October to December 2016
Teenz RPG Series on
"Genesis"

Do pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance before you begin your devotional time, for unless the Spirit reveals the meaning, we cannot understand scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10). Then you must read the scripture text; please don't be tempted to read the devotional alone without reading the Bible. Memorizing the scripture text will help you meditate upon it (Psalm 1:2), even long after you have finished your devotional time. After reading the devotional, always end with self-reflection: compare yourself against the standard of God's Word, and humbly yield to the Holy Spirit to direct you towards that standard (James 1:23-25). Be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only!

At the end of this series, may you be able to say as David said,

"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."
(Psalm 63:1)

May all glory be God's alone!

Dn Milton Ang
On behalf of the Teenz RPG committee

WHAT IS SO IMPORTANT ABOUT GENESIS?

The book of Genesis is the very foundation upon which the rest of the Bible is based upon. To reject the historicity and accuracy of the book of Genesis, would be to reject the rest of the Bible. As creation scientist Henry Morris describes: "If the Bible were somehow expurgated of the Book of Genesis (as many people today would prefer), the rest of the Bible would be incomprehensible. It would be like a building without a ground floor, or a bridge with no support".

As a whole, the Bible has probably influenced the world more than any other work of man. As its foundation, the book of Genesis can be seen as not just the most important book of the Bible, but is probably the most important book ever written in the history of mankind!

Thus the importance of this book cannot be emphasized too much. Every born again Christian ought to know something of the book of Genesis, and be delighted to immerse himself in a serious and careful study of what this whole book is all about. As we study, we must take a careful Biblical and God-honouring approach to it, with full faith believing God's Word to be perfectly true. This is especially so in our present day and age of contention and controversy over the accuracy and inerrancy of Scripture. So many so-called Christians, especially seminary professors and Bible scholars, question the literal historical understanding of the book of Genesis, and simply dismiss the book of Genesis as a collection of myths and stories, and try to fit the theory of evolution into it.

Yet for us we know that God makes no mistake. His Word is perfectly inspired and preserved by Him, and we can accept every single jot and title as the infallible Word of God. God gave us the Genesis record for our learning and understanding, and thus we must be serious in our study of it.

As we embark on this most important study, it would be good if you can take some time to read through at least the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis. If you have time through this day, it would be good if you could read all 50 chapters as well!

Thought: It's good to begin with the book of beginnings!
Prayer: Lord, may you sustain my interest and desire for your Word as we begin this study of the book of Genesis.

WHAT IS GENESIS ALL ABOUT?

The name 'genesis' literally means the beginning or origin of anything, and that is basically what this book is all about. This is the first book of the Bible, and teaches us about the beginning of beginnings. It spans a period of about two thousand years, highly significant in the history of the world and also of the nation Israel. It recounts the majestic creation of the universe; the introduction of man onto this Earth; the wonderful relationship that God had with His creation, with Adam and Eve in the beautiful Garden of Eden. But then it also narrates the fall of Man, where sin entered into the world through Adam and Eve's rebellion and succumbing to the deceit of Satan (Genesis 3). It tracks how generations of patriarchs lived and died (Genesis 4), until a point where the wickedness of man was so great in the earth, and their thoughts were evil continually (Genesis 6:5). As a result God had to judge the whole world through a global flood that destroyed every living substance upon the face of the ground (Genesis 7:23).

Yet amidst all this death and destruction, God gave a message of hope. Just as Genesis gave us the origin of sin, it also revealed to us the plan of salvation. As God delivered the verdict of His judgment upon the sin of Adam and Eve, He also gave them the first gospel in Genesis 3:15, that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. This described how a descendant of Eve, a second Adam would come to overcome the Devil, to destroy sin and the curse of sin, and grant life and salvation to mankind. Do you realize the phrase "seed of a woman" points to the Virgin Birth? This would be the first of many revelations that God would give His people in the Old Testament, to slowly reveal to them what His divine plan of salvation was to be. It is indeed an amazing drama of redemption!

Through the rest of the book of Genesis, God focuses His attention in tracing the lineage of this promised seed from Adam, through Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Judah. God directs history, guiding these patriarchs and teaching them faith, setting in motion processes that would culminate in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ thousands of years later.

Thought: God's plan is always perfect.
Prayer: Lord, may we always be able to see your perfect plan in all that you do.

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF GENESIS?

Up until the 19th century, almost all scholars, both Christian and Jewish alike, held to the view that Moses was the author of the book of Genesis. This is clearly attested in many portions of Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments (e.g. Exodus 17:14, 24:4, Joshua 1:7-8, Mark 12:26 etc.). However, somewhere in the middle of the 19th century, certain liberal scholars begin to put forth views that questioned and even rejected the Mosaic authorship of the book of Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch. They claim to have identified four different sources originating from different periods of history that were compiled together to form the book of Genesis. They assign the letters J, E, D and P to identify them, describing the so-called 'Jehovah, Elohim, Deuteronomic and priestly' documents. Of these, they say that the 'Jehovah' document was written about 850 BC, and is by an author that prefers the name Jehovah to refer to God. Likewise the 'Elohim' document was written by one who prefers that name for God, and wrote it around 750 BC. The 'deuteronomic' document refers to the bulk of the book of Deuteronomy, and was said to be written around 620 BC, whilst the priestly document was penned by priests around 570 BC.

There is of course no evidence whatsoever to suggest such an artificial dichotomy of the first five books of the Bible. These are but fancy postulations of unbelieving scholars who choose to cast doubt on the contents of the Bible, rather than to accept it by faith. In their rationalistic minds, they refuse to believe that God was the one who inspired Moses to write these amazing accounts of man's history and God's providential dealings with them. They refuse to believe in God's direct intervention with man in teaching them His laws and intricate system of worship. They claim that such complicated systems could only have been developed hundreds of years after the time of Moses. As a result, they invent their own heretical explanations that do nothing but attack the Word of God.

Truly as Jesus rebuked the Jews in John 5:45-47, it is only if they believe the words of Moses, that they would be able to believe in the words of Christ. If they chose to reject the writings of Moses, then how are they able to put their faith and trust in Christ?

Thought: If we say Moses did not write the Pentateuch, then we are calling Jesus a liar!
Prayer: Lord, may I have the simple faith to believe in your Word.

HOW SHOULD I INTERPRET GENESIS?

There is a huge controversy raging in Christendom today concerning the interpretation of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. There are many who claim to be Bible-believing Christians, yet in the same breath turn around and throw doubt upon God's Word. Instead of taking God at His word and believing the simple understanding of Scripture to be true, these people have elevated science and human understanding to become their authority. They look at the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2; the account of man's fall in Genesis 3; long lives of the patriarchs in Genesis 4-5; the accounts of the global flood in Genesis 6-8; and the beginning of races and languages in Genesis 11 and dismiss them all as myth! They say that these are but a collection of legends and stories passed down through the ages, and cannot be understood as a literal historical account of what really happened. The reason why they take such a view is because what they read in the Bible just does not seem to tally with what they learn in the sciences, archaeology, history and anthropology. Scientists postulate that the universe is billions of years old, started with a big bang, and that man evolved from a 'primordial soup' of elements. This seems to contradict with the simple truths of Genesis. Thus they decide to reinterpret the Bible with this modernistic godless worldview. God's Word thus is compromised, ignored, and man's wisdom becomes the source of truth.

As Bible-believing Christians, we must simply take God at His Word. The Scriptures clearly state that God created everything in the beginning out of nothing, and that the whole Creation was created in six literal 24 hour days. The line 'and the evening and the morning' clearly attests to that fact. The moment we accept the atheistic theories of evolution, we reject the idea that man was created in the image of God, that God's creation was 'very good'. Instead the world around us is nothing more than a coincidental accumulation of death, mutation and decay. Sin becomes trivialised also, as it was not man rejecting God in the Garden of Eden, but it is simply man reacting to his carnal animalistic instincts. This cannot be! We know that man was created sinless and perfect, and we have the glorious hope that through Jesus Christ, Eden can be restored, and we can enjoy perfect fellowship with God one day in Heaven. That is our blessed hope!

Thought: Why should Genesis be interpreted differently from any other part of the Bible?
Prayer: May I have the wisdom to accept God's truth in all things.

WHAT WAS CREATED ON THE FIRST DAY?

Try to imagine the universe with nothing at all. And by nothing, we mean absolutely nothing. No air, no matter, not a single atom. It is hard to visualize or even conceptualize such a situation, for we have always known a universe and world full of things. We find it hard to imagine all these gone, and to know what 'nihilo' was like. But yet we know that everything was created by God 'ex nihilo' (Latin for 'out of nothing'.). And so before anything was, there was God, and nothing else. God alone, in the perfection of His Godhead, decreed that He would create the universe, and also create man and a world for him to live in – all for His glory.

And so in the very beginning, before even the start of time, Genesis 1:1 tells us that out of nothingness, God created the heaven and the earth. God created and started the whole space-time continuum, of linear time (in the beginning), and the dimensions of space (the heaven) that would soon be filled with matter (beginning with the earth) that He too would create. How did God create? It was simply an act of His divine will. He did not need any tools or raw materials to do so. Simply by divine fiat (the command of God), all things just came into being.

The heavens that were made include both the expanse of space that we understand as 'space' or 'outer-space', the regions beyond our earth's atmosphere, and also heaven in the sense of the realm of angels that we cannot see, for we know that angels (the sons of God) were present at the creation of the earth (Job 38:4-7). The earth that was created was as yet 'without form', and 'void'. This does not speak of chaos, but of the fact that it was not yet physically shaped into the present form that we are familiar with, and it was empty and uninhabited; a complete void, and endless stretch of deep waters which was in complete and utter darkness. The Spirit of God, the third person of the trinity was present there, moving upon the face of the waters, superintending the process of creation.

Then, out of darkness, God created light, with the simple words 'let there be light', and it was so. What was the nature of this light and darkness? We will find our more tomorrow.

Thought: Can there be any truth in the so-called 'gap theory'?
Prayer: Lord, help me to appreciate the wonder and greatness of your creation.

Genesis 1:1-5
Memorise 2 Corinthians 4:6
"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."

WHAT IS LIGHT AND DARKNESS?

Darkness is simply the absence of light. Darkness was not something that had to be physically created, but it was the state of the universe before light was introduced to it. On day one, after creating the heaven and the earth, God introduced the concept of light into the universe, and it was seen in contrast to darkness. This was accomplished with the divine decree of God, such that simply because He so commanded it, it would happen. This shows us the infinite creative power of God, for He has to but desire it to be so, and it will be so. This will be the same pattern in which the rest of creation will take place – through the authoritative will of God.

The nature of this light that was created is hard to define. We know that it was not the sunlight of the sun that our earth revolves around, for the sun was only created on day 4. Instead, it was likely to be a unique, singular light source that shone upon the earth, allowing the beginning of the cycle of light and darkness which was used to denote night and day. This showed that the earth that was created was rotating on its axis, with some portion of it illuminated by the light, whilst another would be in darkness. This is important, and God established this on the very first day to facilitate a method for tracking time in the first few moments of creation. With light and darkness, God can now explain the acts of creation in terms of literal 24-hour days, with the darkness of the evening signalling the end of the day, and the light in the morning the beginning of the next one. This became the established pattern for God's creative works, as He would do His work in the light of day, and no work would be done between evening and morning, during the darkness of night time.

There was definitely the creation of visible light, differentiated from darkness. Yet it could possibly include the entire electromagnetic spectrum, of which visible light is only a small part of. It would encompass other invisible wavelengths, from the long radio waves to the short wavelengths of ultraviolet and x-rays. In a sense what we see are the physical laws of force and energy being introduced into the universe, and it would be upon these laws that the physical world would interact and exist.

Thought: It was God, not Newton or any other physicists that established the laws of nature.
Prayer: Lord, may you illumine my minds to help me to understand thy mighty works.

WHAT WAS CREATED ON THE SECOND DAY?

At the end of the first day, the earth was still but a vast formless water body. What then happened on the second day was that God divided the waters and introduced a firmament (expanse) in the midst of it. The purpose of this firmament was to divide the waters beneath from the waters above – forming what we understand to be our sky or atmosphere. Although in verse 8 this firmament is described also as "heaven", we must understand the meaning of the word in its context, and not confuse it with the "heaven" that was created on day one.

The heaven that was created on day two is the atmosphere that we are living in – of the air that we breathe, the skies around us that we can see, the wind that we can feel all around us. God in His infinite wisdom created the atmosphere in such a way that the balance of the elements (oxygen, CO2 etc.) in it would be in the perfect balance for the support of life. We know that too much or too little of any of these elements would be disastrous for life on this planet. Realize that life on this planet and the balance of the earth's atmosphere did not 'evolve' to the precise levels that we have today. Instead, we know that these were all created and intended by God to fulfil its purpose, such that the entire ecosystem of the world fits perfectly together to continue to sustain the existence of life.

Above the firmament, God also set a layer of waters above it. This does not refer to clouds or the 'ozone layer' that we have in the present. Instead it was a unique canopy of water vapour that existed in that pre-flood era. The entire water cycle was different then, for there was no rain (Genesis 2:5), and probably no clouds also. This vapour canopy would have been transparent, for to allow the light of the sun in, and also allow stars to be visible (Genesis 1:14-18). Again, through this we see the wise design of God, for such a vapour canopy would be perfectly suited to maintain a uniform and ideal climate throughout the planet. Such conditions would have contributed greatly to the lush vegetation that we see described in the Garden of Eden, and also to the longevity experienced by those who lived in that era. In God's timing, this water canopy would also be that which would condense and pour down as rain which God would send as judgment during Noah's time. All these were in God's perfect plan from the beginning.

Thought: God never moves without purpose or plan.
Prayer: Lord, may I understand your perfect plan in my life as well.

Genesis 1:9-13
Memorise Jonah 1:9
"God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land."

WHAT WAS CREATED ON THE THIRD DAY?

Now God would focus His attention on the surface of the earth, which at the beginning of day three, was still just an endless shoreless ocean, devoid of any life at all. Then, at God's command, the waters of this ocean parted, and dry land appeared. These continents arose, and between and upon them, an intricate network of streams, rivers, lakes, and seas were formed.

Next, God issued a second command, and instantly the lands were all populated with all manner of plant life – of grass, herbs, tress, and various other forms of vegetation. It is specifically mentioned here that it was mature plans that were created, that would bring forth seed after their own kind. Though there were but seconds old, they already had an appearance of age. Adam did not have to wait for a few years before the tress started to produce fruit – they were already there hanging on the trees by day six!

They were also unique species that would only bear seed of its own kind. In fact, this phrase "after his kind" is repeated a total of ten times in this first chapter of Genesis, emphasizing the fact that all life, both plant and animal, were created by God, and did not evolve, as what modern science would try to insist. The individual DNA of each plant was specially programmed into each one of them as they were created by God, with all their unique adaptive traits, and were well suited to the environments and ecosystems which they would find themselves in. Yes there is potential for some variation within each kind, but never to the extent whereby a blade of grass would one day evolve to become an apple tree.

Thus at the end of this third day, the first life had appeared on the earth. They all came in a most dramatic way, spontaneously appearing upon the land, just as spontaneously as the land itself had appeared out of the water. It was not a slow process over billions of years, evolving out of a 'primordial soup' of organic compounds to form the first cells, but an act of divine creation. In fact, contrary to evolutionary theory, life first appeared on land and not in the sea, and complex vegetation appeared before the first animal life appeared. Yet as illogical as it may seem to modern scientists, it was all good in the sight of God!

Thought: Would I know how to respond to teachers or classmates that support evolution?
Prayer: Lord, grant me the faith to believe in thy creation.

Genesis 1:14-19
Memorise Psalm 19:1

"Heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork"

WHAT WAS CREATED ON THE FOURTH DAY?

From the earth, the attention now shifts to the skies above, and the void of space that lay beyond it. Up to this point, the days were bathed in light, whilst the nights were in complete darkness. There was not a single other planetary body in the universe, aside from our single lone planet.

Now, on day four, God began the work of filling all that he had created in the first three days, starting first with lights to hang in the firmament of the heaven that he had made on day one. There would be two great lights, namely the Sun to rule the day, and the Moon to rule by night. At the same time, God also made all the vast myriad of stars that shine high up above, each of them massive fiery furnaces burning in their own orbits, hurtling through the voids of space. The distance that they are from the earth is staggering, some hundreds, thousands or even millions of light years away. Yet in a single instance, they all popped into view, spread out in a majestic display of lights to adorn the night sky. How was this possible? Would the light from these distant starts not need to travel for thousands or even millions of years before they can be visible from Earth? Well, just as God was able to create plants, animals and also man with the appearance of age, so in His infinite wisdom, He also created these stars together with the light trails towards Earth, such that they would be visible from the day they were created.

On top of that, we are told that these stars would then be used as signs to tell the seasons, of days and years. Men would study the stars and use them to tell the passing of time, to chart calendars, and track dates. God made all the calculations, knowing the exact distance to place them in relation to their gravitational pull, the velocity of their orbits, relative brightness, factoring in the distance away from the earth etc. such that they would have their regular patterns throughout the years, to tell the seasons, and the days.

Today, on a dark night, especially in rural areas far away from the bright city lights, we would be able to cast our gaze up at the heavens, and we are continually amazed by the cosmic spectacle of luminosities that greet us from above. We would be reminded of the fact that the heavens, with its brilliant array of lights, all declare the glory and infinite wisdom of God.

Thought: RHC #6 "The Spacious Firmament on High".
Prayer: Lord, may I appreciate the glory and splendour of thy creation.

WHAT WAS CREATED ON THE FIFTH DAY?

From the heavens above, we come back down to the earth beneath, and the focus is now on the waters - seas and the oceans and all other water bodies, and also the firmament (skies) that was created on the second day. Having filled the outer space, God now sets to fill the skies and the seas with life. Thus God gave the command for the waters to "bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life", and for "fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven" (Genesis 1:20).

And so just as God commanded it to be, it was so. From the large complex whales of the sea, to the smallest plankton and the simple single-celled organisms, the seas were filled abundantly with all manner of life. Up in the heavens, numerous species of birds, all manner of flying creatures filled the airs, conquering the skies up above. Without anyone to teach them, they knew to swim and fly, to subsist and survive the environments that they were placed in. They were created with their unique adaptations, instincts and mannerisms, all perfectly suited to the ecosystem that God created them to be a part of.

Again there is a very marked difference in the theories of the evolutionary order from what we read in the Bible. Evolutionists claim that marine creatures evolved first, before coming to land as amphibious reptiles, before the reptiles then evolved to have wings to fly and became birds. But that is clearly not so, for God created fishes and birds on the same day, before the land animals were created the day after.

So it was with utmost care to meticulous detail that God made all these things, and then He promised to care for His creation, as Jesus said, in Matthew 10:29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." Also in Matthew 6:26 "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

Thought: Just as God promised to care for the sparrows and the fowl of the air, He cares for me as well!
Prayer: Lord, I thank you for your gracious provision for every area of my life. Help me to always trust in your faithfulness and goodness.

WHAT WAS CREATED ON THE SIXTH DAY?

We come finally to the 6th day, where the finals elements of creation are added to make everything complete. The seas and the skies have now been filled with living things; what remains now is the dry land. Whilst they were filled with plants and trees on day three, there were still no living creatures to popular the vast landscapes. And so now on the sixth day, God calls: "let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind". And thus it was so. All the land animals, as well as all land based insects and other organisms were created, and God saw it was good.

