day — when we come back next time, we'll be going straight to the twelfth verse of Genesis 25 to dive into the text. I'll look forward to seeing you all; until then, God's rich and abundant blessings to each of you in our risen Lord Jesus. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich blessings to you in Christ, and welcome to another session of EDiBS, our day-by-day journey through the Word of God as the people of God. On this Tuesday we're opening the Scriptures again to the book of beginnings...the book of Genesis... where we've just begun a brand new study series. It's one that I know will serve to impact us in

significant ways as we seek to learn and grow together. I'm glad you're here today — let's pray and begin!

Prayer

Father, we thank you for this time to be with you in your Word and for the joyful privilege we've been given to gather together in this special way around your Word. Please help us to grow in our faith as we study today. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Abraham is dead and buried — an ending of sorts. The new beginning that comes after is the life and times of his son, Isaac...but before we can get to Isaac, there's the matter of Abraham's other well-known son, the son born not of Sarah but of her servant, Hagar. That son, of course, is Ishmael. How does God's Word address this issue? That's our focus for the day.

Genesis 25:12-18

12This is the account of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Sarah's maidservant, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham. 13These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. 16These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve tribal rulers according to their settlements and camps. 17Altogether, Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people. 18His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt, as you go toward Asshur. And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.

When I lived in California, daylilies were always part of my garden landscape. After spending many years away from them, I've begun to plant them again here in Georgia. Daylilies aren't actually lilies at all, but I won't geek out on you with a long monologue on the subject. What I will point out, however, is that their common name is an apt one: the beautiful flowers daylilies produce each last just roughly a day. Many people don't realize this, because during their growing season a typical daylily is absolutely loaded with blooms and seems to be in flower all the time.

I mention daylilies and their flowers today because as we return to Genesis 25 and begin to move forward from the life of Abraham to the life of his sons, Ishmael — his firstborn child conceived by Hagar — gets just seven verses in the text. Seven verses before we move on to Isaac. Seven verses to explain an entire family tree...or perhaps more appropriately, a family daylily. Why do I say that? Because Ishmael seems to be here for the briefest of moments, and then he's gone.

The truth, of course, is a little more nuanced. While it's true that Ishmael is afforded very little space at this juncture in the narrative, if we go back a few chapters and do some reviewing, we begin to get a picture of the entire plant and all of its flower stalks, each coming on in its own unique time and place. Ishmael's story, in fact, has three distinct "blooms," if you will, between Genesis 16 and Genesis 21. First comes Sarah's suggestion — barren Sarah's suggestion, you'll recall — that Abraham have a child with her slave Hagar, an Egyptian. It seems like a good idea at the time, but in the end it gives birth, literally and figuratively, to more problems than it solves, not least of which is a growing feud between Sarah and Hagar. After Hagar runs away due to harsh treatment by Sarah, the Lord appears to Hagar and comforts her, giving her the assurance that the child in her womb will be okay. She's to name him Ishmael, which means *The Lord Hears*, because God has heard her in her misery due to her mistreatment. Ishmael, it seems, is going to be a hand full: God tells Hagar that he will be a wild donkey of a

man, that his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and that he will live in hostility toward all his brothers. The entirety of that episode is recounted for us in chapter 16.

Next, chapter 17 shows us the Lord's promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael: though Isaac is the child of promise and will be the carrier of the covenant between the Lord and His people, Ishmael will not be forgotten. He will be blessed as well, fathering twelve rulers and in time becoming a great nation.

Finally, chapter 21 brings things to a head with respect to Ishmael, recording for us the still-simmering bitterness on Sarah's part toward Hagar and her son. Long story short, after witnessing Ishmael mocking a now-young Isaac at a feast, Sarah insists that the two be banished. Though troubled by this development, after hearing from the Lord on the matter (who reaffirms His promise regarding Ishmael) Abraham does as Sarah says and sends the two away. God, true to His Word, is with Ishmael as he grows up. He lives in the Desert of Paran and becomes a skilled archer, and while he's living there his mother even secures a wife for him from Egypt.

There's more to all of this, of course, but as I said a moment ago, those are the blooms on the bush, so to speak.

The last time we see Ishmael prior to today's reading is earlier in this same chapter. In the ninth verse here in Genesis 25, Ishmael joins his brother Isaac following the death of their father and helps to bury him. Once that is done, all is done regarding Ishmael, save for the brief seven verses we have about him today.

And what of those verses? They're here for a couple of reasons: first, to give us a truncated version of his descendants. Second, to show us that the word the Lord had spoken concerning Ishmael came true: he did indeed father twelve rulers, he did indeed become a great nation, and yes, he was indeed a wild donkey of a man...him and all his family with him. They were a feuding, fussing, fighting bunch from beginning to end, and they were at enmity with their brothers all the days of their lives. In the end, though, one more thing stands out: while Ishmael was eventually the progenitor of a great nation through his offspring, he was *not* the child that God had promised to Abraham and Sarah. That role would fall to Isaac, and a reading of the saga surrounding his and his brother's birth shows why.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the Bible tells us that these 12 descendants of Ishmael settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt as one moves toward Ashur. Where's that? In the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. In fact, the descendants of Ishmael eventually became known by what we call them today: Arabs. Though not all in the Arabian Peninsula are descendants of Ishmael, (the descendants of others also settled and lived on the Arabian Peninsula as well), old records do clearly link the north Arabians with Ishmael's descendants. It's yet another piece that fits into the very large puzzle of the world, its peoples, and its religions, and another brushstroke in the grand painting of God's plan of salvation.

So far our time with Ishmael, everyone...when we come back tomorrow to continue, it's on to Isaac. Do join in, won't you? God's rich peace to you in Christ, and I'll see you then!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace and peace to you in our the King of kings and Lord of lords, our risen Savior Jesus Christ. Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS! Thanks for being here today for the third session of our new series in the book of Genesis, a time of study that's going to take us from chapter 25 through chapter 37 in this first book of the Bible. What a gift we

have to be able to approach God's Word so freely...a gift I know we all want to make the most of in our lives of growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ. As most of you know, we're moving into the life of Abraham's son Isaac today where we'll begin to set the stage for just about all of what's to come in this third part of our series in Genesis. Thanks so much for being here; let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord God, we thank you for your great love for us, a love shown to us in a deep and powerful way through the precious gift of a Savior in your Son, Jesus. We thank you also that through your Word...in every place therein...you draw us deeper and deeper into the knowledge of just how great your love is. Bless our study time today here in the book of Genesis, and help us to grow in wisdom and understanding as a result. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the brief accounting of Ishmael's family tree behind us, we now come to the Abraham and Sarah's son Isaac — the one who will be the carrier of the covenant between the Lord and His people. Our focus this session: the child of promise.

Genesis 25:19

19 This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac.

I'm privileged to be the father of a son. It's hard to believe, but this month Jacob will have his 24th birthday. Those of you who have been with EDiBS from way back in the early days remember my boy as an eight year-old third grader who loved Star Wars and his pet roosters. These days he still loves Star Wars, but he's now a college graduate, not a third grader...and since he lives in an apartment instead of on a hobby farm, there's unfortunately no workable option for roosters at the moment or he'd definitely have one!

I'm so proud of Jacob — and yet even as I say that, I'm also very surprised at how he's grown and who he's become as a young man. If you'd have asked me ten years ago how I thought things would look for him today, I'd have given you a completely different description of him than what I see now. His interests, his career choice, his friends, the way he spends his time... they're all different than I assumed they'd be. They're all good, and he's absolutely, positively, wonderfully great! He's just not what I expected. And you know what? That's actually a very good thing.

As we come to God's Word today, I've purposely made our reading very short, because at the mention of Isaac's name in verse 19, we need to take a moment and do a hard stop. Why? Because as we've followed his life in our earlier sessions in Genesis and watched him grow into a young man — he's forty now and about to marry his wife, Rebekah — Isaac has in many ways surprised us. He hasn't done the things we'd think he'd do, nor has he turned out to be the kind of person we assumed he'd be. He hasn't fit into any kind of standard ancient near-east mold of what a father's son would be and do. His life is a good one, and his actions as a son have been absolutely, positively, wonderfully great...it's just that he's just not what we expected. Since I'm sure you're waiting for me to say it, I will: that's actually a very good thing.

Truth be told, it's very likely that had we been flies on the wall of Sarah and Abraham's tent late in the evenings over the years, we would learn that Isaac wasn't what they had expected either. At almost every turn in their long journey to and through parenthood as his mother and father, there were oddities, irregularities, and peculiarities to navigate, and these began long before he was even a twinkle in his mother's eye.

Remember, this is not the son resulting from the human wisdom applied by Abraham and Sarah to try and “help” God with His promise to them; this is the son who came to them as God had intended all along — a son not from a surrogate slave but from Sarah’s own womb. This is not the son who would plod through life in the regular, ordinary way of sons here there and everywhere; this is the son upon whom the unique blessings and promises of God would rest, the son whose life would be the channel through which those blessings and promises would continue to be multiplied and passed down from generation to generation. This is not the son that a typical mother and father would see as part and parcel of what it means to marry and have a family; this is the son Abraham and Sarah received as a great and unfathomable gift from the Lord, the son even the very idea of whom was laughable from a human standpoint — especially the standpoint of a centenarian and his barren, ninety year-old wife. This is the son, fittingly then and without a trace of irony, whose name meant “laughter.”

Who is this son, this one called Isaac? This is the son whose life was a sign...the son whose life pointed to and foreshadowed the Savior who would come to the world through his line.

With these things in mind, as we get ready to move forward with Isaac, let’s first take just a moment to look back and remember whose footsteps we’re about to follow:

Like Jesus, Isaac is a child of promise, miraculously conceived.

Like Jesus, Isaac is his father’s “only son.”

Like Jesus, Isaac is offered in sacrifice by his father, who loves him.

Like Jesus, Isaac is to be a sacrificial lamb of God.

Like Jesus, Isaac carries wood on his back to die; wood which is to be instrumental in his death.

Like Jesus, Isaac is obedient to his father even in the face of death.

Like Jesus, Isaac has a three-day journey from life to death to life again.

Like Jesus, Isaac’s rescue shows that God will provide.

Like Jesus’ Father, Isaac’s father anticipates his son’s resurrection.

While we could continue our list here and make it much longer, what we’ve mentioned thus far is compelling in its own right: in instance after instance, Isaac is a picture of Jesus.

Wrapping Up

Yet there’s one more thing to remember about Isaac today: Isaac is also a picture of each of us. What do I mean by that? As we wrap things up for the day, while Isaac most certainly shows himself to be a picture of Christ in many compelling ways, in the moment that God provided the substitute ram in the thicket to sacrifice in place of Isaac, the view shifted. That’s when Isaac became a picture of each of us.

Do you remember the account in Genesis 22? As Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son, “...The angel of the Lord called out to him, ‘Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.’”

Why wasn't Isaac sacrificed? Because of the substitute that was provided. And just as God provided a substitute for Isaac, He has also provided a substitute for each of us in Jesus Christ. In fact, it's very possible that the Lord provided Jesus as the ultimate, final sacrifice on the same mountain where Isaac was taken to be killed centuries earlier....something we can talk about a bit more another time.

For now though, we can simply close with this: Isaac, a great son indeed, offers us a picture of the Great Son, capital G — Jesus Christ, who would one day be offered as the atonement for our sins, die, and be resurrected to save us all.

Have a terrific day, everyone; I'll see you again next time. Joy to you in Christ, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to be with you today, where in this session we'll continue to move through the 25th chapter of Genesis, a place just beginning to reveal the life of Isaac and his family to us.

I'm glad you're here for our time together in God's Word, and I pray that you'll be encouraged as you study along today. Let's pray as we begin:

Prayer

Almighty God, bless the reading of your Word today, and by the power of your Spirit, help us to learn and grow through these pages of Scripture. More than anything, strengthen us as your people and keep us steadfast in your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Isaac marries Rebekah, and in time, the two are able to start a family. From the very beginning, the ride is a wild one! Our focus: one womb, two nations.

Genesis 25:19-23

19This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, 20and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. 21Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. 22The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord . 23The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

When we were together last time, I told you a little bit about my son. As we move into today's study time, I'm going to tell you a little bit about my brother. I'm the youngest of four children in my family. Of the four of us, there were three brothers and one sister. When I was still just a little guy, our family had an interesting dynamic to it: my siblings were all quite a bit older than I was. Steve was 11 years my senior, Cyndi was 10 years ahead of me, and Jim was seven years older. As a result, by the time I was eight or nine Steve and Cyndi were already grown and gone, and Jim was close to it. Jim, though, always seemed to be on the struggle bus — and for better or worse, I often ended up in the seat next to him. Not because I wanted to be there, but because he dragged me along.

Jim and I, from our earliest days, existed in a persistent state of conflict with one another. I idolized him because he was my older brother, and I always wanted us to be the world's greatest buddies. For the most part, though, the relationship was a fraught one. We fought constantly, and there were times I had to hide from him or run away to keep from being harmed. Jim had substance abuse issues and he ran with a rough crowd, and I never knew from one day to the next whether the danger associated with those things would accompany him home. If it did, I had to be ready to vanish.

Jim died when he was 20. I've said to some of you in the past that although his death was tragic, it was also, I believe, merciful. His life was one of constant wandering and restlessness and difficulty, and the fog of his struggles, coupled with the fog of his addiction, made him an unhappy person for most of his days.

Which, in one way, is the point I want to make today...and which, in addition, is something our family has always wrestled to understand, especially my mom. Four kids, all from the same seed and the same womb. Four kids, all raised the same way in the same home with the same values. Three of those kids managed to grow up to navigate life and become reasonably functioning individuals over the years, but one didn't. Jim was different. Jim just never made it.

As we come to God's Word today, we have not four siblings, but two. They're from the same seed and the same womb. They also happen to be twins, the very first twins mentioned in the Bible. But even before they're born, it becomes very clear to us — just as it is to their mother, Rebekah — that something about them is off. They've not yet entered the world, but they're already struggling with each other in utero. This prenatal striving, it turns out, is no mere jostling in a tight space; rather, it's a foreshadowing of a later and much greater conflict to come. Who are these two in the womb? Who are these siblings in conflict? Esau and his younger brother, Jacob...or significantly, "Jacob and Esau," as they'll come to be known through the ages.

The word from the Lord to Rebekah in today's text is prophetic: first, both Jacob and Esau will indeed become fathers of two different nations. God will change Jacob's name to Israel (Genesis 32), and he'll become the father of the 12 tribes of Israel; Esau's descendants will be the Edomites (Genesis 36). Not surprisingly, and for a host of reasons that we'll delve into as time goes on, the Israelites and the Edomites won't do very well at getting along. They'll fight with one another often. In fact, it's not too much to say that they'll find themselves in an almost persistent state of conflict with one another through the years, with Edom plaguing Israel so often that it will finally be judged by God and wiped off the map for good.

In light of what I've just said, it's also clear in the case of these two brothers that the older will end up serving the younger. It's the younger Jacob who will receive Isaac's blessing and carry on the Abrahamic Covenant, while the older Esau will be excluded from all that such a blessing entails...including exclusion from the Messianic line. That this is "not the way it's supposed to be" in the manner of familial blessings and inheritances makes Esau's pill all the more bitter to swallow, and again, there will be much for us to observe and discuss when we get to that point in the narrative.

Wrapping Up

Looking at these two brothers today is, in some ways, striking. Why? Because there are so many similarities between their lives and the lives of their father and grandfather. In their story — even in this pre-birth prologue, as it were — we see the importance of family and of influence. As we go forward, themes like deceit, favoritism, family strife, unexpected blessing, reconciliation, and faith will come up over and over again, just like we saw with Abraham and Sarah and just like we'll be seeing with Isaac and Rebekah too. But as we wrap things up for the day, do you know what we'll see more than anything in all of this? We'll see more than anything, in the midst of the foolishness and foibles of man, that God remains solid as a rock and faithful to His promises...that God happily chooses to accomplish His purposes in the world through imperfect, sinful people who mess up a lot...and that God is not deterred or hindered by our hard-driving ineptitude or the hollowness of our hearts. We'll see, on the contrary, that God is on a mission of mercy because of those things. He knows that mercy is what we need.

More on that next time, everyone; until then, have a wonderful day, and may the joy of our Lord Jesus be your abiding strength. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone, and God's peace to you as we come to Friday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to be with you on this final day of our week together, where right now we're nearing the end of Genesis 25. If you're just joining in or have missed any of our previous sessions of this new series and want to catch up, just go to the "Most Recent Studies" tab at EDiBS.life and you can pick up any of the previous 20 study sessions we've done to find what you need. In addition, you can also go to the website's "Today's Video" tab and search for videos of any of the 3,000+ study sessions that are there, including all the videos for parts 1 and 2 of Genesis. Thanks for being here today; let's pray as we prepare to open our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, Thank you for this day and for the freedom you've given us to live as your people through the life death and resurrection of your Son. We ask that you would strengthen us today as your beloved children and that in all things, you would help us to walk in your ways to the glory of your name. Bless our study of your Word for these next few minutes. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've come to the final stage-setting scene that introduces the trajectory Isaac, Rebekah, and their sons Jacob and Esau will find themselves on in life. Our focus: from conflict in the womb to conflict in the world.

Genesis 25:24-27

24When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. 25The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. 26After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. 27The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents.

Some of you will remember that I'm a dog person, and have been my entire life. Right now I have two dogs. They're both relatively recent acquisitions, they're both from the county animal shelter, and they both found their way to my house because their situation at the shelter was dire. I got Weston, my middle-aged Husky mix, about 7 months ago. Carl, who's a cross between a Beagle, a Rottweiler, and who knows what else, was born on Christmas Day and came to my house in February.

The reason I brought Carl home was so that Weston would have a companion to pal around with. I've always had dogs in multiples, and I figured it would be a good thing. But while it was indeed a good idea in principle, it hasn't quite worked out as planned. From the moment Carl came through the door, there was trouble, and the trouble continues. Put simply, Carl just won't leave Weston alone. If there's a tail or an ankle to be latched on to, Carl is there to grab it. If there's a peaceful nap taking place at the foot of the bed, Carl is there to interrupt it. In fact, offer up pretty much any scenario where Weston and Carl are in close proximity to one another and I'll bet dollars to donuts that Carl will find a way to upset the status quo. Very early in his life he earned the nickname Combat Carl, and it remains an apt description as he goes through puppyhood.

Today we have just one observation to make, and I'll make it brief: the brothers born to Rebekah and Isaac, though they are twins, are very much *not* destined to be companions in life. They won't be pals in the least. From the moment they leave the womb for the world and take air into their lungs for the first time, there is trouble, and there will continue to be trouble between the two all the days of their lives.

Their names, of course, are descriptive. Esau is born hairy and is named as such, but especially with respect to Jacob, his is a name not merely descriptive, but indicative as well. He comes from the womb grasping his brother's heel as if trying to overtake him and get out first. He will be a hustler, a supplanter...a deceiver. And though we remember him so often for the incidents of securing Esau's birthright and later Esau's rightful blessing from their father Isaac, the truth is that as we begin following Jacob's life in earnest over the next several weeks, we'll find that his deceitful, supplanting character is something that will often be on display.

As the passage ends today, we're told that the boys grow up. Esau becomes a skillful hunter, while Jacob is quiet and more of a homebody. These personality traits, too, will play into the drama ahead of us: the rough outdoorsman who has little regard for the importance of the Big Picture or of long-range planning in life will have that used against him...used against him by his quiet, thoughtful — dare we say scheming — brother. There's a lot to unpack here, and with that unpacking comes a lot of questions as well. In fact, we'll close today by putting the biggest one of all out on the table.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, even with the little we know thus far about him, why in the world would God ever choose someone like Jacob, and use someone like Jacob — with a personality like Jacob and character traits like Jacob and with a heart and mind like Jacob — to raise up for Himself a beloved, chosen people and to further His plan of redemption for humanity by using this man and his family in the Messianic line? Why not anyone *but* Jacob? To ask it another way, why is Jacob the key here?

Why indeed...and that's precisely what we'll be wrestling with in the days ahead as we consider the seeming irony of it all. Suffice it to say that there's more here than meets the eye!

Have a great weekend, everyone...God's rich peace to you in our Lord Jesus, and I'll see you again next week. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich blessings of joy, pardon and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a great blessing for me to be with you as

we open God's Word today; I'm glad you've joined in as we continue our ongoing series in the book of Genesis, and I pray that you're learning and growing as we study together. Let's prepare our hearts for today's reading and pray as we begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise you for all that you are and all that you've done for us. We are grateful for the cleansing blood of your son Jesus, who has redeemed us from the power of sin and death and given us new life. Teach us today. Remind us of your love. Send your Holy Spirit to enlighten and endow us with wisdom from on high as we study. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming to one of the most well-known incidents that occurs between Jacob and his brother Esau. Our focus this session: Esau despises his birthright.

Genesis 25:28-34

28Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. 29Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. 30He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.) 31Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." 32"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" 33But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. 34Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

I have a rather odd nickname that was given to me by my sister in-law. One day she popped over to my house while I was in the kitchen cooking, and I happened to be making lentil soup. I love just about any kind of lentil: brown, green, red, black, French green, and on it goes. Though here in America we're mostly familiar with the varieties I've just mentioned, there are actually hundreds of different types out there, and I could easily bore you to death with an enthusiastic discourse on many of them. That, in fact, is what I began to do with my sister in-law as we visited, and after a good amount of ribbing and mocking on her part, I became known as Lentil. These days, lots of people in the family know that I'm *called* Lentil, but they don't know the backstory of *why* I'm called Lentil...so they just shake their heads, let it go, and move on.

I may love lentils in any way shape or form, and I might have any number of go-to recipes that I enjoy (and which give my sister in-law an ever growing justification for teasing me), but I've never come to the point in my life where a lentil managed supersede rational thought. I've never experienced desire so great that I allowed a bowl of soup to irreversibly alter my future. And yet this is precisely what happened to Esau, Isaac's first-born son and Jacob's elder brother, when he let an incredibly important part of who he was and who he was to become slip away for the price of a a meal — and humble one at that. As we read today's text here at the end of Genesis 25, many of us know *that* Esau did this unfathomable thing, but we don't necessarily know *why* he did it...or why it's such a big deal. If we're to be students of the Scriptures and people mindful of God's hand on our own lives, then we need to understand that this is more than just an ordinary, passing moment in Genesis 25. Shaking our heads, letting it go, and moving on isn't an option as we learn about Esau selling his birthright for a bowl of Lentil stew.

At first glance, our attention, and perhaps our annoyance or even anger, is directed towards Jacob today. To a degree, it's a fair assessment. After all, his brother has just come in from the open country, ostensibly famished, and Jacob has food that, ostensibly, he can share. Esau's

not looking for a snack because his stomach is growling; he's truly hungry...perhaps, as he says, even famished. Is he using hyperbole when he tells Jacob he's about to die? Maybe a little. But nonetheless, he's obviously been without food for a considerable period of time, he's probably quite weak, and he's in an emotionally and physically vulnerable state. Does Jacob rise to the occasion as a gracious person, a loving brother? No. Instead, Jacob goes low. Capitalizing on his brother's urgent need, he bullies Esau out of his birthright. There's no decorum on display here; only a deceitful heart. Jacob is living up to his name.

According to our Bible, however, as bad as Jacob's behavior is, there's actually a bigger issue in play right now. What is it? It's Esau's indifference, his dismissive attitude, with respect to his status and position as the firstborn son. Esau, for what we can only assume is a variety of reasons, completely misses the significance of God's promises to his family — promises first given to his grandfather Abraham, then to his father Isaac, and finally, promises slated to be given to him also as the natural and rightful heir. But there's more than even that: these promises will extend not just *to* his family, but *through* his family to the entire world. The sacred carrying of a most sacred covenant is to be his great privilege, and yes, his great responsibility. Yet again, Esau has no regard for this fact whatsoever. He's a man of the Here And Now, and it's clear by both his words and his actions in the text that he cares little for the Come What May.

So it is, we are told, that Esau despises his birthright. In fact, he seems almost contemptuous of it, and if that word seems too strong, we can at least say that He doesn't care about it. What he does care about, and seemingly all he cares about, is his immediate want and need — which, in this instance, happens to be those aforementioned lentils.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what's the upshot of all of this? Due to the forsaking of his position as the firstborn son, Hebrews 12 calls Esau unholy. He's considered unholy because he didn't recognize — or again, didn't care about — God's redemptive plan for the world and the manner in which it would be carried out through his family line. Despising his birthright was in essence a rejection of the things of God. It was tantamount not to unfaithfulness, but an absence of faith altogether.

A bowl of stew for a birthright? It might sound silly, but there it is for us to consider today... and consider, I might add, contextually. We'll be talking about this more in the days to come, but for now, how do Esau's actions here connect, at least at times, to our own? What of the things we care about, or don't care about, in this world as the people of God in Christ? Where are we most apt to trade long-term blessings for short-term bowls of this, that, or the other? And finally, how is it that we're so often willing to settle for the inferior of the immediate rather than wait for the excellence of what is eternal? Good things to think about as we close, not to condemn us, but to call us to reflection as we seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus. May God draw you to Himself in a special way today as you ponder these matters, and may you find times of restoration and recentering as a result.

Have a great day, everyone — I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our risen Lord Jesus Christ, and a warm welcome to each of you as we begin today's edition of EDiBS. It's great to

have you along on this Wednesday, where today we'll be having our first look at Genesis 26. Let's prepare our hearts for today's time by going to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this day, for the amazing love you have for each one of us, and for the way you've so lavishly demonstrated it in the sending of your Son. Thank you for the time we can have with you in your Word for these next few minutes, and as we thank you, we also ask that you would send your Holy Spirit to enlighten us and endow us with wisdom. Please grant your blessing on this time. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 26 begins with the Lord appearing to Isaac, both to give him direction, and quite significantly, to reaffirm that the promises that had been given to his father Abraham will continue to be perpetuated through him. Our focus this session: "I will be with you and will bless you."

Genesis 26:1-6

Now there was a famine in the land—besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time—and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. 2The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. 3Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. 4I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, 5because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws." 6So Isaac stayed in Gerar.

We all know the story. It's simple but powerful, and it's one that always does us good and provides us with an important reminder when we hear it. During the terrible days of the Blitz in WWII, a father, holding his small son by the hand, ran from a building that had been struck by a bomb. In the front yard was a crater from a shell. Seeking shelter as quickly as possible, the father jumped into the hole and held up his arms for his son to follow. Terrified, unable to see anything because of the smoke and disoriented because of the chaos surrounding him, the little boy heard his father's voice telling him to jump. He replied, "But I can't see you!" The father, looking up against the sky tinted red by burning buildings, called to the silhouette of his son, "But I can see you. Jump!"

As we come to God's Word today, the passage before us is one that, essentially, is a call to jump. It's a call to Isaac...a call, in the midst of difficult circumstances and an unclear future, to trust—fall into the arms of the Lord. It's a call for him to take God at His word and believe...to have faith that what God says He will do, He will do indeed.

What's the backdrop to all of this? There's a famine happening. The logical thing for Isaac to do for the sake of his family is to flee it and go somewhere else, just as His father Abraham had done years before — and actually, this is what he has started to do, which is why he's presently in Gerar. The plan, it seems, is to continue south to Egypt — again, as his father Abraham had done because of the severe famine that had occurred during his lifetime. It's at this juncture, however, that the Lord appears to Isaac and gives him a peculiar set of instructions:

Don't go down to Egypt; instead, live where I tell you to live. Stay here for a while. I'll be with you and bless you.

You can almost see the look on Isaac's face. Really? Stay in Gerar? Hang out here, where the Philistines are? The answer, of course, is an emphatic yes. How can this be? The reason has to

do with God's plans and purposes, but also with God's promises: Gerar is in the southern region of *Canaan*, and as He reiterates to Isaac in today's passage, this is the very land that was promised to Abraham and his descendants...which will include Isaac and his descendants, Jacob and his descendants, and so on. The truth is that Gerar, though it may seem to Isaac a temporary stopping place on his route to long-term safety and provision, will actually and ultimately be the destination wherein blessings will be realized and reaped in great abundance. Does Isaac see that now? Is it clear to him? No. That's why the call here is simply to listen, believe, and obey....to act in faith on what he has received from Almighty God.

St. Augustine wrote that Understanding is the reward of faith, not the other way around. In light of that, his counsel was always clear to those who asked: "Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand." That's precisely the scenario before us in the text, and we have some special days ahead of us as we follow along and see that journey unfold.

Incidentally, as we come to God's Word over the next several sessions here in Genesis 26, just a heads up that we'll be putting Jacob and Esau aside for a little while and shifting our focus to this new season in Isaac and Rebekah's life. In doing that, we're very quickly going to find ourselves experiencing a sense of *deja vu*. Why? Because while Genesis 26 is going to track with the life and times of this married couple and their journey together, many of their exploits are going to resemble the experiences of Abraham and Sarah before them. There's a reason for that, and I'm looking forward to discussing it as we go. All of these things, of course, are part of a much bigger picture and a much bigger message, so do stay with us as we mine the truth of Scripture and see what it's all about!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, there's a question hanging in the air right now that we haven't answered yet: Did the boy from our opening illustration jump? Of course he did. He jumped because he trusted his father. Isaac is going to jump for the same reason...and guess what? You and I can jump for that same reason also. Our Father will always be there to catch us when He calls for us. There's an old saying that goes something like this: Our Christian faith enables us to face life, meet death, and experience all things in between, not because we can see, but with the certainty that we are seen; not that we know all the answers, but that we are known. There's comfort in that, and my prayer for you as we close today is that you'll find that comfort in great measure as you look to your Savior for assurance.

Thanks again for being here today, everyone; you're in my prayers, and I do hope you have a terrific day. Take care, and I'll see you again next time. God's peace!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and the blessings of our Lord Jesus be with each of you as we gather together today. In this first session of the new week,

we'll be continuing with our time in Genesis 26, where we're about to see something that will ring a bell for us. Why? Because we've seen it before. I'm glad to be back with you today, and I'm eager to go to God's Word together! Let's pray and begin:

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this day. We bow before you, grateful for the way you sent your Son for us, and that in Him our sins have been forgiven and our inheritance of eternal life secured. Teach us today as we open your Word, that we can grow in our faith and serve you with joy. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, once Isaac settles in Gerar, we happen upon an incident that carries us back to the days of his parents...a moment that feels like *deja vu*. Our focus this session: A despicable deception.

Genesis 26:7-11

7When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful." 8When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. 9So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, "She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac answered him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her." 10Then Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." 11So Abimelech gave orders to all the people: "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

Abraham Lincoln was arguing with an opponent. It was something that happened often during his administration due to the deep complexities and strong emotions surrounding the Civil War. As president, he was always happy to engage in spirited and honest debate because he knew that iron sharpens iron, but the person with whom he was having the disagreement was deliberately misrepresenting the truth on the subject at hand. Lincoln knew it, and it was time to catch him in his words. The segue he used to go in for the kill was classic. Disputing with the man over his points, he used the following approach:

"Now then...how many legs does a cow have?" Lincoln asked.

"Four, of course," came the disgusted reply.

"That's right," agreed Lincoln. "Now suppose you call the cow's tail a leg; how many legs would the cow have then?"

"Why, five, of course," was the confident reply.

"Now, that's where you're wrong," said Lincoln. "Calling a cow's tail a leg doesn't make it a leg. And calling your lies the truth doesn't make them true."

Today in God's Word, we have a man trying to pass off a five-legged cow as the real deal. Scripture showcases for us an individual unconscionably choosing to tell a lie, then living in that lie for a considerable period of time...yet finally being caught in that lie. Despite his best efforts, he is ultimately found out. The fact that this person happens to be Isaac is surprising in one respect, but on further reflection, maybe not so much as we might think.

If you've ever wondered whether it's true that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, today's reading gives us a great example of that old adage. Isaac shows himself, most assuredly so, to be his father's son — but unfortunately, in the worst way instead of the best. Coming into Gerar, knowing that his wife will be noticed by the local population because of her beauty, and thus frightened for his own safety as a potentially marked man because he's her husband, Isaac succumbs to the temptation to pass off his wife as his sister to protect himself...which is a frankly shocking and terribly disturbing matter regardless of what you might say about the times, the prevailing culture of the day, or anything else. What Isaac does here is wrong in every way shape and form...and when the pagan king Abimelech discovers the ruse, even he recognizes it as evil and scolds Isaac for it. When a godless leader has a more accurate moral compass and holds himself to a higher degree of integrity than God's man, that's saying something.

Never mind the fact that God has already promised Isaac that He'll give both him and his descendants all the lands he's currently residing in (a continuation of the promise He had given to Abraham in this same place many years before), and that in order for that to happen it will be necessary that Isaac live and carry on his partnership with Rebekah to bring it about. In fact, everything we saw God say to Isaac just a few verses back is an almost verbatim reiteration of the Abrahamic covenant, reaffirmed to Isaac as Abraham's son — and that brings up the issue we need to make note of today, doesn't it: that issue of *deja vu*. Indeed, we have some connections to make between Isaac, his father, and their choices in times of testing.

The similarities between Isaac and his father in this instance are numerous. Both sin in the land where Abimelech is king, and both are rebuked by that ruler of the Philistines (although time-wise, it's probably a later Abimelech with Isaac; a son, grandson, or other later ruler). Both have a beautiful wife and fear for their own safety, thinking that they might be killed so that someone can marry their wife in their stead. Both lie by saying that their wife is their sister. Both are caught...and at least as far as the text goes, neither does it seem that Isaac — or his father before him — end up feeling much personal responsibility for their wrongdoing, understand the gravity thereof, or fully repent of it. It's troubling,

God, of course, has already shown Himself to be faithful and worthy of Isaac's trust, having led his father and his people all the days of their lives, even into the land promised to them and their future descendants. But none of this seems to mean anything at the moment. Instead, as Isaac looks at his situation and considers his options, he leaves God's promises out of the equation altogether and does exactly what his father had done so many years before: he essentially sells Rebekah down the river, jeopardizes her honor, and places her in great danger so that he can save his own neck.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, why is God's faithfulness so far from Isaac's mind? How could it be that God's promises fail to make an impact on his thinking? In one sense, we don't know. We can't read his mind, and Scripture doesn't tell us why he acts in human weakness instead of God's great strength. In another sense, however, we know all too well why Isaac does what he does, don't we. We know because we've all had Isaac-like moments in our own lives. We've all had moments when in spite of knowing God's great promises and in spite of real-life evidence of God's loving faithfulness toward us, we've chosen to go our own way, do our own thing, or muster up our own solution to a given situation.

Question: Is that wisdom at work, or is it just worry and weakness? Is God being honored in an instance like that or is His presence being discounted and His promises eschewed? It's easy to

make that call on Isaac's life from the outside looking in, but when it comes to our own lives, we quickly become reticent. When we come back next time, let's talk this out a bit more. There's some law in the house at the moment, I know...and yes, we need to move from law to gospel and come to a time of refreshing together as we move forward! Be sure to come along for the conversation, won't you?

Have a great day, everyone, Christ's peace to you and yours, and I'll see you again soon. Until then, take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's joy and peace to each of you in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for joining me today as we take some time

to be in God's Word together, where right now we're working through the 26th chapter of Genesis...a section that has brought both remembrance and remonstrance to us as God's people. Whatever the Lord brings to us from day to day, I'm always glad to be with you as we go to the Scriptures. Now is a great time to take a nice deep breath, quiet your mind, and prepare your heart for our time in the Bible, so let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Father, we praise you for the way you've given yourself to us as your people — and especially for the way you've revealed your Son to us as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Thank you for pouring your love into our lives through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Please help us to learn and grow today as we continue in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're going to return once more to where we were yesterday...to Isaac's truly indefensible decision to use Rebekah as a human shield in his quest to protect himself from the Philistines. Our focus: Walking, uncomfortably, in Isaac's shoes.

Genesis 26:7-11 (Part 2)

7When the men of that place asked Isaac about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful." 8When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. 9So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, "She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac answered him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her." 10Then Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." 11So Abimelech gave orders to all the people: "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

I get teased a lot these days over my shoes. Apparently, my sense of style has moved from the realm of "middle-aged cool" to that of "up and coming grandpa." I don't know when the shift occurred, and I can't tell you why there's so much mockery over my Clarks walkers and my Reebok Dressports, but all I know is that my feet are very comfortable in my footwear of choice, and I'm willing to bet that if my family members were willing to walk a mile in my shoes they'd change their tune.

When we were together last time, we were following Isaac as he made the very troubling and unconscionable choice to protect himself at the expense of his wife, Rebekah...something his father, Abraham, had also done with his wife, Sarah. As we began, we looked at the similarities between the actions of father and son, and we took note of the fact that, curiously, each entered into their unwise and faithless choice not long after God had powerfully spoken great promise and blessing into their lives. As we finished our session, we did so by asking some rather difficult questions of ourselves...questions that dared to ponder the similarities not between Isaac and his father, but between Isaac and us. We talked about being all too familiar with what it's like to walk in Isaac's shoes...to follow in his footsteps...to travel in a direction contrary to that which is holy, toward a destination that is far from the place of blessing. That's where we're picking things up today, and the reason is that I think we need some closure here. I think we need some encouragement. Actually, the truth is that we need words of hope, restoration, and reconciliation in the face of our Isaacian foibles in life, and if we take the long view as we go through this portion of Scripture, there's good news: that hope, restoration, and reconciliation are present in great abundance.

There are several different ways we might look at Isaac's — and our — deficit when it comes to making bad decisions in life...decisions that don't mesh with God's clearly revealed will and ways. Certainly, we need to start with the fact that as fallen people living in a fallen world we are, on our best days, still the worst of sinners. That's not a popular sentiment in today's world, and very often not in today's church either. But the Word of God is clear, and so, frankly, is conscience of every man woman and child on the face of the earth: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and all of us know it. None are righteous...not you, not me, and not Abraham or Isaac either. That truth all by itself goes a long way toward explaining the 'why' of those times in life when we follow the way that leads to death rather than the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Another aspect of our nature, though, is that we are a people who are prone to forgetting things. We forget who we are and whose we are. We forget that divine promise and blessing have been spoken over us by the One who created and even now sustains us. And we forget that while we are indeed sinners, we are also sinners redeemed by the blood of Jesus; people of whom it can be said that the old has gone and the new has come. Strange as it may seem, as believers in a great and mighty God who has saved us because He loves us, we nonetheless forget, and forget often, that we have the great and mighty privilege to approach His throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Abraham forgot that too...forgot it often. So did Isaac. We all forget.

So it is that like Abraham, and like Isaac after him, it is for us today: we need God's mercy... and God's grace...and God's help...to remember. To remember in those moments of testing and trial in life, those moments of fight or flight, those moments where things like fear or anger or temptation rise up to attack us, that God is on duty — He neither slumbers and sleeps. That God is ever faithful to us — He never sells us out. That God indeed is the God who keeps His promises — and that one of His greatest promises of all is that He will never leave us or forsake us.

Wrapping Up

Follow Abraham's life and you'll see the truth of that assertion. Follow Isaac's life and you'll see the same. Here are two men, men who daily sin much...but they have a God who forgives more. As we wrap things up for the day, I don't think I need to tell you this, but I will anyway: their God is our God. The One true God. The One and only God. He is the God who will help you today to remember His faithfulness to you, even as He chooses to forget your sin against Him. He is the God who chose to be incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary...to be made man...so He could walk in your shoes and take a journey to a place of holiness and blessing on your behalf that you could never have made on your own. This is the God who, once His time in your shoes was complete, removed them so that His feet could be pierced through — and His hands too — to nail your sins to a cross on a hill outside of Jerusalem. And this is the God who, after all was said and done, rose again on the third day so that one day soon you will walk with Him in the place He has prepared for you. Remember Him today, everyone...and as you do, walk away from our time together not beaten down, but built up and encouraged in the love and forgiveness of Christ. Have a great day, folks — take care, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings to you in the name of the King of kings and Lord of lords — our Savior Jesus Christ — and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad you're here as

we continue our day-by-day study in God's Word together, where right now the book holding our attention is Genesis. We're in the midst of Genesis 26 at the moment, devoting the lion's share of our time to Isaac and his life in a place called Gerar. Today's verses will continue on that track, and they'll also begin to set the stage for another very well-known incident involving Isaac's twin sons, Esau and his brother Jacob. Let's go to the Lord together in prayer as we get to it.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise your holy name and give glory and honor to you, for you are worthy or receiving glory and honor from all of your creation. You are above all things; all things are under your feet. All things were made by you and belong to you. We bless your name and come to you today with thanksgiving in our hearts for all that you've done for us in Christ. Please draw us closer to you today through our time in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, in the aftermath of Isaac's blunder over trying to protect himself at his wife's expense, the narrative in Genesis 26 moves on. Our focus this session: Growing — in more ways than one.

Genesis 26:12-17

12Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. 13The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. 14He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. 15So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth. 16Then Abimelech said to Isaac, "Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us." 17So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there.

D.L. Moody told a story about an eagle who was envious of another — one that could fly better than he could. One day the bird saw a sportsman with a bow and arrow and said to him, "I wish you'd bring down that eagle up there." The man said he would if he had some feathers for his arrow, so the jealous eagle pulled one out of his wing. The arrow was shot, but it didn't quite reach the rival bird because he was flying too high. So the first eagle pulled out another feather, then another — until he had lost so many that he himself couldn't fly anymore. The archer took advantage of the situation, turned around, and killed the now-helpless bird. Mr. Moody concluded his story by saying, "If you're envious of others, the one you'll hurt the most by your actions will be yourself."

Today in God's Word, envy is afoot. It has risen in the hearts of the people of Gerar, the Philistines. It has come to pass because of a certain man who is living among them — a man, of course, named Isaac. Isaac has planted crops and reaped in just one growing season a hundredfold what he had sown. Isaac has flocks and herds so vast that they cover the land like frosting on a cake. Isaac is wealthy and growing wealthier — wealthy in the extreme — and by the look of things, there's no end in sight.

With wealth comes power. With wealth comes influence. With wealth comes opportunity. And with wealth comes — in Isaac's case especially — more wealth. Isaac's wealth, in fact, is at the point where things have become a self-perpetuating cycle...a little like Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos or Bill Gates today, whose vast resources are at the point where they can't *not* continuously multiply into more.

So — where are we right now with respect to Isaac's life, and how is it that things have come to pass as they have? With Isaac's ruse regarding Rebekah exposed, and with Abimelech's resulting pronouncement that Isaac and Rebekah are to be protected and left alone in the land as they spend time there, the dust eventually settles and everyone gets on with life. We don't know how much time has transpired since that whole brouhaha because the text doesn't say, but presumably Isaac rolls up his sleeves and gets to work in the immediate aftermath of it all. As we can see, his efforts pay off; he does very, very well.

We'll get to the whys and wherefores of Isaac's present success in just a moment, because it's key to today's passage and actually key to the trajectory of generation upon generation upon generation to come. Before we do that, however, we should make note of the impact Isaac's success has on the people around him. What do the Philistines do when they see Isaac's growing resources? They do some growing of their own. They grow envious, coveting what Isaac has accumulated. They grow jealous, worrying that his gain will mean their loss. They grow angry and spiteful, attempting to undermine his prosperity by sabotaging his operations. And all the while, they understandably grow fearful, believing that his power is becoming a threat to them and to their way of life. All of these things are tantamount to the plucking of their own feathers, one after another...the loss of which will, in time, render the Philistines incapable of flight when they need it most. That's another study for another time — and a longitudinal study at that. But for now, let's just say that D.L. Moody's sage words are germane to the situation at hand: *"If you're envious of others, the one you'll hurt the most by your actions will be yourself."*

In the end, because of Isaac's growing power, Abimelech demands that Isaac and his family depart Gerar. Isaac almost certainly has the resources to buck Abimelech's command and push back on what amounts to a forced expulsion, but he doesn't do that. Rather, he goes in peace. Resettling in the Valley of Gerar — a place not in or adjacent to the city, but still within its sphere of influence — Isaac gets back to work, putting one foot in front of the other as he keeps on keeping on...something we'll see him continue to do in our next session.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for today, let's go back to what I said a moment ago regarding Isaac and the reason for all of this bounty in his life. Is Isaac a resourceful person? A hard worker? An individual who has wisdom and knowledge with respect to the workings and ways of the world? Yes. But that's not the source of his success. The source of his success is found in verse 12: He is successful because the Lord has blessed him. Lest any of us jump to the conclusion that this is an early proof text for the name-it-and-claim-it wealth and prosperity gospel, we need to understand something here: God's blessing of Isaac and the work of his hands is not principally about Isaac at all. God's blessing of Isaac is God continuing to work out of the big picture promises of the covenant that He made with Abraham, Isaac's father. God's blessing of Isaac is a build-up for what's to come after Isaac. And while God's blessing of Isaac is certainly a gracious outpouring rich in mercy and lavish in provision, the bounty here is a mere drop in the bucket when compared to all that will be built on this foundation. Remember what God told Isaac earlier in the chapter?

Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws." (Genesis 26:3-5)
It's hard to fathom, but here is a trustworthy statement: what we saw in the life of Abraham, what we are continuing to see in the life of Isaac, and what we are yet to see in the life of Jacob and those who will come after him, are all threads being woven into the tapestry of God's plan

of salvation. Preparations, even now, are being made...people, even now, are being put in place...all to play their role and pave the way for the coming of the Messiah — of Jesus — who will save the world from sin. That's the real reason we see the Lord blessing Isaac as He does in today's passage, and that's why we see Him speaking His *promise* of blessing to others as well. It's all part of His grand design of grace...amazingly, grace which extends even to you and to me in these last days.

More to come on this next time, everyone — it's been good to be with you, and I hope your day continues to be a great one! God's peace, and I'll see you soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody — blessings to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS! Thanks for being here for Bible Study today; I'm glad to have you along, and

I'm always hopeful that our time together will be a blessing for you in your walk with God. Today we're continuing our study of Genesis 26, so if you'll take a minute and open your Bible, we'll begin. Will you pray with me?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for a new day to live as your beloved children. Strengthen us today for service in your kingdom and for a deeper, more intimate walk with you. Use your Word to teach and train us, that we can be thoroughly equipped as your people. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, after Isaac settles in the Valley of Gerar, we'd think that he would finally be free of the conflict that beset him in Gerar proper. Unfortunately for him, that doesn't seem to be the case. Our focus this session: joy in the journey, blessing in the burden.

Genesis 26:18-23

18Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them. 19Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. 20But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. 21Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. 22He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land." 23From there he went up to Beersheba.

Have you ever struggled with patience...specifically the lack thereof? The old familiar saying, which many of you may already be thinking of as I speak, goes like this:

Patience is a virtue,
Possess it if you can.
Found seldom in a woman,
Never in a man.

Actually, I like what Leonardo Da Vinci said about patience. He wrote, "Patience serves as a protection against wrongs as clothes do against cold. For if you put on more clothes as the cold increases it will have no power to hurt you. So in like manner you must grow in patience when you meet with great wrongs, and they will then be powerless to vex your mind."

I'm thinking about patience and the exercise thereof today because of Isaac and his ongoing experiences with the Philistines in the Valley of Gerar. He's been exceedingly gracious in his dealings with them to this point, even as they've been considerably less so with him. He's acted with great restraint and in good faith as he's moved from Gerar to the more sparsely populated Valley of Gerar, and though he's been under no moral obligation to do it, he's sought to minimize his footprint in the region in a manner that will serve to alleviate the fears of those around him who see his growing wealth and power as a threat. And yet even with all of this, today's passage shows us that Isaac still finds himself in conflict with the people of Gerar; conflict unwanted and unlooked-for. How does he handle it? That's the amazing thing. Patience. He handles it with patience.

We're going to go through the specifics of this passage in our time together tomorrow. We'll talk about names and places and beefs and bullying, and we'll get into how and why Isaac responds to all of the bitterness and quarreling as he does. For now, in preparation for that, I'd simply like for you to spend some time today focusing on the backdrop of it all. I'd like you to

focus on Isaac's patience — and as you do, I'd like you to reflect on patience and its place in your own life as a child of God redeemed by the blood of Christ.

More often than not, the purposes of God often develop slowly. His grand designs typically aren't hurried. The Big Picture takes time to paint, and admittedly, sometimes it's hard to see how the individual brushstrokes contribute to the whole until it's all said and done. It takes faith to be part of it all. Isaac, in the verses before us today, shows that he understands that. Though he doesn't have all the details laid out for him as far as God's plan goes, he does understand that the Master is at work, and that he's part of the painting, as it were...part of the art...part of God's act of making everything beautiful in His time. Knowing that fact informs how Isaac navigates his circumstances. Knowing that fact can inform you and me in our lives as well.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Thomas a Kempis described very well the kind of patience Isaac exhibits in today's passage. He wrote, "He deserves not the name of *patient* who is only willing to suffer as much as he thinks proper, and for whom he pleases. The truly patient man asks nothing from whom he suffers, whether his superior, his equal, or his inferior. Rather, from whomever, or how much, or how often wrong is done to him, he accepts it all as from the hand of God, and counts it gain." Is that an easy kind of thing to do? Absolutely not. Is there great burden associated with it? There can be, yes. But in the end, is there greater blessing that outweighs the greatness of the burden? Again, the answer is yes.

When we gather next time, we'll parse these things out, make some important connections, and draw some important conclusions that I think will be of great encouragement to us all in our Christian faith, so I hope you'll come along and follow it through with me. Until then, have a super day...and a reflective, prayerful day too as you think about what we've shared here together. God's rich peace to you and yours, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and God's continued joy and peace to you in our Lord Jesus. Thanks for spending some time with me here at the end of another week, where as we open God's Word together today we're starting to wind down our look at

the 26th chapter of Genesis. I'm glad you're here; let's go right to prayer and ask the Lord to bless our time together as we begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you've given us so much. Thank you for your grace and mercy, and thank you most of all for sending your Son, Jesus, through whom we have received your many wondrous gifts. Please bless this study time in your Word today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're going back to Isaac and his settling in the Valley of Gerar. What's the source of his conflict there? That's our focus this session.

Genesis 26:18-23

18Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them. 19Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. 20But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. 21Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. 22He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land." 23From there he went up to Beersheba.

Most of us are familiar with the beautiful statue overlooking Rio De Janeiro in Brazil. Known as Christ the Redeemer, it's considered one of the seven wonders of the modern world. Most of us aren't familiar, however, with another statue of Jesus in South America. It's also called Christ the Redeemer, but it's better known as Christ of the Andes. It was unveiled in March of 1904 in celebration of the peaceful resolution of a border dispute between Chile and Argentina, a dispute that came very close to boiling over into war. Sitting at over 12,500 feet in elevation, it straddles the border between the two countries, and engraved at its foot are these words: "Sooner shall these mountains crumble into dust than Chileans and Argentinians break the peace which at the feet of Christ, the Redeemer, they have sworn to maintain."

Here, though, is the funny thing: shortly after the statue was erected, the Chileans began to complain that they had been slighted. The way Jesus had been erected on the monument's foundation, they felt, had too much of His back turned toward their side of the border. Tempers ran hot, and a groundswell of protest rose to an alarming level, one that actually brought calls to end the truce. It was then that an unassuming Chilean journalist stepped in and saved the day. In an editorial that broke the tension, satisfied the protesters, and even made them laugh, he simply wrote, "It's okay, my friends. The people of Argentina need more watching over than the Chileans." Sometimes it's the unexpected approach — and indeed, the non-confrontational approach, the gentle approach, the peaceful approach, the patient approach — that wins the day.

As we come once more to today's section of verses here in Genesis 26, you'll remember that the last time we were together, our sole focus as we had our first look at the passage was on Isaac — specifically, Isaac's patience in the face of all the conflict the Philistines were bringing to him as he attempted to settle in the Valley of Gerar. Some have read this account over the years and assumed, wrongly so, that the reason Isaac kept kowtowing to the people of the region was that he wasn't up to the task of defending himself; that he was fearful of what might happen to him if he made a stand. The truth, however, is quite the opposite, and that's what we want to discuss today in our time together. Let's just quickly go through what's happening in the text, and then we'll draw some things out of it that we can take with us into the rest of our day.

Isaac, as we know, has moved from Gerar to the Valley of Gerar at the insistence of Abimelech, the king of the region. As leader of the Philistines, Abimelech has seen the wealth and power of Isaac grow — grow so much, in fact, that he's come to be seen as a threat to the people and their way of life. Thus this move, one away from populated areas and away from any opportunity to wield influence over anyone. Yet, no sooner does Isaac begin to settle in and set up shop, as it were, the herdsmen of Gerar begin to dispute with Isaac's servants about water rights. This happens not once, but twice, and in response, Isaac does two things: he gives the wells a name, and then — surprisingly — he moves on.

The first well that brings conflict he names *Esek*. *Esek* means *contention*. The second well, which is pretty much a carbon copy of the first in terms of the reaction of the herdsmen, he names *Sitnah*, which means *enmity*. Vacating the area where those first wells were dug, Isaac finally moves to a new place and digs a third well...one that no one disputes. This one he names *Rehoboth*, which is the Hebrew word for *a broad place*...a place with room. "Now the Lord has given us room," says Isaac, "and we will flourish in the land."

In so many ways, Isaac's actions with respect to the herdsmen of Gerar are not what we would expect. But that's the point. And remember, sometimes it's the unexpected approach — and indeed, the non-confrontational approach, the gentle approach, the peaceful approach, and the patient approach — that wins the day.

Why does Isaac act as he does here? He acts as he does because his mindset and his expectations for outcome are on an entirely different plane than those who are biting at his heels and giving him grief. They're focused on the temporal; Isaac is focused on the long term. They're intent on "getting what's theirs;" Isaac knows that he already possesses all that he can see and every place that he steps. They're acting out of fear; Isaac, because he is steeped and established in the promises of God, acts in faith. Since that's the case, Isaac has no need to defend himself or his territory. Isaac has no reason to fret or panic when others come against him. Isaac, because he is God's child walking under God's blessing in accordance with God's plan, is content to go with the flow and wait on the Lord for direction. Which is why, very significantly, when he comes to the place where he digs the third well and finds no one quarreling with him over it, Isaac clearly ascribes it to the hand of Almighty God. "Now *the Lord* has given us room," he says, "and we will flourish in the land." Isaac's trust is in the Lord. And that makes all the difference.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for this session, I told you that before our time was up today we'd be able to look at the events of this passage and draw some helpful conclusions from it with respect to our own lives. Are you ready to do that? It all comes down to the previous paragraph...to the things I just said about Isaac. Why? Because just as Isaac is a person who operated under God's favor as God's child in the big picture of God's plan, so are you. You are a person who is loved in an unconditional, everlasting way by the One who sent His only Son into the world to save you from your sin and give you new life. Do you know what that means? It means that as a person redeemed by the blood of Christ, your mindset and your expectations about how things work in this world are on an entirely different plane than those who spend their time biting at your heels and giving you grief because of who you are and what you're about as a person of faith. They're focused on the temporal; you're focused on the long term. They're intent on "getting what's theirs;" you know that in Christ, you already possess an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. They're acting out of fear; you, because you are steeped and established in the promises of God, act in faith. Since that's the case, you have no need to defend yourself or your territory. You have no reason to fret or panic when others come against you. You, because you are God's child walking under God's

blessing in accordance with God's plan, can be content to go with the flow and wait on the Lord for direction, and when it comes, you can clearly and joyfully and confidently ascribe it to the hand of Almighty God.

The Lord has given you room, and in Him you will flourish!

Trust in Him today. Remember who He is, remember who you are in Him, *and trust in the Lord*. Truly, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that makes all the difference!

Take care, everyone; you're in my prayers, and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon. God bless you richly in Christ!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to be with you again after the weekend, and I pray that the days God gives us together this week will strengthen, encourage, and equip you followers of Christ. Today we

continue our time on the downward slope of Genesis 26, where we're following Isaac as he forges a positive and faithful path forward in life even as he finds himself in the midst of a hostile and argumentative people. Let's jump right in. Will you pray with me?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this time to be in your Word today. Thank you for the promise of your presence as we give ourselves over to the Scriptures; please open our hearts to what you desire to teach us, and please lead us in the way you would have us to go. We ask this in Christ's holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, following a rather unsettled resettling process in the Valley of Gerar, peace and resolution has finally come to Isaac, and he's now gone to Beersheba...what the Bible idiomatically points to as the southernmost point of Israel. There the Lord appears to him, and the message he receives is one of great comfort and encouragement. Our focus this session: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you."

Genesis 26:24-25

24That night the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." 25Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord . There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

I've been reading a lot lately about aviation. My house happens to be near a small airfield where a lot of WWII planes are kept and flown by airline pilots and other enthusiasts when they have down time and can get into the cockpits of their hobby aircraft. One of the great aviators of recent times, whom I knew nothing about until this past week, was a man by the name of Eddie Rickenbacker. If you're a student of the First World War, you may know him as a very highly decorated flying ace and Medal of Honor recipient. If you're more into business and industry, then you might know him instead as the longtime head of Eastern Airlines, among other endeavors.

One thing that you quickly learn when reading about Rickenbacker is that he was an envelope pusher in the extreme. He was always straining forward, always innovating, always ready to try new, untested things, and almost always ahead of the curve. Many of his exploits, business and otherwise, were filled with risk, and there were times he failed in magnificent fashion. In the end, though, it was his courage to launch into uncharted territory that defined him and his many successes, and it's what defines his lasting legacy as well. Asked once about his fearlessness, he interrupted his interviewer to correct him. "I don't live in the absence of fear," he said; "I have a great many fears. What I have more of is courage." It was in his autobiography many years later that Eddie Rickenbacker crystalized that sentiment when he wrote, "Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared."

Today as we come to God's Word and find the Lord appearing to Isaac in the aftermath of his time of trial in the Valley of Gerar, we read a familiar phrase, don't we; one spoken to many different people in many different places and at many different times by God, His angels, or His prophets. What is that phrase? "Do not be afraid." There wouldn't be reason to say it if it didn't need to be said, and the fact that it shows up so often in Scripture — well over a hundred times — lets us know that it's actually a common thing for God's people to have moments, or even seasons, of fear in their lives. In the passage before us, Isaac, given his circumstances, has a multitude of reasons to be afraid. He's in a land filled with people who are hostile toward him and who have been working to undermine him at every turn. Even when he has graciously

done that which has been asked of him, he still has bad operators putting squeeze plays on him. Is he exercising courage in the face of it? He is indeed, and that's laudable...and we've already talked about the fact that it's his faith in God and God's promises that has enabled that response. But when God comes to Isaac in Beersheba, the word He speaks is not about having courage in the midst of his fears, a la Eddie Rickenbacker (again, laudable though that is), but rather, to not be afraid.

"I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you..."

There's a difference, isn't there.

That Isaac has come to Beersheba is significant. Not just because his father had gone there before him, but because Beersheba is actually a place where several people through the years came into contact with God. Such appearances were almost always in the midst, or in the immediate aftermath, of times of difficulty, trouble or angst. Isaac's son Jacob would hear from God in a dream at Beersheba. Hagar, back in Genesis 21, and Elijah the prophet in the book of 1 Kings, were each in the wilderness of Beersheba when God spoke to them. Furthermore, when God spoke to His people at Beersheba, it was almost always with the kind of message that Isaac hears in today's passage: a message of assurance and comfort, a message of encouragement, and again, a message not so much to have courage, but to not be afraid. Why? Because even in the midst of trial, God was God, God was present, and God would bless.

It almost looks, textually speaking, as though God used the conflicts in Isaac's life to purposely lead him to Beersheba so that Isaac could have the experience there that he did. And because God repeatedly demonstrated His faithfulness to Isaac, Isaac was thus reaffirmed and knew that he would be okay; that he would be okay wherever God would lead him. So it is that as the passage ends, it does so with a newfound confidence on Isaac's part. He builds an altar there...he pitches his tent there...he digs a well there...he settles there. And not only does he settle there, in his heart he is settled. God was God, God was present, and God would bless.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, in many ways Beersheba was a special place. In Beersheba, The Lord showed in a special way that He knew Isaac, that He knew Isaac's heart, and that He knew Isaac's need. Moreover, He knew the plans He had for Isaac, and He knew that Beersheba would be the perfect place to remind him of that fact and to reiterate those plans to him as a way to strengthen him in his time of uncertainty.

As a result of those things, Beersheba is sometimes seen today as symbol of the Lord's faithfulness to His people at large, especially in the hard times — times in our lives where we call upon the name of the Lord because we're scared or hurting. Tragedy may strike, a heartache might break us open, a season of fear might grip us and refuse to let go. In those times, what does the Lord do? The Lord shows Himself to be strong on our behalf. The Lord reminds us that He knows us as His people, knows our hearts, and understands our needs. He also knows His plans for us, and He knows the right time to come and remind us that because we belong to Him, we need not be afraid.

Think of a time where in a special way God revealed His will to you about something you were struggling with, or rescued you in some way that brought you peace and a sense of settledness after a period of fear. That's what you might call a Beersheba Moment, and it's a wonderful thing to hold onto and treasure in your heart. Why? Because the next time seasons of doubt or conflict or anxiety come your way, you can go back to that Beersheba and remember God's faithfulness to you. In fact, you can go there over and over in your heart to be

reminded of the assurance that God is with you, that He is for you, and that He is fulfilling His plan in and through as His beloved child. May I say it one more time? God is God. God is present. And God will bless — is blessing even now.

Thanks so much for your time, everyone — may the peace of our Lord Jesus, who gave Himself for you and whose perfect love casts out fear, guard your hearts and minds today. Have a great day, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone — blessings to you in Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. Today we continue our look at Genesis 26, and with lots to get to in this session, let's take a moment and go right to prayer as we get ready to study.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you so much for showing us your power and authority through your life and ministry. Thank you for living the life that we were unable to live because of our sin, and thank you for taking the penalty of our sin upon yourself through your death on the cross and rising in triumph on the third day. Please teach us today as we open the Scriptures, that we might continue to be matured and strengthened as your people. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come to another mirror image in the life of Isaac with respect to his father Abraham and his time among the people of Gerar. Our focus this session: God's blessing gives witness.

Genesis 26:26-33

26Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. 27Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?" 28They answered, "We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us' — between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you 29that you will do us no harm, just as we did not molest you but always treated you well and sent you away in peace. And now you are blessed by the Lord ." 30Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. 31Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they left him in peace. 32That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, "We've found water!" 33He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.

Francis d'Assisi once invited a young monk to join him on a trip to town to preach. Honored to be given the invitation, the monk readily accepted. All day long he and Francis walked through the streets, byways, and alleys, and even into the suburbs. They rubbed shoulders with hundreds of people. At day's end, the two headed back home. Not even once had Francis addressed a crowd, nor had he talked to anyone about the gospel. Greatly disappointed, his young companion said, "I thought we were going into town to preach." Francis responded, "My son, we have preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We were seen by many and our behavior was closely watched. It is of no use to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk."

As we come to God's Word today, there's a great deal here that we could spend our time on. We could, for one thing, detail the similarities between Abraham's covenant with Abimelech in Genesis 21 and Isaac's here in Genesis 26. We could discuss Abimelech's motivation for approaching Isaac, and in turn, consider the nature of Isaac's response and why it is that he ultimately agreed to the deal. We could talk, as we did yesterday, about Beersheba and the significance of its name...again, beginning with Abraham and then following on to Isaac, observing the nuances of how both father and son put special layers of meaning into that moniker. In actuality, we'll be giving time to each of those things over the next day or two, because they're important to our overall understanding of the text and the overarching message of the text. Today, however, I'd like to have us focus on just one thing...to meditate on just one thing. I don't want to teach it, and I certainly don't want to preach it; I just want to speak it and then leave it for God to do with it as He sees fit.

In verse 28, Abimelech and his two advisers, responding to Isaac's question about why they've come to him — especially since they'd earlier and angrily sent him away — have a ready answer. These thoroughly pagan, spiritually uninterested, worldly-focused, some-time frenemies of Isaac say something incredibly profound:

We saw clearly that the Lord was with you.

My entire reason for being...my one bit of solid footing in life...the sum total of who I am and what I do and why I do it is all found in One Person: Jesus, who loves me and gave Himself for me. He is my hope. He is my peace. He is my present and my future. He is my all in all. But I wonder — not so much when I'm sitting here in front of the camera, but when I'm out on the street or in line at Home Depot or sitting at the dinner table with family or having a drink with friends — do people see clearly that the Lord is with me? Do they see Christ reflected in me? Do they recognize that what I'm about isn't typical of what the world around me is about? If they don't see that clearly, then what are they seeing?

“We saw clearly that the Lord was with you.” That's where everything stopped for me as I read today's passage. That's where things became a little uncomfortable and a little unsettled. That's what's bouncing around in my head right now, and it's what's turning in my heart and churning in my stomach. That those things are occurring is a pretty solid indicator that I have some things not just to think about, but to pray through and act upon. I wonder if when you consider those words, perhaps you do as well.

May God in His grace sensitize us to that, and may God in His mercy and by the power of His Spirit move us to new ground on this matter as well. Indeed, Lord make it so — in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.

Take care everyone — God-willing, I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone — grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you today, and though I know that emotions are strong right now, that hearts all across the country are broken again after yet another senseless and evil act, still we gather as God's people. Today we look to Him for hope. We look to Him for comfort. We seek from Him His mercy on all who mourn.

It's never a popular thing to say, but in times like this especially, it needs to be said: ours is a sinful and fallen world with sinful and fallen people, and the darkness presently in our midst is a reminder of humanity's great need for a Savior. Something else needs to be said as well: though we understand that truth in principle and even in practice — at least to a certain degree — when something occurs like Uvalde, or Buffalo, or Sacramento, or for that matter any of the more than 200 mass shootings that have happened in the United States since January, our understanding starts to fray. Things go off the rails and move every which way...and in the process, move beyond us and our ability to process them. I'm like so many of you today: bowing my head in weariness, not wanting to look at the news anymore, asking rhetorical questions over and over again, questions whose answers seem so easy but for some reason never play out that way.

I know that many people today are saying that thoughts and prayers don't help in a situation like this. They're tired of the "thoughts and prayers" line altogether, and I understand completely. But while I'll agree on the "thought" portion of that sentiment — skewed human thinking is what, in part, brought this about in the first place — I'm a person who *does* believe that prayer is both important and powerful right now. It's what we as Christians need to be doing. I believe that in bringing our collective cries to the throne room of God, our gracious Lord hears and acts, and I further believe that there's always more going on from an eternal perspective than any of us can know or perceive.

God did not will this tragedy.

God did not cause this tragedy.

But God will absolutely work through this tragedy for His name's sake — and He will also, though it is impossible to fathom in this moment, work it for good.

Though the enemy would use this terrible event to create doubt and derision in the world, to turn people away from God and cause them to question the goodness of God, you can be sure that in the end, Satan's tactics will be thrown down, the name of the Lord will be glorified, and the world will know the power and love of the Savior who loves them and gave Himself for them.

I sat down to film yesterday's session and it just didn't seem right to stick with business as usual. I sat down to film for today and felt the same way...felt that at this moment in time, the right thing to do was to give some space, continue to encourage intercession, and bring the light of Jesus into the midst of this darkness. Tomorrow we'll head back to our regular schedule, and I look forward to it very much, but for now, I hope you'll understand the pause.

Thank you, everyone — remember those who are experiencing such tremendous loss today. Bring them to the Lord in prayer. Find a tangible way to support them in their time of need. Be the hands and feet of Christ to them...be church.

I'll see you again next time, returning to the book of Genesis. Until then, God bless you richly in your Redeemer, and do take care.

Greetings

Greetings everyone — welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and Christ's joy and peace to each of you today. It's great to have you along as we come back to God's Word after a prayerful pause surrounding the events in Uvalde, Texas this week; I know we're all continuing to pray and continuing to put our faith into action as we come alongside that community with the love of our Savior. On this final day of our week together, we're doing what we most days that we gather: spending some intentional time in the Scriptures, where right now we find ourselves in the 26th chapter of Genesis with Isaac navigating his days in light of the promises of God. If you'll take a moment to find your place, we'll pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord God, in this moment we ascribe all glory, honor, power and might to you, both now and forever. Thank you for this time today to learn more of you in your holy Word. By your Spirit, open our hearts to all that you would have us to receive. As we come to you in Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming back once more to Isaac and the agreement he makes with Abimelech in the Valley of Gerar, and we're doing so to tie up some loose ends and make a few important observations. Our focus this session: the consideration of a covenant.

Genesis 26:26-33

26Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. 27Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?" 28They answered, "We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us' — between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you 29that you will do us no harm, just as we did not molest you but always treated you well and sent you away in peace. And now you are blessed by the Lord ." 30Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. 31Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they left him in peace. 32That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, "We've found water!" 33He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.

James Engell is a scholar at Harvard, a professor of English and Comparative Literature there. He's also a member of the university's committee on the study of religion, and as part of that group he once conducted research that looked at the prevailing tenets undergirding the belief system of what he called the "modern" world. Here's what he found among his subjects:

God, if He exists at all, is just an impersonal moral force;
Man has the capacity within himself to be moral and make good choices;
Happiness consists of unlimited material acquisition;
There's no true, objective basis for right and wrong; and finally,
The supernatural is not real...just a figment of the imagination.

Keep in mind that Dr. Engell's report wasn't necessarily indicative of his personal beliefs (I don't know what they are), nor was it indicative of Americans as a whole. Rather, what the arc of his research showed was a growing secularism in the United States, a declining belief in traditional Judeo-Christian values and teachings, and a general shift from dependence on God to a dependence on self.

I don't know what the parameters of his study were, but I do know this: what he showed through the empirical nature of his research has been anecdotally clear and plainly observable in our culture for a very long time. The results of his work surprised no one.

The one thing that was surprising to me as I read about Dr. Engell's work was that he focused so narrowly on the modern world. It surprised me because the truth of the matter is that the bullet points we just read through aren't unique to today's prevailing world view at all. They've been in evidence for thousands of years across all different kinds of people groups, and absent a distinct awareness and understanding that there is a Creator/Redeemer/Sustainer God of the universe who holds all things in the palm of His hand, the natural way of world has always been just as Dr. Engell's research revealed: at their core, people tend to be godless (or create gods in their own image), humanistic, acquisitional, selfish, and ultimately secular.

I bring that up today for one simple reason: if we were to do a case study on the society, culture, and general belief system of the Philistines back in the days of Abraham and Isaac, we'd end up with a pretty similar blueprint. They did have deities that they worshipped, specifically Ashtoreth, Dagon, and Baal-Zebub, but again, at their heart those were idols of wood and stone, fashioned in the image of the peoples' own imagination. They were ultimately, then, worshipers of self — and true to form, selfishness in all of its different expressions informed most of their decisions.

When we look at today's passage, then, on the one hand we're not surprised in the least to see Abimelech coming to Isaac to try and forge a treaty wherein he and his people will be protected from Isaac's burgeoning power and influence. It's all about self, remember? On the other hand, however, it's quite surprising to see what prompts Abimelech and his advisers to approach Isaac: these self-absorbed idol-worshippers who care little for anyone or anything but advancing themselves, these people who are all about looking out for number one, this culture which believes it's at the top of the heap of humanity high above pretty much anyone else, recognizes that Isaac has surpassed them. That he is better than they are. And frankly, that he is not simply better, but superior. Abimelech and his advisers recognize something else as well: the reason for Isaac's position is God. Not a god, little g, like they have created for themselves, but *the* God, capital G, the One true God...the Creator/Redeemer/Sustainer God who holds all things in the palm of His hand.

To review, what's the background here? Isaac, of course, is still living in the land that Abimelech controls, and as Abimelech has watched Isaac's life and the divine blessings so clearly in evidence on all that he does, he's moved to propose a covenant between himself and Isaac in order to secure a long-term relationship...one, by the way, that will be binding not just through his own reign, but extend even to his descendants. In one sense, we can even say that this proposed covenant is actually the reaffirmation of an existing covenant...one originally made between Isaac's father Abraham and Abimelech (most likely the father or grandfather of the present Abimelech) in a previous generation. It's a perpetuation of the mutual agreement that the family of Abraham had made with the leader of Gerar and his people as they sojourned in that land. At any rate, because God has blessed Isaac, and because he's a man of great wealth, power, and influence, Abimelech knows that having and keeping Isaac on his kingdom's good side is of great importance.

Along that line, We should take a just a moment to touch once more on our conversation from our last look at this passage. The fact that Abimelech and his leaders "have clearly seen that the Lord is with" Isaac certainly has to do, at least to some degree, with his material wealth, his power, and his influence. That kind of an assessment on their part is understandable, especially in light of how they consider the measure of a man in their own cultural context. But at the same time, we also need to remember something else, something a great deal more intangible and in one sense, something the leaders of Gerar find rather unsettling: in all his dealings with Abimelech and the Philistine people, from the king himself right down to the herdsman, Isaac has been remarkable in his exercise of goodwill, restraint, and a peaceable

attitude. He seems un-jostled by conflict, generally choosing to acquiesce to his detractors in moments of strife rather than stand his ground and fight. In short, he carries himself as a high road person when the typical approach of the day in that part of the world — especially from someone of his station and means — is to show force and overwhelm the weak at every turn. That Isaac has chosen not to do this, and that his position has only improved as a result, is striking to Abimelech and his men. They realize that Isaac is a different kind of person with a different kind of outlook on life. He's different because of his relationship with God. So it is that they also realize that Isaac's blessings don't simply come from socioeconomic prowess. Rather, they must come from the power and promises of the Lord.

In the end, after a time of discussion the covenant is agreed to, and as we've already discussed, the place where it happens becomes significant and is marked by a name. Abraham had originally named this area Beersheba, a word that means "the well of the seven" or "the well of the oath" in reference to the seven ewe lambs Abraham had given Abimelech as part of the resolution they'd struck over a disputed well. As Isaac cuts his own covenant with Abimelech, it happens to coincide with the discovery of water in a new well Isaac's servants have been digging. To memorialize the agreement, Isaac fittingly names the new well *Shibah*, which is similar to the Hebrew word for *oath*.

To this day, says the text, the town is known as Beersheba...and the amazing thing is that those words continue to be true in modern times. The modern Israeli city of Be'er Sheva still exists. It's not only the largest city in the Negev Desert, but one of the five largest metro areas in the entire country. What of its proximity to the ancient ruins of the Beersheba we're discussing today in the text? Just a stone's throw — a little over two miles. And guess what? In the area of the ruins of the old city, several ancient wells have been found — and they still produce water!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what started as the establishment of a covenant between Abraham and the people of Gerar now continues with Abraham's son Isaac and the covenant he makes with Gerar's inhabitants. But this covenant, significant though it is for the here and now in Isaac's life, is not the be-all-end-all for him in the least. Why? Because Isaac, as we all know, is the carrier of the Great covenant, and the son from whom a great people — including the greatest Person ever — will ultimately come, even our Lord Jesus Christ. As we've made note of before, while Isaac isn't fully aware of how all of this fits together, what he is aware of is God's hand on his life and God's promises in his heart. He trusts what the Lord has told him about the nations of the world being blessed through him, and in faith, he remains focused on that as he lives his life under God's gracious guidance and provision. Like his father Abraham before him, Isaac believes God. He trusts God. He knows that with God, all things are possible...and he knows that with God, everything will be okay.

More on all of this when we come together after the weekend, everyone. I appreciate your time, especially with this longer "catch-up" session today, and I look forward to being with you again soon. Have a terrific weekend, and the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and the blessing of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, be upon each one of you as we come to the Scriptures today. Thanks for being here as part of our online family, where in this session we've come to the final two verses in Genesis 26. Take a moment, quiet your mind, and join me for prayer as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, you've been gracious and merciful to us beyond all our knowing. Thank you for your love, and thank you that through your Word you've given us all we need to become wise unto salvation in Jesus our Savior. Please bless our study time today as we return to Genesis. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, Genesis 26 closes in a rather abrupt and mysterious way, telling us just briefly about Esau's wives and the impact — a negative one — that they had on Isaac and Rebekah. Our focus this session: Hard days from the Hittites.

Genesis 26:34-35

34When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. 35They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

During the years I lived among the Amish in southwest Missouri, I met and enjoyed friendships with many of my neighbors. Some of them were young couples just starting out, while others were much farther along...25, 35, 50, even 60 years. Regardless of the length of time an Amish couple had been married, one thing I saw over and over again — almost a hundred percent of the time, in fact — was that in the home, things were always peaceful. There was gentleness in evidence, gentleness that seemed to permeate the whole house. Whether it was Chris and Elizabeth, old and wizened and sitting on their porch enjoying early spring weather, or Petey and Lavina in their late twenties with seven kids running around the kitchen, nothing ever seemed stressed. There was no angst. There was a distinct absence of conflict. Instead, there was a quiet flow to things. There was harmony. Words were spoken quietly, decisions were arrived at equitably, and everyone, from the littlest baby to the ninety year-old great-grandmother and everybody in between, was honored and esteemed. This wasn't merely an immediate family or even intrafamily phenomenon; it extended across the entire community from family to family to family. My Amish friends weren't sinless saints by any stretch of the imagination. They needed a Savior just as much as any of us. But I loved them then and love them still for the value they put on...well...valuing one another.

I'm thinking about my Amish neighbors in Missouri right now because as we come to God's Word and consider the verses before us, though there's much that we don't know, the passage says enough so that what we *do* know speaks loudly and clearly: harmony, equity, honor and esteem were not things which characterized the interactions between Esau's wives and their in-laws. In fact, there was very little value placed on the relationship at all.

There are two tracks that we want to follow here today: one quite obvious and which needs no real introduction, and the other a bit off the beaten path, but no less important. We can dispatch the first rather quickly, so let's begin there. The Bible says that both Judith and Basemath, who were Hittites, brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Those two pieces of information are linked. Being Hittites, these two women weren't simply from a different culture, but from a culture espousing a completely different world view than that of Isaac and Rebekah's people. Most significantly, it was the religion of the Hittites that presented an issue: like that of so many pagan people groups in that day, it was pluralistic and focused on the worship of nature. Hittites believed in a pantheon of gods, much like what comes to mind when we think of the Greeks and Romans. Likewise, as in most pagan societies of the day, that belief

system led to despicable and immoral practices in their worship rituals. When Esau married these two women, he was making a specific choice to leave the parameters of the faith in which he was raised and the one true God whom he had been taught to know and worship. At the same time, Judith and Basemath undoubtedly introduced aspects of their own religious practices to Esau (and perhaps others in the family as well), so it's not surprising in the least that these two were a source of grief for Esau's mother and father. We'll have the opportunity to discuss this a bit more down the line, so tuck it into your hat and keep it handy for recall later on.

The second thing that I'd like to take a bit of time with today is the notion of the Hittites themselves. They're a little on the down low, as it were...kind of a blip on the screen in the big picture of the world...but they're nonetheless a nation that played an important role in the history of the Old Testament. Even more than that, however, is that the Hittites have inadvertently helped to verify the accuracy of the Bible. How so? For a very long time, scholars didn't know a thing about this group of people. Historians, archaeologists, and others went years without finding any specific references to them outside the pages of Scripture. Over time, then, critics simply stopped believing that the Hittites had been real, and so they began to treat them as part of a broader near-eastern mythology. The reasoning was that since no archaeological evidence could be found of their civilization, it must have never existed...and in turn, all of those references to Hittites in the Bible (there are over 50 of them) must be made up or just plain wrong.

Skip forward in time, however, to the end of the 19th century. It was then, in 1876, that many archaeological discoveries began to be made about the Hittites, and today it's long-since been proven that the Hittites were a well-known and powerful people in the 15th and 16th centuries B.C. who ruled in what today would be Syria and the eastern portion of Turkey. What happened to the Hittites? Over time, as with many groups, they were eventually absorbed into surrounding cultures and lost their distinctive identity, but again, the discoveries concerning the Hittite kingdom have been a great support in verifying the details recorded about them in the Bible.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what might we say as a last word on these verses? On the one hand, we've been given an early biblical picture of the strife that often comes when there's an unequal yoking in marriage between a child of God and a nonbeliever. If we were to follow all of the references regarding the Hittites in the Bible, many of them would take us to places they once occupied, then lost as God came into a territory and routed the worshippers of idols so that His holy people would be protected from pagan influence. Judith and Basemath, along with Esau himself, serve as cautionary examples of the harm that can be done when we walk in the way that seems best to us as opposed to the revealed will of God.

On the other hand, this brief account has also given us a jumping off point to explore yet another solid piece of evidence for the authority authenticity, and veracity of God's Word...a fascinating topic that can easily move a person into hours of research and study that yields an ever-growing delight in the things of God and the salvation He's prepared for us in Christ.

When we come back tomorrow and return to the Scriptures, we'll be opening to Genesis 27, another very familiar portion of our Bible that will be leading us into some great learning and life application in the days ahead. I hope you'll plan to join in and be part of it! Thanks, everyone; have a terrific day, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon. God's peace!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm glad you're here for our midweek study session together, where today we'll be opening to the 27th chapter of Genesis...46 verses of down and dirty family deception and dysfunction. Sounds like fun, doesn't it! Actually, while the passages to come in the days ahead won't be pretty ones, what they'll be lacking in sweetness and light they'll make up for with some fantastic learning and growing opportunities. We have some important groundwork to lay today as we get into all of this, so let's pray and prepare our hearts to engage with God's Word.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this day. Thank you for your finished work at the cross, in which you paid the penalty of our sins. Thank you for your indwelling Spirit, which enlightens us and gives us understanding as we open the Scriptures. Please bless our study time today, that we may know you and worship you aright. We ask this in your strong and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with Isaac growing old and infirm, the time has come to speak his blessing over his firstborn son. That son, of course, is Esau, but high drama is on the horizon, and over our next several sessions together we'll be watching Isaac's family explode in conflict because of the deception Jacob and his mother Rebekah employ against Esau. Our focus as we enter the fray: birthrights and blessings.

Genesis 27:1-4

When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, "My son." "Here I am," he answered. 2Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. 3Now then, get your weapons-your quiver and bow-and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. 4Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."

In the late 1860s, President Ulysses S. Grant gave a cigar to Dr. Horace Norton, the noted philanthropist and founder of Norton College. Because of his respect for the President, Dr. Norton chose to keep the cigar rather than smoke it. Upon his death, the cigar passed to his son, and later it was bequeathed to his grandson. It was Norton's grandson who in 1932 chose to light the cigar ceremoniously during an oration at Norton College's 70th anniversary celebration. Waxing eloquent, Norton lit the famous cigar and proceeded to extol the many virtues of Grant until suddenly...Boom! The renowned cigar exploded. That's right — over sixty years earlier Grant had passed a loaded cigar along to a good friend, and at long last it had made a fool of someone: not his friend, but his friend's grandson!

Jacob and Esau — brothers and twins, though as different as night and day — have a rather fraught relationship. They're brothers, yes, but like many brothers, there's a bit of competition, animosity, and enmity between them as well. Call them frenemies if you'd like. Esau was first out of the womb, so again, though the brothers are twins, Esau is technically the firstborn. That's a big deal, because as the firstborn son, all the rights and privileges associated with that position have been conferred upon him. This, as we know, includes something called the *birthright*. Problem #1 for our consideration today? In the case of Jacob and Esau, there's already been an exploding cigar moment between them on that front. Earlier in our study, we watched a very sleazy, cunning, and opportunistic younger brother pass a stinker and take advantage of his older brother, securing the birthright from him for the price of a bowl of stew. That incident left a lasting and bitter taste in Esau's mouth, and it also made him look like a fool. He's had to live with the consequences of that foolish choice ever since.

The birthright, just to quickly review, can be described this way: it's an honor given to the firstborn that bestows head-of-household status. It also carries with it the right to inherit a double portion of the father's estate after his death. Under the birthright, the firstborn son assumes both his father's authority and his responsibilities as he carries on in his stead. It's a big deal, and once again, therefore, a big loss for Esau.

As we pick things up in the text today, that birthright incident is fresh in our minds, partly because it just occurred back in chapter 25. Yet it's also fresh in our minds for another reason. As we continue to follow Jacob and Esau's sojourn through life, the time has come for another hugely important moment for them, one with long term implications: the time has come for Isaac to grant his fatherly blessing. It's not much of a spoiler alert to come out and say that there's another exploding cigar moment in the offing; as almost all of us know, Jacob will soon be deceiving his father into giving him what should, as in the case of the birthright, belong to Esau.

But wait a minute. What's the difference between the birthright and the blessing, and why are we talking about it here? That's an issue of some confusion for people as they read through this account, because often the assumption is that the birthright and the blessing are one and the same thing and that Esau is at this stage already out of luck. The truth, though, is that the two are different. The birthright can be described as a codified, almost legal standing, while the fatherly blessing, such as that which Isaac will soon be giving, is more personal. It includes words of encouragement, specific details regarding the nature of the inheritance to be given, and often, prophetic words concerning the future. Some final blessings include statements that, in hindsight, reveal God's supernatural power at work through various people of His choosing.

Wrapping Up

In one sense I know that all of this must seem in some ways rather tedious. It comes across as being a deep background, minutiae-driven hashing out of things that has no bearing on much of anything worth talking about, especially as it pertains to you and me. That, though, is where we would be wrong in our assessment. Why? As we wrap things up for the day, here are some things we'll very soon be talking about together in light of this Genesis narrative:

As God's people in Christ, we have an inherited birthright status through Jesus as the only begotten Son of God. As God's Son, Jesus received the kingdom from His Father — and He promises, as the appointed heir of all things, to share both that kingdom and inheritance with us. We, in fact, are joint heirs with Him.

Do you see it? God — in His mercy, His compassion, His love, and His sheer joy over having us as His people — has in Christ made us recipients of the both the birthright *and* the blessing! And what's more, all the way back in the early days of salvation history, through the lives of people like Isaac and Jacob (messed up people with a whole lot of issues, by the way), He chose to give us a picture of how it would all come together, ultimately culminating in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf. There's a great deal here to unpack, and we'll be doing that day by day as we go through the text together and see God at work. I hope you'll join in for all that's to come, and I'm praying that you'll be richly blessed as a result.

Thanks, everyone — have a terrific day, and I'll see you again soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and may God's continuing joy and peace touch each of you in our Savior Jesus as we come together today. Thanks for being here as we continue working our way through the book of Genesis, where at the moment we're still in the opening verses of Genesis 27. One of the great blessings of God's Word is that it always speaks to our hearts through whichever portion of Scripture we happen to be in, and I know that it will bless us as we open ourselves to its message today. Let's take a moment to pray as we begin.

Prayer

Father, in your great mercy, bless our lives with new wisdom and understanding today. Help us to know you more. Grant us open hearts ready to be implanted with your Word. We are grateful for this time in the Scriptures, and we ask now that you would go before us and lead us into all truth. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today we're going to take the four opening verses of Genesis 27 which we read together yesterday and join them to the ten verses that follow. Doing that will help us to get a cohesive picture of all that's going on here at the beginning of the chapter. Our focus this session: the coming darkness of deception.

Genesis 27:1-14

When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, "My son." "Here I am," he answered. 2Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. 3Now then, get your weapons-your quiver and bow-and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. 4Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."

5Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, 6Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, 7'Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the Lord before I die.' 8Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: 9Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. 10Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies." 11Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I'm a man with smooth skin. 12What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing." 13His mother said to him, "My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me." 14So he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared some tasty food, just the way his father liked it.

Many of you have heard of the Children's Crusades of centuries past. There were actually several different ones over several hundred years, but the first was in the year 1212, when a French shepherd boy by the name of Steven claimed that Jesus had appeared to him disguised as a pilgrim. Among other things, Jesus supposedly instructed him to take a letter to the king of France and then proceed to the Holy Land to retake Jerusalem from the Muslims and restore Christianity to its rightful home. Before long Steven had gathered thousands of young people who committed to accompany him on his pilgrimage. They did get to Marseilles, but afterward, the waves didn't miraculously part and let them continue their journey to Jerusalem on dry land as they had expected.

That part of the story — the story up to that point — is well known, but what's not so well-known is what happened next. It was while they were stuck in Marseilles that the children met

two men, men who claimed to be so impressed with the calling of God on their lives that they offered to transport them across the Mediterranean in seven ships, free of charge. What they didn't know was that those two men were actually slave traders. Everyone boarded the ships and the journey began, but rather than setting sail for the Holy Land as had been expected, the ships set a course for North Africa. Once there, most of the children were sold as slaves in the Muslim marketplaces. Few if any ever returned, and no one ever did reach the Holy Land. Two cunning and deceitful men, employing an elaborate ruse, were able to take what wasn't theirs and ruin countless lives in the process...a tragic footnote to what was a tragic undertaking to begin with.

Deceit. We see it all around us in the world today, and yes, we see it liberally sprinkled throughout history as well...including holy history. Today in God's Word, we've come to a moment that many of us know very well — a moment where two cunning and deceitful people, employing an elaborate ruse, make a move to take what isn't theirs. In one sense, many lives, even countless lives, will be ruined or at least forever altered as a result...and yet at the same time, there will be a very different kind of outcome in the aftermath of it all. Rather than a tragic footnote to a tragic undertaking, an almost unfathomable, incomprehensible good will come from it. The ingredient that will make it so is the grace, mercy, and perfect will of Almighty God.

As we look at today's passage, everything is pretty straightforward and unambiguous. We see exactly what's going on, and there are no underlying textual notes or theological points that we need to uncover. Still, we would do well to note just a couple of things. I'll simply list them today for our consideration, and then as this incident develops over the next several sessions, we'll comment on each of them further.

First, let's observe that there's an overwhelming attitude of willfulness at work here, not just on the part of Rebekah and Jacob, but on the part of Isaac and Esau as well. In addition, none of these family members seem to trust one another; they're all working at cross-purposes against each other.

Why, for example, does Isaac insist on giving his blessing to Esau, the son he already knows God has not chosen (Genesis 25:23)? Why does he insist on blessing Esau, who has despised his birthright and who has married pagan wives? Isaac, it seems, is intent not on godly thinking and spiritual wisdom, but on taking care of his favorite son. Esau, for his part, is happy to go along with it all, not least because of his antagonism toward his brother. He's only too happy to stick it to Jacob by hurrying out to hunt and gain his father's special favor.

Next, why does Rebekah, instead of trusting God to fulfill what He has already decreed (again, Genesis 25:23) use manipulative scheming to try and accomplish what she wants? Jacob, as we know, is her favorite son, and that fact is in play here just as it is with Isaac and Esau. Once again, it is not God's plan, but her preference which is foremost in her mind, and even if she's trying to help God's plan along by positioning Jacob as she is, her actions are still deceitful against her husband and her other son. She too, therefore, is in the wrong.

Finally, we come to Jacob. True to his name (which means deceit), our resident ankle grabber is only too happy to go along with this plan. As we see Rebekah instructing him on what to do, his concern isn't whether it's right or not; his only concern is whether he'll be caught and if the plan will succeed. Once he receives his mother's assurance and overcomes his fear, he's ready to go. Is Rebekah manipulating Jacob? Absolutely. Jacob, however, is willing to be manipulated for the sake of the huge benefit he sees coming his way as a result.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, is this family a model of dastardly dysfunction and sinful behavior? Without a doubt. Are there terrible consequences in the offing because of all the trickery that's in the process of transpiring? Yes indeed. And yet as I alluded to at the beginning of today's session, as distasteful and reprehensible as these things are, there's a great deal more to the story than what we currently see, and the ending will be — at least to our way of thinking and to our sensibilities — a hugely surprising one. But surprise endings are one of God's specialties, and as we follow this drama and see how the Lord works through it all, what we'll find is that this will not just be a surprise ending, but a happy ending as well....one that impacts even you and me today!

We'll talk about all of this again next time, everyone; until then, have a great day, and remember that the Lord is your mighty fortress and your great Redeemer. Christ's peace — I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! God's rich blessings to you on this last day of our study week together; I pray that it's been a good one and that you've been able to look to God's Word in a way that's encouraging and helpful to you. I'm glad to be with you for the next few minutes, where today we're privileged to be opening again to Genesis 27. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, we praise you for the gift of life today, and especially for the gift of life eternal through the cleansing blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. Help us to stand firm in our faith as we live in this world of sinking sand, and remind us that you are always with us, holding us up when the ground gets soft beneath our feet. Please bless us as we open our Bibles. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're in the midst of a most unsavory moment: Rebekah both instructing and assisting Jacob in tricking his father so that he can receive the family blessing. Our focus this session: doubling down on deception.

Genesis 27:15-29

15Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob. 16She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. 17Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made. 18He went to his father and said, "My father." "Yes, my son," he answered. "Who is it?" 19Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing." 20Isaac asked his son, "How did you find it so quickly, my son?" "The Lord your God gave me success," he replied. 21Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not." 22Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he blessed him. 24"Are you really my son Esau?" he asked. "I am," he replied. 25Then he said, "My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing." Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. 26Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come here, my son, and kiss me." 27So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. 28May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness - an abundance of grain and new wine. 29May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed."

Omne Trium Perfectum. It's the old Latin phrase — significantly, three words — which conveys a simple overarching philosophy about life: "Everything that comes in threes is perfect."

At the same time, there's also a popular saying, still current today and frankly more prevalent, which says that *bad* things come in threes...in other words, if an unfortunate event has already occurred twice, a third unfortunate event is likely to occur very soon. One common application of that particular idea is the "Celebrity Death Rule of Threes" — when one of our stars dies, two more tend to follow, or so the common wisdom goes. The most famous example of that might be 2009's so-called Summer of Death: Ed McMahon on June 23, Farrah Fawcett on June 25, and a few hours later that day, Michael Jackson.

I prefer to be a person who accentuates the positive, and if it were up to me I'd always come down on the Latin side of the equation of threes. Sometimes, however, the opposite is true, and there are occasions when we have to be realistic about the presence of the not-so-positive in the world. A stellar example of that? The "threes" that we see in God's Word today in Genesis 27. As we read through this passage, a passage that continues the pulling of wool over the eyes of Isaac and doubles down on the deception that was initiated by Rebekah and her son Jacob in previous verses, we see three clear "threes" in the text: three lies on the part of Rebekah, three lies on the part of Jacob, and three instances of doubt and suspicion on the part of Isaac as those lies are being spoken to him. In the end, however, doubt and suspicion is overcome, the lies prevail, and the stage is set for the consequential results to come.

What lies and deceptions are being floated by mother and son today? Rebekah's are as follows: first, she takes Esau's clothes and puts them on Jacob. Second, she takes the skins of goat bucklings and puts those on Jacob as well. Finally, she passes off the food she's prepared as food prepared by Esau. All of this is in service to her desire that Isaac believe Jacob to be the older brother so that he will pronounce his blessing upon the younger son.

For Jacob, the transgressions are similar, but in a way even more baldfaced: first, he comes to his father and asserts that he is Esau. Second, when his father asks how he has so quickly prepared all that has been requested of him, Jacob attributes it to the blessing of God — an especially bold fabrication. Finally, the third time that Isaac asks if Jacob is really Esau, obviously suspicious over the vibe in the room, Jacob once again affirms that indeed, he is Esau.

It's in like manner, and corresponding to the lies perpetrated by his wife and son, that Isaac — old, infirm, and not in possession of all his faculties due to his age and his eyesight — voices his suspicions over Jacob's presence. Three times he expresses doubt over the veracity of what's occurring, three times he questions whether the person in his presence is really Esau, and three times he is assured — falsely so, of course — that all is well. Unfortunately, three times he is duped, so that he ultimately pronounces his blessing on Jacob, thinking he is Esau.

And make no mistake: this is not a typical, perfunctory blessing decreeing mere material possessions or worldly gain. Instead, this is a blessing that encompasses all the fullness of the promises that God had originally given to Isaac's father, Abraham. It's a blessing that calls for sovereignty over peoples and nations, a blessing that promises kings will be among Jacob's descendants, a blessing that speaks divine favor and protection over Jacob and Jacob's family line. This is the whole enchilada, as it were, and while there's certainly great plenty here as far as earthly riches and the privileges that go with it, the real pot of gold will be in the spiritual realm. This is indeed a victory for Jacob, ill-gotten though it is, and a coup de grace upon Esau as he loses his blessing and is summarily excluded from God's kingdom promises.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, that last statement is a hard blow, and it's difficult to digest... at least it is for me. When we come back on Monday, we'll be taking some time to talk about Esau and his future in light of the developments we've just seen, and we'll also be looking at those things in the context of the bigger picture of God's salvific plan for humanity. To be sure, Esau will not be left barren and without any kind of blessing at all; much like Isaac's brother Ishmael, the Lord will make a way for Esau as he lives his life, granting him a great abundance of children, possessions, and livestock. Again, more on that later.

Today we've seen a compendium of threes...not threes contributing to perfection, but unfortunately, threes of the other kind. What will turn it all around? The One truly perfect Three...the Three in One to be specific. Our great God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, will intervene in this all-too-human situation and make things right, both for time and eternity.

It's been great to be with you this week, everyone; thanks so much for your time each day, and do know that you're in my prayers as we head into the weekend. God's rich peace to you in Christ, and I'll see you again soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Continued blessings of Christ's joy and peace to each of you today, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being with me as we begin a new week of Bible study together, where as we come back to the book of Genesis today we do so remembering that our Lord is ever-faithful to speak to us all through His Word at all times and in every circumstance. We happen to be in the midst of some high drama right now surrounding Jacob, Esau, and their father Isaac, so let's take a moment and prepare our hearts for some good time in the Scriptures. Will you pray with me as we begin?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise you for all that you are and all that you've done for us. We bow before you this day grateful for the cleansing blood of your son Jesus, who has redeemed us from the power of sin and death and given us new life. Please teach us through your Word today. Remind us of your love, and as always, send your Holy Spirit to enlighten us and endow us with wisdom as we study. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Jacob has just left his father's presence after receiving the patriarchal blessing, having done so via deception. Now Esau comes in, completely unaware of the trickery that has just occurred. That's about to change, and the reaction from both father and son is one that has reverberated down through the ages. Our focus this session: a sudden and shocking realization.

Genesis 27:30-33

30After Isaac finished blessing him and Jacob had scarcely left his father's presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting. 31He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him, "My father, sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing." 32His father Isaac asked him, "Who are you?" "I am your son," he answered, "your firstborn, Esau." 33Isaac trembled violently and said, "Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him-and indeed he will be blessed!"

I love to cook. I especially love to cook for other people — and though I'm a long way off from being what you'd call a good cook, thanks to my mom I have a few good *enough* dishes in my repertoire to get the job done and, most of the time, please my family in the process. One time, though, I went about the task of cooking something extra special and ended up bitterly disappointed in the end.

My wife and children had been out of town visiting the grandparents, and they were slated to return on Sunday night. After church I got out of my pastor clothes, put on old jeans and my favorite t-shirt, and spent all afternoon happily preparing for their return by preparing their favorite meal. I timed it all just right: everything was done right as they arrived, the table was set with our best dishes, I had everyone's favorite drinks poured and ready to go, and I also, of course, was filled with anticipation over the good food and nice time we'd have around the table together. When they walked in the door, however, instead of being excited about a great dinner waiting for them they said, "Oh, we ate McDonald's on the way into town. We're not hungry, but thanks anyway." I won't say that I was angry, but I'd be lying if I didn't admit that I was downhearted. Was it a snub? Not at all. Was it a different outcome than I'd anticipated? Absolutely.

In God's Word today, Esau, at the express instruction of his father, has gone into the open country, hunted and killed some wild game, butchered it, and spent time preparing it in a very special way...just the way his father likes. He's done this happily and with great anticipation,

and why? Because his father has indicated that once the meal is set before him, he will grant his blessing to him. Not just an everyday blessing, an I love you blessing, a blessing that every father pronounces on his son many times through the course of life...no, this is the Fatherly Blessing, the Familial Blessing, the Passing it On Blessing. This is the Patriarchal Blessing wherein all the rights, privileges, responsibilities and benefits of Abraham, Isaac & Co. are conferred on the next generation. Esau is about to come into a grand future, and the fact that he's finally on the threshold, finally on the edge of receiving what he feels is rightfully his as the firstborn son, has him in a very good mood. The problem? Number one, his timing is off. His mother and brother have beat him to the punch with dinner. But number two, and regardless of whether their dinner had come before his or not, the truth of the matter is that God has already decreed the one upon whom Isaac's blessing will ultimately rest — and Esau it is not.

At first, things don't seem too out of the ordinary to Esau when he comes in to offer his father the food he's prepared. When Isaac questions who he is, Esau's assumption is that since Isaac is old and can't see well, he just needs to affirm that he's his father's oldest and all will be well. As things unfold, however, both father and son suddenly realize that — at least to their way of thinking — something has gone very wrong indeed.

It's in verse 33 that Isaac reacts to the what has transpired. The Bible says that as what has just happened dawns on him, he begins trembling exceedingly — in Hebrew, the sense is very strong, literally that he “shakes convulsively.” His plan to bless Esau has been thwarted, and what's more, he knows in an instant that what has been done can't be undone. Why is Isaac so troubled? In truth, it's not what we're prone to think, and this is actually the heart of the passage today...something we need to get our heads around so that we can understand what's really going on.

On the surface, it seems that the reason Isaac is so disturbed is the reason any of us would be disturbed in a scenario like this: he's been duped into doing something special for someone who lied in order to get it. Yet while that's true as far as it goes, there's another, greater reason that Isaac is upset with this course of events: though Esau is his first and favorite son, and though Isaac's desire is to bless him as the firstborn and protect the legacy that he'll be leaving, we need to remember *that from the time his boys were in the womb, he's known that it is the younger son who will carry on the covenant promise of God rather than the older.* The underlying reality here is that in his heart, Isaac knows he's been trying to work against the plan that God had revealed back when his sons were still *in utero*...and in this moment, Isaac realizes that God has prevailed in spite of his best efforts. The fear and shaking and shuddering here is not simply because Jacob has bested him, but that God has had His way. That's the reason that, as he considers this rapidly unfolding situation, Isaac says to Esau of Jacob, “I blessed him — and indeed he will be blessed!”

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, there's a great deal here to unpack...and thankfully, God's Word itself will help us to do that over the next several days as we follow this event through to its ending point. For now, we can close by observing that Isaac has just learned something in a very tactile way which each of us must learn along life's road as well: namely, that there is a God, and we are not Him; that God is righteous and just in His decisions, even if we don't necessarily understand or agree with them; and finally, that God will work His will as He wills... whether by us, or through us, or, as Isaac has just discovered, in spite of us. The good news in that is this: just as God is righteous and just in His decisions, so His will is perfect, and perfectly brought to bear through every situation, whether we're on board or not! Does that always seem right or fair in the moment? Of course not. But thankfully, the things we fail to grasp in the moment are things He has known from time immemorial. Think about that today as

it relates to your own life, everyone. When we come back next time, we'll talk about all of this some more. Have a great day, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Hello everyone! God bless you richly in Christ and the power of His grace, mercy, and peace, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to be with you today, where over the next few minutes we'll be continuing our study in the 27th chapter of Genesis. Thanks for joining me, but thanks especially for your ongoing commitment to be in the Scriptures each day as God's people in Christ. As we get ready for our time together, let's take a moment to pray:

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as we prepare to study your Word today, enlighten us by the power of Your Holy Spirit and open our hearts to wisdom and understanding. Bless us through this time with you so that we can be a blessing to others as we point the way to you, your love, and your mercy. We ask this in your strong and saving name, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're picking things up in the midst of a fraught conversation between Esau and his father Isaac over the patriarchal blessing that has just been given, unintentionally, to Jacob. Our focus this session: "Is there nothing left for me?"

Genesis 27:34-38

34When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me-me too, my father!" 35But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing." 36Esau said, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" Then he asked, "Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?" 37Isaac answered Esau, "I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son? 38Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!" Then Esau wept aloud.

Madeleine L'Engle, a writer and a Christian whom I greatly admire, garnered worldwide fame for her book *A Wrinkle in Time*, published back in 1962. Interest in her work has seen an uptick in recent years after *A Wrinkle in Time* was made into a major motion picture — which I won't comment on because my job here is not that of a film critic! At any rate, if you've heard of Ms. L'Engle and are interested in exploring her further, one of her especially interesting books is *A Severed Wasp*. The title, which comes from one of George Orwell's essays, offers a graphic image of human lostness. Orwell once described a wasp that he encountered this way:

He was sucking jam on my plate, and I cut him in half. He paid no attention, merely went on with his meal, while a tiny stream of jam trickled out of his severed esophagus. Only when he tried to fly away did he grasp the dreadful thing that had happened to him.

The wasp — and people without a cognizant awareness of the existence and presence of God in the world and in their lives — have a whole lot in common. Severed from their souls, but greedy and unaware, they continue to look for and consume as much as they can of life's sweetness. It's only when the time has come to fly away that they grasp their dreadful condition. And then? Then, it's too late.

I'm thinking of *A Severed Wasp* today because as we come back to God's Word here in Genesis 27, the scene before us is in many ways reminiscent of that book's theme. Here is Esau...

Esau, who despised his birthright and traded it for a bowl of stew.
Esau, who cared not for the things of God, preferring earthly things to spiritual things.

Esau, who was so focused on the things of the here and now that he never gave any consideration to the importance of his future...that is, until now.

Here is Esau...Esau, who is left out in the cold as he comes to the realization of all that has passed him by. The time to fly away, figuratively speaking, has come, and in today's text we are witnessing the moment wherein he suddenly grasps his dreadful condition.

Esau lifts up his voice and weeps in this passage, and we can certainly understand why. Even so, the question looms large: are his tears tears of regret over his own sin, shortsightedness, and callous heart, or are his tears tears of frustrated selfishness over the fact that once again, he has not gotten what he has so deeply desired? The answer, which Scripture itself gives to us in the New Testament, is that these are *not* tears of true repentance over his sin, but tears of bitterness over the result of his folly. Esau now realizes, too late, what he has truly lost...and irony of ironies, it is the very thing that he has spent the bulk of his life despising.

Isaac, for his part, makes sure to show Esau that this is a door which is closed for good. There is only one patriarchal blessing to give, and it has already been given...a blessing which includes not just the promise of the land of Canaan, but also the perpetuation of the family line that will see its culmination in the Person and work of Jesus.

All in all, this is a moment in Esau's life astounding for its gravity, and more astounding still for its grief.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Hebrews 12 is the portion of the New Testament which mentions this incident in the life of Esau, and it's brought forth to the reader as a warning. It says, "See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is...godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done."

As we've already discussed at length, there's a much bigger, more far-reaching issue at hand here right now — indeed, an overarching trajectory being laid out through this course of events that has its center not in Esau's folly, but in Isaac's blessing. We'll be getting to that in very short order and when we do, we'll start putting all of the different pieces of this drama together into a cohesive picture that points not to the peril of this moment, but to the promise of a coming Messiah. For the time being, however, we're left today with a bitter and broken favorite son whose life has just been turned upside down. To be clear, it's not as though the boom has just been lowered; in truth, here is a person who has lived without a cognizant awareness of the existence and presence of God in the world and in his life...a person who has lived severed from his soul, as it were. In many ways, Esau is only reaping what he has sown — and in light of the choices he has made and the manner in which he has lived, he is held before us today as an example *not* to follow.

We'll have more to say about this next time, everyone. While I hate ending on a note that seems to ring only of the law, when we take things up again tomorrow we'll be holding them up to the light of the grace, mercy, and peace of the Gospel. Do be sure and join us, because I know you'll be encouraged! Have a great day, and I'll look forward to seeing you then. God's peace, and the joy of Jesus be your strength!

Greetings

God's peace, everyone! Greetings to you in Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad you're here today for our daily time in God's Word together, and it's my heartfelt prayer that you'll be blessed by our time in the Scriptures over these next few minutes. Today we're returning to our study in the book of Genesis, with just a bit of a side journey into Hebrews 12 as we carry on with our talk about Esau and his great loss. Thanks for your time today; let's take a moment and approach the Lord in prayer as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the indwelling presence of your Holy Spirit. Enlighten us, prompt us, and lead us into all truth today. Your Word is truth; please bless us as we study it. We ask this in the strong name of Christ, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've come back to Esau in his time of distress after his realization that he has been shut out of Isaac's patriarchal blessing. Why? Because in a very real way, when we look at Esau and the factors that led to his most unenviable position, we're also looking at ourselves. The much-needed good news, however, is that there's a difference between us and him — and that's our focus for the day.

Genesis 27:38

38Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!" Then Esau wept aloud.

The story of my well-known aversion to Algebra — hatred would be a very strong word, so we'll just say aversion — begins in eighth grade. I'd always done just fine with basic math, but when I hit Mr. Warhatch's pre-Algebra class at Yucaipa Intermediate School at the age of 13, I hit a brick wall. In ninth grade it was the same. In tenth grade I repeated what I'd had in ninth grade because I hadn't been successful. In eleventh grade I took a gap year away from math of all kinds, and as a senior — just because I had to — I took Geometry to meet the minimum college entry requirements for the California State University system. Most of my classmates were taking Algebra II, Trigonometry, or pre-Calculus by that time, and they never let me forget that I was spending an hour a day with a bunch of sophomores when I when I could have been hanging out with them instead. In college, Algebra came back to bite me again. We've hashed that journey out before in other EDiBS sessions, but just to jog your memory, I failed or dropped college Algebra three times before finally getting a passing grade at the local community college — *after* my graduation ceremonies had already taken place.

The reason I'm recounting that litany of mathematical failure for you today isn't so much to talk about the aspect of failing itself — that's another topic for another time — but to talk to you about a byproduct of that failure: all the things I missed because of it. In eighth grade, I missed the big trip to Disneyland that was given to the students on the all-A honor roll list. I had five A's...and then that D in pre-Algebra. In both ninth and tenth grades as a person beginning to perform very well on our nationally ranked speech and debate team, I missed my chance to compete at the state tournament because my poor grades in Algebra rendered me academically ineligible to travel — even though I was one of the top three students in my event. During my senior year of high school, a time when I should have been making memories with friends and planning my future, I was stuck struggling through Geometry with all those aforementioned sophomores. And finally, there was college graduation day: a day when I walked across the stage and received an empty folder from my college president instead of one with my degree in it, and why? Because I was still trying to pass college Algebra at the local community college.

I can't tell you the emptiness I felt when I watched my fellow eighth-graders get on the bus in the school parking lot to head to "The Happiest Place on Earth." I can't tell you how low I felt, how frustrated and angry I was, when I watched my fellow ninth and tenth graders get on the bus for two years straight and go to the state speech tournament without me...a tournament I won in eleventh grade when I did get to go. And I can't tell you the sense of shame I felt, not to mention anxiety, when on what was supposed to have been my college graduation day I walked away empty-handed with my future still uncertain.

In each of those instances, I was a person shut out from the blessing. I was a person on the outside looking in. I was an individual who, due to unwise choices and unacceptable performance, was cut off.

Have you ever felt like that? On the outs? All alone? Future dim, and perhaps beating up on yourself because the one responsible for you being in that position was (or is) you? The truth is that both theologically and practically speaking, we're all in that position. And as we look to God's Word and the saga of family brokenness and dysfunction it is sharing with us at present, that's where Esau is as well. He's not owning it at the moment, of course, but that's where he is nonetheless. For his whole life he's walked contrary to the things of God, contrary to the faith of his father, contrary to the faith of the family...contrary to the way of blessing. And now? Now he has been decidedly and irretrievably cut off from that blessing — even though he longs for it with every fiber of his being.

Esau is one thing, but what of you and me? That's the great, grand question of the day, and the short answer is that because of the Gospel, there is a different outcome in the offing. We'll be talking about it at length after the weekend break, but for the moment what needs to be said, what needs to be heard, and what needs to be embraced by each one of us is this: in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, all that we've missed because of our great failures in life will one day soon be finally and fully fixed. Emptiness? Frustration? Anger? Shame? Anxiety? An uncertain future? The truth is that all of it, every bit, has been washed away by the blood of the Savior who loves us and gave Himself for us. And while in this present moment as fallen people in a fallen world we still feel the effects of those things, in the day of Christ's appearing all that has been lost because of them will be restored and made perfect. In that day we will be like Him. And in that day, we will be fully free.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, A.B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance church, famously said this about the Gospel: "It tells rebellious men that God is reconciled, that justice is satisfied, that sin has been atoned for, that the judgment of the guilty is revoked, that the condemnation of the sinner is cancelled, that the curse of the Law has been blotted out, that the gates of hell are closed and the portals of heaven open wide, that the power of sin is subdued, that the guilty conscience is healed, that the broken heart is comforted, and that the sorrow and misery of the Fall is undone." The reason he was able to say that is because of the proclamation of Scripture: that while we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive in Christ (Ephesians 2). In Jesus, we are no longer cut off, and no longer on the outside looking in. In Jesus we are no longer shut off from the blessing.

More to come on this next time, everyone. Thanks for being here today, and as we close things off for the weekend, do rest in the peace of Christ, knowing that in Him you are a person with a sure hope and a very certain future! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! It's always great to be with you at the beginning of a new week, and as we open our Bibles today, we're still tracking with Esau as he takes in the news of having been shut out of Isaac's patriarchal blessing. The news for him is grim, and while we'll touch on that briefly today, what we're going to do for one more session as we begin this week is contrast the non-blessing of Esau with the great blessing that we have as the people of God in Christ. Why? On one hand, we need that positive reminder today in the face of so much darkness surrounding Esau's present situation. On the other hand, focusing on the blessings we have as the redeemed also centers us on the wider narrative being carved out right now in Genesis — the narrative that explains how it came to be that a Savior would one day come for us.

After a lengthier-than-usual Getting Started section today, we'll move into a short reading in Genesis 27 and then immediately follow it with an even shorter passage from the book of 1 John to provide the contrast I mentioned a moment ago. I hope you'll be encouraged over the next few minutes, and I hope as well that you'll be able to see some of the groundwork we're laying as we prepare to move from the life of Esau and into the life of Jacob. Thanks, everyone — let's go to the Lord and ask for His blessing as we study today.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are grateful this day for the way you sent your Son for us...that in Him our sins have been forgiven and our inheritance of eternal life has been secured. Teach us today as we open your Word, that we can grow in our faith and serve you with joy. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, in response to the bitter beggar's cry of Esau entreating his father to bless him after he had already given the patriarchal blessing to Jacob, we see that Isaac does speak words over his son...but in effect, he pronounces a blessing that is no blessing at all. Humanly speaking, of course, Esau deserves what Jacob, with the help of his mother, has stolen from him. But what Esau doesn't understand is that in the big picture of God's divine plan for the salvation of the human race, he is not, and never was, the chosen child to carry on the covenant. His is not the line that will lead to the Love which will lower itself in sacrifice in order to redeem humanity. Those things have been designated for his brother Jacob from on High. As for Esau? God has taken his natural hardness of heart to spiritual things and allowed it to follow its natural course. It's no surprise, then, that while his great desire in life is for blessing, the great reality in his life will be one of burden upon burden going forward.

Shifting, however, to the New Testament, in the first letter of John we see a message of another kind altogether being shared: to a people for whom no blessing whatsoever is merited or deserved, a great blessing is given to them in any case. The Savior who would one day come has now come indeed and made us His own. John shares some powerful truths about what it means to be in God's family.

We have several things going on appositionally to each other in today's session, but our ultimate focus is a simple one: the joy and assurance that comes from belonging to the Lord.

Genesis 27:39-40

39His father Isaac answered him, "Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above. 40You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck."

1 John 2:12

12I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

I am a father of children who went through, and to some degree still are, at a Disney age when it comes to their taste in cinema. While we didn't do TV in our house when our kids were young, we did have family movie night on Fridays, and 9 times out of 10 we'd end up watching a Disney flick.

In that great spiritual classic "Lilo and Stitch," Lilo is a little Hawaiian girl being raised by her older sister because their parents are no longer living. It's a struggle, of course, and social services are always a step away from taking Lilo out of the home and putting her in foster care. I forget exactly how it transpires, but somehow Lilo convinces her sister to get a dog, and they go to the shelter to pick one out. Here's where Disney magic enters the scene: instead of getting a dog, they end up with Stitch, an alien from outer space who is posing as a dog as he hides from other aliens trying to capture him. The movie goes on to chronicle the many adventures that result from this unique arrangement. And while it's not my purpose here to give you a rundown of the film or critique it from a biblical point of view, I mention it today because of the theme running through it from beginning to end. To a group of hard-pressed, struggling misfits who can't catch a break, it is family that holds them together through thick and thin. As is mentioned many times throughout the story, "Ohana means family, and family means that no one gets left behind."

In today's two short readings, we see what it looks like to *not* be in God's family, and then what it means to be in that family...to be in God's household. Those who belong to Almighty God through faith in His Son are not only "not left behind"; they are also blessed beyond compare.

As we look at God's Word in 1 John, it will help us to note something up front: in the section of chapter 2 where I read from a moment ago, John is probably quoting very familiar, well-known statements regarding the Christian faith, statements with which his audience is already familiar. Because of that, many translations, including the NIV, set that whole section of verses in meter and give them the bearing of a quotation. Just as we might recite one of the creeds or a verse of Scripture to remind ourselves of what we believe, John means for the lines he's writing to serve the same purpose. He wants to take his readers back to the beginning of their faith and remind them of what they've always believed. What is chief among those beliefs and to be chief in their memories? That in Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, the One who came for them to save them, they have been forgiven.

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of His name.

By reminding them of who they are and what they have been given, John assures his readers — including you and me — that they can be confident that they know God and are known by God. As people purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ, they have indeed been forgiven — and if we were to read the whole of that passage, we'd see that not only are they forgiven, they also are strong, they have God's Word abiding in them, and they have overcome the evil one.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, I just want to remind all of you that if you are in Christ, you belong to the Father. You are part of His family...and family means that no one gets left behind. Though in the life of Esau we're seeing the distinct lack of that blessing at the moment, we're also seeing the way being paved for that blessing to be extended to countless others... a great blessing which belonged not only to the early church, but to you and me too as precious, dearly loved children in the household of God. We'll be returning to Esau and wrestling along with him as he moves into his future, so do stay tuned for that. For now, however, rejoice in the

truth of your kinship in Christ, and allow that truth impact the way you live today and in the days ahead. God's peace, everyone! I'll look forward to seeing you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS; the joy of our Lord Jesus be with you and be your continuing strength as you live in His grace. I'm glad you're here for our time in God's Word today, and I hope that you'll be strengthened and encouraged as we open the Scriptures together. We have a brief meditation on an important topic today as we continue to set things up for an in-depth study on the matter later in the week, and I know it will cause each one of us to stop, think, and pray over it as we consider its impact in our lives. Thanks for your time today. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, thank you for your love and mercy. By your gracious Spirit, open our hearts to wisdom and understanding today. Please grant us your blessing as we look to you for guidance. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Jacob has stolen Esau's blessing, Isaac has spoken words over Esau in the aftermath that are almost an anti-blessing, and Esau? Esau is livid. Our focus this session: rage, regret, and recompense.

Genesis 27:41-44

41Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

42When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you."

43Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran. 44Stay with him for a while until your brother's fury subsides.

In his great book titled *Wishful Thinking Transformed by Thorns*, Frederick Buechner wrote, "Of the 7 deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back — in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you."

As Buechner's words reveal, anger is fraught with pitfalls and risks — not only to others, but especially to us. It's a meal that kills, because we are the ones who are ultimately consumed. As we look to God's Word today, we see how the table, as it were, has been set for Esau, and how is his appetite? He has knife and fork in hand and is about to dig in with gusto. His anger over the wrongs done to him, his lack of understanding about why things are happening as they are, and his feelings regarding what he sees as a lack of fairness with respect to all that has come his way in life have come to a head. He's hungry, alright, and the way he plans to satisfy that hunger is to kill his brother. What Esau is not realizing in the moment, is that he'll only be consuming himself.

We're going to stop there today. We're stopping because I'm a person who needs to pause and consider my own bouts with anger in life and the damage it could cause were I to binge on it as I might like to from time to time. You may be a person like that as well. For that matter, each of us knows others who struggle with this issue...our mother or father, perhaps. Our child. Our spouse. Our best friend. Here's the thing about that: in the hundreds of references to, and examples of, anger in the Bible — not to mention its cousins whose names are wrath, hatred, and malice — all but a tiny few have bad news endings.

Unrighteous anger inhibits the expression of godly love. It bleeds the joy out of life. It's the antithesis of patience and peace. It erodes kindness. Anger despises gentleness and resists attempts at self-control. And what happens when anger becomes entrenched in an individual's life? It's held onto, nursed, and even enjoyed...even as it eats away at the person wielding it.

Anger in Esau's life has stolen his joy, limited his potential, and frankly, has done a bang-up job of keeping him miserable. As you consider his plight today, you might take a cue from his misery to pause like me and take some time to think about any roots of bitterness in your own life right now. They may be actively growing, but they might also be dormant, waiting for just the right time to spring up and choke the life out of you. Do you really want that? Do you really think it will achieve a good news ending? Of course it won't. That begs the question, then, doesn't it: is anger really the kind of banquet where you want a seat at the table?

Today is a day to search and discover, to confess and repent. Today is a day to humble yourself in the presence of Almighty God and pray, asking Him to root out the root of anger and bitterness in you. I hope you'll make time to spend time doing that; I'm going to do the same, and as I do, I'll be praying for you even as I pray for myself.

Take care, everyone — may you be blessed in the hours to come as you yield to the healing, transforming power of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in coming to Him, may you find rest for your soul. Have a great day, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. It's my joy to have you along today, it's my ongoing prayer that our study time continues to be a blessing for you, and I hope that as you walk along with me each day, you're noticing growth in your faith and a closer walk with our Savior. My main goal here at EDiBS has always been that we all grow together in the grace and knowledge of Christ, so thanks for traveling that road with me! Today we'll be concluding our look at Genesis 27, so let's prepare our hearts and go to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the new life you've given us through Christ. We praise you for the forgiveness you've poured into lives through the giving of your only begotten Son, and we praise you for the gift of knowing because of that gift, your mercies are new every day. Please bless our time in your Word these next few minutes so that we can learn and grow in our relationship with you. We ask this with joy and confidence in the name of Jesus, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we'll be putting a cap on Genesis 27 today by backing up just a little bit to reexamine all that happened in the aftermath of the big blessing brouhaha surrounding Jacob, Esau, Isaac, and Rebekah. Our focus this session: kicking the can down the road...the long and winding road.

Genesis 27:41-46

41Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."
42When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you.
43Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran. 44Stay with him for a while until your brother's fury subsides. 45When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?" 46Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living."

When I was in high school, if you had asked me what my plans were for life, I wouldn't have been able to tell you. Sometimes I'd say that I'd be a lawyer someday, because I thought that would please my parents. Other times I'd talk about becoming an oceanographer, because I loved the way the ocean made me feel and I liked the idea of living near the beach and working on a boat. With an explanation like that it's clear that I had no idea whatsoever about what being an oceanographer entailed, but it didn't stop me from saying that I wanted to be one. The truth is, I didn't do much planning for my future when I was young. I just kept kicking the can down the road when it came to deciding who I'd be and what I'd do, and even when I was nearing college graduation I didn't have any firm plans. I guess I figured that I'd eventually stumble into whatever it was that I was supposed to do — and in a way that's what happened. But even then things didn't end up as I thought they would. Time, I felt, would work everything out and make everything right. Career, marriage, family...all of it would fall into place if I'd just wait things out and hang on until the time was right. As a young person I assumed that this magical "right time" would come quickly, but that's not what happened. In the end, it turned out that my idea of pushing things down the road only did one thing: it made the road longer. It also made reaching my eventual destination more difficult than it needed to be.

Today I would tell you that a plan like that is really no plan at all, and I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. And yet it's funny: I'm far from the first person in the world to have gone that route,

and I'm definitely not the last person who will ever go that way. The popular slogan of our day, a quote lifted out of context from a Tolkien novel, is "Not all who wander are lost." That may be so, but guess what? Most who wander are!

As we come to God's Word today, we have several wanderers in our text. Every one of them thinks they've set a course for a preferable future, every one of them thinks it will only be a matter of time before they achieve what they want to achieve, and every one of them thinks that time will be short. Every one of them is wrong...and in a way, every one of them is almost comically, yet truly and tragically, lost.

Esau, angry and bitter over the bungled blessing that his conniving brother Jacob has taken from him, vows to kill Jacob as soon as his father passes. "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob," he says. Consoling himself with thoughts of sweet revenge, he makes his plans and readies himself for the moment.

But guess what? That moment never came. Isaac lived another 40+ years before he finally died, and by that time Esau's passion and purpose had petered out. That's a long time to put your life on hold just to stick it to someone...especially when you don't end up doing it.

Jacob, learning of his brother's plans to bump him off, listens to the hastily put-together plan of his mother, Rebekah, and gets himself out of Dodge. "Go stay with Laban for a while until your brother's fury subsides. When he's no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there." So it is that Jacob heads off to his uncle's place.

But guess what? That whole "stay with Laban for a while" plan turned out to be a lot more than just a while. Jacob ended up staying in Haran for more than 20 years.

Rebekah, desperately trying to keep her ambitious plans for her favorite son on track, kicks the can down the road in her own way by continuing in her already-established pattern of deception and manipulation. The way she secures Jacob's ticket out of town is by telling Isaac that she's concerned over the poor marriage prospects available to Jacob in the area. *God forbid*, she says, *that we end up with a second son who takes a Hittite woman as a bride like Esau did*. In this way she successfully manipulates Isaac into telling Jacob to leave (which we'll talk about more in the next chapter), and she gains a diplomatic victory in ensuring Jacob's safety even though she has to pull the wool over Isaac's eyes yet another time to do it.

But guess what? Rebekah never got the chance to send word for Jacob to come back. After orchestrating all of those things for the sake of the son she loved, she never saw her son again.

Finally, what of Isaac? As we already know, Isaac, at least in one way, has actually initiated some of the drama we see unfolding in this portion of the Bible. Though he's known — since before his twins were even born — that the Lord's choice for the continuation of the Abrahamic covenant and the Messianic line is the younger, not the older, son, he has attempted to confer his blessing upon Esau anyway. He's known the family dynamics involved, known the importance of following the Lord in this matter, and known that even though everything about this divine plan is culturally counterintuitive, the right thing to do is obey God and leave the consequences to Him. Instead, Isaac makes the choice to try and steer things in a different direction...the direction he thinks will be best for his family and their future.

But guess what? The results of his efforts, as we've seen in this chapter, ended up being almost farcical. As one absurdity built upon another, his plan failed. Isaac's choice didn't bring

what was best for his family; Isaac's choice brought the dismantling of his family over the conflict he had a part in creating.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, everyone in today's passage is a wanderer indeed...a wanderer away from the wisdom and will of God. Each person, in his or her own way, schemes, maneuvers, and expends enormous amounts of energy and human capital in rejecting God's plan for the sake of their own desires. Each person ends up traveling a long and lonely road as a result...a road that, humanly speaking, leads them far from where they want to be. Yet there's an amazing aspect to this narrative, and why? Because while humanly speaking this is a classic study in willfulness and disobedience, divinely speaking God is at work fulfilling His purposes in spite of it, and yes, even through it. God is not limited by the messes of man; He will fulfill His purpose in *all* of this. That leaves you and me with a great deal to think about today as we consider our own lives under the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus, and it's something we'll talk about more when we gather again next time.

Thanks, everyone; it's been great to spend time with you today, and I look forward to seeing you again soon. Until then, God's peace, and the joy of our Lord Jesus be your hope and stay!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and God's abiding joy and peace to each of you in the name of our Savior Jesus. I'm so glad to have you with me for another day of Bible study, where having just concluded our time in Genesis 27, we'll have a final word on the faults and foibles of the main players in the narrative before we move forward into our next section. Thanks for coming along; let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this time in your Word today. Please send your Holy Spirit to enlighten us and endow us with wisdom as we study, and continue to grow us up into maturity as we live our days under your grace and mercy. We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our last session ended with the point being made that even through the willful disobedience and self-serving attitudes of Isaac, Esau, Jacob, and Rebekah, God's will was not thwarted, nor was God's plan upended. The truth, in fact, would turn out to be quite the opposite. Even more than that? As God would go about working His will and initiating His Messianic plans in spite of the mess Isaac's family was making of everything, He would also work in their lives to bring them blessing — despite their hapless ways. Our focus today? Justice warranted, but mercy given.

It has been said that there are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them.

A number of years ago researchers performed an experiment to study the effect that hope has on those undergoing hardship, whether of their own making or at the hands of others. How did it work? Two sets of laboratory rats were placed in separate tubs of water. The researchers simply left the first set in the water and found that within an hour they had all drowned. The other set of rats, however, were periodically lifted out of the water for a moment and then put back in. When that happened, the second set of rats swam for over 24 hours. Why? Not because they were given a rest, but because they had hope of getting out of their predicament. The rats, so the idea went, *hoped* that if they could stay afloat just a little longer, someone would reach down and rescue them...and so they held on and didn't give up. The conclusion of the researchers: hope is a real and powerful thing, and if hope can hold that much power for soulless rodents, how much greater is the power of hope for those who can understand its true properties and its true Source.

When we were last together, we spent our time talking about four individuals who in many and various ways were lost; almost hopelessly lost. Jacob and Esau, Isaac and Rebekah...here were four people, a family no less, who were all working at cross-purposes with each other. The result of their individual follies was a familial fallout, and as we ended the 27th chapter of Genesis, we did so by recounting how their ungodly quests for happiness left each of them in a hollow place of hopelessness instead.

That got me to thinking, and why? While the events described in the text are unique to Isaac's family, the underlying cause of those events is universal in nature. We all know what it's like to bungle the blessings we've been given in life, don't we. We all know what it's like to chart a course for happiness, only to find ourselves in a place of hopelessness instead. We also know what it's like to work at cross-purposes with others...sometimes, even people in our own family. And yes, we all know something else as well: we know how it feels to realize that we've missed the mark along the way and made a mess of things. When those moments come, sometimes we just want to quit in despair.

If you've ever been in that situation, or if you happen to be there right now, I'd like to give you some perspective today...and with that perspective some encouragement and, dare I say it, a good strong dose of *hope*.

Martin Luther, who had more than his fair share of hopeless, despairing moments in life as he served the Lord, once made an interesting observation. Commenting on Paul and Barnabas in the book of Acts — specifically the time in Acts 15 when those two great servants of Christ got into such a fight over how ministry should be done that they parted ways over it — Luther said this:

Here it appears either Paul or Barnabas went too far. It must have been a violent disagreement to separate two associates who were so closely united. Indeed, the text indicates as much. (But) such examples are written for our consolation: for it is a great comfort to us to hear that great saints, who have the Spirit of God, also struggle. Samson, David, and many other celebrated men full of the Holy Spirit fell into grievous sins. Job and Jeremiah cursed the day of their birth; Elijah and Jonah were weary of life and desired death. But here is the truth: God still used them. And here is the further truth: no one has ever fallen so grievously that he may not rise again.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, it may feel at times like your own falls in life have been too grievous for you to ever rise again, but here is the truth: there is One who died and rose again in order that your rising would be assured. And by the way, the One who died and rose for you just happened to come onto the scene courtesy, in part, of a certain blessing-bungling, cross-purpose-working family whose members were quite adept at failing and falling themselves. Yes, God still used them, not for cross-purposes, but for His purposes. And yes, God will still use you as well. Hope today. Hope anew. Hold on and don't give up, because the Lord has come to lift you up.

Take care, everyone; God-willing, I'll see you again next time.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ as we come to the end of another week together. It's always good to be with you, and I hope that you'll find the next little while helpful to you in your relationship with our Savior. As we take a moment and prepare our hearts to receive what God has for us today, let's begin with prayer.

Prayer

Father, thank you for new life you've given us through Christ. We praise you for the forgiveness you've poured out upon our lives, and we praise you for the gift of knowing that your mercies are new every day. Please bless our time in your Word today. This we pray in the name of Jesus, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we'll be having our first look at Genesis 28, and with this new chapter we'll see a transition take place in the text as God's Word begins to zero in on the life of Jacob. Our focus this session: a blessing, a sending, and a new beginning.

Genesis 28:1-5

So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman. 2Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. 3May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. 4May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." 5Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

Blaise Pascal, the great French mathematician and physicist, not to mention sometime Catholic theologian, was raised in the heyday of Enlightenment thought. Long story short, try as he might he couldn't buy into it. Reason's last step, he said, is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it. One of his most famous assertions, in fact, is that "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know at all." That statement would eventually become the chief critique of rationalism — and for him it was the starting point of a defense of the Christian faith as well, one that still influences people today. To the academic community who mocked and ridiculed him for his faith, he said this:

It is vain, O men, that you seek within yourselves the cure for your miseries. All your insight only leads you to the knowledge that it is not in yourselves that you will discover the true and the good.

We haven't gathered today for a primer on Pascal, though it would be a fascinating topic for those of you who are into history and philosophy. The reason I've brought him up is that his declarations regarding the way of the human heart and mind apart from God serve our study time: they're a wonderful commentary on the ongoing journey of a certain young man in our Bible by the name of Jacob.

Jacob, as we begin our time in Genesis 28, is beginning his own time of growth and discovery in life...and as he does so, there's something we need to understand about his mindset. Has he grown up in the household of his father Isaac? Yes. Has he been taught about Almighty God, His power, His provision, and specifically, His promises to the family? We're not specifically apprised of that in Scripture, but it has been clear from Isaac's life and from his

words to his son that God is believed in, relied upon, and spoken of in the household. The family of Isaac is a family under Yahweh. Here, though, is the question: is the faith of Isaac at this point in time also the faith of Jacob? It's a question not often asked, but one that needs to be, as we'll see going forward.

As we pick up the reading today, Jacob is being instructed by his father to travel to northwest Mesopotamia — to the house of Rebekah's father — and once there, to find a wife for himself from among his extended family. This was a common practice in that day, and the reason for it in this case is to ensure that Jacob marries from among his own people rather than take a Hittite (or more broadly speaking, Canaanite) woman for a bride. Ostensibly this is because of the idol-worshipping practices of the Hittites, but further so because the two Hittite daughters in-law of Isaac and Rebekah by way of Esau have brought them nothing but grief. They don't want another one added to the mix! Remember, though, that in a way this whole "Travel away from here to find a wife" idea is all a ruse: a ruse put together by Rebekah to protect Jacob from Esau, who wants to kill him. Jacob himself probably doesn't care one way or another about from which tribe or people he marries, but because things are on the dicey side right now for him safety-wise, he's only too happy to leave in order to save his bacon. For her part, Rebekah has put this all together in a way that has left Isaac in the dark, so in essence, mother and son are still continuing their deception for the sake of their own desired outcomes.

Significantly, as he sends his son away, Isaac again blesses Jacob — and notice the way he does it: his words are not just reminiscent, but almost a verbatim repetition, of the blessing the Lord had originally given to Abraham, and Isaac specifically mentions Abraham as a way to connect the two so that Jacob understands the implications of what is being said:

May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham."

Though Isaac is sending Jacob away, it is with full expectation that he will ultimately return to Canaan to take possession of all that God has given him and to become all that God created him to be. Yet from what we can see — at least from the evidence given to us in Scripture itself — is that while Jacob may be outwardly obeying his father, in matters of the heart he is far from understanding or embracing the things of God. At present, he is still operating wholly in line with the meaning of his name: deceiver. His ankle-grabbing, deceitful self is still just jumping through hoops to hold fast to what he has and to get more of what he wants. In the words of Blaise Pascal, he is "seeking within himself to cure his miseries," and he has not yet come to the knowledge "that it is not in himself that he will discover the true and the good." To be blunt, Jacob doesn't really care about what is true and good, much less about discovering it.

Wrapping Up

So it is that Jacob goes on his way and sets out to do what his father has asked of him, but as we'll see in the days ahead, things for this deceitful son aren't going to go as smoothly and uneventfully as he might like. As we wrap things up for the day, the truth is that while Jacob is embarking on what he thinks will be a relatively quick trip to sidestep trouble at home and gain a wife at the same time, the journey at hand is one that's going to upend his life and change him forever. It's also one that will put to rest in rather short order any feelings of ambivalence he might have about the presence of power of Almighty God. Do stay with us as we continue, because the fireworks show is going to be starting very soon!

Have a terrific weekend, everyone; God bless you richly, and I'll see you again come Monday. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's rich and abundant blessings to you in our Savior Jesus, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad you're here with me today for some time together in Scripture, and I know that God's Word will bless us as we open ourselves to its message over these next few minutes. We're in Genesis 28 right now as we take out our Bibles, so let's take a moment to pray as we begin:

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this day and the many blessings that have come with it. As we study today, please bless our lives with increasing faith, increasing understanding, and an ever increasing reliance upon you for all things. Help us to truly grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus today. In His name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, With Jacob having set off toward his uncle's home in Paddan Aram, we're turning our attention, just briefly, back to Esau. Our focus this session: A change of heart...or a change of tactics?

Genesis 28:6-9

6Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," 7and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. 8Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; 9so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had.

Of the two dogs I have in my home, one is old and the other is young. One is well-versed in the ways of the household and the other is decidedly not. Of these two dogs, one is deferential and obedient, which usually results in special privileges like extra treats. The other is anything but deferential and obedient and, generally speaking, has received none of the extra perks its housemate enjoys...but lately that seems to be changing. In recent weeks, when Weston (the older of the two) has been rewarded for good behavior, Carl (the young pup) has watched carefully. Sometimes, he's even copied whatever Weston has done in order to get in on the blessing of the moment. The question, though, is whether Carl is sincere and earnest in his learning or if he's just doing the right thing with the hope of benefitting from it. Sometimes I think I can tell, but other times I'm not so sure.

As we come to today's brief reading from Genesis 28, we see a very similar scenario...one, in fact, that theologians have been puzzling over and wrestling with for as long as people have been studying God's Word. Jacob the deceiver, who has just effectively bilked his twin brother out of their father's patriarchal blessing, has left town for personal safety reasons and is on his way to Mesopotamia to hang out with his uncle Laban for a while. (More on all of that soon, because that's what we'll be taking up together tomorrow and in the days following.) Esau, of course, has stayed back and is still stewing over his brother's duplicity and his own resulting misfortune. He is, in fact, is feeling literally murderous towards his brother right now, and why? Not only has he been cheated, but his father has told him in no uncertain terms that since the blessing has been given to Jacob, it cannot and will not be rescinded. Furthermore, there is no additional blessing or extension of the original blessing that can be directed to him. Esau, for all intents and purposes, is out of luck...but might that change? That seems to be Esau's hope here, and as we follow the passage before us through to its conclusion, we can almost see the wheels in his head turning — vain though that turning may be.

When Esau learns that Jacob has left town, and when he learns further that Isaac blessed him upon his departure, and when he learns, lastly, that Jacob has obeyed the instructions of his father concerning the acquisition of a bride from among the family's own tribe rather than looking for a woman from among the Canaanites, what happens to Esau? Esau has an "aha" moment and says to himself, *Wow, I never realized how displeasing my two wives are to my father. Maybe I should do something about it.* The subtext here, of course, is that in the deep, dark recesses of his heart, Esau may very well be hoping against hope that if he goes and finds a wife that his father and mother would deem suitable, perhaps...just perhaps...there might be a jot or tittle of a blessing somewhere for him after all. So it is that Esau copies the actions of his brother. He goes and finds a new wife for himself — or more properly, an additional wife for himself — not from the Canaanites, but from his own people, specifically from his uncle Ishmael...Abraham's son and Isaac's brother.

The question, though, is whether Esau is sincere and earnest in his learning or if he's just doing the right thing with the hope of benefitting from it. Has Esau had a change of heart and an epiphany regarding his past boorishness? Has he suddenly realized that honoring his father and his mother and their wishes for him to marry a God-fearing woman is an idea whose time has come? *Or...* is he just trying to check all the right boxes so that his father will somehow be moved to dig deep and pull something out of his hat that will confer a blessing on his life? Some scholars, from reading and studying the text and its context, believe they can tell. But many others aren't so sure. What are your thoughts?