However, that was not all that was done on the 6th day. In a separate unique category of creation, not one that was considered as a 'beast of the earth' or some other sort of land creature, God made man. In Genesis 1:26, God said "let us make man in our image, after our own likeness". We see a sort of 'divine council' convening, whereby God within His own godhead, conferred and decreed to make man. This shows that this particular work of creation would be different from the rest, for it was not just the most complex of all, but it was to be the one who would reign over and be charged with caring for the rest of creation. In fact, the creation of man was so important to God, that He would devote a large part of the next chapter to zoom in on the account of man's creation, and explain the happenings in day six of creation in greater detail.

But here, what we do see is God creating man as the crowning glory of all of creation, as the one who would have dominion over the whole earth that He has created and over all the living creatures in it. Creation would not have been complete, without man, as God's representative, to subdue the whole earth. Man is therefore to be responsible stewards over the created world, to use it for God's glory, and not to abuse it. Indeed, the whole world in all its splendour and beauty is given as a gift from God to man. Through it we have our life, our breath, our food for our sustenance. Sadly, man in his sin, greed and pride have sought to conquer portions of the world for themselves, and have sought to exploit all he can out of it for his own benefit. As we live in this world, remember that God made all things, and has given it all to us!

Thought: To subdue and have dominion is not to abuse and exploit.
Prayer: Lord, may I be a responsible steward over thy creation.

HOW WAS IT ALL VERY GOOD?

With everything finished, God looked over all that He had done, and pronounced it all as "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Hitherto, the pronouncements made at the end of each day was that "it was good". But now, with the whole of creation complete, and everything put together, God adds the term "very" to express just how good it really was. The word "very" is a strong term used that has the root meaning of 'vehemence'. It is a word that is elsewhere translated with words like 'exceedingly', 'mightily' or 'greatly'. The term "good" as we use it today has the idea of something that is just slightly above average. However, in the Bible, this word means so much more than that. It does not just denote the mid-point between bad and superb, but it speaks of something that is pleasant and excellent. God is Himself is described as 'good', and we know that He is one who is far more than just mediocre.

And so used together, the phrase "very good" describes the complete perfection of all that had been done. God's creation was absolutely and utterly excellent, and there was no flaw or wickedness in it at all. All things were created in complete unity one with another, and could have existed in this state of perfection forever. Both man and angels were created sinless, and all life existed as a testament to God's greatness and goodness.

However, we know that sin then entered into the world. Satan, in his pride fell (Ezekiel 28:15), and tempted man to fall as well (Genesis 3:6-7), and with that the whole created was then marred by sin. Man's perfect fellowship with God was shattered, and the world could no longer be described as 'very good'. That is God has promised to one day destroy the present heaven and earth with fire (2 Peter 3:12), in order that He may create a New Heaven and New Earth, one that is once again perfect, free from the ravages of sin, and one where man can be at perfect peace with God once more.

Knowing this, we look forward to the day when the Lord Jesus Christ can return, to restore all things back to its proper order. That is the Christian's blessed hope, whereby we know that his present world, as good as it is, is not our eternal dwelling place, for it is no longer "very good".

Thought: Do we sometimes use the word 'good' too casually?
Prayer: Lord, I thank thee for the wonderful promises of eternity that thou has promised us, for we know that it will certainly be very good.

Genesis 1:5-2:3
Memorise Exodus 20:11

"And the evening and the morning were the first day..."

WERE THESE LITERALLY 24 HOUR DAYS?

When discussing the six days of creation in Genesis 1, one common objection or argument that comes up, would be with reference to the length of each 'day' of creation. Instead of accepting the traditional view of 6 literal days of creation, many would look to the arguments and so-called facts of science, and insist that the earth must be billions of years old. Sadly, even some Christians today also hold to that view, quoting passages like 2 Peter 3:8 to try justify their understanding that God does not always mean a literal twenty-four hour day when he says 'one day', for one day in that verse could also mean a thousand years. Yet if we examine that passage more closely, we realize that the verse speaks nothing of the actual length of a 'day', but it is about the waiting for the second coming of the Lord, and that God is outside of time, and does not see time the same way that we see it. In fact, as much as a day would be like a thousand years, the reverse is also true, in that a thousand years are as one day, and that effectively cancels out their argument!

Instead, as we look back at the record given in Genesis 1, there are many clues given to conclusively show that the Bible consistently and clearly speaks of single 24 hour days in the Creation week. It is true that the use of the Hebrew word for day, 'yom', can refer to either an actual single day or a period of time. However, whenever it is used with a numerical adjective (first, second etc.), as it is in Genesis 1, it always refers to a single 24 hour day. Furthermore, in the description of each day in Genesis 1, there is always the mention of 'the evening and the morning', showing that it was in the framework of a 24 hour day and night cycle.

Turning to the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:11, we see another clear undeniable proof of a literal 24 hour day. Using the creation week as an example, the commandment clearly instructs us to labour for only six days, and then to keep the Sabbath day as the holy day of the Lord, in which we are to do no work. This commandment would make no sense if the day refers to long indefinite periods of time!

This understanding is crucial, for the repudiation of 6 literal days undermines the whole message of the Bible and the validity of the gospel!

Thought: Can faith and science co-exist?
Prayer: Lord, may I learn to appreciate your wisdom in all things.

Genesis 2:1-3
Memorise Isaiah 40:28

"and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made"

WHY DID GOD NEED TO REST?

And so after all that God did in the first six days of the universe's existence, the Bible tells us that God rested on the seventh day. What does it mean when God rested? Does it mean he ceased completely from any involvement in the world? Did he only rest for one day? Or is he still 'resting'? Actually, why did God even need to rest at all? Was He so tired out from creation that He needed a break? Would this cause us to question God's ability and sovereignty?

We must first understand that God can never tire. He is infinite in his power, ability, greatness and might. He is "the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isa 40:28). The word for rest in the Hebrew, 'shabath', does not always need to refer to the rest that comes from the result of weariness. Instead it can simply mean a ceasing or stopping.

Thus what is described here is God ceasing from the work of creation, for all that needed to be done was now complete. This does not mean that God has now ceased completely from any activity at all, for we know that He is still actively involved in His creation and in the lives of His people. Instead what we understand is that the work of creation was finished, and therefore God would no longer be creating or making anything else.

Through this act of God ceasing, the seventh day then became an example for man, in that God blessed and sanctified it to be the Sabbath day of rest for man's benefit. This is God's way to regulate man's activity, knowing that he certainly needs time for rest and refreshment, to be apart from the vigour and toil of the week, to have a day in seven where we would gather to remember our creator and honour Him. That is why in the fourth commandment, we are told to cease from our labour, and observe it as a hallowed day, set aside for the Lord. Exodus 23:12 explains this concept clearly, telling us that we are to work for six days, but then to rest (shabath) on the seventh day. During this day, our ox and ass may rest (not shabath, but the Hebrew word 'nuach' which means to rest and settle down), and people in our midst may be refreshed. Indeed the Sabbath law is a wonderful gracious provision from God for our spiritual benefit!

Thought: God does not need to rest, but we certainly do!
Prayer: Lord, I thank you for the provision of a Sabbath rest.

Genesis 2:4-6
Memorise Peter 3:3-4

"there went up a mist...and watered the whole face of the ground."

HOW WAS EARTH'S ORIGINAL CLIMATE LIKE?

Whilst Genesis 1 focuses on the sequence and chronology of the creation week, Genesis 2 zooms in and focuses on the events of the sixth day. In Genesis 2:4-6, the Bible gives us a brief summary of how the earth's climate and environment was like in the days before the flood.

Here we are told that the plants that God had created on day three of creation were growing well, despite the fact that there was no one to tend the plants and till the ground. There was also no rainfall. Instead there was a mist that went forth and watered the whole face of the ground (Genesis 2:6). Through this we realize that the water cycle in those days was drastically different from that of the present day. Somehow, the difference in temperature between night and day then was optimal to effect a daily evaporation through the day, and then to have them condense as a dew and fog in the coolness of the nights and mornings. These waters would then be sufficient to water all the plants and sustain life throughout the planet.

Furthermore, we also know in Genesis 1:7 that there were also waters which were above the firmament of the sky, referring to this canopy of water vapour high up above. This canopy would cause certain climatic conditions that were unique to the pre-flood world, such as a uniform temperature due to the greenhouse effect; a lack of storms and large scale weather patterns as there would be no pressure and temperature differences to move air-mass; uniform humidity and constant cycle for evaporation and condensation, thus causing the whole world to be full of lush vegetation with not barren deserts or ice caps.

It was therefore in such a climate that the people that existed before the flood existed in. It was therefore then all the more unbelievable to them when God warned of the judgment of water that would rain down upon the earth to destroy all flesh (Genesis 6:17). That is no one except Noah and his family were saved, for the rest were mockers and scorners, refusing to believe that a thing such as 'rain' was possible! Yet God in His perfect wisdom knew all this would come to pass from the very beginning, just as He has also warned us of the future judgment of the tribulation and the complete destruction of the world by fire. Do we believe this prophecy?

Thought: Everything that God does has a specific design and purpose.
Prayer: Lord, may I be prepared for the second coming of Christ!

Genesis 2:7-15
Memorise Ephesians 4:24
"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground"

HOW DID GOD MAKE MAN?

Back in Genesis 1:26-27, we had already seen how God made man in His own image to have dominion over the world. However, we still have not fully explored what it means for man to be made in God's image. At the most basic level, to be made in the image of God means that we were made in His semblance. Yet we know that God is a spirit with no corporeal form. Therefore it cannot be referring to the image and likeness in a physical sense. Rather, it is the spiritual aspect of God that man is modelled after – of our spiritual inner man, and not the physical outer man. There are certain attributes of God that we certainly cannot have, such as His omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. These are known as the incommunicable attributes of God. Yet there are certain other attributes, such as His holiness, His knowledge, His love, His consciousness and self-awareness, His creative ability etc. These are known as the communicable attributes of God, and can be found in man. Therefore, what it means for man to be made in the image of God, is that he is capable of having these communicable attributes of God in him, for he is made as a being that is separate and distinct from the other animals. Man is self-aware, and capable of learning, of communication, and most importantly, of having a relationship with God.

And so God formed Adam out of the dust of the ground. Out of inorganic matter, God crafted man with all his intricate details and amazing biological processes, and simply breathed life into him, and from then on, man had both a physical body and a living soul. When Adam was first created, he was a morally perfect, innocent from any taint of sin, but yet had the ability to choose sin. He was able to have fellowship with God, and communicated freely with Him in the Garden of Eden. God placed him in there with the simple task of tending and keeping the garden, and blessed him with all the pleasant fruits that were good for food.

However, we know that man soon fell into sin, and from there, sin entered into the world, and the image of God in man was forever marred and tainted by sin. Yet through the promise of God's salvation through Christ Jesus, this image can be restored, and what happens is we can put on the new man, "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness".

Thought: Does my life reflect the image of God?
Prayer: Lord I thank you for making me, me!

WHY 2 TREES?

Amongst all the trees spread throughout the Garden of Eden, two trees in particular were singled out for mention – the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. These two trees were deliberately placed there by God as a test for Adam. God gave very specific instructions: "of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). Thus Adam had a choice before him. He could either choose to obey God, and then gain eternal life, or he could disobey God, and receive the judgment of a certain death.

Within the names of the two trees, we see a spiritual symbolic meaning in both. The tree of life represents the eternal life that Adam could have had, if he had obeyed God and not eaten of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. We see this in the response of mercy that God had when he set Cherubims at the entrance of the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were evicted from it, for the reason He gave was "lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22). The tree of life will be seen again in the New Heaven and the New Earth, where it will bear forth 12 fruits, a different one each month, and it will be for the "healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:2).

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, speaks of the experiential knowledge of sin that Adam and Eve had, after they disobeyed God. Not that there was any inherently wicked in the fruit itself. However, because of the prohibition that God had made against the eating of it, it then became symbolic of the knowledge of good and evil that they had after they fell.

And so we all know the choice that Adam and Eve made. In taking the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they went against God's commandment. Thus rejecting the offer of eternal life, they fell into sin and condemnation. Their eyes were opened and they were now plunged into a life of sin. Yet we know that amidst this condemnation, we can have hope through the Lord Jesus Christ! We can be partakers of the tree of life once again when we see it on the banks of the river of life in the New Jerusalem!

Thought: What if Adam had chosen the tree of life instead?
Prayer: Lord, I thank you that despite my sin, that has given us thy gracious promise of eternal life!

Genesis 2:16-17
Memorise Romans 5:19
"thou shalt not eat of it"

WHAT IS THE COVENANT OF WORKS?

A covenant is a formal or informal arrangement, agreement, contract or treaty made between two or more parties. The Westminster Confession of Faith states that "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." Although we do not see the phrase "covenant of work" in the account in Genesis 2, nonetheless the commands and prohibitions that God gave to Adam, along with the promise of blessing upon obedience shows that here was certainly a covenant in operation here.

Adam was given the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This prohibition was clearly spelt out for Adam in no uncertain terms, that he must certainly not eat of the fruit, and that if he eats of it, he will surely die (Genesis 2:17). This command therefore formed the basis of the covenant that God made with not just Adam, but as the federal head of all mankind, it was also with all his posterity. If he had passed the test and not taken of the fruit, he and all his descendants would have been awarded with eternal life. We see the significance of what is going on here in Romans 5:12, where in describing the sin of Adam, Paul explains that "as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." In failing to pass the test, Adam broke the agreements of the covenant, and as a result of that, all of mankind was now lost in sin.

However, all was not lost, for though the covenant was broken by Adam, God sent Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who was able to fulfil all the requirements of the covenant perfectly through his sinless life, and thus attain salvation for us. The Westminster Confession of Faith continues to explain "Man, by his fall, having made himself uncapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ…". As Romans 5:19 tells us, "for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous".

Thought: Not by works of righteousness which we have done (Titus 3:5).
Prayer: Lord I thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who lived the perfect life and died for my sins to fulfil the requirements of the law!

Genesis 2:18-23
Memorise Genesis 2:23
"she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"

HOW DID GOD MAKE THE FIRST WOMAN?

Up to this point, Adam was still alone. All the other animals would have come in pairs, male and female. However for man, God deliberately created Adam first, before creating Eve later in the day, whilst noting that it is not good for man to be alone. God promised to make for Adam a helper that would be meet (suitable) for him.

To help Adam realize this need for a helper, God set Adam to the task of naming the animals. One by one the living creatures were set before Adam, and he would give them their names. Through it all, Adam saw no creature that would be able to serve as a companion for him. He realized that unlike the other animals that came in pairs of male and female, he was all alone. He would also realize that none of them were like him and able to have fellowship with him. There were none that he could communicate with, to help him in his tasks, or develop any meaningful relationship with, and that is why "for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:20).

It was at this moment, that God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, sort of like a patient undergoing general anaesthesia before an operation. God then took a rib out of Adam's side, and from that, He made woman. She was then presented to Adam, who joyfully exclaimed "this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:23). In this manner, God made a companion for Adam. She was not taken from his head, to suggest she is superior to him and ought to rule over him, nor from his feet to show that she was to be trampled under his foot. Instead she was taken out of his side to demonstrate their mutual compatibility and equality, that she would work alongside him and help him in all he does.

Indeed God in His perfect wisdom made both man and woman, that one would complement the other. There are distinct differences between the genders, and they are there not to cause strife and rivalry, but that as a race, we would have the diversity and yet unity to be all as one, the creation of God, made in His likeness, to fulfil His purposes and to live for His glory.

Thought: Whether male or female, we are all made in God's image, created for His glory!
Prayer: Lord, I thank you for making me a guy/girl, and help me to fulfil my purpose as a guy/girl to the best of my abilities!

Genesis 2:18-25
Memorise Matthew 19:5-6
"And they shall be one flesh..."

WHAT WAS THE FIRST MARRIAGE LIKE?

After Adam awoke out of his deep sleep, God then brought Eve and presented her before Adam. Adam's response was one of great delight! Everything that he saw in her just seemed to 'click' with him, for he recognized that she was of him, as the "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh". He understood that she was not like the other living creatures around him, but that she would be a help that was meet for him. And so God then conducted the first ever wedding in the history of mankind, as He declared "therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). With those words, God joined them together in holy matrimony, and also set down principles of what this divine ordained union of man and woman ought to be like.

First we see that marriage is ordained by God, and not a social construct of man. God is the one who made man and woman for each other, and is the divinely appointed pattern that He has set for us in order that we might multiply and populate the earth.

Second, the pattern set is that of an exclusive monogamous relationship, of one man for one wife, and no other parties involved. The man and woman are to leave their respective parents, and cleave to each other, and the two are to be one flesh. Adultery is a sin, and clearly commanded against in numerous portions of the Bible (Exodus 20:14)

Third, we see that it is a permanent and a close and intimate bond. It is the strongest relationship that two people can have on earth, for it is a relationship that is to last till death.

Fourth, we note that it is certainly a heterosexual relationship, of one man and one woman, and not two men or two women. God made Adam and Eve, male and female, created so that each would be well suited to the other. God's perfect design is that it would always be a relationship with the opposite gender and not the same one. To do otherwise would be an abomination to God!

Thought: Am I ready for marriage?
Prayer: Lord, may you teach me to patiently seek thy will with regards to the life-partner that you would want me to have.

Genesis 3:1
Memorise Revelation 12:9
"that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan..."

WHO WAS THE SERPENT?

As we come to Genesis 3, we are suddenly introduced to a new character here in the Garden of Eden, and that is the Serpent. When was he created, and what was he doing in the Garden of Eden? As we read through the narrative, we quickly realize that this was not just any ordinary snake, but it was possessed or somehow controlled by Satan, the leader of the fallen angels. This is the first time that we will read of him in the Bible, but it will certainly not be the last! In fact, he will feature quite prominently as the adversary of God, and will try everything within his means to try to thwart the purposes of God, starting with the first temptation here in Genesis 3.

From passages like Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Isaiah 14:12-17, we read of the origin and fall of Satan. He would have been created together with the angels during creation week, and was set as the foremost amongst the angels, beautiful and perfect in all his ways. However, his pride got the better of him, and he thought to usurp the glory and power of God. As a result, he was cast down from heaven, and he also took one third of the angels together with him (Revelation 12:4). His position as the anointed one amongst the cherubs was removed, and became Satan, the Devil, the Tempter and Deceiver.

Just one single attribute of Satan's character is singled out in the account in Genesis 3 – the fact that he was more subtil that any beast of the field. What this means is that is one that is crafty, cunning, sly and shrewd. He acts in a cold calculated manner, always seeking every opportunity to trick, cheat, deceive and manipulate, all for his own wicked advantage. This is the manner in which he would approach Eve, and tempt her to take of the 'forbidden fruit' and fall into sin.

Since then, Satan has not ceased his activity. All through the Bible, we see Satan continually trying to tempt men to sin, and draw them away from God. His objective is to lure as many people away from Christ as possible, and to cause them to do his bidding. The Bible continually warns us to be sober and vigilant, for this same deceiver and tempter continues to roam about the earth like a roaring lion, seeking for prey to devour! (1 Peter 5:8)

Thought: How can we withstand the wiles of the Devil?
Prayer: Lord, may you always keep me safe from every temptation, and protect me from the fiery darts of the wicked one.

HOW DID SATAN TEMPT EVE?