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what *is* sure is this: this action on the part of Esau is not one which will have any bearing on any kind of blessing. This action is not going to change the course of events that has already been put into motion. That ship has already sailed; sailed under the sacred wind of the Holy Spirit, who has been guiding and directing this matter from the start. Significantly, this is the last time we're going to hear of Esau until we get to chapter 36, and — spoiler alert — what we'll learn about him there will, in my estimation, answer many of the questions being raised about him here. In the meantime, there's a lot to think about today when we consider Esau, the things he did, and the motives that drove him. There's a lot to think about when we hold him and his circumstances up to our own lives. And finally, there's also a lot to think about when we look at the bigger picture in play here — the overarching narrative that is leading us slowly but surely to the Messiah...our Lord Jesus Christ, who takes away the sin of the world.

Do stay with us as we work through all of this — the personal impact will be worth the wading, I promise! Have a great day everyone, and I'll see you next time. Until then, the joy of the Lord be your strength, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.

Greetings

Hello everyone! Blessings to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. This week in our Bible study time we're continuing our way through the 28th chapter of Genesis, where right now we're beginning to follow Jacob as he embarks on his northward trip to Mesopotamia...first as a way to flee the wrath of his brother, but also to find a wife from among his extended family members. Today we'll see the Lord show up on the scene in a mighty way, and we'll even get a small glimpse of heaven — which is actually what we'll be thinking on together over the next few minutes. Let's pray and take a moment to prepare our hearts as we begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are ever mindful that it was the blood of your Son, Jesus that redeemed us from sin and brought us back to you. Thank you for calling us your children and for giving us a place in your family through the life, death, and resurrection victory of our Savior. Thank you also this day for forgiveness, for new life, and for the promise of heaven. Enlighten us now and give us wisdom as we study today. We ask these things in the precious name of Christ, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, as Jacob sets out for the home of his relatives in the north, once the sun has set he stops for the night to make camp and head to bed. It's while he's asleep that the Lord appears to him in a dream. Our focus: The Lord, the God of heaven and earth!

Genesis 28:10-17

10Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. 11When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. 12He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." 16When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." 17He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

J.I. Packer, one of the great Christian minds of our generation, wrote a beautiful book many years ago called *Your Father Loves You*. I've shared portions of it with you time and time again through the years, because Dr. Packer had a gift for speaking about the important things in life humbly and eloquently all at the same time. As we come to a section of God's Word this week that speaks in many ways — both symbolically and concretely — about eternity with the Lord and all it will entail, I want to set things up today by briefly taking you back to Dr. Packer's book. My desire is a simple one: to get us all thinking about the reality of heaven, the reality that because of Christ and His finished work we will each have a place in it, and the fact that the God who created it did so in part so that we could be there with Him. Even so, however, there's a still-greater truth for us to embrace reflected in the passage we've just read: though we will indeed dwell with our Lord in heaven someday soon, God is not waiting until that day comes to have fellowship with us. Indeed, our Lord is everywhere present...and He is with us even now. Here is what Dr. Packer wrote:

As I get older, I find that I appreciate God and people and good and lovely and noble things more and more intensely; so it is pure delight to think that this enjoyment will continue and

increase in some form (what form, God knows, and I am content to wait and see), literally forever. Christians inherit in fact the destiny which fairy tales envisaged in fancy: we (yes, you and I, the silly saved sinners) live and live happily, and by God's endless mercy will live happily ever after.

We cannot visualize heaven's life, and the wise man will not try to do so. Instead he will dwell on the doctrine of heaven, where the redeemed will find all their heart's desire: joy with their Lord, joy with his people, and joy in the ending of all frustration and distress and in the supply of all wants. What was said to the child — "If you want sweets and hamsters in heaven, they'll be there" — was not an evasion but a witness to the truth that in heaven no felt needs or longings go unsatisfied. What our wants will actually be, however, we hardly know, except the first and foremost: we shall want to be "always...with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

What shall we do in heaven? Not lounge around but worship, work, think, and communicate, enjoying activity, beauty, people, and God. First and foremost, however, we shall see and love Jesus, our Savior, Master, and Friend.

Dr. Packer finishes by saying this:

To those who have learned to love and trust Jesus, the prospect of meeting him face to face and being with him forever is the hope that keeps us going — no matter what life may throw at us.

These things are most certainly true, everyone...and many of you can attest to that fact by virtue of your own experiences in life. These things are also great reminders for us today, especially as we see Jacob encountering their reality in a personal way for the first time. At the moment, he has so much to learn about who God is and what God is about that it's almost a bit comical to watch. At the same time, however, we can see so much of ourselves in him...and when we do, we remember that we still have much to learn as well.

I hope you'll join in for our study time each day this week as we unpack all of this, because I know you'll be blessed and built up in your faith as a result. For now and until next time, have a terrific day, be safe, and may the joy of the Lord continue to be your strength. I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everyone — God's peace, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS! I hope you've been having a great week in your neck of the woods, and I'm glad you've come along for some study time in God's Word. Today's session is actually the one I'd planned to share with you yesterday, but due to some unexpected family matters with our dear old dog, I didn't make it back to the office in time to get it out. I do apologize for that, and going forward we'll either catch up with a special Saturday session or just absorb the lost day and move into next week with a fresh start. If you have a strong opinion one way or another be sure and drop us a line at the ministry and we'll take your thoughts into consideration as we plan. For now, we're back in Genesis 28 today, and what are we doing? Having another look at Jacob and all that happens to him as he undertakes his journey out of Beersheba and into Haran. This is actually a section of Scripture we'll be examining for the next several days, and I know good things are in store for us as the Lord leads our time together. Let's take a moment and pray as we begin:

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the indwelling presence of your Holy Spirit. Lead us into all truth today through your Word, and please grant your blessing as we study. We ask this in the strong name of our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Getting Started

Getting things started today, we're returning to Jacob, his journey, and his dream...an astounding dream wherein the Lord appears to this wayward young man and speaks some incredible promises into his life just as He had done with his father and his grandfather. But we're getting ahead of ourselves! Our focus this session? A link to heaven.

Genesis 28:10-15

10Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. 11When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. 12He had a dream in which he saw a ladder resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

When I left my farm in Missouri back in 2014 to go and serve a church in the Atlanta, Georgia, area, one of the things I did — which was very difficult for me — was leave almost all of my outdoor equipment behind. I sold my tractor with its bush hog, plow, box blade, and rock rake, and I didn't feel too badly about that. But when it came to most of the other things that were in the barn...shovels, forks, hoses, hoes and things for my animals or my little fruit orchard... those were hard to let go of. One of the hardest of all? My ladder. I left it because I knew I was getting to the age where I really had no business being on it anymore. I have several friends in my age bracket with new knees and hips resulting from a ladder fall, and when I was packing up the moving truck and saw it hanging there, I had to have an argument with myself over its fate. Even though I live in the suburbs these days, there are always occasions when to have a ladder seems like it would be a big help. The truth, though, is that my decision was a good one. I have no business trying to climb anymore; it's a job best left to someone else.

As we come to God's Word today, we've come to yet another very familiar passage in Genesis, one that has also birthed a familiar term: "Jacob's Ladder." Jacob's Ladder is a common reference with common and broad use these days. I have some Jacob's Ladder growing in my

shade garden, for example. You may have read one of several books with the name of Jacob's Ladder, though I particularly like the one by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings about a family living in the backwoods of Florida during the Great Depression. There's also a psychological horror film called Jacob's Ladder (which I haven't seen), and we haven't even touched on things like rope ladders on the sides of ships, high voltage electrical arcs, pastry recipes...even a popular toy made of blocks that creates a visual illusion when put into motion. All are named Jacob's Ladder for various reasons. That's all well and good as far it goes, but where did all of this originate? It comes from right here in Genesis 28.

When God's Word tells us that Jacob lays down to go to sleep for the night after a day of travel on his way to Haran, it next lets us know about a dream he has in which he sees a ladder, or stairway (the Hebrew word for the two is the same), resting on the earth with its top reaching to heaven. He also sees that the angels of God are ascending and descending on it. In the dream, God speaks many promises to Jacob, and He also gives Jacob assurance that He will be with him, watch over him, and remain with him until all that He has promised is accomplished.

To explain the significance of this picture, I'm going to briefly mention two things today. First, as Jacob sleeps, notice that it is God who comes to him and not the other way around...God extending a connection between Himself and this young, deceitful, wayward man...God providing a link between heaven and earth, and specifically, the link between Himself and the people who dwell on earth. Why do I mention that? Because it's precisely the opposite of something we saw earlier in our study of Genesis. Back in chapter 11 as the population of the world grew after the Flood and people moved eastward, they came to a plain in Shinar and settled there. What did they do? They made the decision that they would build themselves a city with a tower that soared to the heavens in order to make a name for themselves. It did not go well. The point? Genesis 11 shows how humanity tried to reach up to heaven by its own actions completely apart from the power and provision of God. Genesis 28, however, shows God reaching down to humanity with the promise of His unmerited grace and favor. One group tries to attain heaven based on its own actions and ideals, while the other has access to heaven based solely on the initiation and provision of God. The contrast between the two is striking, and it's an important distinction for us to remember. It is impossible to be saved by works; salvation comes only as a free gift of the grace of God in Christ.

Wrapping Up

The second thing I want to mention today relates to the first, and while it's a matter we'll talk more about a few study sessions down the line, I want to introduce it now both as a way to wrap things up for the day and as a way to prepare for those future conversations. As Christians, there's a great deal for us to see here in today's passage, but of chief importance is the manner in which Jacob's Ladder is described for us later on...specifically in the New Testament. A moment ago I said that when the ladder in Jacob's dream appeared it was God who was coming to him and not the other way around...God extending a connection between Himself and that young, deceitful, wayward man...God providing a link between heaven and earth, and specifically, the link between Himself and the people who dwell on earth. If you go to the first chapter of the Gospel according to John, guess what you'll find? You'll find Jesus saying that He Himself is the Ladder between heaven and earth. He Himself is the One upon whom angels ascend and descend. He Himself is the Mediator who came to earth as a Ladder reconnecting us to our relationship with God which was severed because of our sin...because of our deceitful, wayward selves. Here is a true and profound and wonderfully beautiful thing: according to the Bible, Jesus is our ideal "Jacob's Ladder" who came to earth from heaven, from the line of Jacob, through the provisions of God, and redeemed us so that we may live in heaven for eternity. Think through that sentence a few times as we close today, Roll it around in your head. Finally, consider the sheer awesomeness of the declaration. You know something? We have no business trying to climb anymore. It's a job best left to Someone Else...and it's a

job that has been completed on our behalf by the One who loves us and gave Himself for us. Be at peace today in the knowledge of that truth, everyone. Joy to you in our Lord Jesus, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and as always, the rich and abundant blessings of our Lord Jesus Christ be with each of you today. As we come to the Scriptures this session and continue our time in Genesis 28, I know that God's Word will be strong and sure to lead us into a deeper relationship with Him. That's a great truth to remember whenever we come to the Bible, and I hope you'll be encouraged by that thought as we begin. Let's pray as we prepare for the verses before us.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your Word. As we prepare to study the Scriptures today, help us to place all of our trust and dependency in the finished work of Jesus at the cross, and help us to openly receive all that you have for us in your Word. We ask this in the strong name of Christ, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Jacob awakens from his slumber and is deeply troubled as he considers the dream he's just had. There's much here for us to unpack over the next several days, but for today's session we'll be looking at just one thing. Our focus this session: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it."

Genesis 28:16-17

16When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." 17He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

Most of you know that the late Chuck Colson, following his years of Washington skulduggery and his eventual conviction over his role in the Watergate scandal, had a profound conversion experience while in prison for his crimes. But unlike so many public figures who so publicly find God in the aftermath of their misdeeds and then go on to milk their profession of faith for all it's worth in the marketplace, Mr. Colson's was not a conversion of convenience or opportunism in the least. It wasn't colored by his fame or accompanied by fake crocodile tears and endless public appearances designed to grow his post-prison brand. Rather, his conversion was a real and lasting one, one in which the Lord Jesus Christ completely upended his life and changed him forever. After he left prison, he was never the same again, and he spent the rest of his life serving Christ by doing all he could to tell others about Him — especially people who were incarcerated as he had been.

Because he had a heart for people who had no inkling of God, and more than that, people who disdained the very idea of God, he was always deeply affected by the story told by Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher who famously proclaimed in the face of rationalism and the Enlightenment that God is dead. Nietzsche wrote,

Surely you've heard of the madman who lit a lamp in the bright morning and went to the marketplace crying ceaselessly, "I seek God! I seek God!" There were many among those standing there who didn't believe in God so he made them laugh. "Is God lost?" one of them said. "Has he gone astray like a child?" said another. "Or is he hiding? Has he gone on board ship and emigrated?" So they laughed and shouted to one another. The man sprang into their midst and looked daggers at them. "Where is God?" he cried. "I will tell you. We have killed him — you and I. We are all his killers! But how have we done this? How could we swallow up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the horizon? What will we do as the earth is set loose from its sun?"

In truth, Nietzsche's point was not that God doesn't exist, but that God has become irrelevant to people. Colson commented on it this way, saying "Men and women may assert that God exists or that He does not, but in Nietzsche's view it makes little difference either way. God is dead not because He doesn't exist, but because we live, play, procreate, govern, and die as though He doesn't."

I mention Chuck Colson, his conversion, his new life, and his lifelong struggle with Nietzsche's assertions for just one reason today: Jacob, up to this point in his life, has been a veritable poster child for the principle which Nietzsche espoused. In spite of growing up in a family that has enjoyed the blessings of God, and in spite of literally *being* one of those blessings as a child born to a barren woman whose womb the Lord had graciously opened, Jacob has lived as though God doesn't exist. If he believes in Him at all, he hasn't shown concern one way or the other about the implications of God being real. Why? Because even if God is real, Jacob has found Him to be irrelevant. Quite frankly, the only god in Jacob's life up til now has been Jacob himself.

With his dream...an astounding dream in which the Lord appeared to him, identified Himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac, and spoke words of blessing over him and his future descendants...the whole *God, if He exists at all, is irrelevant* schtick in Jacob's life has been upended, much like Chuck Colson's ideas about God were upended when he encountered Christ. Jacob, we're told, is afraid. And yes, Jacob suddenly realizes something: God is real... and God is *here*...and in this awesome moment in this awesome place, all of the arrogance and deceitfulness and pride and self-promotion that has been Jacob's life is suddenly laid bare in an instant. "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it."

Wrapping Up

I wonder at times, even as a Christian person who talks primarily to primarily Christian people five days each week, how truly cognizant we are — how aware we are from moment to moment — that God really is real, and that God is in our midst, and that, just as He did when He appeared to Jacob, so God makes a habit of speaking His promises over us on a continual basis as His beloved children in Christ. I wonder if we really understand how *awesome* He is... not that word in its casual and overused sense, but according to its true definition. And finally, I wonder if we actually understand the fact when we remember them and consciously live in their embrace, these truths are incredibly powerful difference makers in our lives. As we wrap things up for the day, we'll be talking about all of this a great deal more in the days ahead because Jacob will be wrestling with all of this a great deal more in the days ahead, and our job is to follow along so that we can learn and grow as we go. But for now, let me say this as we close: surely, the presence of the Lord is in this place. In my place. In your place. Are you aware of it?

God bless you richly as you meditate on that, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon to pick this up another time. Take care everyone — Have a great weekend, and the joy of the Lord Be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and God's abiding grace and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It's good to be together again after a weekend away, and as we begin this new week I pray that our time in God's Word will be an encouragement to you. Today we continue our look at Genesis 28, so let's pray as we prepare to go to the Scriptures together:

Prayer

Father, We thank you for your Word this day, and as we prepare to open the Bible and study, we ask that you would help us to see the power of the Scriptures...how in every way they continually point to our Savior Jesus and His gracious work for us. It's in His name that we pray, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, morning has come after Jacob's (literal) eye-opening dream during the night. With that event still understandably consuming his thoughts, he takes action. Our focus this session: What's in a rock?

Genesis 28:18-22

18Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. 19He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. 20Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear 21so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God 22and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

Wherever there is farmland with rocks in the soil, you usually see them: stone cribs or gabions used as corner posts for fencing. Kids, the children of the people farming that land, probably picked those rocks from the field each spring at plowing time. These days, if they're still on the farm their own kids are probably picking rocks from those same fields. The harvest is always plentiful!

Another kind of stone feature, common especially at beaches, along rivers and creeks, and sometimes out in the desert, are cairns set up by people as decorative sculptures in the landscape. Sometimes they're small, and other times quite large. Where I grew up in southern California, you'd always see cairns set up among the rocks at Little Corona Del Mar, or further north, you'd see them along the world famous 17-Mile Drive near Pebble Beach. Another place I've seen them is in the desert along Route 66 on that long, straight stretch from Needles to Amboy.

People have always set up rocks for different reasons. Sometimes as play, sometimes as a memorial, and in some cultures, even as part of worship. In God's Word today, we see Jacob setting up a stone as a pillar, and it leads us to ask some important questions.

First, we should make note that significantly, the pillar that Jacob sets up is *not* an altar. It's actually far from it, and if we were to describe it according to what we see in the text, it's more of a memorial to himself, the marker of a vow that Jacob has made not to the Lord, but to his own interests. Second, we should also note that setting up a pillar like Jacob does here is actually a characteristic of Canaanite worship, not the worship of Yahweh. Later on, in fact, God, in the giving of the law, will prohibit the setting up of pillars for precisely that reason.

What do these two things tell us about Jacob? At the very least they tell us that while he has just had a life-altering encounter with the God of the universe, he's still hedging his bets. He's

not ready to give himself over to this Deity that has come to him in a dream. Remembering that all the people around Isaac and his family in the region of Beersheba were pagans, it's not surprising for us to see Jacob exhibiting behavior here more in line with their worship practices than those of his father's house. For his entire life he's been underhanded, subversive, and dismissive of his family, operating on a different plane to try and advance his plans over his kin. The amusing thing is that we now see him trying to do the same thing with God Himself — which is another signpost for us that he still doesn't understand who he's just encountered and that he doesn't yet realize that the God of Abraham and Isaac is not just another god, little g, in the pantheon of religious expression.

The final thing we see in the passage today that tips us off to Jacob's lack of awareness regarding the nature of God — and his current absence of faith in God — is the manner in which he makes his vow and deigns to put conditions on any future relationship that might occur between himself and God. He really thinks he's in charge. Remember the beautiful promises that God spoke to Jacob in his dream?

- I am the LORD God.
- I will give to you.
- I am with you.
- I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken.

But now look at Jacob's vow:

- “ *If God will be with me,*
- And keep me in this way that I am going,
 - And give me bread and clothing,
 - And ensure that I make it back to my father's house...

Then He will be my God. Oh, and this stone I just set up as a pillar? That will be God's house.”

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, do you see how Jacob is trying to control the situation? Do you see how Jacob's natural inclination is to think that God is not so much a Someone as a something...something he can put in a box (or in a rock) and use solely for his own desires? This is Classic Jacob on display, isn't it — but to be honest, I think there might be a sermon in there for you and me as well. Check that: there's *definitely* a sermon in there for me, and it's not one for me to preach, but to hear.

Do you know what I find amazing in all of this? God, even in the face of this brazen arrogance and stupidity on Jacob's part, is gracious enough not to take His covenant back when He hears this ridiculous talk. Astoundingly, God, who at the moment has identified Himself as the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, will in time refer to Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It's hard to fathom, I know, but God has chosen Jacob. He's taking him right now just as he is. But through the years yet to come, He will also fashion him into what he is yet to be. It's all part of the incredible, inviolate nature of the Lord's covenant. And you know something? I think there's a sermon for you and me there as well.

God bless you richly today, everyone...I'll see you again next time to continue. Until then, joy to each of you, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks so much for coming along today for some time together in God's Word. I'm glad you're here, and as we open the Scriptures over the next few minutes it's great to know that the Lord is with us to bring grace and truth into our lives. We're beginning our look at Genesis 29 today, so as we get ready to study, let's take a moment and pray.

Prayer

Father, you have given us every good and perfect gift to bless us and help us to grow in our faith. Thank you for the way you've poured your grace into our lives through your Son. Our great desire is to know you more, and we pray that today's study time will help us in that journey. We ask this in the strong name of Jesus our Savior, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, as Jacob continues northward toward the place where his extended family dwells, he finally encounters his own people — and the first person he meets brings butterflies to his tummy and stars to his eyes. Our focus this session: Rachel, daughter of Laban.

Genesis 29:1-10

Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. 2There he saw a well in the field, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. 3When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well. 4Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?" "We're from Haran," they replied. 5He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?" "Yes, we know him," they answered. 6Then Jacob asked them, "Is he well?" "Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep." 7"Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture." 8"We can't," they replied, "until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep." 9While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. 10When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep.

I'm not a country music fan per se, but I love the song Luke Bryan wrote about good directions. It's a story about his encounter with a beautiful woman out in the Georgia countryside who's looking for directions back to the interstate. I won't quote all of the lyrics here, but when she asks for his help, here's what he tells her:

"Way up yonder past the caution lights
There's a little country store with an old coke sign
You gotta stop and ask "Miss" Bell
For some of her sweet tea
Then a left will take you to the Interstate
But a right will bring you right back here to me."

In the end, it's a sweet story, and if you want to hear it for yourself just pop online and listen either to Luke Bryan's own version, or the more well-known track sung by Billy Currington. Either way, I think it will make you smile!

During ancient times such as when Jacob lived, while there were certainly established roads and recognized ways to get from one place to another, there wasn't a whole lot in the way of navigational helps along the way — no real road maps or street signs, no mile markers or other distinguishing features that would tell you where you were. What, then, did you do to find your way? You talked to people on your journey, and you listened to them as they gave you local landmarks and certain people you could expect to encounter on your way to your destination. As we come to God's Word today, Jacob's journey is about to come to an end — and while the long-term prognosis of his situation is going to be a lot more complicated than the lyrics to a country song, in the beginning at least, it's a sweet story that we definitely want to hear for ourselves.

As we pick things up in the text, because the Lord has blessed his trip we see that Jacob now successfully returns to the land of his mother Rebekah — which of course is also the land of his grandfather Abraham. How does it unfold? As he walks through the countryside in the general direction of where he knows his relatives live, he notices some shepherds near a well being used to water their sheep. Again, in this age before clearly marked roads and signs, Jacob can't know where he is unless he talks to some of the locals, and that's what he's doing here. It's as he speaks with the shepherds at the well that he learns he's actually arrived at his destination.

As it turns out, not only are the shepherds from Haran, and not only do they know Laban, they also know his daughter, who happens to be a fellow shepherd...and it just so happens that as they're speaking, they see her coming toward the well with her flock. Get ready, because things are about to get interesting. Once Jacob sees Rachel coming toward the group, what happens? Naturally, he almost immediately moves into doing what he does best: Jacob moves into hustle position. The first thing that our resident hustler does? He tries move the other shepherds along.

Hey boys, don't you think it's time to get these sheep watered and back out to pasture? It's not time to gather them in for the day...too early, you see.

Why does Jacob do this? There are likely two things in play. First, he wants them out of the picture so that he can speak directly with Rachel and not have witnesses to whatever it he might say to her. As we know by the kind of person he's evidenced himself to be, Jacob is probably already conjuring up a plan and working on an angle to position himself in some advantageous way. The second aspect here — not exclusive of the first but in conjunction with it — is that when Jacob sees Rachel, he's struck by her beauty. The last thing he wants is a bunch of shepherds hanging around to interfere with his repartee. (And by the way, these are probably boys, not men, which we can deduce from the fact that shepherding was a common task for younger members of a family and from the fact that they're unable to roll away the large stone from the well by themselves.) At any rate, when his suggestion isn't heeded, and when Rachel arrives in their midst, Jacob takes matters into his own hands. He goes to the well and moves the stone himself, and in a masterfully calculated value-added proposition, he also waters Rachel's sheep so that she doesn't have to.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, let's end with a thought that ties the different elements of this scene together: Jacob, remember, has come north not just to flee his brother's anger over his stealing of the patriarchal blessing; he's come north, at the instruction of his parents, to find a wife from among his extended family. It's obvious that in this fortuitous situation, he's already become quite taken with Rachel. It's also obvious that he's already trying to impress her, both by using his strength to move a large stone and by displaying kindness, initiative, and ability by

watering her sheep. Jacob, even in these first moments after meeting Rachel, has gone into woo mode. When we come back next time, we'll see how his plan continues to unfold.

It's been great to be with you today, everyone — thanks so much for your time! God's rich blessings to you as you go through your day, and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone — welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and blessings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus! I'm thankful to be with you today as we continue our study in the book of Genesis, and my prayer is that you'll find encouragement and strength in Christ today as we continue to see Him work in the lives of regular, everyday people...even people with baggage and burdens and blow-ups scattered about their lives. In other words, people just like you and me! Let's take a minute, clear our minds, prepare our hearts, and get ready for our Lord to do His gracious work in us. Will you pray with me?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the amazing love you have for us. Thank you that even while we were dead in our sins, you chose to make us alive in your Son. We want to cherish the time we have with you in your Word today, and we ask that you would send your Holy Spirit to enlighten us, endow us with wisdom, and bring transformation and renewal to our lives as a result. This we pray in the strong and saving name of Christ, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, upon seeing Rachel approach with her flock of sheep, Jacob has put on a bit of swagger and stepped forward to roll away the stone covering the well, and he's even watered her animals himself. Now he breaks down as he shares that he is Laban's nephew, the son of Rebekah. Our focus this session: Established custom, or calculated theatrics?

Genesis 29:11-14a

11Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. 12He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father. 13As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. 14Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood."

When I was growing up, I loved my extended family on both my mom and dad's sides. Dad's parents, and his brothers too, were a bit formal and reserved. I remember a lot of great visits with them, but I don't remember much about how we greeted one another when those visits commenced...probably because the greetings, like the people themselves, were on the formal and reserved side. On Mom's side of the family, however, there was a ton of warmth, and that extended to the way our family greetings went. As a kid, all the hugging and kissing and fawning was a little too much sometimes, and instead of hugging Aunt Jeanie or giving aunt Judy a kiss as requested, I'd run and lock myself in the bathroom to avoid it! In time I got used to that more demonstrative way of saying hello, and I eventually realized that it was an expression of genuine love and happiness over the fact that we were all together.

In God's Word today, every time I read the passage before us I always wonder: when we see Jacob greeting Rachel, are we witnessing genuine love and happiness at the establishment of a family connection, are we simply observing a traditional, culturally distinctive display of emotion that typifies the greeting of relatives in that part of the world...*or*, are we seeing something more at work here? Has Jacob already begun hatching a classic, Jacob-style plan to benefit himself? Has Jacob, quickly sizing up the situation before him, already begun laying groundwork for a preferred future? In other words, is Jacob being Jacob? Actually, if we were to take a moment and skip ahead to the end of this developing story, I think we'd find in hindsight that there's a little of all of those things going on right now. Let's go ahead and start here at the beginning, and let's follow it through together.

As we get into the brief passage before us, I have to say again that I'm both struck, and yes, a little suspicious, about this scene. I don't know about you, but if I were Rachel, I'd be more than a little surprised if a man I'd never met before greeted me, kissed me, and then began to weep loudly as he explained that we were kith and kin. Rachel, for her part, has almost certainly been told about her Aunt Rebekah before, and she probably knows that she lives to the south and is married to a very wealthy distant relative, so Jacob's story checks out. But still, she's got to be a little creeped out by this course of events. In the middle of a field with a bunch of sheep, she can't run and lock herself in the bathroom to avoid Jacob, but she does the next best thing: she runs and tells her father what's going on.

At this point in the narrative with Rachel running to her father and letting him know what's just happened, we're now entering a bit of a shift as we're introduced to Laban — because in being introduced to Laban, we're meeting a man who in many ways is going to prove himself superior in craftiness to his crafty, deceitful nephew. Laban, from the moment he comes onto the scene, shows himself to be a schemer. You can almost see it oozing from him as he hurries out to meet Jacob, takes him home, and listens to his story. You can almost see the smile — an oily, saccharin, over-the-top smile, as he says to his nephew, "You are my own flesh and blood."

Why do I say these things? I say them because while Laban is certainly doing the right and familial thing by showing Jacob hospitality, the truth is that he's not doing this just because it's right and familial. He's not doing this just because of custom. He *is* doing this because Jacob is his nephew...but specifically, he's doing it because Jacob his nephew is Isaac's son — and as Isaac's son, Jacob will one day inherit a grand fortune. "My own flesh and blood?" My foot!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for this session, if you think this line of reasoning is a bit of a stretch on my part, just hang with me for a little while and watch as things begin to unfold over our next several days together. What we'll be finding is that Jacob, who up until now has been the undisputed king of the con, is about to get a run for his money when it comes to that title. Yet all of this, of course, will be serving a bigger, more important story with a bigger, more important purpose — and when we gather together next time, we'll begin to talk about it. I hope you'll come along as we get into it!

Thanks, everyone — have a great day, know that God has big and important purposes He's bringing to bear in your life too, and know as it all transpires, your Lord Jesus will be with you through every step along the path! Joy to you in Christ, and I'll see you soon.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and God's joy and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus. Thanks for clicking in with me today as we continue through our week together, where right now we're beginning to work more deeply into the 29th chapter of Genesis. It's always great to have you along; let's prepare our hearts for today's study by going to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Father, Thank you for a new day to know that we are loved by you and ever served by you with your gracious gifts. Thank you for a new day to love and serve you in response, a new day to grow in our faith, and a new day to share your love with the people around us. Please bless our time in your Word today, and draw near to us as we study. We ask this in Jesus name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, a month has passed since Jacob arrived in Paddan Aram, and he's been staying with his uncle Laban. As is often the case in life when it comes to family matters, the time has come for a frank discussion between Laban and his houseguest. Our focus this session: addressing the elephant in the room.

Genesis 29:14b-20

After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, 15 Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be." 16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. 18 Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel." 19 Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

I don't know how it happened, and it was a young and foolish thing to do, but between my freshman and sophomore year of college I had a crazy, irrational crush on a girl I worked with up in the mountains of southern California. We began dating, and after our summer job was over, we went back down the mountain — together. Because my parents were living far away at the time, and because I had five weeks before I could move back into campus housing, I was invited to be a guest in my girlfriend's home. It was all on the up and up, and there were some pretty strict parameters put in place by her folks regarding where and how we spent our time together. The house also happened to be more mansion-like than house-like, and the bedroom where I stayed had actually been designed as staff quarters, so it was on the opposite side of the house from the rest of the family. I'd never seen or experienced such opulence in my life, and though I was a conscientious guest and always tried to be helpful, it's also safe to say that I made myself comfortable — probably a little too comfortable!

One day, my girlfriend's father invited me to sit down for a chat. Without going into all the details with you, he basically gave me the lay of the land, laid out some expectations for the remainder of my time there, and also made it clear that my time there was coming to an end. I got the message, and was ultimately able to get back onto campus two weeks early because of a work study job I'd gotten. The story ends the way most summer romances do: I went back to school in southern California, she went back to school in Northern Indiana, we traded letters for a few weeks, and then one day I received the inevitable Dear John note. I never heard from her again, and these many years later I can see that it was just as well for both of us!

As we return to Genesis 29 today, we've happened upon a chat between Laban and Jacob: one that, without going into all the details, basically gives Jacob the lay of the land and lays out

some expectations for the remainder of his time there. It also, ostensibly, includes a clear date on when that time will end. There's a lot that happens in between the lines of this conversation, however, and that's what we want to talk about today.

The first thing we want to tackle today is Laban's opening line with Jacob: "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be." In truth, though this might sound like a gracious and generous offer from a benevolent uncle, what Laban is actually doing here is letting Jacob know that if he wants to keep staying with him, he's going to have to stay on as a hired servant, not a privileged, coddled nephew. Jacob is strong and skilled, and he knows how to work, but remember: Jacob is also the son of a man of tremendous wealth. We can't make a judgment as to his work ethic, but it's probably safe to say that Jacob has been making himself comfortable in his uncle's home — maybe a little too comfortable. Though his personality type certainly doesn't seem like one prone to laziness, it's also true that in his life back home, there were servants to do much of the hard work. Now, should he choose to stay, Jacob will be the servant.

Now — Jacob, if he is unnerved or offended by this development, doesn't show it. Instead, he immediately looks at the situation as an opportunity, and by now we expect this, don't we. Every time we've seen Jacob at any kind of a crossroad, he's turned a prospective negative into a personal positive, and in fact, it's even possible that Jacob has anticipated and planned for this moment all along. Being put into this position doesn't turn him into an underling; rather, it gives him a chance to go for the prize he's seeking, and now he does so with boldness. In response to his uncle's wage question, Jacob says, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."

This offer on Jacob's part is essentially a dowry: a demonstration on the one hand that he's fit to support a family and on the other hand, a giving of compensation for the receiving of Laban's daughter in marriage. Yet, while this is the common practice and custom of the day, we should be quick to note that seven years is an extremely generous offer...one far above a normal dowry. Why does Jacob offer such extravagance? For his part, he doesn't want to risk a refusal. He loves Rachel and doesn't want to lose her. But in showing his hand, as it were, Jacob's eagerness sets the stage for a backfire. Why? As Laban sees how badly Jacob wants Rachel for his wife, he now sees that he has much more leverage in the situation than he had perhaps realized. Now, should he desire to do so, Laban knows that he can take advantage of Jacob...and going forward, borrowing a page out of Jacob's own playbook, take advantage of him he will — at every turn.

Wrapping Up

At this point, we're going to go ahead and wrap things up for the day. There's quite a bit in the passage that we haven't covered yet, particularly with respect to Rachel and Leah, but when we come back tomorrow we're going to dedicate our whole session just to them and to the dynamics of their relationship, because that piece of the puzzle is going to be especially important for our understanding of what will be coming in the days ahead. For now, however, this deal between Jacob and his uncle is struck. Our Bible shows us that Jacob enters into it joyfully, and because his love and desire for Rachel is so great, the seven years he has agreed to fly by like the passing of but a few days. Do remember as we continue that this up-front portion of the narrative of Jacob and Rachel will in time show itself to be the subtext to the actual story being told. In the days ahead, the deceiver will be deceived, the trickster will be tricked, and the hustler will be hustled. In the process, he will learn...about the world, about himself, and most important of all, about the God who created it all.

I'll look forward to seeing you next time, everyone; until then, have a great day, and the peace of our Lord Jesus rest on you and yours. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. Yesterday in the United States we celebrated Independence Day. Though as Americans we cherish our freedoms (even as a very much less-than-perfect union), for anyone who is a follower of Jesus there is an ultimate freedom that far supersedes what we celebrate on the fourth of July — or what any other nation celebrates on any other day. While we thank our great and mighty God for the temporal blessings of country and kin, we know that our true citizenship is in heaven and that our true family is the family of Christ...and we also know that if the Son sets us free, we will be free indeed! Wherever you may be today in our EDiBS family, whether here in America or one of the many countries we serve in Europe, Africa, South America, or Asia, I pray that you're knowing and relishing your freedom in Jesus as you await His return. He is our hope and our peace, now and always!

As we begin a new month together today, we're continuing our study of the life of Jacob and his extended family in Genesis 29, and we currently have quite a bit of activity going on in the household of Jacob's uncle, Laban. I'm glad you're here today, and I'm eager to get to the Scriptures with you over these next few minutes. Let's take a moment, prepare our hearts, and ask the Lord to go before us as we open His Word.

Prayer

Father, we ask that in opening your Word today, it would be an enlightening time for us as your children. Teach us, lead us, and change us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, in the family of Laban there are two daughters. One is described to us as beautiful and lovely in form, and the other? The other is described only as having weak eyes. Our focus this session: sisters of the world, unite...or not.

Genesis 29:16-17

16Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful.

Last week I asked a woman I know about her relationship with her younger sister. She was immediate in her assessment: "She's wonderful and I'm so glad we have each other!" I should be quick to add that both this woman and her sister are highly educated, have very good jobs in different sectors of the medical field, and have husbands, children and home lives that contribute to a generally positive outlook on life. Furthermore, their parents raised them in an environment with an emphasis on family togetherness and mutual support.

When I asked the same question of another woman I know, however, her answer was quite different...in fact, at first it seemed like she wouldn't answer at all. It turned out that hers was a story of bitterness. Her younger sister was beautiful and athletic; she was shy and on the heavy side. Her younger sister was outgoing; she was a wallflower. Her younger sister had an interesting dating life, and more than that, she had actually dated the young man that the older sister had long secretly admired. On and on the comparisons went; on and on the hurts were listed. It was like a litany, and it was sad. In their adult lives, there's little sisterly affection between the two, and not much contact either. The conflict, competition, and jealousy of their youth has taken its toll.

You might think I've concocted this illustration for the sake of the topic at hand today, but I haven't. It's the real story of real people...and the truth is that for as many truly wonderful relationships as there are between siblings in the world today, the existence of those which are less-than wonderful is not especially uncommon.

As we look to God's Word today and think of Leah and her sister Rachel, it's significant to note that the way they're introduced to us is by way of comparison. Moreover, it's clear that one is described for us favorably, and the other unfavorably. Leah is a doorstop; Rachel is delightful. It's a tragedy in stereotyping, and in a way, a life sentence for them both.

In following the ins and outs of their relationship as we continue on in the text, the days ahead of us will be full of twists and turns and one surprise after another — but what won't be much of a surprise is the current of acrimony flowing between the two. Today's brief passage is the first hint of all that's to come.

It's not difficult to understand what the Scripture says of Rachel today — she's obviously beautiful, with a beautiful figure to match. When it comes to Leah, however, we have a bit less to go on. Her eyes, we are told, are weak. Some translations say delicate. Some Hebrew scholars take the stance that Leah's eyes are bad and that she doesn't see well, or that they're oddly set and affect her appearance. Others believe that the description refers to more of a dullness in her eyes, hinting that perhaps she lacks a vivaciousness in her personality. The overall consensus, at any rate, is that Leah is not bright and glowing with the radiance of Rachel's beauty, and that she may even be rather homely compared to Rachel. Her eyes definitely have something to do with that, and if in and of itself it is not a cross for Leah to bear, the fact that she has a very beautiful sister to whom she is unfavorably compared makes it so in the end.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, The comparison of Rachel and Leah and their respective beauty — or lack thereof — is a small clue for us not just into what will be propelling the shenanigans to come in their relationship with one another and with Jacob, but into what was probably a complicated, conflict-filled, and competitive family life. Their father — who, it will be shown, is obviously aware of all of this — does nothing to quell it. On the contrary, he himself will only add fuel to the fire. An environment which puts an emphasis on family togetherness and mutual support is not present here.

Is the portrait being painted here a sad one? For the moment, it is indeed. But in the not-too-distant future, several divine brushstrokes will be bringing a different look to this canvas... including a kind of beauty to Leah that will in significant ways even surpass Rachel's. I'm looking forward to working through it with you as we continue!

Thanks for your time today, everyone — God's rich blessings, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's grace, mercy and peace to each of you in the name of our Lord Jesus. Today is a great time for us to take a deep breath, lean in, and spend some committed time with our Savior in His Word, and I'm glad you're here. Right now we're continuing our look into the 29th chapter of Genesis, and I know it will be a blessing to us as we seek God and listen to Him with our whole heart. Let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for this day. There are times when we're so tired, so distracted, so worn out...times when we need a refreshing that only you can give. Please come to us by the power of your Spirit today as we study your Word. Bless us with clean hearts and spirits made newly aright from the inside out, and then lead us in our learning. We ask this in Christ's name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, seven years have passed in Jacob's life...seven years that, because of his love and desire for Rachel, have seemed like nothing, like the blink of an eye. Now, the time has come for his uncle Laban to make good on the agreement the two had made regarding Rachel — but Laban has other plans. Our focus this session: Jacob gets "Jacobed."

Genesis 29:21-25

21Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her." 22So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. 23But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her. 24And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter as her maidservant. 25When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

I used to know a set of identical twins who, from time to time during their college years, were disingenuous in their dating lives. In short, they would trick the young women they were with into thinking that they were the other brother. In that way, the two were able to date two girls simultaneously without either girl's knowledge. I don't know if they were ever caught, but their jokes about their high jinks always left me feeling uncomfortable. They may have considered it nothing but innocent fun, but the truth is that their behavior wasn't funny at all; it was actually reprehensible — and in today's climate, likely criminal as well.

In today's reading, it is Laban who is disingenuous, isn't it...and while the situation is a bit different than what I've just described with respect to that set of twins, the fraud being committed is the same, and the nature of Laban's actions is equally reprehensible.

As we pick things up today, the time has come for Laban to make good on the agreement he's struck with Jacob concerning his daughter Rachel. Jacob's words are clear enough: he's kept his end of the deal, and now he's done waiting. He's ready to take Rachel as his wife and get on with his life. Initially, Laban responds as would be expected: he invites a passel of guests and makes ready for a wedding feast. While all seems to be well, when the time comes for Jacob and his bride to retire for the evening so that the marriage can be consummated, Laban does a bait and switch: he takes Leah, his older daughter, and gives her to Jacob instead.

Two questions arise from this course of events. First, how could *Jacob* not know that he was given the wrong woman, and second, how could *Leah* not know — and speak up — about what was happening? The first answer comes rather easily. According to the wedding customs of the day, the new bride would remain heavily veiled until she was finally alone with her husband following the wedding feast. In addition, it was most likely dark by the time Jacob and

his new bride were alone together (something Laban could have easily arranged). Finally, there was probably more than a little alcohol consumed by everyone, including Jacob, during the celebration, and so there's that aspect to consider. But still — is all of that really enough to pull one over on the king of deceivers himself? Not unless there's some help from the outside... which brings us to the question of Leah and her part in all of this.

A moment ago I asked this of Leah: How could she not know? The answer, of course, is that she did know. The deeper answer is that not only did she know, but she was also a willing party to the deception. And the deepest answer of all? Not only did Leah know, and not only was she a willing party, but to pull off a switcheroo like this couldn't have happened on the fly. It would have required advance planning. Make no mistake: Leah knew she would end up in the bridal suite with Jacob that night, and the reason is that she and her father had meant it to be that way all along.

So — why would Leah do such a thing? Dr. H.C. Leupold, a Lutheran scholar from the mid-twentieth century, offered some good thoughts on the matter. He wrote, "She may have loved Jacob secretly. She may have considered this her one chance to get a husband. She may have even thought (and we talked about this relational dynamic in our time together yesterday) that this was an unsought, and therefore justifiable, opportunity to gain an advantage on her sister." Whatever the case, the outcome was the same. As today's reading says, "When morning came, there was Leah!" There was Leah indeed...and Jacob too, not knowing what to do!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, we can see how upset Jacob is by this turn of events, and we can hardly blame him. We'll be unpacking this situation more in the days ahead, but for now, consider this bit of poetic justice: Laban's deception towards Jacob here is similar to the deception Jacob had put upon his father Isaac and his brother Esau. Jacob had exchanged the younger for the older; Laban has now exchanged the older for the younger. Jacob the deceiver is now Jacob the deceived, and in this way, Jacob is reaping what he has sown. What will come of this? How will God work through it? What will Jacob learn from it? We'll talk about all that and more as we continue in the days ahead, so be sure to come along as we study together.

Have a great day everyone — thank you for being with me today, and I'll see you again soon. Until then, the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. Today we continue our study in the 29th chapter of Genesis, where we've begun to see some movement in the matter of Jacob, Leah, Rachel, and Laban. I'm glad you're here; let's pray as we open our Bibles.

Prayer

Gracious Father, thank you for the privilege of studying your Word today, and thank you for the promises that you give to your people throughout the pages of Scripture. May you be honored and glorified through this time together, and may your people be blessed. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Laban, who has just shown himself to be equal to Jacob in his ability to deceive, now negotiates anew with Jacob for the hand of Rachel in marriage. We'll spend two days on this development, starting with a brief introduction today and finishing with a more detailed accounting of the text to close out the week. Our focus this session: Jacob and Laban get what they want...and also more than they bargained for.

Genesis 29:26-30

26Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. 27Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work." 28And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. 30Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

I was at Jimmy John's the other day...a sub chain whose turkey sandwiches on wheat bread are one of my guilty pleasures from time to time. Lo and behold, that particular shop was having a special: two for one. What could be better, right? Wrong. For some people it would be a great deal, but for me, a guy who's always struggled with overeating, it ended up being a recipe for disaster. The wheat bread at Jimmy John's isn't a big sub roll, it's like regular sandwich bread. As I ordered, I was already reasoning with myself that since the sandwiches made on that kind of bread were much smaller — and since I was getting turkey, so healthy and lean — it wouldn't be a problem to have both. Plus, I was in the middle of a five-hour drive between our ministry office in Brunswick and Atlanta, so I would need that extra sustenance, right? Again, wrong. The old adage "If one is good, two are better" is not always true...not when it comes to sandwiches, and as we can see in today's reading from God's Word, definitely not when it comes to spouses.

In this passage we have several things in play. First is Laban, continuing his deceptive and fraudulent behavior toward Jacob. Second is Jacob, who while more than a little disgruntled, makes the choice to cowboy up and follow through on Laban's revised (and frankly ridiculous) offer regarding Rachel. Third? Third is the result of these negotiations — a result which sees each of these two men secretly thinking they've prevailed in their quest to get from the other that which they desire. Yet what neither realizes at the moment is that in getting what they think they want, they've actually gotten what they would never wish upon themselves.

Laban gets both his daughters married off — which, we're led to believe, would have been difficult in the case of Leah — and double the brideprice that he had originally sought from Jacob. But while it seems like a triumph at the moment, in the end this seeming victory over his nephew will turn out badly for him...and it will turn out badly for his daughters as well.

And what of Jacob? Jacob now has two wives, along with the two maidservants that came with them. More important to him, however, and uppermost in his mind, is that he finally has Rachel. Though he's still on the hook for seven more years of work to complete the marriage agreement, he doesn't have to wait for her any longer; as soon as his bridal week with Leah is complete, he consummates his union with Rachel and loves her as his own. But if the prospect of having two wives isn't a daunting one all by itself, the prospect of having two wives who happen to be sisters is. And when you add to that already difficult equation the fact that Jacob clearly and openly loves one more than the other, you've got a recipe for disaster — one that, in his relationship with Rachel and Leah, will be prepared over and over again in the years to come.

Wrapping Up

Laban and Jacob fancy themselves as players. They're master manipulators, hawkish negotiators, and hard bargain drivers who are always looking out for number one. But as we wrap things up for the day, each of these serial deal makers has just made a deal which will in many ways undo them. They're looking out for number one, but their vision is nearsighted — in fact, some would say that they're blind as a bat. The only clarity in this mess right now is that in the midst of this situation is God, who not only knows all, but sees all...and who will also see to it that in spite of the sinful, selfish ways of these two men, a multitude of good will come, despite the multitude of their ineptitude. That's a principle that will preach, as we pastors like to say — and in the days ahead, we'll have a front row seat as our gracious Lord goes to work in all of this. Do come along, because the scenes to come will truly awesome ones to behold, and they'll hold awesome things for our own lives as well!

Thanks, everyone — take care, and God-willing I'll see you soon. Until then, Christ's joy and peace to each of you, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks for coming along for another day of study together in the Scriptures. I'm so heartened to know that the Lord is present with us today, and equally heartened to know that God's Word will be faithful to penetrate our hearts today as we read and study. Right now we're continuing our time in the 29th chapter of Genesis, so let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, Thank you for your Word. Help us today so that in gladly hearing it, we will grow in our faith, learn more deeply of your love and mercy, and grow to serve you with increasing joy and gladness in our lives. We bless your holy name, and we ask now that you would send your Spirit to open our hearts to the Scriptures. In Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're returning once more to Jacob's surprise marriage to Leah...one that he had no hand in and no knowledge of until the morning after the wedding. Our focus this session: Why the union stands.

Genesis 29:25-30

25When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?" 26Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. 27Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work." 28And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. 30Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

It's a common saying today: "Choose your battles wisely." Another way that sentiment is phrased is in the form of a question: "Is it a hill worth dying on?" And a fine young pastor friend I know said it this way just the other day: "Be selective in your battles — sometimes peace is better than being right."

For a person like me — someone who has probably spent far too much time in my life standing down from battles I should have taken up and having been taken advantage of and put upon as a result — these sayings ring true in a way that perhaps they weren't intended. I've let things go in life that I shouldn't have just because I don't like conflict. For another kind of person, a person like our friend Jacob here in Genesis, perhaps, these sayings ring true in the more traditional sense. Jacob is a man who's never faced a situation that he didn't believe he could win. Jacob, in fact, is a man usually eager for a fight, though he definitely has his own way of doing battle. This is a man who, as we've seen, typically brawls with his wits. He uses his skills of deceit and manipulation to come out on top. Because he thinks he's smarter than everyone else, it's hard for him to walk away from a situation. Still, there have been times when Jacob has counted the cost and walked away. There have been hills he's opted not to die on. There have been occasions — at least one or two — where's he's had the sense to be selective in his battles, and why? Because "sometimes peace is better than being right." The caveat in Jacob's mind, of course, is that peace is overrated. For him, walking away is both temporary and strategic, because walking away just gives him time to figure out a different path to victory.

To a degree, this is what we see happening in today's reading from God's Word. Jacob has just had a whopper of a scam perpetrated upon him by his uncle Laban, and he's seething with anger. But even as he confronts Laban about his dishonesty, several things start to come into very sharp focus for Jacob. First and foremost in his mind may be self-preservation. If he

makes too big of a stink and tries to walk out on this situation, Laban may very well pursue and even kill him. According to the standards of Laban's people, Jacob's marriage to Leah is valid. At this point he can't simply set her aside and say it's all been a terrible mistake or that he's been cheated, because now that she's been given to Jacob in matrimony, Leah will be unable to marry another and will become a pariah as a result. That would be a terrible sentence for her, and again, another reason for Laban to bring hurt to Jacob. But there's another big fish to fry here too, isn't there: Jacob is still in love with Rachel. He's worked for seven years in order for the opportunity to marry her. He still wants to marry her, and if he pushes the matter of Leah too hard with Laban, he may lose Rachel as well.

So — what to do? Though Laban is obviously piling on with his patently unfair offer to give Rachel to Jacob for *another* seven years of work, Jacob is committed enough in his desire for her to go along with the contract. It helps that Laban has dangled the carrot of giving Rachel to Jacob immediately after his bridal week with Leah is complete — meaning that he can have marital relations and live with her as her husband right alongside Leah. At the same time, with seven more years of working for Laban, Jacob will now have the opportunity to hatch a scheme of his own on his uncle. And if you and I think for even moment that he won't do such a thing, we're greatly mistaken!

The great sadness in this text, of course, Leah. Though she ostensibly agreed to and participated in the initial portion of this plan alongside her father, she has very quickly become a pawn in the chess match between uncle and nephew. In the morning she is a happy, victorious bride, but by day's end she is going to be consigned to the position of wife number two...and in the days to come, she is quickly going to learn that while being married is one thing, being loved is quite another. Her sister will be in Jacob's arms and in his heart, but she will only have one of those things, and the hurt and bitterness she feels as a result will only grow over time.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, we can already see that the saga of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel is going to be one filled with dysfunction and difficulty. In time, however, we'll also be seeing something else: that even in a triangle of selfish, conniving, and broken people like these, God is faithful to show up and do His work. God will come and, through the stained and twisted actions and attitudes of these people, greatly impact history. The twelve sons from these three will be the leaders of the twelve tribes that become the nation of Israel. Through their family, dysfunctional and unhappy though it is, God will bless the entire world: Jesus the Messiah will be born from the tribe of Judah and bring salvation to us all. There will be many things for us to talk about as we start to follow this fraught family tree, and talk about them we will. At the beginning, middle, and end of every conversation, however, will be one amazing truth: that Almighty God in His mercy is working His plan, and working it for good. We're at the top of a rollercoaster ride right now, just about ready to plunge into a dizzying array of twists, turns, hills, valleys...and maybe even a loop or two! I hope you'll come along as we see how God navigates through this incredibly astounding ride of a lifetime.

Thanks everyone — have a great weekend, and I'll see you again soon. God bless you richly in Christ, and do care care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that you'll be blessed by our time in God's Word together today, where on this first day of a new week we're continuing our look at the 29th chapter of Genesis, getting close now to the end. Take a moment to find your place, and then let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, Thank you for this day and for the freedom you've given us to live as your children through the life death and resurrection of your Son. We ask that you would strengthen us today through our study of your holy Word for these next few minutes. In Jesus name, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, in the last verse of Friday's session, Genesis 29:30, we read something very sad, but not surprising: "And Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah." Today, we see a divine response to that state of things. Our focus: The Lord saw.

Genesis 29:31

31When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

When I think of the word *unloved*, for some reason I tend to think of bleak scenes from nature: a rocky, windswept promontory on the edge of the sea. A gray day with nothing before it but an empty horizon. A parched, sunburnt patch of ground void of life. For me, pictures like that evoke feelings of loneliness, of hopelessness...of insignificance.

Many people — perhaps some of you reading or watching this today — have known the feeling of that gray day, that empty horizon, not through scenes from nature but through the actual experience of a relationship that is not as it should be. It's something deeply profound and life-altering: the heartache of knowing that though you love someone, you are not loved in return. A person going through that journey knows in a way that no one else can the sense of loneliness, hopelessness, and insignificance that accompanies such a union...or lack of union.

In today's reading, we see a woman who is experiencing all of the things I've just mentioned. She is hurt and disillusioned. She is in a situation unwanted and unlooked for. She is unloved.

Leah is unloved.

Leah is *unloved*.

Leah is unloved.

It may be difficult, and yes, it may be painful, but today I'd like you to try and put yourself in Leah's shoes for a moment or two. I think it's important that we not pass her condition over with nary a thought. I think it's important that we take some time to live in her world...to live in her reality. We'll have much to say about Leah's lot in life in the coming days, but for this day, my great desire is not to say anything about Leah, but simply to see Leah. When we do that, we'll also see why the Lord did the same thing.

Here is Martin Luther's vivid description of Leah's life with Jacob post-wedding. It's one of the most gripping ever written by a commentator. I'm going to share it here, and once finished, I'll simply sign off for the day so that the scene can linger in your mind and open your heart.

"Wretched Leah sits sadly in her tent with her maid and spends her time spinning and weeping. For the rest of the household, and especially Rachel, despises her because she has been

scorned by her husband, who prefers Rachel and is desperately in love with Rachel alone. She is not beautiful, not pleasing. No, she is odious and hated. There the poor girl sits; no one pays any attention to her. Rachel gives herself airs before; she does not deign to look at her. 'I am the lady of the house,' she thinks, 'Leah is a slave.' These are truly carnal things in the saintly fathers and mothers, like the things that usually happen in our houses."

Take care, everyone — let's come back together tomorrow and address this matter. Let's do so truly seeing Leah. Take care, and I'll see you soon.

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's peace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to be with you today, where over the next few minutes we'll be gathering for some continued study time in the 29th chapter of Genesis. We're currently in a section where the Lord's blessing is coming upon Leah in a special way. Let's pray as we prepare to open our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, As we thank you for your Word this day, we ask that you would help us also to absorb all that you would teach us today through the Scriptures, and that by your Spirit you would lead us into all truth, ever forward in faith. We pray these things today in the strong name of Christ, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, you'll remember that in our last session I wrote/spoke about a certain word. Today, I'm going to write/speak about another word...in the very same way. Our focus: from lovelessness to barrenness.

Genesis 29:31

31When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

When I think of the word *barren*, for some reason I tend to think of bleak scenes from nature: a rocky, windswept promontory on the edge of the sea. A gray day with nothing before it but an empty horizon. A parched, sunburnt patch of ground void of life. For me, pictures like that evoke feelings of loneliness, of hopelessness...of insignificance.

Many women — perhaps some of you reading or watching this today — have known the feeling of that gray day, that empty horizon, not through scenes from nature but through the deeply profound and life-altering heartache of experiencing infertility...sometimes for reasons known, sometimes for reasons unknown. A woman going through that journey knows in a way that no one else can the sense of loneliness, hopelessness, and insignificance that can accompany it.

As we come back to God's Word and continue to look at Leah and Rachel, I'd like you to think just a bit abstractly for a moment. I've used almost the exact same introduction today as I did in our last session for a specific reason, and why? Because in the one verse before us, there are actually two women who are barren: Rachel in womb, which we'll be talking about in the days to come, and Leah in heart, which we began to discuss last time. One is experiencing the terrible heartache of childlessness for reasons unknown, and one is experiencing the loneliness, hopelessness, and sense of insignificance that has come from being cast aside and abandoned in her marriage. In her own way, each is navigating a parched, sunburnt patch of ground that makes her world feel void of life. And in her own way, each is suffering greatly.

The fact that these two women are sisters, the fact that they're married to the same man, the fact that their respective problems each revolve around that marriage, and the fact that there's a growing enmity between them because of it complicates this narrative in ways that we can't even fathom. We'll be untangling what we're able as we go along, but what I'll tell you right up front is that we shouldn't plan on a happy ending between the two. We shouldn't plan on a neat ending either. Any loose ends here will be left that way; tying them up isn't in the cards.

But back to the issue of the moment! So that you don't wonder and go away from our time today with the mistaken notion that God has chosen to bless Leah and thus exclude blessing from Rachel, the time is coming, not far off, when the Lord will hear and be merciful to Rachel's

plight just as we see Him doing here to Leah. Here, however, Leah is the focus of the text, and what we're told is that the Lord, seeing that Leah is unloved, opens her womb. Indeed, Leah will soon be pregnant with her firstborn.

I love that the Lord looks upon Leah. I love that the Lord sees. And I especially love that the Lord doesn't merely see, He acts. As pastor David Guzik says so gently and well in his commentary on this verse, God is good to Leah, even when her husband and sister are not. Going further, Pastor Guzik says that while husbands are responsible to care for their wives, and while Jacob clearly doesn't in the case of Leah, God meets the needs of this hurting wife by blessing her and making her womb a fruitful one.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, it's worth remembering at this point that even though Leah is the less-favored wife in this triangulated marital relationship, and while she will often be put in her place and treated poorly by her younger sister as the two vie for Jacob's attention, it's ultimately from Leah's womb that the most significant things will come, not Rachel's. While it's true that Rachel and Leah are each remembered as the two "who together built up the house of Israel" (Ruth 4), Leah, though she is neglected by Jacob and despised by Rachel, is the one who will be shown to fulfill the greatest purpose in God's eternal plan. From Leah will come Levi (the priestly tribe), and from Leah will also come Judah (the royal tribe) — the tribe from whom the Messiah will come.

When we gather again next time, we're going to begin tracking the divine blessings that come to Leah from God in the birth of her children, and we'll start with Reuben. Reuben has — as each of her sons born thereafter will also have — an important story to tell and an important role to fill in the family of Jacob, the house of Israel. Many parts of his narrative will intersect with the overarching narrative of God's plan to bring a Savior to the world, and I'm looking forward to getting into it with you in the days ahead. As we close, you might remember it this way: all of this history, astounding though it may seem, doesn't find its completion in lives long past, but in our lives now...and especially, our lives in the future at the great consummation of the age. Jesus is coming soon, and it is then that all will finally and truly be fulfilled. Thank God that in Christ, we have a part in it!!

Thanks for your time, everyone — I'll see you again tomorrow to continue. Until then take care, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. God's grace, mercy, and peace in Christ to you today, and may you each know the joy of belonging to Him in all your coming and going both now and in the days ahead. It's good to be back with you after a few days of travel, and as we begin today I want to say thanks once more for all of your well wishes, your prayers, and your grace these past two weeks as I've been with my parents following my mom's fall. She continues to improve each day, and with time I think she'll be back home with my dad, strong and ready to resume her daily routine. For those of you who have been asking, Harrison too is doing much better and is home with his folks getting stronger each day. He and his family send their love and thanks to all of you as well. I'm grateful for this community that shares together in the joys and concerns of life, and most grateful of all that we have a great and mighty God who loves us and attends to each of us with His strong, yet gentle hand.

Today we're coming back to our study in the 29th chapter of Genesis, where we're beginning to follow God's blessing upon Leah through the birth of several children. Let's pray as we open the Scriptures.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this day, and thank you for the new mercies you've given us this day as well. We are grateful, and humbled, as we remember that you sent your Son for us... that in Him our sins have been forgiven and our inheritance of eternal life secured. Teach us today as we open your Word, that we can grow in our faith and serve you with gladness. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Leah, looked upon by God with compassion because she is unloved, rejected, and lonely, now gives birth to her first born. Our focus this session: Behold, a son.

Genesis 29:32

Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

James DeLoach, a pastor and author, shared something many years ago in an essay that deeply resonates with many people — in fact, it's a story that has become rather well known in Christian circles over the years. It seems that Pastor DeLoach saw a picture one day that deeply moved him, and reflecting on it months later he wrote,

I am not a connoisseur of great art, but from time to time a painting or picture will really speak a clear, strong message to me. Some time ago I saw a picture of an old burned-out mountain shack. All that remained was the chimney...the charred debris of what had been that family's sole possession. In front of this destroyed home stood an old grandfather-looking man dressed only in his underclothes with a small boy clutching a pair of patched overalls. It was evident that the child was crying. Beneath the picture were the words which the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy. They were simple words, yet they presented a profound theology and philosophy of life. Those words were, "Hush child, God ain't dead!"

Pastor DeLoach continued,

That vivid picture of that burned-out mountain shack, that old man, the weeping child, and those words "God ain't dead" keep returning to my mind. Instead of it being a reminder of the despair of life, it has come to be a reminder of hope. I need reminders that there is hope in this

world. In the midst of all of life's troubles and failures, I need mental pictures to remind me that all is not lost as long as God is alive and in control of His world.

I'm sharing that story with you today for a simple reason: as we look upon Leah in God's Word and see her giving birth to her first child, the tiny little boy in her arms is for her a living picture. It's a picture to remind her not of her despair in life — of which there is much — but of hope in the midst of that despair. Leah needs a reminder that there is hope in the world...in her world. She needs to see, to touch, to hold onto something that signals for her the truth that regardless of all of life's troubles and failures, all is not lost as long as God is alive and in control of His world. The birth of this, her first child, is that Something. The Scriptures have already told us, in fact, that God has opened her womb and blessed her for this very reason. And while this child — whom she names Reuben, meaning “Behold, a son” — won't magically erase all of her difficulties or heal her relationships or remove the enmity that exists between her and her sister Rachel, it *will* deepen her faith and bring her the joy of motherhood...and yes, it will also bring her hope for a future brighter than her present.

Were we to look upon this development today, give a contented sigh, and move on in the text with the idea that the birth of Reuben will be the ultimate salve that calms the storms in Leah's life and brings her fulfillment and happiness, we would be fulfilled and happy too — but we would also be wrong. The reality of the situation, like so many things in life, is that the situation here is a messy one. Good things will certainly come from this, but not to the exclusion of a raft of bad things...some of which we see beginning right here in today's reading.

When Leah names her baby boy Reuben, for example, it's a statement to Jacob and everyone else on God's green earth that the Lord has looked upon her affliction and blessed her. Providing her husband with a firstborn son — something, by the way, that Rachel *hasn't* done — is, in Leah's mind, vindication. But it also causes her to believe, unfortunately and mistakenly so, that Jacob will now shift his love away from Rachel, and that he'll love her instead as his first and rightful (and first and *fruitful*) wife. Thus, when Leah says “Surely my husband will love me now,” her words are affirming for us not just a temporary tension between her and her younger sister, but the beginning of a lifelong resentment that will define these two as competing spouses in their marriage to Jacob. It's not the only narrative in play here, but for the moment it's the biggie, even as it plays into the biggest of the biggies... the Big Picture of God's redemptive plan for humanity through the sending of the Messiah.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, here's just a quick reminder that even with all that's going on right now, we're still at the very beginning of our time of following the life of Jacob and his family. There's a great deal left for us to track down in Leah's life in the days to come, and Rachel's too, and it won't be long before Laban is back in the mix as well, fighting things out with Jacob as the two perpetrate new and creative means of trickery on each other in their ongoing battle of oneupmanship. Through it all, of course, there are children being born along the way who will grow up to have their own relationship quirks with one another, even as they become the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. The family history here is complex, and it will only become more so as time goes on. But remember: each part in its own way contributes to the greater whole — and as we see how it all fits together (how it is divinely *brought* together), the great blessing of it all is that we'll be gaining an ever greater understanding of God and His gracious work in the world, and more specifically, of God and His gracious work for us as His beloved people. Do stay connected as we continue; there's great learning and growing ahead for us all! Have a great day everyone, and I'll look forward to seeing you next time. God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's peace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being here today for some time in God's Word together, where we're currently winding down our look at Genesis 29 as we follow Leah and the birth of her first four children. It's great to have you along as we open the Scriptures; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, bless the teaching of your Word today and open many hearts to its message by the power of your Holy Spirit. Thank you for revealing the Lord Jesus Christ to us and for bringing salvation to us through His life, death and resurrection. Please draw close to us now as we study. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, following the arrival of her firstborn son Reuben, Leah conceives and bears son number two. Our focus this session: the birth of Simeon.

Genesis 29:33

33She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon.

Many of you are of the age where the name George Marshall — General George Marshall — is still a familiar one. Rising through the ranks of the U.S. Army as a young man, he ultimately became Chief of Staff of the Army under FDR and Harry Truman, and later served as Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense. It was General Marshall who championed the idea of U.S. economic and political commitment to aid in the recovery of Europe after WWII, and in recognition of that work, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953. Known almost universally as a person who placed great value on his fellow man, he was often asked how he was able to work so well with so many different kinds of people. His response?

- 1. Listen to the other person's story.*
- 2. Listen to the other person's full story.*
- 3. Listen to the other person's full story first.*

Listening. It seems so simple, yet it's not something that automatically happens in life, is it. In truth, as much as each of us longs to be heard, many times we ourselves aren't the best at hearing others. In over 25 years of pastoral ministry where I spent a great deal of my time with people who sought me out because of various stresses and difficulties and complications in their lives, it was a constant and conscious battle for me to make sure to listen rather than speak — and not just listen with my ears, but also with my eyes and my mind and my heart. A person's story is one thing, but General Marshall was right: their full story might be something else entirely, and it's important to listen to that full story first, before anything else, if I'm going to be able to respond in a helpful and appropriate way.

As we look once again upon Leah today, now rejoicing at the birth of her second son, I simply want to point out one thing and then leave things for the day. She names this child Simeon, and do you know why? Because Simeon means "hearing." Leah knows that in the midst of her life, stressful and difficult and complicated as it is, there is One who has listened to her story... her full story...and who has listened to her full story first, before anything else. God has listened to Leah. The fact of the matter, of course, is that not only has God listened to Leah and heard the cries of her heart, He actually knows her own story better than she does. He is the one who knows her full story...even the parts which are yet to unfold and as yet unknown to her. And because God loves her with an everlasting love, and has great plans for her life, and

knows what even she herself does not, He is uniquely equipped to respond to the great need in her life in a helpful and appropriate way.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for today, you may be a person who at this particular moment in life needs a particular reminder: God our gracious Father, the One who sent His only begotten Son into the world to be the atoning sacrifice for your sins and the One who with the Son has sent His Spirit to draw you into a saving relationship with your Savior and to dwell within you as your Helper and your Comforter, is *always* the God who listens...who hears. He knows your story — your full story, including the parts you're happy with, the parts you're not proud of, and even the parts which are yet to unfold and as yet are unknown to you. God loves you everlastingly. He has great plans for your life, whether you're 15 or 55 or 105. And because He knows what even you yourself do not, He is uniquely equipped to respond to whatever the great need in your life happens to be right now. Look to Him today. Bow before Him in humility of heart and in the sure confidence of faith. He is with you, and He is for you — always.

God bless you richly, everyone; I'll see you again next time to continue. Until then, Have a super day, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for clicking in with me for what will be a different kind of session today, a session where I want to share a few personal reflections, some devotional thoughts, and a special thank you for all that you've done to make this ministry a source of hope and encouragement to so many people in so many places. Will you pray with me as we begin?

Prayer

Father, we ascribe blessing and honor and power and might unto your name forever and ever. Thank you for this day, and thank you for this time. As we gather, guide us by your gracious Spirit and draw close to us. We ask this in the strong name of Christ Jesus our Lord, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, I have a question for you: what is it that sparks a sense of gratitude in your life? What are you thankful for? And finally, how do you "live out" that thankfulness from day to day in your sphere of influence? I'm asking myself that same question today, and as we think through it together, we'll let that be our focus for this session.

Psalm 107:1

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

Charles L. Brown (yes, his real name), the great savior of AT&T in the early 1980s, was known for his pithy and sometimes witty observations about everything from life in general to business in particular. He was especially adept at pointing out how simple deficits in human behavior could lead to complex problems in the marketplace. Once, reflecting on the importance of shared appreciation and gratitude in the workplace among employers and their employees, he posed this question: "In the Bible, why did only one cleansed leper return to thank Jesus?" Then, unprompted, he proceeded to answer his own inquiry. According to Mr. Brown, the following are nine possible reasons why the nine did not return:

One waited to see if the cure was real.

One waited to see if it would last.

One said he would see Jesus later.

One decided that he had never had leprosy in the first place.

One said he would have gotten well anyway.

One gave the glory to the priests.

One said, "Oh, well, Jesus didn't really do anything — it was coincidence."

One said, "Any rabbi could have done it." And...

One said, "I was already much improved and on my way to health."

I have to be honest with you today and say that I've never understood stinginess or excuses when it comes to giving credit where credit is due...when it comes to giving thanks for the things that we have, the people we enjoy, and the life we're privileged to live. Even thoroughly secular folks generally agree that we all stand on the shoulders of others, and that we're all, at the core, beneficiaries of the largesse and kindness of others. Those who label themselves self-made men and women are no different. Such people, who have worked for everything they've ever had, still (at least most of the time) embrace the fact that they haven't achieved their success in a vacuum. In short, we all need each other. We all serve each other. We all share an interdependence in life, and that's true whether we want to believe it or not.