Make no mistake – Satan is an extremely crafty, cunning and shrewd individual. He is also very driven, bent on opposing God. Despite how good God's creation was, and how perfect an environment Adam and Eve had, Satan managed to incite in them the lust to want something more than they had, and thus to rebel against the simple command that God gave them. How did he accomplish this? We realize that his method was to attack God's Word.

He first subtly questioned the word of God, by asking her "yea hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the Garden?" (Genesis 3:1). In so doing he cast doubt onto what she knew of God's gracious provision to them to eat of every tree in the garden (Genesis 2:16). It was a statement that questioned God's goodness, subtly implying that God was selfish, and not allowing them to eat of some trees in the garden. In response to this, Eve gave a rather shaky response, where in her haste to defend God, she misquoted God's commands by omitting the word 'freely', and adding the phrase 'neither shall ye touch it'. She also weakened the warning, from 'ye shall surely die', to 'lest ye die' (compare Genesis 3:2-3 with Genesis 2:16-17).

Satan then pounced on her uncertain knowledge of God's word by boldly denying and adding to God's Word. He declared to her, "ye shall not surely die", which was a direct contradiction to God's warning that they will most certainly die (Genesis 2:17). Instead, he told them that if they would eat of the fruit, then their eyes would be opened, and could then be as gods! These were all half-truths, no different from lies, specially designed to deceive Eve, and cause her to doubt God and His Word. Yet the lie was something alluring and attractive to Eve. What she heard was a promise that she could be like Elohim, which is the same Hebrew word for 'gods' and also the title referring to God himself. To her, God was good, and the only 'elohim' she knew. The impression given to her was that she could become as God, and surely that was a good thing wasn't it?

Indeed Satan is the Father of lies (John 8:44), and will stop at nothing to deceive and tempt us into sin as well.

Thought: What sort of lies would Satan tell us to tempt us to sin?
Prayer: Lord, may I have the wisdom to discern and know the truth of thy Word, and to stand against the wiles of the Devil.

WHAT IS THE ORIGINAL SIN?

The passage in Genesis 3:1-7 can probably be described as the most tragic incident in the whole Bible, and also of the history of mankind. When Eve took of the fruit, and gave also to Adam to eat, the whole of mankind plunged into sin. This is what theologians call the original sin.

Yet if we were to just do a cursory read of the sin that Eve committed, one might be tempted to conclude that it was not all that serious a sin, right? Yes it is true that God told them not to eat of the fruit, and yet they still did; but we commit such offences all the time don't we? For example, your mother may have bought something nice for tomorrow's breakfast and warned you not to eat it before then. But that evening, you may have opened the fridge to look for a snack, and in your hunger, ignored mother's warning and ate some of the food that she bought. Is that such a heinous sin, serious enough to warrant the damnation of the whole human race?

We must understand the position that Adam was in as the first man created by God. He was set as the federal head, meaning to say that his actions would represent all of his descendants - all of mankind. Romans 5:12-21 explains this clearly, telling us that by the sin of one man, that is Adam, sin entered into this world. Through him, sin, and the consequence of sin was passed unto all men, such that although they had not committed Adam's actual sin, yet they were now under the same condemnation. This happened because Adam's first original sin is judicially imputed to all men, such that we are all now born with the sin nature, and cannot help but sin.

Lest at this juncture we complain and bemoan such an 'unfair' arrangement, we must also realize that the same representative principle was applied on Jesus Christ, who came as our second Adam to represent us in attaining the righteousness that we do not deserve. Paul continues in Romans 5:15 to explain how Jesus Christ came by the grace of God. Just as through the sin of Adam, we were all made sinners, then likewise through the obedience of Jesus Christ, the way is open for us to be made righteous, not through any merits of our own, but only through the perfect obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ! This is nothing short of the wonderful grace of God that enables sinners such as us to have the hope of eternal life!

Thought: Was it unfair that Jesus could represent us on the cross?
Prayer: Lord I thank you for Your wonderful exceeding grace!

WHAT WAS THE CONSEQUENCE OF SIN?

Sin will always have its consequences. The Bible tells us that the moment Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, their eyes were opened. They looked at each other and straightaway they felt exposed, ashamed and sinful. Whereas they had only known innocence and purity, their eyes were now opened to the whole realm of wickedness. Their minds were now tainted with lust, and they understood what it meant to rebel against the God who created them and gave them life. In vain they tried to cover up their sin by sewing fig leaves together, and in vain they tried to hide themselves from the presence of the Holy God, too ashamed to stand and face Him.

When God questioned Adam as to whether he did eat of the tree, he was now quick to evade the question and shunt the blame to his wife Eve. At the same time, he even implied that it was God's fault that he sinned, for she is "the woman whom thou gavest to be with me"! Eve too was quick to shirk responsibility for her action, for she then pointed to the serpent and blamed him for beguiling her.

Their innocence and purity was now gone. Without any teacher, Adam and Eve now knew how to cover up their sin, to be coy with their responses, and refuse to acknowledge their personal guilt. Through this all, we see that the perfect fellowship and relationship that God once had with man was shattered. Man could no longer communicate so freely and openly with God, for he now felt shame in His presence. Man had rebelled against God, and was now a sinner who would continue to perpetuate more and more sin. How sad!

The Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 19 describes the fall in this manner: "Question: What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell? Answer: All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever". That seemingly so innocuous sin cause man to lose the relationship he once had with God, and to now be in a state of condemnation. He died spiritually, and can only be saved through Christ. Indeed sin, no matter how tempting, is never worth it!

Thought: Would Adam have sinned, if he had known the full consequences of his action?
Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil..."

Genesis 3:14-19
Memorise Deuteronomy 28:15
"Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed...."

WHAT WERE THE CURSES PRONOUNCED?

Along with its consequences, sin will always have its judgments. Genesis 3:14-19 gives us the sobering curses that God pronounced upon the serpent, man and woman, because of the sin that they committed in rebelling against God.

To the serpent (Genesis 3:14), God's judgment was that they would have to slither upon their belly and eat the dust of the ground. It is not known what physical form snakes had before the fall. Nonetheless how they are now comes as a result of the fall. They will always be the lowest of all beasts and constantly be trampled under the feet of all other animals. This curse will continue into the millennium, as even then "dust shall be the serpent's meat" (Isaiah 65:25), serving as a sober reminder of the fall of man.

To the woman (Genesis 3:16), she will have an increase of pain in child birth. The blessing of conception has now been made a curse, because of the labour pains that she will have to experience. She will always have a desire to have dominion at home and rule over her husband, but she will have to be subsumed under his authority.

For the man (Genesis 3:17-19), his work and the labour of his hands will now be done in toil and sorrow. The ground will not yield forth fruit as easily as before, for there will now be thorns and thistles to hinder the growth of his crops. Work will no longer be easy and pleasurable, but will result in the sweat of his brow.

To all of mankind, they will now have a limit to their lifespan, for they will eventually "return unto the ground... for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). This speaks of the physical death we will all have to experience as a judgment for sin (Hebrews 9:27).

Till today, these curses continue to be experienced by all mankind. Though we have clever inventions like the epidural injection and air-conditioning to alleviate the sorrows of those curses, nonetheless they are still in effect, and will be until the Lord returns. They will continue to serve as a stern reminder of the severe effects of the original sin that caused the fall.

Thought: Do we complain of our lives being hard and full of sorrow?
Prayer: Lord, help me to understand the seriousness of sin.

Genesis 3:15, 20-24
Memorise Genesis 3:1
"It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"

WAS THERE HOPE AMIDST THE CURSE?

After such a sobering judgment upon their sin, one would think that Adam and Eve would be very discouraged, and lose all hope of living. Their sin had just caused them to be alienated from God – the loving Father who had created them, and hitherto they had known nothing but a close unhindered communion with Him. Yet now He had pronounced a series of curses upon them, and they realized that they could no longer come into His presence. Yet what Adam says next shows that amidst the curses, he had hope. He looked at his wife, and called her Eve, which means "life" or "living", and the reason was "because she was the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20). This shows that Adam understood and realized that though their lives will forever be different, yet through Eve, the seed of the woman, they can have life! Not physical life, but spiritual, eternal life! How so? He understood the promise of Genesis 3:15.

As we studied the various curses yesterday, there was one particular verse that we missed out, and that was Genesis 3:15. In that verse, God pronounces the curse upon the one who was behind the serpent – Satan himself. God prophesied that there would be constant enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Note that the word 'seed' is deliberately used in the singular, referring to not all of the progeny, but one very specific descendent, that is the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:1-5). He will come as the one to save mankind from the curses effected by Satan's temptation, by destroying the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). This verse is a clear messianic prophecy, often described as the "protoevangelium" – meaning the first gospel. It describes the victory that Christ will have in going to the cross (His heel is bruised) and in so doing, to destroy the head of Satan and deliver us from the condemnation of sin and death.

This message of hope is further reinforced by God's next act in Genesis 3:21. He makes coats of animals' skins to replace their inadequate fig leaves, and in so doing, demonstrates the principle of having a blood sacrifice to cover sins. God then banished them from the Garden of Eden, not as a punishment, but as an act of mercy, for if they were to remain, they might eat of the tree of life and remain in their state of sin forever! Indeed how marvellous is the grace and mercy of our God.

Thought: How miserable would it be, to live a life without hope?
Prayer: Lord I thank Thee for the wonderful blessed hope we can have!

Genesis 4:1-7
Memorise Hebrews 11:4
"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice..."

WHY WAS CAIN'S OFFERING NOT ACCEPTED?

Cain and Abel were the first two children to be born into the world, and together with their parents, were the first family to have lived. At the time of the account in Genesis 4, they would have been at least in their late teens, or early twenties as both Cain and Abel had professions by then. Both of them were farmers, with Abel as a keeper of sheep, dealing with livestock, whilst Cain was a tiller of the ground, dealing with agriculture.

There came a day where they had to bring an offering unto the Lord. This was probably not the first time, as they would have been bringing regular offerings and sacrifices unto the Lord, as taught by their parents. They would have known that what God requires is a blood sacrifice through the killing of animals. However, this time, Cain decided to bring the fruit of the ground, probably the produce of his fields, whilst Abel brought the firstlings of his flock. Perhaps it was because he resented the situation, that he would have to trade his produce to acquire the animal for sacrifice; or maybe it was because he thought that God should accept the fruit of his labour, and not need to bring an animal. Either way, the Lord was certainly not pleased with his offering, for the Bible tell us "the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect" (Genesis 4:4-5). Cain was angry with the situation. But God's counter argument to him was very wise. He told him simply that if Cain had offered the right sacrifice, it would have been accepted. However, he had allowed sin to enter into his heart, to rule over him, to control his actions. Thus we realize that behind the wrong offering, was a sinful heart. Cain in his pride had thought to approach God on his own terms. Unlike his brother Abel, he did not offer up a sacrifice by faith (Hebrews 11:4). Instead, it was out of his own selfish convenience, thinking that what was good for him should be good enough for God. Even when rebuked, Cain refused to repent, but continued to insist that he had done no wrong.

How many of us have committed this same sin of Cain, in trying to approach God on our own terms, insist that He accepts us in our sin? How often has sin been pointed out to us, but yet we refuse to repent, and become angry instead? Be careful that you do not go in the "way of Cain", for the Bible warns us "woe unto you!" (Jude 11).

Thought: Is it fair for God to punish sin?
Prayer: Lord, may my life and all I do always be acceptable to Thee.

Genesis 4:1-10
Memorise 1 John 3:12
"Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous"

WHY DID CAIN KILL ABEL?

Although Cain did not seem to care too much for honouring God in giving the right offerings, it seemed that he was very much affected by God's opinion of him. When it was made known to him that God did not care for his offerings, he was "very wroth, and his countenance fell". Yet he refused to repent, but decided then to take matters into his own hands.

The pain of God's rejection had been gnawing at his pride. He could not accept the fact that Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God, whilst his was not. He rejected God's counsel to "do well", but allowed sin to dominate his heart and actions. When Cain realized that he could not do anything directly to hurt God, his anger grew into a hatred that manifested in spiteful envy against his brother. Every time he thought of Abel, he was reminded of the whole incident, and it brought him much grief. Finally, in a fit of murderous rage, he rose up and slew his brother while they were alone out in the field. Even after this heinous crime, Cain remained unrepentant and indignant, replying to God's queries about Abel with the angry retort: "am I my brother's keeper?" How sad it was, that the relationship between this very first pair of siblings would end in such a manner. Truly this shows us the terrible effects of sin, that Cain would descend into such a state of depravity. Just a few short years after God declared all of creation as perfect and "very good", man had already learnt deceit, envy, hatred and murder.

Through this whole incident we realize that Cain was never a true believer and worshipper of God. He may have been going through the motion of worship, and even be communicating directly to God, but he never had any love and desire for God. He cared only about himself, of his desires, and how he felt. 1 John 3:11-12 teaches us to love one another, and warns us not to be as Cain – a negative example who did not know how to love. Instead, the Bible tells us that he was of the wicked one, Satan! He acted according to the wickedness of the devil, and not the love of God. His own works were all evil, whilst Abel's were righteous. He was never the child of God, but a child of the devil (1 John 3:10). As such, he never cared about God's Word and about obeying His law. Dear teen, is this a description of you?

Thought: Am I a child of God, or a child of the devil?
Prayer: Lord, may You help me to truly love one another, and never fall into the sin of hatred and anger as Cain did.

WHAT WAS CAIN'S PUNISHMENT?

Because of Cain's crime of murder, God pronounced a judgment against him in Genesis 4:11-12. To him, the ground was now cursed, and it would no longer yield its increase. He would no longer be able to practice his occupation as a tiller of the land, for his harvests would always fail. He will now have to roam the lands as a wanderer and a vagabond, unable to settle in a place to grow his crops. He would have to constantly forage for food, or live off the charity of others.

Cain understood the implications of this curse, and cried out "my punishment is greater than I can bear!" He also understood that as he wanders from place to place, people (they would actually be all his relatives, either siblings, or their children after them) would recognize him as Abel's murderer, and would kill him for it. As a result, God placed a mark upon Cain, and passed a law that no one is to slay Cain, for the one who does so will be severely dealt with as well. Through all this God shows the seriousness of the crime of murder, and that it is a sin that God hates, and He will not allow it to pass lightly. We also realize that while Cain lamented about his punishment, nonetheless God is always just and fair, and will never pass a judgment that is too lax or too harsh. It will always be perfect, just and good.

Yet God did spare Cain's life, and he married a wife and established a family. The rest of Genesis 4 records the lineage of Cain, where he settled in the land of Nod, meaning 'land of wandering'. We see the record of 7 generations until Lamech, who himself was also an ungodly man. He was polygamous, marrying two wives, and also a murderer who proudly declared his heinous act. He proclaimed that he had slain a man, and then made a mockery of God's protective mark upon Cain, to say that as the seventh generation from Cain, he ought to be guaranteed a seventy and sevenfold vengeance upon any who harms him! Through this we see that Cain's descendants continued to rebel against God, and were not the chosen line, for that would be through Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, whom we will read of tomorrow.

Thought: God's judgments are always fair.
Prayer: Lord, may I learn to fear Thee, and never rebel against Thy will and Thy word.

Genesis 4:25-5:8
Memorise Genesis 4:25
"Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord"

WHO WAS SETH?

In the last two verses of Genesis 4, we are introduced to another son of Adam, and that is Seth. This name Seth means "appointed" or "substitution". That is how they understood Seth's role, for he was to be the chosen one from whom the "seed of the woman" would come forth to fulfil the prophecy given in Genesis 3:15. He was to be the replacement for Abel, and it would be his line that the rest of the Bible will focus upon. Men like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon and all the other kings of Judah would all be from the line that began with Seth, finally culminating in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus in the naming of Seth, Eve understood by faith that God was faithfully carrying out His covenant.

It is interesting to note that Seth's birth would only come when Adam was 130 years old (Genesis 5:3). Perhaps God deliberately withheld a son from Eve's womb, in order that it may be a test of faith for her, that despite the long wait, they would continue to trust in the promise that God had given them, that there will certainly be the seed from which God's promised line would continue through.

Seth then had a son whom he called Enos. This name means "weak or faint one", perhaps as a testimony of his awareness of his spiritual need, that he was but a sinner who needed a saviour. He understood the terrible effects of sin, and acknowledged that mankind was weak and frail, and could do nothing to help himself.

After Enos was born, the Bible tells us that "then began men to call upon the name of the Lord". This is not to say that man did not worship God before that, for we know that Adam and Eve would have worshipped God and brought offerings to Him, as evident in Genesis 4. What this statement probably refers to then is the public worship of God. With the birth of Enos, there would have probably been a sizable number of people on the earth by then, with other siblings of Seth and their children. Thus what we see highlighted is that the godly messianic line through Seth were the ones who would continue to worship God, whilst the wicked line through Cain would continue to rebel against God.

Thought: Would I identify more with Cain or with Seth?
Prayer: Lord, I thank you for Your perfect plan of redemption.

Genesis 5:1-32
Memorise Hebrews 9:27
"and he died...and he died...and he died..."

WHY ALL NAMES AND NUMBERS?

In a way, Genesis 5 is a rather depressing chapter of the Bible. The one line that we see repeated again and again is the phrase "and he died". In a single chapter, we have the first 1500 years of man's existence summarized for us, following family tree as we trace the generations from Adam to Noah. If we just give this chapter a cursory reading, it might seem to be just a whole listing of names and numbers that does not mean anything. What we have is just a chronological look at each successive patriarch; of how old he was when he had his first son; how long he lived after that, and how old he was when he died. The narrative then continues from generation to generation, until we arrive at Noah in Genesis 5:32. However, if we were to take a moment to ponder upon the information given by God, we would realize that there are very good reasons why this chapter is included in the Bible in the first place, and that it is actually a very valuable chapter in helping us understand various truths.

We must understand that God in His wisdom chose to record these data for us. God makes no mistake. It was very deliberately done so to leave us with a perfect and inspired record that warrants a close study. Through a comparative study of the years and dates, there are a few interesting facts that one can draw out concerning the lives of these men. For example, it is interesting to note that Adam, who died at the age of 930, would have lived to see the birth of Lamech, Noah's father. Also, we see that when Noah was born, all the patriarchs except Adam, Seth and Enoch would still have been alive. Thus he would have been able to learn of Creation and of God from the grandson of Adam, Enos. Another detail we can observe, would be the fact that Methuselah, the oldest man to have lived in recorded history, would have died the year the flood came, thus fulfilling the prophecy given in his name, which means "when he dies, a sending forth" – referring to the event of the flood!

Through this account, we also see the certainty of the curse of the fall. Although they had very long lives, nonetheless one by one, all died in fulfilment to God's Word to Adam in Genesis 2:16-17. This was the sure judgment against sin. Yet amidst all the deaths, we see one who didn't die! How was that so? We will learn more of that in tomorrow's reading.

Thought: Is there any way to escape death?
Prayer: Lord, thank you for the hope we have of life after death!

Genesis 5:21-24
Memorise Hebrews 11:5
"He had this testimony, that he pleased God..."

WHO WAS ENOCH?

Amidst all the records of deaths, we see one unique account that stands out – of one who walked with God and did not have to face death! After the usual description of the years of his life, in living for 65 years before begetting Methuselah, the account then inserts a commentary of his life, which simply states that "and Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years". Such a description is seen of no other character in Genesis 5, and certainly bears witness to the faith of Enoch. In fact, Enoch also has a special mention in Hebrews 11:5, whereby he was shown to have lived a life by faith, and "had this testimony that he pleased God". This is indeed a wonderful and encouraging testimony, to know that amidst all the ungodliness around him, Enoch stood apart from the rest and had a close relationship and walk with God. Furthermore, Jude 14-15 tells us that Enoch was also a prophet of God, who spoke up against the ungodliness of his time, and prophesied of the Second Coming of Christ, who would come to judge the world for their sin.