As people of faith, Christian people in particular, we know that that's precisely how God created us to be. We were never meant to go it alone, never meant to become something on

our own apart from everyone and everything else, never meant to live apart from the encouragement, influence and input of others. In fact, as people who know that we've been rescued from sin and death and brought from darkness to light in our Lord Jesus Christ, we recognize the fact that all we have in this life is a gift. The Scripture is true when it proclaims that *every* good and perfect gift is from above, and the reason I asked you a moment ago what sparks gratitude inside of you is that I knew you would immediately begin to think of God's manifold blessings in your life. Our God is good and gracious, and indeed, His mercy — that is, His *chesed*, which is His merciful love, or lovingkindness — endures forever!

When it comes to God's manifold blessings in my own life, among the first things to come to my mind is this time that we share each day — and one thing you'll never have to wonder about with respect to EDiBS is what role thanksgiving plays in all that it is and all it could ever hope to be. My role in being a steward of God's Word through this ministry is one made possible by God's grace and mercy...yes, His *chesed*...and also by each one of you as you join me in learning, growing, sharing in, and supporting all that we do here. Whenever I've laid our needs before you over the years and invited you to partner with the work of EDiBS, you've always been far beyond gracious in your response. Your kindness and spirit of generosity has sustained us through thick and thin, through good times and bad, and through everything in between. Your faithfulness in joining me in the journey, so to speak, has enabled me to focus on sharing God's Word in truth and purity with as many people as possible so that they can know the joy of salvation in Jesus Christ and grow in their understanding of His Word.

Sometimes I still marvel at the scale of it all: in congregational ministry where I loved to teach Bible class each week, I relished having the time to be with twenty or thirty of my parishioners for one morning each week. These days, I get to spend five days a week in the Scriptures with over two thousand of you — and by the time a typical study session hits its saturation point, it ends up being about 3,000 of you, not counting the people you forward it to or those who pick it up on social media. The numbers themselves, of course, aren't really that important in the big picture. We're actually a tiny ministry when compared to many others. But what is important — and what I'm so grateful for — is that through the format EDiBS uses, we're able as a ministry to steward our time and resources and maximize our reach to share God's Word with many more people than we ever could in a typical or traditional Bible class setting. We're also able to do it all around the world.

I've mentioned before that the great missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, always said that when God's work is done in God's way for God's glory, it will never lack God's supply. At EDiBS, we've tried to subscribe to that pattern as best we can, and for 16 1/2 years now we've kept at it, always asking God to bless His Word as it goes forth and to accomplish the purpose for which it is being sent. We've always known that we have a message of truth and encouragement that shows people the Jesus Christ of Scripture, and we've always wanted to make the very most of the opportunities we've been given to share that message. I just want to remind you today that it's because of you...because of God working through you...that we've been able to do just that. You are what sparks my gratitude. You are what makes me deeply thankful. Along with our gracious and merciful Savior, it's you I think of when it comes to giving thanks for the things that I have, the people I enjoy, and the life I'm privileged to live.

Thanks so much, everyone — joy to each of you in our risen Christ, have a great day, be filled with gratitude for your great inheritance in our Savior, and be at peace. Take care, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and God's grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It's great to have you along today, and it's my deep privilege to count you as part of our family here at the ministry as we study God's Word each day. Today we're continuing our time in the 29th chapter of Genesis, almost to the end now, so take a moment, quiet your mind, and pray with me as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, you've been gracious and merciful to us beyond our ability to comprehend. Thank you for your love in Christ, and thank you that through your Word you've given us all we need to become wise unto salvation. Please bless our study time today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the births of Reuben and Simeon, Leah gave them names that reflected both God's blessing and mercy toward her as well as her own deep sense of struggle and hope for a better future with her husband, Jacob. Today that pattern continues with the birth of son number three. Our focus this session: the arrival of Levi.

Genesis 29:34

34 Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi.

During WWII six Navy pilots left their aircraft carrier on a mission. After searching the seas for enemy submarines, they tried to return to their ship shortly after dark. But the captain had ordered a blackout of all lights on the ship. Over and over the frantic pilots radioed, asking for just one light so they could see to land. But the pilots were told that the blackout couldn't be lifted. After several appeals and denials of their request, the ship's operator finally broke radio contact — and the pilots were forced to ditch in the ocean.

As we've been following Leah's life as a young mother in a household where she shares a spouse with her younger sister — a sister who is loved by Jacob while Leah is not — we've gotten several sad and telling glimpses of her heart. She's been desperately trying to find a place to land in her relationship with Jacob, desperately looking for even the tiniest bit of light to see a way through the darkness. When Reuben was born it was "Behold, a son! Surely my husband will love me now." When Simeon was born it was "Look — the Lord has heard that I am unloved, so He's given me another son," the hope being, of course, that Jacob would see that second blessing as the gift that it was and turn his heart toward Leah as a result. To this point, however, none of that hoped-for change has happened. Instead, Jacob has kept Leah in the dark. She's in a terribly frustrating and terribly hurtful husband-imposed blackout, and if we read between the lines a little bit, it's obvious that there's not much going on in the communication department either. Jacob hasn't broken radio contact, so to speak, but there's not much chatter going on about much of anything either.

So it is that as we come again to Leah today, pregnant and ready to give birth for the third time, we find her still searching. Still hoping. Still hurting and frustrated too, and ultimately? Ultimately continuing to fly in the dark, continuing to look for that safe landing, continuing to wonder what kind of a future she's going to have. Right now the ship is nowhere to be seen. Right now her plaintive appeals are being met with denial after denial. In her heart she is becoming frantic, and an as yet unspoken question is quickly becoming a valid one: how long can she continue before she crashes into the sea and drowns in her despair?

At the moment, God's Word is unfortunately silent on the matter. That's because as baby number three is born, all that we have before right now is more of the same. More of what we've already seen. What do I mean? Leah names her third child Levi, and why? Because Levi means *attachment*.

Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.

Leah is still living in the desperate hope that Jacob will finally grow to love her...that he'll finally become attached to her through the birth of their children. It's a touching sentiment, but unfortunately it's a rather hollow wish for the time being, and so what does that mean? It means that for the moment at least, the pain in Leah's heart continues to be just as evident as the hardness of Jacob's heart. It means that we don't have any resolution yet as we study. And yes, it means that as we see this pattern continue in Leah's life, we're also left to struggle with the discomfort of the situation and wrestle with all the whys and wherefores that have presented themselves to this point. It's not an especially easy place to be.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I'm going to ask you to hold on with me for one more day in all of this. When we gather tomorrow to close out the week, some things will continue to be the same, but one thing in particular will be very, very different — and that one different thing will end up making all the difference in this ongoing saga. There's a change in the wind and a bit of good news on the way, and I promise that it will bring us a time of refreshing...one that will renew and strengthen us for the next leg of the journey!

Thanks for being with me today everyone; God's rich peace to you in Christ, and I'll see you again next time for more. Until then, take care and as always, have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich blessings of grace and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm glad you've been able to join in today, and as always, I pray that EDiBS continues to be a blessing for you in your devotional life and in your understanding of God's Word. Today we at last come to the end of Genesis 29, so let's prepare our hearts for today's study by going to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this day. Thank you for your finished work at the cross, in which you paid the penalty of our sins. Thank you also for your indwelling Spirit, who enlightens us and gives us understanding as we open the Scriptures. Please bless our study time today, that we may know you more and worship you from the heart. We ask this in your strong and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 29 ends with the birth of Leah's fourth child. While this baby is a boy just as her first three children were, something in that familiar pattern is different this time around. Our focus this session: the birth of Judah...and the birth of a new perspective.

Genesis 29:35

35She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the Lord." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

I said the word a moment ago, and I'll say it again now: perspective.

A man was driving in the country one day and he saw an old man sitting on a fence rail watching the cars go by. Stopping to visit, the traveler said, "I never could stand living out here. You don't see anything, and I'm sure you don't travel like I do. I'm on the go all the time." The old man on the fence looked down at the stranger and drawled, "I can't see much difference in what I'm doing and what you're doing. I sit on the fence and watch the cars go by and you sit in your car and watch the fences go by. It's just the way you look at things."

We're going to talk about this at length the next time we gather, but may I be so bold as to ask a question today? What in your life right now would benefit from a change in perspective?

Look at the Scripture. Three times, Leah was pregnant. Three times, she hoped beyond hope that the birth of her child would turn her husband's heart toward her own. Three times, even the names she gave her offspring were in part based on her yearnings for things to be good, right, and salutary with her spouse.

Three times, she was disappointed.

Now we've come to the fourth child, and with this fourth child, we've finally come to something different. Notice that Leah has taken her focus off of herself. Off of her desires. Off of her preoccupation with gaining a foothold in Jacob's life so that he'll notice her and begin to love her. As the unfavored, unloved spouse she has longed for a change in Jacob's heart — but at this juncture we see a change in her own heart instead. Today we see in Leah a change of perspective.

Today's focus is not "Behold, a son." Today's focus is not "The Lord has heard me in my misery." Today's focus is not "Now my husband will finally be attached to me." Today the focus has shifted. Today Leah says, "This time, I will praise the Lord."

Wrapping Up

There are so many things in my life right now that could benefit from that very same shift. There are so many situations where to take my focus off of myself, off of my desires, and off of my preoccupation with others would deeply impact me for the better. If I would simply stop, admit my powerlessness to change a given situation, and instead focus on changing my response to it, untold misery could be avoided. If today I were to bow before the Lord, admit my need, and look to Him as my portion in life rather than to a million other things, things would be very different. So that's what I'm going to do...and I'm going to invite you to do it with me.

Today I am proclaiming a shift in focus.

Today, with Leah — and with you too — I choose to say:

This time I will praise the Lord.

This time I will praise the Lord indeed. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit — amen.

Take care, everyone...more on this when we gather again on Monday. Until then, the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's peace, welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks for being here as we come to a new week in our study of God's Word. In our transition from Genesis 29 to Genesis 30 today, we'll be looking one more time at Leah and her response to the birth of her fourth child, Judah. As we do that we'll be reminded of some important things being wrought by the Lord in her life, in the life of her family, and most of all, in the big picture of God's redemptive plan for the world. I'm glad we can be together for these next few minutes; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for a new day, a new opportunity to live in your grace and mercy this day, and a new opportunity to be changed by the power of Your Word this day. Please bless our time together, and help us always to grow deeper in our understanding of your love for us in Christ. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the birth of Judah Leah stops having children — at least for the time being. But with the arrival of Judah comes the arrival of something far greater than Leah can possibly understand, and truly, far greater than any living person of the time could understand. Our focus this session: In the distance, a Lion roars.

Genesis 29:35

35Leah conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the Lord." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

Many of you are familiar with it, some of you may have even seen it yourself, and if memory serves me correctly, we even talked about it here in an EDiBS session many years ago. What I am referring to? A historical marker at Abraham Lincoln's birthplace near Hodgenville, Kentucky. That marker includes a plaque with an engraving of a little scrap of conversation:

"Any news down't the village, Ezry?"

"Well, Squire McLain's gone t'Washington t'see Madison swore in, and ol' Spellman tells me this Bonaparte fella has captured most o' Spain. What's new out here, neighbor?"

"Nuthin', nuthin' a'tall, 'cept fer a new baby born t'Tom Lincoln's. Nuthin' ever happens out here."

Some events — like birthdays in Hodgenville, Kentucky — may not create much splash when they first happen. Those of lasting importance, however — again, like birthdays in Hodgenville, Kentucky — eventually get the notice they deserve!

It's with that thought in mind that I'd like to do something just a bit out of the ordinary today. Over the next several minutes we'll be taking an advance peek at a place in Genesis...a place still about 20 chapters ahead of us. Why do I want to go there? Because it will shed light upon, and show the lasting importance of, what's just happened here in today's reading. As we begin, hear God's Word from Genesis 49:10:

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

With some special help from Dr. Ray Pritchard today, who has written about this topic extensively, let's have a quick, if abbreviated, lesson in biblical genealogy.

God, as we know, had promised Abraham that all the world would be blessed through him. That promise, as we also know, was passed down to Isaac, and then to Jacob. That's just about where we are in our study of Genesis right now. Leah, however, has now had four children, and Rachel isn't far behind; she too will have children, both through her maidservant and later from her own womb. Between Leah, Rachel, and their two maidservants, Jacob will end up having *twelve* sons...sons who will go on to constitute the twelve tribes of Israel. But which one will be chosen to carry on the covenant promise of God?

By right, it should have been Reuben, the firstborn — but he sinned and was passed over because of it. The same is true of both Simeon and Levi. But when Jacob was old in years and growing close to the time when he would die, in blessing his sons he did something that shook his family to the core and put the whole world on notice: he uttered one of the great prophecies of Scripture. Genesis 49:8-12, in fact, has been regarded as one of the greatest Messianic prophecies in all the Bible. Again, although Jacob was old and dying, with eyes of faith he saw a day still to come when — you guessed it — *the tribe of Judah* would take leadership in Israel. To hear him tell it, the people of Judah would be lion-like in courage and strength. Their tribe would lead the way; the other eleven tribes would follow. That's why in Genesis 49:10 Jacob says "The scepter will rest with Judah until the arrival of the One to whom it belongs." And who is that One? That One is the Messiah Himself!

If we were to outline Genesis 49:8-12, here's what it would look like:

Judah will be the dominant tribe in Israel (v. 8).
Judah will be lion-like in courage and strength (v. 9).
The Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah (v. 10)
His coming will bring peace, joy and prosperity (v. 11-12)

Though this prophecy wasn't fulfilled for many centuries...Israel's earliest leaders came from other tribes...after King Saul (who was from the tribe of Benjamin) was rejected, God finally chose a man from the tribe of Judah to be king. That man was David — and if you go to the first verse of the New Testament in the Gospel according to Matthew, here's what you'll read: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." You could just as well add "the son of Judah, the son of Jacob." That's the Messianic line!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, here's one final dot for us to connect today: when the elders in Revelation 5 describe Jesus to John the apostle, do you remember what they call him? *The Lion of the tribe of Judah*. It's a picture of Christ that goes all the way back to — you guessed it again — what we've just read in Genesis 49! How beautiful, and what a powerful image comes to our mind's eye, as we consider that when our Lord came the first time it was as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, yet when He returns at the end of the age it will be as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. It's also beautiful and powerful to see how God's divine plan of redemption stretches from the first pages of the Bible to the last; from the beginning of history to the end. In closing, I've said it before and I'll say it again: it is from Leah, neglected by Jacob and despised by Rachel, that the Messiah will come to love all and die for all...and He will come through the line of Judah. There's a lot to explore here, and that's exactly what we'll be doing in the days to come, so do join in and be part of it all!

That's it for today, everyone — thanks so much, and may the joy of Jesus fill you and sustain you in all your comings and goings. Take care, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It's great to have you along today as we move into a new chapter of God's Word together, this time the thirtieth chapter of Genesis. Take a moment to quiet your mind, and as you do that, let's begin with prayer.

Prayer

Almighty God, you've been profoundly gracious and merciful to us. Thank you for your love in Christ, and thank you that through your Word you've given us all we need to become wise unto salvation. Please bless our study time today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 30 starts with a temporary shift from Leah to Rachel. Our focus this session: Back to the name game.

Genesis 30:1-8

When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" 2Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?" 3Then she said, "Here is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family." 4So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, 5and she became pregnant and bore him a son. 6Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan. 7Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali.

Two shopkeepers were bitter rivals. Their stores were directly across the street from each other, and they would spend each day keeping track of each other's business. If one got a customer, he would smile in triumph at his rival. One night a genie appeared to one of the shopkeepers in a dream and said, "I will give you anything you ask, but whatever you receive, your competitor will receive twice as much. Would you be rich? You can be very rich, but he will be twice as wealthy. Do you wish to live a long and healthy life? You can, but his life will be longer and healthier. What is your desire?" The man frowned, thought for a moment, and then said, "Here is my request: Strike me blind in one eye!"

Do you know what one of the surest signs of jealousy is? When it's easier to show a sour face and "weep with those who weep" than it is to exhibit joy and "rejoice with those who rejoice."

As we pick things up today in the text, we're presently in possession of two important facts concerning two bitter rivals. Leah has been having children; her sister Rachel has not. We also know this about these two: both are unhappy, but for different reasons. Despite Rachel's great beauty, she's also in great despair because her womb has not been fruitful. Despite the fruitfulness of Leah's womb, she is barren in heart because she is unloved. In her heart, in fact, it's almost certain that Leah has had moments where she's said to herself, "If I only had my sister's beauty and the love of my husband, I would be happy." At the same time, it's just as likely that Rachel has said something similar: "If I only had sons like my sister, I would be happy." We talked about Leah's particular burdens in life through the majority of our last chapter of study, and now as we start our time in a new chapter, God's Word shines a light on the burdens that Rachel bears.

How is her plight introduced to us here at the beginning of Genesis 30? Today — out of frustration, despair, and yes, out of raging jealousy as well — Rachel says to her husband Jacob, “Give me children or I’ll die!”

There’s quite a bit to untangle here in these first eight verses, but I think the best place to begin is to cut to the chase, go to the end, and work in reverse over the next couple of days. Long story short, because Rachel remains barren, she gives her maidservant, Bilhah, to Jacob in order to bear children for her. This surrogate arrangement brings two sons: Dan, the first, and Naphtali, the second.

Do you remember how we saw Leah name her children in a manner that symbolized what she was thinking, feeling, hoping, and believing with regard to the events in her life? Reuben meant “Behold, a son.” Simeon meant “Hearing.” Levi meant “Attachment.” Judah meant “Praise.” Each of those monikers held special significance for Leah at the time that each of those children were born. Today, we see the same thing happening with Rachel — yet while Leah’s naming of her children was an exercise in longing and hopefulness, the names Rachel chooses for her two sons are very different. Do they reflect what she’s thinking, feeling, hoping, and believing? Yes. But rather than an exercise in longing and hopefulness, the names Dan and Naphtali show us that she remains angry, bitter, strident, competitive...and again, jealous.

Dan means “Judgment.” He is so named because of Rachel’s belief that the Lord has vindicated her in her stand against her sister and in her quest to have a child. “God has vindicated me; He has listened to my plea and given me a son,” she says. The birth of Dan is proof in Rachel’s mind that God has heard her complaint, and as a result she feels strengthened in her competition against Leah.

In much the same way, Rachel gives her second child via Bilhah another provocative name. *Naphtali* means “Wrestle,” and today’s passage shows us the reason: “I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won,” she says. Did you catch that? Rachel couches her relationship with Leah not in terms of the blessing of sisterhood, but in terms of the bitterness of sibling — not to mention spousal — rivalry. Things have broken down between these two to such an extent that there is no longer anything holding them together; rather, everything is keeping them apart. Regardless of what Leah means or brings to the family, Rachel is intent on just one thing: Winning. Beating her sister. Maintaining her position as the only truly favored wife of Jacob. To her way of thinking, the arrival of these two children through the surrogacy of Bilhah puts her back on top, Leah and her children be damned. What she doesn’t realize at the moment, of course, is that she’s not the only woman in the household with a chip on her shoulder and a streak of jealousy running through her veins. The battle is not over by any stretch of the imagination. The war, in fact, has only just begun.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Donald Barnhouse, the renowned and highly regarded pastor and scholar who served the Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia from 1927 until his death in 1960, once said something that raised many eyebrows among his colleagues in ministry:

Can a woman get so low that she will hit her sister over the head with a baby? Rachel did.

Eyebrow-raising indeed...but also true in every respect! When we come back tomorrow, we’ll begin to unpack this situation in greater detail, and guess what? Along the way we’ll be discovering many things in this portion of Scripture that speak to us in our own stations in life — family, work, friendships, and literally everything in between. I hope you’ll make plans to join in, because we got some great growing ahead of us as God’s people in Christ!

Thanks so much for your time today everyone; God bless you richly in Christ, and I'll see you again next time. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich blessings of grace and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm glad you're able to join in today, and as always, I pray that EDiBS continues to be a blessing to you by bringing you to a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. We're continuing our time in Genesis 30 today, so let's prepare our hearts for today's study by going to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this day. Thank you for your finished work at the cross, in which you paid the penalty of our sins. Thank you also for your indwelling Spirit, who enlightens us and gives us understanding as we open the Scriptures. Please bless our study time today, that we may know you and worship you aright. We ask this in your strong and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've already had a brief look at how Rachel's first two children came into the world — namely, through the surrogacy of her servant Bilhah. What we haven't done yet is have a conversation about the underlying issues related to it. Our focus: A frantic heart, a panicked appeal.

Genesis 30:1

When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

I think it was the late Howard Hendricks who first told this story: One day a little boy asked his mother where he came from, and also where she had come from as a baby. His mother gave him a tall tale about a beautiful white-feathered bird. The boy asked his grandmother the same question and received a variation on the bird story. Talking with his playmate down the street later that day he said, "You know, there hasn't been a normal birth in our family for three generations."

If you've been with me over the course of our long-running study in the book of Genesis — we're in Part Three right now of what will ultimately be a four-part series — one thing you've probably noticed over and over again is that whenever the subject of pregnancy and childbirth has come up, it has often been accompanied by more than its fair share of drama. Not only that, but so-called "normal births," especially in Abraham's family line, have generally been the exception rather than the rule. Truth be told, the most normal thing about mothers like Sarah, Rebekah, and now Rachel, is that their stories and situations have been anything *but* normal.

When we consider this issue as God's people, the matter before us isn't so much one of biology; barrenness then, as now, was not an uncommon occurrence, and there could be many reasons for it. The bigger question is why a woman being barren was looked upon with such disdain by the culture around her. It's when we answer that question that we begin to understand the heart of the feud between Rachel and Leah and the hurt in their family because of it.

Fertility, of course, is the ability to conceive children. Every society in every era has considered fertility among its chief concerns, because the fertility of a people ensures its future. If you go back and read some of the earliest recorded histories of the ancients, one thing you'll see is that many pagan cultures invented deities and idols that were supposed to grant fertility to those who worshipped them. The worship of those so-called fertility gods led to a great deal of wickedness and perversion through the centuries.

In similar fashion, a woman's fertility was also considered to be of great importance in the lives of God's people. A woman gained a sense of value and was accorded honor by her people if she could give her husband a son — or better yet, many sons — but a woman who could not conceive suffered emotionally, was considered cursed, and was often ostracized as a result of her barrenness. Not only that, but in sheer practical terms, her family suffered as well: with no sons to help with the work (or alternatively, no daughters to manage the house or to care for the parents as they aged), their ability to grow, prosper, and wield influence in the community was limited.

When we understand these things, we begin to better understand Rachel's jealousy over the fruitfulness of Leah's womb. We also begin to understand Rachel's growing panic over her own womb being closed. "Give me children or I'll die" isn't merely a hyperbolic statement being made in frustration; there's a literal connotation to Rachel's words and a very real concern on her part that any legitimate channel for hereditary succession and inheritance could be lost. If Rachel dies without giving Jacob children, any legacy she might leave to future generations — and any memory they might have of her time in the world — will die along with her.

That last fact gives us insight into one more thing that we've been seeing in God's Word, not just with Rachel but with Leah as well: to this point, their focus on wanting and having children hasn't pertained to the joy of motherhood and family life in the least. Rather, every time either of them talks about the issue of children, the focus is on their own power, position, and reputation. We can sit back and chide them for it, I suppose, but that would be rather disingenuous. The simple truth is that the reality of the world they're living in imposes those pressures on them. It's enough to tie anyone's stomach up in knots, and both of these women are worse off because of it. Jealousy over their husband aside, there is a baby war going on between these two sisters — and it's only going to get worse as time goes on.

Wrapping Up

Yet as we wrap things up for the day, we need to note one last thing: the Bible is clear that God is intimately involved with both fertility and infertility. He is the One, in fact, who ultimately opens and closes the womb, and He is also directly involved in the formation of the baby inside that womb. When we see barrenness being discussed in Scripture, do you know what we, in almost every case, see along with it? We see God caring...and listening...and acting. We very often see God opening that which was closed. And while things don't always work out in accordance with what would be easy and happy, don't always end up neatly tied up and squared away, they do work out according to our Lord's good and gracious will and are squared away in a manner that deeply and compassionately ministers to the women who are struggling to bear a truly heavy and difficult burden. There's a message in that for you and me as well...and when we come back next time, we'll be talking about it some more.

I'm praying for you today, everyone; thanks so much for your time these past few minutes, and God-willing, I'll see you again tomorrow to continue. Christ's peace, and do have a terrific day. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to be with you today, and I'm thankful for the time we have to come to God's Word together over the next several minutes. As we continue our study in the opening verses of Genesis 30, we have one more matter to discuss before moving forward in the text, so let's get right to it. Would you join me for prayer?

Prayer

Father, you have blessed us in incredible ways. Thank you for the new life you've given us in Christ, and that because we are in Him, we are brand new creations. Help us to truly leave the past in the past and move forward in our lives with your Son as our great Redeemer. Please bless our lives with new wisdom and understanding as we study today, and help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. It's in His name that we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, one question that many people have regarding Rachel is the manner in which she takes her maidservant, gives her to her husband as a "wife" (concubine is a more accurate description), directs her husband to have sex with that maidservant, and then claims the baby in that servant's womb as her own. It's a hard issue any way you look at it, and that's why the peculiar practice of servant-surrogacy is our focus for this session.

Genesis 30:3-5

3Then Rachel said, "Here is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family." 4So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, 5and she became pregnant and bore him a son.

Many of us have learned over the years what it's like to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. Others of us have had the blessing of standing on someone else's shoulders as we've grown and matured in life. Both of those phrases are still in common use today, and pretty much anyone who hears them knows what they mean. But what if someone came and started talking to you about bearing a child on their knees? That's a phrase with which you're probably not familiar — and it's not in common use today. At another time in another place, however, talking about bearing a child on someone's knees was neither odd nor unusual. In fact, were we to look at a more literal rendering of the text today, that's exactly what we'd read. Listen, for example, to verses 3-5 again in the New American Standard Bible:

Then she said, "Here is my female slave Bilhah: have relations with her that she may give birth on my knees, so that by her I too may obtain a child." 4 So she gave him her slave Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob had relations with her. 5 Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.

What is Rachel talking about in this section of Scripture? The phrase "bear a child on my knees" actually refers to the ancient practice of surrogate adoption, and while some commentators have taught through the years that the phrase is a figure of speech (like walking in someone else's shoes or standing on someone else's shoulders), many others believe that this was a literal practice. Some scholars, for instance, point to a practice where just after the surrogate mother would give birth to the child she carried on behalf of her mistress, the baby would immediately be placed on the knees of the one who would claim and raise the child as her own. Others, however, believe that the phrase alluded to a practice that was far more involved. That view — also a popular one and seen as a reasonable possibility — is that "bearing a child on one's knees" referred to the surrogate sitting on the lap of the adoptive mother at the time of insemination as well as the time of birth.

Of course, “reasonable possibility” isn’t “complete certainty”...we don’t know enough about it to make a solid judgment...but the wording of the passage definitely opens the door to such an interpretation, and in any case it helps to explain more fully the role of Rachel’s maidservant Bilhah in this endeavor.

Having talked about the “what,” let’s now move just briefly to the “how” in all of this. First, can Rachel really do such a thing? Does she actually have that degree power over her maidservant? Is such a practice normal? And finally, is there any protection or benefit for a servant who acts as the surrogate mother in a case like this?

First, yes — Rachel, as the owner of Bilhah, really does have the power to use her servant in this way. Though Bilhah is a human being and should be accorded the value and dignity that is the right of every person, she is not. She is a slave. She, again, is owned. We’ve talked before about the ungodliness of the scourge that is slavery, and we could do so here as well, especially because of the way that Rachel presses her maidservant into a sexual relationship with her husband for the express purpose of providing her with a child. For now, we’ll simply make note of it and move forward.

Second — and not surprising based on what I just mentioned a moment ago — it was indeed common practice for a barren wife to enlist a servant as a concubine to guarantee children to her husband.

But finally — surprisingly so this time — a concubine such as Bilhah was afforded a degree of care and protection as a child-bearing concubine or “second-tier wife.” She was even treated, to a certain degree, as a member of the family, and as we mentioned last time, any children she provided to her mistress were looked upon as legitimate. Such children were considered full-fledged and valid members of the family, especially with regard to hereditary succession and inheritance.

Wrapping Up

All in all, the practice we see here in the Scriptures is not one that we would find noble, nor workable, nor even acceptable. As we wrap things up for the day, it is, however, what it is. The good news is that before we’re through with our time in this portion of God’s Word, we’ll see how the Lord will work, even through decision-making as questionable and selfish as this, for His glory and for our good. Do stay tuned as we work through it!

God bless you richly in Christ, everyone — have a great day, and I’ll look forward to seeing you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's great grace and mercy to you and yours in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. As we go into our study time today, I'm praying as I always do that your interaction with God's Word will be a truly devotional, personally impactful experience. Let's pray as we begin:

Prayer

Lord Jesus, We pray that you would bless all those who open the Scriptures today. Fill them with your Spirit, enlighten them to your ways, and give them joy through the transforming power of your Word and its message of salvation in you. We ask this in your holy and precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, I was working late last evening after completing a few days of maintenance at our ministry office in Brunswick and a 5 1/2 hour drive back to Atlanta. While at my local late-night watering hole with my laptop open, I happened to have a conversation with a gentleman whose heart was full of wisdom and whose words spoke winsomely to my own heart. Our focus this session: the God who leads us home.

Proverbs 16:9

The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

The drive between coastal Brunswick Georgia, the place of my residence and also the place of our EDiBS ministry office, is approximately five hours from the Atlanta metro area. Ever since a tornado damaged my neighborhood in Brunswick last April, I've been staying in the Atlanta area and commuting back and forth between the two locales every couple of weeks to take care of business and ministry issues and to work on getting our office back into a workable space. It's been a slow process because we've been doing it mostly on our own, but the good news is that we're just about back to normal now with only a couple of small projects to finish before everything that was lost or broken is found and fixed. As I mentioned a moment ago, this week I've been in Brunswick doing things like replacing burnt out ceiling fans, attic vents, and electrical outlets, all lost when a falling tree took out our main electrical line to the office and caused a surge that shorted out most of the building. After my work for the week was done, it was hard to leave...but at the same time it was good to get back to Atlanta and into an office space that provides all we need to run things at EDiBS from day to day.

While on my way home, my GPS indicated that there was an accident ahead. The recommendation from my navigation system was to get off of the interstate and take a county highway around the congestion. I followed those directions, but then I missed a turn down a country road that I was supposed to have taken. My navigation system alerted me, rerouted me, and got me back on track. A few minutes later when I thought I knew where I was, I started taking different roads on my own to get back to the interstate — but naturally, the route in my head turned out to be incorrect. What happened? Once again, my faithful navigation system rerouted me. After getting lost twice on my own, I decided not to try and go it alone anymore. I followed the directions on my screen, and in very short order I was back on the interstate and on my way home.

Which brings me, incidentally, to my conversation with that wise man last night. We were shooting the breeze a little, and when he asked me why I was out so late we started talking and commiserating about how many times each of us have gone down the wrong road in life. I don't remember exactly how he phrased it, but at one point he looked at me and said, "Isn't it amazing how good God is? No matter how many wrong turns we make, He always reroutes us. He's always putting us back on the right road. He's always leading us home."

I don't know what road you may be traveling today. I don't know if you're on the correct route right now or way out in the boonies somewhere driving back and forth in the wilderness. If you're like me at various points in my life, you might even be sitting in a ditch somewhere at the moment because you've made a spectacularly bad decision that caused a spectacularly bad crash. You might even be thinking that your life is totaled.

It's not.

There is a Savior — the Lord Jesus Christ — who, as my friend said, is always there to reroute us...to put us back on the right road...to lead us home. No matter how far off of the Narrow Road we may have traveled, and no matter how big the Broad Path to Destruction we may find ourselves on may be, Jesus is there to redirect our steps and bring us back to the safety of His embrace.

But in truth, that's not even the half of it. Why? Because the Gospel of Christ isn't simply about a God who directs and redirects our steps over and over again (though He absolutely, lovingly and graciously, does that every hour of every day). No — the Gospel of Christ is the message of a Savior who, because He knew we could never travel the right road in the right direction on our own, traveled it for us...in our stead. The Gospel of Christ is the message of a Savior who knew that no amount of Divine direction would ever be enough for a people who insisted on traveling their own way. Humanity didn't need a roadmap — it needed a Rescuer.

Through His perfect life, lived for you,
Through His sacrificial death, died for you, and
Through His victorious resurrection, wherein He overcame death for you, Jesus is that Rescuer.
He is your Rescuer.

Jesus doesn't merely provide the right road to follow in life; Jesus *is* the road. As you are joined to Him in Word and sacrament and every part of life, as you are found in Him through faith in His finished work at the cross, He is the Way that will lead you...take you...yes, even carry you...home.

Do you always seem to be working on little projects to try and take care of business, to try and get your life back into a workable space? Do you often find yourself feeling like it's a slow process because you're doing it mostly on your own? Has it been hard for you to get to a place where everything that was lost or broken in your life is found and fixed? Maybe you've been going back and forth too much. Maybe it's time for a reroute. Maybe it's time for a new Road altogether. Here is what I know based on the truth of God's Word and from my own story in life: the One who loves you and gave Himself for you is the One who will lead you home.

Jesus is with you today. May His peace be upon you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.

Have a great weekend, everyone; God-willing I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and God's special blessings to each of you in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. As we begin a new week together, I'm praying that our time each day will see your faith being strengthened and your joy made full in the finished work of our Redeemer. God's Word is always faithful to do its work in each of us, and so I'm glad to have you along with me as we head we head back to Genesis 30 today. Let's pray as we begin , shall we?

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you today for your love and your mercy. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...something so great and beyond us that we can only bow in thanksgiving, with grateful hearts for what you've done for us in your Son. Thank you also for this time to study your Word today; please use it to strengthen us and to increase our faith. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, once Rachel gave Bilhah to Jacob in order to provide her with children, she reveled in the births of two little boys...almost chortled, in fact, because she saw it as both a victory over her sister and a vindication of her barrenness. But is that the end of the story and the end of the feud between these two sisters? Not in the least! Our focus this session: what's good for the goose is good for...well, the other goose!

Genesis 30:9-13

9When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 10Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 11Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad. 12Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 13Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

You probably know her best as the author of *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, a children's book that millions of people, myself included, absolutely adore. But Judith Viorst also wrote other books for children, and another of my particular favorites by her is called *I'll Fix Anthony*. It's all about a little brother who complains about the way his older brother — Anthony — treats him. Listen to this passage and I think you'll get the idea:

My brother Anthony can read books now, but he won't read any books to me. He plays checkers with Bruce from his school. But when I want to play he says, "Go away or I'll clobber you." I let him wear my Snoopy sweatshirt, but he never lets me borrow his sword. Mother says deep down in his heart Anthony loves me. Anthony says deep down in his heart he thinks I stink. Mother says deep deep down in his heart, where he doesn't even know it, Anthony loves me. Anthony says deep deep down in his heart he still thinks I stink. When I'm six I'll fix Anthony. When I'm six I'll float, but Anthony will sink to the bottom. I'll dive off the board, but Anthony will change his mind. I'll breathe in and out when I should, but Anthony will only go glug, glug. When I'm six my teeth will fall out, and I'll put them under the bed, and the tooth fairy will take them away and leave dimes. Anthony's teeth won't fall out. He'll wiggle and wiggle them, but they won't fall out. I might sell him one of my teeth, but I might not. Anthony is chasing me out of the playroom. He says I stink. He says he is going to clobber me. I have to run now, but I won't have to run when I'm six. When I'm six, I'll fix Anthony.

So — why quote at length from *I'll Fix Anthony* today? Because if we change the names and the circumstances just a little, and if we take the time of writing from 1969 (when Viorst's book was published) and back it up several thousand years, and if we change the locale from the

United States and shift it to the ancient Near East, we might as well be talking about the relationship between Rachel and Leah. For quite awhile now, they've both been all about "fixing" one another. It's been ugly eyes, dirty looks, and "you stink" remarks since the moment they found themselves as co-spouses of Jacob, and it has only escalated with time.

In today's reading, we're confronted with what, at least to my way of thinking, is the most in-your-face "fix" yet; Leah, already with four sons from Jacob but with a womb that at the moment is not fertile, sees what Rachel has done with her maidservant, and so she endeavors to do the same. The result? Just as Rachel gained two children from Bilhah, from Zilpah Leah gains an additional two children of her own...children whose names, by the way, just twist the knife in her sister's back. *Gad* means "Good Fortune," of which Leah has already had a great deal in the child-bearing department (contrary, of course, to her sister), and *Asher* means "Happy" or "Blessed"...and to be quite frank, we have to wonder if her happiness is because of the children themselves or because she has just one-upped her sister again.

With all the pain that Leah has endured because of Jacob's love for Rachel instead of her, and with all the undermining Rachel has surely done in the marital relationship to underscore Leah's inferior position in the family, the one thing Leah has been able to do to bolster herself — and try to earn Jacob's favor in the process — is to give him children. Not only has she been able to do that in a way that Rachel hasn't, but now she has used Rachel's own methodology to show her up. It's a classic example of "Anything you can do, I can do better," and to Leah's way of looking at things, it's a rare victory for her in the trenches of a war she never asked for and has never wanted to fight. For better or for worse, however, she's in it, and fight she will — because in a very real sense, she's fighting for her very life.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, while we don't see Rachel's reaction to all of this just yet, we won't have to wait long to see how this latest development impacts the relationship between these two. And yet before we look into that, we're going to have to take a moment to pause, catch our breath, and reorient ourselves to the bigger picture in play here. Why? Because if we don't, we're liable to lose the forest for the trees. Let's be blunt, shall we? This is really icky stuff. So icky, in fact, that it's hard to read through it and remember that we're actually reading God's Word...God's Word which carries God's message for God's people. So it is that when we come together next time, we'll take that pause, we'll take that breath, and we'll take a few minutes to hit the refresh button and refocus ourselves on the large arc of all that's going on here. I think it's going to be a very helpful few minutes for us tomorrow, so I hope you'll come along and be part of it.

God bless you richly, everyone; it's been great to be with you today, and I pray that the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts until we meet again. Have a great day, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! God's blessings of joy and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ; I'm glad to have you with me today as we continue to follow God's Word together in the book of Genesis. In today's session we'll be returning to Genesis 30, so if you'll take a moment and turn there, we'll pray and begin.

Prayer

Holy and most gracious God, we come to you in a spirit of praise and thanksgiving today; a spirit of worship from humble, grateful hearts. You have sent your Son to be our Savior, and we know that this truth changes everything about our lives, both right now and for eternity. Thank you for the gift of forgiveness and salvation in Christ, and thank you for your abiding presence with us. Bless us now as we study. Grant us your Spirit to receive and understand the Scriptures rightly. This we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, here we are in the Bible's first book. Here we are following the family lines of Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob. Here we are, a people who, when we hear those names, immediately think of the great figures of the Old Testament; heroes of the faith; harbingers of God's great promises to His people from generation to generation. As we've been reading through this portion of Scripture, however, the picture being presented to us hasn't seemed to mesh with those high-minded ideals. As our focus for the day, let's take some time to talk about that, and as a launching pad for our discussion, let's read a bit more of the text to set the stage.

Genesis 30:14-16 (Introduction)

14During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." 15But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" "Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." 16So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night.

When I was growing up, night-time television was rife with things I wasn't allowed to watch. There was *Soap*. There was *Dallas*, and later on, *Knott's Landing*. There was *Falcon Crest* and *Dynasty*, and the list goes on. I wasn't allowed to watch such things because my mother said they were just sleazy night-time soap operas full of sex and potty humor (though I think she used the the word "inappropriate" instead of "sleazy," because to say "sleazy" would have been, um, inappropriate). Anyway, though I didn't like her rules at the time, at the risk of sounding like a prude, my mother was absolutely right. Go back and look at the shows of that era and while they may seem tame by today's standards — another conversation for another time — they were anything but tame if held up to traditional Judeo-Christian family values. Many of them, in fact, drew the ratings they did precisely because they challenged long accepted ideals of what was moral, family-friendly, and to use my mother's word again, appropriate.

But guess what was also true of most of those programs? Though the culture warriors of the day were loathe to admit it, shows like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* weren't preaching a new morality to America; they were reflecting the reality of a morality that already existed. Shows like *Soap* weren't advocating for a new standard of raunch and sexuality on television; they were poking fun at the raunchiness and sex that already existed on the Daytime soap operas. One can certainly make the argument that media in its various forms always has and always will influence the broader culture to a certain extent. No one would argue that. At the same time,

however, it must also be said that media in its various forms *also* always has and always will be a reflection of what already exists — even if that reflection is of things that go unspoken in polite company.

Which brings us, not in a roundabout way but directly so, to what we've been seeing in God's Word as we've been studying through Genesis together. Today's passage (which we've only read in part for this session and which we'll return to tomorrow in greater detail) is a classic example. You can't get a more seedy, dysfunctional, leer-worthy storyline than what we've got going here. There's a love triangle in the midst of a plural marriage, there's bitterness and rage and jealousy, and there's even the selling of sex — and that's just three verses' worth.

And by the way, this phenomenon is not just here in Genesis, but pretty much any portion of Scripture we've been where we see the presence of people...people and the lives they lead. Read through most any book of the Bible and you'll be hard-pressed not to find something about lying, cheating, stealing, fighting, infidelity, or any number of other things that fail the *Moral, Family-Friendly, and Appropriate* test. If we don't see them actually happening, we're often reading about the fact that they did happen. If we're not reading about the fact that they did happen, we're being counseled to avoid letting them happen. Why is this so? It is so because the Bible is not a book that whitewashes who people are, what they do, or where they may be lacking as individuals. On the contrary, the Bible shows people just as they are — and in the process shows exactly why God has chosen to act as He has in the sending of a Savior. The very reason God sent His Son into the world as a Redeemer is a pretty simple one: it was full of people!

Chad Bird, an Old Testament scholar and author whose work I greatly admire, has written a new book that discusses the point I'm making today, and he does it in a far more beautiful way than I ever could. Called *Limping With God: Jacob and the Old Testament Guide to Messy Discipleship*, he writes about the wonder of an Almighty God who would send a Rescuer to a world of sinful people...and who would do so by working through the very people who need rescuing. Listen as he explains, using Jacob as an example:

There is much in Jacob's character, actions, and motives that I find extremely distasteful, which is exactly why I identify so closely with him. He is everything about myself that I wish I were not. Even in utero, he is looking out for #1. He takes full advantage of the disadvantages of others. He tells lies. He plays favorites. He fights with God. For all these reasons and more, Jacob is the model disciple. The model disciple in that there is no effort to clean him up and make him look more presentable to the world so as not to embarrass God for having chosen such a deceitful man to be not only his follower but the very man after whom the Old Testament community of believers was named: Israel.

Jacob's crimes and punishments are paraded in public, as is the Lord's stubborn and gracious commitment to him.

Jacob's story is the story of a God who doesn't select the sainted or pick the pious, but who regularly pans for gold in the sewers of this world. And, even there, he doesn't find gold but plain old stink-covered rocks that he washes, polishes, and gilds with grace.

Such is Jacob.

Such am I.

And such are you.

(From the Introduction to *Limping with God*.)

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, that's a masterful description, don't you think? And yet as masterful as it is, what's beautiful about it is that it's such a hopeful description. It's a description of the the truth about God's great attributes and God's great lavishing of grace and mercy upon a people in great need. It's a description that brings solace to the heart: God in Christ has come to wash us, to polish us, and to gild us with grace.

If you'd like to read more insight like this from Chad Bird, I'm leaving a link in today's study where you can order your own copy of *Limping with God*...or any of his other excellent books about the grace and mercy of the God who loves us.

<https://shop.1517.org/products/limping-with-god-jacob-and-the-old-testament-guide-to-messy-discipleship>

Everyone, Scripture will always be messy because Scripture deals with the messiness of the human heart. God's Word will never sugarcoat sin. But there's good news: neither will God's Word ever leave us wondering if our sin can be atoned for. It can, and it has, in the Person and work of His Son. What we're studying right now in Genesis is the laying of the groundwork that ultimately brings Jesus into the world to save us. That's the larger arc of the book...and that's why all the messiness merits the time spent. I hope you'll be refreshed and encouraged by that truth today.

God's grace mercy and peace to each of you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and God-willing, I'll see you again next time. Have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God bless you richly in Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. The middle of the week is upon us, and that means it's a great time to take a deep breath, step back, and spend some committed time with our great God in His holy Word. Today in our look at Genesis 30 we're coming back to what we read in yesterday's session to unpack what's there. I'm sure glad you're here; Let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Father, as we prepare to study your Word today, enlighten us by the power of Your Holy Spirit, and open our hearts to wisdom and understanding. Bless us through our time with you so that we can be a people growing in the grace and knowledge of our Savior Jesus. We ask this in His strong and precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, most of you know that for a while now, we've been in the midst of a tit-for-tat scenario between Rachel and Leah with regard to the bearing and raising of children. Leah first did it naturally, producing four sons; Rachel followed, using her maidservant Bilhah to have two sons of her own. Leah, probably irritated and taking umbrage at her sister's actions, then used her own maidservant Zilpah to acquire two more sons. At this point in the text, the cold war continues, but things are about to ramp up again with what comes next. Our focus this session: Of mandrakes, menace...and motherhood.

Genesis 30:14-16 (Part 2)

14During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." 15But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" "Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." 16So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night.

When I lived in the Ozark Mountains of southwest Missouri, my little plot of land out in the country was an incredibly joyful place to be. I spent so much time out in the meadow, the woods, and around my little pond that I knew literally every square inch of my 12 1/2 acres. I could tell you every plant that grew on my land, exactly where to find it, what it could be used for, and how to incorporate it in a way that would be beneficial to the family. I read a lot about wildcraft and natural remedies, and I enjoyed experimenting with what I learned from different books I'd check out at the library. At the end of the day, though, I was never more than a novice...which meant that I was always careful and never went beyond the basics in what I gathered on my land (mostly fruits and nuts for baking and various herbs for tea and tinctures).

That wasn't the case for several of my old-school neighbors, however — many of whom ranched or farmed on land that had been in their family for over a hundred years. These people were extremely knowledgeable and well-practiced in the ways of folk medicine, and if you walked into their pantry or their root cellar, you'd be amazed at what you'd find. I'm only embellishing a little when I say that there seemed to be assistance for every ailment, a cure for every condition, and an aid for every aspiration.

I'm thinking about my folk medicine neighbors today because as we come to God's Word and happen upon what seems to be an odd exchange between Leah and Rachel, the key to it all is exactly what I've been talking about: folk medicine. Leah's first-born son, Reuben, goes out to the fields one day and finds some very special plants — mandrakes, to be exact. When he brings them home to his mother, a minor tizzy ensues between Leah and Rachel because of

them. Let's talk about the mandrakes themselves first, and then let's make some observations about the family dynamics on display.

Mandrakes are plants which have large, forked roots, roots that can sometimes resemble a human body whose arms and legs are open. So — why are they so desirable, and why are they front and center in the text today? To say it another way, what ailment might they assist, what condition do they supposedly cure, and what aspiration might they aid? I'm sure you've already guessed the answer, at least in part. In the ancient world, mandrake roots were considered an aphrodisiac on the one hand, and on the other hand they were commonly prepared and eaten as a fertility drug. In other words, mandrakes were believed to bring blessings in the baby department...which is one of the main battlegrounds in Rachel's and Leah's relationship with one another.

Rachel, of course, wants a child of her own (that is, from her own womb as opposed to the womb of her maidservant). Leah wants additional children of her own as well. When Reuben finds those mandrakes in the field and gives them to his mother, both women see them as an opportunity, and seizing on the supposed medicinal properties of the plant, they each make plans to use them for their own purposes.

It's when Rachel approaches Leah to see if she'll share some of the mandrakes that we get a sudden and rather intense reveal. First, Leah tears into her sister with words that clearly show her ongoing bitterness and sense of alienation in the family. It's almost like a trigger has been pulled, and the explosion of vitriol exiting Leah finds its target straight away. Yet even while we're still reeling from Leah's outburst, Rachel's response is almost the more shocking of the two. It's not just that she seems unperturbed by Leah's words, but that she shows herself to be so fully in control of the situation...and indeed, in control of Leah herself. Consider this: Leah is the older sister. Leah is also the first-married wife and the one who has borne children to Jacob. Leah, culturally speaking and in accordance with tradition, should be the "main" or "first" spouse in Jacob's household. Clearly, however, she's not. Instead, it is Rachel — the one who is beautiful and loved and favored by Jacob — who holds authority in the home, including authority over her sister. So much so, in fact, that she can even dictate when Leah can and can't be intimate with Jacob. So much so that she can hold that intimacy over her sister's head and use it as a carrot to get whatever she wants — even if it's something as mundane as a pile of mandrakes.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up, our ending point for the moment is a rather sad one, because through the haze of her loneliness, eagerness, and desperation to be known and loved by her husband, Leah accepts Rachel's rather despicable offer. Verse 16 tells us that when Jacob comes in from the fields that evening, Leah goes out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she says. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So that evening, Jacob does just that.

Yet as is very often the case in God's Word, while this is the ending point for the moment, it's not the end of the story. Rachel, of course, has worked this deal because she believes that the mandrakes she gets from Leah are going to help her conceive a child. But irony of ironies, when Leah sleeps with Jacob that night, she's the one who becomes pregnant again — pregnancy number five, in fact. Rachel? She's still barren. She'll remain barren in fact, not just through this pregnancy of Leah's, but through two more besides. Many of you know that Rachel's time to bear a child of her own is coming, and she will finally know the joy that she has so longed for. But for now, the only thing she will bear in her body is the pain of watching her sister welcome more babies into the world while she continues in her infertility. I hate to use the word *backfire* in a context like this, but in Rachel's case, that's exactly what her plan has done. And as we add more and more layers to this situation, the complexities — and

difficulties — are only going to grow. Do stay connected each day as we continue, everyone; the Lord has much to teach us in all that's ahead, and we'll be the richer for it by His grace!

Thanks for your time, folks; have a great day, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone. God's peace, welcome to another daily edition of EDiBS, and the rich and gracious blessings of our Lord Jesus be upon each of you on this Thursday. I'm glad you're with me today as we continue to follow the life and times of Jacob and his family, where over the past several weeks we've been focusing on his two wives, Leah and Rachel. I know that God's Word will bless us in our time together today, so if you'll turn to Genesis 30 in your Bible, we'll take a moment to pray as we begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this day and the many blessings that have come with it. As we study today, please grant your blessing, that we will be enabled to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus our Redeemer. In His name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, in the aftermath of the incident between Leah and Rachel over the mandrakes Reuben had brought in from the field, we now come to Leah and her return to a period of childbearing. Our focus: Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah.

Genesis 30:17-21

17God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar. 19Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. 20Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. 21Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

I was in the shower the other day when I grabbed for the shampoo to wash my hair. In that moment I experienced something almost universally common to the human condition: the bottle was empty. I knew from the moment I picked it up that I was out of luck because of how light the container was, so grunting in irritation I put it back on the shelf (!) and made ready to make do with the bar of Ivory instead. But then a funny thought popped into my head: maybe there was a little more in there than I thought; maybe there was a little more in there after all.

Maybe if I unscrewed the lid and tried again...

Maybe if I let a little bit of water trickle into the bottle and swished it around a bit...then
Maybe, just maybe, there would be enough for one more round of hair-washing.

In making the decision to try and eke out a tiny bit more shampoo from that bottle before letting it go, I actually got more than I bargained for. I didn't merely get through that one shower with clean hair, but through the next two as well. Instead of calling it dead and calling it a day, giving things the old college try resulted in a swan song of sorts, and that bottle rewarded me for my efforts.

Today's time in God's Word is going to be rather quick and straight forward for us, and why? Because the passage before us exists, for the most part, to advance the narrative of the text and to share some nuts-and-bolts information on the last additional children born to Leah and Jacob. The two things that make these verses a little more interesting than a typical birth announcement, however, are their bookends. First, these births come to Leah from her own womb when she is seemingly already "empty" of children. Yet not one, not two, but three offspring eventually arrive. Rather than making ready to make do with what she already has, she ends up finding that there's a little more in her than she thought; a little more in her after all. Second, after these children are born, Leah's childbearing years do, in fact, finally come to an end. After the birth of her daughter Dinah, she is through — which is going to set the stage for

a new subject for us to focus on in our daily study time. For now, let's look just briefly at the three little ones born to Leah in this, her swan song season of childbirth.

First on the list is Issachar, Jacob's ninth son overall and the fifth son from Leah's womb. Issachar means *Reward*, and he is so-named because Leah believes that her generosity in offering her maidservant to Jacob has been rewarded by God. Our task is not to question her reasoning in this instance, but simply to note her perspective and her mindset and tuck it away so that we can pull it out later for recall.

The next child is Zebulun: Jacob's tenth son overall and Leah's sixth. The New International Version of the Scriptures accentuates one aspect what Zebulun means because its focus is on helping us to understand Leah's heart at the time of his birth. The way verse 20 reads in the NIV is as follows:

Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun.

But listen now to a different rendering of the same verse, this time from the King James Version:

And Leah said, God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun.

The trilateral Hebrew root of Zebulun's name is interesting. In its verb form, *zabal*, it means to exalt or honor...which is the emphasis the NIV gives to the verse explaining Zebulun's name. Leah says, "This time, my husband will treat me with honor." In its noun form, *zebul*, it refers to a lofty abode or dwelling place which is designed to honor its occupant...which is the emphasis of the King James Version. Leah says, "Now will my husband dwell with me."

Regardless of which rendering is used here (either emphasis is acceptable and they relate to one another in any case), the meaning of Zebulun is quite important. As we know, Leah is still waiting for her husband to finally and truly love her and live with her — indeed, to *honor* her and to *dwell* with her in accordance with how marriage is meant to be. This has been her heart's cry from the beginning of her life with him, and the point of the text is that she's hoping against hope that the sheer quantity of sons she has now given to Jacob will finally win his heart to her...that he will finally honor her and dwell with her as his beloved.

Last of all today, but not insignificant in the least, we are told that at some point later on, Leah finally bears a daughter, whom she names Dinah. We don't have any symbolic importance to attach to Dinah's name, but Dinah is important nonetheless because while nobody knows it at the moment, she's going to figure prominently in a future event that will deeply affect the family and carry longterm consequences for Jacob's household. Scholars, in fact, believe that it's precisely because of that future event that Dinah's birth is recorded and mentioned here...it's a signpost pointing to that which is to come on the horizon.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, what I mentioned a few moments ago I'll mention once more: with the birth of her daughter, Leah's childbearing years are now over. Scripture records no additional offspring which are the result of her union with Jacob, and now the book of Genesis will turn to other matters — matters we'll begin working through very soon. I'm sure glad to have been with you today for these past few minutes, and I hope our time together has been helpful to you in your understanding of this portion of God's Word. More to come soon on all of this, including our ongoing discussion about how these many seemingly disjointed incidents

and events are being used by God to further His redemptive plan for humanity — His redemptive plan that from eternity past included even you and me in these tumultuous last days! Have a great day, everyone, and I'll see you again soon. Until then, God's peace, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone, and welcome to this Friday edition of EDiBS. Christ's abiding peace to you and yours on this last day of our week together, and thanks as always for joining in for our brief time of Bible study. As we open our hearts over these next few minutes and look back on what we've been studying in Genesis 30 with respect to Leah and her sister Rachel, my hope is that we'll all come away from our time today meditative and contemplative over all that we've seen. I'm glad for your presence today; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Father, thank you for your love and mercy, which you've so lavishly poured into our lives through your Son. We ask you to open our hearts to wisdom and truth as we read your Word these next few minutes. Help us to hold it and hide it in our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, while with the conclusion of her childbearing season in life we've come to the end of the active feud between Leah and her sister Rachel, that doesn't mean their relationship has experienced any healing or reconciliation. The Bible doesn't give us any indication that such a thing ever happened. As we prepare to move on from this sad narrative, let's give it one final look. Our focus this session: a losing hand.

I was having dinner with my son last night at one of our local restaurants, a place called Taco Mac. It's a family establishment, but with an emphasis on sports, and so every inch of wall space is plastered with flat screen televisions. On one screen our Atlanta Braves were losing to the New York Mets, on another the NFL Hall of Fame game was being played between the Las Vegas Raiders and the Jacksonville Jaguars, but on a third screen off in one of the corners was something that neither my son nor I have ever been able to understand: on that third screen The World Series of Poker was being played. That's right...poker, on television. Can you explain this to me? People actually watch poker? On TV? For entertainment? I can't for the life of me imagine why anyone would spend their time that way, but ratings don't lie. Poker on television is a big deal and tons of people watch it...which means that I must be missing something. I just don't know what that something could be.

But come to think of it, perhaps I have an idea after all. Maybe people watch poker on TV because of the drama. Because of the tension. Because of the high stakes involved, the risks and rewards. Maybe people watch poker on TV because they like to dream about winning in life...and maybe there are even a few people out there who are fascinated by watching people lose.

And yet here's the crazy thing: if you take a moment to think things through using the description I've just given, you might very well say that we've been watching a poker game of our own over the past couple of weeks. As we've followed the saga of Leah and Rachel, their enmity toward each other over their common husband, and their competition in the Having Children department, we've seen drama, tension, high stakes, and winning and losing in droves. It has been fascinating, yes, but it has also been enlightening...enlightening in a way that helps us to see the futility of such things in our own lives. It helps us to see that bitterness, rivalry, and oneupmanship ultimately yield no winners in the end.

I don't remember now if it was Charles Spurgeon or another commentator who made the connection between Leah, Rachel, and a hand of poker (I can't find a reliable attribution anywhere), but the analogy actually has been made, and it fits. When it comes to what we've seen here in Genesis 30 surrounding the lives of these two sisters, for them it has indeed been a high stakes game. You can almost imagine them at the table:

“I bid one wife, loved and beautiful.” That’s Rachel.

Leah responds: “I bid one wife and four sons.”

Rachel counters: “I’ll match your one wife and raise you a maidservant and the maidservant’s two sons.” Ooh, that’s a tough bid. What will Leah do?

“I’ll raise you another maidservant and two more sons by her; plus two more sons on my own, and I’ll throw in a daughter. I’ll stand with one wife, one maidservant, six sons, and one daughter.”

At that point, the hand is over. Rachel folds. Leah takes the pot...but only for a time, and why? Because another hand will soon be dealt, and another after that, and still another after that. Each hand will be different from the first. Every hand, in fact, is always different. And the energy required to keep up and stay in the game is almost more than anyone can muster over time.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up in this brief review session for today, does all of this sound petty? Yes. Does it sound desperate? Also yes. Does it sound haughty and arrogant? Again, yes, and again, nobody could possibly be the winner in such a competition. As we’ve seen, however, that’s exactly how Leah and Rachel have played it, and their lives have been all the more miserable because of it. What about you and me? Might there be some work to be done in that regard? Is there a hand being played right now where we’re holding our cards tight and clinging to high-stakes hopes...even though we actually have no business being at the table? Now might be the time to graciously bow out. Now might be the time to fold your hand and walk away. Now might be the time to finally say to yourself, *Life is too short and too precious for this kind of gambling.*

Is that the main thrust of the storyline in Genesis 30? Of course not. As we’ve said many times now, there’s a much bigger picture in play. But Big Picture aside for the moment, are there nonetheless some smaller pictures that we happen upon along the way which might be of value to look at and consider? Absolutely — and when we do, we often find that they’re self-portraits. God bless you richly in Christ as you meditate on the picture you see today.

Have a great weekend, everyone, and I’ll see you again next week as we turn the page and move forward. Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! It's good to be with you today, and as we open our Bibles and ask the Lord to teach us and transform our lives through His Word, I know that we'll all be blessed as a result. We're back in the 30th chapter of Genesis as we begin this new week, following the saga of Leah and Rachel as they wrestle with one another over the blessing of motherhood and their position in the household of Jacob. Let's pray and ask God to lead us as we study.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've come to a moment long-awaited and over which there has been a great deal of anguish. Rachel, having struggled for many years with the cultural shame of barrenness and the continual undercurrent of bitter competition between herself and Leah in the domestic arena, finally becomes pregnant. Our focus this session: The God who remembers.

Genesis 30:22-24

22Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. 23She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." 24She named him Joseph, and said, "May the Lord add to me another son."

Donuts were a great rarity in our home when the kids were young. So rare, in fact, that they were an item that would be longed for, pined for, begged for...an item the absence of which routinely caused great anguish, and for long periods of time. Part of their rarity in the household was due to the fact that we lived out in the country. The nearest donut shop was almost an hour away, and that was if I drove faster than I should — which, naturally, you do for donuts. But the other reason donuts were a rarity in the Stark household was...well, all you have to do is look at me and you'll know the answer. One donut could easily add two inches to my waistline, and three donuts could add four. Which they did. So, long story short? We're back to that "Donuts were a great rarity" line.

If I'm being completely honest, however, I do have to mention one more thing, and I do so with reluctance because I love my children and I never want to seem as though I'm criticizing them. On the rare occasions when those wonderful, pillowy soft bits of deep-fried dough did make it back to the Missouri countryside, here's what would invariably happen. I'd open the box for all to see and let the choosing begin, and then I'd get this question — get this question, keep in mind, before the first donut was even chosen, plated, and enjoyed by the ravenous ones in my midst:

"Can I have another one?"

They wanted another before they'd even enjoyed the first.
They wanted more before taking the time to appreciate what they'd just been given.
Their minds were fixated not on the now, but on the next.

As for me? As for me, it was always *almost* enough to make me never want to buy donuts again...and it made them all the more rare in our household as a result.

If you can understand my frustration with my children regarding their presumptuous expectations about something so common as donuts, then you're well on your way to understanding something of greater import today as we come to God's Word. Something phenomenal has just been given by the Lord to His servant Rachel...but while it is briefly acknowledged, it is just as quickly set aside. Appreciation has been replaced by fixation. To be blunt about it, with one stunning action on Rachel's part, an incredibly beautiful and blessed moment has shifted from the now to the next. I'm talking, of course, about the birth of a certain baby boy.

It has been many years now that Leah's younger sister has been without a child from her own womb. The giving of her maidservant Bilhah to Jacob brought temporary satisfaction, but the yearning for a child truly her own has never left Rachel. Now, the Bible says, God remembers her. Whenever God "remembers" something, we should note that in almost every case where that phrase is used in Scripture, it means that the Lord is going to act favorably toward someone who needs His intervention. It's a great phrase, in fact, on which to do a word study, because it opens up a whole new world of God's grace and mercy in action to anyone willing to run it down and see when and where it's used. In any case, what God "remembers" in this instance is Rachel and her barrenness. Having listened to the cries of her heart and having watched her go through the challenge of childlessness even as her sister's womb has been fruitful, God now opens Rachel's womb and enables her to conceive and give birth to a son.

The first thing that Rachel says isn't surprising in the least, given her struggles in life and her great angst over being, for so many years, without any offspring from her own body: "The Lord has taken away my disgrace." These are words of gratefulness if not gratitude; words acknowledging restoration if not rescue. Rachel, we must say to her credit, does — at least in a passing way — direct her thoughts to God, affirming His hand in this precious moment that she is experiencing. At the same time, however, we can't ignore the larger statement that she makes here, one which shows that the state of her heart is still attuned to the world instead of God's will; still focused on self rather than serving the Lord through the vocation of motherhood. What am I talking about, you ask? I'm talking about what she names this blessing from the Lord. Verse 24 of today's text says that Rachel names her baby Joseph, saying "May the Lord add to me another son." How are these two things related? They're related because that's what Joseph means: "Add To." Do you see what's going on here? In the very naming of the very first son that the Lord has given to her from her very own body, Rachel asks for a second son.

She wants another before she's even enjoyed the first.
She wants more before taking the time to appreciate what she's just been given.
Her mind is fixated not on the now, but on the next.

Why such a frame of mind? Because she's still competing with Leah. She's still keeping score. She's still trying to win. And in her mind, the only thing that will bring her across the finish line as victor is...more. From where she stands, she's unable to see the bigger blessing. And in failing to see it, she misses the true greatness of this moment altogether.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, we'll have more to say on this — almost in the form of a post script — when we get to Genesis 35, because in chapter 35 we'll be seeing how God answers this expression of desire from Rachel. There will be some good in it to be sure, but with the good will come the gut-wrenching, and with resolution will come a certain amount of regret. As for God? As for God, the good news is that as unsavory and self-serving as Rachel's words are here, they're not even close to making Him regret His decision to remember her...because the

love of God and the mercy of God, far from rare, is something that He delights to lavish abundantly on households that belong to Him.

Take care everyone — may God bless *your* household today with an abundance of grace and mercy as well, provided to you richly in our Savior Jesus Christ! Until next time, have a terrific day, and the joy of the Lord be your strength. I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! I'm glad to be with you for another day in the Scriptures together, and as we move into the flow of our week, my prayer is that you're growing in Christ, growing in your knowledge of God's love for you, and growing in your understanding of His holy Word. Today we're moving into what amounts to a new section in Genesis even as we continue in chapter 30. Thanks so much for joining in as we do that; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on this day we bless your holy name and ask that you bless the teaching of your Word. Help us to see in the Scriptures today your call for a steadfast heart that seeks you in all things. We love you, and we thank you as always for this time. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with the birth of Joseph to Rachel and Jacob, Jacob approaches Laban for a talk. Our focus this session: Time for a change.

Genesis 30:25-28

25After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. 26Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you." 27But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you." 28He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them."

When I was a college student getting ready for graduation, I had a great job with a ministry that served adults with developmental disabilities. A big part of me wanted to stay and continue to work there after graduation, but another part of me was looking for a new adventure in another part of the country. One day I went in to talk to my boss about it, and the way she broke things down for me was as follows: First, they'd love me to stay. Second, once I had my degree in hand, my job title would change, my responsibilities would increase, and my wages would go up. Third, should I choose to stay I would also be provided with continuing education opportunities that would further my professional certifications — which would in turn, over time, increase my salary yet again. In short, I was being offered a great opportunity by great people representing a great organization. Though in the end I did decide to go in a different direction, it wasn't because my employer lacked integrity, kindness, or generosity. I still look back on that workplace and the people with whom I worked with great fondness.

As we come to God's Word today, we happen to be talking a little bit about workplaces here as well...and as we do, what we're seeing is that the present situation for Jacob is unfortunately a little more dicey than my own. His employer's integrity? Lacking. His employer's kindness? Disingenuous. And his employer's generosity? Nonexistent. Jacob, of course, has known these things all along. It has been his experience with Laban from the beginning. Jacob, being an expert at deception himself, has even come close to meeting his match via his father-in-law's own brand of unprincipled self-promotion and duplicity. After so many years of working under these conditions, Jacob has decided to go in and have a talk with his boss. He's done. He's fulfilled his original commitments, he's got a life of his own that needs building, and he's ready to go home. *I'm ready*, he says, *to be on my way*.

Yet in spite of having said these things to Laban, Jacob is now strongly urged — or more accurately, hard-pressed and even cajoled — to take a new deal being offered by his father-in-law. Instead of leaving with his family as he desires, instead of returning to his homeland to

reestablish himself there and settle his household in the land God has given to him, Laban floats something else for Jacob to consider instead:

First, Jacob, I'd love you to stay. Second, if you stay, your wages will go up...in fact, just name them. Whatever you want, I'll pay. Third, should you choose to stay I know that not only will you continue to be blessed, but I'll be blessed too. Think of it: there's only more growing and gathering and increase waiting for us both. I also happen to know that your own God is the one who will make it all happen, and if God is involved, how could this be a bad thing? This is going to be a win-win for both our families. I'm offering you a great opportunity, son...a great opportunity from someone you can trust: your own father in-law, the father of your own wives, and the grandfather of your own children...great people in a great organization. How 'bout it?

Why this overture? Is it that he remains close to his daughters and doesn't want to see them go? Is it because he loves the time he gets to spend with his grandkids and can't stomach the thought of them going to a far-away place where he'll likely never see them again? While these sentiments are things that would quickly come to mind for many of us and our situations in life, God's Word gives us no indication that Laban has anything so noble motivating his thoughts. Where is Laban coming from in all of this? Quite simply, he has been enriched because of Jacob. Laban's wealth, in fact, has ballooned due to Jacob's management of his herds. Ironically, Laban has even discerned through divination — that is, through pagan rituals associated with his own idol worship — that the reason for it all is Almighty God. It is because of the Lord, Laban realizes, that he has been blessed through Jacob...and therefore he has a vested interest in keeping Jacob under his thumb for as long as possible. Keeping Jacob under his thumb, by the way, has been relatively easy for him through the course of their relationship, at least to this point, and Laban has almost surely taken that fact into consideration in making this new offer to his son-in-law. Having now laid it on the table, it's Jacob's move.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, if you're smelling a little bit of a rat here, let's just say that your nose knows! Of course there's a rat, and not only do you and I smell it, but Jacob does too. How will he respond to this development? Let's say it this way: the question isn't whether a new contest is about to begin between these two inveterate deceivers; the question is what game they're going to be playing. Laban's mindset right now is Chinese Checkers. Some hopping skipping and jumping, some corralling of the marbles to tidy things up, and then it's game over. The problem is that Jacob is about to pull out a Chess board instead...and the strategy he'll be employing in the days ahead will prove exceedingly difficult for his father-in-law to match. I hope you'll come along as we follow along in the text, because we're about to see God protect and perpetuate His Covenant promises to His people in yet another dramatic way!

Thanks for being with me today, everyone — there's much more to come, and I pray that you'll be encouraged as we see our great God at work in the days ahead! Christ's rich peace to you today, do take care, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's rich peace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being here today as we continue on with our study in the book of Genesis, where right now we're working our way toward the end of Genesis 30. I'm glad you've come along for all that's before us! Just a reminder today as we begin: do remember that you're always welcome to post our daily sessions on your various social media platforms, forward them via email to as many people as you'd like each day, or share EDiBS in any other manner that the people you love and care about might find helpful. Also, if you haven't already, be sure to like us on Facebook and follow us on Instagram and Twitter. Even if those places aren't where you typically get your EDiBS each day, liking and following helps with the algorithm so that more people see our posts. For example, we currently connect with about 700 people a month via Facebook who *aren't* EDiBS subscribers — and that means we're bringing God's Word and the love of Christ to many who otherwise wouldn't be engaging with us from day to day. Any way we can share the message of our Savior with more people is a win for the kingdom of God, and I'm thankful for the role you play in meeting that goal! Let's pray and open our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, you have rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into your marvelous light. You have made us alive in Christ, who gave Himself for us that our sins could be forgiven and that our fellowship with you could be restored. Thank you so very much. As we come to the study of your Word today, please bless its hearing and bring us closer to you. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Jacob's father-in-law Laban has just asked Jacob to stay on as his hired man rather than leave with his family and return to Canaan. He has also offered to pay any kind of wage that Jacob might require. Now Jacob responds. Our focus this session: A burgeoning business transaction, a battle of wits...or both?

Genesis 30:29-36

29Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. 30The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?" 31"What shall I give you?" he asked. "Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: 32Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. 33And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen." 34"Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." 35That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. 36Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks.

When you're going to make a special meal for dinner, one that might be new to you or a little on the complicated side, you often follow a recipe. It's there to provide an ingredient list, a step-by-step process for preparing the dish, and perhaps a serving suggestion once everything's done cooking and ready to go to the table. Recipes are helpful. They bring order to time spent in the kitchen and take away the guesswork that often accompanies the unfamiliar. They also give you an idea, in your head at least, about how things are supposed to turn out in the end.

Today in God's Word, we have before us the beginnings of what will be a rather complicated dish. It's an instance, in fact, where a recipe will be very helpful. Though the cooking on this one is going to be low and slow, it's important that we're clear about the ingredient list right from the get-go, because if we're not, we might get confused during the preparation time. What am I talking about? I'm talking about the new business agreement being hammered out between Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban. It seems convoluted, doesn't it. It sounds a little kooky. There's cloudiness here, not clarity, and as we see these two in today's passage going back and forth in their negotiating, it's already clear that while the negotiations may be front and center, there's some behind-the-scenes scheming going on in each man's mind as well... and it's the scheming that constitutes the real activity here.

So — what ingredients are we working with here? We'll make the list now, and then we'll go through the nitty-gritty of how they fit together — or don't fit together — when we come back next time. As you consider them here, you might also begin thinking about what other things may need to be added. Jacob, in particular, has a secret sauce that as of yet he's revealed to no one...and in actuality, we won't even learn about it until our next chapter, when all of this is about ready to come out of the oven. For now, however, here's what's on our recipe card:

Take...

Two deceitful men.

Two healthy egos.

Two hungry pocketbooks.

Add...

Two differing desires and two similar desires, in equal measure.

Fold in...

Hundreds of sheep (various markings).

Hundreds of goats (various markings).

Combine ingredients, knead to proper consistency, divide in half and separate, then proceed to next steps.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the next steps, of course, are to heat up the oven and begin baking...and rest assured, neither Laban nor Jacob will waste any time getting started! I hope you'll make plans to join in and see how each one does in the kitchen!

Thanks, everyone — it's always my joy to be with you, and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon. Until then, God bless you richly in Christ, and have a terrific day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. It's sure great to be with you today for our daily time in God's Word, where as we get going with today's session we're having our final look at Genesis 30. This has been an important chapter that, while a little tiresome to wade through at times, has nonetheless been very helpful to us in understanding the ongoing saga that has defined Jacob's household for so long. I know our time over these next few minutes will bless us as we put our minds to the Scriptures, so let's go to our Lord and pray as we begin.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence, and we ask in this moment that you bless us with your Spirit and turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. We are grateful for this time and we pray that you would help us to use it well. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 30 comes to a close with what can only be described as an exceedingly odd course of action taken by Jacob as he goes about tending Laban's flocks and increasing his own in accordance with the agreement the two have struck. Our focus: Jacob's folk medicine, God's faithfulness.

Genesis 30:37-43

37Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. 38Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, 39they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted. 40Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals. 41Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches, 42but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. 43In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys.

When I was five years old and living at 19585 Pecan Avenue in Rialto, California, I got my first bike. It was orange. It had a white seat with a black racing stripe going down its center. It had safety reflectors attached to the spokes on both the front and back wheels, and it had genuine whitewall tires. At one and the same time I thought I was one of the luckiest, and among the coolest, kids in the neighborhood.

Only one thing about that bike kept me from being the coolest kid of them all: training wheels. I'd never ridden a big boy bike, so although I didn't like them, I needed them. Still, from the very first day I started riding, I was also plotting how to get rid of them.

One day I decided that the time had come. I had been getting better. I had been working hard. I had even, in my five year-old way, been tinkering with my bike, fancying myself a mechanic who was making improvements to my machine so I wouldn't need the assistance of those spindly little wheels any longer. I was tired of the crutch they represented in my quest for bicycle independence, and so I told my dad I wanted them removed. In somber and considered fashion, with a look of great seriousness on his face, he acquiesced. My older brother, armed with a crescent wrench, undid one side, then the other, and finally — with me

on my racing seat and my hands firmly affixed to my handlebars — my brother gave me a push down the driveway and off I went. Straight and true, I never looked back, and I never used those training wheels again.

Once more, let me make mention of my five year-old mind, and why? Because it was a mind that attributed my success in riding on two wheels to my own devices. I was sure that my brilliant tinkering had somehow played a role. I was convinced that my bold decision-making and my timing in taking those wheels off were critical components in the equation that brought about my success. Unbeknownst to me, however, at Dad's instruction my brother had over the course of a month been slowly adjusting those training wheels upward in little increments. By the time I went to my father to request that they be removed, the truth was that they hadn't even been touching the ground for two weeks. I did what I did. All the while thinking that I was contributing to my victory over training wheels. The reality was that Dad had been directing the whole thing all along.

Here at the end of Genesis 30, Laban has asked Jacob to name the wages he requires in order to be willing to stay and work for the family. In response, Jacob has said, "Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages." Jacob says, furthermore, that in the future "...Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen." Laban agrees, and the animals are divided...but Laban, in a preemptory move, separates out the multi-colored animals for himself and sends them away with his sons to tend, leaving only the solid-colored animals for Jacob to tend. Jacob, in other words, is once again starting at zero.

In today's passage, however, to increase his flocks (and diminish Laban's in the process), Jacob now initiates what can only be called a weird and wild exercise in superstitious quackery to try and influence the make-up of the animals. It's folk medicine, plain and simple. He takes fresh-cut branches from different trees, peels the bark to create white stripes on them, and then places the peeled branches in all the watering troughs so that they'll be directly in front of the flocks when they come to drink. When the flocks go into heat and come to drink, they mate in front of the branches, and they ostensibly end up bearing young that are streaked or speckled or spotted. Let's be very clear about something at this point: the Bible doesn't say how or if these striped branches impact the mating of the animals and the color of their offspring; rather, the Bible simply records what Jacob does and what the result is. I'll have more to say about that in a moment, but first, let's look at one other action that Jacob takes. In addition to increasing the number of spotted animals, Jacob also wants to make sure that the spotted ones are stronger than the rest, so he only places the branches in the troughs when the stronger females are in heat. If the animals are weak, he refrains. Once again, the result that the Bible records is that the stronger of the flock end up being multi-colored, and the weaker end up being of normal color. In the end, we're told, Jacob grows exceedingly prosperous through this and comes to own large flocks of his own.

So — what are we to make of this most unusual account? Some people try to find a natural explanation to it all, and you'll hear things like, "Jacob, through a lifetime of experience with sheep, knew that something in the branches would cause the animals to be sexually stimulated and to mate more often." They'll go on to say, "He placed the branches strategically to breed those animals more likely to produce speckled and spotted offspring." The problem is, the Bible never says that, nor does it even hint at it.

A better view, and one the Bible *does* speak of, is that God is supernaturally intervening here to increase Jacob's flocks. Jacob may be relying on his own efforts, tainted as they are by superstition and folklore, but remember, God has determined to bless him as the one on whom

His covenant promise rests and through whom it will be passed to the next generation. I alluded to it before, but the Scriptural answer to the mystery of Jacob's peeled poles and his other efforts is actually found in the next chapter. In Genesis 31, we're going to see an exchange where Jacob says to Rachel,

I've worked for your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me. In breeding season I had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.' (Genesis 31:6–12)

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, let's say it one more time so that we're all clear on the matter: the Bible isn't teaching here any kind of validity regarding, as one scholar put it, "visual, prenatal influence over genetics." Whatever superstitious ideas are behind Jacob's placement of branches in troughs and the like, it is God who is causing the increase in the speckled sheep and goats. All of Jacob's work...peeling branches, setting them out in front of the flocks at different times and so forth, is if anything a lack of faith on his part, especially considering the dream he had where the Lord assured him of success. In any case, Jacob's schemes to increase his flocks are unnecessary, because God has already determined to enrich him.

Does Jacob think that he's playing a role in all of this? Perhaps. Does he believe that his bold decision-making and his sense of timing are critical components to his success? It's possible. He may very well be doing what he's doing thinking he's contributing to his victory over Laban. The reality, however, is that his Father in heaven has been directing the whole thing all along.

We'll talk more about this next time as we move into our next chapter of study, so I hope you'll come along and be part of it. Thanks, everyone — have a terrific day, and the joy of our Lord Jesus be your strength. I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! God's peace to each of you in Christ, and thanks for being here today as we take some time to open God's Word together. If you've been studying along with us for any length of time, then you know that right now we're in the Old Testament book of Genesis, and in this session we'll be having our first look at Genesis 31. I'm glad to be with you today; let's pray as we go to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day and this time together to be in your Word, we ask that you would cause it, by your gracious Spirit, to penetrate our lives and do that which you desire it to do within us. We place ourselves before you with humble, yet expectant hearts, because we know what a great privilege it is to open the Scriptures and learn of you and from you. Bless this time, we pray in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 31 begins with a big shift taking place in the household of Jacob. As an introduction to all that's about to happen, we'll be doing more reading today than unpacking, but in doing so we'll be setting the stage for quite a bit to work through in the days ahead. Our focus this session: When attitude is everything.

Genesis 31:1-18

Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father." 2And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been. 3Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you." 4So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. 5He said to them, "I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me. 6You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, 7yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. 8If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, 'The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked young. 9So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me. 10" In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. 11The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' 12And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. 13I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.' " 14Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? 15Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. 16Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you." 17Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, 18and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

I loved serving God's people as a pastor. I miss the parish and the people so very much. Like every pastor, I had both highs and lows in ministry over 20+ years, but all in all it was a wonderful period in my life. I had many seasons of great joy, a few seasons of doubt and discouragement, and an occasional season of sorrow here and there — again, like most every pastor does. I feel fortunate to be one of those people who never questioned my calling...but sometimes I *did* question my circumstances and the choices I made that put me there. I say that because I wasn't always wise in my discernment. I wasn't always circumspect enough when new opportunities were placed before me. There are things I wish I could do over again

and churches I wish I'd have never left, but I think that for the majority of people in ministry, those things are all part of the journey. I'm often asked if I would ever consider going back to congregational ministry. The answer I always give is that God would need to make His will in that regard so utterly clear and unambiguous, touch my heart in such an unmistakable way, and set the place and people of His choosing so plainly before me that my decision in the matter would be a forgone conclusion. So many things would have to fall in place and so many other things would have to be taken out of the way that I can't imagine it ever happening. But if God so desired that I return, and if God so qualified, equipped and called, God would most certainly have His way. In short, if I perceived a change, and if God's hand was evident, it would be time to go...and I would go wherever He desired to send me.

If you'll be so gracious to forgive such a personal illustration today, the only reason I've shared it is that it falls in line so well with the scene being set up for us in today's reading from Genesis 31. Jacob, as we've seen through several chapters of study here in God's Word, is in somewhat of a holding pattern in life, and things have been that way for many years. He almost surely never meant to stay in the region of Mesopotamia for so long, and he almost surely never meant to live his life as a hired shepherd or as a husband to two wives who happen to be sisters either, but that's been his lot. Yet as we open to this new chapter today, something is different. There's discontent in the air. Laban's sons have been talking, complaining about Jacob and his success as the manager of their father's herds...or more properly, his success with his own herds at their father's expense. Laban's attitude has also been different toward Jacob. It's not like it was before. What's going on? What's going on is that after so many years of living the status quo, Jacob now perceives that things around him — things that influence and impact him and his family on a daily basis — are changing.

Change is one thing, of course...after all, change is constant and there's always an ebb and flow to everything in life...but the change that Jacob is seeing here is of a different kind. This is a change that brings unsettledness to his heart. Significantly, it's as he ponders that unsettledness that the Lord speaks to Him: "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you." God, in fact, has been with Jacob all along. God, having chosen Jacob as the one on whom His covenant promise rests and through whom He will pass His covenant promise from generation to generation, has continually directed Jacob's steps, and though Jacob hasn't always realized that, he's nonetheless received the blessings from it.

Pondering his unsettled heart, and now also pondering the hand of the Lord in telling him to go home, Jacob now gathers his family together and talks things out with them. Once he puts everything together, he realizes, first, that his perception about things changing is spot on; he realizes, second, that God's hand is clearly evident in the instructions he's received to respond to that change; and he realizes, finally and significantly, that his family's reaction to the situation as he's explained it to them confirms the wisdom of acting on it. The fact that even Leah and Rachel are on board, and that they're actually in agreement with each other on this matter, is particularly striking. So, what do we see? We see that right then and there, Jacob sees that it's time to go. And go he does.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, here is what we can say of Jacob at the moment:

He has perceived a change.
He has seen the evidence of God's hand.
He has realized that the time to go is now.

When we come together again next week, we'll begin to unpack all of this, so do come along and be part of the discussion as we learn and grow together! Thanks so much everyone; take care, have a great couple of days, and I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you today at the beginning of a new week, and as we open our Bibles and ask the Lord to teach us over these next few minutes, we can be assured of His gracious presence and leading. Today we're back in the 31st chapter of Genesis, where the status quo in Jacob's life — and in Laban's too, for that matter — has just been upended. I'm glad you're here; let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, at the beginning of Genesis 31 Jacob has just taken his children, his wives, all his livestock, and all the goods he's accumulated in his time working for his father-in-law Laban, and he's gotten out of Dodge. He's done this because of the Lord's explicit instruction and the Lord's explicit promise that He'll be with Jacob in the undertaking. So it is that as we pick things up today, Jacob has left town...but he's also left more than a few loose ends dangling in his wake. Our focus this session: Man on the run!

Genesis 31:19-24

19When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods.
20Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away.
21So he fled with all he had, and crossing the River, he headed for the hill country of Gilead.
22On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. 23Taking his relatives with him, he pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. 24Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad."

I left the "normal" rhythm of "typical" pastoral ministry — those words are in quotes on purpose, by the way, because there's no such thing as "normal" or "typical" when it comes to being in ministry — way back in 2005. From 2005 onward I continued to serve my denomination in various different roles at both the local and district-wide level — in conflict resolution and reconciliation ministry, as a teacher, as a rural vacancy pastor, as a mission developer — but as far as being the pastor of a single church in a single place in a regular ministry setting with a regular schedule, September of 2005 pretty much marked the passing of that era.

I remember that date so well because of the way it came about. I'd been considering a change for some time. I'd been seeking God's direction and talking to godly mentors about what I was working through. Then all at once, before I even realized what was happening, everything for a transition to a different kind of life and a different kind of ministry came together in one fell swoop. It was so fast, in fact, that it didn't just catch me off guard, it caught everyone off guard. My parents and siblings were shocked. My congregation was stunned. My coworkers were bowled over. In the course of just two weeks, I announced my departure, sold and closed on my old house, bought and closed on a new house halfway across the country, and hit the road on my way to a new life.

Did I leave with integrity and a clear conscience? Absolutely, in more ways than I can even begin to express. There are no qualms and no regrets. But...did I leave well? The answer to that question is another story entirely. If I had it to do over again, today's older, wiser, more mature version of me would have taken more time, talked to more people, and made better

preparations for the change. I still would have left...but I would have left much differently than I did.

As we come to God's Word today, Jacob has been on a similar trajectory in his own life. He's been considering a change — longing for a change — for some time. He's been working through a lot of stuff, and it's been a constant struggle, but he's hung with it by telling himself, *Just keep on keeping on, Jacob; just get through another day.* Then one day, all at once and before he even realizes what's happening, everything for that change — everything for his transition to a different kind of life and a different kind of existence — comes together in one fell swoop. It's so fast, in fact, that it doesn't just catch him off guard, it catches everyone off guard. It's stunning to witness, really: in the course of an afternoon or so, Jacob gathers up everyone and everything associated with who he is, closes up shop, and hits the road on his way to a new life...or more accurately, to his old life. What, however, does Jacob fail to do? What, in fact, does he purposely not do?

Jacob doesn't announce his departure.

This portion of Scripture doesn't call into question Jacob's decision at all. As we mentioned before and as we saw in our last session, Jacob is making this departure at the Lord's direction. What we might make note of, however, is the manner in which Jacob leaves, because in many ways it constitutes what has become a trademark move on his part.

In quick succession, today's passage outlines several things for us. First is that when Laban goes out to shear his sheep, his daughter Rachel pops into his space and steals his idols — his household gods. We'll have more to say on that later on, but just quickly, yes: your eyebrows *should* be raised a bit as you consider the fact that one of Jacob's wives is dabbling with pagan-related items. It says a lot about Rachel, and once more, we'll comment on that down the line a little bit. Second, God's Word says to us today that Jacob deceives Laban by running away without telling him — the word *deceive* being operative here, used intentionally. Finally, doubling down on the manner of Jacob's departure, the Bible tells us that Jacob actually *flees* Laban's presence and then literally heads for the hills of Gilead.

If this hasty getaway isn't drama-filled enough — especially when you consider the logistics of moving that many people and that many possessions that quickly — we've barely gotten started. After a three-day head start, Laban finally gets word about what Jacob has done, and naturally, he opts to give chase. The one detail we shouldn't overlook in this bit of information is that Laban doesn't merely go after Jacob on his own, but takes his relatives with him. This isn't a statement advising us that Laban grabs a few scattered cousins, uncles, and brothers from here and there to hop on their camels and go searching; rather, with the size of his family network and his long history in the region, Laban likely has many, many kinfolk he can muster to pursue his son-in-law. This isn't a search party, it's a small army — and everyone knows that when you assemble a small army for a mission, you have a specific purpose in mind. Translation: Laban is one ticked off dude.

Wrapping Up

Yet, wrapping things up for the day, it's as we come to the last verse in today's reading that we suddenly see God's intervention. Just as God had promised Jacob, God now delivers. He shows up. He is with Jacob, just He had said He would be. His hand of protection rests on His servant. After seven days, Laban has caught up with Jacob, but that's exactly when God catches up with Laban and says, in essence, *You'd best be careful how you deal with your son in-law.* In that very moment, every prognostication we might expect to make over how this event will end is suddenly turned on its head. Things, on the contrary, will conclude very differently. And when we come back next time, we'll see both the how and the why of it all.

That's going to do it for today, everyone. Thanks so much for spending some time with me today in the Scriptures, and do make plans to come back tomorrow as we follow this through. I'll look forward to see you then! God bless you richly in our Lord Jesus, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you for another day in the Scriptures together, and as we move deeper into our week my great hope is that you're growing in your understanding of God's Word and God's great redemptive plan for the world through the sending of a Savior. In our study of the book of Genesis, we're following the early genealogical line that will ultimately serve to bring that Savior to humanity, and as we continue in Genesis 31 today we'll be taking more steps forward in that regard. As always, I'm happy to have you along — let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on this day we bless your holy name and ask that you bless the teaching of your Word. Help us to see in the Scriptures today your call for a steadfast heart that holds tightly to the treasure of your promises. We love you, and we thank you for this time. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Laban has caught up with Jacob in the hill country of Gilead after a seven-day pursuit. His wrath, however, has been tempered by a dream he's had from the Lord, warning him against doing anything that will compromise Jacob and his family. Our focus this session: A most uncomfortable confrontation.

Genesis 31:25-29

25Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. 26Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. 27Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of tambourines and harps? 28You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters good-bye. You have done a foolish thing. 29I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.'

He'd been up on and off throughout the night, quietly moving about, quietly opening and closing drawers containing his toys, quietly going about his clandestine activity with the mistaken notion that no one was, nor would be, the wiser for it. The truth? I happened to be in my chair at the bottom of the stairs, working through the evening hours like I often do. Which meant, of course, that I heard everything. Every tip-toeing footstep, every soft trickle of Legos through his fingers, every dainty opening and closing of every book from his bookshelf...each one, though carefully executed on his part, might as well have been the roar of Niagara Falls. I chose to say nothing.

In the morning he was tired and grumpy, and yes, having a hard time getting ready for school. Again, I chose to say nothing. But that afternoon when he got off the bus and presented me with a note that indicated he'd had an equally hard time getting through his day and that his behavior was found to be lacking, I looked him in the eye and said, "Would you like to tell me why you were up half the night playing instead of in your bed sleeping?" After a brief moment of uncertainty on his face, the kind of uncertainty every parent recognizes as a child contemplates whether to compound the lie or come clean with the truth, my son simply said to me, "I don't know," and then promptly dissolved into a heap of tears and exhaustion. As I comforted him, I reflected on the fact that while the confrontation was ultimately a gentle one, for him it was still a "deer in the headlights" moment. On the one hand, he was fearful of retribution, the just recompense of his actions. But on the other, he was shocked because he never expected to get caught.

As we come back to God's Word today and continue to follow Jacob, a man who seems to have a penchant for putting himself in compromising and confrontational situations in life, we've come to find him in another of those situations right now. In this instance he hasn't done anything egregious — on the contrary, he's in the midst of obeying God's command to leave his father-in-law's family and go back home to Canaan — but the manner in which he's carried out that divine directive is what's gotten him into his current mess. When God told Jacob to go, He had promised him His presence along the way, and as we all know, where God guides God provides. Jacob had no need to fear and no need to flee. When we look at the present course of events, however, we see that he *is* fearful, and that he *has* fled. His less-than forthright departure, in fact, shows us his lack of confidence in God and His promise, and the resulting trouble in which he finds himself is instructive for us with respect to what happens when we choose to rely on our own wisdom and abilities instead of the wisdom and way of the Lord.

It's nearly 300 miles from Haran to the hill country of Gilead. Jacob, quietly moving about in preparation to leave, quietly going about his clandestine activity in order to slip away without Laban being the wiser for it, has now been on the road for ten days. He's made it to a safe haven — or at least he assumes so. The mountainous region of Gilead has all kinds of nooks and crannies where he can hide out if he finds that he's being pursued by his father-in-law, and he can pick his way through the region in duck-and-cover mode for as long as he needs as he makes his way back toward Canaan. All things considered, Jacob probably thinks this is a good place to be right now. After all, he's a man on the run making decisions on the fly. He needs time to think. He needs time to put together a new game plan. Twenty years have passed since he's been home, and that's got to be weighing on him. He's missed his family, and he's thinking about what the reunion will be like and what he'll need to do to set up house again among his relatives. At the same time there are also things he's not so sure about at this point...notably his brother Esau, who, you might remember, has sworn to kill Jacob if and when the two should meet again. It's very likely that Jacob is turning these and many other things over in his mind right now. His brain is fully occupied. Is Laban on his mind too? Perhaps, but 300 miles in ancient times is a big, big distance to place between yourself and anyone who may be angry with you, and again, ten days have now passed. His escape plan has most likely been successful, right? Wrong. Jacob may have had a three-day head start before Laban got word of his departure, and Jacob may currently have other things on his mind, but one thing in today's text is clear: on this, the tenth day of Jacob's sojourn toward home, Laban overtakes him...and Laban also wastes no time in confronting him.

All the words spoken in today's passage belong to Laban. They're words of anger, words of heartache, words of lament, and words of accusation. They're all spoken with great drama, they're all tinged with menace, and guess what else? They all serve to usher Jacob into a "deer in the headlights" moment if there ever was one. His father-in-law, with his small army of kinfolk, has just overrun him. He can literally see and hear, in face-to-face fashion, the anger he has fomented...see the coming retribution in his father-in-law's eyes and hear the coming recompense in his voice. This is no proud moment for Jacob; it is an incredibly frightening one — perhaps all the more so because in his leaving of Laban, he never expected to get caught.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, only one thing saves Jacob at this point: the dream that Laban had the night before. Laban's dream, wherein the Lord came to him and spoke words of warning regarding his treatment of his son-in-law, transforms this meeting from the serving of a death warrant into a confrontation that, while frightening, is ultimately gentle. But that's not all. Very significantly, this moment is also the beginning, as we'll see over the next several days, of Jacob doing something rather striking: it will be the beginning of Jacob making the choice not to compound a lie, but to tell the truth. Jacob will find his voice...and in finding his voice, he

will finally gain his freedom. It's an all-important step in his journey, and a marked moment on his way to becoming who God created him to be.

I hope you'll make plans to join in next time as we move forward with this passage; there's lots to discuss together, lots to learn, and lots to take to heart as we look to our Lord and follow His leading. Have a great day everyone, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon. Christ's joy and peace to each of you, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and may our Lord's rich blessings be upon each of you today in the name of Christ. Thanks for coming along as we gather for another day in the Scriptures, where right now we find ourselves in the midst of Genesis 31. Before we jump into things today, I want to share a quick word about our time together next week. My daughter, who was married in the summer of 2019, lives with her husband in Ohio. She's been teaching music, drama, band, and choir in a Lutheran school and running a flute studio on the side, and she's living a full and happy life in a little college town not too far outside of Columbus. Aside from a quick two-day meet-up a little over a year ago, I haven't seen her since her wedding — but the opportunity to head up and visit for a whole week just recently presented itself, and I'm going to take it! I'll still be here with you next Monday through Friday, but I'll be sharing some individual, stand-alone sessions with you from our archives that I know will bless you and encourage you each day. I'm in the process of curating them right now, and I'm praying that each one I choose will be helpful to you in your walk with Christ.

If you have your Bible handy, go ahead and turn to the 31st chapter of Genesis now and find your spot at verse 30 as we prepare for our time. Thanks everyone; let's pray.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to our Bibles today with grateful and expectant hearts, knowing that your hand of mercy is upon us and knowing that your face is toward us, not against us. Look upon us through the shed blood of your Son this day. Forgive our sins. Restore our hearts. Renew a right spirit within us. We ask as your beloved children that you would teach us through your Word as we gather to learn and grow. Thank you, Lord God. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we return to a subject that has already mentioned in passing: namely, the fact that when Jacob took his family and left Haran, Rachel took her father's household gods in the process. Now, Laban has realized they're missing, and naturally, he has implicated Jacob. Our focus this session: Rachel's Reasons.

Genesis 31:30-35

(Laban said) 30Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's house. But why did you steal my gods?" 31Jacob answered Laban, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. 32But if you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods. 33So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maidservants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. 34Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing. 35Rachel said to her father, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I'm having my period." So he searched but could not find the household gods.

Have you ever taken something that didn't belong to you? When I was four or five years old, I took a roll of pennies from my parents' dresser top, unwrapped them, and hid them in my piggy bank. (Actually, it was a bunny bank, but you get the picture.) I took that roll of pennies because my older brother, with whom I shared a room, had been teasing me about how much money he had and how little I had. At that age, I couldn't have told you the difference between a penny, a nickel, and a silver dollar. In my mind it was all about quantity, and because I only

had a few coins of my own — and knew about the many coins in my parents' bedroom — I went for them as soon as I had the chance.

Mom and Dad probably never would have missed that one roll of coins among so many on the dresser, but they eventually found out it was gone, thanks, of course, to my brother! The next time we were in our room and he brought up money, I was ready to silence him with my own now-full bank, but the sheer volume of pennies sloshing around inside tipped my brother off to my, um, financial irregularity. In the end I got in trouble, as I should have...but I also ended up getting my first lesson in money management from my folks, which was that particular cloud's silver lining.

Unfortunately, if you're looking for a silver lining in today's reading from God's Word concerning Rachel and anything she might have learned in the aftermath of taking her father's household idols, you'll be hard pressed to find one. Rachel, as we've just read together, never gives herself up. She never admits to the crime. Instead, true her family's hallmark character trait, she employs deceit to derail her father's investigation of the theft. Here is a woman who has taken what does not belong to her. Here is a woman who has hidden her contraband to keep it from being discovered. Here also is a woman whose act of hiding what she has stolen is extremely risky business: her husband has just pledged death to anyone in the family who's found to have the stolen goods, because he has no idea she's taken them.

Genesis doesn't explain why Rachel steals these household gods. Some theologians note the possibility that they were made of valuable materials like precious metal, something that could be melted down and used for financial gain later on. It's also possible, of course, that Rachel actually believes in the power of the images; that she takes them because they serve as talismans or good-luck charms for her. Here are a few other plausible theories put forth by scholars through the years:

Perhaps Rachel took the idols because she didn't want her father to use them as tools of divination against Jacob and his household as they fled. She may have believed that his worship of the idols might help him to catch them.

Since idols such as these were often used as deeds to property in ancient times, perhaps Rachel thought that by taking them, she was also taking whatever inheritance might be left to Laban's children.

Perhaps Rachel took the idols for a more pedestrian reason: to simply get back at her father, whom she felt had mistreated her, her husband, and her whole family through the years. This is what's known as the "spite theory."

Finally, some Jewish traditions put Rachel in a positive light here and ascribe her actions as noble. They say that Rachel took the household gods with her because she wanted to keep her father Laban from idolatry.

That last theory seems the least likely of the bunch because of what we already know about Rachel, her life, and the way she lives it. In fact, from both the text and the context here, it appears that the most probable reason that Rachel took these gods was opposite of what the "noble woman" theory proposes: that she took them because she continued to hold to the superstitions and pagan spiritual practices that had long been embraced by her father's family.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, whatever it was that went through Rachel's mind and prompted her to abscond with her father's idols, by doing so she put both herself and her

entire family in grave danger. By all accounts, she didn't count the cost: rather, she went after those gods as soon as she had the chance, and it appears that she didn't consider what would happen should her father find them missing. Did her quick thinking and deceitful ways outwit her dad? Yes. Her continued possession of the idols in the aftermath of this incident, however, leads to some troubling implications and troubling conclusions...conclusions that we'll discuss when we come together again next time.

Thanks again for being here today everyone; do make plans to join in tomorrow so we can keep at this portion of the text. God's peace, and have a terrific day!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and blessings to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a privilege to be with you today as we gather around God's Word, and as we do that today we'll be continuing in the 31st chapter of Genesis and having another look at Laban's household idols. I'm glad you're here; Let's pray as we prepare for our time together.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, We thank you today for who you are and what you've done for us through your life, death, and resurrection. We have no words to express how grateful we are. We thank you. We worship you. We humbly bow before you. In the time we have over these next few minutes, we ask that you bless our study time in your Word. Help us through it to learn and grow in faith toward you, but more important, help us to understand in ever growing fashion your great faithfulness to us. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've spent some time talking about Rachel and the various reasons she may have taken her father's household gods when she left her homeland. When we left off, however, we did so on a bit of an uncomfortable note: there's no indication that she ever gave them up. The implications of that are troubling, and it opens the door to a larger question that we need to ask of ourselves. Our focus this session: household gods of the modern age.

Genesis 31:30

(Laban said to Jacob,) 30Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's house. But why did you steal my gods?"

Hideyoshi, a Japanese warlord who ruled over Japan in the late 1500s, commissioned a colossal statue of Buddha for a shrine in Kyoto. It took 50,000 men five years to build, but the work had scarcely been completed when the earthquake of 1596 brought the roof of the shrine crashing down and wrecked the statue. In a rage Hideyoshi shot an arrow at the fallen colossus. "I put you here at great expense," he shouted, "and you can't even look after your own temple!"

What truth he spoke in his great moment of frustration...ironically, a truth more profound than he with his pagan worldview could even recognize. So it is with the gods that people create: they are often given honor and worshiped at the altar of sacrifice, but everything they stand for and purportedly uphold ultimately collapses around them, and they can only let you down in the end.

Since the earliest of times, humanity has always wanted a physical god that it could touch and see. The imaginary gods and goddesses of ancient mythology are symptoms of that desire. Idols we can make, idols we can hold in our hands, feel more manageable to us. We feel like we can understand and control a god we can hold. And that, of course, is why we're so adept at creating gods in the first place: it makes for an easy, satisfying, and self-serving religious experience. But things we create in order to worship, things we create to give us power in, through, and over our devotion, have no real power at all. As the Bible says, there is only One God. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Any other kind of worship is idolatry — and having just followed Rachel's daring and deceitful ploy to hide and keep her father's household idols for herself, today is a good day to say a brief word about our own penchant for idolatry in life.

The First Commandment

You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

The Second Commandment

You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

It's easy to say, and it would seem, at first glance, that in saying what I'm about to say I'm being rhetorical...but I'm not being rhetorical in the least:

Idols of any kind are not to be part of any Christian's life in any form.

In an almost silly and very elementary sense, this includes many things that are obvious. Any image or statue used as a good-luck charm, for example, is actually an example of a modern-day household god. That would extend to something seemingly innocent, like a statue of St. Joseph buried in the front yard in order to try and sell a house or an image of St. Christopher used to protect travelers in a car. Each one, used in that manner, is really nothing less than a household idol being used to curry divine — little d — favor. The use of crystals or tarot cards, the worship of angels, and other kinds of New Age-related religious practices are also forms of divination and idol worship. They're throwbacks to paganism and gnostic heresy that shouldn't be part of a Christian's life.

Again, Scripture is clear that there's only one God and that He alone is to be worshiped and served. We get that, and we can also readily observe the coarse and blatant examples of idol worship that surround us today. But the coarse and blatant isn't generally what trips us up or pulls us in, is it. Though we don't, per se, face the same pantheon of false gods that the Israelites did, and though much of what we face today is easily identifiable and relatively easy to stay away from, we *do* face pressures from a pantheon of false *values* in the world today, and there's where the danger is. Why? Because those values are things that, almost without our realizing it, can quickly transform into the objects of our worship. And when that happens, they become gods to us.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, there is no accusation here — only sensitization and the invitation for reflection.

What is the focus of our affections, our efforts, and our attention in life? Where does the majority of our time go? On what do we spend the greatest amount of our resources? I ask myself questions like that often, and when I do, the answers I give sometimes give me pause. Am I part of the cult of conspicuous consumption? Am I caught up in the accumulation game? Are money, sex, and power in their various forms ruling my heart in any way? Is my body serving as the temple of the Holy Spirit or as a monument to self? For so many of us, these are where the modern idols are. And though it's true that there's nothing new under the sun, the contemporary expressions of these ancient foibles are what often begin to fester within us, and in time they sidle into, sully, and put a squeeze play on our worship of the One true God, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

St. Augustine said that idolatry is worshiping anything that ought to be used, or using that which ought to be worshiped. I think he had it right. And my prayer today, for me and for each of you, is that God will grant us His loving mercy, His gentle correction, and His times of refreshing as we seek by His Spirit to reverse that tendency in our hearts. Grace to you in our

Lord Jesus, everyone, and I'll see you again tomorrow to continue. Take care, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS, one final day of the week that sees us coming together as God's people redeemed in Christ to celebrate His love and mercy and to learn from His Word. It's great to have you along for the next few minutes as we go to the Scriptures, and as we do that today, we'll be continuing our time in the 31st chapter of Genesis. Let's pray as we begin:

Prayer

Almighty God, as we open the Scriptures today we ask that you, by your Spirit, would go before us; that you would light the way, open our hearts and minds, and accomplish through your Word all that you have purposed for us. We know that this is your good and gracious will, and so we ask these things with joy and confidence in the name of our risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, after being confronted by Laban over his swift and unannounced departure from him in Haran, Jacob's anger finally boils to the surface, and he responds to Laban's confrontation with a confrontation of his own. Our focus this session: Jacob finds his voice.

Genesis 31:36-42

36Jacob was angry and took Laban to task. "What is my crime?" he asked Laban. "What sin have I committed that you hunt me down? 37Now that you have searched through all my goods, what have you found that belongs to your household? Put it here in front of your relatives and mine, and let them judge between the two of us. 38"I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. 39I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. 40This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. 41It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times. 42If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you."

Are you a person who in the heat of battle, in the thick of a fight, in the midst of a disagreement, can never find the right words to say in the moment...but then later, after all is said and done and the point is moot, come up with the speech of the ages to champion your position and defend your honor? I've had a few of those episodes over the years, and most of my friends have as well. Sometimes when we get together we talk about those times, and though we chuckle about it and commiserate with one another now, the truth is that we didn't feel so good in the immediate aftermath of our defeat.

Because so many of us have been in that position at least once or twice in life, we can empathize with others who have gone through the same. But something we especially love to do is celebrate and congratulate when someone actually wins...when in the middle of being dressed down, someone has grabbed the opportunity to step up and vindicate themselves. It's one of the most classic vicarious feel-good experiences around: we all rejoice when the little guy "sticks it to the man" and gets a victory.

As we come to God's Word today and find ourselves returning to the midst of a confrontation between Laban and Jacob, Laban has been coming down hard on his son-in-law with everything from guilt trips to threats for leaving him the way that he did. He's also started to

turn up the heat on the fear and manipulation front, and we can see that he's angling to pull Jacob back into his clutches and keep him in servitude. Suddenly, however, something marvelous happens. Something atypical occurs. Jacob, hearing his father-in-law's accusations and weighing them against the twenty years he's been under the man's thumb, finally gets his back up. He rebukes Laban, and in true "speech of the ages" fashion Jacob champions his position, defends his honor, and sticks it to the man who has been the bane of his existence for the better part of two decades. This is a monologue he's probably been composing and practicing in his head for a long, long time, and as it finally spills out in a giant wave of righteous indignation, topped off with a healthy dose of counter-accusations regarding Laban's behavior toward him through the years, Jacob at last gets his victory. Let the congratulations and celebrations begin, right? Right!

But hold on. Before you chortle too loudly or identify too readily with Jacob in this, his swaggering moment of triumph, there's something else I want you to see...something we all need to see. Though the emotion here is understandable, and though our wanting to cheer Jacob on as he finally stands up to his father-in-law is understandable as well, there's actually a much greater reason to cheer today. Maybe it's a realization that has been growing over time, or perhaps it's something that has only just now, in this moment, burst into his consciousness because of the weight of what's happening. But in today's reading, in a way that heretofore Jacob has not done, he gives explicit credit to Almighty God for protecting him against Laban's schemes. In verse 42, Jacob says,

If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.

Now — has Jacob mentioned God before? Yes, in passing. Has Jacob had interaction with God before? Yes, but not in a way that has convinced him of the Lord's power, presence, or provision in his life. Jacob has, to this point, considered himself a self-made man, and has in no uncertain manner acted as such. While God is certainly real to him in peripheral kind of way, Jacob hasn't given much indication that he's interested in anything beyond that. But now, something has changed...or, at least, is changing. It started with the Lord telling him to leave Haran and go back to Canaan. It started with the Lord saying to Jacob, "I will be with you." These are echoes of the Covenant Promise. God, Jacob is beginning to realize, is acting as his liberator. God, Jacob is beginning to realize, is more than just an abstract, disembodied deity out there somewhere that his father and grandfather were always talking about. Perhaps God is more significant than he thought. Perhaps there's actually something to this God of Abraham and Fear of Isaac. Perhaps this God is also *his* God...the God of Jacob. Is Jacob all the way there yet? No. But something is happening. A turning of the heart is beginning. And though it will still be some time before we see additional evidence of transformation in Jacob's life, *this* moment in time is an important one to mark. Here, Jacob is ascribing honor and power to the God of the universe and proclaiming His glory to another person...in a way that he never has before. God, Jacob realizes, has done this thing.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, this moment in Jacob's life reminds me of the well-known story about John III, king of Poland in the late 17th century. He's best remembered as the man who saved central Europe from invading armies of the Turks in 1683. With the Turks at the walls of Vienna, John led a charge that broke the siege. His rescue of Vienna is considered one of the greatest and most decisive battles in European history. In announcing his great victory at the end of that campaign, do you know what John did? He paraphrased the famous words of Caesar and said, simply, "I came; I saw; *God conquered.*" In a very real way, Jacob has just

come to the same conclusion regarding his own long-running campaign....and it's a sign of many changes to come!

God's rich peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, everyone; I pray you'll be blessed as you think on these things. Take care, have a terrific weekend, and I'll see you again come Monday.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks for being here as we take time to open our Bibles together as Christ's holy and dearly loved people. I pray that you're finding peace today as you spend time meditating on God's Word; the Lord is always with us in the opening of the Scriptures, and as we go back to Genesis 31 today after a couple of weeks in the Psalms, I know His blessing is upon us as well. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this time to be quiet, to rid ourselves of distractions, and to focus on you and your Word. We ask that by it you would teach us and transform us, and that through it you would also encourage and sustain us. We so need you in our lives, and we are truly grateful for your presence with us right now. May your name be glorified in all things, Lord. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, things are beginning to wind down in Jacob's longstanding and long-suffering relationship with his father-in-law, Laban. At the same time, things are beginning to ramp up in a different area of Jacob's life, and we see yet another hint of that in today's reading. Our focus this session: a most significant witness.

Genesis 31:43-50

43Laban answered Jacob, "The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne? 44Come now, let's make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us." 45So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46He said to his relatives, "Gather some stones." So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they ate there by the heap. 47Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed. 48Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed. 49It was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. 50If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me."

When I left California, my lifelong home, for a new life in a new place, one of the first things I did after I got the lay of the land on my new property was to set aside a special place in the woods to mark and memorialize the change. It was a plan I'd had from the beginning...from when I first started dreaming about living in the countryside. Because of who I am, and more importantly because of Who I belong to, that special place ultimately took the form of a worship space. My memorialization, as it turned out, was really more of a dedication. There in the woods, I built an altar to the Lord. There in the woods, in a clearing that I underplanted with spring bulbs and where I set up benches for for reading, for praying, and for just being quiet, I bowed down one warm fall day and made both an affirmation and a declaration. First, I affirmed the truth of Scripture: all that I was and all that I had belonged to Almighty God. Second, and in light of that, I declared myself a servant of His will for the whole of my life, whatever it might be and wherever it might take me. One of my most common prayers in those days was simply, "Show me, Lord."

Since that day in the woods, there have been some high points, some low points, and a lot of in between. I've spent time in Missouri, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, and now back in Georgia again, more places than I ever expected to be for the rest of my life. There have been victories and defeats, times in the wilderness and times in the thick of all that makes the world go 'round. But more than anything else? All that I am and all that I have still belongs to Almighty God. And in light of that, I'm still doggedly, by hook or by crook — but mostly by God's grace

— a servant of His will, whatever it might be and wherever it might take me. That altar in the woods of the Missouri Ozarks, even though I've moved on from there, remains an abiding witness to that fact. These days, as much as I ever have, I'm still praying, "Show me, Lord."

The reason I bring up that marked moment in my life — a moment that seems like a lifetime ago and yet in many ways remains as fresh as the morning dew — is that it's not unique. People of every background and from every place on the planet have been marking significant life moments in similar ways since time immemorial. And as we come back to God's Word today in the book of Genesis and continue on with the exchange between Laban and Jacob in the aftermath of Jacob's exit from Laban's employ and influence, I'd like to make two very important observations about the moment being marked between them.

It's plain to see, of course, what has precipitated this event. As we've followed the long (and as we mentioned before, long-suffering) relationship between Jacob and his father-in-law, things have been anything but rosy between the two of them. They've taken turns through the years deceiving and dumping on one another, and while Jacob has certainly engaged in more than his fair share of shenanigans, Laban has clearly been the more opportunistic and dishonorable of the two. Now, at the direction of the Lord, Jacob has left Laban to return to Canaan, and not unexpectedly, Laban has angrily pursued him as he sees what has been the main source of his prosperity ride off into the sunset.

After a fraught dialogue between the two that ends in an impasse, Laban proposes a solution to the conflict at hand, and what is it? A covenant. Not one of those happy, blessed agreements that we read of so often in Scripture; no, this will be a covenant of witness, an agreement between two disagreeing parties that promises bad things to the other should said covenant be violated. The marker of this agreement? Two pillars of stone, one made by each party. In Laban's native Aramaic this is a *Jegar Sahadutha*, and in Jacob's Hebrew tongue it's a *Galeed*. Each word means approximately the same thing: "Witness Heap." By the marker of these stones in this particular place, Laban and Jacob are agreeing on the boundaries not only of their territories, but of their future relationship, such as it will be. It's a line of demarcation, and the idea is that neither dare transgress the agreed upon parameters lest they bring judgment and destruction upon themselves and their families.

Here, though, is where things get interesting, and here is where a frankly stunning move is made by Jacob. It may seem small and insignificant at first glance, but in truth it's a huge signpost of a huge shift happening in Jacob's life. In ancient times, a covenant marker such as the one we have here in the text was always made in conjunction with the religious beliefs of those making it. In other words, people always brought their particular god into the mix as part of their pledge. They were keen to bring whatever power they believed their deity had into the midst of whatever agreement they might be making, because having a god on their side (actually, it was usually *gods*, plural) could only be a good thing, right? So, at least went the thinking...

...And so, incidentally, we see this practice come into play in today's reading. Not surprisingly, Laban and his kinfolk reflect their pagan beliefs, and they do so through the gathering of the many stones they use to assemble their covenantal pillar. That plurality of stones corresponds with the plurality of their idols. In essence, they're endeavoring to bring the full weight of their cultic system to bear on the contract at hand, and at the same time they're also attempting to up the intimidation factor as they show off their idea of power in numbers.

Wrapping Up

But what about Jacob? What does he do? How does he represent his own religious beliefs in this most important moment? Now remember: here is a man who for the majority of his life has

held any allegiance to God at arm's length. Moreover, here is a man who has spent the majority of his adult life living among pagans. Finally, here is a man whose own wives have been worshippers of idols. Jacob is a man who's lived a life steeped in all kinds of things that would lead a lot of us astray simply by immersion, gradual osmosis, and the passage of time. Yet as we wrap things up for the day, you read it just as plainly as I did: Jacob gathers just one stone. One stone as a pillar. One stone reflecting his belief in One God...the One true God. The God of His father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham, and yes, the One true God he now seems willing to put up against any assemblage of idols imaginable, no matter how great they are in number.

What's happening here? Jacob is making both an affirmation and a declaration. All that he is and all that he has belongs to Almighty God, and in light of that, he is thus declaring himself a servant of God's will for the remainder of his life, whatever it might be and wherever it might take him. Let's be clear: Jacob is no saint. He still has many high points, a few low points, and a lot of in between seasons to go through before his time in the world comes to an end. There will be victories and defeats, more time in the wilderness, and even a little time in the thick of all that makes the world go 'round. Nonetheless, this event in today's passage is a watershed moment, and why? Because this heretofore spiritually wayward individual is publicly identifying not just who he is, but Whose he is. And that will make all the difference in the end.

Thanks for being here today as we've gotten back to our time in Genesis, everyone. I'm looking forward to a great week, and I hope you'll make plans to be here next time as we continue. God's peace, have a great day, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks for joining in today as we continue to walk through God's Word together. I'm glad you're here as we move further into our study week, where today finds us finishing our time in Genesis 31. Take a moment, turn there in your Bible, and join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this special moment in time – a moment where we have the opportunity to dedicate ourselves to the study of your Word and bring it to bear it to our lives. We ask that you would mercifully grant us the ability to understand what we read, and that you would help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's in His name that we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the long-running relationship between Jacob and Laban finally comes to an end. Our focus this session: separation...in more ways than one.

Genesis 31:51-55

51Laban also said to Jacob, "Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. 52This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me. 53May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob took an oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac. 54He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there. 55Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.

There are people I've been deeply privileged to know through the years whose stories of major life change have always stayed with me. They stay with me not because of the mere fact that a change took place, but because the change that took place — whether it happened quickly or over time — was both profound and permanent.

The people I'm thinking of right now are folks who have made the hard choice to let something go...who have closed a door that needed to be closed...who have walked away from a situation that, while comfortable and familiar and maybe even comforting in some ways, was simply wrong. For some, those decisions were made quickly and cleanly. For others, those decisions were made and reneged on over and over and over again over a long period of time because the act of separating was so hard and had so much life tangled up in the messiness of the circumstances. The bottom line, however? When that separation was finally complete, life was different, and for the better. Life, in fact, was never the same again. The old really had gone, and it left room for a beautiful kind of new to take its place.

As we come to God's Word here at the end of Genesis 31, we happen to be looking in on precisely that kind of separation: the long longed-for separation of Jacob and his family from the manipulative and worldly ways of his father in-law, Laban. We don't really need to go through the nuts and bolts of the passage today because it's straight forward and frankly, more of the same posturing, veiled threats, and tough talk toward Jacob that we saw last time as the details of the covenant between them are hammered out. What we do need to do, just briefly, is underscore the importance of this moment in Jacob's life, and to do that, we need to start by mentioning one more thing about Laban.

Something very telling in today's passage is that this is the last record we have of Laban...not just here in Genesis, but in the entire Bible. After this parting scene, we never hear from him or

of him again. This is by Divine design. God is showing us that all which Laban stood for, all for which he worked, and all that he worshipped in life was ultimately for naught. It was an exercise in vanity, a pursuit after the wind. Laban, in essence, was a man of the world rather than a man of God, and while the account of his life as written in Scripture certainly bears that out, the manner in which he is written out of Scripture here at the end of Genesis 31 is confirmation thereof. We don't know what life was like for him after he went back home. We don't know how he fared. We don't know how he died. We really don't know anything other than this: as Laban exits the scene, he leaves empty, defeated, and on the wrong side of Almighty God — and going forward, he is no more.

How does Jacob fit into this narrative? The kind of life that Laban lived, the self-serving purpose on which he based his existence, and the empty and powerless pagan idols which he worshipped were all influences in Jacob's life. For 20 years he was exposed to them, and to a certain degree lived them out himself. Those influences were hindrances to who God had created Jacob to be and roadblocks to the plan that God had for Jacob's life. Because of that, they were all things Jacob needed to walk away from in order to be free. It was not merely Laban from whom Jacob needed to separate; it was Laban's world view. With what we see occurring in today's reading, that separation is finally coming about.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, has this been an easy time for Jacob? Of course not. Not only has Laban been a thorn in his side for 20+ years, he's had plenty of his own demons to deal with along the way. The bottom line, however? With this separation from his father-in-law now finally complete, life is going to be different, and for the better. Life, in fact, is never going to be the same again. This is a moment in time where we see that for Jacob, the old really has gone, and it has left room for a beautiful kind of new to take its place. We're going to start seeing that new in our very next session, so make sure you plan to join in as we discover it together!

Thanks for your time today everyone; God bless you richly in Christ, and I'll see you again real soon. Take care, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus. Thanks for being here today for our study time in God's Word; I pray that you'll be richly blessed in these next few moments as we introduce a new chapter in Genesis, one where we'll be seeing Jacob and his faith, but especially God's faithfulness on the table as we continue with the text. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, have mercy on your children today. We are in need of your ministering presence in our lives. Thank you for your promise to be with us always and that you will never leave us or forsake us. We especially ask that you would draw near to us now as we study your Word. Use it to transform us by the renewing of our minds. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, following the departure of Laban back to his home in Haran, Jacob also continues on his way, resuming his journey toward Canaan. What awaits him there? That's our focus this session.

Genesis 32:1a

Jacob also went on his way.

Have you ever taken a step into the unknown? Have you ever walked toward a new and still unfolding future not sure of what awaited you? Have you ever moved forward in life with no safety net, with nothing in the rearview mirror to fall back on because you've truly left it behind? If you've done that, then you know how frightening it can be. You also know, however, how affirming and exhilarating and hopeful it can be at the same time. That's especially the case if your walk forward comes as a result of separating yourself from something that enslaved you.

Maybe you took your first step toward sobriety after years of addiction and substance abuse. Incredibly courageous. Incredibly scary. Incredibly awesome.

Maybe you were finally honest with yourself about the dead-end job that was sucking the life out of you, and you quit to follow your passion and start your own business. How brave. How nerve-racking. How wonderfully exciting.

Everyone knows that if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten. It's only when you break the chains of your past and chart a new course forward that you find your way to a place of renewal and restoration...to a place of rebirth. It's the act of moving on to a new camp. And while that kind of journey is never an easy one, it's always a journey worthwhile.

That observation, of course, can easily be turned into a platitude. It can be overused and come off as generic and cliché, something that can be found in almost every self-help book ever written. But truth be told, it doesn't have to be. Moreover, when the observation regarding our need to leave behind the burden of the old in order to embrace the blessing of the new is made in the context of our lives as people of faith, there's nothing cliché about it. It's the meat and potatoes of what defines us as God's people in Christ, and as we all know, the place it all starts is with Christ Himself. What does Scripture say? If anyone is *in Christ*, he is, she is, a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come. It's the beautiful act of God calling us out of darkness and into the marvelous light of Jesus His Son — a call to leave an old camp for a new one — that brings us new life. And guess what? It's also what sets us on a lifelong journey of growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ as we live under His mercy.

Part of growing in that grace and knowledge is learning to know when we're slinking back toward darkness again. Part of growing in grace and knowledge is understanding that the act of slinking back is part of our DNA as sinful human beings; that's it's always going to be the inclination of our hearts as long as we live, this side of eternity. Therefore, part of growing in grace and knowledge is also this: endeavoring day by day, as baptized children of God, in the Lord's strength, to walk away from the darkness and walk in the light, just as He is in the light. As the apostle John said in his first letter,

"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

Wrapping Up

As we prepare to enter a new chapter in God's Word, I want to sensitize you to the fact that Genesis 32 will also be introducing us to a new chapter in Jacob's life. Why? Because God has called Jacob out of the darkness of his old life and back into the light of His holy promises. In fact, Jacob, freshly separated from his old life, is about to encounter that which is staggeringly holy and eye-opening...that which will bring renewal and restoration, and yes, rebirth to his heart in a way that he never imagined. God is bringing Jacob into a new camp. And as we wrap things up for the day, the final remark I'll make is in the form of a question:

What about you?

God bless you richly in our Lord Jesus as you consider that; we'll have a lot to talk about on that topic when we come back tomorrow and get into things. I hope you'll make plans to join in, because I know you'll be strengthened and encouraged in your faith as a result. Have a great day everyone, and I'll look forward to seeing you then. Take care!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for joining in for our daily time in the Scriptures; I hope the sessions we've been doing in this portion of Genesis have proved to be fruitful for you in your walk with the Lord, and my prayer is that God through His Word is continually speaking to your heart and bringing transformation into your life through the renewing of your mind. Today we're back in the beginning verses of Genesis 32, so let's pray as we go back to the text.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have been gracious and kind to us, loving and compassionate, slow to anger and quick to forgive and restore. We thank you for your all-encompassing mercy in our lives, and as we come before you this day we do so mindful of our sin, mindful of the fact that we are but dust, mindful that we are deserving only of temporal and eternal punishment. But we speak to you in faith today, sure of your willingness to forgive, sure of the atonement made for our sins through your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Look upon us according to His perfect sacrifice, and speak your Word into our hearts and minds to strengthen and restore us. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, Jacob, having begun his final journey home to Canaan, doesn't get very far before he encounters an astounding sight...a sight that serves as a powerful reminder for us concerning one of the Lord's great but often unrealized gifts to His people. Our focus this session: the angels of God.

Genesis 32:1-2

Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim.

One of the deeply formative periods in my life as a young person was the time I spent as a summer counselor at one of my denomination's Christian camps, specifically Arrowhead Lutheran Camp in the mountains of southern California. My first season there was just after my freshman year of college, and it was one where my faith was still developing as a young adult. Some great seeds were planted in me that summer. My second summer season was just after my senior year of college, and it turned out to be a landmark time, a time that still informs what I do today. I can't explain or quantify the impact of those three or four months other than to say that my faith grew and began to mature in a way that I'd never before experienced. God's Word became like a fire to me. It burned white hot in my heart and it consumed me as quickly as I could consume it. I developed a passion for service that summer, a passion which continues, and I'll always remember those days as days of great change. For me, Arrowhead Lutheran Camp was in many ways not just my camp, but the camp of God. He met me there, changed me there, and began to equip me there for my life's work.

As we return to God's Word today and follow Jacob's first footsteps back toward the Promised Land after his separation from Laban, let's for the moment keep things brief and to the point. While we'll return to these verses next time and unpack them in detail, for now let's simply review the facts.

The main event? Jacob, traveling homeward, encounters his own camp of God. As he sojourns, doubtless wondering what the future holds for him back at the home he left some twenty years ago, all at once the Lord's angels meet him along the way. Shocked by what he sees, he suddenly realizes that far from being alone in this endeavor, he's surrounded by the

ministering messengers of Almighty God. Far from hoofing it on his own, God has gone before him and has also sent him help.

Do we know exactly why God causes Jacob to see this great encampment? No — but we can certainly surmise from what's come before that it's meant to be a faith-strengthening affirmation, a moment of equipping, and a sign of divine favor and blessing. Remember: not many days ago God appeared to Jacob with the promise that He would be with him as he left Laban and returned to Canaan. This moment thus serves as a powerful reminder that He's being true to His word. A promise from God is a promise kept, and with the blessing of that assurance, Jacob can now move forward and face some truly uncertain times with the confidence that the Lord is by his side.

Wrapping Up

That's actually going to do it for us today, and why? Because as we wrap things up, I want to leave off with you and I beginning to think about the implications of this scene...not just in Jacob's life, not just in Old Testament history, but in our own story. Do we need to talk more about angels? Yes, and we will. Do we need to learn what the word *Mahanaim* means? Yes, and we'll talk about that too. More than anything, however, what needs to be occupying our time in the days ahead is this whole idea of the Lord's presence, the Lord's promises, and the Lord's faithfulness in keeping His word. What needs to be occupying our time in the days to come is the consideration of the profound nature of the Lord's goodness in sending help to His people in their time of need. What we need to be thinking about as we go through this portion of Scripture is the fact that the God who promised to be with Jacob as he stepped forward into a new life is the same God who has said to us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." This great and mighty God is our God. His promises are still true. And His goodness to us as His redeemed in Christ knows no bounds. I pray you'll be comforted and encouraged by that today, and I hope you'll come along next time as we start building on these foundational truths. You'll be blessed as you do!

Thanks, everyone; have a terrific weekend, and God-willing, I'll see you again next week to continue. God's peace, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! God's peace to each of you in Christ, and thanks for your presence today as we take some time to open God's Word together. If you've been studying along with us over the past couple of months, then you know we're in the Old Testament book of Genesis right now, and in this session we'll be going back to Genesis 32 to see how Jacob is faring as he heads home from Haran to Canaan. Let's pray as we go to the Scriptures, shall we?

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day and this time together in your Word, we ask that you would fix it deeply into our hearts and cause it to do that which you desire within us. We place ourselves before you with a quiet confidence in this moment because we know what a great privilege it is to open the Scriptures and learn from you. Bless this time, we pray, in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming to our last bit of introduction with respect to Genesis 32. Jacob is heading home to Canaan after leaving Laban, but in truth, he's heading into the great unknown at the same time. A lot has changed in 20 years, and there's more than a little uncertainty ahead of him as he ventures back to his homeland. Our focus this session? Strength for the journey.

Genesis 32:1-2

Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim.

We call it Vanuatu today, but in the 1850s, John Paton — a missionary to what was then known as the New Hebrides Islands — encountered a night there that he would never forget. Hostile, cannibalistic natives had surrounded his mission's headquarters, intent on driving him and his wife out of their home and killing them. The couple prayed through the entire evening, and when daylight finally came, their attackers were gone. A year later, the chief of the tribe that had ambushed them became a Christian, and Paton, hosting him one evening in his home, brought up the night of attack and asked about it.

The story the chief told him has become so well known in church circles around the world that many of you already know what I'm about to say. As they discussed the events surrounding that night, The chief suddenly asked, "Who were all those men you had with you there at headquarters that evening?" Paton was puzzled and said that it was only he and his wife who had been there. The chief, however, insisted that he and his warriors had seen hundreds of big men with shining garments and swords circling the mission. It was so frightening that the natives were afraid to advance, and so quite simply, they didn't. Instead, they turned around and fled for their lives into the darkness of the jungle.

That night in the New Hebrides, a *mahanaim* was in place...a double camp. That's what the word means: "two camps." In other words, it wasn't just Paton and his wife who were there in the island wilderness...it was Paton, his wife, and a great host of the Lord's angels who had been sent to protect them.

Here in Genesis 32 as Jacob steps into a new life away from the worldliness of his father-in-law and heads, at God's call, back to Canaan and in a very literal way back to God's promises and God's plans for his life, it's in many ways a fresh start for him. He can't know it yet, but the rest of his life, which will still be filled with its share of high jinx and high drama, will also be filled with high calling and high purpose. But let's get back to the "he can't know it" phrase for a

moment: Jacob can't know about these things, can't think about these things, can't focus on these things, because he has other matters on his mind at present. It's been over 20 years now since he's been home. Twenty years since he's seen his family. But more specifically, it's been twenty years since his mother arranged his hasty exit away from the family so that he wouldn't be killed by his brother after stealing his birthright — remember that little episode? As Jacob heads toward home, he's doing so in obedience to the Lord, but he's also doing so with anxiety and trepidation in his heart because of what he so messily left behind all those years ago. The steps he's taking are steps of faith, but it's a fearful faith as he faces the great unknown of how he'll fare when he finally faces his past.

It's as he's in that state, taking his first uncertain steps toward all I just mentioned, that Jacob is met by the angels of God. It's a *mahanaim* — a double camp. In other words, it's not just Jacob setting out on this journey, but also a great host of the Lord's angels who have been sent to protect him and encourage his flagging heart. God, who has already appeared to Jacob and called him home to Canaan, is now reassuring Jacob that what He said, He meant; that what He promised, He will do. God has promised His presence, His protection, and His ongoing blessing to Jacob, and Jacob's extraordinary encounter with these heavenly servants is a Divine accent mark to those promises, a reminder that yes, all is well and on track.

As we talk about these things, this is a good time for us to remember one of the primary activities of angels. First and foremost, of course, they serve and worship God. They always behold His holy face. But angels also exist to serve God's purposes in the world, and so in many ways they are also God's messengers...in fact, that's what the Greek word for "angel" means. Though higher beings than us in a sense, they've been ordained by God to be our servants. They serve us even as they served Jesus. God commands them concerning us. They're ministering spirits sent to help us and to protect us. In the great unseen spiritual realm, they even do battle against the enemy, and the list goes on and on. Essentially, whatever God gives them to do, they do — and that includes things He gives them to do for our sake.

Why bring that up in light of today's passage? Because that which we see happening with Jacob here in Genesis 32 as he launches into an uncertain and frightening future is also something that happens with us as the people of God in Christ. We can know be confident in light of Scripture that God sends His angels to minister to us at various times in our lives just as He sent them to Jacob. Do we see them, as Jacob does in the passage we've just read? Though it's very rare, some people have. Seeing them or not seeing them, however, is not the issue; the issue is whether they are there, and whether they are doing that which God has called them to do on our behalf. To that we can say unabashedly and with great confidence say *Yes; yes and forever yes!*

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Charles Haddon Spurgeon had great insight and spoke with great wisdom concerning this issue. He wrote, "I do not ask that you may see angels: still, if it can be, so be it. But what is it, after all, to see an angel? Is not the fact of God's presence better than the sight of the best of His creatures?" That, of course, is the real point in all of this, both for Jacob in his present circumstances and for you and me in our circumstances. God is with us. And God, who has already called us to Himself and is leading us home to the Great Canaan, the Promised Land called Heaven, reassures us in many ways along our journey — including through the sending of His ministering spirits on our behalf — that what He has said to us, He means; that what He promised, He will do. God has promised His presence, His protection, and His ongoing blessing to us in Christ. His sending of heavenly servants to help us in uncertain and frightening times in life, and in other times as well, is a Divine accent mark to those promises, a reminder that yes, all is well and on track. As we look at the world around us, and perhaps as we look at the world within us that no one else sees, those are especially

encouraging and comforting things to remember. Our Almighty God is with us. He has gone, and is going, before us. Along the way, He will never leave us. And in the end, He will bring us home.

Have a great day everyone; I'll see you again next time, where we'll keep following Jacob's journey and keep learning more about our own. God's peace to you in our Lord Jesus, and take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and thank you for being here today as we take time to open our Bibles together as God's people. The Lord is always here with us as we go to His Word and seek His face, so as we go back to Genesis 32 in today's session, let's pray and ask His blessing on our study time.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this time to focus on you and your Word. We ask that by it you would teach us and transform us, and that through it you would also encourage and sustain us. We do so need you in our lives, and we are truly grateful for your presence with us right now. May your name be glorified in all things! In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, having talked last time about the uncertainty and uneasiness accompanying Jacob as he takes his first steps toward home, now we see the degree to which that uncertainty and uneasiness is affecting him. Our focus this session: Calculated planning, frantic pandering...or both?

Genesis 32:3-6

3Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4He instructed them: "This is what you are to say to my master Esau: 'Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. 5I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, menservants and maidservants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.'" 6When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

Here's a great book for you: *Nothing to Fear* by Fraser Kent. It's entertaining, it's educational, and it's got a big dose of little bits of trivia about fear that will serve you well at parties and family gatherings. Here's a sampling:

Peladophobia: fear of baldness and bald people. Aerophobia: fear of drafts. Porphyrophobia: fear of the color purple. Chaetophobia: fear of hairy people. Levophobia: fear of objects on the left side of the body. Dextrophobia: fear of objects on the right side of the body. Auroraphobia: fear of the northern lights. Calyprophobia: fear of obscure meanings. Thalassophobia: fear of being seated. Stabisbasiphobia: fear of standing and walking. Odontophobia: fear of teeth. Graphophobia: fear of writing. Phobophobia: fear of being afraid.

What are you afraid of? Big things or little, whatever the object might be, I think we can all agree that fear is a fearsome thing with which to be saddled in life. That said, there are gradations to fear, aren't there. Being scared of spiders — arachnophobia, by the way — is one thing; being afraid of losing your job is quite another. Or there's this: being afraid of family conflict is one thing; being afraid of being killed by a family member is definitely quite another. Every fear, rational or not, is a fearful thing, but some fears arise from legitimate and quantifiable threats — and as we come back to God's Word today, Jacob is a man whose current fear is of precisely that variety: every measurable and knowable thing about his situation points to a bad-news prognosis. Family conflict? The least of his present worries. Becoming the victim of fratricide? Bingo.

The passage before us is, of course, not a surprising one. Jacob's circumstances, seeds that were self-sown over two decades previous, have now grown to maturity. The mama's boy who cheated his brother and got away with it more than once, the conniving deceiver whose sole focus in life has always been about bilking other people out of what's rightfully theirs, Jacob's

past with Esau has finally caught up with him. It's obvious by what we see in the passage that this has been on his mind. He's anticipated it, he's strategized over it, and he's even put a plan in motion to deal with it. Through a humble overture, a healthy dose of groveling, and an attempt to give assurances about the legitimacy of his intentions in returning to Canaan, Jacob even instructs his advance messengers to refer to him as Esau's servant when they deliver his greetings. Though seemingly all quite open-handed and above board, the question at this point is whether those things will be enough. In fact, while it's a little cheeky and backhanded to say it in the way of the old Thanksgiving hymn, it's worthy of our contemplation:

First the blade and then the ear, now the full corn has appeared...

but unfortunately, Jacob hasn't spent much time during the past two decades praying,

Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be.

On the contrary, Jacob has spent most of his life being anything *but* one who strives to be wholesome and pure, and this has been particularly so in the case of his relationship with his brother Esau. So it is that at the moment, it looks as though the harvest Jacob is about to reap might be rather detrimental to his longevity. It looks as if rather than "raising the song of harvest home," he'll be taking it to his grave instead.

As all of this begins, however — and make no mistake, today's passage is truly just the beginning — there's one very important thing for us to note: for perhaps the first time in his life (at least so far as his life is documented for us in Scripture) Jacob is approaching a problem by facing it head on rather than running from it, deflecting it, or attempting to mitigate it through deception. Think about it: In coming home he knows what awaits him, yet still he comes. In making contact with his brother Esau he knows what the outcome may be, yet still he makes contact. At this moment in time, Jacob is facing an elder brother whom he has terribly defrauded, said brother now coming to meet him with 400 of his men, a virtual army. But Jacob, though he will make ready for that meeting as best he can, will not flee. In the days ahead as we go through this chapter of God's Word, we will instead watch Jacob step forward as a man to meet his fate, and he will also do something else: he will place himself in God's hands for whatever the outcome may be.

The old Jacob would have utilized a completely different approach. For one thing, the old Jacob wouldn't have been caught dead admitting to wrongdoing. Likewise, the old Jacob never would have approached anyone in a spirit of humility. The old Jacob would have laughed at the idea of shooting straight when facing a tough situation, and finally, the old Jacob hardly had God in his vocabulary, much less in his heart. Something has changed, or as we said a few days ago, *changing*. Something is growing. Newness is on the horizon. And fear? While it's still there, it's being faced — which is a phenomenal development in the life of a man who's always been more mousey than matter-of-fact.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the shift we see taking place in Jacob's life is powerful to watch...but why? What is it about all of this that grabs hold of us and causes us to lean into it? I think it comes down to this: we're not witnessing Jacob's performance...we're witnessing God's power. We're not observing a man trying to do better in life...we're observing a man being reborn. There's a Potter in this picture whose hands are patiently and purposefully working a lump of clay. And as we strain our eyes and crane our necks to see how it's taking shape, part of the reason is that we can almost see....would like to see...somehow hope to see...ourselves in His hands as well. In our innermost part, such is our desire — because in our innermost part, we realize that such is our deepest need.