As a result of all that Enoch had done, the Bible tells us that "he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). Hebrews 11:5 further explains to tell us that he did not see death, but was not found because God translated him. This word "translated" means that he was conveyed to another place – he was taken up to be with the Lord whom he loved! This was certainly a supernatural act of God, whereby in his physical flesh, Enoch was somehow transported up into heaven, and did not have to die a physical death. What an amazing privilege!

Through this act, God shows us that there is hope for sinful man. Although the curse of death is certainly in effect, yet there is a way through which death can be conquered, and God is well able to control both death and life. Whilst we must not confuse this translation of Enoch with the rapture, for he would not have received the glorified body yet, yet we see in this a message of hope. God was signalling to sinful men that all who would trust in Him and walk in Him by faith, can also have the hope of eternal life. For us we know that this can only be through our faith in Christ. When our faith is true, then we can be like Enoch, to have a testimony that we please God, and walk with Him all the days of our lives..

Thought: Is my testimony pleasing to God?
Prayer: Lord, may I have the faith to walk with you and please you.

Genesis 6:1-6,11-12
Memorise Matthew 24:37-39
"The wickedness of man was great in the earth..."

WHAT WERE THE DAYS OF NOAH LIKE?

The world had now been in existence for more than a thousand years. The disease of sin, which began with one seemingly innocuous sin had been festering and multiplying amongst mankind. Each generation brought with them more wicked imaginations and more creative ways to rebel against their creator. As God looked down upon the world that he had made, and he saw that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Also, "the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11), the Bible tells us that "it grieved him at his heart" (Genesis 6:6). It brought so much sorrow to God, as he watched mankind destroy themselves with their evil thoughts and wicked ways.

Furthermore, we read of this terrible abomination happening in Genesis 6:1-4. Satan, perhaps wanting to try to gain an upper hand against God and seeking to have dominion over all of mankind, sent his demons (the sons of God – term used to describe angels in Job 37:8, and refers to the fallen angels here in this text) who possessed sinful men and married the daughters of men. These are the angels that are described in Jude 6, who "kept not their first estate", but are now reserved for judgment in the last day. The result of this wicked union was giants – strong mighty men that were known amongst the people. God could not allow such wicked abominable practices to continue, for it would completely corrupt the lineage of man, and destroy God's plan of salvation. God therefore warned that in 120 years' time, a judgment would come upon them (Genesis 6:3). Such was the depth of depravity upon the world, that God would decree that a global bath of water was necessary to purge and cleanse the corrupt earth.

In Matthew 24:37-39, Jesus warned the disciples that one of the signs of His impending return, would be when we see the world around us becoming like as it was in the days of Noah. When we see the same immorality and wickedness overtaking our world, then we will know that Jesus Christ will come soon to judge the world a second time. Like the days of Noah, sinful men will just carry on in their partying and revelry, and will all be taken by surprise. Dear teen, do we not see the days of Noah all around us?

Thought: Am I like Noah, or like the people in the days of Noah?
Prayer: Lord, may you keep me from the sin and evil of this world.

WHY DID GOD 'REPENT'?

Today's reading has a particular statement that perhaps might seem a bit strange and hard to understand. It tells us that as God looked at the terrible wickedness of man upon the earth, "it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Genesis 6:6). What does it mean that God "repented"? Does this mean that He had sinned in creating the world and then allowing them to fall into wickedness? Was God sorry for what he had done and thus felt a need to 'make amends' for His wrong? Now we know that God is perfectly holy, and can never sin. His eyes are too holy to even behold evil, not to mention commit any sin of His own. So how are we to interpret this description of God repenting?

In the Hebrew Bible, there are two main words that are translated as "repent". The first one "shub", used in passages like 1 Kings 8:47 and Ezekiel 14:6, 18:30 expresses the basic idea of turning, and carries the common idea of repenting from sin and wickedness. The second word "nacham" is one that carries the idea of regret or sorrow, and is used here in Genesis 6:6. There are also other instances in which it is used on God, such as in Jonah 3:10. In such occurrences, we understand that it is used in the sense of what theologians describe as "anthropomorphism". This is a personification of God as a man with human attributes, emotions, characteristics or physical qualities which God uses to help us understand His actions better. In this context, it certainly does not mean that God is repenting from any sin, but expresses His feeling of grief and sorrow over the evil and wickedness of man. He rues over the fact that man have turned into such a deplorable state of evil, and in human terms, almost seems like he regrets even the decision to make man in the first place.

Of course God in His grace and mercy did not wipe man out completely, but would save one family, and continue the human race through them. Yet through this we see a very important spiritual lesson. When man falls into sin, and so wilfully rebel against Him, God is very grieved. He looks down upon man with sorrow and compassion, and like a loving father, His heart is saddened by the fact that His children refuse to obey Him. We must realize that when we sin, we grieve God as well.

Thought: Does it grieve us, when we grieve God?
Prayer: Lord, help me never to test the limits of your longsuffering, but by your grace, may I learn to live a life that brings you joy and not sorrow.

Genesis 6:8-12
Memorise Hebrews 11:7

"Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God"

WHO WAS NOAH?

Amidst the description of all the sin, immorality and abominations during the time, we see Noah – one who found grace in the eyes of the LORD. He was indeed a remarkable and exceptional man, for he was able to stand apart from all the worldliness around him and lead a life that was pleasing to God. Noah was unlike any other in his time, for the Bible tells us that he was a just man and perfect in his generations, for he walked with the Lord (Genesis 6:9). This was not to say that he was perfectly sinless, but that he was a man of faith who had the righteousness of God, and was sincere and upright in heart, able to maintain an unblemished testimony amidst the apostasy of his time. This description of Noah comes in stark contrast to the state of the world all around him, for the earth was described as being "corrupt before God", and was "filled with violence". God looked down upon the earth and was extremely grieved, such that He would decide to destroy them all with the judgment of the flood. For Noah however, he found grace and favour in the eyes of God, and out of His goodness, God instructed Noah to build the ark to save his own family.

Noah obeyed. Three times in Genesis 6 and 7, we are told that Noah did "according to all that God commanded him" (Genesis 6:22, 7:5,9). This was all done in faith, as Hebrews 11:7 tells us, in giving us a commentary of Noah's life. By faith, he believed in God's warning of a judgment by a flood, even though he had never experienced rain before. By faith he believed that the ark which he built according to God's specifications would keep him safe. By faith, he preached to the people around him, warning them of the impending calamity, as 2 Peter 2:5 tells us he was a "preacher of righteousness". By faith, he gathered his family and all the animals into the ark, to the mocking scorn of the people around him.

Like Noah, we too live in a world filled with wickedness and unbelief. We have received the good news of salvation, and also the warning of a coming judgment. What will we do with this news? Will we be a preacher of righteousness like Noah, and warn others of the soon coming return of the Lord Jesus Christ? Will we be willing to bear the scorn of others? Will we live a life of faith and find grace in the sight of the Lord?

Thought: But without faith it is impossible to please God.
Prayer: Lord, may I too learn to live a life of faith and find grace in your sight.

Genesis 6:14-7:9
Memorise Genesis 6:18
"and thou shalt come into the ark..."

WHAT WAS THE ARK LIKE?

Often in children's books, cartoons and illustrations, we have this image of a wooden boat with a very crowded deck, with all the cute zoo animals lounging around in a very happy scene. Often there would be pairs of zebras, elephants, pigs, tigers, bears etc. standing by the ledge peering out, with parrots and monkeys perched atop the roof, and a pair of giraffes sticking out through the window. It is often a very colourful happy scene, where it seems like everyone is having the time of their lives. However when we look at the description given in the Bible, we see a much more sobering scene set before us, as it is mankind and all animal life fighting for their very survival, amidst a terrible catastrophe of global proportions. The whole world was being judged with a destructive flood, and the only thing which would save them from the complete decimation of all life, was this stout rectangle floating platform known as Noah's ark.

If we look at the dimensions of the ark (Genesis 6:14-16), we would realize that it was probably a large wooden rectangular structure that was 6 times as long as its width. It was to be 3 stories high, each storey about 10 cubits or 4.5 metres high. Dr Henry Morris, a creation scientist who was a professor of hydraulics (study of fluid mechanics) explains that "it can be shown hydrodynamically that a gigantic box of such proportions would be exceedingly stable, almost impossible to capsize. Even in a sea of gigantic wave, the ark could be tilted through any angle up to just short of 90 degrees and would immediately thereafter right itself again." Calculations have also shown that such an ark would have the capacity to contain over 125,000 animals the size of a sheep, and so would have more than sufficient space to carry all the animals in it, especially if they were young animals and not full-grown ones.

We know that God makes no mistake. When He gave Noah the dimensions of the ark, and promised that he and all the animals in it will certainly be kept alive (Genesis 6:19-20), it would surely be an ark that was big enough but yet seaworthy to survive the floodwaters. The ark was their lifeboat, it was all that kept the hope of God's covenant alive, to preserve Noah and his family, that through them, the messianic life can continue.

Thought: God will always protect His own and fulfil His Word.
Prayer: Lord I thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, our 'ark' in whom we can find salvation and the hope of eternal life.

WHAT WAS THE FLOOD LIKE?

So the Ark was finally completed, built according to God's specifications. The animals had all come in their pairs and were safely housed within the rooms of the Ark, together with the clean animals that were prepared for the first sacrifices after the flood. The food had also been stored up, enough to last both Noah and his family, and also all the animals through the entire duration of the flood. With all that completed, God commanded Noah and his family to enter into the ark, and then God himself was the one who shut them in, securing them from the coming deluge (Genesis 7:16).

Then, the fountains of the great deep broke up, and the windows of heaven were opened. From both below and above, vast quantities of water gushed forth to inundate the entire planet. For forty days and forty nights, massive torrents of rain covered every single corner of the globe, covering every blade of grass and every inch of land. The waters increased so much, such that the highest mountains were covered by at least 15 cubits (close to 7 meters) of water, and continued that way for the next 150 days.

As the flood waters rose, so did the death toll. The animals would probably have died quite quickly, not knowing how to swim, and unable to escape to higher grounds. The birds would have had to fly higher and higher, trying to seek ground to perch on and places to find food, all whilst fighting the torrential rain. The people would probably have lived the longest, running to high ground and desperately clinging on to floating uprooted trees and other flotsam drifting around. But in time, exhaustion, hunger and other factors would take their lives one by one, such that by the end of the flood, "every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark" (Genesis 7:23).

Such was the extent of the global devastation that the flood effected upon the earth. Nothing was spared, everything was destroyed. For us, the Bible promises that God will never again use such a flood to destroy the earth (Genesis 9:11). However, the Bible does warn of another judgment, only this time, it will be by fire (2 Peter 3:10). Dear teen, are you ready?

Thought: Did God over-punish the world when He sent the flood?
Prayer: Lord, may I never be found wanting at thy return.

HOW DO WE KNOW IT WAS A GLOBAL FLOOD?

A simple straightforward reading of the account of the flood in Genesis 6-8 would lead most to assume it was a real global flood. Historically, Christians throughout the ages have always known Noah's flood to be one that covered the whole earth and destroyed all air-breathing inhabitants, both man and animal. However there are many so-called Christians today who deny the literal reading of the book of Genesis, explaining the flood to be a local one. Based on apparent scientific and geological 'facts', they claim that there is no evidence whatsoever that attests for a global catastrophe. They have fallen prey to the intellectualism of these faithless, scientific 'proofs', and have denied much of the historic faith.

As we take a closer look from Genesis 7:10 onwards, we see a very clear description of a flood that covered every single inch of the whole earth. In fact, the very notion that Noah had to build an ark in the first place and took the effort to gather all the animals and provisions for the year long voyage shows that there was no escape except through the ark. If it was just a local flood, he could have easily spent that 100 years travelling to the other side of the world to escape the flood. To say that he spent all that time constructing such a large craft just to survive a local flood would be making a mockery of the whole biblical account!

Instead we are told clearly that waters rained down for forty days and forty nights, such that the waters rose up high above all hills, and every mountain was covered. The repeated use of words like 'all' and 'every' and 'whole' clearly attest to the fact that the flood was global. Not only were all the high hills covered (Genesis 7:19), but all flesh and every man upon the earth also died (Genesis 7:21). The whole world was completely covered to a height of 15 cubits (close to 7 m) – enough clearance to allow the ark to drift anywhere without it being struck from below. The Bible then explicitly states that all that was left was Noah and those in the ark.

With such clear explicit biblical evidence, it is a shame that there continues to be Christians today who deny the fact that it was indeed a global flood. Truly as 2 Peter 3:3 explains, these are scoffers who walk after their own lusts, and willfully are ignorant of the Lord's judgments upon the earth!

Thought: God always means what He says and says what He means.
Prayer: Lord, may I always have the faith and discernment to believe.

WHAT WAS THE NEW WORLD LIKE?

After spending a total of 371 days on the ark, the flood waters were finally gone, and Noah and his family stepped out onto dry land. The shoreless ocean was gone, and in its place were new landforms, mountains, valleys, rivers and seas. Creation scientist Henry Morris describes it this way: "The lands that once had teemed with animals and people and lush vegetation had been replaced by a desolate wilderness. The air which formerly was warm and gentle now moved in stiff and sometimes violent winds, and there was a chill on the mountain slope where the ark rested. Dark clouds rolling about the sky, which had once been perpetually and pleasantly bright, seemed to threaten more rains and a recurrence of flood conditions. At the same time, however, the earth had been purged of the wicked hordes that had made its physical beauty only a mockery, and God had granted a gracious opportunity for a new beginning for the children of Adam."

With a mixture of trepidation, excitement, relief, but probably also of sadness, Noah and his family entered into a completely new world. All that they remembered about the past was now gone. The earth had undergone a drastic transformation. Genesis 8:22 tells us that there would now be variations in the seasons, whereby there was no longer a uniform climate throughout the world. Instead there would be cold and heat, summer and winter. Likely what had happened was that the cataclysmic processes that resulted in the flood had also caused the earth to tilt on its axis, such that there would be seasons caused by the varying distance from the sun throughout the year. Furthermore, the vapour canopy overhead was now gone, replaced by clouds that would vary based on the hydrological cycle, resulting in new weather patterns that they had never experienced before. Genesis 9:2 also tells us that there was also now a change in the manner which animals would regard humans. There was now a dread or terror, in that animals would now fear man, and flee from his presence. Man's diet also changed as animals were for the first time authorised as food. In so doing, he also established a penalty of death upon anyone who takes the life of a man. Through this, God made a strong distinction between man and animals, whereby man, made in God's image, is entirely different from beast. Yet his duty remains the same – to be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth, and function as God's steward, having dominion over the world.

Thought: New world, but same God, with a same purpose for man.
Prayer: Lord, help me to appreciate the world that you have made.

Genesis 9:8-17
Memorise Genesis 9:16

"I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant"

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BOW?

A rainbow is indeed a very beautiful sight to behold. It is an amazing phenomenon of light, whereby the entire visible spectrum of light is spread out in a large multi-coloured arc across the sky. Today whenever we see a rainbow in the sky, camera phones all around us are whipped out, as everyone recognizes its beauty, and would want to capture a memory of it.

Yet we know that the rainbow is far more than just a nice memory or a good photographic opportunity. In fact, it is a very important symbol of a promise that God has made with man. It was the sign of a covenant that God made with Noah right after the flood. Through the sign of the rainbow, God promised that there shall be no more flood of such magnitude to destroy the earth ever again. This global flood was a once and for all event, never to be repeated again. Yes there may still be local floods; even of huge floods which may claim thousands of lives and do reach sizable depths. Yet it will never be of such massive proportions that it would cover the entire globe and destroy all flesh. It was a covenant made not just with Noah, but also with all flesh upon the earth, and would last forever. Thus by extension, we who are living right now upon the earth continue to be the beneficiaries of this wonderful promise that God has made to all mankind.

Now, every time we see a beautiful rainbow painted across the sky, remember the promise of God. This is God's way of reminding us of the fact that He is very much involved in the affairs of His creation, and that He cares for us. It is a message of God's mercy and grace, both in His judgment and His withholding of judgment. It was by God's grace and goodness that He chose to judge the earth by a flood the first time, in order that He might wipe away all the filth and wicked corruption of sin. Yet it is by also God's mercy and lovingkindness that He has now promised that He will never judge the world again through such a flood. The time that we have on earth right now is an opportunity for man to repent, that he may escape the judgment that is to come.

Thought: God used a beautiful symbol to illustrate an even more beautiful promise.
Prayer: Lord, may I learn to appreciate your wonderful grace and mercy in my life.

Genesis 9:18-29
Memorise Leviticus 18:6-7
"The nakedness of thy father... shalt thou not uncover"

WHY WAS CANAAN CURSED?

After the whole event of the flood, Noah and his family, as the sole inhabitants of the entire world, had to go forth to replenish and multiply the earth. It was a fresh chance for mankind to mend their ways, and live in accordance to God's will and not after the wicked ways that incited the judgment of the flood. Yet it was not to be, for we see that shortly after the flood was over, man's sin nature continued to reign, for their rebellious heart continued to devise wickedness and revel in wanton sin.

Genesis 9:20 tells us that the occupation that Noah took up was that of husbandry - he became a farmer who planted vineyards. In the process of time, he reaped his first harvest of grapes, from which he made wine. Perhaps it was unbeknownst to him that now in the post-flood world, the climatic conditions had changed, such that the fermentation process was accelerated, and the grape juice became alcoholic faster than he realized. Or maybe now that the whole event of the flood was over, and Noah felt that he deserved a break, and so he let his guard down and allowed himself to become drunk. Nonetheless it was certainly stern warning in the Bible here against the dangers of drunkenness. In his drunken stupor, coupled with the hot flush from alcohol overdose, Noah threw off his clothes and was naked in his tent. It was in this state that Ham saw his father. The word for 'saw' does not describe just a quick embarrassed glance. Rather, it carries the idea of gazing upon, or even to inspect and give attention to. Instead of covering up the chastity of his father, he went to tell his brothers about it, perhaps instigating them to also come and gaze upon their father's shame. This was a wicked deed done out of the perversity of his heart.

His brothers responded differently, for when they heard of what happened, they took a garment and very carefully covered the nakedness of their father with their backs facing him so they would not even have a glimpse of him in this state. When Noah awoke and heard of what had happened, he responded justly and cursed Ham and his son Canaan because of the sin that he had committed. It was a prophetic judgment that their descendants would be servants to their brethren, whilst Shem and Japheth would be blessed by God. This was a very important and necessary act, for Noah had to nip sin in the bud, and show that such wickedness cannot be tolerated!

Thought: Do I honour my father and my mother?
Prayer: Lord, help me to realize the gravity and seriousness of sin.

Genesis 10:1-32
Memorise Psalm 22:27-28

"And by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood"

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SONS OF NOAH?

From the three sons of Noah, we see three households emerging, which would be the beginnings of nations, races and peoples. Genesis 10 gives us a listing of the descendants from each of these three sons, the nations and people that resulted out of them, and also of the lands which they settled in. This particular chapter of the book of Genesis, though seemingly meaningless to many of us, is actually lauded by many Bible scholars, archaeologists and historians as an incomparable accurate record of ancient nations, unparalleled in its antiquity and comprehensiveness.