When we come back next time to continue, we'll see more clay being thrown, more definition taking place, and more of a shape beginning to emerge. Jacob's life is in process. What it is and what it is yet to be are two very different things...which is something to remember about ourselves as well. God be with you as you consider that truth today, and God-willing, I'll see you soon to unpack this some more. Until then, have a great day, and the joy of the Lord sustain you and be your strength. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, and thanks for coming along today as we take time to open our Bibles together here at the midpoint in our week. As we go back to Genesis 32 in today's session, we're going to begin talking more about the issue of fear. Why? Because fear is a big part of Jacob's life at the moment. As we've done with other important subjects that have come up in our study of Genesis, we're going to take a few moments today to address fear in a distinctly devotional way, followed by a more in-depth textual treatment of it tomorrow. As we go to our Bibles, let's pray and ask God's blessing on our study time.

Prayer

Father, thank you for this time to focus on your holy Word, and thank you for the way your Word shows life in all its fullness...not just the beautiful, but also the not so beautiful; not just what victory looks like, but what defeat looks like as well. Thank you that in showing us real life and all of its attendant messiness, you also show us your true Love in all of its redeeming, life-giving splendor. Thank you for demonstrating your Love in this: that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. May your name be glorified today in this time, and may your people be blessed and encouraged as well. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're continuing with a portion of Genesis 32 where we see Jacob, on a journey back to Canaan to establish a new life, experiencing some early bumps in the road. Our focus this session: great fear and distress.

Genesis 32:7-8

7In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. 8He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape."

Author Charles Allen writes about a 5-year old boy who was in the kitchen one night as his mother made dinner. She asked him to go to the storage room in the basement and get her a can of tomato soup, but he didn't want to go in alone; it was dark in there and he was scared. She asked again, but he persisted. Finally she said, "It's okay...Jesus will be in there with you." The boy walked hesitantly to the door and slowly opened it. He peeked down the stairs into the darkness, but it was just too much. He was turning around to leave when all at once an idea came to him. In the most casual and grown-up voice he could muster, he turned back to the open door and called down into the basement: "Jesus, if you're in there, would you hand me a can of tomato soup?"

Fear. We all know it. We've all experienced it. We all loathe it...but still we dance with it, and still it bests us from time to time in our lives. We are the people of God in Christ, people who have a Savior who loves us perfectly and everlastingly, people who know that Christ's perfect love casts out fear. God says to us over and over in His Word to be strong and courageous. God calls out to us over and over, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." We are a people deeply and richly blessed by our Lord's presence, by His power, by His protection, and by His provision...a people lifted high by His promises. In Him, we have nothing to fear.

Still, however, times come this side of heaven when fear dares to darken our door anyway. It's not what we want, but sometimes it's what we get. It's not something we welcome, but sometimes it's something we have to share space with for a time until our gracious God comes to kick it out and send it back to where it belongs. Properly speaking, fear isn't part of life, it's part of death. One Day soon (Day, capital D, as in the Day of our Lord's coming) it will be gone

for good. But until that Day arrives, it remains something that looks and lurks; something that seeks to lure us into its darkness.

In God's Word today, Jacob's uncertainty and uneasiness, on display in the opening verses of the chapter due to his impending return home — a place he'd left in a hurry with trouble at his heels some two decades earlier — has now morphed into that which we've just discussed: fear. Abject fear, actually...abject fear and dismay. Why is this the case? He's just received word that Esau is coming to meet him, and four hundred of his men are with him. Esau, of course, is the brother he so badly cheated those many years ago and the one who pledged to kill him because of it. Standing in Jacob's shoes, we can understand his position. We can empathize. We know his paralysis. While we haven't faced the uniqueness of his present circumstances, we've faced mouth-dropping, heart-stopping, panic-inducing situations of our own. Some of us, in fact, are in the midst of a time like that right now.

If that's the case for you or for someone you love, I'd like to take a moment right now and invite you to click in each day over the next week or so as we walk through God's Word in this season of Jacob's life. As we do, we'll be learning about the fact that while fear in the world is a powerful thing, faith in the God who reigns over it is infinitely more so. That God is for you, not against you. He is the One who sent His Son to die for you. He is the One who, for Christ's sake, forgives and restores you day after day after day, 70x7, forever and ever amen. Our gracious God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, will not leave you to wallow in your fear; He will lift you up and remind you that in Him, you are more than a conqueror. You will be okay. He will move you from fear to faith. And He will lead you through.

Dr. E. Stanley Jones, a Methodist pastor and missionary whose evangelistic work on the Indian subcontinent led many to Christ in the early years of the twentieth century, was a man whose work brought him face to face with fearful situations throughout the course of his ministry. Known as the Billy Graham of India, he labored for the Gospel in the early 1900s through times of sickness, through continuous threats on his life by people hostile to the message of Jesus, and through two world wars. Asked if he was ever afraid in the face of all that was against him, he admitted that at times, he was indeed. But then he went on to say this:

I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath — these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely — these are my native air. We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue, brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against reality.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, please don't be discouraged in your time of fear. Please don't give up. Instead, look up — look up to your heavenly Father, who has you in the palm of His hand and who holds you close to His heart. As we'll see when we gather next time, that's actually what Jacob is doing right now. Is he scared to death? Yep. Is he running around making all-too-human plans to try and mitigate his present predicament? Yep. But right now, even in the midst of his crisis, Jacob is doing something else as well: Jacob is holding on to the promise God has given him. Though he doesn't have any idea how the Lord is going to get him through this moment, he's standing his ground and staking his life on the Word that was given him. This is a painful time for Jacob in a way...painful because he recognizes that he's out of his element, out of options, and out of time. His old life with its panoply of deceptive, pull-the-wool-over-your-eyes methods of wriggling out of tight situations is no more. It's gone. All He has now is God. The good news is that God is enough. The better news is that God is

still enough. Take care, everyone; I'll look forward to being with you again tomorrow to move forward in faith! God's peace, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and thanks for joining in today as we walk through God's Word together. As we move deeper into our study week, today finds us continuing on in Genesis 32, so take a moment, turn there in your Bible, and join me for a word of prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the special gift you've given us in granting the opportunity to dedicate ourselves to the study of your Word. We ask that you would mercifully grant us the ability to understand what we read today, and that you would help us to grow in our faith as a result. It's in the name of Christ that we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, we're coming one more time to Jacob's mindset as he considers his present predicament. Esau is on his way to meet him with a considerable army of men, and he has no idea whether his brother is coming in peace or coming to wipe him out. Naturally, Jacob is filled with fear...and that's what we need to hone in on as we look at the passage before us. Our focus this session: the "why" of fear.

Genesis 32:7-8

7In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. 8He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape."

It may seem a little off-topic at first, but I came across a bit of verse this past week that gave me a jolt. I was surprised, first of all, that I hadn't come across it before. What really struck me, however, was both how true and unvarnished it was — how truly accurate and brutally honest its sentiment. I'm not the best "poetry reading" kind of guy, but here it is. After I share it, let's take some time to talk about it.

Myself

*I have to live with myself, and so
I want to be fit for myself to know,
I want to be able, as days go by,
Always to look myself straight in the eye;
I don't want to stand, with the setting sun,
And hate myself for the things I've done.*

*I don't want to keep on the closet shelf
A lot of secrets about myself,
And fool myself, as I come and go,
Into thinking that nobody else will know
The kind of a man I really am;
I don't want to dress up myself in sham.*

*I want to go out with my head erect,
I want to deserve all men's respect;
But here in the struggle for fame and pelf
I want to be able to like myself.
I don't want to look at myself and know*

That I'm bluster and bluff and empty show.

*I can never hide myself from me;
I see what others may never see;
I know what others may never know,
I never can fool myself, and so,
Whatever happens, I want to be
Self-respecting and conscience free.*

Why have I shared this today? I've shared this because this is the kind of person Jacob is in the process of becoming in his rapidly changing life. This brief poem, with its blunt assessment of character and integrity and conscience, provides a wonderful snapshot of the transition he's experiencing as he leaves the darkness of his worldliness and comes into the light of God's grace and mercy. In doing that, however, Jacob is having to face some things that, for his entire life, he's avoided. That's not a bad thing; on the contrary, it's actually a good thing. But in facing what he has heretofore sidestepped, he's now experiencing something that he has heretofore never dealt with: the vulnerability that comes with honesty, and the peril that sometimes accompanies principle.

Why is Jacob greatly afraid and distressed in today's reading? He knows he's in the wrong with his brother Esau — and has been for over 20 years.

Why is Jacob greatly afraid and distressed in today's reading? You can't do somebody wrong without being haunted by it afterwards.

The great Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, once said that the antagonism between life and conscience can only be removed in two ways: by a change of life or by a change of conscience. Jacob, after a lifetime of nonchalantly and opportunistically changing his conscience to justify whatever action he wanted to take at any given time, is finally changing his life instead. That's a beautiful thing. But part of such a change is coming to the realization that actions have consequences... consequences that must be confronted head on if they are to be faced honestly. That, in the moment it first is realized, is not such a beautiful thing. Instead, it is a fearful thing, and as we can see from the text, it has brought Jacob to a place of apprehension and dread.

Did you notice that when Laban confronted Jacob with a hostile militia, Jacob boldly stood up to him and spoke his mind...but now that Esau is on his way, ostensibly coming to Jacob with his own militia, Jacob is shrinking back? Once again, this is because Jacob knew he was in the right with Laban, but knows that he has been in the wrong with Esau. In his old manner of living, Jacob would have punted this one away. He would have sidestepped it, or run away, or come up with a plan to deceive Esau and deflect his advance, just like he'd done as a younger man. Now, however, Jacob has determined...is learning to make the determination...that such things are beneath his growing dignity and newly developing integrity as a servant of God. Now, Jacob is realizing that going over, under, or around a conflict is no longer a workable solution for him. The only acceptable way to navigate a conflict is to face it and go through it.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, one of Dr. Charles Stanley's most well known phrases has always been, "Obey God and leave the consequences to Him." In his own way, this is precisely what Jacob is endeavoring to do right now. Is he making allowances and trying to provide the best options for his household should things with Esau go south? Yes. But at the same time, Jacob's not running away. Jacob knows that whatever's coming down the pike at the moment can't be solved, can't be salvaged, can't be brought to resolution, unless he stands to greet it

with open hands rather than closed fists. This, he is learning, is the way of honor. This is the way of righteousness. And in light of all that God has told him and promised him and reassured him of in the last several days, this is also the way through. The bottom line? Jacob — haltingly and imperfectly and with not a little trepidation — is entrusting Himself to Almighty God. As we'll see in the days ahead, he's about to learn in a powerful way what that yields in life.

There's a lot of fodder here for you and me to ruminate on with respect to Jacob's circumstances today. There's a lot to think about with respect to our own circumstances as well. The way of blessing isn't very often comprised of hiding out and slinking around in life's shadows. But when we bow down and give up our own way of doing things...when we instead entrust ourselves to Almighty God and His purpose for our lives, however haltingly or imperfectly or filled with trepidation...that's when things begin to change.

When we come back tomorrow, we'll be seeing how Jacob addresses this with the Lord, and it's a session that I think will be helpful to us all. Until then, have a great day, and do remember that your Lord Jesus is with you in everything. Take care, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. I pray that your day is moving along in a good way as we head into a new week, and I'm also praying that our time together over these next few minutes will establish you more deeply in your faith and bring peace to your heart as you open God's Word. Thanks for being here; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, you are indeed great and mighty — the only and all-wise God of the universe. Thank you for your love and mercy today, and thank you for your standing promise that you will never leave us or forsake us. Please bless us as we look to you this day in the Scriptures, and grant us understanding and application as we learn. It's in Jesus' precious name that we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming back to what, for all intents and purposes, is a potentially dire situation for Jacob as he anticipates the arrival of his brother Esau, who's coming out to meet him in the wilderness. Jacob is thoroughly shaken, and after doing everything he can do from a human standpoint to try and prepare for what's to come, there's still one more thing to do — the most important thing of all. It's also an amazing thing to behold. Our focus this session: Jacob humbles himself before the Lord.

Genesis 32:9-12

9Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' 10I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. 11Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. 12But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.' "

Like many of you, I've been following, to a certain degree, the news stories marking the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's passing. She was a remarkable woman, a woman of great dignity...but most of all, a woman of deep Christian faith. Like you and me she was a sinner, and she knew it. She was a person in need of God's grace and mercy which was poured out for us in our Lord Jesus Christ, and she expressed deep gratitude for her life in our Savior. Queen Elizabeth would be the first person to proclaim that she was far from perfect, and she had many moments in her long reign where she publicly admitted times when she and the monarchy as a whole could have done better. Through it all, however, one quality — a character trait, if you will — always rose to the top in both her public and private life: her genuine humility.

At a reception honoring the great patron of the musical arts, Sir Robert Mayer, on his 100th birthday, elderly British socialite Lady Diana Cooper fell into conversation with a friendly woman who seemed to know her very well. Lady Diana's failing eyesight prevented her from recognizing her fellow guest until she peered more closely at her companion's magnificent diamonds and suddenly realized she was talking to the Queen. Overcome with embarrassment, Lady Diana curtsied and stammered,

"Ma'am, oh, ma'am, I'm sorry ma'am. I didn't recognize you without your crown!"

"It was so much Sir Robert's evening," the Queen replied, "that I decided to leave it behind."

Leaving your crown behind. What a concept. It would be like you and me taking everything that defines who we are and what we've done and what we're worth and how we feel we should be viewed by the world and leaving it in the hall closet before we go out for the night...and doing it on purpose. When our hearts are humble, it's not that we're looking down of ourselves; it's just that we're empty of ourselves. And when we're empty of ourselves, it's amazing how much room is made free for better things to take up residence.

As we come back to God's Word today, it has taken quite a bit to get there, but we're there nonetheless: Jacob, in perhaps the most consequential and frightening moment of his life, is empty. There is nothing in him but the realization that nothing about him is equal to the task before him. Any of the self-styled crowns he wore in his earlier days — and there have been many since he's been so full of himself for so long — have clattered to the ground in the face of this current predicament. His brother is on his way. There are 400 men with him. Jacob knows that he is wholly inadequate to deal with whatever it is that Esau is bringing. He also knows that, far from being the man of the moment, he is a man at the mercy of someone besides himself. Rather than try to strategize his way out of it (as he's done with just about every major incident in his life to this point), Jacob does something which, as I said a moment ago, is astounding: in a way we've never seen before, he sets aside his pride, his arrogance, and everything else that makes Jacob Jacob, and acknowledges his need. Jacob goes before Almighty God and prays.

What do we see in this prayer? First off, let's not miss the fact that this prayer is really his very first, at least so far as Scripture records. Yes, Jacob has had encounters with the Lord, and yes, he has made some declarations about the Lord, but until now, we've never seen him truly entreat the Lord. We've never seen him address the Lord. The fact that he does so here is monumental, and the manner in which he prays is more monumental still. What do I mean by that? Everything that defines who Jacob is and what he's done and what he's worth and how he feels he should be viewed by the world — in other words, everything that Jacob has always been about — is absent in this prayer. Here is a man who has come to the end of himself. And guess what? It's the very best place he can be, because at the end of himself he finds a new beginning with God.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, while what's absent in this prayer is significant, what *is* in this prayer is incredibly important as well, and we're going to talk about it in detail when we come back next time. For now, however, I'd like you to do a little bit of a gut check today...just like I'm doing. So often in life I find that I'm very full of myself. Not necessarily in an arrogant way, but in a self-possessed way. I focus on minute details and get caught up in trying to do this, that, or the other thing in order to get ready for whatever's coming down the pike. I'll end up doing everything I can do from a human standpoint to try and prepare for what's to come, but a lot of the time I forget that there's still one more thing to do — the most important thing of all. How often, both in regular everyday situations as well as in times of trial and tribulation, I forget to humble myself before Almighty God and pray. I forget what it is to be empty. I forget to leave my self-styled crowns in the hall closet where they belong, and so too many times they get in the way of me being real with my heavenly Father. I don't want that for me, and I don't want that for you, and our gracious and merciful Lord doesn't want that for us either. Will you join me in stopping today, right now, right where you're at? Let's leave our crowns behind. Let's allow them to clatter to the ground. Let's walk away from them...on purpose...and let's bow before our Lord with hearts that are humble. Remember, when our hearts are humble, it's not that we're looking down on ourselves; it's just that we're empty of ourselves. And when we're empty of ourselves, it's amazing how much room is made free for better things to take up residence.

Thanks, everyone. It's a tough meditation...but it's a good place to be, and I know the Lord is with us! Take care, and I'll see you again tomorrow to continue. God's peace, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It's good to get back to the Scriptures with you today, and as we return to God's Word over these next few minutes, we'll be looking once more at a particularly important series of verses in Genesis 32. Thanks for coming along today; let's pray as we prepare to study.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are good and just and right in all you do. We praise you today for your mercy, which you have poured into our lives through the sacrifice of your one and only Son. We are grateful, and we give you thanks for the salvation which you have brought us. Open our hearts as we look to your Word, and teach us by your Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're having one more look at Jacob's prayer to the Lord as he nervously awaits the arrival of his brother Esau while journeying back to Canaan. Our focus this session: poor in spirit; powerful in petition.

Genesis 32:9-12

9Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' 10I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. 11Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. 12But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

During my second year of seminary in St. Louis, I was agonizing over a sermon I was preparing for a class assignment. I always loved the preaching courses I got to take in school, and I loved to preach too...but I also always struggled. Nothing ever came easy for me when it came to studying the text, putting the words to paper, or speaking those words from the pulpit. That remains the case for me today: I still love to preach, but I still struggle to preach. More than twenty-five years in and I'm still trying to learn how to effectively share Jesus from the pulpit; it's an exercise that never ends.

But back to the agony of that assignment: I had labored over it for several days. Not only was I struggling to get the theology right, the words weren't coming either. Everything was rough, nothing was fitting together the way I wanted it to, and to top it off, by this time I was out of time. It was due the next morning at 8 o'clock. It was with a spirit of resignation that I sat down one last time and tried to make things work...but in actuality, that description is a misnomer. What really happened is that I sat down that last time and *didn't* try to make things work at all. Instead, I remember resting my forehead on the desk, letting out a long sigh, and simply praying, "God, I can't do this. I can't get it right. Please have mercy and help me." Long story short, God did. I finished that sermon, turned it in on time, and to my great surprise, my professor liked it enough that he encouraged me to work on it some more. Several weeks later, I preached a more polished version of that message at my fieldwork church. It definitely wasn't a meditation for the ages, but it was a start.

The experience of putting together that sermon, which began in great frustration, ended up having a very positive outcome. In fact, today I can look back and point to that assignment as a catalyst in my life. It was a moment of realization for me, one that helped me to understand that the hard work of preparing a message from God's Word is always worth the effort. Yet ironically, what brought me to a place of peace and eventual progress in that endeavor wasn't my theological prowess or my creativity or my writing skills; it was my recognition that perhaps

I was relying too much on those things and not enough on the Lord. It was in my place of great weakness and emptiness that God began to show forth His great presence and strength.

I bring up that memory today because as we return to Genesis 32 and pick things up with Jacob and all that's going on in his life, we find that he's in a very similar situation. Let's take a moment and briefly review his present circumstances. It's been more than 20 years since he and his brother have seen each other, and the last time they parted it was an act of necessity on Jacob's part because Esau had sworn to kill him. Now Esau is on his way to meet Jacob with 400 of his men...not a good sign. To mitigate the situation, Jacob has already divided his camp in half so that if Esau attacks, at least a portion of his people will have the chance to escape. His fear is palpable, and it's also understandable...at least to a point.

Why only to a point? Because while we can certainly understand Jacob's fear right now, it's also a bit puzzling. Remember, in the very recent — extremely recent — past, God gave Jacob multiple assurances that not only was He with him, but that He would see Him through every situation he would face and moreover, bless him in the process.

It was God who called Jacob home to Canaan with the promise that He would be with him.

It was God who delivered Jacob from the hand of Laban after Laban pursued him following his departure from Haran.

It was also God who, after a peaceful resolution to the matter between Jacob and Laban, sent His angels to meet Jacob on the road so that he would be cognizant of just how much power and protection surrounded him as he went his way.

All of these things, by the way, fall in exact line with the promise that God had given Jacob way back in Genesis 28:

I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. (Genesis 28:13b-15)

God, all this time, through thick and thin and all points in between, has been faithful to lead Jacob through life just as He said He would. Right now, however, it would almost seem that Jacob has forgotten it all. The only thing putting down that argument is that it's an impossibility, given the short period of time within which all these assurances have occurred. At any rate, and as we said in our last study session, here is Jacob, afraid just the same...but here is Jacob with something else going on as well:

Jacob, perhaps moved by his fear, in an astounding moment unlike anything we've seen in all the time we've been following him, has just done an amazing thing: Jacob has just gone before the Lord in prayer. It's not just any prayer, but in many ways Jacob's first prayer. And as is the case with many first prayers, this is a "God I can't do this, I can't get it right, please have mercy and help me" kind of prayer. Look at Jacob's words: they're humble, empty of himself. They're in accordance with God's Word and promises. They're words that speak not of Jacob's worthiness, but of God's...and of God's kindness and goodness and generosity as well. Finally, Jacob's words are words of faith. Jacob boldly asks the Lord for what only the Lord can do, and he places himself in the Lord's hands for the results that only the Lord can bring. Truly, this

is a watershed moment...a catalyst. This is a turning point in Jacob's life, because he will never be the same again.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Jacob has always been a slick, cunning, deceitful person able to sidestep or sidle out of just about anything. He's not able to do that here. And ironically, that which is ultimately going to bring him to a place of peace and eventual progress in his current endeavor isn't his eponymous deceitfulness or his cunning or his slickness; it will be his recognition that he has spent his life relying too much on those things and not enough on the Lord. It will be in his place of great weakness and emptiness that God will begin, once again, to show forth His great presence and strength. You and I will get to observe that in the days ahead as we walk in Jacob's footsteps. And in walking in his footsteps, we will learn an important path for ourselves.

Take care, everybody...I'll see you again next time as we continue. Have a terrific day, and the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's peace, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. As we come into the middle part of the week it's good to have each of you here to gather around God's Word, where today we're continuing on in Genesis 32. Almost the whole of our study in this current portion of Genesis has been about the life of Jacob and the promise that rests upon his life, and that subject will continue to occupy our time and attention as we work our way forward in the text. I'm glad you're here today; let's pray as we open the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Thank you for this day to belong to you and to be called your own. We ask for your blessing as we look to your Word in this next little while. Teach us and grow us up into maturity as we study, and continue your transforming work in our lives throughout this day. We ask this in your precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, having prayed for God's help and deliverance with respect to his impending meeting with Esau, Jacob now goes about making ready for said meeting...and there's long been a vigorous debate in Christian circles about Jacob's actions. Our focus this session: Preparing in fear or preparing in faith?

Genesis 32:13-21

13He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: 14two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. 16He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds." 17He instructed the one in the lead: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?' 18then you are to say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.' " 19He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: "You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. 20And be sure to say, 'Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.' " For he thought, "I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me." 21So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp.

Can I talk to you about fog for a minute? Fog, as most of you know, is basically a cloud that touches the ground. It seems like a huge mass, but in reality it's made of extremely tiny droplets of water. Each cubic meter of fog contains .05 to .5 grams (that is, half the weight of a paper clip) of H₂O. That means that a dense fog covering, say, a seven-city-block area one hundred feet deep can actually be composed of less than one glass of water divided into sixty thousand million drops. There's not much there...but it can cripple an entire city.

Why bring up fog today? Because the nature of fog as we've just described it happens to be a little bit like worry, and many people feel that Jacob's actions in today's reading from God's Word is nothing less than worry at its worst.

Worry, of course, generally occurs over things we can't change or control, and generally, most of what we worry about never comes to pass. Which harkens back to the fog idea: the truth is that there's not much there...but it can cripple us just the same. Have you ever noticed that we humans are experts at taking tiny things and turning them into huge masses that roll in and obscure what's important in life? Worry is faith in the negative. It's trust in the unpleasant. It's

assurance of disaster. It's belief in defeat. It has been said that worry is wasting today's time to clutter up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's troubles.

It has also been said that worry is fear's extravagance. It extracts interest on trouble before it comes due. It constantly drains the energy God gives us to face daily problems and to fulfill our many responsibilities. It's like the woman who had lived long enough to learn some important truths about life. She said, "I've had a lot of trouble — most of which never happened." Like many of us, she had worried about many things that had never occurred. Still, it took her a long time to see the futility of her anxieties.

Regarding today's passage, as I said a moment ago there are many pastors, teachers, and scholars who believe that Jacob's behavior here is, indeed, worry. They point to his track record, point to his practice of having to always watch his back over the years because of his deceitful and dishonest actions, and frankly, they point to his character. Jacob is the kind of person who never had much to stand on in the way of integrity, and he probably worried about many things through the years because of the situations he got himself into. It's also in keeping with Jacob's character that, even with the Lord having given him assurance after assurance after assurance concerning His presence and protection, Jacob may not have the faith yet to yield himself to God and His promises absent a self-styled backup.

Others, however, take this much less seriously. They simply see Jacob, having prayed, now preparing for the meet-up with his brother as any prudent person would. Rather than operating in fear and with a lack of faith, they see Jacob as one acting wisely in the face of what could be a difficult and dangerous confrontation. Many of you will remember that Martin Luther was famous for saying "Pray like it all depends on God, then when you are done, go work like it all depends on you." Could that be the plausible explanation for Jacob doing the things he's doing right now? Again, many think so. They don't see the old Jacob, living solely for self; they see the new and developing Jacob, learning and growing as he steps into his future as the Lord's servant.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I'm not going to weigh in on the subject at the moment, though over the next several days you'll definitely see my personal view being expressed in the context of other things happening in the text. For now, I just want to get all of this out on the table and get each one of us thinking more about fear versus faith; about worry versus wellbeing. If you're a worrier at heart, I pray that you'll take to heart some of what we talked about in today's session, because here's what I can tell you with utmost confidence: as God's people in Christ, worry is not part of our birthright. We were not fashioned for it, and the simple fact of the matter is that we have far more important things, far more productive things, and far more enjoyable things to be doing with our time. We'll talk more about all of this next time, so I hope you'll join in and be part of it.

Thanks so much for your time today, everyone...God's peace, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's blessings of joy and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. It's great to have you along today, where as we come to a new week and continue our study in the book of Genesis, I continue to pray that you're finding God's Word moving your heart each day. Over these next few minutes we'll be going into a new section of Genesis 32, which is actually one of the best-known Bible passages connected to the life of Jacob. If you'll take a moment to open your Bible, we'll pray and have our first look.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your great love for us, and we are mindful that it was through your perfect life, your sacrificial death, and your miraculous return to life that we were brought forgiveness, peace, and new life. Help us to live in the reality of your grace today, and may our study time today in your Word be a fruitful time for each one of us. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today and return to Jacob's present predicament concerning his impending meeting with his brother Esau, he's in a most precarious place...not just in this particular moment, but in his life as a whole. We've talked about that a little bit already, but today's passage is going to add a whole new layer to all that's going on. Our focus this session: Jacob stands alone.

Genesis 32:22-25

22That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. 24So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

Have you ever stood at a crossroads in life? An intersection where no matter which direction you chose to go, things would never...could never...be the same again? Maybe it was a career issue or a relationship issue. Maybe it was about a move; whether to pull up roots or stay planted where you already were. Perhaps it was where to go to college or trade school, or if you should forgo both and enter the work world immediately after high school graduation. Obviously, your personal crossroads experience might be any of a hundred things; it all depends on your circumstances.

Crossroads, I think, are difficult, and why? Because whenever we happen upon those intersections during life's journey, there are always unknowns. There are always risk-benefit ratios to consider. There are usually strong emotions involved. And there's something else involved as well: when those moments happen, it's never easy; there's always a struggle connected to them.

When we were together last time, we left Jacob in a rather unenviable state. He's just walked away from an old life, he's just begun to walk towards a new life, and while he's doing so based on the call and promise of God on his life, he's already in a pickle. Esau is coming. He has 400 men with him. And Jacob? Jacob has nowhere to run. As soon as he learned of his brother's advance, Jacob was frantic, greatly distressed, terribly afraid...but he was also, as we saw, eminently pragmatic. So it is that as we pick things up today, we do so remembering that at this point, Jacob has prayed and planned as best he can. After entreating the Lord for His help and His deliverance, Jacob has gotten himself busy. First, he's divided his camp in two so that if Esau should attack, at least part of his entourage will survive. Next, he's sent a massive —

and I mean an incredibly lavish kind of massive — gift to his brother so that perhaps Esau's longstanding anger against him will be assuaged. In today's reading, he's done the last thing that he can do, and arguably, it's one of the most noble things we've ever witnessed as far as Jacob is concerned: To protect them and to provide for them should he be killed, Jacob sends his family across the Jabbok River ahead of him, along with all of his possessions...and then stays behind to see things through. Let me say it a different way: Jacob stays behind to face the music. Jacob, rather than shrinking back as a coward or slinking around and oozing about as a deceiver, stands as a man and waits like a man for whatever the hours ahead will bring. He has left himself no retreat.

Jacob is at a crossroads.

Think, just for a moment, of what he's been through and where he is: His father-in-law is behind him. His brother is ahead of him. Truly he has nowhere to go...unless he goes *through* his present situation.

Having thus made that choice — the choice to go through — Jacob is now alone, says our Bible. But it's at that very moment, the moment in which Jacob has finished his preparations and steeled himself for what is to come, the moment in which he has made the irreversibly and incredibly bold decision to do what faith and integrity would have him do, that something extraordinary happens: Far from being alone after all, a Man comes to him. Let's be clear: this is not a man, lowercase m, but a Man, uppercase M. This is Man is God, something about which we'll have a great deal more to say when we come back next time. But just quickly, before we close for the day, what happens in this meeting? A wrestling match is what happens. It's an all night wrestling match. It's as vigorous as they come. And the one thing I want you to be sure and notice today as you look at the passage is that it is not Jacob who is wrestling with the Man; it is the Man who comes to wrestle with Jacob. Why? What for? What is the purpose? What, really, is going on here? The short answer is this: though Jacob certainly understands that he has come to a significant intersection in his journey, the truth is that he doesn't know the half of it. The Lord has an agenda for His servant in this meeting, and the simple fact is that Jacob is not only at a crossroads...he's at *the* Crossroad. After this, his life will never...can never...be the same again.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Frederick Buechner, one of my favorite authors ever, a shy and retiring deep-thinking Christian man who just went be with our Lord this past month, once characterized Jacob's encounter at the Jabbok River as the "magnificent defeat of the human soul at the hands of God." Why would he say that? Because God is coming for Jacob. God wants, once and for all, all of Jacob: his proud self-reliance, his fleshly scheming...every last vestige of his self-styled wisdom and human strength. God doesn't only want it, but He has come to take it, and come the morning, because Jacob won't concede, God will take it by force. Has God come to him in anger and wrath? No. God has come to him in love — and we'll soon see the impact of that love in Jacob's life as it starts to take root and grow.

There's a whole lot in this scenario that extends a long way beyond Jacob. It certainly extends to me, and if I were a betting man, I'd wager that it extends to you too. The good news in it all is that what God takes, He replaces with something much better. And when we come back tomorrow, that's where we'll pick things up. Thanks for your time, everyone — Have a great day, and I'll look forward to seeing you then. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings to you in the name Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I pray that the promise of God's abiding presence is giving you strength as you're going through your day, and as we kick off another session of Bible study today I also pray that our time in the Scriptures together will be a blessing to you as you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior. Thanks for being here; let's pray as we go to God's Word.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the day you've given us, and thank you especially for the time you've given us today to focus on our relationship with you through the truth of the Scriptures. Help us to set this study time apart as a special time of learning, of growing, and of fellowship with you — a time that moves us to worship. We ask this in Christ's name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the passage before us is wonderful on a host of levels, and instructive on a host of levels as well. There's so much to talk about that we can't squeeze it into just one session, so please indulge me in the decision I've made to break it into several mini-studies over the next few days. Our focus this session: The Man who wrestled with Jacob.

Genesis 32:22-29

22That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. 24So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. 28Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." 29Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

When I was a freshman in high school...a small freshman, a thin and wispy freshman, a very-much-under-exercised freshman...I somehow decided that it would be a good idea to join the wrestling team. I don't know where that decision came from, nor do I have any idea what possessed me to explore what, up until then, was an unknown sport to me. Still, I went out for wrestling all the same. In many ways, I enjoyed it. There was lots of running and conditioning, and there were endless floor exercises. I also got my first-ever taste of a weight room, and my teammates were all very encouraging as they helped me to learn the ropes. By the end of preseason training, I even had the temerity to think that I was getting pretty good. But there was one thing I hadn't considered.

I've already mentioned my physique at that time in my life...thin, wispy, and under-exercised... but what I haven't yet mentioned is what all of that running and conditioning and weight training did to said physique as I went to practice each day after school. In one sense it was all good, and I was grateful every day when I looked in my bathroom mirror and began to see a young man emerging from the body of a boy. But as good as it was, it also set me up for something not so good. I had gone in with an initial weigh-in of 139 pounds. Translation: thin and wispy class. By the time we were ready to compete in the first match of the season, however, guess what had happened to me after all that training? When I stepped on the scale, I was no longer a 139-pound milquetoasty kid; I was a 151-pound newbie wrestler. Through all our practices as a team, I'd never gone against somebody in that weight class, but it didn't

matter: in my first sanctioned match, that was my slot— and I was absolutely overwhelmed by my opponent.

In God's Word today, we have another wrestler before us. He's one who has gone through his whole life cheating his way from mat to mat, emerging from ring after ring after ring with ill-gotten victory after ill-gotten victory. He's accustomed to getting his way, and he's more accustomed still to *making* a way for himself when things don't look promising with respect to his desired outcome. We're talking, of course, about Jacob, and in particular, we're talking about a character trait so representative of Jacob and so on display in his life through the years: Jacob the sleazy, Jacob the schmoozer, Jacob the scurrilous, discourteous loser... Jacob who, loser though he is, always seems to come out on top. This man, as we read a moment ago, has just been in the match of his life. Only today, Jacob hasn't come out on top. Jacob has been defeated. But in actuality, it's the most momentous and most gracious thing that could possibly happen to him.

Jacob, as we all know, is on a journey home...a journey home in more ways than one. In light of that, we should make note of something very important: that way home must involve for him — and for all of us too, by the way — a moment of truth at the crossroads, a place of surrender to what 'must be' going forward. You'll recall that in our last session we said that behind Jacob is the past: the lying, the manipulating, the deceiving, the stealing, and the cheating. Before him is a new way of life: honest repentance, reconciliation, healing, generosity, and selflessness. The wrestling match he's just taken part in has been a contest with none other than God Himself (most likely a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ) wherein his path in the days to come has hung in the balance. But what Jacob didn't anticipate was that God would step into the ring wanting something from him: his self-reliance, his pride, his carnal scheming, and everything else that made Jacob, Jacob. Before He was through, the Lord put Jacob on the mat and took it all by force. And though it was ultimately for his good, Jacob was nonetheless overwhelmed by his divine opponent.

In the end, Jacob was left wanting only God's blessing, but before he could get it he had to be delivered from his own self-will and self-reliance. He was left not fighting, but clinging and crying out for what he longed for, weeping in his desperation for God's hand of favor. We know there were tears, incidentally, from Hosea's retelling of this incident in Hosea 12. And that brings up a point: though there's something to be said for every person doing his or her wrestling with God in life, there's also something to be said for then acknowledging God's greatness after we've been overcome and overwhelmed. In the final analysis, we must learn that we serve a God who is greater than we are. And as Charles Spurgeon once put it quite bluntly and a bit shockingly, "We cannot conquer much of anything until He conquers us."

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I don't know about you, but in Jacob's story I can very quickly and without much stretching recognize my own elements of struggle in life: my fears, my darkness, my loneliness, my vulnerabilities, my exhaustion, and even the relentless pain I feel in my body. That's why, in so many ways, Jacob's life is so instructive for me: he does what I...what we all... must do. He confronts his sin, his failures, his weaknesses — all the things that are hurting him — and faces God. Jacob wrestled with God all night. It was an exhausting struggle that left him crippled. But after he came to grips with God and ceased his struggling, after he came to the realization that he couldn't go on without Him, he received God's blessing and moved forward in faith.

When we come back next time, we'll be talking more specifically about Jacob's blessing and his life in the aftermath, so I hope you'll come and be part of our study. Until then, Christ's

peace to each of you, have a great day in the knowledge that God is with you and for you, and rest well in knowing that His blessing is upon you. Take care everyone, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! God's peace to you in our Savior Jesus Christ, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to have you along today as we continue our study in the thirty-second chapter of Genesis, where for the past few sessions we've been talking about Jacob's impending meeting with his brother and his surprise encounter with God in the night. Today our next-to-last session in this section brings us directly into the midst of that divine encounter, so let's take a moment to pray as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, we ask that in our time together today, you would draw close to us and give us wisdom. By the power of your Spirit, help us to learn and grow as we study. As always, and more than anything, please continue to strengthen us in our relationship with your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Jacob has wrestled with God, and God has blessed him...but between the time God came near and when that blessing was finally given, many things transpired. Our focus this session: Limping...but limping forward.

Genesis 32:25-26

25When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

I've never been a fighter, and I didn't get into many skirmishes as a boy, but one of the few I'll never forget was with a neighbor kid named Steven. He was a couple of years younger than I was, but he was one of those brash, in-your-face kids who was always manufacturing trouble. He'd try and start things with whomever he could whenever he could, and one day while a bunch of us were playing in his front yard, he started in with me. Being averse to conflict, I tried to deescalate the situation, and I finally decided that the best thing to do was just walk away. As I turned to go, however, Steven lunged at me and grabbed me by the hair. He pulled me to the ground...and thus began perhaps the longest 35 minutes of my childhood. Why? Because Steven wouldn't let go. His fist held a huge clump of my hair, and no matter what I did to try and free myself, he held fast. I kicked him, I hit him, I grabbed and pulled at his face, and I tried over and over again to roll away from him. He never yielded a single follicle. In the end, I finally had the opportunity to "kick him where it counts," so to speak. As he recoiled in pain, with one mighty yank I managed to get away from him — but the hair he'd commandeered stayed with him. I went home and showed my mother the bloody bald spot on my scalp, but while she was shocked and upset, she never did believe my version of the story. In the end it didn't matter; from then on I was never allowed in Steven's yard again.

As much as I hated that experience, these many years later I have to admit a grudging respect for little Stevie. It takes a lot of guts to do what he did. It takes a lot of wherewithal to hold on to something or someone come hell or high water. Though I'll never understand his reasons for doing what he did, something inside of him decided, on a cold winter day over 40 years ago now, that I was worth his time and attention in a way that consumed the whole of his being... that I was worth his time and attention in a way that took everything he had and then some to get what he wanted.

As we've been following Jacob over the past couple of days here in Genesis 32, we have to ask a question: how did he ever manage to keep up his struggle with God...with GOD... through an entire night? How is it that he was so bold and gutsy as to hold on, come hell or

high water, to the Creator of the universe — even after he had been overcome — in an effort to get what he wanted? The struggle we've read of (and reread of today) took the whole of Jacob's being. It took everything he had and then some. Here was a man who realized he had been conquered by God, and yet was desperate for the blessing of God...desperate to the extent that he found it worth every iota of his time and attention to seek out the desired end to his quest. How exceedingly extraordinary.

What we want to see in today's reading is, at its heart, quite simple: After so many years of relying on himself, after a lifetime of depending on his own strength, after coming near to God but still thinking that he could somehow contend with God and come out on top, Jacob was finally reduced to a place where, exhausted and maimed, all he could do was cling to the Lord with everything he had. Jacob couldn't fight anymore...but he could hold on. And to be honest, that's not a bad place to be.

Wrapping Up

On that note, we're going to stop here and wrap things up for the day in this briefer-than-normal session. We're doing that because I'd like to leave you with the chance to take a few minutes and ponder Jacob's life, ponder Jacob's present situation, and then ponder your own life in light of it. One of the great truths of the Christian faith is that we must come to the end of ourselves before we can begin to understand God, His nature, and the reality of His grace and mercy in our lives. Jacob is in the midst of that realization in a very dramatic and tangible way right now. But where am I...and where are you? What are we relying on...depending on...contending with? Have we come yet to the place where all that's left for us in life is to cling to God and cry out for His blessing, or are we still striving and trying to operate in our own strength? Those are important questions for us to ask ourselves from time to time. Let's make today one of those times and bow before the Lord accordingly as we reflect on what we find.

We'll bring all of this together in a Big Picture kind of way when we come back tomorrow, and I'm already praying that the application we'll be making will serve to deepen your faith and strongly encourage you in your walk with the Lord. I hope you'll join in as we address the text as a whole. Until then, have a great day and be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. I'll look forward to seeing you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS! God's peace to each of you in Christ, and thanks for coming along today as we take some time to open God's Word together. As most of you know, we're in the Old Testament book of Genesis right now, and today and tomorrow we'll be finishing our look at Genesis 32. I'm always glad that you're here; let's pray as we go to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day we ask that you would have your holy Word penetrate our lives and do that which you desire it to do within us. We place ourselves before you knowing what a great privilege it is to open the Scriptures and learn of you, and we are grateful. Bless this time, we pray, in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming to our final observations with respect to Jacob's wrestling match with God. To go with his new limp, courtesy of a wrenched hip given to him by his divine Opponent during their struggle, Jacob now gets two additional things to go along with it. Our focus this session: new limp, new name, new life.

Genesis 32:27-29

27The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. 28Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." 29Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

Have I ever told you about the time I tried to change my name? I was in 8th grade. I was rather unpopular, not very confident in myself, and as a result I was an easy target for people who wanted to pick on me — of which there were many. One of the things that the kids at school used to do was mock my name. *Paul* usually became *Pauline* or *Paula*, and if not that, they'd alliterate Paul with other P words which I can't speak of here, stringing them together to give me a variety of crude nicknames. One day sitting in metal shop, my eyes stinging and face burning after yet another name-calling incident, I decided that from that day forward, I would no longer go by Paul. I would give myself a new name, thereby becoming a new person, and that way I could rid myself of all the hurtful things associated with how people referred to me. Instead of *Paul*, I became *Matt*...but as you can imagine, my brilliant and sudden rebadging idea was a spectacular failure. After a few days of even more merciless teasing than before, I went back to Paul, and it's been Paul ever since.

Coming back to God's Word today, returning once more to the amazing scene of God coming to wrestle with Jacob in the night, we see that Jacob too is going through a rebadging of sorts. Jacob too is getting a new name. But in this case, it's not a spectacular failure in the least...it's just spectacular. As we pick up the text and listen in on the conversation that's occurring, remember that Jacob — overcome, exhausted, and newly, permanently, gimp in his hip — is clinging to the Lord and crying out for His blessing. What happens next? God speaks.

As God speaks, He does so in the form of a rhetorical question. He knows Jacob's name, of course, but the point in His asking is twofold: first, remembering that Jacob's name (meaning "deceiver") has been a defining characteristic of his life for the entirety of his life, the Lord wants Jacob to speak it aloud as an admission and reminder of who he has been. Jacob, merely by saying his name, is by default having to acknowledge both to the Lord and to himself the nature of his character. Having thus spoken it aloud, however, the second and more significant reason for this exchange becomes clear: God, because He is bringing Jacob into a new life, is also giving him a new name to replace the old: *Israel*.

Israel is actually a combination of the Hebrew words for "wrestle" and "God." It's a name that expresses the concept of wrestling, clinging firmly to God, and overcoming. The Late Dr. Gerard Van Groningen, a renowned Old Testament scholar who contributed so much to the church in America and around the world through his teaching, writing, and work as a pastor, often shared with his students that in many ways, "Israel" is to be understood as Jacob's *covenant* name. That is, the name speaks of his being bound with a bond of life and love to God. Dr. Van Groningen explained it this way:

Jacob's descendants were at times referred to as Hebrews, and eventually they were known as Jews. The use of those references indicated that among the nations, Jacob's descendants were known nationally and/or ethnically.

The name "Israel," however, referred specifically to Jacob's descendants' spiritual, covenantal, and religious heritage. The name "Israel" spoke of the ethnic or national Hebrews' and Jews' unique relationship with God. Yes, there was a time when the name wasn't used to refer to all of Jacob's descendants; after the division of the tribes, the northern ten tribes were known as Israel and the southern tribes as Judah. But after the exile it was used again to refer to the entire community.

What Dr. Van Groningen is saying is that in essence, with Jacob's new name comes a new identity. God, in a very real way (even though I'm using New Testament language now) Christens Jacob and changes him forever. From this day forward, he will no longer go by Jacob. He will be given a new name, thereby becoming a new person, and that way he will be rid of all the hurtful things associated with how people referred to him and how, indeed, he once referred to himself. Instead of *Jacob*, he becomes *Israel*...and he has been Israel ever since.

Which, incidentally, plays directly into our understanding of the blessing he receives at the end of today's passage. When God blesses Israel, it's the blessing of the passing of the old (Jacob) life and the coming of the new (Israel) life. Whatever Israel needs, God's blessing will provide for him in the moment. Moreover, whatever is necessary for Israel and his people in their journey, God will bring. The ultimate necessity for them — a Messiah who will come to save them from their sins — is indeed provided, indeed brought, when in the fullness of time the Lord Jesus Christ Himself comes...and not just to Israel and the rest of the world, but *through* Israel as well. It's the greatest blessing of all. And this is a remarkable moment in that great salvation history.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, let's be sure and notice one more thing about Israel's blessing: it comes in a very special, if perhaps difficult place. It comes in the place of special trial and testing. It comes in the place of intense pleading before God. It comes in the place of seeing the face of God...and it comes in the place of conscious weakness in the presence of God. There's quite a bit there to unpack, and when we come back next time and see Jacob, now Israel, debriefing himself on what he's just experienced, we'll get into it more deeply. Until then, I pray you all have a great day — It's always my joy to be with you, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon. Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus, and do take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody — grace to you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS! Thanks for clicking in with me today as we continue to work through the Old Testament book of Genesis. Today in our time together I want to share just one brief thought on what we've most recently been covering in Genesis 32. It's something I've been thinking about myself, and it's something that perhaps you can ponder and take into the weekend with you in a way that will bring some reflection and maybe some unexpected blessing into your life. When we come back on Monday, we'll put it into some context as we close off the chapter...and while that's a day later than we had anticipated, I hope that our few moments together now will be profitable for you in your walk with the Lord.

Let's go to Him today as we begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless us. That you would comfort and console us. That you would work through us. We need you. We have no hope without you. But in you, we have everything...immeasurably and abundantly more than all we can ask or even imagine according to your power that is at work within us. Help us to see and be mindful of that great truth today, regardless of what may be swirling around us out in the world. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we look to you. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Hear God's Word from Genesis 32:24...

24So Jacob was left alone, and a Man wrestled with him till daybreak.

God wrestled Jacob...and so too, God wrestles us.

As with Jacob, God wrestles us into His purposes. Wrestles us into His good, His gracious, plans for our lives. Wrestles us away from the old Adam in us so that all things become new again. God wrestles us because we are strong-willed, bullheaded people who prefer to go our own way...a way that leads to destruction. Because He loves us, because He cares for us, because He has saved us by the blood of His one and only Son and brought us into His family, God opts to come for us rather than leave us alone.

But remember: it's a wrestling, not a thrashing or a beatdown. It's a wrestling, not an attack or an ambush. It's a wrestling, not a boxing match, not a rumble, not a fight. God wrestles us because He has redeemed us. God wrestles us in order to restore us. God wrestles us into renewal. God wrestles us because sometimes that's the only way He can get us to be still and know that He is God rather than we ourselves.

It was only by God's grace and mercy that Jacob survived that nighttime encounter with his Maker. But make no mistake, the life he walked away with in the morning was new...and that's how it is when God comes to us in the nighttimes of life. No man, no woman, wrestles with God and prevails with their old life intact. The way of blessing comes through God's overcoming of the old in us so that He, our Maker, can remake us.

Where is the struggle in you right now? What is God wrestling away? What is your strong will and your bullheadedness clinging to that is keeping you from clinging to your Lord instead?

Those things, the things that are making themselves known in your heart even as I speak, are the things that God has come for. Yield to Him today. Concede. Confess and repent, and when you rise again and continue on your journey — though it may be with a limp to remind you of where you've been — your way forward will be sure, and your gracious Lord will go before you as he leads you on your way.

Thanks for considering those things with me today, everyone; you're in my prayers, I'm always grateful to be in yours, and I hope that when Monday comes we can all be together again to open God's Word and grow. Take care, have a terrific weekend, and I'll see you then!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you today, and as we open our Bibles and ask the Lord to teach and transform our lives over these next few minutes, I know that He'll hear and answer us as His people. We're finishing up our time in Genesis 32 today, so let's pray and ask our Almighty God to lead us as we learn.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open the Scriptures. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 32 ends with an afterword of sorts as Jacob walks away from his encounter with God a different man with a different outlook on life. As we know, this has been in process for quite some time at this point, but going forward we'll begin to see a marked change in Jacob's demeanor. Our focus this session: the dawn of a new day.

Genesis 32:30-32

30So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." 31The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. 32Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

While serving as a missionary in Laos, John Yoder happened upon what, for him, became a very important illustration of the kingdom of God. Long before the colonialists ever imposed formal national boundaries separating the two countries, the kings of Laos and Vietnam reached an agreement on taxation in the border areas. Those who ate short-grain rice, built their houses on stilts, and decorated them with Indian-style serpents were considered Laotians. On the other hand, those who ate long-grain rice, built their houses on the ground, and decorated them with Chinese-style dragons were considered Vietnamese. The exact location of a person's home wasn't what determined his or her nationality. Instead, each person belonged to the kingdom whose cultural values he or she exhibited.

That's the way it is with us as God's people in Christ. We live in this world, but as part of God's kingdom, we don't carry ourselves as individuals who exist in or are identified by the arbitrary boundaries, customs, and standards of one country or another. Rather, as citizens of heaven, we live according to the standards and values of our Lord's kingdom, regardless of where we are.

As we talk about Jacob today, we need to do so remembering that for the majority of his life, he has embodied the exact opposite of that value. Instead, here is a man who has always, to a certain degree, been a willing product of his environment. He's been a master shape-shifter, not physically but situationally. As an opportunist, he's been an expert at capitalizing on his circumstances and finding a way to gain the advantage. Whether dealing with brothers, birthrights, familial blessings, fathers-in-law who bully, or even bickering wives, he's always found a way through — a way through that's generally seen him come out on top. Usually, Jacob's victories have come through sheer deception and a certain degree of intellectual prowess. As a result, over the years he's become very wealthy, very self-assured...

...and very out of touch with the reality of who he is, what he was created for, and to whom he belongs.

Jacob, whether he has realized it or not — and in spite of multiple encounters with Almighty God over time — has until very recently been entrenched in the worship of self, been the leader of the cult of self, been a follower of the religion of self.

As we know, however, in recent days all of that has changed. In the text before us today, in fact, Jacob is no more a man of self at all; he is a man who has come to the end of himself. He is a man who, though he has for his entire life been a deceiver, has now become astounded at the depth of his own self-deception. Jacob is no longer a man heading up his own mutual admiration society; he is a man who has come to see the reality of his true powerlessness and the depth of his need. And as we see him walk away from his wrestling match with the Lord — or more accurately, limp away from his wrestling match with the Lord — he is shaking his head in wonderment over the fact that he has seen God and lived.

Peniel, by the way, means “face of God,” which is why Jacob named this place as he did. But I’m always quick to think about something else when I read that, a little play on words that helps me to be mindful of the important thing that happened there: while Jacob did indeed see the face of God on that most momentous occasion in the wilderness between Haran and Canaan, it’s also the place where he finally laid himself bare and *faced* God. And it was as he faced God that his future was fixed.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, Jacob has just gone through a transition. He’s gone from living in and of the world to understanding that God would have him to live in, but *not* of, the world. As part of God’s kingdom, he will no longer carry himself as an individual who exists in, who is identified by, the arbitrary boundaries, customs, and standards of wherever he happens to be at the moment. He will no longer operate as the extraordinary, self-serving shape-shifter who’s always looking out for number one. Rather, as a citizen of heaven, Jacob will now begin to live according to the standards and values of His Lord’s kingdom, regardless of where he is.

Not that he’ll do it perfectly; not that he’ll never mess up; not that this moment at Peniel marks the end of his struggle with self-worship and selfishness and all of the other sins which so easily befall the human heart. But Jacob’s transition here most assuredly marks a startling realization on his part: first, that there really is a God, and it is not him; and second, that this God, almighty in power and wisdom and strength, is also rich in mercy and abounding in love. Abounding in love even for someone like him, a scoundrel and a deceiver. Abounding in love, in fact, *especially* for someone like him.

There’s a lot in this moment, I believe, for you and me to consider today. There’s a lot here for us to think on, to ponder over, to — dare I say — wrestle with. To put it bluntly, there’s a lot of Jacob in us, and a lot of us in Jacob. But the good news in that is this: the same God — the God who is almighty in power and wisdom and strength but also rich in mercy and abounding in love — is abounding in love for us. Abounding in love through the Son He sent to be our Savior. Abounding in love, in fact, through the Son He sent as our Savior through the line of... Jacob!

We’ll talk more about all of this next time as we begin our look at Genesis 33. I hope you’ll come and be part of things, and I thank you deeply for being part of things today. Take care everyone, and God-willing, I’ll see you again soon.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you for another day in the Scriptures, and as we move into a new chapter in God's Word this week I'm grateful as always for your presence and praying as always for your growth in Christ and in your understanding of His Word. Today we're in Genesis 33 for the first time to follow Jacob as he prepares to face Esau. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on this day we bless your holy name and ask that you bless the teaching of your Word. Create in each of us a steadfast heart that trusts and acts upon your gracious promises to your people. We love you, and we thank you as always for this time. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Jacob has walked away from Peniel and turned once more toward Canaan...but he knows that between him and home is a dark moment from his past that has quite inconveniently found its way to his present. How will he deal with it? That's our focus for the day.

Genesis 33:1-3

Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. ²He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. ³He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

Here in Georgia, just as in many places, both the hummingbird and the vulture fly over our landscape. We have about a dozen species of hummers here, and two species of vultures. Our hummers have just begun to leave for the season — one of the reasons they're on my mind today — while the vultures stay year-round. The two birds are different in other ways too. Size is an obvious one, and their social habits are dissimilar as well. Another distinction between the two? Their diet. Out in the world, vultures see one thing: rotting meat. They see it because that's what they look for. They thrive on that food source, and while they can kill small prey when necessary, for the most part they just exist on what's already dead. Hummingbirds, on the other hand, aren't about decaying flesh. Instead, they search out the living. The beautiful, fragrant flowers that dot the countryside, whether in open fields or suburban backyards like mine, are their food. Vultures live on what was. They live on the past. They fill themselves with what's dead and gone. But hummingbirds live on what is. They seek new life. They fill themselves with it all day, every day, from dawn to dusk.

Each bird finds what it's looking for.

And for that matter, you and I do too.

Today we begin our time in Genesis 33 with a simple observation: Jacob, looking up to see his brother Esau appear with 400 of his men...a show of force strong enough to make anyone weak in the knees...has a decision to make. His past has finally caught up with him. It's standing, literally, between him and his future. So — will he be a vulture or a hummingbird?

Will Jacob lean in as he always has in the past, feeding on the death and decay of broken, deceit-ridden relationships, or will he seek out life instead? In this first test of his "new way for a new day" life under God's gracious hand, will he go back to what's comfortable and familiar — an environment which, though reeking of rot, is one he knows and understands how to

navigate — or will he take a deep breath, trust the Lord, and face what he needs to face with honesty, integrity, and humility? If you've ever been there yourself, then you know that while on paper the choice is easy, in practice it can be exceedingly difficult. There's a lot of personal risk involved. The outcome, at least initially, may not be what you had hoped for. There's the very real possibility of being hung out to dry or worse. To put it bluntly, faith is harder than fear. And that's precisely where Jacob finds himself at the moment.

His choice, of course, isn't a secret. The text is clear: In what can only be described as an amazing show of newness in a moment of extreme uncertainty, Jacob chooses faith. Jacob forsakes the way of the vulture for the way of the hummingbird and trusts his Lord for life. Look at today's verses again: there's no old Jacob in evidence here at all. No blustering, blathering, or bamboozling...only bowing. There's no fakery here either; only one who's been through the fire of testing and has come to the conclusion that, counterintuitive though it may seem, the only safe bet anymore in life is on God and His ways rather than on anything Jacob might manufacture on his own.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the picture we come away from this passage might at first glance be one seeming to lack parity. It's Esau and his 400 men on one side and Jacob, his wives, and his children on the other. Humanly speaking, it's incredibly lopsided indeed. Jacob, though, now has something more...something that until very recently he had never fully assembled in his heart and mind. Jacob now has the realization that the God of his grandfather Abraham and the God of his father Isaac is real and true, and that this God is his God as well. Jacob has moved from death to life. He's moved from the precariousness of planning each day on his own to resting in the promises of the Almighty. He's certainly not comfortable at the moment. There's certainly more than a modicum of the unknown before him right now. But for the first time ever in a conscious way, Jacob is trusting that unknown future to a known God. And that has made all the difference.

I don't need to spend too much time connecting the dots for us today. I trust that the Holy Spirit has been doing that for you and me as we've gone along. As we close, let me just say this one thing: If you've been laboring over the past, living there, feeding there, getting your sustenance from things that are dead and gone, it's time to seek out life instead. It's time to forsake the vulture mentality and embrace that of the hummingbird. And the way you start is by taking a conscious step forward from fear to faith. Take a deep breath, trust the Lord, and face what you need to face today with honesty, integrity, and humility. Uncomfortable and counterintuitive though it may seem, I promise you, on the authority of the Scriptures themselves, that the only safe bet for any one of us in life is on God and His ways rather than on anything we might manufacture on our own. God bless you richly in our Savior Jesus as you think on that, and do know that I'll be praying for you as the day goes on.

Take care everyone, and I'll see you again next time!

a. He divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants: These preparations were not necessarily examples of unbelief or of human wisdom and strength. Yet the order of the groups shows that Jacob openly favored Rachel and her son Joseph, with Rachel and Joseph last.

b. He put the maidservants and their children in front: Leah and her children were more protected than the two maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah, and their respective children.

2. (3) Jacob demonstrates his submission to Esau.

Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

a. He crossed over before them: After being conquered by God, Jacob now led the procession to meet Esau. This displays some change of character.

b. Bowed himself to the ground: Jacob already sent over gifts and showed he didn't want to take anything materially from Esau. Then, by bowing down, he showed he was submitted to his brother and wanted no social power over him.

If Jacob had not superstitiously tried to steal the blessing 20 years before, all this would have been unnecessary. Isaac's promise to Jacob, Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren (Genesis 27:29) would have been more immediately fulfilled.

ii. It is still common to suffer some problems because we try to accomplish what we think to be God's will, or in unbelief to protect ourselves with merely human energy and wisdom. God never needs us to sin to help Him fulfill His plan in our lives.

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, a day that, like each day we gather, sees us coming together as God's people redeemed in Christ, celebrating His love, and learning from His Word. It's great to have you along for the next few minutes as we go to the Scriptures, and as we do that today we'll be opening again to the beginning of Genesis 33. Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, as we move into our Bible study time today we ask that you, by your Spirit, would go before us. Light the way, open our hearts and minds, and accomplish through your Word all that you have purposed for us. We know this is your good and gracious will, and so we ask these things with joy and confidence in the name of our risen Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the meeting between Jacob and Esau, which we've been preparing for for some time now, finally occurs. Jacob has come before Esau and bowed low to the ground in submission, wondering what might happen next. As we look at the exchange between these two brothers, brothers who have been at enmity with one another over a wrong committed a very long time ago, we don't see revenge, but reconciliation. It's a riveting and beautiful picture. Our focus this session: A most powerful embrace.

Genesis 33:4-11

4But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. 5Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked. Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant." 6Then the maidservants and their children approached and bowed down. 7Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down. 8Esau asked, "What do you mean by all these droves I met?" "To find favor in your eyes, my lord," he said. 9But Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself." 10"No, please!" said Jacob. "If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. 11Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need." And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

I'd like to point out something today. Having just read the passage before us, there's both a lot to say...and not much to say at all. There's a lot to talk about...but also very little to talk about. The verses we've just read are verses about forgiveness and reconciliation. They're verses about God's mercy. They're verses about new beginnings. They're also verses about moving on...or to put it more succinctly, moving forward. I'm not going to comment on the passage itself today; we'll be doing that tomorrow in conjunction with the next section of verses. For now, I'd like you to take a brief moment out of your day to listen to and ponder over a modern-day story that is in many ways a parallel of what's in the text. As you do that, I hope that it will move you to consider the manner in which you yourself have been forgiven by God in Christ. I also hope it will remind you of the calling you've thus been given by God to forgive others in like manner. Not just for their benefit, but for yours as well.

Here then is that short story. It's a riveting and beautiful account to be sure. It's also an account that just might rub you the wrong way — which makes it all the more important to meditate on.

"The man I ate dinner with tonight killed my brother."

Those words, spoken by a woman named Ruth Youngsman at a Prison Fellowship Ministries banquet in Seattle, Washington, amazed the audience who was listening to her. She told how a man named John had murdered her brother during a robbery, served 18 years in prison as a result, and then settled into a job on a dairy farm to start his life over again. That's where she met him in 1983, 20 years after his crime. Compelled by Christ's command to forgive, Ruth had gone to her enemy and pronounced forgiveness....and then, going a step further, she took him to her father's deathbed, prompting reconciliation there as well.

Many people who have heard that story over the years have condemned it rather than lauded it. To them, it's not a success story, because nowhere along the way did John the murderer dedicate his life to Christ. But at that Prison Fellowship banquet in Seattle, this is what did happen: John got up to speak, and his voice cracked as he said, "Christians are the only people I know that you can kill their son, and they'll make you a part of their family. I don't know the Man Upstairs, but He sure is hounding me."

It's true that John's story was unfinished. It's true that at that time he hadn't yet come to know and embrace Christ. But that's not really the focus of the story. The focus of the story is that just as Christ died for us regardless of our actions or acceptance, Ruth forgave John without qualification. Even more, she became his friend — and in doing so, she made a way for both of them to move forward....to finally move forward.

Are there forgiveness issues in your life today...either as one needing to forgive or one needing to be forgiven? Are there longstanding hurts, unresolved issues, or long-repressed fears and anxieties about various relationships in your life that are preventing you from moving on... preventing you from moving forward? The beginning of the end of that road, the place to finally start if you would have peace and renewal and restoration, is not in your own heart; it's in the heart of God. The place to begin is with Him, or to say it in a more accurate way, the place of beginning is in bowing before God and admitting that you've come to the end. That's what Jacob did, and look at what we see happening today between him and his brother some twenty years after his crime. Look at God making a way. Look at two grown men starting life over again with one another when before their relationship was marked by deceit, hatred, and murderous thoughts.

"Where there's a will, there's a way" isn't always true in life. But where God is, there is always a way indeed...and when we come back next time, we'll be fleshing that out some more, so I hope you'll come along to be part of our time together. Lots to think about today, I know, but the Lord is with us as we consider it all. Have a great day everyone, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon. Take care!

Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day!

a. Esau ran to meet him: This probably terrified Jacob. Surely, he thought his life would soon end. Instead, God had worked in Esau, and he only wanted to bless Jacob.

b. Fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept: Esau and Jacob did not feel a need to discuss and resolve the past. God worked in both their hearts, and there was no need to discuss or argue over it all again. What was past was past.

c. Who are these with you: In a moving scene, Jacob introduced his large family to his brother Esau.

a. What do you mean by all this company which I met: Jacob's generous gifts confused Esau. He did not expect this, showing that he had no sense of superiority over Jacob or did not have a strong sense that Jacob owed him.

b. I have enough... I have enough: Both Esau and Jacob have a blessed testimony; they could both say, I have enough. Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). Esau's peace and contentment showed him to be a remarkably blessed man, though he did not receive the promise of the Abrahamic covenant as he had hoped.

i. "Although Esau did not receive the great blessing — the covenant blessing, — that having gone to Jacob who secured it by deception, yet Esau did receive a great blessing of a temporal kind, which Isaac pronounced upon him with all the fervor of a father who loved his son most ardently. Esau thus received what he most wanted, for he cared very little for the spiritual blessing, — not being a spiritual man, — and when he obtained the temporal blessing, that satisfied his heart, and he said, 'It is enough.'" (Spurgeon)

c. So he urged him, and he took it:

Esau's receiving of the gifts was as important to the reconciliation as Jacob's giving of the gifts. When Jacob gave such generous gifts, it was his way of saying to Esau that he was sorry, and when Esau accepted the gifts, it was his way of accepting Jacob and saying he was forgiven. In that culture, one never accepted a gift from an enemy, only from a friend. To accept the gift was to accept the friendship.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and blessings to each of you in our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a privilege to be with you today, where in our time together over the next few minutes we'll be continuing our study of Genesis 33. With this new chapter we're marking a shift in focus as we follow Jacob back to the land of Canaan and into a new way of looking at life...though as we'll quickly see, that new life is one which is definitely still in transition! Thanks for coming along today; let's pray as we open the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for who you are and what you've done for us through your life, death, and resurrection. We have no words to express how grateful we are. We come to you today for help...we come asking that you would help us to learn and grow in faith toward you as we open the Scriptures. More important, help us to understand in ever growing fashion your great faithfulness to us. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with things having gone favorably for Jacob in his meeting with his brother — yesterday we even saw a heartwarming moment where Jacob introduced Esau to his wives and children — we'd think that all is well and that Jacob's heart has been set at ease. That, however, seems to be far from the case, and we need to take a moment and address it. Our focus this session: Jacob hedges his bets.

Genesis 33:12-17

12Then Esau said, "Let us be on our way; I'll accompany you." 13But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. 14So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the droves before me and that of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir." 15Esau said, "Then let me leave some of my men with you." "But why do that?" Jacob asked. "Just let me find favor in the eyes of my lord." 16So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. 17Jacob, however, went to Succoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Succoth.

When I found out that I would be leaving the Missouri Ozarks and moving to the Atlanta, Georgia area as a church worker, I wrestled with something that as a pastor I had never wrestled with before: I wrestled with the idea of leaving my farm behind...of leaving one place to go to another. It wasn't that I was struggling over leaving the property or the lifestyle of countryside living. It wasn't that I had second thoughts about the move — at least I don't think that was the case. To tell you the truth, I can't really say what it was that made me uneasy and ambivalent about exiting Missouri, and to this day I've never resolved it. What I can tell you, however, is that when I made the final decision to go to Georgia, my initial plan was to hang on to the farm. My plan was to keep it. My thought was that having it there in the wings, so to speak, was somehow wise and prudent, and since I didn't need to sell it, I convinced myself that retaining a place for the family out in rural America would be good for my kids and grandkids, yada yada yada. Here, though, is what I think was really going on: I think I was hedging my bets. For some reason I was afraid of the future, and looking back, I believe now that I was trying to hold on to an out if I ran into trouble — trying to maintain a safety release valve of sorts that would enable me to get back on my feet if I fell on my face.

The oddest thing about that whole season in my life was that I had never experienced anything like it before and I've never experienced anything like it since. I've always been an all-in, no-holds-barred kind of person when it comes to my vocation, and I still am today. But in the spring of 2014, I was a person whose hands were on the plow but whose head was looking

back. I was a double-minded man. Again, I've still never worked out the "why" of it. But to deny it would be dishonest.

Jacob and Esau have reconnected. Not only that, they've reconciled. The meeting between the two has gone well, and Esau has taken pains to let Jacob know that all is forgiven and that the past is over and gone. In today's passage we see Esau's joy, and he even makes an overture to Jacob about traveling home together.

Jacob, though, begs off.

Not only does he beg off, he lies to his brother.

And not only does he lie to his brother, he ultimately goes on to act in disobedience to some very clear decrees that the Lord has spoken to him about where to go, what to do, and how to settle in the land after returning to Canaan.

Isn't this rather odd behavior from a man who has just taken major strides forward as a truster of God and a follower of His ways? Isn't it peculiar that in the morning he stands as God's Israel, a man of integrity with a newfound confidence in the Lord who faces the coming of his brother with faith in divine blessing and promise, but now just hours later seems once again to be God's Jacob, the shifty deceiver with a ready plan in his back pocket that can be tailored to any eventuality?

The excuse-based answer to this is that Jacob has been under stress; he's still jittery and perhaps not thinking things through very well at the moment. Maybe he just needs some time to clear his head and become rational again. The reality-based answer, however, is much more simple: Jacob is a man who's hedging his bets. Jacob is afraid of his future. Jacob is holding on to an out should he run into trouble, a safety release valve that will enable him to get back on his feet if he falls on his face.

Let's be quick to add something quite important here. It's true: Jacob *has* been taking some very bold and laudable steps of faith in recent days. We've seen him place his trust in God in ways that he never has before. But we also see — not surprisingly, because we can surely relate to this ourselves — that Jacob is still placing his trust in Jacob as well. And we'll continue to see that tug of war, that ebb and flow, that stubborn plague of double-mindedness on display, for the rest of his life...just like it maintains its hold on you and me in these days.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, what we see in Jacob's behavior should not be shocking to us, nor should it be offensive. As I alluded to just a minute ago, if anything, Jacob's behavior will be familiar to us since we engage in it ourselves. Rising to walk in newness of life is a real thing, and it's also a beautiful thing. But guess what? It's not a one-and-done kind of proposition. We are indeed justified by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus for us at Calvary. It truly is finished! We are forgiven and free! But growing in sanctification is a life-long process...and sometimes it can be one step forward, two steps back as we go. That's what Jacob is learning right now as he navigates his way forward as a servant of the Lord. It's something we'll see in his life right to the very end of it. When we come back next time, we'll add another layer to this current conversation, so I hope you'll join in and be part of it. Until then, have a terrific day everyone, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. I'm happy to have you along for our last bit of study time before the weekend, where today we'll be coming to our second-to-last look at Genesis 33. God's blessings to us are great and mighty as we come under the authority of His Word, so let's pray as we begin and ask for open hearts and minds to receive what our Lord has for us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, We thank you for your mercy – for the great truth that though weeping may last for the night, with the coming of morning comes restoration and renewal and times of refreshing from you. Please bless us today with eyes to see and ears to hear as we open your Word. This we ask in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 33 ends with what would seem to be a brief summary statement about Jacob's sojourn back to the land of Canaan, but there's actually much more than meets the eye in the few verses before us. We'll be closing out the chapter when we come back together on Monday, but before we do that, we need to take a brief moment to connect some very important dots. Our focus this session: The God of Abraham, Isaac...and yes, Jacob...that is, the God of Israel.

Genesis 33:18-20

18After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. 19For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. 20There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel.

To talk about God's ongoing, far-reaching, often uncomfortable but ever-thorough work in our lives as the people He dearly loves, C.S. Lewis used to tell a story about his childhood. He wrote,

When I was a child, I often had a toothache, and I knew that if I went to my mother, she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep. But I did not go to my mother – at least not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this: I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin; but I knew she would also do something else. I knew she would take me to the dentist the next morning. I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more, which I did not want. I wanted immediate relief from my pain; but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew those dentists; I knew they would start fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. Our Lord is like the dentists. Dozens of people go to him to be cured of some particular sin. Well, he will cure it all right, but he will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if you once call him in, he will give you the full treatment.

Today in our initial reading of the end of Genesis 33, we're looking once again at Jacob. As we do so, it's fitting at this juncture that our gaze be a more contemplative one than usual. Why? Because with just a few lines of narrative here in the text, God's Word has actually brought us to a very powerful moment that merits reflection.

To keep with C.S. Lewis's analogy, here is a man who spent the better part of his life searching out quick fixes for his almost continual spiritual toothache. He tried for years to ignore the decay that caused him ongoing pain. He diligently sought to avoid the dental chair and did his

best to power through on his own, but powering through on his own just brought more decay. It was as he was fleeing for his life, heading north from Canaan to Haran after pulling yet another shenanigan on his family. that he had his first encounter with the One who could cure his ill. Do you remember it?

Way back in Genesis 28, God appeared to Jacob in a dream. It was a magnificent scene with a stairway resting on the earth, its top reaching to heaven. The angels of God were ascending and descending on it, and above it all stood the Lord, who spoke promises to Jacob which were even more magnificent than the vision itself. It was a truly remarkable moment. Jacob's response at that time, however, was essentially the equivalent of trying to accept an aspirin without getting roped into a trip to the dentist. He said, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God." (Genesis 28:20-21). He also raised a pillar there as a memorial of the occasion and anointed it with oil...a practice not associated with the worship of the Lord but with the idol worship of the day.

God, of course, was the God of Jacob even then, just as He is the God of all of us, and indeed of all creation. In Jacob's mind, however, God wasn't his God in the least; He was merely the God of his fathers, a deity now applying for the job of leading him as well. If God would give him what he wanted, he'd consider Him for the full time gig. But like C.S. Lewis found out when it came to getting relief for his toothache, Jacob would end up learning over the next twenty years or so that he couldn't get what he wanted out of God without getting something more, which he didn't want. He wanted immediate relief from his pain and predicament, but over time he would learn that he couldn't get it without other things being permanently set right.

If we were to take the time today to review Jacob's subsequent encounters and interactions with God — encounters between that moment in Genesis 28 and the passage we have before us here at the end of Genesis 33 — the picture we would get is consistent. Jacob steadfastly refrained from calling God his own for a long time, as evidenced in both Genesis 31 and 32. And though in the face of God's continual grace and mercy we saw him being drawn more deeply in, saw his heart softening, saw change beginning, even saw his name changed to Israel by God Himself, we also saw in Jacob a man very uncomfortable sitting in the Dentist's chair.

That's why what we see here at the conclusion of our present chapter is so powerful. That's why the simple words before us seem inadequate for what is being described. As Jacob returns to Canaan and settles in, though we see him continue to do some very Jacob-like things (which we'll talk about next time we're together), we also see this: one of his first orders of business is to set up an altar...not a pillar, but an altar...not a pagan symbol but a proper place of worship. And what does he name it? "El Elohe Israel." Translation:

God, the God of Israel.

God has always been Jacob's God...but after two decades of pain and struggle and squirming and wriggling away, after years and years of trying to get by on his own, Jacob has finally realized that truth. He has submitted to it, embraced it. He has ceased striving. Jacob has come from a pillar of bargaining to an altar of worship. And in doing so, he has come at last to a place of peace with the Lord.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I don't think I need to say that Jacob's story is also your story and my story; in our own way, each one of us knows that though the specific twists and turns may be different, his journey from pain to peace, and his wrestling along the way, is also

our own as a people called out of darkness and into the light of Christ. And C.S. Lewis was right, wasn't he: Our Lord is like the dentist. We go to Him with our pain...to be cured of some particular sin. He will cure it all right, but He won't stop there. That may be all we asked; but if we once call Him in, He will give us the full treatment.

God be with you today, everyone; Christ's rich and abiding peace to you and yours, and I'll see you again next time. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Joy to you in our risen Lord Jesus, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you at the beginning of another week, and I'm praying that you'll be encouraged and strengthened in your faith over the next several days as we continue our way through the study of Genesis. Our Lord is always in the process of calling us to Himself, and His Word is one of the great means through which He does that, so I'm especially glad you've come along today to open the Scriptures with me. Let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Lord, we pray that as we work through another week together, you would continually put your hand of blessing upon each one of us, and that you would graciously guide and protect us as your dearly loved children in all that we do. Bless the hearing, teaching, and study of your Word today. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're closing our time in Genesis 33 by doing a quick bit of review and also by highlighting something important that we see being evidenced in Jacob's life. Our focus: the great goodness of God; the great foolishness of self.

Genesis 33:18-20

18After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. 19For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. 20There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel.

For four years back in the 1980s, I was a member of my high school speech team. I loved it. It was a place to belong, a place to learn some practical life skills, and a place to make some good friends. It was also, unfortunately, a place where on one occasion I got into big trouble.

Once I became an upperclassman, I and some of my fellow team members would sometimes be invited to serve as helpers at tournaments for beginning speakers. Those events were always a lot of fun, and there was also a little bit of freedom that went along with them: for some reason, instead of riding the bus with the rest of the students we were allowed to drive our own cars to wherever the tournament was being held. That fact would be my downfall.

I don't remember all of the details anymore, but here are the basics: I had been offered a chance to go and serve at a tournament two towns away. I shared this invitation with my parents and asked their permission to go, which was granted. On the day of the event, my friends invited me to ride with them. I declined, telling them that I was having a little tire trouble with my own car and that I was going to stop off at the GoodYear shop to get it taken care of. I'd catch up with them before the tournament started. Two of them offered to come with me to ensure that I would be safe, and again I declined, thanking them very much and assuring them there was no danger — I just had a slow leak that I needed to get plugged. So it was that they said goodbye and went off to the tournament, and so it was that I went off too...but not to the tournament. A different opportunity had come my way a few days before, and I had decided to use the speech tournament as a cover and go to be with my other friends instead.

Because high school students aren't always very wise, it won't surprise you that I didn't completely think through the points of my plan. My friends at the speech tournament worried when I didn't show up, and so what did they do? They went to the office and called my mom. Mom, worried sick, had no idea where I was...and just three years earlier she'd lost a son to a terrible accident under similar circumstances, so you can imagine her state of mind. As for me?

As for me, I waltzed into the house at the carefully planned, pre-appointed time that would make it look like I was returning from the speech tournament. But one look at my mom — and my dad too — and I knew that they knew I hadn't gone where I said I was going and hadn't done what I said I'd be doing. In the end, the aftermath of my foolish choices brought a lot of suffering to my family. The consequences I earned, as bad as they were, didn't hold a candle to the hurt I felt for what I had done to my folks.

As we come back a final time to Genesis 33 today, I promised you a brief review, followed by the highlighting of something that's especially important for you and me to grasp as we look at Jacob and the life he's been leading. So — what has been happening over the past 20 verses?

First, Jacob has faced Esau like a man: head-on, with no excuses, and with a truly humble heart. That's wonderful. He's also reconciled with Esau, and he's done so with integrity. That's wonderful as well. But as soon as that bit of business is done, what happens? First, he wriggles out of his brother's invitation to travel together. His livestock, he says, and his children...they need a lot of care and attention, and they can't travel too quickly or things will go badly for them. He also declines Esau's offer to leave some of his men to assist him. That's fine as far as it goes, but look at what immediately follows: Jacob next lies to Esau, promising to join him in Seir a bit down the line, which he never does. Why do we know that? Because the text says that rather than travel south to join his brother — a journey that would have been about 100 miles — Jacob instead makes a quick hop of less than five miles to the west, making camp in Succoth. After a period time there, he ultimately continues his journey westward to the outskirts of Shechem, where he buys property and pitches his tent.

This, by the way, is another problem: while it's good that Jacob has returned to the land to which God has called him, Shechem is not the place within the land to which he's been called. He's supposed to have headed to Bethel, and while he'll eventually get there after the Lord speaks to him about it another time, for the moment he's made his decision on where to settle completely apart from the counsel of God. He's made his decision based on what's right in his own eyes...something which, unfortunately, will bring a lot of suffering to his family in the end.

Dr. R.C. Sproul once talked about how crazy it was that Jacob would move so quickly back into his old ways after such an amazing, life-changing encounter with Almighty God, and how easily it would have been to simply tell Esau the truth instead. He wrote, "At no point does Jacob say something directly to Esau such as, 'No, my brother. I must fulfill my vow to worship God in my country.' Again he plays fast and loose with the truth in an attempt to accomplish his purposes."

That's really the way it has been with Jacob all along...not just here in chapter 33 but going all the way back to when he bought his brother's birthright for a bowl of beans. There are fits of faith marred by flights of fear. There are bits of wisdom obscured by bucketloads of balderdash. Which brings us, incidentally, to that very important observation we should make as we say goodbye to this chapter.

First, we would be remiss to ignore the fact that Jacob's successful return to the Promised Land shows us something about God: that His abundant grace and mercy, as well as His promises, remain intact as they always have. At the same time, however, Jacob's deeds from almost the moment he enters the Land show us something else: that God's abundant grace, mercy, and promises have not cured Jacob of his life-long propensity for pursuing self-sufficiency and all that's wise in his own eyes. He's most definitely a work in progress.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, have you ever noticed that just like Jacob, though we are new creations due to the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, our former selves nonetheless rise up and trip us up in life...and do so over and over again?

Our struggle in that endeavor can leave us discouraged at times, but we need not lose heart, and why? Because just as was the case for Jacob, the Lord is at work in us, bringing His promises to bear, bringing His strength to our weakness, and conforming us more and more to the image of His Son in the process. As to our justification, it is finished. Jesus paid it all. We are forgiven and free. The old has gone and the new has come. Yet as to our sanctification, we are works in progress. So by faith, we make use of the means of grace. In addition to studying God's Word together like we do here each day, we hear the preached Word in worship and receive the sacraments. We join together for prayer, for Christian fellowship, for service. All these things bring transformation. And all these things keep us mindful both that the Lord is with us and that He is coming soon. Keep your focus there, and as you do, you'll find your spirit both longing and yielding to the Spirit of God.

Thanks, everyone...more on this when we continue next time. It's been great to be with you today, and God-willing, I'll see you again soon. Until then, take care!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings of love, joy, and peace to you in the name of our Savior Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I pray that the abiding presence of the Lord will be your ongoing strength today as you go through your routine, and as we come to another day of Bible study, I pray that our time in the Scriptures together will be a blessing to you as God's child. Let's pray as we go to His Word.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the day you've given us, and thank you especially for the power of your presence among us and your precious promise to guide and direct us in the way of blessing as we come to our Bibles. Please help us to set these next moments apart as a special time of fellowship with you. We ask this in Christ's name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've come to the introduction of Genesis 34, and as we do that we need to begin with a word of caution because of the subject matter coming our way. Our focus this session: when evil hits home.

Genesis 34:1-4

Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. 2When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and violated her. 3His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. 4And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife."

Dr. Nigel Wright, the well-known and deeply respected theologian, academic, author, and pastor in the Baptist tradition, penned a very important book back in 1990 when I was just entering the seminary. Published by Zondervan, the title was provocative. It was called *The Satan Syndrome: Putting the Power of Darkness in its Place*, and it was about the need for Christians to understand the ways of the devil so that they can be sober, alert, and act with wisdom when dealing with his evil tactics rather than find themselves in concert with them. Knowing that Satan is evil is one thing. But when it comes to the sheer terribleness of evil, when it comes to trying to make sense of its presence in the world and why it touches us (and indeed, why we touch it), sometimes it's too much to fathom, even too much to face. In his book, Dr. Wright expressed it this way:

There is a fundamental sense in which evil is not something that can be made sense of. The essence of evil is that it is something which is absurd, bizarre and irrational. It is the nature of evil to be inexplicable, an enigma and a stupidity.

As we come to Genesis 34 today, we've already touched on the truth of that statement. This chapter contains one of the ugliest, most unsettling, most upsetting, and most heart-wrenching incidents in the history of Jacob's family. As we see in today's introductory verses, a terrible crime — a great evil — is committed against Dinah, the daughter of Jacob and Leah.

The fact that this portion of Scripture deals with rape is enough for some of you, for various reasons, to make the decision to bypass it...to sit out our daily sessions for a little while and pick things up again at the beginning of chapter 35. I understand that, and the reason I'm mentioning it here at the beginning of the narrative is because I want you to be able to make that decision without it bothering your conscience. If you need to bow out for a bit, please do so with both God's blessing and mine, and know that when we pick things up in the next

chapter, there will be enough context for you to get what you need to get without dwelling on the attendant trauma of this incident and its aftermath.

And speaking of aftermaths, I also need to be clear with respect to the verses to come: more terrible things will be happening...not to Dinah but to the individual who assaulted her, to his family, and to his entire community. All of this will be at the hands of Jacob's sons — particularly Simeon and Levi. It's not a pleasant thing to say, but all in all, what we're walking into right now is 31 verses of pain, violence and vengeance. It's dysfunction with a capital D, and it will have far-reaching implications for Jacob and his family going forward.

Though in one way we can understand the rage and the resulting violence that we'll be seeing as Dinah's brothers avenge her, it's important that we recognize something else as well in our journey through this chapter: their actions against Dinah's perpetrators, though different than what was done to her, are nonetheless equally reprehensible and difficult to stomach. They are equally inexcusable. Jacob himself will make that proclamation...and thus, we will be making it with him.

Wrapping Up

I know this is a rather unusual and atypical way for us to start a section of Scripture, but the simple truth is that sometimes we need to pause for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Sometimes we need to look at things with a different set of eyes than our own. And sometimes we need to lead with sensitivity and compassion when dealing with sensitive subjects that touch the lives of the people we love and care for.

As we wrap things up for the day, one thing that we can say in the face of all that's making its way down the pike right now is that when the Bible shows its leaders and its "heroes" in the kind of unvarnished, terrible manner that we're about to witness, it speaks in a powerful way to the veracity and authenticity of Scripture. People don't typically choose, of their own volition, to write about themselves and their ancestors and their family histories like we'll see them described in the verses ahead. There's no whitewashing in this book, however, because this is a book from God. And God, taking what is all-too-real in the lives of His sinful, broken people, proclaims His mercy in the midst of it all and shows forth both His saving love and His hand of rescue in the process. That's the God Jacob and his family needs...and it's the God you and I need as well. When we come back next time, we'll get into the details of this new chapter, so do come along if you're able. We'll tread lightly but firmly as we go, and I know that we'll learn and grow together.

Thanks so much much for your time today, everyone; Christ's peace to you and yours, and I'll see you again soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being here today, where as we get going with our study time we're continuing our look at Genesis 34. I'm glad for what's before us in the text, and I hope it will bless you as we work through it. Let's pray as we go to our Bibles.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence, and we ask in this moment of quiet that you bless us with your Spirit and turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. It is life and salvation to us, and we are grateful for it. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, the opening of Genesis 34 sets before us a clash of cultures that reveals itself in a most despicable way. Our focus this session: Dinah is attacked.

Genesis 34:1-4 (Part 2)

Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. 2When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her. 3His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. 4And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife."

Sometimes things get lost in translation. Sometimes cultural distinctives can create confusion among people. Sometimes, because people can be naive, assumptions are made by one group about another that have no basis in reality at all...they're simply presumed based on incorrect and stereotypical information.

I was having a Brazilian pastor and his family over for dinner one evening. They'd come to America to study and were part of our congregation in Missouri while they lived in our community. When I heard his wife one Sunday morning at church mention to someone how much the family loved avocados and that they missed the big avocado tree in their front yard at home, I took that as the starting point of my menu, and when they came for dinner a few weeks later I had everything ready: homemade burritos made from my mom's recipe, chips and fresh salsa made from the peppers, onions, and tomatoes in my neighbor's garden, and the *coup de grace*? A huge bowl of guacamole that I made from scratch with the best avocados I could find. Sounds great, right?

It *would* be great...if Brazilian cuisine was similar to Mexican cuisine, which though I didn't know it at the time, generally isn't. Imagine my embarrassment. Imagine my further embarrassment when I learned later on that the dissimilarities between Mexican and Brazilian cuisine extend to the manner in which avocados are used. In Mexican cooking they're savory — *a la* my lovely bowl of guacamole — while in Brazilian cooking they're used more for sweet, dessert-related applications. When Pastor and his family arrived, I was keen to give them an authentic taste of home, but my ignorance with respect to their culture and my foolish assumption that all Latino cooking was similar made the meal I placed in front of them anything but. They were gracious, and I think they even enjoyed what I prepared, but it was very different from what they were used to eating. The crossed wires that night on my part definitely made for an interesting learning experience when all was said and done.

As we come back to God's Word today, we come back to the issue of the rape of Dinah. Some versions translate the Hebrew verb in verse 2 as *violated* instead of *raped*, and add that she was also *humiliated*, both of which are true and are inclusive in the overall meaning of the

word. In short, Jacob and Leah's daughter, venturing into the city to seek out other young women for friendship and probably hoping to learn about the area in the process, becomes the victim of sexual assault. The text makes clear that Shechem son of Hamor sees her, then takes her. He forces himself on her against her will and does what he wants to her.

Very quickly in the passage, however, things go decidedly sideways. After literally seizing her, then assaulting her, violating her, humiliating her...*raping her*...the text next says that Shechem son of Hamor's heart is drawn to Dinah, and that he loves her. In what can only be described as a horrific case of adding insult to injury, after he rapes her he speaks tenderly to her. And that's still not the end of it. After taking Dinah and using her to satisfy his lust, he decides he'd like to keep her — so he asks his father to secure her for him as a wife. What's going on here?

Cultural distinctives can create confusion among people. Sometimes, because people can be naive, assumptions are made by one group about another that have no basis in reality at all. In the case of Shechem and Dinah, that truth runs both ways. He looks at the world with one set of eyes; she with another. For him the situation is opportunistic; for her it's a nightmare in the making. Starting with this precipitating event, the entirety of the chapter before us is one that will be showing two worlds colliding, with disastrous results. On both sides there are missteps, mistaken impressions, and misunderstandings...presumptions made based on incorrect and stereotypical information. Let's take a moment to untangle some of the crossed wires here.

First, we need to understand something about the Canaanites. Not only was their moral code quite different from that of Jacob and his family, their moral code was essentially nonexistent. Men did what was right in their own eyes — in other words, they did whatever they wanted and placed whatever construct they needed to around their decisions in order to justify them. Combine that with the pagan view of women at the time — that they were basically property, a commodity to be used, bought, sold, traded, or even sacrificed — and you have a perfect storm of unchecked malice brewing anywhere that large groups of people resided. Unattached young women were considered fair game in cities of the time. Promiscuity wasn't just common, it was part and parcel of the fabric of society and even built into the idolatrous religious systems of the day so as to codify it. As hard as it is to fathom, any unattended and unprotected female could be taken and raped the way Dinah was, and any perceived dishonor or violation resulting from it could be mitigated in the aftermath by what amounted to a business transaction between the perpetrator and the men in her family.

This is the backdrop to what we see happening in today's passage. This is why Shechem son of Hamor is acting as he is with no hint of remorse and no feeling of the need to apologize for his actions. The Bible, for its part, is not excusing what he's done in the least; it's merely reporting how in doing what he's done to Dinah, he's acted in accordance with the ways of his people and thus sees no problem with what has ensued. He's found something that he wants, has taken it, and now wants to legally possess it.

With that in mind, don't let his saccharin words of tenderness fool you: to him, Dinah is not a person, but a product. Shechem's gross, repugnant, and violent demand for immediate gratification shows that, and it has caused her to suffer greatly. Is he attracted to Dinah? Obviously so, but also obviously, his attraction has nothing to do with real love at all; at best, only his highly misguided, deficient, and selfish understanding of love. Even being as charitable as we can possibly be, the most we can say here is that if anything, Shechem loves Dinah for what he thinks she can be for him and give to him, not for what he can ever be or give to her. Pastor David Guzik is so insightful when he remarks that "The true nature of Shechem's heart is shown when he approaches his father and says to him, 'Get me this girl as my wife.'" Indeed, it's just another display of his raw desire, not to mention his sense of entitlement as the son of the region's ruler.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, there is, of course, a great deal more to say about this matter on the other side of the coin. Jacob, Leah, and Dinah herself all leave us with questions for which answers need to be found. We'll address those matters when we come together next time, but for now, it's important as we begin working through this incident that we recognize it (and all that will follow from it) as something which is actually part of a much greater whole with much broader implications than what it at first might seem. This is not merely an egregious assault on a young woman and her personhood; it's also the opening salvo of an attack on the very covenant promise of God which has been passed from Abraham, to Isaac, and now to Jacob — to His servant Israel. We'll be unpacking that as we move forward, so I hope you'll join in and be part of it.

Thank for your time today, everyone; God bless you richly in Christ, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon. Take care, and have a great day!

A brief comment/preparatory remark on Genesis 34:1-7

When I was a young person in ministry, there was a moment about 2 1/2 years into serving my first church where within a week's time, I received three calls from three different congregations asking me to come and be their pastor. I was honestly at a loss as to what I should do. I loved where I was, I felt I was doing effective work, and I had no great desire to pick up and move. In my particular tradition, a call doesn't mandate you to leave one place and go to another — it's simply a proclamation by a congregation stating that the people there have prayed and believe that the Holy Spirit is calling you to be in their midst. It's up to you to go through your own time of prayer and of seeking wise counsel to determine if the call being extended is indeed the call of God on your life.

As I've already mentioned, there was nothing going on in my life or ministry at the time that seemed as though God was preparing to move me, nor did I have a quickening in my spirit that gripped me and pointed me in the direction of something new. What I did have, however — in spades, no less — was immaturity, impatience, and the ego of youth, three things which worked in concert with each other to bring me to what, over time, proved to be an unwise decision. Though several people whom I respected very much encouraged me to stay where I was and gave me good reasons for doing so, I ended up leaving my church anyway. Looking back, I think I should have stayed. The church I ended up going to was one with much promise but many problems...a great church that had recently gone through a period of gutting. Looking back, that congregation probably shouldn't have taken on such a green, inexperienced individual like me. They needed many things — especially seasoned leadership — which at that time in my life I was ill-equipped to provide.

Did God work through my choice in spite of it? He did. Were people pointed to Jesus and were lives changed because of the Gospel through my service there? Yes. God is gracious and merciful, and He specializes in working through us in spite of us. But in leaving the old, I left many things undone...and in going to the new, I did many things which would need to be undone by my eventual successor. If I knew then what I know now, that younger version of me would have listened more carefully to the loving advice I had received. Rather than go to where I wanted to go — a new church in a new place with new opportunities — I would have gone instead to where I needed to be: up the steps of that little country church, through the double doors, down the center aisle of the sanctuary, and into my office, where I would go about the work of counseling my people, preparing the next week's sermon, praying for my community, and leading the life of a parish pastor...the pastor I was called to be in that place.

I share this with you today to say this: the decisions we make in life have consequences. That is especially the case when it comes to the decisions we make in response to the clearly revealed will of God. We're at a place in Genesis right now where we're seeing, in heart-wrenching fashion, what it can look like to go where we want to go instead of where we need to be...what it looks like to do what is wise in our own eyes instead of remembering that the beginning of true wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

Where are you going today? Where are you called to be? Are they one and the same place, or is it possible that you're on a journey to somewhere that is less than God's will for you in Christ? Consider that as you go through your day. Pray on it. If need be, wrestle with it. When we come back next time we'll overlay all of this onto Jacob's current situation and what it is that has led him to the place he's at. It's definitely where he wanted to go, but it's not at all where he needs to be...not at all where he has been called to be.

God be with you as you ponder these things; I'll see you again next time to you unpack this some more. Joy to each of you in our Lord Jesus, and have a terrific day!

Greetings

Hello everyone! Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for joining in as we head into the final portion of our study week together, where today we're returning to Genesis 34 with more to say in the aftermath of the assault on Jacob's daughter, Dinah. I'm glad to have you along for the next few minutes; let's pray as we go back to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord God, as we thank you for this day and this time together to be in your Word, we place ourselves before you with humble anticipation, because we know what a great privilege it is to open the Scriptures and learn of you and from you. Please bless this time, we pray in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, a terrible thing has occurred in the family of Jacob. As we would expect, when word gets out about what has happened to Dinah there is great heartache and great rage. While we can't go back and change history to save Dinah from the pain inflicted upon her or the dishonor she had to endure, for our own growth in wisdom and understanding we can — and should — go back and assess the events and decisions that led to her time of suffering. Our focus this session: if only Bethel.

Genesis 34:5-7

5When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he kept quiet about it until they came home. 6Then Shechem's father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob. 7Now Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter — a thing that should not be done.

In our time together yesterday, I shared with you about some decisions I made as a very young pastor...decisions that I made for all the wrong reasons. Though God worked through my foolishness and immaturity and fashioned some good out of the bad in spite of me, the simple truth is that had I assessed my situation with my heart fixed on the Lord's purposes instead of my own, and if I had been open to the wise counsel of those around me instead of choosing to ignore their words — after all, I had gone to them for that specific reason — the trajectory of my ministry and the impact it had in the community I served would have, over the course of several years, been much different. There are, for every one of us, moments in life like that: moments when we're faced with the hard choice of choosing to go where we want to go, or choosing to go where we need to be. The outcome of such decisions can be life-changing and landscape-altering. And while they don't always carry that much significance, they always carry weight.

As we return to God's Word today and come back to the tragic, and yes, infuriating aftermath of the rape of Dinah, we have before us a rather unpleasant task: that of looking back to see what may have led to this most egregious and heartbreaking event. When we do that, when all is said and done we come down squarely on the shoulders, not of Dinah, and not even of Shechem son of Hamor, but of who? We come down squarely on the shoulders of Jacob.

Yes, Shechem is evil; a perpetrator on a power trip, a pathetic excuse of a human being who seized on an opportunity to gratify his sinful, selfish desires. We'll deal with him later.

Yes, Dinah too has contributed to this debacle. As we say that, we are not victim-blaming, nor are we questioning her morals, her dress, or any interaction she may have had with Shechem

prior to his assault. What we do question is why she left her family's household on her own and went into an unfamiliar city with no escort — a necessity in those times for the purely practical reasons of safety and protection. We don't know the backdrop, the why, of her choice, whether it was simple naivete or a spirit of willfulness. But in doing what she did, we must acknowledge that she placed herself in great danger.

Why, though, do I say that we must ultimately come back to Jacob in this mess, especially considering what we've just said about Shechem and Dinah? Where does Jacob fit into the story, and how is it that he bears responsibility for what has happened? At the heart of things, it is this: when faced with the hard choice of choosing to go where he wanted to go or choosing to go where he needed to be, Jacob followed his own desire rather than the direction of the Lord.

When he returned to Canaan, rather than go to Bethel where the Lord had called him — a place where his family would be safe and where he could grow unhindered in the nurture and admonition of the Lord — Jacob instead headed to the pagan settlement of Shechem. Not only did he camp in a place close to and overlooking the city, he even bought land there with the intention of establishing permanence. Why would he do such a thing, given that God had called him elsewhere and that the city in any case would exert a strong and ungodly pull on him and on his family? We can't say for sure, save for the fact that his human wisdom won out over his trust in the Lord. But make no mistake: like the decisions I made for all the wrong reasons as a young pastor, Jacob decided on Shechem as a place to settle for all the wrong reasons as well, and as we now see, the outcome of that decision ended up being both life-changing and landscape-altering...certainly for his daughter, but for the whole of his family as well.

Wrapping Up

In fact, as we wrap things up for the day, it is in part because of Jacob's disobedience to the Lord that we do so with a young woman suffering in the aftermath of being raped, a father troubled in heart over the violation of his daughter, a group of brothers outraged over the incident and already plotting vengeance, and oh — with an additional father on the scene as well: Shechem's father, who has come both to broker a deal for Dinah and to hold out an even greater offer to Jacob with respect to his future. We are in a place of heartache at the moment to be sure, but we are also in a place where the hustle is alive and well...which is where that bigger picture with even bigger danger that we talked about the other day begins to come into play. What a mess indeed...and when we gather again on Monday, we'll begin to discuss it.

Thanks for a great week, everyone — God-willing I'll see you again soon. Until then, the joy of our risen Lord be your deep and abiding strength! Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks for being here today for our study time in God's Word; I pray that our next few minutes together will be profitable for you as we open the Scriptures together. As we continue our time in Let's open our Bibles and pray as we begin.

Prayer

Father, have mercy on us today. As always, we are in need of your ministering presence in our lives. Thank you for your promise to be with us always; for the promise that you will never leave us or forsake us. We especially ask that you would draw near to us now as we study your Word. Use it to transform us by the renewing of our minds. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today and return to Genesis 34, we're coming to the scene of Hamor and his son Shechem approaching Jacob and his sons with the hope of acquiring Dinah as Shechem's wife...Shechem, who has just raped her. Our focus this session: a most distasteful — and dangerous — offer.

Genesis 34:8-12

8But Hamor said to them, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. 9Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. 10You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it." 11Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. 12Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the girl as my wife."

Our ministry office in Brunswick, Georgia, sits at the south end of town about four blocks from the port. Not only do we see and hear big boats coming and going throughout the day, we also hear the sounds of the railroad that runs alongside the riverfront. There's a spur there for loading and offloading cargo to and from the ships, and the trains go back and forth all day long as they move their goods and supplies.

I recently read an article from a safety officer that taught me some things about trains that I didn't know. For example, did you know that it's common for a train to "outrun" its sound? That means that by the time you hear it, it's usually almost right on top on you. If a train engineer sees you on a track, he'll blow the whistle, but most engineers say that it often takes more than one blast to get the average person's attention. That doesn't bode well for you, especially when you consider another thing I learned in that same article: when it comes to the rails themselves, there's a common optical illusion that happens with the tracks. When you see a train coming, to your mind's eye it actually looks as if it's traveling half as fast and is two times farther away than it really is. In other words, if a freight train is going 60 miles per hour and is half a mile away, it looks to you as though it's traveling 30 miles per hour and is a mile away.

Taken together, these facts show why last year in the United States almost 900 people were killed, and almost 5,800 more were injured, by trains. Some of those folks never heard what was coming. Others didn't see their situation for what it really was. In each case, by the time they saw the danger they were in it was too late to get out of the way.

I mention all of that for a reason. As we come to God's Word today, there's a train coming down the tracks like no other. Hamor and his son Shechem are the dual locomotives at the front, and they're moving some bad cargo — cargo they'd like to offload onto Jacob and his

family. Shechem, as we already know, wants Dinah for his wife. Hamor is intent on reaching an agreement to that end with Jacob. Hamor and Shechem, in fact, are actually attempting to negotiate the matter in good faith, and they probably feel that they're being generous in what they're offering for Dinah. What they don't realize, however, is that the manner in which they're going about things is just dishonoring Dinah even more than she's already been dishonored, and it's further raising the ire of her father (and especially her brothers) at the same time. Offers of money and marriage won't make her pain and disgrace go away, nor will it sweep Shechem's deplorable actions against her under the rug.

Yet that fact, bad as it is, is only half of the equation today, and why? Because while Hamor and Shechem obviously have an agenda, and while they're definitely seeking a specific outcome, they actually have no idea of the *true* danger that they're peddling. As they come to Jacob and his sons with their proposal, the money means nothing. Jacob is already extremely wealthy and has no need of more. What's far more tantalizing at the moment is this:

"Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it." (Verses 9-10)

That Hamor and his son are trying to put together a crude business deal in order to acquire Dinah as a wife for Shechem is indeed disgusting and inappropriate, and it's an issue that needs to be called out all by itself. But the broader invitation here — the invitation to get comfortable in the land, to enculturate, to intermarry, to settle — presents a direct threat to the integrity of God's covenant promise to Jacob, his family, and all the families in the world who will be blessed through him over time. Intermarriage with the Canaanites, in fact, would prove to be especially disastrous in the big picture of God's redemptive plan for humanity. Think about it: the allowing of this one marriage to occur wouldn't just be highly damaging in and of itself; if Shechem were to be allowed to take Dinah as his wife, it would set a precedent, a pattern, for future marriages between Jacob's family and the people of Canaan. The result? An eventual and complete assimilation of Jacob's family into Canaanite culture...and Canaanite idolatry to boot.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, it needs to be said again: the issue of Dinah's rape is a terrible blow to her and her family, and the actions we see by Hamor and Shechem to legitimize it in today's verses is reprehensible. At the same time, the undercurrent here...the almost subliminal subtext of the situation...presents an additional and highly insidious menace. The future of this covenant family as a distinct people set apart for God and His purposes is at risk. The question is this: Does Jacob hear what's coming in the words being spoken to him? Does he see this situation for what it really is? Does he recognize the danger at hand? And if so, does he have enough time to get out of the way?

That's what we'll be talking about in the days ahead, so I hope you'll follow along this week as we work through it. Thanks for spending part of your day with me, everyone; the peace of Christ rest on each of you in great measure, and I'll look forward to seeing you again next time. Take care, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. Today in our study time we'll be continuing our way through the verses of Genesis 34, building on what we talked about yesterday — the encounter between Hamor and his son and Jacob and his sons over the matter of Dinah. We have just a little bit of groundwork to lay today in what will be a shorter session than usual, so let's pray as we go to the Scriptures and ask for God's blessing.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we do ask today that in your love and compassion for your people, you would bless the study of your holy Word. Draw close to us and speak to our hearts as we open our Bibles. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Hamor and Shechem think that their negotiations for the acquisition of Dinah are going well, and on the surface that certainly looks to be the case. The reality of the situation, however, is that they're being set up for a great fall. Our focus this session: a steep counteroffer, in more ways than one.

Genesis 34:13-17

13Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. 14They said to them, "We can't do such a thing; we can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. 15We will give our consent to you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. 16Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. 17But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go."

Deception has been part of warfare since the Trojan horse. During WWII, there were instances when it was nothing short of high art. The other day my son, a history buff, was telling me about one such instance — a pre D-Day ruse employed by the Americans that would prove very helpful on the actual day of the invasion. For several weeks beforehand, members of the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops used special "weapons"...dummy planes, tanks, anti-aircraft guns, and amplified recordings that created war sounds...to fool the German high command. To enable a combat unit to change positions or even attack when the Germans thought it hadn't moved at all, the 1800 men of the 23rd impersonated entire divisions. They'd move in at night, change insignias, and inflate their rubber decoys. Meanwhile, the troops they were replacing sneaked away. Such deception was a major factor in the success of the Allies on D-Day, as the German 15th Army waited elsewhere for an assault that never came.

As we come to God's Word today, a war is brewing...but only one side knows it, and they're going to keep it that way. How? Through the use of deception. Planned, calculated, and utterly ruthless deception.

When we left off last time, Hamor and his son Shechem had come to Jacob and his sons for the purpose of acquiring Dinah to be Shechem's wife. They were engaging in what to them was a common and accepted practice, and they were extra conciliatory in their approach because they knew Shechem's actions had caused grief and dismay to Dinah's family and they wanted to assuage the consternation of her male relatives. They came, therefore, with open hands. They came offering what they considered to be a very generous transaction, one that would make everything right between the two parties. Finally, they were confident that with their offer, they would achieve their desired outcome.

In today's reading, however, God's Word lets us know right up front that Jacob's boys have a different take on things altogether. They're seething with rage, and they're also bent on vengeance because of what Shechem has done to their sister. Pulling a page out of their father's playbook, rather than reveal their true state of mind they employ a ruse. Rather than confront, they conceal. Instead of spitting words in anger, they speak words of deception. How do they do it? Covering their true feelings (and as we'll see, their true intentions) with spiritual platitudes, they agree to the proposal of Hamor and Shechem on one condition: all the men in the land must be circumcised as they are in order to proceed. If they will agree to that, then not only can Shechem and Dinah marry, but the two extended families can enjoy a shared future as well. If they refuse, then Jacob and his sons will simply take Dinah and go.

If this seems like an ultimatum to you, you're right. It is. If, however, it seems like a trap, then you're even more right, and you've just hit the nail on the head. This is a trap for the ages, and the way it has just been laid is nothing short of high art.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, make no mistake: to Shechem, Dinah is a prize that would almost be worth cutting himself to have. His base instincts are ready to accept almost any stipulation set forth by Jacob and his sons if it means getting to possess Dinah as his own. To Shechem's father Hamor, however, the bigger prize in this whole scenario is Jacob and his vast wealth...Jacob and his large family...Jacob dwelling in his land and becoming inculcated and absorbed into the fabric of the culture of his people. From Hamor's perspective as the leader of the region, that's where the true pay dirt is in all of this, and if circumcision is what it takes to gain access to all that Jacob brings to the table, in his eyes it's a temporary discomfort with the potential to yield permanent good fortune. That, in fact, is why we'll soon see him take his case to the men of the city and seek buy-in from them.

Hamor has no way of knowing it, of course, but though in his eyes He's acting as an advocate for a preferable future, in reality he's only advancing the plans of his enemy and hastening a precipitous fall. We'll talk more on this subject when we gather together next time, so be sure to come along and be part of it. Until then, have a terrific day everyone, and may the joy of our Lord Jesus uplift and sustain you in all your ways. Take care, and I'll see you soon!

God's Word: Give It Your All (Special Session)

It wasn't like Scott Kregel to give up. He was a non-stop fighter, a dedicated basketball player with a reputation for excellence. He had spent hour after hour perfecting both his free throw and his jump shot during the hot summer months of 1987. Just before fall practice began, however, everything changed for Scott. A serious car accident left him in a coma for several days, and when he awoke, a long rehabilitation process lay ahead.

Like most patients with closed-head injuries, Scott balked at doing the slow, tedious work that was required to get him back to normal — things like stringing beads to redevelop his fine motor skills. What high school junior would enjoy that? But Tom Martin, Scott's basketball coach at the Christian school he attended, had an idea. Coach Martin told Scott that he would reserve a spot on the varsity team for him if he would cooperate with his therapist and show progress in the tasks he was asked to do, menial though they seemed. Coach Martin's wife, Cindy, spent many hours with Scott as well, encouraging him to keep going. The doctors said there would be physical and neurological risks in trying to return to the basketball court, but with the help of the people who believed in him, Scott made the decision to give it his all.

Two months later, on a brisk autumn evening, Scott was carried off the basketball court...not on a stretcher due to an injury, but on the shoulders of his teammates. He had made nine straight free throws to clinch a triple-overtime league victory.

Scott's story is a remarkable testimony about the power of encouragement, and the reason I'm sharing it with you today is because of a comment I received on our EDiBS Facebook page yesterday. It was from an account that turned out to be a fake profile, and I wasn't able to trace it, so I don't know who sent it. Apparently, whoever it was wanted it that way. Why do I say that? Because while the message wasn't unkind, it was highly critical. Basically, the person who posted took me to task, telling me that instead of spending so much time on the historical narrative of the Scriptures and teaching passage by passage and chapter by chapter as I typically do, I should be focusing solely on spiritual application and the personal relevance of the text each day. If a passage doesn't have anything to say in that realm, said the person, I should just skip over it and not waste everyone's time.

As I thought about those remarks, I didn't find myself becoming defensive, but I did ponder the points that were made, and I understood the frustration that was being expressed. In the end I decided to receive that critique with a teachable spirit...but at the same time, it made me want to share something with all of you in the EDiBS family today that I hope will be helpful to you in your own journey through God's Word.

The Bible is a beautiful book. It is truth in its greatest and most complete expression. It holds out the message of forgiveness, of new life, and of eternal salvation in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the earliest pages of the Old Testament, it promises the coming of Jesus.

In the opening of the New Testament we see Jesus arriving on the scene, fulfilling those Old Testament promises, then living, dying, and rising again for us in victory over sin, death and the devil.

In its final pages, we see Jesus return at the consummation of the age to judge the living and the dead and to gather His own to be forever with Him.

So let me say it again: the Bible is beautiful, and the Bible is true. The Bible brings to you and to me a message of hope that each one of us desperately needs. But guess what? Sometimes, the Bible is also hard. Sometimes it's tedious. Sometimes it's difficult to understand. And sometimes, because the Bible can also be plain old boring in places, the easiest thing in the world would be to skip over the parts that don't seem that important...to set aside the passages that confuse us...to leave untouched the verses that don't immediately grab us with a promise or a principle or some other thing that we would deem to be profitable.

May I be uncomfortably honest with you for a moment? As Christians, there are times when we balk at doing the slow, tedious work that is occasionally required of us when engaging the Scriptures. It's like Scott Kregel being asked to string beads or to cooperate with his therapist or to focus on menial tasks that seem really useless to spend time on. But here's what's true: it was in doing those things that Scott got stronger. It was in doing those things that Scott began to develop his skillsets again. It was in doing those things that healing began to come into Scott's life. The process didn't always make sense to him, and he didn't always enjoy doing what he was asked to do. But to get to where he needed to be, all of those things were necessary...and in the end, all of those things made all of the difference. And here's something else that's true: it was when he made the decision to give it his all that things started to change.

As you consider God's Word today and the way you interact with it in your life...as you consider, perhaps, the portion of Genesis that we happen to be in right now, a portion of Scripture that can seem long and tedious and boring and occasionally confusing...I would like to say something to you, and I hope you won't think me presumptuous in speaking this way:

I believe in you. Keep going. Don't quit because it's hard. Don't zone out if it gets boring. Don't skip over something just because it isn't immediately applicable to your current situation in life. Instead, when it comes to the time you spend in your Bible, make the decision to give it your all. When you do that, things will start to change.

I know that the process doesn't always make sense to you. I know that it's not always enjoyable to do what needs doing. But as you come to God's Word each day, in time you're going to become stronger. In time you're going to begin to develop your skillsets as a student of Scripture. And in time you're going to see healing begin to come into your life. The impact of the power and truth of God's Word on your heart is real. It is supernatural. And in the end, it will make all the difference for you. What does God's Word itself say about our engagement with Scripture?

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Did you catch the apostle Paul's words? *All* Scripture is God-breathed, and *All* Scripture is useful — even those parts which, at times, might seem anything but.

Be encouraged today, everyone. Through His Word, God is doing a work in you and me...and nothing could be better than that! Take care, and I'll see you again next time!

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings of joy and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS. As always, it's great to be with you today as we head into the latter part of our study week, and I pray that our time in the Scriptures together will be a blessing to you. We're in Genesis 34 right now, so let's pray as we prepare for all that's before us in these next few minutes.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the day you've given us, and thank you especially for the time you've given us to spend with you in your Word. Help us to set this study time apart as a special time of fellowship with you, and help us to learn and grow as we follow along. We ask this in Christ's strong, precious, and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Jacob's sons have given a proposal to Hamor and Shechem that the two find favorable. Hamor and Shechem next go to the men of their city to get buy-in. After all agree that the terms will ultimately be to their benefit, every male in the city undergoes circumcision. What happens next? That's our focus this session.

Genesis 34:18-29

18Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. 19The young man, who was the most honored of all his father's household, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. 20So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to their fellow townsmen. 21"These men are friendly toward us," they said. "Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. 22But the men will consent to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. 23Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us." 24All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised. 25Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. 26They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. 27The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. 28They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. 29They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.

I've always been most familiar with him as a cellist of unusual talent and skill — something I probably learned in a music appreciation class somewhere — but the great Arturo Toscanini was far more legendary as one of the world's great orchestral conductors, especially when it came to presenting operas. Something I didn't know about him until recently, however, is that he was also legendary for his fits of rage. The music librarian of one of Toscanini's orchestras used to become particularly distressed by the maestro's habit of throwing valuable musical scores at the musicians when he was angry. There were no computers, laser printers, or copy machines in the early 1900s, and no truly standardized score production techniques either, so when a big sheaf of music was ruined it was very time consuming and expensive to replace.

Over time, the librarian observed that one of the first things Toscanini would do when he got angry was to take his baton in both hands and try to break it. If the baton snapped, Toscanini typically calmed down and rehearsal continued. If the baton didn't break, that's when he began hurling music across the stage. That gave the librarian an idea. To save precious and expensive

musical scores from destruction, he made sure Toscanini had a generous supply of very flimsy batons on hand for rehearsal. They broke easily, but they also broke the spell of the conductor's anger. It worked like a charm, and in time it also helped Toscanini himself see the foolishness of his behavior. Those batons were the beginning of a change in his life, and in his later years he expressed gratitude for his librarian's clever solution.

As we come back to God's Word today, I'm thinking of Toscanini's batons for a reason: oh, that Jacob's sons would have had something similar in their lives to break the spell of rage that consumed them. Had they had something — anything — to help quash their anger over what had been done to their sister, something that had enabled them to think rationally and respond in a measured manner to the situation rather than with unchecked vengeance, things for them — and indeed, for Jacob's entire family — would have been much different in the end. Instead, Simeon, Levi, and all the rest unleashed a scorched earth policy on Hamor, his son Shechem, and the entirety of the city of Shechem. It was a masterfully planned ambush, but it was also a miscalculation in the extreme.

Today's passage walks us through the events leading up to that aforementioned ambush, and the one thing we should be sure to note as we look in on the text is that there's just as much planning and hijinx going on in Hamor and Shechem's camp with respect to Jacob and his family as there is in Jacob's camp directed at them. As magnanimous as Hamor and Shechem had appeared to be in the presence of Jacob and his sons when seeking a deal for Dinah, the verses we've just read show that they had just as much of a hidden end game in mind regarding Jacob and his sons as Jacob's sons had for them in the aftermath of Dinah's rape. Look at verse 23, where Hamor and Shechem are addressing the men of their city as to whether they should agree to be circumcised. What's the impetus?

Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us.

Granted, this wasn't the planning of a massacre. It was very clearly, however, a larger plan for subjugation and control over time. Though not the seeking of a physical death *per se*, Hamor and Shechem's aim regarding Jacob and his family was that of cultural and spiritual death just the same. I don't think I would have been a person willing to undergo a cutting of my genitals for the chance to bring such a plan to fruition, but the men of the city of Shechem, seeing a grand potential for wealth generation, did — and so it was that each one submitted himself to the knife.

All of this, of course, is exactly what Jacob's sons had planned for. Remember, circumcision wasn't an office procedure back then using sterile instruments, clean bandages, and a nice local anesthetic to deal with the pain. It was crudely performed, quite painful, and also quite incapacitating — and it was while the men were dealing with that pain in their incapacitated state that Simeon and Levi went through the city, striking every one of them down with the sword. The text goes on to tell us that their brothers followed after, looting Shechem. They seized flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else they could get their hands on, and not just in the city itself but out in the fields too. Worst of all? Jacob's sons also took the women and children of the city as part of the plunder. They carried them off, where they would eventually, most likely, be made into slaves. It was a day of infamy. And it was a day that was sanctioned by no one.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up today, while it's true that we have two sets of bad actors here — acting badly, in fact, toward each other in different ways, for different reasons, and with different outcomes in mind — the actions of Jacob's sons go beyond the pale. Their wholesale throttling

of Shechem, though in one way understandable, is without merit, is absent of morals, and is void of mercy. It's something that, as we'll soon see, will anger their father tremendously — and it's also something that will come back to haunt them in the future. When we come back next time, we'll look at Jacob's response to all of this, and we'll also have some things to say about vengeance in general that we all need to hear. I hope you can come along, and I'll look forward to seeing you then. Have a great day everyone, and may the joy of the Lord be your strength. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's peace, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. Thanks for being here today, where as we come to our study time here at the first of the week we'll be finishing our look at Genesis 34. I'm eager to get to what's before us in the text, and I hope it will bring you to a place of seeking the Lord as we work through it. Let's pray as we go to our Bibles:

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your presence, and we ask in this moment of quiet that you bless us with your Spirit and turn our hearts to the hearing and learning of your precious Word. Hear us for Jesus' sake and in His name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, after Simeon and Levi carry out the terrible massacre of the men of Shechem, they incur their father's wrath over what they've done. Genesis 34 ends today, but the aftereffects of this saga are far from done. Our focus this session: a stench in the land.

Genesis 34:30-31

30Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed." 31But they replied, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?"

I'm not sure how it happened, but I missed my garbage pick-up last week. The company I have a contract with, whose truck usually comes by each Monday afternoon, apparently came earlier than usual. I set my bin out at the same time I do every week, but at the end of the day when I went out to bring it back down the driveway, it was still full. Ordinarily, something like that wouldn't be a big deal because I just don't generate much trash. Last Sunday afternoon, though, something happened that would end up making it a quite *out* of the ordinary predicament. I had gone to the garage to pull some chicken out of the freezer for dinner, but when I got there, I noticed something that made my heart sink: the door was ajar, and evidently had been for some time. Everything inside had thawed, and some items were barely cool to the touch. It all had to be thrown out. Where did it go? Into the trash bin, of course...the same trash bin that missed being picked up the next day. For seven days, my trash — comprised of my regular household garbage plus an entire freezer's worth of meat — languished in that bin. By the second day it began to smell. By the fourth day the odor was uncomfortably strong. And by the weekend? By the weekend, not only could I smell it from pretty much any place on my property, but my neighbors on either side of me and across the street could smell it too. In very little time, my personal "incense" resulted in the public being incensed.

In God's Word today, the aftermath of the massacre of the men of Shechem at the hands of Simeon and Levi is before us. To put it very simply, what the text tells us is that in the manner of overripe garbage which has become a public nuisance, so the actions of Jacob's sons have brought a stench on the land: the stench of their own evil deeds, the foul odor of abhorrently brazen behavior that reeks of wickedness. They have not been mere purveyors of the smell, mere deliverers of the smell; they *are* the smell. It's an odor that has brought offense, and it's also one which has brought with it the threat of recompense on the part of others living in the land. After all, better to take preemptory action, neutralizing a threat, than to be sitting ducks as the Shechemites were. As a result, Jacob is incensed in his own right over the matter, and he says as much when he castigates Simeon and Levi for what they've done. The worst of it is that as the head of the family, Jacob is the one having to bear their dishonor and the

accompanying threat that goes with it. That, in fact, is why he personalizes it; it's why he says to his two sons, "You've made *me* a stench to the Canaanites and the Perizzites."

As we consider the scene here, we should be quick to note that some scholars see in this event a big "one step forward, twenty-four steps back" kind of situation for Jacob and his family, and their rationale for calling it that way is on point. After a lifetime of deceit, of trickery, and of less-than forthright dealings both with family members and those on the outside, the example Jacob has set for his sons has been decidedly less than stellar. His belief in, devotion to, and reliance on the Lord has only recently begun to come into focus in his life, and as we've discussed before, that's shown itself to be an ongoing process with fits and starts along the way. His very presence in Shechem, in fact, is testimony that his personal desires still compete with, and still win out at times, over God's directives in his life, and frankly, the string of difficulties that have hurt the family here in Genesis 34 have been a direct outcome those desires.

With these things being the case, why should the actions of Simeon, Levi, and the others surprise us? Indeed, in a throwback to his old way of life, even his own anger over what has occurred shows Jacob concerned not with the egregious actions of his sons so much as with his own welfare and the newly minted danger of possible retribution against the family. There's no voice given here to right versus wrong, no voice speaking of concern for God's righteousness...not even the slightest show of grief over the plundering of the innocents that has occurred at the hands of his offspring. In short, the picture here is a snapshot not of a family enduring a terrible and unlooked for tribulation through no fault of their own, but of a situation that they've brought fully upon themselves. Furthermore, as violent and unsavory and yes, ungodly as the actions of Jacob's sons have been — and as much as they'll have to bear personal responsibility for what they've done, which we'll see toward the end of Genesis — the unfortunate truth that needs acknowledging here is that the seeds of their exploits were sown, watered, and fertilized over many years in a nursery called "family." Now, in their own lives as grown men, we see that the apple hasn't fallen far from the tree. In time we'll see Jacob take this to heart, and in time we'll see yet more change in his life as a result. For the moment, however, there is only shock, anger, and the casting of aspersions. There are only thoughts for the salvaging of self. Reflection, and a heart turned back to the Lord, will come later.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the sordid details of all that has transpired in this chapter are far from comforting...far from God. And in actuality, that's not only theologically true, but textually true as well. Some of you may have noticed that nowhere in Genesis 34 is God mentioned. This is a chapter completely absent of His name. The reason for it is obvious, and as you ponder that, I'd like to recommend that you go back through and reread the chapter so that you can see it for yourself. Not only will it be a great way for you to put a cap all that we've just studied, it will also help you to prepare for what's to come. What do I mean by that? Though Genesis 34 makes no reference to our Lord, Genesis 35 is going to be mentioning Him both directly and indirectly over 20 times. The reason for that will be obvious as well, and I'm excited to get there and talk about it with you in the days ahead. The difference between what we've just now seen and what we'll soon be seeing is the difference between a life lived in the shadows and a life lived in the shadow of the Most High. It's a comparison and a contrast that I need to be reminded of often, and my prayer is that as we see it together, it will comfort, encourage, and strengthen you as well.

Thanks so much for being with me to start another week, everyone...rest deeply and peacefully in the love of Christ today, and God-willing, I'll see you again next time to continue. Take care, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Grace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. As we come to the Scriptures today, we're approaching yet another transition, another growth point, in Jacob's life...one that will serve us well as we look to our own transitions and growth points in life as God's people in Christ. I'm so glad you're here for our time together; let's pray and ask for open hearts and minds as we open God's Word.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, We thank you for your mercy – for the truth that through your life, your death, and your resurrection, there is forgiveness, restoration, and renewal in you. Please bless us today with eyes to see and ears to hear as we open your holy Word. We ask this in your precious and saving name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our study time will be taking us to the opening of Genesis 35, building on — or rather, spring-boarding from — all we talked about in chapter 34. Our focus this session: Go. Settle. Worship.

Genesis 35:1

Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."

Some of you know that I've always been a Victor Borge fan. His grace, poise, and skill as a pianist was a perfect foil for his comedy, and even when I was a little boy watching him on television with my parents, he made me laugh out loud. It was Victor Borge, sitting behind his instrument during a concert one night, who stopped in the middle of a piece and told a joke — a funny but wry, poking-fun kind of joke — about something in life to which we can all relate.

A couple going on vacation was standing in line waiting to check their bags at the airline counter. The husband said to the wife, "I wish we had brought the piano." The wife said, "Why? We've got sixteen bags already!" The husband said, "Yes, I know — but the tickets are on the piano!"

One of the telling things about life, one of the great hallmarks of humanity, is that people — tall people, short people, rich people, poor people, young people, old people, all people everywhere — are very good at taking primary things and making them into secondary things. Sometimes it's inadvertent, but often times it's on purpose. We get so caught up in the minutiae around us, so consumed with and focused on what's happening in our immediate little sphere of existence, that that we forget, cast aside, or leave behind what's most important.

As we come back to the Scriptures today and find Jacob still reeling from the actions fomented by his sons against the city of Shechem, what we're actually looking in on is a man who, a very long time ago, left his tickets on the piano. We're seeing a man who time and time again in life has taken what should have been primary and consigned it instead to that which is secondary — if even that. On a couple of occasions we've seen him suddenly remember those tickets, seen him seemingly make a turn back to go and get them, but each time something else has grabbed his attention in the interim. Each time something has drawn him away. Each time that he has begun to remember, he has just as quickly forgotten...cast aside...chosen to leave behind...the one thing most important in his life.

The most recent distraction, in fact, is what we've just finished studying together: Shechem. Jacob, having come so far, having actually followed through on God's call to return to Canaan,

having gotten so close to sidling up to that piano at Bethel and grasping once again those long-lost tickets bursting with life and salvation and a multitude of divine promises, stopped short. And in stopping short, he opened himself and his family members to the influences of worldliness, idolatry, and danger. In stopping short, he opened himself and his family members to things which would hurt them rather than help them. The 31 verses we just laid to rest in Genesis 34 are among the most sordid and tragic in the history of Jacob's family. We can't allow ourselves to forget the reason for that: it, in large part, was due to Jacob's failure to follow through on that which God had called him to do.

What makes the new chapter before us such a powerful one to study, however, is that once again, things are about to change. What is the substance of that change going to be? Very simply, God. I told you yesterday that God wasn't mentioned in Genesis 34 — not mentioned once, not even referred to in passing. Look, however, at the first three words here in chapter 35:

Then God said.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, those three words are going to be what drives all that we'll be looking at in the days ahead. Those three words are going to set a new course — or more accurately, a renewed course — for Jacob and his family. When the Lord speaks, Jacob is shaken from the stupor of his spiritual dullness. When the Lord speaks, Jacob is re-sensitized to that which is beyond the minutiae he's been so caught up in, to that which is beyond his immediate little sphere of existence. Jacob is about to leave Shechem. He's about to return... finally...to Bethel. Jacob is about to retrieve a set of tickets that he really needs to have in his possession in order to go forward as the individual God has created and called him to be. When we come back next time, we'll start to look at all of this in earnest. I hope, in the meantime, that today's overview has done its job in setting the scene.

God's peace to you in our Lord Jesus as you head into the rest of your day, everyone — I'm grateful for you and for our time together, and I'll look forward to seeing you next time. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! God's grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus our Lord, and welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to have you here with me for Bible study today, where right now we're continuing our look at the opening of Genesis 35. I like to say this occasionally, and today is one of those occasions: if you know someone who could benefit from this daily time in God's Word, why not share EDiBS with them? Remember, it's as easy as clicking the Share/Tweet/Forward buttons we provide for you at the top of the daily email, and by sending our daily study on to others, you're helping people to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Do be sure to make use of the opportunity; it's a great way to encourage your friends and loved ones. Thanks for being here today; let's pray as we turn our attention to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you have loved us with an everlasting love and have showered your grace and mercy upon us through your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. We thank you for the great gift of our salvation. We thank you that we are not under law, but under grace. We also thank you for your Word, by which you have revealed that precious truth to us. Please send your Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts and minds as we study today. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're coming once more to the beginning of our new chapter in Genesis, and as we do so, we're going to see the power inherent in God's Word and the impact it has when it goes out to His people. Our focus this session: When God speaks.

Genesis 35:1 (Part 2)

Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."

I'm a person who, since I mostly speak and write as my vocation, know I'm prone to the repetition of phrases and the use of cliches. Because of that, I relate to the following story on a whole host of levels, mostly because I could easily be the subject at hand:

Many years ago, there was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania who was known for giving boring, cliché-ridden lectures. At the beginning of one semester, an innovative class breathed new life into his course by assigning baseball plays to each overused phrase. For example, "on the other hand" was a base hit; "by the same token" was a strikeout; "and so on" was a stolen base. Divided into two teams by the center aisle of the lecture hall, the students played inning after inning of silent but vigorous baseball throughout the entire term. On the last day of class, the impossible happened: the score was tied, the bases were loaded, and on the last play of the game, the batter hit a home run, and the winning team stood and cheered wildly. Though deeply appreciative, the professor was quoted later as having wondered why only half of the students had been enthusiastic about his lectures!

As I said, I can relate to that poor professor. My "indeeds" and "on the other hands" and "coming down the pikes," not to mention my "essentiallys" and "generally speakings" and "in facts" probably drive a lot of you crazy on occasion. It's not that we public speakers try to be repetitive or talk in predictable patterns, it's just that we do so much of it we run out of original ways to express things from time to time (there's another one for you!).

I mention my use of words today, and yes, my continual struggle over using words in the best and most helpful way, for the purpose of drawing a dramatic contrast. My words are often many. Because of their great number, they sometimes lack punch and power, and because

they lack punch and power, they can at times be dismissed — understandably so — by the ones to whom I'm speaking. As we come to God's Word today, however, we see something very different. The Creator of the Universe does not struggle with words in the least. He has no difficulty whatsoever in how to put them together in the best and most helpful way. Far from being many, His words are often few, and to be quite frank, His words, whenever they are spoken, are the very definition of punch and power. People still dismiss His words, just like they dismiss my words...but the outcome isn't the same. The stakes are much higher. When I speak, people can listen to me, or not. When God speaks, people either listen to Him for their edification, or they dismiss Him to their peril.

In today's reading, the truth of what I've just described is on display for all to see. God speaks. His words are few. While they do come as a command, they're nonetheless wrapped in promise, and the punch they pack is the epitome of power. After Jacob's disastrous quasi-settlement in Shechem, a choice on his part that brought untold misery to his family and untold damage to his reputation in the region, the Lord *could* have laid into him with a lengthy lecture. The Lord *could* have laid out all that he had done wrong. The Lord *could* have castigated, berated, and punished him. Instead, here in the opening of Genesis 35 He simply, and with brevity, says three things:

- 1) Go. Go, not only meaning *I have another place for you to be* — Bethel — but also meaning *You shouldn't be here in Shechem*. Jacob is to leave the place he's not supposed to be and go to the place he was told to go in the first place. And make no mistake regarding the larger message here: this is a call out of worldliness and back to the things of God. The only cure for worldliness is to separate from it, and so there has to be a departure here.
- 2) Settle. Not only is Jacob to go to Bethel, notice that he's also to settle there. What does that mean? It means that Jacob is to find his portion, and find his peace, where God has called him to be. Rather than follow any lingering wanderlust in his heart, rather than seek his own path, rather than continue to search out that elusive, perfect destination that he's created in his mind's eye — it's elusive because such a place doesn't exist — Jacob is to put down roots in Bethel and find his satisfaction in a life of fellowship with the Lord.
- 3) Worship. Not only is Jacob to leave Shechem, not only is he to go to Bethel, and not only is he to settle there, but once there his first order of business is to build an altar to God and resume a life of worship. Why? Because it is in fully giving himself over to the worship of Almighty God that Jacob will finally begin to understand the true nature and character of the One who has created, called, and come to him with divine favor...the One who has cared for him and given him a life of purpose and of promise.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, God's word to Jacob here in the opening of Genesis 35 may be simple and marked by brevity, but its punch and power will literally change, as it has several times already, the course of Jacob's life. It's a change that at the moment is desperately needed. And as we'll see when we gather next time, Jacob's response will thankfully be one of listening for his edification rather than dismissing to his peril. How about you and me?

Rather than launching into longwinded, cliché-laden professorial lecture here, let me close today by saying this: sometimes as Christians we don't need to stop along life's road and simply look back; sometimes we need to stop what we're doing and go back — back to where God first met us, back to where He first called us. Sometimes we need to stop the trajectory we find ourselves on, hear His Word, and go back to a life of worship. You will always find your portion, and find your peace, in the place where God has called you to be — and the place God has called each one of us to be is with Him.

More on this next time, everyone — Christ's rich peace to each of you, have a great day, and I'll see you again soon. Take care.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, and God's rich grace and peace to each you in our Lord Jesus. I'm super glad to have you along as we get ready to study together today, where right now we're continuing our time in the 35th chapter of Genesis. Take a moment, prepare your heart to come into the Lord's presence, and then join me for prayer.

Prayer

Father, bless the hearing of your Word today, that all who come under its teaching will grow and change; that we would all learn more of your love for us in Christ; and that we would all become stronger in our faith. What a joy and privilege it is to ask for this, and we do so with confidence in Jesus' name, amen.

Getting started

As we get started today, having heard the word of the Lord, Jacob gathers his household together and makes a major announcement. Our focus this session: a time to purify, a time to consecrate.

Genesis 35:2-5

2So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. 3Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." 4So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. 5Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.

In the city where my son lives, there's a thrift store in town called Clothes Less Traveled. I've shopped there often for household items like glasses, vases and pots for my plants, and I even found a great pair of dress shoes there once that I still wear today. But I've never found any clothes there that fit, and the reason is that I've never tried any on. Why? While the sign on the outside of the building might say Clothes Less Traveled, let's just say that the smell of those clothes on the inside of the building tells another story. Clothes Well Traveled wouldn't be enough of a name change. Clothes Not Fit To Travel is closer. While I'm sure there are many excellent buys amongst those racks lining the aisles, and while I'm equally sure that once gotten home and washed most of those garments lose their mustiness, I've never been able to get past the smell that hits you when you first walk in the door.

Today in God's Word, Jacob gathers his large household together to announce their impending departure from Shechem and their upcoming journey to Bethel. He begins by telling everyone in his midst that anything and everything having to do with ungodly influences in their lives must be left behind.

Get rid of your foreign gods, he says. Purify yourselves. And by the way, change your clothes too.

Each of these things is vitally important, and each must be done in fullness with no one holding anything back. While specific purification rituals weren't especially developed at this early point in time (they would be prescribed by the Lord later on), the mindset of purifying one's self was very real nonetheless, and in addition to washing the body in both a cleansing and ceremonial way, putting on clean clothes was part and parcel of the process. What's the significance here? Many of you know that throughout the Bible, garments symbolize character. The inward life of faith is one typified by clothing. Shining garments, clean garments, represent holiness. The heart of an unregenerate person or that of a person caught up in sin is compared to a polluted

garment, one that is unwashed and therefore unclean. When we consider all the evil that has been undertaken by Jacob's household — not just the events in the previous chapter but events going all the way back to when Jacob was still in Haran working for his father-in-law — we have a whole closet full of musty garments to look at, don't we. From family infighting and competition to dishonesty and deceit...even to outright idolatry, something brought into the home by Jacob's beloved Rachel...what we have before us is rack after rack of Clothes Not Fit To Travel.

Not only that, but remember: due to recent events perpetrated by Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi, Jacob's clan now includes dozens of women and children captured in the sacking of Shechem. All of these people had grown up believing in and worshipping idols also, and they doubtless had personal trinkets and amulets that they used in their pagan worship rituals. Their lives now have to be taken into account as well. (Scholars, in fact, believe that this is where the mention of earrings in the text gets its significance: it's believed that the Shechemite women and children wore earrings and other jewelry which had religious symbols or connotations.)

At any rate, as Jacob readies all of these people to leave Shechem and go to Bethel — the House of God — he's determined that everyone make a clean break with the past, prepare for a fresh start and look toward a preferred future under the hand of the Lord. That's why everything they had been clinging to that was not of God was to be buried in Shechem and left behind once and for all. Jacob would not allow it to follow them into Bethel.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, while everything in today's passage is straightforward, and while it all makes perfect sense, these verses are remarkable nonetheless. Why do I say that? Because after God spoke to Jacob and told him to go, settle, and worship at Bethel, it's obvious that Jacob reflected on God's Word and took it to heart. His response is the action we've just seen him take in the text...action that, to our knowledge, God didn't explicitly command Jacob to take. The point is that Jacob processed God's words to him, made sense of them in light of his own life, and then reframed the same message for his family. When God spoke to Jacob, Jacob saw himself as he was, saw God as He is, and responded in repentance...and then, as the leader of his clan, he called his household to do the same.

Today God is calling some of us to bury our idols and leave them behind. Today God is calling some of us to leave Shechem and head to Bethel. Today God is calling some of us to return to Him; to change our musty, odorous clothes; to prepare for a fresh start and to look toward a preferred future under His mighty hand. Today God is speaking to us through His Word. Is He calling you back to Himself? If so, how will you respond?

If God is calling you to Bethel today, take heart. You're not traveling alone. I know the journey can be intensely fearful and that it might cause you to feel vulnerable and exposed on every side as you take those first steps. But just like God made a way when Jacob set out, God will do the same for you. He'll make sure you get there.

Thanks for your time today, everyone... have a great day in the portion and peace of your Savior, and I'll see you next time to pick things up again. Until then, take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's blessings of joy and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. One thing I always pray for when I think of our EDiBS family is that as you open your Bibles each day and place yourselves under the authority of God's Word, you're experiencing transformation, renewal, and new wisdom and insight about who God is and what He's done for you in His one and only Son. We've been given such a great and wonderful salvation in Christ, and more than anything I desire that we can all grow together in our relationship with Him through this ministry. Thanks for being here today as we begin a new week; let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father, we are mindful today of the many promises — the boundless promises — that you give to us in your Word. We're so thankful for the way you reach into every facet of our lives to love us and lavish your mercy upon us. We also praise you this day for the way you never give up on us. We ask that you bless the reading and the study of the Scriptures over these next few minutes, and finally, we also ask that you use this time to shape us as your people; to fashion us into what you've created us to be. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, with all the preparations complete for their relocation to Bethel, Jacob and his family make the journey and arrive safely thanks to God's protective hand. While their trek is a powerful witness of Divine grace and mercy in action, it's actually what happens once they arrive that we want to give our attention to right now. Our focus this session: Jacob builds an altar.

Genesis 35:6-7

6Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. 7There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

Many of you are of the age where you remember turning on the television and watching the great Dallas Cowboys quarterback, Roger Staubach, in action. He led the Cowboys to four Super Bowls during his career, winning two, including Super Bowl XII in 1977. I was ten years old that year, a budding football fan, and that year's Super Bowl was the first I had ever watched. After seeing all he did on the field and all the different kinds of plays he called as the team's leader, I became a dedicated Roger Staubach fan. I remained so until he retired in 1980.