After leaving the ark and the unpleasant experience in the previous chapter, the three sons of Noah probably went their separate ways to establish their own homes. In the genealogical record in Genesis 10, each son is detailed one after another, starting from Japheth the oldest, then Ham, and then to Shem. Whilst it would be hard to trace each and every single descendant of each son to a high degree of accuracy, enough detail is given to us in these records to help us have a general idea of the vicinities to which each son ended up in. It is generally understood that the sons of Japheth were the ancestors of the Indo-European people branching off to regions of Europe, India, and possibly even North Africa. The sons of Ham would give rise to the Canaanites – the inhabitants of the Middle Eastern region, and also to the Cushites who moved to Ethiopia and other parts of Africa. It is possible also that the Sinite (Genesis 10:17) were those who travelled to the Far East (Isaiah 49:12), giving rise to the Oriental, Chinese people. The sons of Shem, of course resulted in the nation of Israel. Other descendants would include the Syrians and other tribes around the Arabic region.

Of course these are but well-researched educated guesses that should not be taken as gospel truth. Nonetheless what we do realize from this list is that all the inhabitants of this earth did originate from a common ancestry. There may be many different races and nations in the world, but we are all the sons of Adam and Noah, created by God for His glory. Yet man in his sinful pride continues to fight and war, all seeking to put himself up above the rest. As long as sin continues to plague mankind, there can be no peace. Only when Christ returns, would "all the ends of the world remember and turn unto the Lord" (Psalm 22:27).

Thought: Red and yellow black and white they are precious in His sight.
Prayer: Lord, may I see all men equally, as sinners in need of thy grace.

Genesis 11:1-6
Memorise Genesis 11:6

"let us build us a city and a tower... and let us make us a name"

WHAT WAS WRONG WITH BABEL?

About a hundred years had passed since Noah and his family had stepped out of the ark into the new world. They had obeyed God's command to go forth and multiply, and had begun to replenish the earth. At that time, all the inhabitants of the world spoke one single language (Genesis 11:1), and that was Hebrew, the same language that God used to speak to Adam in the Garden of Eden. As the population expanded, people had started to migrate to the regions around, moving further and further to find lands to establish their homes. One particular group of them journeyed to the east, to the plains of the land of Shinar, somewhere in the region of Mesapotamia, modern day Iraq. Nestled between two large rivers, it would have been a popular place, for its fertile lands would be ideal for their farming activities. As they gathered and grew, the wicked sin of pride began to enter into their hearts. Under the leadership of a mighty hunter named Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-10), they were organized into a kingdom known as Babel. They developed the technology to produce bricks, which were the building blocks of the strong permanent structures of a city.

It is not that there was anything wrong with building a city or a tower. However, the motivation behind it was the main issue which provoked God's reaction. As their city grew, they proudly declared "let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). Clearly, their problem was one of pride, and a disregard for God. God's will for them was to go forth and multiply and replenish the earth, and not to congregate in just one locality. This, they defiantly disobeyed. Furthermore, their desire was to build a high tower to make a name for themselves. In their arrogance, they thought that in building something so impressive and grand, they would be great in the eyes of man, and that brought them satisfaction. They wanted to be independent from God's rule, and tried to establish a kingdom whereby man and not God, would be the one in charge. Basically, they were trying to establish an ecumenical one world government on earth, contrary to God's commands. If they were allowed to continue on in their ways, mankind would very quickly descend into the wickedness that was rampant before the flood!

Thought: What is more important to me: My name or God's name?
Prayer: Lord, may I learn to always humbly submit to your will.

Genesis 11:7-9
Memorise Genesis 11:9
"the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth"

WHERE DID LANGUAGES COME FROM?

Depending on your system of classification, there seems to be three or six or more different major races in the world, close to 200 different nations, and more than 3,000 different languages or dialects. Where did such diversity come from? The topic of the origin of language is something that has befuddled scientists and linguistic experts for centuries. Because of the false theory of evolution, the general consensus is that languages must have evolved from a simpler pre-linguistic form that became more complex over time. Apparently as man evolved, so did their methods of communication. Yet we know that that is certainly not the truth. Instead, Genesis 11 clearly shows us how languages, and also how the different races came about.

As God looked down upon the sin of the people around the city and tower of Babel, He knew He had to do something about it. If they were allowed to continue in their ways unchecked, they would very quickly descend into a terrible state of apostasy all over again. Thus God, in the infinite wisdom of His Godhead took council amongst themselves and made the decision to confound (to mix up or to confuse) their languages. This was a miraculous act of God, whereby they suddenly could no longer understand one another, each having their own new language, completely unintelligible to the person next to them. It does not mean that they lost the ability to speak, but rather that their brains were suddenly wired to speak and comprehend an entirely new and different language, and that they completely lost all knowledge of the previous language that they were fluent in. Having lost their ability to communicate, all building works on the city ceased, and the different language groups naturally congregated and moved away, each becoming a tribe that would exist in isolation one from another. It is likely that the languages were divided along family lines, as that was the division that we saw in Genesis 10. In time, each group would start to develop their own unique cultures, occupy territories and mark out national borders. Such shifts also limited the gene pools of each group, and in a few generations, nuanced genetic differences would give rise to different races, each having their own distinct characteristics. Thus with this one act, God foiled the attempts of Nimrod and his followers, and also divided up the people of the world, all for His own glory, in accordance to His plan.

Thought: What sort of unity does God desire?
Prayer: Lord, I thank you for the country that I am born in, and the languages that you have enabled me to learn and converse in.

Genesis 11:10-32
Memorise Joshua 24:15

"Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot"

WHERE DID ABRAHAM COME FROM?

In the rest of Genesis 11, we see yet another listing of names and numbers. Some of the names were already mentioned in Genesis 10:22-29, where we had a look at the descendants of Shem. Here, the focus of this genealogy is on the messianic line through Shem, from which the Lord Jesus Christ would descend from. This is important, for this record is vital to show that the lineage of Jesus was indeed a direct one that can be traced back through Abraham, to Shem, to Adam. It is the same list that we see being quoted by Luke's gospel, in Luke 3:34-38, as it traces the genealogy of Jesus all the way back to Adam. This genealogy also gives us an important bridge from the time of Noah's flood to the birth of Abraham – an era that spans almost 300 years. It is interesting to note that both Noah and Shem would have lived to see the birth of Abraham (see Genesis 9:28, 11:11), and that Abraham himself would have had the opportunity to meet with them in the early years of his life.

From Genesis 11:27 onwards, we see a pause in the record, as the narrative zooms in on the family of Terah. This is significant, for it is from the sons of Terah that the nation of Israel would come forth. Some details are thus given about the family background of Abram, of his brothers and their families, and also the land that they came from – Ur of the Chaldees. This was a great ancient city in the Mesopotamian region whose remains have been extensively studied by archaeologists. It was known as an advanced city for its time, but also very idolatrous. The family of Terah was heavily influenced by idolatry as well (Joshua 24:2, Genesis 31:19, 34), and it is likely that Abram was raised in such an environment. Yet having received the call from God, Abram would have been the one to influence his family to move out of Ur and head towards Canaan. However, for some reason or other, Terah stopped at Haran (possibly a city established by his son), and stayed there till his death. Perhaps he was attracted by the comforts of Haran, and was not willing to risk the uncertainty of the hostile land of Canaan. As a result of that, Abram had to wait there until Terah's death, before he could continue on to the land where God wanted him to go. Yet despite this interruption, and his family's idolatrous background, God's plan was never thwarted. God was still able to take this son from a family of idol worshippers, and raise him up to become the father of faith!

Thought: God could use Abram, He can use me too!
Prayer: Lord, may I always be ready to answer your call!

Genesis 12:1-8
Memorise Genesis 12:2-3

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee"

WHY DID GOD CALL ABRAHAM?

After the scattering at the tower of Babel, it seems that most of the families by and large continued in their rebellious ways, and very quickly turn to idols. Even the godly line through Shem was not spared, for Terah and his family also worshipped idols in the land of Ur. If this continued, then mankind would quickly forget about God, and engage in all manner of wickedness again. In order to preserve a remnant of true believers who would continue to call upon the name of the Lord, God would form a nation of His choosing, to whom He would give His law, statutes and commandments, and to whom the Messiah would one day come forth from. In order to do that, He had to first call a man and establish a covenant with him, of one who would be the father of God's chosen people. This was the plan which God had already formulated even before the foundation of the world. God already had His perfect plan for redemption worked out in meticulous detail. He knew exactly was required, in ensuring that in the fullness of time, He will send forth His Son (Galatians 4:4), the seed of the woman as promised in Genesis 3:15.

The man of God's choosing was therefore Abraham, or Abram, as he was still known as at the point of his call. It was not because of any particular talent, ability or righteousness on the part of Abraham that God chose to call him. It was not even because God knew that he would respond in faith and obedience that God chose to use him. In fact, we would soon read of various failings that Abraham had in his lack of faith and propensity to lie. As a man, Abraham had his flaws. Yet in accordance to His good will and pleasure, God was the one who chose Abraham, and made the covenant with him. God alone made all the promises, and God alone would be the one who would see to its fulfilment. Though it seemed that Sarah was barren, and they still did not have a son, yet God assured Abraham that He would make of him a great nation, and that they would inherit the land of Canaan. Not too many further details were given. All Abraham had to do was to follow God's commands step by step, and God would take care of the rest.

God has a plan and a purpose for each of us as well. Are you ready to hearken to God's call?

Thought: What is God's purpose for my life?
Prayer: Lord, may I actively seek to know your will for my life.

Genesis 12:7-20
Memorise Hebrews 11:6
"What is this that thou hast done unto me?"

HOW DID ABRAHAM SHOW A LACK OF FAITH?

We often remember Abraham as the father of faith, as the great man of God who trusted in God through numerous adverse circumstances, even going so far as to be willing to sacrifice his own son to prove his love for God. Yet we also learn that Abraham did not always demonstrate such strong faith. He was not always one who would obey God's commands without question or doubt. In fact, there were instances in his life when he feared and thus sinned, because he did not have the faith to believe in God's promises.

One such instance is in today's passage, where we see Abram journeying south into Egypt. God's call to Abram was just for them to go into the land of Canaan, for in Genesis 12:7 God appeared to him and affirmed that this was the land that would be given to his seed. However, because of a famine in the land, Abram chose instead to venture further south into Egypt. That was Abram's first mistake. He should have trusted in the Lord and stayed in the land that God had promised to bless him in. Instead he was worried by the famine, and thought to find greener pastures to the south.

As Abram and his wife came into Egypt, there was another fear that came upon him. He was afraid that the Egyptians would covet his beautiful wife, and kill him for her, and so he instructed his wife to lie, to say that she is his sister instead. Again he forgot God's promise that He would make of him a great nation, and bless him. All he saw was the immediate problem ahead of him, and thus came up with a solution that involved them having to sin and tells lies.

All these mistakes were the result of a lack of faith on Abram's part. He should have trusted in God's promises, and obeyed His word. Instead he trusted in his own wisdom, and sought to fix his problems with his own poorly thought out plans. As a result of that, his testimony was marred in the eyes of Pharaoh and his house, for they would remember him to be the liar that brought plagues to their people. God had to intervene, and pull Abram out of this fix. If Abram had trusted in the Lord, none of these would have happened! Dear teen, are you able to trust in God no matter what happens in your life?

Thought: Can my solution ever be better than God's plans?
Prayer: Lord, may you grant me the faith to always trust in you.

Genesis 13:1-18
Memorise Hebrews 13:5

"And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan..."

WHAT WAS LOT'S MISTAKE?

Uncle Abram would have been like a father to Lot. Lot's own father, Haran, had probably died when he was very young (Genesis 11:27-28). Since then, he had come under the charge of Abram and had followed him as he left Haran and came down to Canaan. After their detour down into Egypt, they were now back in Canaan, and had settled in the central region of Bethel. They were now both leaders of rich households, with many servants, livestock and possessions under their charge. However, despite all that Lot had, he was not satisfied. Perhaps they had become victims of their own success, in that their livestock and households were so large that they were fast running out of space. Furthermore, fights were beginning to break out between their herdsmen, and also with other locals of the land. When matters reached a breaking point, Abram proposed that they would go their separate ways, to split the land between them that they would be able to continue in a peaceful co-existence. Being the uncle, Abram had every right to have priority in choosing his land first, and assigning the remainder to Lot. Yet he graciously and generously allowed Lot to choose first, wanting nothing to get in the way of their relationship.

And so as Lot surveyed the land before him, he used very carnal and worldly criteria to make his choice. He gazed upon the plain of Jordan to the east, and saw a land that was well watered and suitable for his crops and livestock. Driven by greed and covetousness, Lord made his decision. To Lot, it did not matter that being in the plains of Jordan also meant it was in close proximity to Sodom, whose men were "wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly (Genesis 13:13). In fact, he actually pitched his tents toward Sodom, probably intending to do business and have trade relationships with them (Genesis 13:12). Neither did he take into consideration the fact that it was Canaan, and not the plains of Jordan, that God had told Abram to stay in. And so he packed his bags, bid farewell to Uncle Abram, and in so doing turned his back on God and His blessings, enticed by the attractions of sin. In time to come, we would see the grave consequences of Lot's mistake. He ignored God's will, and chose instead to go the way of the world. He chose the attractions of sin and the temporal pleasures of the present. Dear teen, is this how we make decisions in our lives?

Thought: What should be the foremost criteria in our choices?
Prayer: Lord, may I never make the same mistake as Lot!

Genesis 14:1-24
Memorise Genesis 14:22-23

"Blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand"

WOULD YOU HAVE REPENTED?

Lot was in trouble! The armies of the alliance under Chedorlaomer had defeated the armies of Sodom and Gomorrah and their allies. Lot and his family were now taken captive. Uncle Abram was told of this tragic news, and though he was not a military man, he decided to take up arms to rescue his nephew. It was certainly a courageous and noble act on the part of Abram. Lot had already separated from Uncle Abram and chose instead to consort with the sinners in Sodom. Abram did not really have any obligation to help this errant nephew who was but facing the consequences of his mistakes. Yet in an act of great kindness and no small amount of risk to himself, Abram gathered his servants and pursued the army of Chedorlaomer. Though they were probably greatly outnumbered, God was with them, and granted them a swift victory. Abram returned victorious with all the loot that the army had stolen, and also with Lot and his family.

At this juncture, Lot should have realized his mistake and taken the opportunity to return to the Lord. He should have been sensitive to God's chastisement, to realize that this attack and his close brush with death was God's warning for him. He should have repented of his wicked ways and returned to the Lord. He should have learnt from the godly example of Uncle Abram, of how he gave all credit to the Lord, and gave tithes to Melchizedek, the priest of God. He should also have learnt the important lesson on separation and holiness, when Abram said "I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (Genesis 14:23).

Yet despite all that, Lot did not change. He returned to Sodom, and continued to dwell in that depraved city. He lacked the courage and moral strength to pull himself out of that wicked place. He continued to imagine that Sodom would be able to offer him a better life. In fact, having gone from just 'pitching his tent towards Sodom' (Genesis 13:12), and now dwelling in Sodom (Genesis 14:12), the next time we hear of Lot, he would be sitting at the gate of Sodom (Genesis 19:1), having achieved a certain prominent position there. He completely ignored God's warning and the opportunity he had to repent, but instead plunged even further into sin. How tragic!

Thought: "The Lord... is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).
Prayer: Lord, may I always be sensitive to sin and quick to repent.

Genesis 15:1-21
Memorise Genesis 15:6

"behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces"

WHAT IS A SUZERAINTY COVENANT?

Although many things had happened since Abram left his home and journeyed to Canaan, there was still one major concern on his mind, and that was the issue of his heir. God had promised to make a great nation of him. Yet he must have been wondering, how was that possible if he had no son? He still did not have an heir, not a single descendant, not to mention a whole nation! Though he was assured that God was with him, nonetheless this issue must have weighed heavily in his heart.

Now, God had appeared to him once again to assure him. Abram's instant response was to pursue the matter of an heir. Though God had told him not to fear, he was certainly worried about his childlessness. He therefore brought up Eliezer, thinking that perhaps he could adopt him as his heir. God then quashed all his concerns by assertively informing him that he certainly will have an heir from his own seed, and that his descendants would number as many as the stars in the sky. Abraham believed in this promise, and this showed the faith that he had in God. Yet he wanted a sort of proof and assurance that this would be so. God thus instructed Abram to prepare animals, cut them down the middle, and lay them in a row. This was an arrangement that Abram understood well, for it was the format for a standard Chaldean agreement – akin to us signing on a contract agreement. Normally, both parties would have to walk through the divided animals, whereby the cut animals symbolised the penalty that would be incurred should either one fail to meet the agreement of the covenant. However, in this instance, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Abram, such that he would be unable to move. The Lord appeared unto Abram in a dream, and affirmed the promise of the covenant, also revealing further details about the future of the nation that would come forth from Abram. Then, Abram saw "a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" (Genesis 15:17). This was God walking through the cut pieces of the animals, showing to Abram that He alone would be the one who would take responsibility and fulfil all of the agreement. This is therefore what a suzerainty covenant is – that a single party dictates the terms of the covenant, and he alone will honour it. This would have been greatly comforting to Abram, knowing that God has promised to take care of everything! All he needs to do is to walk by faith and trust in Him!

Thought: Is our promised salvation a suzerainty covenant?
Prayer: Lord, help me to walk by faith and believe in thy promises.

2 Chronicles 19:1-2
Genesis 16:1-16
Memorise Proverbs 3:5-6

"And lean not unto thine own understanding"

DO YOU TRUST IN YOUR OWN WISDOM?

In the previous chapter the Lord affirmed the covenant with Abram, promising that he will indeed have a son of his own seed, and that He alone would be the one to bring it to pass. By faith, Abram did believe in that promise. However, the fact of the matter was, there was still no son! His wife Sarai, who was already 75 years old, then proposed a seemingly viable solution – that he should take her handmaid Hagar as a second wife, and bear a child through her instead. This seemed practical and logical, and in line with God's plan. It would still be a child from his seed, and would circumvent the problem of his wife being way past childbearing age. Furthermore, this was something that was customary and culturally acceptable in those days that the handmaid of the wife can serve as a sort of a surrogate mother. The child that came from her womb would be considered as the child of the wife and not the handmaid.

However, just because it was culturally acceptable did not make it right in the eyes of God. It was certainly an adulterous act, and one that was not in line with God's will. Although Abram was sincerely trying to fulfil God's plan, he was impatient and tried to do things his own way. He followed man's wisdom, listening to the voice of his wife and not the voice of God, and what resulted was a sinful solution. He had forgotten God's assurance to him that He alone would be responsible for fulfilling His covenant, and that he did not need to worry.

This single mistake resulted in a life of heartache and headache for Abram, and also the nation of Israel. Soon, Hagar conceived, and became proud, thinking that as the mother of Abram's child, she was now above Sarai, and she despised her mistress (Genesis 16:4). The feud that ensued between the two women caused Hagar to run away, and the angel of the LORD had to appear to Hagar to call her to return to Abram, assuring her that her son would also a multitude of descendants. Yet there would be conflict between his descendants and his brethren's, though they would live as neighbours. This prophecy continues to ring true till today, as seen in the on-going conflict in the Middle East between Israel and the Arab nations.

Thought: What is my wisdom, compared to God's wisdom?
Prayer: Lord, may you help me to always trust you with all my heart, and never to lean unto my own understanding.

Genesis 17:1-27
Memorise Deuteronomy 7:9

"And I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant..."

IS GOD FAITHFUL?

13 long years had passed since Ishmael had been born, and since Abram last heard from the Lord. Abram was now 99 years old, and ready to pass on all that he had to his sole heir, Ishmael. Abram had assumed that he would have been the chosen one, for he was a son of his own seed, and that it would be through him that God would bring forth the promised nation. Perhaps after these 13 years of silence, Abram might have felt that God had forsaken him, maybe even broken off the covenant because of his misdemeanour. To quell all his doubts, and also to further reveal to him the details of His plan, God now appeared to Abram.

God began by presenting Himself as the Almighty God – the sovereign God who is able to work miracles and is in control of all things. He then affirmed the covenant again, and changed Abram's name to Abraham – meaning the father of a multitude. God then introduced the practice of circumcision to him, as a sign or a token of the covenant that God had made with him. This was something that all the descendants of Abraham had to keep, if they wanted to be a part of the covenant that was promised to him. Every time they circumcised their children, they would be reminded of all the promises that God had made to him and his seed. Up till this point, Abraham was still thinking that it would all happen through his only son, Ishmael. However, God then changed Sarai's name to Sarah, which means lady or queen, signifying the fact that it would be from Sarah's child that God's covenant would continue. To this revelation, "Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed". He could not imagine how his wife, now 90 years of age, could ever bear a son. Yet God reiterated His promise, and assured that Abraham would certainly have a son through Sarah, and that the covenant would be established through him and not Ishmael.

Through all this, we see the patience and faithfulness of God. Despite Abraham's scepticism and impatience, God remained true to His promise, and continually assured him that He was in control. As seemingly impossible as it was, Abraham had to trust in the Almighty God, and believe that He would certainly see to His promise, and give him a son through Sarah. In response, Abraham, together with all the males in his household were circumcised, signifying their faith in God's promise.

Thought: Would God ever fail in keeping to His promises?.
Prayer: Lord, may I never be led to doubt your faithfulness.

Genesis 18:1-15
Memorise Genesis 18:14
"Is any thing too hard for the LORD?"

DO WE DOUBT GOD?

Up to this point, Abraham had been convinced that Sarah would indeed bear a son that would be the chosen heir through whom God's covenant would continue. However, Sarah herself also needed to be convinced. She would have known her own physical body well and that the natural processes had already taken place in her such that it was simply not possible for a woman of her age to bear a child. In fact, this is a point that the Bible chooses to highlight, that "Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women" (Genesis 18:11). This was to show that it was indeed a miracle that God would perform, in enabling Sarah to be with child.

And so Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, visited Abraham, together with two other angels. They appeared to him as men, visitors whom he welcomed and honoured greatly. Whilst he may not have known it immediately, somehow through the course of their conversation, Abraham realized that this was the LORD himself who had come in human form to speak with him. Though he had never met these three strangers before, they knew of his wife, and that her name had been changed to Sarah – a change which had only just happened, and was communicated directly from God to Abraham. Furthermore, they reiterated God's promise given in the previous chapter, that Sarah would indeed have a son.

Sarah was eavesdropping on the conversation in the tent next door, and when she heard that she would conceived, she "laughed within herself, saying, after I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord, being old also?" (Genesis 18:12). This was probably just the silent thoughts within her heart – one of disbelief and jest. Though God had been promising them an heir for so long, she just could not understand how that would be possible, given her age. To this silent chuckle, the LORD rebutted with a simple statement: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14). Indeed she should have known better than to question the LORD! This was the same God who had called them to Canaan, protected them during their trial in Egypt, had guided Abraham and his servants in liberating Sodom, and had prospered them so greatly! And now He was to fulfil the promise to give them a son – certainly He would be able to do exactly as He promised!

Thought: God can do anything but fail.
Prayer: Lord, help me never to doubt your ability and power.

Genesis 18:16-33
Memorise 2 Peter 3:9
"I will not destroy it for ten's sake"

IS GOD MERCIFUL?

After affirming God's promise to Abraham in giving him a son, there remained another task that the Angel of the Lord had to accomplish – to bring judgment upon the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord chose to reveal this to Abraham, in order that he may understand the way that God deals with man, in that he would bless those who obey, but would not hesitate to judge those who sin against him. God was confident of his righteousness (Genesis 18:19), but yet at the same time wanted to demonstrate to him the important principle of the balance of justice and mercy.

In Genesis 18:20-22, God explained to Abraham as to why the impending judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah was fully justified. Their sin was very grievous (as we would clearly see in the next chapter), and God knew that their hearts were so sinfully and wickedly depraved. To show that He was not just acting on impulse or unverified rumours, he sent the two angels into the cities to confirm their sin. This does not mean that God did not know, but it was to demonstrate to Abraham that He was certainly careful in the meting out of punishment.

As Abraham observed all this, his response was "wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (Genesis 18:23). Likely his concern was for his nephew Lot and his family. Although Abraham certainly did not approve of his presence in Sodom, yet he was concerned Lot would be judged together with the sinners in Sodom. And so Abraham began to intercede on behalf of the people of Sodom. He began by asking if God would spare the city if at least 50 righteous people were in it. He then reduced the number to 45, 40, 30, then 20 and finally all the way down to 10. Through this 'bargaining', he did it in a most humble manner, careful not to incur the wrath of God. The basis of his argument was not on the goodness of man, but the justice and righteousness of God (Genesis 18:25). In response, God was very patient with his requests, showing that He is indeed a merciful God, who would never over punish, but would show compassion to those who deserve it. Indeed their sins were great, but God was willing to spare the whole city just for 10 righteous people, for in His perfect wisdom and justice, "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished".

Thought: Do we dare think that we know how to judge better than God?
Prayer: Lord, I thank thee for thy grace and mercy in saving me.

Genesis 19:1-14
Memorise Luke 17:28-29

"Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city."

DID SODOM DESERVE ITS JUDGMENT?

Together with the last few chapters of the book of Judges, this narrative is perhaps one of the most difficult to read and hard to stomach passages of the Bible. What we see portrayed here is really the depths of depravity that man can sink into. We see the utter wickedness and extreme immorality of the people of Sodom, just before God would destroy them with fire and brimstone. Did they deserve such a judgment? Let us read on.

As the angels went down into Sodom, it was very quickly confirmed that the city was indeed sinful, and there were less than 10 righteous people within it that were required to spare the city. As they entered into the city, they met Lot, who was sitting at the gate. Knowing the wickedness of the city, Lot quickly invited them into his house and offered to host them for the night. What happened next is something almost unbelievable and unimaginable. The men of the city, both old and young, heard of the arrival of these two strangers, and so they gathered round Lot's house, calling for him to bring forth the men that they may "know them" (Genesis 19:5). What they were asking for was not just an innocent 'meet and greet session'. What they were really calling for was to 'know' them in the sexual sense. They were blatantly and shamelessly shouting out in the streets for a homosexual orgy! They were demanding for it as if it was their entitlement, and was probably something that they expected of every visitor to their city. However, what is even more saddening and disturbing was Lot's response to them. Though he told them to "do not so wickedly", yet he then offered his own two virgin daughters for them to "do ye to them as is good in your eyes" (Genesis 19:8). How can a father do such a thing to his daughters! To put them into the hands of this sex-crazed violent crowd, and allow them to do what they wanted! Truly the sinful influence of this city had so calloused the heart of Lot, such that he would not realize the great wickedness of his offer to them. Indeed this is what would happen when one wilfully dwells in the midst of sin, and freely allows it to reign. There was absolutely no fear of God in this city, and they deserved judgment!

Today, we too are living in a society that is close becoming that of Sodom in the days of Lot. The Lord had warned us that when we see that happening around us, then know that the Lord's return is soon!

Thought: Have we become numb and insensitive to the sin around us?
Prayer: Lord may I always be ready for the Lord's soon coming return!

Genesis 19:14-38
Memorise 2 Peter 2:6-7

"And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked"

WHAT HAPPENED TO LOT?

The story of Lot is indeed a very tragic one. We know that he was a believer, for 2 Peter 2:7 tells us that he was 'just' – meaning he was justified. However, his life can probably be deemed as a failure. He wasted his life, and paid dearly for it. Lot started his sinful decline when he "pitched his tent toward Sodom" (Genesis 13:12), then "dwelt in Sodom" (Genesis 14:12), and now he "sat in the gate of Sodom" (Genesis 19:1), serving as a sort of a magistrate or city official. How sad it is to see this believer so actively involved in the affairs of this wicked, corrupt city. At the back of his mind, he would have known the error of his ways, and 2 Peter 2:7 notes that he was indeed vexed by the filth of the city. Yet he did not have the moral courage to pluck himself out of the city, perhaps because of the attractions of its riches, and the business opportunities that he had there.

By the mercy of God, Lot was delivered from the judgment upon Sodom. Even for that, the angels had to forcibly snatch him out of the city, grabbing his hand as he lingered (Genesis 19:16), reluctant to leave the wicked city that he called home. However, as they were fleeing, his wife disobeyed the instructions of the angels and looked back, and was turned into a pillar of salt. Now left with just his two daughters, Lot retreated into the mountains, dwelling in a cave. It must have been a miserable experience, losing all their friends and loved ones, their home and all their possessions. Living in a cave would come as a stark contrast to the life of luxury that they were used to in Sodom. But at least, they had their lives.

At this juncture, another tragic incident occurred, through the dastardly sin of incest, and it happened not once, but twice. His daughters were concerned that with the death of their mother, and now living apart from anyone else, their father would have no chance to produce any heirs. So they decided to take it upon themselves to make their father drunk and be impregnated by him. This immoral scheme truly reflects the effects of being surrounded by sin as they were in Sodom, for they had been stripped of any moral values, and thought that such incestuous fornication could be the solution to their apparent problems. The outcome of these shameful acts were two sons, one named Moab (which means 'from the father') and the other Ben-ammi (which means 'son of my people').

Thought: Sin will always have its consequences.
Prayer: Lord, may I never take the path of sin and waste my life away.

Genesis 20:1-18
Memorise Exodus 20:16
"thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin"

DO WE LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES?

He had come a long way in his journey of faith. He had made mistakes in the past because of the weakness of his faith and through momentary lapses in his judgment. Nonetheless God continued to be patient with him, continually reaffirmed His covenant with him. This incident is one example in which Abraham wavered in his faith, and repeated the same mistake that he had made years ago, in lying about his relationship to Sarah.

For reasons unknown, Abraham chose to journey toward the south, towards the city of Gerar. As he neared the city he realized that the inhabitants of Gerar were ungodly people. His old fears and insecurities plagued him again, for he was afraid that they would covet after his wife and kill him in order to take her (Genesis 20:11). Thus he repeated the same masquerade, telling them that she was actually his sister. True enough, Abimelech the king of Gerar was attracted by her, and took her for himself.

Again God had to intervene, to appear to Abimelech in a dream by night to warn him from committing the grievous sin of adultery, yet acknowledging that he was innocent in this matter, for Abraham had deceived him. Abimelech heeded to the warning from God, and told his whole household about it, and warned them against harming Abraham and his wife. However, he also sternly rebuked Abraham, questioning him "What has thou done unto us? And what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done" (Genesis 20:9). Indeed what a shame it was for Abraham the man of God to be admonished by this heathen king! In this instance, Abimelech certainly acted more righteously than Abraham, and had every right to be angry with Abraham's deception.

In his defence, Abraham tried to explain that Sarah was indeed his half-sister (Genesis 20:12). However that was really more an excuse and cover up, for it was clear that he had concealed the truth of their marriage. A half-truth is still a lie, and it was clear even to the heathen king. As a result, Abraham's testimony was again marred.

Thought: Have I ever repeated the same mistake twice?
Prayer: Lord, help me to learn from the mistakes that I make, and to constantly strive to be more godly and holy in all my ways.

DOES GOD KEEP HIS PROMISES? (I)

When Abraham was 75 years old, God first appeared to him and promised that He would make of him a great nation. In order for that to happen, Abraham knew he had to have a son. In the years that followed, God never wavered on that promise, and continually assured him that it would be a son from him and his wife Sarah, though she was well pass child-bearing age. Now, at the age of 100 (and Sarah at 90), the promise was finally coming true. "The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age" (Genesis 21:1-2). This was certainly a miracle of God, and the result of Abraham's faith in God. Thus Sarah bore a son, and called him Isaac, in accordance to God's instructions (Genesis 17:19). The name Isaac means 'laughter', and would remind them of how both Abraham and Sarah doubted God and laughed when told that she would have a child (Genesis 17:17, 18:12). Yet it would also remind them of the joy that they have, in having a son at such an old age, for Isaac was indeed a blessing from God!

In having this son, it was both a testimony of Abraham's and Sarah's faith in God, and also of God's goodness in keeping His promises to them. We can read more of Sarah's faith in Hebrews 11:11: "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised". We also see Abraham's faith being explained in Romans 4:18-20: "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God". For both of them, it was by faith, that they believed in God's promises, and God blessed them for it.

Indeed the God whom we worship is the same God as Abraham and Sarah. He has certainly given us many great and precious promises in His Word (2 Peter 1:4). We must believe them by faith, to be assured that God does indeed keep His promises, and will always take care of His children.

Thought: Has God ever failed us?
Prayer: Lord, may I have the faith to believe that I can cast all my cares upon thee, for you care for us.

Genesis 21:9-21
Memorise Hebrews 13:5-6
"Fear not; for God hath heard..."

DOES GOD KEEP HIS PROMISES? (II)

With the new addition to the family, Abraham's household was again thrown into turmoil. Now that Sarah had a son of her own, she was again jealous of Hagar her handmaid, and was very concerned about the status of Abraham's son through her, Ishmael. Ishmael too was not pleased with the turn of events, and he was found to be 'mocking', meaning to have disdain and ridicule towards having a step-brother. Thus the joy that they had with Isaac's birth was overshadowed by the conflict that started to arise between Sarah and Ishmael. This caused Abraham no small amount of consternation, for "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son" (Genesis 21:11).

Perhaps what caused even more grief to Abraham was God's instruction to Abraham on how he ought to respond to the situation at hand. He was told to hearken to Sarah's desire to cast Hagar and her son out of the household. As a father, it would have pained his heart greatly to cast an innocent 13 year old son out of the house and expect him to fend for himself in the wilderness. Nonetheless God assured him that "also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed" (Genesis 21:13). And so trusting in God's protection, though with a heavy heart, Abraham equipped them with as much provision as they could carry, and sent Hagar and Ishmael out into the wilderness.

Soon, mother and child ran out of water. Desperate, Hagar left her child under the bushes, for she could not bear to watch her poor son die. It was here that the Lord called to Hagar, and assured her of the promise that He made to her many years ago, before Ishmael was born. In Genesis 16:10, when Hagar had fled into the wilderness whilst bearing Ishmael, the Lord had already told her that "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude". Whilst she may have forgotten this promise, God certainly had not, and here further reiterated the covenant, by assuring her that "I will make him a great nation" (Genesis 21:18), and by virtue of that fact, what she would infer is that this was certainly not the time for him to die. True enough, as she looked up, there was a well of water right before them. They lived, and in time to come, the descendants of Ishmael did indeed become a great nation. God kept His promise!

Thought: We may forget, but God never forgets!
Prayer: Lord, thank you for all the precious promises you have given!

Genesis 21:22-34
Memorise Romans 12:17-18

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men"

HOW TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT?

After settling the domestic conflicts in his household, now Abraham was facing some conflicts with his neighbours – the people of Gerar. As Abraham prospered in the land, Abimelech (the king of Gerar), and his chief captain Phichol became concerned. They acknowledge that the cause of his success was God's presence with him, for they remarked that "God is with thee in all that thou does" (Genesis 21:22). However, they wanted to protect their interests, to ensure that Abraham's success would not cause him to one day decide to take over their whole country. Also, given the history that they had with Abraham, seeing his propensity for telling lies, they made Abraham promise never to deal falsely with them. Instead, they wanted an agreement that they would co-exist in peace, and have a mutual understanding of kindness between them. To this, Abraham readily agreed.

However, shortly after this, Abimelech's servants were the ones who caused a dispute, for they violently took away a well belonging to Abraham. When Abraham confronted Abimelech of this, he insisted that he knew nothing of this. Abraham could have chosen to take offence at that, and demand some manner of compensation, or maybe even break off the agreement that they had. However, he chose to accept his argument, and instead made a covenant to establish the ownership of the well, and even made a further gift of seven ewe lambs to Abimelech to express his gratitude and also to serve as a token of peace between them. In so doing, Abraham was extending his hand of friendship to Abimelech, and took pains to ensure that there were no undercurrents of distrust or conflict between the two parties. This was done to clear the air and ensure that there was a lasting peace in this treaty that they had established. With all that settled, Abraham called the place Beersheba, which means "well of the oath" and planted a grove there and called upon the name of the LORD.

Through all this, Abraham acted wisely, cautiously and peaceably. He understood his place as a sojourner in a foreign land and that it was better to turn the other cheek, than to get angry and respond with pride and aggression. Even though he was wronged, he was the one who made the extra effort to soothe the conflict, did not recompense evil for evil, but instead endeavoured to live peaceably with his neighbour.

Thought: Is it right to insist on "my rights"?
Prayer: Lord, may I learn to live peaceably with all men.

Genesis 22:1-24
Memorise Genesis 22:12
"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest"

IS GOD NUMBER ONE IN YOUR LIFE?

Isaac had grown into a fine young man. He was probably in his teens by now, and was a filial son of a doting father. He was the joy of this elderly couple's heart, and they loved him more dearly than anything else in the world. He was the chosen son that they had been waiting for, and now God had finally answered. It seemed everything was well, and life was good.

However, it was here that God decided to test Abraham. God appeared to him, and told him "take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:2). This would have come as a huge shock and a great blow to Abraham. Was this not the chosen heir whom God had promised? Had they not gone through so much just to get this son? And now God wants him to kill Isaac? All these doubts and questions must have been racing through Abraham's mind. How could he bring himself to sacrifice the son whom he loved so dearly!

Nonetheless Abraham obeyed. He made the necessary preparations and set off with Isaac, though not telling him what exactly they were to do. Every step he took must have weighed heavily upon his heart, knowing that it brought him closer and closer to a task which he dreaded to face. Finally coming to the place which God appointed, "Abraham built an alter there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood" (Genesis 22:9). All this, he did by faith, not fully understanding what was going on, but trusting and believing in the God whom he loved. Then, as he raised his knife, all ready to plunge it into his very own flesh and blood, God called out to him, and intervened at the final moment.

Abraham passed the test! God told him "for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Genesis 22:12). It was not that God did not know, but it was a test for Abraham to learn and know for himself, that above all, God must take first place in his life. As much as he loved his son, he could not allow that love to overshadow the love that he had for God. This is a principle that we must all learn as well – that we must never allow anything at all to take God's position of prominence in our lives.

Thought: Are there any idols in my heart that have taken God's place?
Prayer: Lord, help me love thee with all my heart, soul, and might.

Genesis 23:1-20, 49:29-32
Memorise Hebrews 11:9-10
"I am a stranger and a sojourner"

WHY DID ABRAHAM NEED TO BUY LAND?

It has now been more than 60 years since Abraham stepped into the land of Canaan. Though he had become very rich in the years that passed, yet he never owned a single piece of land. God had promised the whole land to Abraham, but at that point of time, it was not yet his. In fact, he was just a tent dweller, sojourning in a foreign land. He never built a city, and never had a place to call his own.