Years later as a young man in my twenties, I learned something that I'd never known about Roger Staubach. For the entirety of his NFL career, all of which he spent with the Cowboys, the plays he called weren't actually his own; Coach Tom Landry sent in every single one. He told Roger when to pass, when to run, and with whom he was to connect. Only in emergency situations was he permitted to change a play on the fly. For his part, Roger freely admitted that his position as a quarterback who didn't call his own signals was, for several years, a source of trial for him. He bucked against it and tried to work around it. Even though he considered Coach Landry to be a genius when it came to football strategy, he wanted to be his own man. His pride told him that he should be able to play his own game and run his own team. In the end, how did he finally deal with that struggle? He had to recognize who was who in the relationship. Here are his own words: he said, "I faced up to the issue of obedience. Once I learned to obey, there was harmony, fulfillment, and victory."

In today's Bible reading, we have a man — Jacob — whose entire life has been dedicated to putting together his own game plan. Because of that, his relationship with Almighty God has for a very long time been a source of almost constant trial. We've seen him buck against almost every play, every call, that the Lord has sent in to guide and direct his steps. We've seen him try work-around after work-around to get his own way. And even though we've seen Jacob acknowledge the Lord and commit himself to the Lord and in some cases even follow the Lord's leading, we've also seen Jacob hold fast in his desire to be his own man. Over and over we've seen his pride come into view — pride that has told him he should be able to play his own game and run his own team.

In today's Bible reading, however, the Jacob we see isn't a man busily building his own playbook; it's a man building an altar. The Jacob we see isn't a man whining about being told what to do when he thinks he has a better way; it's a man worshiping the Lord. Why are we seeing these things? Because today, Jacob is facing up to who's who in his relationship with God. He's facing up to the issue of obedience. And as we'll see over the next few days when we meet to open the Scriptures together, it's as he learns to obey that Jacob — even in times of trial — will also learn about many precious things which have for so long eluded him in life: harmony, fulfillment, and victory among them.

What is this place that Jacob has come to in his life after such a long and winding road? Or perhaps to say it another way, what is worship? Put simply, to worship God is to recognize His worth or worthiness. It's, as James Packer once wrote, to look God-ward, and to acknowledge in all appropriate ways the value of what we see. The Bible refers to worship as *glorifying God* or *giving glory to God*. It's not man-centered, but God-centered, primarily because it starts with His love for us and good gifts to us, followed by our grateful response as we acknowledge that love and those gifts. Accordingly, Scripture, in all that it teaches about worship, presents it not just as an activity but as a way of life...and as both the ultimate end and the whole duty of the entire human race.

Jacob has been through many difficult times in life, and an especially tough time recently. For the most part those times have come about by his dismissal of the Divine game plan that had been drawn up for his benefit...by his choice to ignore the audible that God had called for the purpose of moving him down the field toward the goal line. Now he has been humbled, and in his time of chastened reflection, perhaps undertaken during the trek from Shechem to Bethel, he has evidently realized something: that worship is not just an activity, but a way of life. That his relationship with Almighty God is interconnected with literally every jot and tittle of who he is and what he does. It's an "aha" moment for him, and his heart is being rewired because of it. That's why we see Jacob doing what he's doing in today's text. And that's why, in Jacob's worship going forward, we will see a different man than the one with whom we have heretofore been familiar. We will see praise and thanksgiving. We will see earnest supplication. We will see offerings and the giving of self. And yes, in Jacob's worship we will also see the showing forth of obedience.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, back in the early 1940s the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, described worship as "...The submission of all our nature to God; the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; and the surrender of will to His purpose." These things have been already, and are now even more, occurring in the life of Jacob. When we come back next time, we'll make the obvious jump and ask the obvious question: what of us?

Thanks for your time today everyone — do make plans to join in tomorrow as we continue, and until then, have a terrific day! Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and welcome to another great day to be together in God's beloved Word as God's beloved children. In today's study time we'll be coming back to Genesis 35, where we'll be looking at what happens in Bethel after Jacob's journey there from Shechem. I'm glad you're here; let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the chance to be together today under the authority of your Word, under the blessing of your teaching, and in the midst of the great promises attached to the Scriptures. Teach us by your Spirit in our time before you, that we may learn to walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name. Open our hearts and help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. In His precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, finally back in Bethel where he belongs, Jacob again receives a visitation from the Lord. The words God speaks here are familiar ones, and they are steeped in blessing. Our focus this session: Precious promises, reaffirmed.

Genesis 35:8-15

8Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak below Bethel. So it was named Allon Bacuth. 9After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. 10God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel. " So he named him Israel. 11And God said to him, "I am God Almighty ; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. 12The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." 13Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him. 14Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. 15Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.

There's a sentiment in literature, a rather melancholy one, that many writers have taken up and advanced through the years. It's about the inability to return to the home of one's childhood or the place one started out, and the inevitability of disappointment for those who try. Thomas Wolfe, thanks to a conversation he had with his journalist friend Ella Winter, penned what has become the most well-known novel on the subject. While he wasn't able to finish it prior to his death, his editor cobbled together a manuscript from Wolfe's notes and published it posthumously. It's simply titled, *You Can't Go Home Again*. Here's a passage from the book that sums up both its theme and its tone:

You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood...back home to a young man's dreams of glory and of fame...back home to places in the country, back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting, but which are changing all the time – back home to the escapes of Time and Memory.

Like I said, quite melancholy. Some would even say depressing. At the same time, however, it's a sentiment not altogether accurate, because truth be told, sometimes we must go home again. Sometimes, to beat what is melancholy and depressing...to move away from what has gone wrong in our lives and to move beyond the place where we find ourselves stuck...the act of going home again is the only way to a new beginning, and this is especially true for us as the people of God. When we've strayed far from where we've been called to be, when we're alone

in the wilderness, when we're spiritually destitute and at the end of ourselves, it's in returning to the place where God first began with us that we're able to begin again.

As we open the Scriptures today, it's in obedience to God's call that Jacob has done this very thing. He's come back to Bethel, the place where many years ago the Lord had first revealed Himself to him as he was fleeing from his brother Esau. Now, Jacob has prepared, and subsequently brought, his entire household along to Bethel with him. He's built an altar to the Lord. He's been intentionally remembering the moments of his long journey through life: first without God as he was running from Esau, but from then on with a growing awareness of God. In Jacob's life there have been moments of listening, then not listening, of following, then not following the Lord, and there have been rich times of God's faithfulness and deliverance in his life interspersed with and mirrored by his own times of faithlessness and disobedience. Jacob, in coming home — that is, his spiritual home, the place where God began with him — is seeking a restart. In coming home to Bethel he has come home to begin again.

Today's passage starts off with what in one sense is a bit of an historical aside. Deborah, Rebekah's (that is, Jacob's mother's) nurse, dies. We really know nothing of Deborah or how she comes to be among Jacob's kin at this point in time. She's mentioned one time earlier in Genesis 24, though not by name, when she's taken along on the journey from Haran to Beersheba as Rebekah becomes Isaac's wife, but how she ends up with Jacob's family isn't clear. What is clear is that she is deeply loved, deeply honored, and deeply mourned by the family. They call the oak tree under which she's laid to rest the "Oak of Weeping." It's a precious moment which reminds us that we're studying real people with real feelings who go through the same things that all of us go through in life.

Sometime after that event, our Bible tells us that God once again appears to Jacob. Why? To bless him. To speak again His profound and far-reaching promises into his life. To remind him of his covenant name — Israel — the new man that God has made him to be. Here at Bethel, God assures Jacob of restoration and reaffirms for Jacob his place and position as a carrier of the great covenant which was first given to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. Has Jacob heard these words from the Lord before? Yes, on more than one occasion. By now, we ourselves are quite familiar with them. But many things have transpired between those earlier declarations and now...things that might cause Jacob to wonder if he's forfeited those earlier-promised blessings. That, in part, is why the Lord repeats them here. There's nothing new; just a confirmation of what by His grace and mercy is true, and with it, a call to cling to it and rest in it.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, do you see what's going on in all of this? As much as Jacob has come to Bethel to begin again, it's actually the Lord who has *called* Jacob to Bethel to begin again with *him*. The Lord is making all things new. The Lord is saying to Jacob, *I'm glad you're home*. The Lord is saying to Jacob, *Let's start fresh*. And so it is that wherever you may be today, the Lord is calling you to Himself as well.

Where is your Bethel? For many of you it's your baptism. For others of you it's a pew in a church somewhere where the Holy Spirit grabbed hold of you with the power of God's Word for the first time. For some of you it's on the bed of a hotel room, where in a moment of desperation you opened a Bible placed by the Gideons and realized the love of a Savior who gave Himself for you. Where did God begin with you? Where is that place in life where He first revealed Himself to you and brought you into His forever family? Maybe it's time to go back and revisit that

place...certainly in your heart and mind, but maybe even in the taking of a trip. When we've strayed far from where we've been called to be, when we're alone in the wilderness, when we're spiritually destitute and at the end of ourselves, it's in returning to the place where God first began with us that we're able to begin again...where God begins with us again. Come to Him today for His blessing. For the assurance of restoration. For the reaffirmation of your place and position as His beloved child. There's nothing new; just a confirmation of what by His grace and mercy is true, and with it, a call to cling to it and rest in it.

I'm praying for you today; take care, ponder these things in your heart, and God-willing, I'll see you again next time to continue. Take care, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Wednesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's peace to each of you in our risen Lord Jesus Christ. It's great to have you along today as we open our Bibles together, where over these next few minutes we'll be returning to our time in Genesis 35. Let's pray as we go to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Lord God, you are worthy of our praise and adoration...not just in words spoken by our lips, but in lives of worship lived in thanksgiving and service to you for all you've done. Thank you for the great salvation you have provided us in Christ, and thank you for the blessing of being able to grow in our faith each day. Bless us now as we study your holy Word. This we pray for Jesus' sake, and in his name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we don't know how long Jacob and his household stay in Bethel proper, but after a certain amount of time they move on. As they travel south toward Bethlehem, another tragedy befalls the family. Our focus this session: the death of Rachel.

Genesis 35:16-20

16Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. 17And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid, for you have another son." 18As she breathed her last — for she was dying — she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. 19So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb.

Do you remember the early days of video games? Before there were arcades full of every kind of machine imaginable, and before home-based consoles brought gaming into everyone's family room, most of the early video games you'd see were in public places like the corner 7-Eleven or the gas station convenience store. Off in a corner, usually on the way to the bathrooms, you'd find Pac-Man or Pole Position, Asteroids or Galaxian, Space Invaders or Centipede. There would always be people crowded around the machine, either watching someone who was really good or waiting for their own turn to play. It was like that for several years.

When I was in high school in the early 1980s, there was a woman from North Carolina who set a world record while playing one of those games in a convenience store. She was a devotee of a bartending game called Tapper, and one day after playing it for fourteen hours straight and amassing seven and a half million points, she was on the verge of making history. As she played, someone told her that a TV crew was on its way to record her efforts and do a story for posterity. Excited that she would become famous, she continued to play as the crew arrived and prepared to do their shoot. But just as she was about to get her due, her video screen suddenly went blank. What happened? While setting up their lights, the camera team from the TV station had accidentally unplugged the game — thus bringing her unprecedented bid for ten million points to an untimely end. Sadly and ironically, it was the effort to publicize her achievement that became the agent of her failure.

I bring up that blast from the past today because it reminds me in a way of what we see happening in God's Word today. Before us is a person who has spent the majority of her life ceaselessly striving — some would say ruthlessly competing, clutching and clawing — for something she greatly desires...a person who has forsaken much of what we would call a normal life due to her obsession with acquiring that which she wants. But sadly and ironically,

it's in the very moment she's so longed for, a moment that she always thought would be one of great victory and ultimate oneupmanship, that she comes to her end in sorrow and defeat. I'm talking, of course, about Rachel...Rachel, whose all-surpassing and unquenchable desire for children and whose jealousy over and pettiness toward her sister Leah because of her own children, has consumed her life and made her bitter.

How do things begin today? After Jacob's time of restoration and renewal at Bethel, and after God declares again to him the promises of the covenant, including that all the land of Canaan will be his, just as it had been his grandfather's and his father's, Jacob takes his entire household and begins to move southward from Bethel toward Ephrath (meaning Bethlehem or the general region or vicinity around Bethlehem). There are legitimate reasons for this move, which we'll discuss over the next several days, but for now we need to give our attention to what happens along the way: a very pregnant Rachel goes into hard labor, has a very difficult time, and finally dies as she gives birth to a little boy. In her great pain and despair, and with her dying breath, she names the child Ben-Oni, which means "Son of my sorrow" — the exact opposite of what she had hoped his coming into the world would bring to her. Jacob won't let that name stand, and that's where "Benjamin" comes in instead, but again, we'll get to the significance of that in an upcoming session.

Obviously, this isn't a passage that brings joy to us as we study it. It's a tragic, sorrowful section of verses, and though I don't want to pile on here, there's something we need to recognize that makes things even more tragic and sorrowful. What am I talking about? I'm talking about the lens through which we need to view Rachel's death; specifically, the lens of history.

First, if you'll remember back to Genesis 30, at that point in her life Rachel was barren. Not only was she unable to bear children, but as I said a moment ago, her sister was doing just fine in that department. The Bible says that Rachel became jealous of Leah, and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die" (Genesis 30:1). Here's that sad irony rearing its ugly head: while all those many years ago Rachel had demanded children of her husband, while she said she would die if she couldn't have children, in truth she would end up dying in the very midst of having a child.

Yet as difficult as it may be to recall that time and make that connection, there's a second and even more striking bit of remembering that we need to do. In Genesis 31, the chapter that details Jacob's departure from Haran and his act of fleeing from his father-in-law, we also read about something Rachel does: she steals her father's household gods. Jacob doesn't know what she's done, and when in his confrontation with Laban over all that's happened Laban brings up his missing idols, accuses Jacob's people of taking them, and demands them back, Jacob pushes back. What does he say? "The one with whom you find your gods shall not live; in the presence of our people, point out what is yours among my belongings and take it for yourself" (Genesis 31:32). Rachel, of course, lies and keeps quiet, and for the time being, it seems as though that's the end of it.

Wrapping Up

But as we wrap things up for the day, many scholars believe that while the sentence may have been delayed in its execution, Rachel's death is in part the result of those words spoken by Jacob; a tragic fulfillment of the curse he pronounced on the one who would steal from Laban. Whether that's the case or not, here's what we see in Rachel's sad end: we see, first of all, the futility of her bitter, lifelong competition with Leah. Here, at the time of her final "victory" in the birthing of Benjamin, all she finds is sorrow. What we see, second of all, is that Rachel's death brings sorrow to others as well. In so many ways hers has been a life marked by brokenness, consumed by jealousy, and shaped by family infighting. It's a mark that she leaves on those

who are left to mourn her. It didn't have to be that way, not for her or for anyone else, but her focus in life left no other option.

When we come back next time, we'll be pushing forward from this sad event, and as we do we'll be picking up some pieces and finding the good in the bad and the happy in the sad, so I hope you'll come along as we do that. Thanks for your time today; it's been good to be with you, and I pray that the Lord will use these past few minutes to bring you to a place of reflection and contemplation. Have a great day, and God-willing, I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Hello, everyone! God's peace to each of you in Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS, a place where we gather to study God's Word together each weekday with people from all walks of life and from all around the world. I'm always glad to know you've clicked in, and on this day that the Lord has given us, we continue to be hard at work in the book of Genesis. If you'll turn once again to Genesis 35, we'll pray and ask for the Lord's blessings on our time.

Prayer

Lord, we praise you for this day and ask that you help us to make the very most of it. What a blessing to come to you and to receive your Word today. Write it on our hearts and by its great living, active power, transform us by the renewing of our minds. This we ask in the precious name of Jesus, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, sometimes difficult passages in God's Word bring to mind difficult passages from our own lives. When that happens, it's not something to run from but to learn from. Here in Genesis 35 as we remember Rachel's life of bitterness — one of her defining character traits right up to the moment of her death — there are things that those of us still living can definitely learn as we take stock of our own character. Our focus this session: There is still time....but the time is now.

Genesis 35:18-19

18As she breathed her last — for she was dying — she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. 19So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

Dr. Tony Evans, who has always excelled in telling parables with purpose — or what I like to call “stories that stick” — once told this story during a Sunday morning worship service: One day, two monks were walking through the countryside. They were on their way to another village to help bring in the crops. As they walked, they saw an old woman sitting at the edge of the river. She was upset because there was no bridge and she couldn't get across on her own. The first monk kindly said, “We'd be happy to carry you across if you'd like.” “Oh, thank you!” she said gratefully, accepting their help. So the two men joined hands, lifted her between them, and carried her across the river. When they got to the other side, they set her down, and she went on her way.

After they had walked another mile or so, the second monk began to complain. “Look at my clothes,” he said. “They're filthy from carrying that woman across the river. And my back still hurts from lifting her. I can feel it getting stiff.” The first monk just smiled and nodded his head.

A few more miles up the road, the second monk griped again. “My back hurts terribly, and it's all because we had to carry that silly woman across the river! I can't go any farther because of the pain.” The first monk looked down at his partner, who by this time was lying on the ground, moaning. “Have you wondered why I'm not complaining?” he asked. “Your back hurts because you're still carrying the woman. But I set her down five miles ago.”

As we consider God's Word today, imagine what Rachel carried — carried her whole life long. Recall, if you will, her many complaints. There was so much hurt within her. So much pain. So much pain...and so much blame. She spent so much time playing the blame game with different family members, in fact, that she lived blinded to her blessings — which was really no kind of living at all. How different her life could have been if only she'd have set down those heavy burdens instead of obsessing over them. How different her life could have been had she

been willing to confess what she needed to confess, forgive what she needed to forgive, and reconcile what needed reconciling. In the end, she chose otherwise. Because of that, she went to her unlooked-for and untimely grave with very little resolution and very little peace.

That's what many of us are like when it comes to dealing with our families and others who are, or once were, close to us. We're that second monk who can't let things go. We hold the pain of the past over the heads of our loved ones like a club. We remind them every once in a while of how they've injured us when we want to get the upper hand. We keep them mindful of the burden we still carry because of something *they* did years ago. The real burden we carry, however, is bitterness...bitterness that comes from an unforgiving heart, from a lack of resolution, and from an absence of peace.

Wrapping Up

There is, though, one difference between us and Rachel: we're still living. Which means that for us, there's still time to, as much as it depends on us, make things right. To restore peace. To confess, forgive, and reconcile, and to choose to open our eyes once again to life's blessings as opposed to its burdens. As we wrap things up for the day, what are you carrying right now that needs to be set down? What do you need to let go of? What river crossing from your past continues to cause you to seethe and to cluck your tongue and to shake your head and to clench your fists? Right now, in this moment, in the presence of your Lord Jesus Christ who loves you and gave Himself for you, there is before you an amazing opportunity: the opportunity to choose differently than Rachel did. Whether you have decades left in this world or just a day, today is the day to settle this matter in your heart.

Today is the day to release your bitterness.

God is with you, dear friends. He has promised never to forsake you. As I say often, He is for you, not against you. So with that in mind...God help you, God strengthen and equip you, God enable you by His mighty power, and God bless you as you face this issue and step forward into freedom. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Take care, everyone; I'll see you again next time to continue. Until then, God's peace, and have a great day.

Greetings

Greetings everyone! Blessings to you in our risen Lord Jesus, and welcome to Friday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you one more time before the weekend, and I hope our last several days together have been beneficial for you in your walk with our Savior. Our time in Genesis 35 has been a bit of a bumpy ride, and we've got one more bump today before things settle down a little, but God's Word is always faithful to do its work in us and I know that will be the case today as well. I'm glad you're here; let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Gracious Father, please grant your people new knowledge and increasing wisdom today as they seek to learn of you from your Word. Speak to their hearts. Fortify their minds. Make them bold and confident in you, for you are the Great Deliverer of your people – the One who protects and goes before us in all things. Thank you so much for this time – help us all to glean all that we can from the Scriptures today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get things started today, after Rachel's death and burial, Jacob — in today's text referred to once again by his Covenant name, Israel — continues to move southward from Bethel toward the area of Bethlehem, setting up camp just a little past the halfway point between the two cities. As he doubtlessly continues to mourn over the loss of Rachel, the wife he deeply loved, he now has to contend with a new affront to his emotions, to his authority as the head of his household, and to his long-range plans for the family. Our focus this session: the sin of Reuben.

Genesis 35:21-22

21Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. 22While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.

My oldest brother, who died several years ago, was a giant in my life. He didn't necessarily know that, because he was too humble and unassuming to see himself as anything but a regular guy. Steve was a giant nonetheless, and I looked up to him in many ways. As the oldest of the siblings in our family, what always moved me most deeply and what made me want to be like him was that he was a man of principle. He worked hard to be a person of integrity. My parents always said that he was everything they could have imagined and hoped for in their first-born child, and then some. We all miss him very much.

Typically, firstborn children gravitate toward positions of leadership as adults, because that was their position in the family growing up. In family crises, the firstborn is the one everyone tends to depend on. Firstborns excel in structured occupations and prefer orderly lives, and studies show that they're reliable, conscientious, punctual, and goal-oriented. This is also the reason that firstborn children are so often the executors of their parents' estate. All of these things were true of my brother, and I'm sure you can think of someone in your own circle of family and friends who fits this description as well.

One firstborn child that misses the mark and doesn't make the list today, however, is Jacob's son Reuben. In today's reading we learn that this oldest sibling in the family, far from being principled or conscientious, does something unconscionable. Far from being the kind of person that would make him a bastion of dependability or a trusted choice for any kind of family leadership in the future, he shows himself instead to be an underminer and a usurper. Reuben, we are told, initiates an illicit sexual union with Bilhah, the woman who had been Rachel's maid and later Jacob's concubine. It's essentially an act tantamount to sleeping with his father's wife, and it's a stunning betrayal.

The question we need to ask as we come upon this incident is the obvious one: why? Why would Reuben do such a disrespectful, unsavory thing? If we look at the bigger picture here, there's a logical answer. While we in the modern world don't see it at first glance, people who were part of that ancient culture would have seen it immediately. This is an incident not so much sexual in nature as it is sinister.

In ancient times, to claim a leader's harem was to possess his kingdom. A person who attempted such a thing could be put to death, but if successful, could depose — and usually dispose of — the one who had been in the seat of power before them. This was a common tactic of the time, and for several centuries thereafter as well.

What we see happening with Reuben and his taking of Bilhah doesn't logically fit into a scenario of lust or sexual desire, or even an affair of the heart. First of all, Reuben is a young man and Bilhah, by this time, is old. Furthermore — and not to be crass but simply to speak truthfully — Reuben, as the oldest son of a large, wealthy family that includes many foreign women who are servants and slaves, has almost limitless opportunity to engage in a liaison-rich lifestyle. There's no reason to go into Bilhah and disrespect his father so egregiously. Even if Bilhah happens to be the very definition of beauty and desirability, no son with other options available to him would willingly transgress his father's realm...unless other motives are in play.

Jacob is in mourning over Rachel. He's getting older. He's on the road again, not in a settled, permanent place. With all he's been through recently, he may look a bit tired...vulnerable... maybe even weak. Jacob has also made a lot of changes recently with respect to how the family does things. He's recommitted himself and his household to the things of God rather than the things of men. He's uprooted everybody again and has them on a path to who knows where. For someone like Reuben, all this change might be unwelcome. For someone like Reuben, slated to assume the mantle of leadership over the family upon his father's death at some point in the future, all this unsettledness, this open-ended lifestyle, may be getting old. Perhaps Reuben is thinking that maybe it's time for a change. Perhaps Reuben is thinking that maybe it's time for Dad to step down so that he can step up. Maybe he, Reuben, is who the family needs right now, not his washed up, over-emotional, uninspiring father.

The significance of Reuben having sex with Bilhah isn't hard to figure out. It all rests in her position as Jacob's concubine. This is very likely an attempt at a power grab to overthrow his father.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, how does Jacob deal with this when he finds out? We don't know his immediate reaction, but we do know Reuben's long-term consequence. We'll get into it in more detail toward the end of our study of Genesis, but for now, let's just say that this firstborn son has lost his golden ticket. Not only will he not inherit the family blessing and be the next carrier of God's great covenant in the generation to come, but in the future he will not excel at anything. Reuben now joins the ranks of Simeon and Levi, his disgraced brothers, as people who have disqualified themselves from the high calling of Abraham's blessing. It is now the fourth son, Judah, whose tribe will bring forth the promised Messiah...something we'll be talking more about in the days ahead.

Thanks so much for a great week in the Scriptures, everybody — I hope the time has been profitable for you, and while I'm grateful for the weekend, I'm already eager and looking forward to being with you again come Monday. Blessings to you and yours in our risen Lord Jesus, and I'll see you soon. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Grace to you in our risen Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. On this opening day of our week together, our time in God's Word will be taking us almost to the end of Genesis 35, a section of verses that we'll be spending two brief sessions on both today and tomorrow. I'm glad you're here, happy for the opportunity to open the Scriptures, and eager to get into things! Let's pray and begin.

Prayer

Father in heaven, we ask that today that you draw near to the cries of our hearts; cries for mercy and restoration, cries for healing, cries for provision, cries for comfort. We take heart in the promise that you are not a God far off, but that you have drawn near to us in your own Son, who loves us and gave Himself for us. Bless our study of the Scriptures, we pray in Christ's holy name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, Genesis 35 ends with a brief summary of Jacob's twelve sons and a final note about Jacob's father, Isaac. There's nothing especially revelatory in the verses that end this chapter, but if we look at them in the overarching context of the narrative, I believe that to do so properly requires a certain frame of mind and a certain work of heart. Our focus this session: humility of heart.

Genesis 35:22b-29

Jacob had twelve sons: 23The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. 24The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 25The sons of Rachel's maidservant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali. 26The sons of Leah's maidservant Zilpah: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram. 27Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. 28Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. 29Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

I've been perusing a few of my old books recently after I found them during a closet clean-out. To be honest, they'd been put away for years and I'd forgotten about them, so in a way I feel like I'm looking at them for the first time. One of the titles is a volume by Warren Wiersbe called *The Integrity Crisis*, and in it he writes about authenticity, vulnerability, and the need to be honest: honest not just with others, but with ourselves. He's not so interested in self-actualization, but in self-realization...specifically, realizing that when it comes to sin, our neighbors don't have a corner on the market and that we shouldn't treat them as if they do.

In coming to the end of Genesis 35 and the several chapters prior to it, this portion of God's Word has been one for the ages when it comes to the need for some realization. Yes, there's been a lot of icky stuff to wade through, and yes, it's astounding to see how ridiculously stupid and unspiritual some of the choices of Jacob and his sons have been. It's an easy section of Scripture to do plenty of head-shaking and finger-pointing and to look at it with the detached air of people who are above such error and boorishness. It's even easy to look with anger on these actions of others. Warren Wiersbe, however, would point out two things in a situation like this. First, are we really as high above such error and boorishness as we think? Second — even if, per chance, we are morally and spiritually superior beings to those we're observing — is head-shaking and finger-pointing and anger the proper reaction when it comes to the failings and foibles and fallenness of others? Is there another way?

To illustrate that point, Wiersbe wrote the following:

Will Rogers was known for his laughter, but he also knew how to weep. One day he was entertaining at the Milton H. Berry Institute in Los Angeles, a hospital that specialized in rehabilitating polio victims and people with broken backs and other extreme physical handicaps. Of course, Rogers had everybody laughing, even patients in really bad condition; but then he suddenly left the platform and went to the rest room. Milton Berry followed him to give him a towel; and when he opened the door, he saw Will Rogers leaning against the wall, sobbing like a child. He closed the door, and in a few minutes, Rogers appeared back on the platform, as jovial as before.

Wiersbe continued,

If you want to learn what a person is really like, ask three questions: What makes him laugh? What makes him angry? What makes him weep? What we need today is not anger but anguish, the kind of anguish that Moses displayed when he broke the two tablets of the law and then climbed the mountain to intercede for his people, or that Jesus displayed when He cleansed the temple and then wept over the city. The difference between anger and anguish is a broken heart. It's easy to get angry, especially at somebody else's sins; but it's not easy to look at sin, our own included, and weep over it.

Here at the end of Genesis 35 we have what, at first glance, is just a list of names...here are Jacob's sons. At second glance, here is a list containing the names of a group of all-too-human individuals, many of whom could star in their own seedy reality TV show...and we could stop there to keep things neat and tidy if the goal is to keep things sterile and at arm's length. At third glance, however, here is a list of names that has plenty of space left on it to include other names...names like my name and your name. It's a list of people who know all too well the reality of failings, foibles, and fallenness in life.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, in light of that fact, maybe this is a list that we shouldn't be too quick to gloss over and dismiss as we rush to what's next in the text. Maybe we should stop and remember that the names here represent actual people who lived actual lives and who struggled and wrestled and fought their way through hard times...people who only, by the grace of God, got to the other side of it all. Maybe we should take some time not for detached, dismissive anger, but for anguish — for them, and for us. Why? Because it's only when we see our own deplorable state and the great need that goes with it that we begin to see the astounding greatness of God and what He has done for us in the sending of a Rescuer...in the sending of One who came to save us from ourselves. When we come back tomorrow, we're going to spend our time talking about what that looked like for Jacob and his household — and consequently, what it looks like for us as well. I hope you'll make time to join in and be part of it.

Have a great day, everyone — God richly bless you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich grace and peace to each of you in our Lord Jesus, and welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS. I'm glad to be with you as we come together to share the joy of God's Word today, and as we head back to the Scriptures in this session we're opening one final time to the end of Genesis 35. Take a moment, find your place, and pray with me as we begin:

Prayer

Father, we praise you for your loving-kindness and your deep, abiding love for us. We're especially mindful today of your goodness and mercy, and so deeply thankful for it. Please bless the study your holy Word today to the end that we grow as your people. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, our final look at Genesis 35 means a final look at the list of Jacob's sons. Our focus this session: the Lord holds steady.

Genesis 35:22b-29

Jacob had twelve sons: 23The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. 24The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 25The sons of Rachel's maidservant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali. 26The sons of Leah's maidservant Zilpah: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram. 27Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. 28Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. 29Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

When they were young, my kids used to love bumper bowling. For the uninitiated among you, bumper bowling is when the gutters on either side of the lane at the bowling alley are covered over so that wayward or poorly thrown balls stay true and reach their intended destination. Not only do bumpers guarantee at least a little bit of happiness for those using them (which can turn a family outing at the bowling alley into an enjoyable evening instead of a night of frustration and tears), they're also known to produce some unexpected and even amazing shots as the ball ricochets from one side of the lane to the other on its way to the pins. Sometimes the ball travels in agonizingly slow fashion, other times it meanders to the left or to the right, and yes, on rare occasions it might even roll straight and true. With bumpers, though, the result is always the same: in the end, the ball always finds its target and the bowler always finds success.

I'd like to say something to you today that needs very little explanation. In fact, rather than explain anything, my goal is simply to speak a reminder into your heart.

As we come to the final verses of Genesis 35 today, we might be tempted to look at this chapter — the past several chapters, actually — as a wild night at the bowling alley. There have been so many wayward and poorly thrown balls by so many people that it's hard to keep track of them all. We've had bowlers who have tried to play by their own rules, bowlers who've refused to stay in their own lane, bowlers who have attacked other bowlers, and even bowlers who have wanted to kick people off of their own team. When it comes to Jacob and his sons, a collection of amazingly spiritual men this is not. Dr. Herbert Carl Leupold, a widely respected authority on the Old Testament in the early 20th century, once wrote concerning Genesis 35 that what amazed him most was how these descendants of Abraham, in such a short period of

time, managed to drift so far from the spiritual foundation which he had established for them as a man of God. And it's true: what we've been looking at as we've studied this portion of God's Word is a family beset with spiritual dysfunction. It's a family that has gone literally every which way when it comes to their theology and practice of life as God's people. This is a family full of sinners.

But notice, if you will, something else: as wild as their exploits have been and as frayed around the edges as they seem to be, they're all still there. No one has been kicked out of the bowling alley. There are balls all over the lobby, beer stains on the floor, half-eaten hotdogs and French fries slowly rotting away on the console, and all kinds of other unpleasantries to boot, but at the end of the day, what do we see? Here is Jacob. Here are his sons. All twelve. And most stunning of all? In spite of the mess that we've mentioned, in spite of a track record of ridiculously stupid choices, in spite of all the deceit and disarray and the accoutrements that go with it, when we look at Jacob and his boys there's not a single gutter ball among them. In each trip to the arrows, whether the ball has traveled agonizingly slow or ricocheted from one side of the lane to the other on its way to the pins, in the end, it has reached its destination. How is that even remotely possible?

It's possible because in His great covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and now to Jacob, God has put His bumpers up. They're there to guide and protect. They're also in place so that when there is sin, there is a path to forgiveness. And while we've certainly seen that there are natural consequences to sin when it occurs, grace and mercy are there in abundance to lead Jacob and his family to repentance, to refresh and renew their hearts, to transform their minds, and to carry them all to place they need to be. God is protecting this man and his sons, and God will also use this man and his sons...not because they're such great and spiritual people who always choose well in life, but because God is great, and He has chosen them by His grace.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, there's a point to all of this, and you already know what it is: in spite of what your own life has looked like through the years, in spite of where it may be now, and in spite of the things you struggle with and wrestle over and even fail at — sometimes day after day after day — you need to be reminded today that just as it was for Jacob and his family as they lived in the grace of the Abrahamic covenant and sojourned as carriers of the promise of the Messiah, so it is for you. In Jesus Christ — the very Messiah who was promised through Jacob's line — you too live in the grace of a special covenant. As a person redeemed by Jesus, you too sojourn as a carrier of His promises. And just as Jacob's journey would take him and his descendants to the Promised Land, your journey is taking you to the Promised Land as well...to heaven, the ultimate expression and realization of the land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob so long ago.

Finally, you should know this as well: just as God used Jacob during his life, so it is that as you go along on your way, God will use you during your life as well. Not because you're such a great and spiritual person who always chooses well in life, but because God is great, and He has chosen you by His grace. God has put His bumpers up for you. They're there to guide and protect. They're in place so that when there is sin, there is a path to forgiveness. In Christ, there is always grace and mercy in abundance to lead you to repentance, to refresh and renew your heart, to transform your mind, and to carry you to place you need to be. You will most assuredly reach your destination!

God give you His peace today as you reflect on those promises, everyone — Lord-willing we'll be back at it tomorrow to continue. Have a terrific day, and the joy of the Lord be your strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Christ's peace to each of you today, and welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS. It's good to be with you again in more of a "live" fashion after a couple of archive days, and I appreciate your understanding as we hunkered down and made our preparations for Tropical Storm Nicole. We're thankful that all of the homes and businesses in our neighborhood fared well, but we're mindful and hurting for our many friends in Florida who had a much greater impact than expected from the storm. All across the world at any given time there are people suffering from natural disasters of one kind or another, and though we can't rush into each and every situation to offer our assistance, one thing we can do as God's people is regularly lift the hurting to Him in prayer, asking that He send the people of His choosing who are able to go into impacted places when there are needs to be met. Certainly, sometimes that's you and me; but thanks be to God that the family of Christ extends around the globe, and that working together, we can all carry out our Lord's incarnational ministry in our own time and place.

As we go to God's Word today, we're in a moment of transition as we move into a section of the Scriptures that details the genealogy not of Jacob, but that of his brother. Let's pray as we begin.

Prayer

Almighty God, you are great and worthy of praise. You are faithful and true. You are the One who looks upon us with compassion and who comes to us in our time of need. As we pray today, we have such peace in knowing that there is nothing about us that you do not know, that you cannot handle, and that you will not forgive and make right. We confess our sin, Lord, and we ask to be made clean...and we also ask that through your Word today you will speak your power, your peace, and your strength into our lives. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Savior, amen.

Getting Started

Getting things started on this Monday, we're having our first look at Genesis 36, a chapter which gives us a brief accounting of Esau and his family. As we get into it, we'll do so by also remembering the end of chapter 35 where we saw the now-reconciled Jacob and Esau come together to bury their father. Our focus this session: an important, but ultimately minor, interlude.

Genesis 36:1-8

This is the account of Esau (that is, Edom). 2Esau took his wives from the women of Canaan: Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite- 3also Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. 4Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, Basemath bore Reuel, 5and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These were the sons of Esau, who were born to him in Canaan. 6Esau took his wives and sons and daughters and all the members of his household, as well as his livestock and all his other animals and all the goods he had acquired in Canaan, and moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob. 7Their possessions were too great for them to remain together; the land where they were staying could not support them both because of their livestock. 8So Esau (that is, Edom) settled in the hill country of Seir.

Even if you're not a big movie fan, chances are you've heard of Sylvester Stallone. He's famous for being one of a very rare breed: a regular Joe who went from a struggling actor playing bit parts and working as an extra to a self-made, box office superstar. How did he do it? Through writing, starring in (and in several cases, directing) the Rocky and Rambo franchises. He's the only actor in the history of American cinema to have starred in a number one film across six consecutive decades. Someone you likely haven't heard of, however, is Sylvester Stallone's

brother, Frank. Frank is in the entertainment industry too, and while his resume isn't as well known as his brother's, in his work as an actor he's been in over 70 films and TV shows. He's also a songwriter and musician, and though I've personally never heard any of his music, he has three Platinum and ten Gold Albums. By anyone's measurement, you can't call a career like that insignificant. He's talented, accomplished, and successful, and in his own circles he's well known and respected. It's just that in the big picture — in the annals of Hollywood history and in terms of the importance of their contributions — it's his brother, not him, who will ultimately be remembered and whose legacy will remain.

As we pick things up today in our study of Genesis and move into the time of transition that I spoke of a few moments ago, perhaps the best “in a nutshell” way to describe where we are right now is to take the lives of Jacob and Esau and overlay them with the lives of Sylvester and Frank. It's a very similar scenario with very similar points of reference and very similar outcomes. It's not that Esau has been a nobody in the narrative of Isaac's sons and Abraham's grandsons; in his own way he's been blessed by God, and as to the ways of the world we know that he's very obviously talented, accomplished, and successful. In the region where he lives he's also well-known and respected. But in the big picture — in the annals of Salvation history and in terms of the importance of their contributions — it's Jacob, not Esau, who will ultimately be remembered and whose legacy will remain.

Genesis 36 begins for us in the aftermath of the death of Isaac. Rather than a fraught passing filled with regrets and unfinished business, it's actually quite beautiful. Isaac, at 180, is old and full of years. His son, Jacob, comes home to him after decades away...comes home to him probably having never expected to see him again. Not only does he come, he comes having reconciled with his brother Esau. The two are together when their father dies, and together they bury him. It's a moment in which God's mercy is magnified for us, and so, in a way, is what we see going forward: though Jacob and Esau are very different men with very different lives and (by this time) very different world views, though they will henceforth separate by sheer necessity due to the amount of their respective material blessings, they will nevertheless do so in peace. It's a happy end to a difficult beginning and the decades-long season of discord that existed in between.

The period to that sentence, so to speak, now allows us a brief time to focus on Esau and his descendants before we return to Jacob, and actually, the pattern set forth here in the text is one we've seen before — namely in the lives of Isaac and his brother Ishmael. What is that pattern? A brief, almost truncated history of the brother outside the line of God's Covenant promise, followed by a much fuller and more comprehensive treatment of the brother through whom that promise will be carried and perpetuated. When we follow Esau's history, we find, of course, that he is inseparably connected to Canaanite religion and culture through his marriages to Adah and Oholibamah. These two are mentioned first here in chapter 36, and only after their names are given is Basemath, the daughter of Ishmael, mentioned. While the choice of wives on Esau's part isn't the reason for his life of wandering apart from God and His ways, it's certainly symptomatic of that fact, and some of you will remember that it's also contrary not just to the wishes of his own parents, but to family policy going all the way back to his grandfather.

For now, we simply want to note that the presence of Canaanite influence in Esau's life through two of his wives — you can also read that as “pagan and idolatrous influence through two of his wives” — if not setting the course for Esau's life, cements it nonetheless. Because of that, it also sets the course for our study time over the next couple of days as we work our way through the ins and outs of Esau and the people who would descend from him.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, I know that some of you are glancing ahead in your Bible right now and looking with dismay at the long, gobbledygook list of names in front of you. You may wonder how in the world (and perhaps *why* in the world) we're going to tackle it. The answer is one that I hope will assuage your fears: First, yes: we *are* going to tackle it, because it's part of God's Word, and every part of God's Word is important. Second, yes again: to do what needs doing, we'll be doing some summarizing, but we'll be doing it in a way that won't gloss over things needful for our learning. Finally, because we'll be summarizing, that means we'll speak broadly where we can, speak with great specificity where we must, but ultimately, speak with application in mind when all is said and done. I hope the next few sessions are ones you'll especially tune in for, because in the end I think you'll be glad for having done so.

That's all for today, everyone; I'm appreciative of your time, and I'll look forward to being with you again very soon. God's peace, and have a great day!

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Tuesday's edition of EDiBS, and God's blessings to each of you as we come to another day of Bible study together. It's always great to be with you as we gather in Christ's name and place ourselves under His Word, and today we'll be using our time to return to Genesis 36 and its description of Esau and his descendants. Let's turn there in our Bibles and go before the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your gracious presence – your promise to be with us always. We thank you for your strong right arm – for defending us and leading us through life with your strength and your protective covering. We thank you most of all today for sending your Son, our Savior – the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived, died and rose again to bring us victory over sin, death, and all the powers of hell. We praise you for, and we are humbled by, your lavish, forgiving, saving love. Draw us into all that you have for us today in the Scriptures. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started, there's actually just one short verse and one important point to make in our time together today, something that will be helpful to know as we begin to unpack the different sections of names later on in this portion of Genesis. Our focus this session: Esau, the father of the Edomites.

Genesis 36:9

9This is the account of Esau, the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir.

I have a special young lady in my life whose hair is red. She's fun and sassy, and at 14, she's growing in wisdom and stature each and every day. I'm proud of her.

I have a pair of drugstore reading glasses, and they happen to be red as well. They're generally my favorite pair of the many that are stashed around the house, which naturally makes them the pair I'm least likely to find when I need them (which is why I'm not wearing them at the moment).

Finally, I also have a red coffee cup. I got it on Amazon. It's cheap, the handle gets hot when I put it in the microwave, and it has two chips in the rim that I have to avoid when I bring it up to my lips. The only reason I keep using it is because it's the perfect size for me, and I guess I have a hard time replacing old things with new as long as they're still functional.

The redhead's name is Natalie, but sometimes I call her Red. I also call my pair of glasses Red, because I'm one of those weird people who likes to give inanimate objects descriptive nicknames. Which, of course, means that you already know what I call my red coffee cup: Red.

Today we're talking once again about Esau. Esau, you may remember, was born with red-colored skin — but they named him Esau because he was hairy too, and that's what Esau means. Years later, however, on that fateful day when he came in from the countryside famished and ready to do anything for a little bit of food, the stew that Jacob sold to him for the price of his birthright happened to be red. That was back in Genesis 25, and that, the Bible tells us, is why Esau was also called Edom...which in Hebrew is the word for Red. It's a rather unflattering nickname that stuck, and as we come to God's Word today and see Esau connected to that name for the second time here in Genesis 36, it's a signpost for us that Scripture is pointing out something important. What is it? Just what it seems: our Lord is reminding us here that every time we see mention made of the Edomites in the Bible — over

130 times if you're the counting type — we're to remember their origin. The Edomites are from the line of Old Red...that is, from from the line of Edom...from the line of Esau. Why is that important to know? Because the Edomites will, over time, play a pivotal (and sometimes difficult) role in the life and times of the Israelites, who come from the line of Jacob. Isn't that an amazingly interesting thought? The brotherhood of these twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah and the intricacies and complexities of their relationship through the years is a fascinating study to be sure, but even more fascinating is that the qualities and characteristics of their relationship will continue to show forth in and through the lives of their descendants long after their passing.

Using just a few examples among what would be many if we took the time to catalog them all, here are some representative highlights of the interface between the Edomites and Israelites over the years.

In Numbers 20-21 when the Israelites, led by Moses, came through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, the Edomites refused to let them pass through their land.

In 1 Samuel 14 during the days of Saul, Edom was made subject to Israel, and later on, David even established military outposts there.

Later still, however, in the days of Joram (one of the sons of King Ahab), the Edomites became independent of Israel again, which you can read about in 2 Kings 8.

The back and forth between these two people groups is like the squabbling of siblings — because in a way that's exactly what it is. God, in fact, even commanded the Israelites to show regard for the Edomites for precisely that reason: in Deuteronomy 23 the Lord says to Israel, "You shall not despise an Edomite, for he is your brother."

Because of this hot and cold, friendly and fraught relationship that Edom has with Israel from generation to generation, one more thing you'll often see when you read about the Edomites is that God sends prophets to speak against them — indeed, just as He does when Israel is entrenched in its own sin. Jeremiah speaks against Edom. So does Ezekiel. Obadiah especially does, declaring that Edom will be brought to nothing and become desolate...which is exactly what finally happened. In the end, Edom and its relationship with Israel is an inextricable part of the ebb and flow of Salvation history in the Old Testament. Its roots go back to Jacob and Esau themselves.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, the Edomites are important not so much for who they are and what they do, but from whom they come and how their actions impact the Israelites over time as the Lord's chosen people. Again, I know that what we have before us in this chapter looks a bit long and convoluted, and maybe a bit difficult to comprehend as well. As we've said regarding other passages like this, hundreds of doctoral theses and more than a few books have been written detailing every single name and affiliation that's mentioned in this portion of God's Word. Some of those names, though, do add to our understanding of how and why everything fits as it does, and there's where the value is for us as God's people. These notes on Esau's family, recorded for us as they are here in Genesis 36, are designed to strengthen our understanding of the power, the promises, and the provision of God for His chosen people from generation to generation as He shepherds them, even through their trials, toward the coming of His Anointed One who will save the world from sin. The assurance that Jesus will come, and that He will come to find lost people and save them, remains the overarching message of Scripture here in

the Old Testament. What we are witnessing is God, in His perfect timing, making all things ready.

I'll look forward to being with you again next time, everyone — I hope you have a terrific day in the embrace of our Savior Jesus, and I'll be praying for you to rest in His peace. Take care, and the joy of the Lord be your abiding strength!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who was, and is, and is to come, and welcome to another daily session of EDiBS. Today is Wednesday, and at this middle point in our week together we're opening our Bibles again to the 36th chapter of Genesis...which, I should let you know, is actually our final chapter of study in this third portion of our series on Genesis. Once we finish things up with Esau over the next few sessions, we'll be putting Genesis away for a time to go elsewhere in God's Word for a season, but just as we did with the other sections in this series, in the not-too-distant future we'll be coming back for the fourth and final part of our study as we pick things up again with Jacob's family...especially the life and times of Jacob's son, Joseph.

I'm so glad that you're here, and my deep and abiding hope is that our Lord will strengthen your heart and your mind today in our time together. Take a moment to join me for a word of prayer as we begin:

Prayer

God our Father, we ask with sincere hearts that you would speak to us today through your Holy Word. Grant us your blessing. Help us to genuinely meditate on the Scriptures, that we may be like trees planted by streams of water, with roots to go deep. We love you, and we thank you for this time. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we've been dipping our toes into this 36th chapter of Genesis in preparation for an overview of Esau's descendants. The question is, how do we do it? Our focus this session: a chapter of names...lots and lots of names.

SO — Genesis 36. Have you looked at it lately? Genesis 36 contains 43 verses. Those 43 verses are divided into several parts, which we'll be unpacking over the next couple of days. So far so good. But what's not so good, at least when it comes to putting together a tidy little study of the text, is that among those several divisions and the 43 verses that make them up, there are *seventy* names given which describe the heads of families, tribes, or nations that come from Esau and his family. In short, what we have before us is a list monster.

Lists of names in God's Word, whether of people, places, things, or any combination thereof, can be beyond boring. They typically read like a phone book, and are about as exciting. They dry out your eyes. They fog your brain. Instead of piquing your interest, they more often put you to sleep. They're a hard row to hoe. Worse still, such lists are found all through the Bible, like here in Genesis 36 for example. Sure, they're there for a reason, but they're just so tedious. That being the case, how should we read them...or should we even bother?

As I've mentioned off and on over the past several days, I'll be the first one to admit that lists of names are a less-than favorite topic of study for me as a pastor. Years ago, however, a fellow pastor spoke at a ministry conference I was attending and shared his own struggle with Bible lists — along with the solution that finally worked for him. I shared his story with you about five years ago, and when I did I also shared how he made peace and even developed a passion for the Bible's many lists. Today I'm going to re-share the strategies that helped him, because ever since I wrote them down, they've helped me too and I know they can help you as well. Are you ready? Here we go.

When you encounter a daunting list of people, places, or things in Scripture, here are seven things you can do to help you work through it in a profitable way:

1. Scan the passage for familiar names. When I find a name I recognize, I stop and remember that person's story. Because we're both in God's family, that person is in my story too. The goal: celebrate the people I know in God's story.

2. Read a few verses slowly and go deep. Usually, I only choose two or three verses at a time. First, I have a go at saying each name. Then I check cross-references in the margins and notes of my Bible to learn where else those names turn up. The goal: discover something new about a person God wants me to remember.

3. Speed-read the whole thing; surf the text. When I use this method I don't actually read the names; I just slur past them and try to feel the flow of the passage. Some lists have little or no cadence, but some of the genealogies, especially, almost sing themselves. It's wonderful to experience that rhythm in the text! The goal: "sense" the poetry; "feel" the history.

4. Skim the section looking for an unexpected tidbit. For example, in Genesis 36:24 we're told of a certain individual: "... This is the Anah who discovered the hot springs in the desert while he was grazing the donkeys of his father Zibeon." How random! Why is something like that even in the Bible? That's a tidbit worth tackling, in my opinion. If humble Anah is known and commemorated in God's Word for something that happened while he was faithfully tending his family's donkeys, it reminds me that with God a person can become a hero by just doing his or her job in the desert. The goal: find the unexpected and reflect on it.

5. Read with the aid of an expert. That is, check a Bible commentary. Scholars who study the names and make connections across the whole Bible often give me gems, gems which I usually then pass on to all of you. The goal: gain new insight.

6. Study one of the places named. I mentioned it a moment ago, but many of the lists in the Bible include geography. When that's the case, I'll choose the first place name I don't know and find it on a map, or sometimes I'll even Google Earth it. Barring that, I might pull one of my Bible dictionaries off the shelf and research it that way. The goal: become aware of a real place.

7. Pray it after reading it. I don't do this quite as often when I approach a list as I might do some of the other things I've mentioned, but this is a wonderful way to approach a difficult or seemingly irrelevant portion of Scripture. Read the text, then stop and pray. Thank God that He loves people enough to preserve ancient lists like the one you're reading. Thank Him that you're part of His family and that your name is written in His eternal book together with so many of the names you're reading on the pages of your Bible. Then, turn the page and keep reading. The goal: embrace the purpose of the text by submitting yourself to the Lord and His purposes for including it in His Word.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, these seven things aren't just great for lists in the Bible; adjusted for different settings, they're excellent things to do with all parts of God's Word. Anything that helps us to focus, to learn, to grow, and to more deeply appreciate the power of God's living and active Word is a win for us as followers of Christ, and my prayer today as we close is that what I've passed on to you today will help you the next time you encounter

something in your Bible that gives you pause. On that note, happy list reading, everyone! I trust these tips will help you stay awake when we come back to Genesis 36!

God's rich and abundant blessings to each of you today in our risen Lord Jesus, and I'll see you again next time. Take care!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to Thursday's edition of EDiBS — a day where we'll be continuing our work in the Old Testament book of Genesis, specifically Genesis 36. Over the next several days we'll be coming to the end of this third part of our series in Genesis, so I'm glad you're here to share some time with me today as we begin to wind things down. We have lots to cover today, so let's pray and get to it!

Prayer

Lord God, our gracious Father, we thank you for this day...for creating it and giving us a place in it to belong to you, to walk in your ways, and to know your love for us in Christ. Help us to see the hours that you give us as a gift, and help us by your grace to make the very most of each one. Bless us today as we speak of your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, we'll be breaking down Genesis 36 into several divisions that will help us to understand the flow of the chapter. Our focus this session: bringing coherence to the convoluted.

Genesis 36, Overview

(Open to Genesis 36 in your own Bible today to follow along).

Sometimes things aren't always as they appear. Sometimes there are reasonable explanations for things that seem to be shrouded in mystery. Sometimes — often times, even — simply observing what's going on brings clarity to what before was dim and out of focus.

Some of you read the recent news story about the woman who complained to her appliance repairman about her new refrigerator. The ice dispenser on the door, she said, was popping ice cubes out onto her kitchen floor all by itself. It was driving her nuts, and she couldn't understand why it was doing it. After two visits within the span of five days, the repairman couldn't find anything wrong, even after he disassembled the unit and put it back together again. The woman, however, continued to call and complain that ice cubes were littering her kitchen floor and creating a slip-and-fall hazard.

To protect themselves against a potential lawsuit, the refrigerator manufacturer finally got involved and sent their own technician to the woman's home. When the man arrived, he got an earful from the woman as he unpacked his tools and readied himself to look at the fridge. While he was listening to her complaint, all at once a German shepherd entered the kitchen. It stood on its hind legs, pressed the button on the dispenser, and — you guessed it — ice rained down onto the floor. The dog, paying no attention to anyone, crunched down a few of the ice cubes, then left the rest to melt. Without ever acknowledging the human occupants, it exited the kitchen and went on with its day...and shortly after, so did the technician, rolling his eyes and shaking his head. Indeed, sometimes there are reasonable explanations for things that seem to be shrouded in mystery, and sometimes — often times, even — simply observing what's going on brings clarity to what before was dim and out of focus!

As we return to Genesis 36 today, what can be said with respect to that woman's refrigerator mystery can also be said with respect to all that's before us in here in God's Word. At first glance, and because we have no real context in which to operate, very little about this list of names in Esau's genealogy makes sense to us. If, however, we take some time to observe what's going on, things begin to come into focus quite nicely. With that in mind, let's do a brief windshield tour of the chapter.

The genealogy in the first five verses of Genesis 36 is based on Esau's two Canaanite wives, Adah and Oholibamah, and his third wife Basemath, who was Ishmael's daughter. Together, there were five children between those three wives. Some of you may have noticed that two of Esau's wives here in chapter 36 have different names than the ones mentioned back in chapter 26, but that's probably because they were known by one name in the Canaanite culture and another in the Hittite culture.

Moving on to the next section dealing with Esau's family, verses 9-14 bring a re-listing of what we had in verses 1-5, but now with the inclusion of Esau's grandchildren. Interestingly, if you don't count Amalek, who was the son of a concubine, Esau had a total of 12 grandchildren resulting in twelve tribes. Why is that significant? Because we see the very same pattern of 12 descendants with Nahor in chapter 22, Ishmael in chapters 17 and 25, and Jacob in chapter 35. 12, of course, is an important number in Scripture, often symbolizing God's power and authority and also symbolizing wholeness or completeness. Certainly, we can see all of those things in evidence as the Lord shepherds His chosen carriers of divine promise through this period in history. Incidentally, if you ever take the time to do a word study on the number 12 in the Bible, you'll be astounded by its use and by the important people, places, and events associated with it — and the people, places, and events here are no exception.

What comes after the listing of Esau's children and grandchildren? The list of chiefs in verses 15-19, and once again, if you observe what's going on you'll see that by and large, each grandson is the chief of a clan.

Moving quickly now, in verses 20-30 we actually read a bit of a different genealogy: that of the three generations of Seir the Horite. Who is he, where did he come from, and why are he and his descendants listed here? The sons of Seir the Horite were early inhabitants of Edom who were actually conquered by Esau (something that's recorded for us in the second chapter of Deuteronomy). Their inclusion here shows Esau's — and the line of Esau's — dominance, power, and authority in the land, things which were part of his earthly, material blessing from the Lord.

Going back now to Esau's own blood line, what do we have verses 31-39? There we read about the *eight kings* that reigned in Edom before Israel ever had its *first king*. Edom, in fact, had a king while Israel was still wandering in the wilderness, which is referenced for us in Numbers 20. Again, this shows us the power of Esau's line through the ages.

Finally, to close off with verses 40-43, we have one final list of chiefs who trace their lineage back to Esau.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, in one sense this is all quite impressive, isn't it. Esau was a man of power and influence, of wealth and prosperity. He had, in many ways, the world by the tail, and he enjoyed a great deal of success in life by almost any way you might like to measure it. There is, however, something that Esau was not: Esau was not the son of promise. God prospered Esau and made him into the great nation of Edom, but at the same time, it's vitally important for us remember that Esau didn't prosper spiritually. On the contrary, as great as he was, in the end his life was defined by a long process of decline. Moreover, the great nation he founded eventually became, as we said yesterday, a special object of God's judgment. As to the end of Edom? That happens to be something that *is* shrouded in mystery, even to this day. We do know that Edom lost its independence in the fifth century B.C., and we know further that from about 312 B.C. it was controlled by the Nabateans, but after that? All that we have is a

bunch of melting ice on the floor of the kitchen, with no idea how it got there and no one who can tell us the reason for it.

When we come back next time, we're going to be taking Esau's life and holding it up to the life of another — namely, his brother Jacob. While Esau was not the son of promise, Jacob was. What are the comparisons? What are the contrasts? And most importantly, what can we learn when we stand these two side by side? There are lots of things to consider in that exercise, and my prayer is that in going through it together we'll be impacted for the good as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior. Thanks so much, everyone — have a terrific day in Christ, and I'll look forward to seeing you soon. God's peace, and take care!

Hi, everyone - blessings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ, who loves you with an abiding and everlasting love.

I had a long conversation with someone last night who's going through an exceedingly difficult time — one of those seasons in life where it just seems like it would be easier to give up than to keep going.

We've all had a time or two like that on our journey...or three or four, or even a whole lot more than that. Sometimes life hurts. It really can be a travail of tears. Sometimes hopelessness begins to push in so that it can settle in and replace the person we once knew ourselves to be. The truth, though, is that the travailing is often at its worst right before the prevailing. The darkness is often at its deepest right before the light breaks through.

Because this has been on my heart — and because I've been there myself in life more than a time or two, or three or four — I just want to share something today. If you need a gentle reminder right now in your own time of travailing, or if you know someone right now for whom a simple word of encouragement could be a lifeline they desperately need, then take a brief moment with me and go back to the beginning.

I want you to remember today that we have a Savior in our Lord Jesus Christ. A Savior, not in the churchy, eye-glazing sense of the word we've said thousands of times without thinking about it, but Savior in its rawest, clearest, and most visceral form. We have been literally *rescued*. Jesus has gone before us into the depths of sin and sadness, of trial and tribulation, of grief and hopelessness, and of evil itself. He emerged victorious after sin, death and the devil brought against Him its very best. Now, as the One who loves us and has redeemed us, as our Advocate and our Champion, our victorious Jesus has promised that He is with us. That He will not leave us. That He will not forsake us. Jesus has promised us that He will see us through. In this world we will have trouble, but we take heart, because He has overcome the world.

Jesus will see us through. Jesus will see *you* through.

Some of you might know these words from the great hymn writer, Audrey Mieir. They're worth memorizing or writing down to keep in your pocket. I keep them in my wallet, and they're an encouragement to me when life presses in during difficult times. I pray they'll help to provide encouragement for you too, especially in your own time of need.

Be not troubled with thoughts of the morrow,
Of duties you surely must do.
On the Lord cast your burden of sorrow;
It matters to Him about you!
Be not weary when trials are given,
But trust Him to carry you through.
He will make all a pathway to heaven;
It matters to Him about you!
Then be patient until His appearing,
'Tis dawn almost now on your view;
For the mists of this dark age are clearing.
In love He is planning for you!

God bless your day today, everyone — the joy and peace of Christ fill you and sustain you!
Take care, and I'll see you next time.

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! Welcome to Monday's edition of EDiBS! It's great to be with you as we start another week together in God's Word, and as we prepare our hearts to go before the Lord, my great hope is that you're benefitting from our journey through the Scriptures and that you're also being established and emboldened in your faith because of them. We're back to Genesis 36 today, almost finished now with both our current chapter and the third part of our four-part series in the book as a whole. I'll have more to say about that tomorrow, but for now let's bow our heads and seek the Lord's blessing as we begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for a new day to praise your name, to live in your grace, and to rejoice in your mercy. Our intention in these next few moments is to have our hearts and minds engaged in your Word, to the end that we learn to embrace you more and more, even as you have so lovingly embraced us. Teach us by the Scriptures today, for your Word is truth. We ask this in your precious name, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, in bringing things to a close with respect to Esau, we've mentioned already that he and his brother were very different in many ways. Today we'll look at the two together and examine the greatest difference of all. Our focus this session: a man of self versus a man of God.

Genesis 36:43b

...This was Esau, the father of the Edomites.

Every time I meet up with family, I'm not only cognizant of who I'm with, but who I'm not with — specifically, people in the family who have passed away. This past week I've especially been thinking about my two older brothers. Jim died back in 1980, and Steve died just a few years ago now. Jim and Steve were very different from one another: Jim died very young, before he really got started in life; Steve died later in life, but still too young and with many things left undone that he'd wanted to accomplish in this world. Jim was brash, angry, and troubled; Steve was quiet, calm, and cerebral. Jim was a follower; Steve was a leader. Jim didn't really have a path in life; Steve was laser-focused about what he wanted and how he was going to get there. Though they were indeed very different, each with unique strengths and weaknesses, one thing united them, something for which I am exceedingly grateful: they were both baptized children of God, redeemed by Christ, men with hope in Jesus who were held securely by His grace.

As we've been studying God's Word together over the past several weeks, we've been talking quite a bit about another set of brothers, also very different from one another. Though they were twins, the fact that one was older and one was younger would be quite significant in terms of their respective trajectories in life, and as we've seen, their relationship through the years was marked by conflict. Thankfully, they would eventually reconcile, but even with that act of reconciliation they would ultimately remain separated in life...and actually, that's what we need to discuss today. While we can ascribe unique strengths and weaknesses to both Esau and his brother Jacob, and while we can say that they did have some similarities with one another as it pertained to their worldly wealth and success, what we can't say is that there was anything that ever truly united them. Where it mattered most, in fact, is where they were farthest apart. Over the course of his life, Jacob became a man whose hope was in the Lord. He was a man redeemed, a man held securely in the grace of the One who had called and saved him. Esau, however, was a man whose only lord was himself, and while he experienced

a great deal of material blessing in his life and became the founder of nations, one place he never cared to enter was the city of God.

And yet here's what's interesting today. If we were to look only on the surface of things, especially with where the text has taken us in its description of these two brothers, in many ways we might assume that Esau was the chosen of the two rather than Jacob. Though both were wealthy, Esau's wealth exceeded that of his brother, and he began to accumulate it much earlier in life. When we saw Jacob finally reunited with Esau back in chapter 33, Esau showed up as a great leader having power and influence and accompanied by 400 armed men; Jacob showed up with nothing but his ragtag, wayfaring, unanchored family. At this point in the text, it has just taken the whole of the 36th chapter of Genesis to list Esau's descendants. In high contrast, when we return at a later date to begin our time in Genesis 37, the entirety of Jacob's life and family will be described and summarized for us in just one verse. It's true that the remainder of the book will go on to flesh out Jacob's descendants, and as that transpires, we'll of course come to see the full weight of his legacy and the greatness of his influence as God's chosen instrument of salvific promise and blessing. But at this juncture, if we were to judge between Jacob and Esau based simply on the merits of human wisdom, Esau would be the one to check all the boxes, not his brother. Jacob, at the very least, had a very late start.

Checked boxes or not, however, if we were to come down on the side of Esau in our assessment of the two brothers, we would be wrong, wouldn't we. We would be wrong because God doesn't look on outward appearances, but on the heart. We would be wrong because God doesn't assess things the way you and I do. As Paul wrote in the first of his letters that we have to the Corinthians, God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, and even the things that are not, to nullify the things that are. Why? So that there could be no prideful boasting before Him. And yet, that's also why God can take the most unseemly, mixed up, broken life and not only mend it, but go on to bless it and then use it for His purposes.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, God's evaluation of these two brothers, as recorded in the book of Hebrews, is straightforward. In Hebrews 12, Esau is judged as unholy, while in Hebrews 11, Jacob is described as a man of true faith. Jacob was the son of promise; Esau was not. And yes, while it's true that we see in Jacob, from a very early age, a spirit of craftiness and deceit and selfishness, we also see in Jacob a heart that softens over time to the things of God. In Esau, from that same very early age, we see a marked disinterest in anything having to do with God. And now as we come to the end of our time looking at Esau, it's notable that after this one chapter dedicated to his descendants, he won't be mentioned again. When we come back next time, we'll have one final observation to make about this portion of Scripture, so I hope you'll make plans to be here and go through it with me. Tomorrow's also the day where I'll share where we're going in our next series, so you'll want to be sure and tune in. Thanks for your time today everyone; God bless you richly in our Lord Jesus, who takes our own unseemly, mixed up, broken lives to mend, to bless, and to use for His purposes. He is with you and He goes before you today in all that you do!

Take care, and I'll see you soon!

Greetings

Greetings, everybody! God's rich blessings to each of you on this beautiful Tuesday, and welcome to another edition of EDiBS. Thanks so much for coming along today, and thanks also for inviting your friends and loved ones to come along with you as we walk through God's Word together. Right now in our study time we're at the end of Genesis 36, and now also at the end of the third part of our four-part series in Genesis, so today is a moment for us to connect some dots and look ahead to what's to come. I'm glad you're here; let's pray and ask for God's guidance as we begin.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for this time to draw near to you, and we ask that you would grant us all that we need today to look to your Word, learn from it, and live out its truth in our own lives as your redeemed, restored, and dearly loved people. We are grateful for the salvation you have brought to us, and we ask that you would help us today to walk in that gratitude. In your precious name we pray, amen

Getting Started

As we get started today, going into today's session we've now come to the end of the third major portion of the book of Genesis. Where have we been, and what's left to finish? That's our focus over these next few minutes.

Genesis 25-36: Before, during, and After

Do you remember Martin Luther's delightful explanation of how he approached the Scriptures? It's a well known illustration, and I've shared it with you several times through the years. Still, it's one of those little gems that bears re-sharing from time to time because it never gets old, and it's always helpful if we endeavor to take it to heart. Luther wrote,

I study my Bible like I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest may fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf.

There's actually more to that quote as Luther further breaks things down, talking about studying book after book, chapter after chapter, and finally paragraphs, sentences, and even individual words and their meanings. The point? There's blessing in being thorough, there's blessing in taking time, and there's blessing in delighting ourselves in the study of God's Word. It's an activity that yields a sweet harvest, and our lives are always the richer for it as we grow in faith and maturity as people redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For a long time now — starting three years ago for parts one and two, then six months ago for part three — we've been shaking limbs, branches, twigs, and even looking under a leaf here and there in the book of Genesis. The hope, of course, is that there's been blessing in it for all of you who've come along, whether for bits and pieces along the way or nonstop from the very first study until now.

Genesis has been telling us, primarily, about the world and its people and about the God who made them...and more important, about the God who would remake them. We've been studying far more than facts and figures and timelines, but rather about real people who were part of real nations, and about the entrance onto the scene of the most significant of those people and their succeeding generations. While in the first part of this series we principally

covered events (chapters 1-11), once we got to parts two and three (chapters 12-36) we began, for the most part, to cover people — beginning with Abraham and Sarah, continuing through Isaac and Rebekah, and finally ending most recently with Jacob and Esau. In actuality, that focus on people will be taking us all the way to the end of the book; when we come back at a later date to cover the final 14 chapters, our focus is going to be on the life of Jacob's son Joseph, a man who, to me, is one of the most fascinating servants of the Lord in the entire Old Testament.

There's one more thing we should say today with regard to all that we've been studying, even though we've said it before: while we've been winding in and out of a whole host of fascinating and extremely imperfect lives over the past several weeks, and while we've seen a great deal of very interesting history being played out as well, it remains extremely important to remember the ultimate and overarching plot that's playing out before us as we read and study this book together: the plot of God's plan to save a fallen world from sin through a Savior, and the manner in which He moves that plan forward from generation to generation through the people of His choosing: people like Abraham, Isaac, and most recently, even (and especially) Jacob.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap things up for the day, the name *Genesis*, as most of you will remember, means "beginnings." How marvelous of our great and mighty God to show us in this book not just the beginnings of things in our world, but more than anything the promise of a *new* beginning in the coming Messiah. Even way back here in Genesis, there is Jesus. In both the beginning and the end, it's all about Him.

When we come back for our next session, we're going to be moving in a different direction for a time. I'm very happy to announce that beginning tomorrow, we'll be returning to the New Testament with a new series in the Book of Acts...perhaps the most pivotal and dynamic book in the New Testament for a whole host of reasons, not least of which is the comprehensive, 30-year history it provides of the birth and growth of the Church in the First Century. Acts is almost nonstop action. Acts is messy and breathtaking. Acts is also beautiful and inspiring, and because of all those things, Acts is also a massively faith-building portion of Scripture to study. I know it's going to be a series that blesses, challenges, teaches, and encourages us as we go through it together, so I hope you'll make plans to jump in right from the beginning and follow along each day.

That's all for today, everyone — as always, you're in my prayers often, and I'm grateful to know that so many of you lift me and the ministry of EDiBS up as well. I know that your prayers sustain and strengthen me in ways I'll never understand this side of heaven, and I'm deeply thankful to have you as my brothers and sisters in the faith. Have a great day, be at peace in Christ, who loves you with an everlasting love, and I'll look forward to seeing you again tomorrow. God bless you richly, and do take care!