Now with Sarah's death, he had to find a place for her burial. He went through the customary negotiations to ensure that the whole transaction was done with integrity and beyond reproach. It is remarkable that after over 60 years, this would be the first place that he would buy. All this while, the commentary in Hebrews tells us that "by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:9-10). He had faith in the promises of God, to know that one day his descendants would inherit the entire land, and thus he would not have to do anything on his part to gain the land for himself.

Why then did he have to buy land to bury Sarah? Again, it was a matter of faith. He knew although this land of Canaan was not his at that point of time, it would be owned and occupied by his descendants one day. A whole nation would be born from him, and so he wanted to have a permanent burial ground for his family. It would serve as a place of remembrance, where he, his sons, and his descendants after him would be buried (Genesis 25:9, 35:27-29, 49:30-31, 50:13). It would be as a memorial to signify that this would be their land for ever, in accordance to God's promise. It was for this same reason, that before Jacob his grandson died, he charged them to bury him in this same land that Abraham bought (Genesis 49:29-32). Likewise Joseph, before his death, made the children of Israel take an oath to promise that they would bring his bones back to the land of Canaan when God brings them out of Israel into the Promised Land.

When we die, we too die in faith, anticipating the promise of the resurrection that God has given to all who believe in His name.

Thought: Our 'Promised Land' is eternity in heaven with God!
Prayer: Lord, help me perceive life and death with the eyes of faith.

Genesis 24:1-27
Memorise Genesis 24:27
"I being in the way, the LORD led me"

HOW TO MAKE WISE DECISIONS?

Finding a suitable godly spouse is probably one of the most important decisions that you would make in your lifetime. It can make a difference between a lifetime of bliss and happiness, or a lifetime of sorrow and regret. It is a decision that cannot be taken lightly or flippantly, or one just based on superficial attractions. Abraham was well aware of this, and was likely quite concerned about his son. Although Isaac was nearly 40 years old by now, he still had not found a wife. Perhaps it was because he was too attached to his mother and was still mourning for her death, that he did not seek to find a wife for himself (Genesis 24:67). Abraham thus assigned his eldest servant to find a wife for his son. Through the instructions from Abraham and the actions of his servant, we see a very good example of how one applies spiritual principles to make wise godly decisions.

Abraham was very sensitive to the will and desire of God. From the very onset, Abraham was adamant that Isaac's wife must not be a Canaanite, for they were ungodly heathen who did not worship God. He wanted a God-fearing daughter-in-law who was from his own people. Therefore he made his servant swear by the LORD that the woman of choice would be from Abraham's own kindred in the city of Nahor, also known as Haran, the city founded by Abraham's brother. In this we see the important principle, of always following God's desire and will, that we do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14).

As the servant set off, he was conscious to commit this whole matter to the Lord in prayer (Genesis 24:12). He knew that the only way in which he could have success in this search, was that the Lord would be the one leading him. He also established godly criteria for the woman that he would meet, that she would be a helpful, hospitable lady who would be willing to draw water not just for him to drink, but also for his 10 camels! When such a lady did indeed appear before him, by faith he realised that the hand of God was indeed guiding him. He was continually conscious of the fact that God was in control (Genesis 24:21). Finally when it was confirmed that she was indeed a lady who met all the criteria set, and was of Abraham's kindred, he was quick to bless the Lord and give all glory to Him, declaring that "I being in the way, the LORD led me" (Genesis 24:27)

Thought: What factors do I consider when I make my decisions?
Prayer: Lord, grant me the wisdom to make godly choices in my life.

HOW ARE WE TO DO THE WORK OF THE LORD?

Abraham's servant was certainly a diligent and faithful servant, worthy of Abraham's confidence and trust. Throughout his journey, he obeyed his master's instructions to the letter, never turning from his objective to find a godly wife for his master's son. We can do well to learn from the attitude and work ethic that he demonstrated and apply it in our service to the Lord.

We see that he was very focused on the task at hand. He was clear on what his purpose was, and had a single-minded attitude towards accomplishing that goal. As he came to the house of Laban, he told them "I will not eat, until I have told mine errand" (Genesis 24:33). For him, it was business before pleasure. He wanted to be certain that his job was done first before he would begin to think of his own comforts.

Next, as he began to tell them of his mission (Genesis 24:34-48), he was very honest and upfront about all that had transpired, careful to inform them of the spiritual importance of his duty. He wanted to make known his intentions very clearly. He held nothing back in his testimony and showed that he had no ill intentions or ulterior motives. He shared details about his oath, his prayers, and also his desire for Rebekah to return with him to Canaan. Through this, he showed them that Rebekah was indeed the answer to his prayers – a fact to which Laban acknowledged, that "the thing proceedeth from the LORD" (Genesis 24:50).

Through it all, the servant continually acknowledged the hand of God in all his dealings, and was quick to worship God at every new development in his quest (Genesis 24:53). He was fully conscious that he was engaged in a spiritual work, and that everything transpired only by the gracious and providential hand of God.

Finally, he never procrastinated in his task. He turned down Laban's offer for them to abide for another ten days to enjoy their hospitality (Genesis 25:55-56), for was keen to get back on the road to return to his master and complete the task that he had set out to do. In good time, he returned to Isaac, and brought him a wife that he loved and could serve as a suitable help meet for him.

Thought: Am I conscious of the fact that all work I do is God's work?
Prayer: Lord, may I always be faithful and diligent in all that I do.

Genesis 25:1-18
Memorise Genesis 17:4
"And thou shalt be a father of many nations"

WHAT OF ABRAHAM'S OTHER DESCENDANTS?

Although the primary focus of God's covenant to Abraham was through Isaac and the Messianic line, there was also the promise that Abraham would be the "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:4). Thus aside from Israel, there would be other nations that would descend from Abraham that would also be multiplied exceedingly. Here in Genesis 25, we see other descendants of Abraham and the nations that resulted from them.

After Sarah died, Abraham remarried and took a wife named Keturah. From her, he had other sons listed for us in Genesis 25:2-4. Amongst the various names, the one son that can be traced conclusively would be Midian, from whom the Midianites descended from. They would later be closely associated with the Ishmaelites (Genesis 37:27-28), and Jethro, Moses's father-in-law would be from there as well (Exodus 2:16).

In Genesis 25:12-16, we are then given a glimpse of the family tree of Ishmael, Abraham's son through Hagar. The last time we heard of Ishmael, he was cast off to wander in the wilderness with his mother. When they were on the brink of death, the Lord appeared to Hagar and assured her that they would survive, and that He would make of Ishmael a great nation (Genesis 21:17-18), a promise previously given to Abraham in Genesis 17:20. God provided a well of water for them and they survived the ordeal. We were told that "God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer." (Genesis 21:20). Now, many years later, we are now given an update as to what became of Ishmael. True to God's promise, he did have 12 sons who were described as princes, and they successfully established towns and cities, and did become a great nation.

However, their story does not end there. Though they were brothers of the Israelites, these nations would become constant thorns in their side. The Ishmaelites, Midianites, and later the Edomites that descended from Esau, would constantly be at war with Israel, even till today, as evidenced by the on-going conflicts between the Jews and Arabs in the Middle Eastern region. It is sad to see these people who were once brothers, now embroiled in such bitter conflict. Yet these are all in the plan of God, and come in fulfilment of the prophecies in His Word. We must always remember that God makes no mistakes – His plan is always the best!

Thought: God will always keep His Word!
Prayer: Lord, may I learn to trust in Your sovereign plan and will.

WOULD YOU SELL YOUR BIRTHRIGHT?

From Genesis 25:19 onwards, we begin a next major section of the book of Genesis, focusing on Isaac and his family. In due time, he was given twin sons, of whom the Lord prophesied: "two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). True to the prophecy, the two brothers grew up to be very different young men. The Bible tells us that "Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents" (Genesis 25:27). It seems that from an early age, there was a certain animosity between the two brothers, exactly as God had prophesied. This conflict was probably made worse by the favouritism that each parent exercised, for Isaac loved Esau, whilst Rebekah loved Jacob.

Because of his birthright as the first born son, Esau had certain privileges. Not only would be accorded a double portion of any material inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17), he was also to be the head of the household after their father passed – a position of both honour and responsibility. However, it seemed Esau had little regard for it, and cared far more for his present needs as compared to his future responsibilities, as demonstrated in the incident in Genesis 25:29-24. In a moment of hunger, he was willing to barter his birthright away for a portion of red pottage that Jacob was preparing. He thought little of the birthright, and asked what profit it had for him, seeing that he was on the verge of death! In response to the deal brokered by Jacob, the Bible describes how flippantly and callously Esau was, for "he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:34). He was willing to satisfy a simple temporal physical desire and forgo the future blessings that he could have had. The Bible's commentary on this incident likened him to a "fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright" (Hebrews 12:16). He cared little for the position that God had placed him in, and was self-seeking, impetuous and carnal in his ways.

The 'birthright' that we have are the positions, responsibilities and blessings that God has given to us. Will we despise our birthrights and shirk from our responsibilities for temporal material pleasures?

Thought: What are the 'birthrights' that God has given to us?
Prayer: Lord, may I always be responsible in the tasks that You give me.

Genesis 26:1-11
Memorise Ezekiel 16:44
"As is the mother (father), so is her daughter (son)"

LIKE FATHER LIKE SON?

Just like how it was when Abraham first came into Canaan (Genesis 26:1, ref 12:10), there was now a famine in the land again. God appeared to Isaac to warn him not to go down to Egypt, but to remain in the land of promise. Along with the warning, God also reaffirmed his covenant with him, assuring him that if he would remain in the land and obey His word, God would bless him and his seed, and accord to him the same promises that He had given to Abraham (Genesis 26:2-5). As a result, Isaac decided to move his family to the city of Gerar in hope of finding a place where his family would be well provided for. This is the same place that Abraham had come to in Genesis 20, where he lied to king Abimelech and was publicly rebuked for his actions.

Sadly, when Isaac came to Gerar, he made the exact same mistake as his father, and convinced his wife Rebekah to lie and tell everyone that she was his sister. He did so because he feared that the men of the place would kill him for Rebekah (Genesis 26:7). In so doing, he failed to trust in God, despite the fact that God had just assured him that he would certainly be blessed and have seed as many as the stars of heaven! He had so quickly forgotten God's call for him to obey His voice and keep His commandments as Abraham did (Genesis 26:5). Instead, he repeated the same sin as his father in lying about his wife, and would now have to face the consequences.

His deception was soon found out, as the king saw Isaac "sporting with Rebekah" – a euphemistic term to describe the physical intimacy of husband and wife. He thus summoned him and strongly rebuked him for his lie. Instead of bearing a godly witness to this heathen king, he was now being told off for a sin that he committed! What a shameful witness he was, and what a stumbling block he had become. Yet we realize that this whole incident bore an uncanny resemblance to what Abraham had done in two separate occasions in the past, in lying about his wife Sarah to Pharoah in Egypt (Genesis 12), and to king Abimelech in Gerar (Genesis 20). In doing what he did, Isaac was just repeating the same sin as his father, probably just mimicking his errant ways. He failed to learn from his father's mistakes, but just blindly followed in his sin.

Thought: Do we learn from the mistakes of others?
Prayer: Lord, may You help me to always be sensitive to sin.

IS THE LORD IS WITH THEE?

Although Isaac had sinned, the Lord dealt very mercifully with him and increased him materially, such that he became a very prosperous man. The Lord blessed him not because of what he did, but because of his gracious covenant with him. Thus the land yielded him bumper harvests, and his flocks and herds increased greatly. However, this caused the Philistines who were the inhabitants of the land, to become very jealous of his success, and he was asked to leave the city. As a result, Isaac had to depart and start afresh in the valley of Gerar.

However, the strife did not end there. Soon after re-digging the wells his father used to maintain, and also digging some new ones, the people of Gerar came and claimed the well for themselves (Genesis 26:20). Leaving it, Isaac dug another one, but they came and strove for that as well. Though he could have asserted his rights, and bring up the agreement that was made between his father Abraham and the King of Gerar (ref Genesis 20:15, 21:25-30), yet he chose to yield to them, perhaps mindful of the previous injustice that he had done to them in lying about his wife.

The Lord then appeared to him and reaffirmed the covenant with him, reassuring him that "I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake" (Genesis 26:24). This was a timely comfort to him, to remind him that it did not matter how unjustly he was being treated, or what strive and contention he had to endure, for God was with him, and He would certainly bless him and fulfil His covenant to him. To remind him of this promise, Isaac erected an altar unto the Lord, and stayed there.

Perhaps fearing reprisal from Isaac, seeing that he was "mightier than we" (Genesis 20:16), Abimelech and his captain came to Isaac to seek for a peace treaty. Even they acknowledged that the Lord was with him, and for that reason they wanted to ensure that they would stay on good terms with him. Isaac agreed amicably to their terms, and they went away in peace. Thus in all this, Isaac dealt wisely and kindly to his neighbours, and he bore a good witness and testimony for the Lord.

Thought: re we assured of God's presence in our lives? Do the people around us acknowledge that the LORD is with us?
Prayer:: Lord, may I always delight and take comfort in Your presence.

WAS ANYONE RIGHT?

In Genesis 27, we have a picture of a rather dysfunctional family, where a son and his mother conspire together to deceive his ailing father and cheat his elder brother. It is certainly not an ideal example to pattern ourselves after, but rather a negative example that we must learn to avoid.

Isaac was now an old man (137 years old), and knew that his time on earth was coming to an end. He wanted to bless Esau his first born and favourite son. This was despite the fact that when his sons were still in their mother's womb, the Lord had prophesied that the younger, that is Jacob, was the chosen heir of the covenant, for the elder shall serve the younger (Genesis 25:23). 77 years had since passed, and the time for Isaac to impart his blessings to them had come. He requested Esau to prepare his favourite venison for him, and ready himself to receive the blessings. In so doing, Isaac was refusing to acknowledge God's prophecy upon Jacob, and was insisting instead to bless his favourite son. When Rachel heard of this, she took matters into her own hands and called Jacob to join her in this plot. She devised an elaborate scheme to deceive Isaac, such that he would believe Jacob to be Esau, and bless him instead. Though Jacob protested, it was more a fear of reprisal from Isaac than for the fear of committing a sin against God in this deception (Genesis 27:12). Yet it did not take much more for him to be convinced and go along with his mother's ploy. True enough, the deception worked, and Jacob was blessed with the blessing that Isaac had intended for Esau. As the patriarch of the house, Isaac's blessings were not just nice sounding platitudes, but were actually prophetic in nature. In fact, Isaac's blessing was very much in line with God's covenant to Abraham and also his prophecy to Rebekah concerning the two sons. Jacob would be the chosen one and Esau would have to serve him.

In this we see the sure hand of God intervening to ensure that His will be done. His prophecy must be fulfilled, even though Isaac sinned in refusing to acknowledge it. This also does not excuse the sin that Rebekah and Jacob committed, for their deception was certainly wrong. Neither was Esau innocent in this whole manner, for he had already sold his birthright, and had no claim to the blessing anymore. What resulted from this whole fiasco was a broken home and bitter animosity amongst the two brothers.

Thought: We must fulfil God's will in His way, and not our own way.
Prayer: Lord, may I be circumspect in my ways and obedient to Thy will.

Genesis 28:1-22
Memorise Genesis 28:15
"If God will be with me....then shall the LORD by my God"

IS THE LORD YOUR GOD?

Although Jacob was brought up in a household that worshipped God, it seemed that he had never fully accepted the Lord as his God. Based on his actions in the past few chapters, he showed little evidence of one who was born again. He took advantage of his brother's weakness to trade for his birthright, and then deceived his ailing father to receive his blessing. Although it could be argued that these were but in fulfilment of God's covenant, yet that does not excuse his actions. He was still entirely culpable for the sins he had committed, and his brother justly exclaimed: "Is not he rightly named Jacob? For he hath supplanted me these two times" (Genesis 27:36), for Jacob means supplanter or usurper.

Now, he was to embark on a journey alone, away from the protection of his father's house, to travel up north to seek for a wife. He was lonely, and probably afraid of his brother who had sworn to kill him. That first night, the Lord gave him a vision to encourage him, of angels ascending and descending from heaven. This signified to him that God's involvement and work amongst man was continuous and on-going. God also appeared to comfort him in a dream, affirming his presence with him, and that the covenant to his father and grandfather would extend through him as well (Genesis 28:15). Yet the Lord was careful to note that whilst he was the God of Abraham and Isaac, he did not yet say that He was the Lord God of Jacob. When Jacob awoke, he did acknowledge the Lord's presence (Genesis 28:16), yet his response was not one of worship and reverence, but of fear, for he exclaimed "how dreadful is this place!" (Genesis 28:17).

Instead of repenting and worshipping God, Jacob set up a stone of memorial to remind him of this event, and then made a vow to the Lord. Though the Lord had promised to be with him, yet he made a 'bargain' with the Lord, and gave the Lord certain conditions to fulfil, before he would regard the Lord as his God. How sad it was, that Jacob did not have the faith to take God at His word. He wanted to first experience God's provision for himself first, before he would acknowledge that God is one who would keep His Word. Dear Teen, is that how we are as well?

Thought: Do we need to first experience God's presence before we believe and acknowledge Him as our God?
Prayer: Lord, give me the faith to truly believe in You.

EVER HAD A TASTE OF YOUR OWN MEDICINE?

The name "Jacob" literally means to catch hold of, and carries the meaning of a supplanter or even to deceive or defraud. It was given to him because when he was born, "his hand took hold on Esau's heel" (Genesis 25:26). This name turned out to be a true reflection of his character, as after he cunningly deceived his father for his blessings, his brother Esau exclaimed "Is not he rightly named Jacob? For he hath supplanted me these two times" (Genesis 27:36). Now, as Jacob comes into contact with Laban, he will have a taste of his own medicine, for the deceiver himself will be deceived!

As Jacob came to Haran and he first met Rachel at the well, it was love at first sight. Soon he began to enquire for her hand in marriage from Laban her father, who was also his uncle, his mother's brother. The deal that was struck seemed reasonable enough. As Jacob had no possessions at all to give as a dowry, he offered to serve under Laban for seven years, and his wage would be the hand of Rachel in marriage. For Jacob, that was no problem at all, and those seven years "seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (Genesis 29:20). However, at the end of the seven years, unbeknownst to Jacob, Laban made a cruel switch, and replaced Rachel with Leah at the wedding. Jacob had been fooled! When he found out the next morning, he rushed to Leban and cried to him: "What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?" (Genesis 29:25). By then it was too late, the marriage had been consummated! If Jacob still wanted to marry Rachel, he would have to work another 7 years for Laban for free! Laban had manipulated him in such a way that he had now married off his two daughters in the right order (older before the younger), and he had a faithful and diligent worker who would work for him for no pay. Truly Jacob was now getting a taste of his own medicine!

I am sure this whole episode would have left a bitter taste in the mouth of Jacob. He was betrayed and wronged, and forced to do what he did not want to do. Yet he really had no cause to complain, for he himself had did the exact same thing, in deceiving and betraying his father's trust. Indeed as Jesus taught the disciples in Matthew 7:12 "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Thought: Am I a person that I would like to be friends with?
Prayer: Lord, help me to always be kind and honest in my ways.

CAN ANYTHING BECOME AN IDOL?

More than anything, Rachel wanted a child of her own. With great envy, she had watched as her sister Leah gave birth to one son after another. It did not matter to her that she was the favoured wife of Jacob who loved her more than her sister Leah. Her desire for a child became her all-consuming desire that quickly became an idol in her heart. It is not that it is wrong to want children. But for Rachel, it became an unhealthy obsession, such that she said to Jacob "give me children, or else I die" (Genesis 30:1). In saying that, she showed that to her, having a child was more important than life itself! She would rather die than be found childless.

Jacob rightly diagnosed her problem. He was rightly angry with Rachel's unreasonable request, and asked her "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" (Genesis 30:2). Jacob knew that it was God's sovereignty at work here, that had caused her to become barren. Thus in demanding from Jacob, she was actually demanding from God! She was angry with God's hand in her life, and was thus sinning.

But her problem did not end there. Instead of repenting, she then came up with a terribly sinful solution to her problem. She suggested that her own husband now sleep with another woman – her handmaid. Whilst it was a culturally acceptable practice at that time, to have a handmaid serve as a sort of a surrogate mother, such that the child from her womb would be considered as Rachel's. Yet it was certainly not acceptable in the eyes of her Lord! Yet Rachel did not care, for she was so caught up in her obsession that she was willing to do what it takes in order to achieve her objective. And so Jacob slept with Bilhah and conceived. Upon seeing that, Leah too joined in this sinful scheme and also gave her own handmaid Zilpah to Jacob in order that he may bear children through her as well. Thus that one sin was now propagating to more and more sin.

Yet at the end of it all, when Rachel herself finally conceived, it seems she was still not satisfied, for she named her first son "Joseph", which means "let him add", showing that she still wanted more from God! Dear teen – covetous and idolatry in the heart are dangerous sins that will never be satisfied. Do you harbour any such sins in you?

Thought: What are the idols in my heart?
Prayer: Lord, may You guard my heart from any such sinful idolatry.

Genesis 30:25 - 31:13
Memorise 2 Corinthians 9:8

"And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle..."

WILL YOU TRUST GOD TO PROVIDE?

By now, Laban recognised that the presence of Jacob had brought great material blessings upon his household. Jacob was a diligent, faithful worker, and Laban himself acknowledged: "I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake" (Genesis 30:27). He wanted Jacob to continue to stay to work for him. However Jacob yearned to return home. He had served the 14 stipulated years for both Leah and Rachel, and having a large family in tow, he felt that now was the appropriate time to go back to his father's land, the land of promise.

Yet Laban encouraged him to stay. He asked Jacob to set a wage and claimed that he would now pay him for his labour. Jacob's response was a seemingly strange one. He told Laban to remove all the speckled, spotted and brown cattle from amongst the flocks. Then, the animals that are born out of this pure flock that were speckled, spotted and brown would be his wage. This was an agreement that Laban readily agreed to, for it seemed greatly to his advantage. As greedy as he was, he thought that this arrangement would mean that Jacob would continue to work for him for as little as possible.

In making this agreement, Jacob was acknowledging the divine presence of the Lord with him. By faith, he trusted that the Lord would provide for him. True enough, God did increase his flocks. Though it seemed that it was due to some 'tricks' that Jacob employed, yet we know that no external agency can change the genes of animals that cause variation in the fur patterns. He might have had a hand in encouraging the stronger cattle to conceive (Genesis 30:41-42), but ultimately it was the Lord that granted him the increase. Jacob himself acknowledged this, for he told Laban's sons that "God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me" (Genesis 31:9). The Lord himself also affirmed this as He assured Jacob that "I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee" (Genesis 31:12).

Thus after all these years, Jacob finally acknowledged that God was indeed with him, and that God had been the one to preserve, protect and provide for him. He was ready to acknowledge the Lord as his God. Dear teen, are you ready to make such a proclamation?

Thought: Must we wait until God proves himself before we believe?
Prayer: Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief!

Genesis 31:14-55
Memorise 1 Corinthians 15:58

"God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands"

HOW TO DEAL WITH UNFAIR TREATMENT?

Jacob had been working for Laban for almost 20 years now. It was originally supposed to be just a 7 year agreement. However because of Laban's deceit, Jacob was forced to marry Leah first, and then serve another 7 years for Rachel. After those 14 years were up and they agreed on the form of payment for Jacob's subsequent service, we are told that Laban deceived him and changed his wages ten times (Genesis 31:7-8). Yet despite that, God gave Jacob the increase, such that Laban and his sons were jealous and resentful of his success (Genesis 31:1-2). In response to all that, Jacob showed a remarkable amount of restraint, and did not protest nor retaliate. He did not respond in kind to steal or sabotage Laban's flocks (something which the old Jacob who deceived his father and brother might have done). He simply trusted in God's faithfulness, and obeyed God's instruction when He told him to leave (Genesis 31:13). Though his wives then came to request for him to claim their portion of inheritance from Laban, Jacob directed them to trust in the Lord instead (Genesis 31:16).

Unbeknownst to Jacob, as they left, Rachel stole some household idols from Laban – tokens that could later be used claim her portion of her inheritance from her father's estate. Miserly and greedy as Laban was, he pursued them with every intention of reclaiming them back. However, Rachel had tricks of her own. She hid the idols under her and claimed that "the custom of women" (her period) was upon her, and she could not rise. Thus after a futile search, Laban returned empty handed. To Jacob, this was a vindication of his innocence, and the last straw of his patience with Laban. Because of his consistent testimony, he could so adamantly and passionately rebuke Laban for all the unfair and unjust treatment he had received (Genesis 31:38-41). He was not wrong in listing these grievances, and had every right to demand more payment from Laban. Yet he did not. Instead, he acknowledged the good hand of the Lord upon him, who had cared for him in spite of Laban's wickedness (Genesis 31:42).

Dear teen, are you in in any difficult unfair situations? Like Jacob, we must wait upon the Lord and trust in Him, and be certain that He knows your situation and will take care of you! Maintain a good testimony, and always deal rightly and honestly in the sight of all men.

Thought: Who determines what is 'fair' or 'unfair' anyway?
Prayer: Lord, teach my patience to wait upon You no matter what.

Genesis 32:1-21
Memorise Psalm 56:3-4

"Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother... for I fear him"

ARE YOU LIVING IN GUILT AND FEAR?

Leaving the problems of Laban behind him, Jacob now commenced his journey to return to the land where he grew up. However, another huge issue awaited him there – a brother who had vowed to kill him! (Genesis 27:41). 20 years had already passed since then, but Jacob was still "greatly afraid and distressed" (Genesis 32:7) with the prospect of meeting Esau. His guilt and fear must have been plaguing him for all those years, and might very well be the reason why he was willing to stay so long in a foreign land. This was because he knew he was in the wrong, for he had betrayed the trust of his own brother. For the past 20 years he had been the one on the receiving end of deceit and treachery, and he how he had learnt what it felt like to be treated so unjustly by your own flesh and blood!

However, he could not be running forever. God's will was for him to return to the land of promise – the land that God had covenanted to his father. He had to resolve this conflict, in order for him to fulfil the will of God. Thus in returning to the land of Canaan, Jacob took certain precautions to ensure the safety of his family, lest Esau come to smite them (Genesis 32:7-8). He also tried very best to show his penitence to his brother, and spared no effort to appease any wrath he might still have been harbouring with generous gifts (Genesis 32:13-20). More importantly, he sought the Lord for help and guidance. As a believer, he realized that God alone was the one who was in control. The prayer that he made (Genesis 32:9-12) was a very good one, for in it he acknowledged his unworthiness and pleaded with the Lord for deliverance. The basis of his request was not for his own selfish desires, but was based on the covenantal promise that God had given him, that he would have "seed as the sand of the sea".

Through all this, Jacob did well to deal with the guilt and fear that had been troubling him all these years. For us, we too realize that we cannot hide from our sins forever. If we have any wrongdoings that we have committed and unresolved conflicts, it is best that we seek for a speedy resolution today. Like Jacob, we must trust in the Lord who is in control. It may be that we would have to suffer the consequences of our sins, but that is better to repent than to try to run from sin and live in fear and guilt.

Thought: Repent today, or *"be sure your sin will find you out"* (Number 32:23)
Prayer: Lord, may You help me to resolve my conflicts in a godly way.

Genesis 32:22 - 33:20
Memorise Genesis 32:26
"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me"

HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT GOD'S BLESSINGS?

That same night, despite having made all the preparations that he could, Jacob still could not shake off the fear that he had. Thus he sent his family and possessions across the river Jabbok, whilst he himself stayed alone on the other side. It was here that a man came to wrestle with him. Initially, Jacob might have thought that his worst fears were coming true, that it was an assassin from Esau sent to kill him. He fought tenaciously for his life, and fought with him all through the night. Eventually, when daybreak came, and it seemed that neither had the upper hand, the man simply touched Jacob at his hip socket, and caused his thigh bone to go out of joint. It was perhaps at this moment, that Jacob realized that this was no mere man, and neither was he an assassin sent from Esau. He perceived that it must have been a divine being that was wrestling with him, for the way that the man wrestled and miraculously injured Jacob must have shown that he was not a common man. Scripture's commentary in Hosea 12:4 and Jacob's naming of the place as "Peniel" shows that this was the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ who had come personally to wrestle with Jacob. This was why Jacob refused to let go even after his thigh was injured, and said "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Genesis 32:26). In this, Jacob shows his humility and acknowledges his weakness. He was not proudly prevailing and demanding from God, but was desperately crying to God to help him in his infirmities. He knew that without God's help and blessing, he would not be able to do anything at all. That is why he struggled so hard, for he seized the opportunity to receive something from the Lord.

True enough, we see in the next chapter that all Jacob's fears were unfounded. God softened the heart of Esau, such that the meeting was a joyous reunion of long lost brothers, and not a terse meeting of arch enemies. Jacob was quick to testify of the Lord's goodness to him in blessing him with family (Genesis 33:5) and wealth (Genesis 33:11). He was certain that it was God who had blessed him, for he had met with God and God had answered His prayer. At the end of it all, he erected an altar and called it "Elelohe-Israel" – meaning God is the God of Israel, his new name (Genesis 32:28).

Thought: Do you actively ask the Lord to bless you?
Prayer: Lord, may You bless us this day, that we might serve Thee with all that we are and all that we have.

Genesis 34:1-31
Memorise James 4:1-2

"Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain"

WHAT DO YOU REALLY CARE ABOUT?

With the past crises behind him, Jacob would have thought that he could finally have some peace and quiet. He bought a parcel of land near a city and pitched his tents there. However, it was not long before another disaster struck - his daughter Dinah was raped! The son of the chief of the city had taken her, lay with her and defiled her (Genesis 34:2). Not only that, they now had the audacity to come and ask for her hand in marriage.

Naturally, her brothers were very wroth, both over the dignity and purity of their sister, but also the honour of their family. However, Hamor's (Shechem's father) offer seemed to be a rather sincere one, and desired peace between the two households. He was willing to offer as much dowry as requested, and also to give the daughters of his city as their wives, and that their cities may dwell together and have trade relationships. Jacob's sons agreed to these terms, on condition that all the men of the city be circumcised. This pleased them "and the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter" (Genesis 34:18). However, behind the veneer of the peaceful agreement, there was a more sinister plot being hatched by Simeon and Levi. They waited until the third day after all the men of the city were circumcised, and when infection and fever had set in, they "took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males" (Genesis 34:25). Whilst they claimed this was vengeance for what had been done to their sister, this was certainly over punishing, for in their rage they murdered a whole city of defenceless men, plundered their goods and took the women and children captive.

After all these events transpired, Jacob finally spoke up: "Ye have troubled me to stink among the inhabitants of the land... they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house" (Genesis 34:30). So really, who was right in all this? Shechem cared only for his own lusts and physical desire. The brothers simply sought for a bloodthirsty vengeance, whilst Jacob cared for reputation and wanted as little conflict as possible, even though his daughter had been violated. No one sought the will of God, and all cared only for their own selfish agendas. It is no surprise that the outcome of all this was just tragedy upon tragedy.

Thought: When everyone is selfish, no one benefits .
Prayer: Lord, grant me the wisdom to seek Your will and not my own.

ARE YOU READY TO SERVE THE LORD?

After the fiasco at Shechem, God appeared to Jacob and instructed him to return to Bethel – the place where God first appeared to him when he was on the run from Esau (Genesis 35:1, ref 28:19). It was a place where Jacob had first made his promise to God, that he would worship Him if God indeed took care of him. Now, the Lord was calling him there in order that he might rededicate himself to the Lord. Before they went they were to leave all their past behind them, including idols that some within his household had taken to, probably including the teraphims that Rachel had stolen from Laban (Genesis 31:19). God wanted them to start afresh, for if He was to make a nation out of Jacob and his 12 sons, they needed to put away their sins and idolatry before God would give the promise to them.

As they came to Bethel, God appeared to Jacob again. The name change that was first instituted in Genesis 32 when Jacob wrestled with God was now repeated. This is significant, for Jacob needed a new name befitting his position. He was to be a father of a nation. He had to put his old past as a deceiver and supplanter behind him, and embrace his role as the head of a family that would become the nation of God's chosen people. And so God told him "thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel" (Genesis 35:10). The name Israel could mean either "God prevails", or "one who prevails with God". The explanation for the name was given in Genesis 32:28, when God told him "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed". This indicated that God was giving Jacob an exalted position as His representation, and that He would rule and prevail through the nation that He would form through Jacob. Indeed what an honour that the almighty God would give to a man. God then elaborated on His promise to Jacob in the next few verses, promising that there would be nations that would come forth from him, and kings would proceed from his loins. The promise of the land given to Abraham and Isaac was extended to him as well (Genesis 35:11-12).

Yet we must remember that before Jacob was ready to do all this, he first had to repent of his sins, acknowledge the Lord as His God, and dedicate himself and his family to Him. Dear teen, are you ready to be used by God?

Thought: What are the sins and idols in my life that I need to be rid of?
Prayer: Lord, help me to be a servant fit for the Master's use.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ESAU?

Coming to Genesis 36, we are given a summary of what happened to Isaac's other son Esau before the next chapter continues with the account of Jacob and his children. In reading through the very detailed look into the generations of Esau, we have a good reminder that God always keeps His promises, despite the sin of men. By marrying the heathen women of Canaan, Esau might have forgotten God and turned away in sin and rebellion, yet God never forgot him. We now see a whole chapter dedicated to an account of his descendants, as God proves that He is indeed a faithful God who will always fulfil His covenants.

Even before Esau was born, God promised his mother in Genesis 25:23: "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger". Although he was the elder, and therefore the weaker nation, nonetheless he was to form a nation of his own. Later, his father Isaac would have this blessing to give him in Genesis 27:39-40: "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; And by thy sword shalt thou live". Now, many years after those promises were given, we see how God indeed prospered Esau and made his family a rich and powerful nation, for in describing the houses of Esau and Jacob, the Bible says "their riches were more than they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle" (Genesis 36:7). Esau was thus known as the father of the Edomites, whose dukes and kings are listed through the rest of the chapter.

And so Esau moved to the land of Seir. This was a mountainous region to the south of Canaan. It was an easily defensible position that allowed Edom to flourish and prosper. It is sad however, that in time to come, the Edomites would become enemies of Israel, and would prove to be a constant thorn in their side. Nonetheless we know that God certainly had a plan and purpose in all that He did, and He raised up the Edomites for His purpose and glory. To know about the end of the Edomites, you can read the short book of Obadiah which rebukes them for their pride and cruelty against Israel, and predicts their eventual judgment and destruction.

Thought: God always remembers – both to bless and to judge.
Prayer: Lord, may I always be faithful, even as You are faithful.

WHO WAS JOSEPH?

From Genesis 37 onwards, the narrative focuses on the life of Joseph, an exemplary young man whose life is a shining example for all of us to follow. Joseph was the 11th son of the patriarch Jacob, and the first son of his second wife, Rachel. As a child of his old age, and also the son of his favourite wife, he was loved and doted upon by his father. He made him a 'coat of many colours' (Genesis 37:3), which in those days was used as a clothing of distinction. However, this show of favouritism led to feelings of jealousy and animosity from his ten elder brothers (Genesis 37:4). To further add to their displeasure, he told them of dreams that he had from God that prophesied of his brothers and parents showing obeisance towards him (Genesis 37:5-11). Perhaps he did so in his innocence, but his brothers kept it in their heart, and caused their anger to grow within them day by day. Their jealousy soon festered into a hatred that soon manifested in a most terrible cruelty against their very own brother.

And so it was one day that Joseph was sent by his father to check on his brothers to see how they were whilst tending the flocks. Seeing him come from a distance, they plotted amongst themselves: "come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams" (Genesis 37:20). The oldest brother Rueben mediated a compromise, calling upon them not to kill him, but to throw him into a pit instead. And so they committed this dastardly deed, and sat down to eat bread, with no guilt or shame in what they had done. Then, seeing some merchants passing by, their devious and hateful hearts thought of yet another scheme. Instead of killing their brother themselves, why not sell them to these merchants for some profit, and get rid of this pesky brother once and for all. To cover this up, they bloodied Joseph's coat and reported to their father that a wild beast had probably killed Joseph. This deception caused Jacob no small amount of grief.

And so at the tender age of 17, Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold off to be a slave in a foreign land. He went from being the favoured son of his father, to just a nameless servant boy cut off from his family. How sad! Dear teen, how would you have reacted in such a situation?

Thought: How does it feel like to be betrayed by your own family?
Prayer: Lord, grant me the patience and wisdom to understand the trials and difficulties that may come my way.

Genesis 38:1-30
Memorise Galatians 6:7
"Be note deceived; God is not mocked"

CAN SIN THWART GOD'S PLAN?

The account again switches to an incident that happened between Judah, his sons, and Tamar his daughter in law. It is a sordid and twisted affair of betrayal, broken promises, deceit and adultery. Yet it was chosen to be included in God's inspired canon. Why is that so? Let us read on.

And so Judah had three sons, and the first married a woman named Tamar. He was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and so the Lord slew him (Genesis 38:7). As was the custom in those days, Judah's second son was then given to Tamar in order that he might raise a son in his first brother's name. However, he refused to do so, and so the Lord slew him as well (Genesis 38:9-10). Seeing Tamar as a sort of a jinx, Judah then sent her back to live in her father's house, though promising his final son Shelah to her when he was old enough to marry (Genesis 38:11). However when Judah failed to keep this promise, Tamar sought to take matters into her own hands. She dressed herself up as a harlot and enticed Judah to sleep with her, not knowing who she actually was. She then took his signet, bracelet and staff – objects that were proof of his identity, as a surety for the payment that he owed her for her services. From that encounter, she became pregnant. When this was made known to Judah, he called for her to be burnt! However, when she presented evidence that the child within her was actually from Judah himself, he realized his sin, and acknowledged that "she hath been more righteous than I; because I gave her not to Shelah my son" (Genesis 38:26). He himself had sinned too for succumbing to the temptation of a harlot, and furthermore she was in a sense 'justified' for resorting to these tactics in order to bear a child. This is not to say that Tamar was entirely guiltless in what she did, but compared to Judah's sin, she was 'more righteous' than him. The remaining verses tell of how from this union came forth a pair of twin sons, Pharez and Zarah. In time to come, we would learn that Pharez would be of the Messianic line, from whom King David and the Lord Jesus Christ would one day descend from (Ruth 4:18-22, Matthew 1:3).

So what can we learn from this whole event? Of course it is a negative example that we would learn not to emulate. But we also see that it is in spite of man's sin that God continues to work. Man may act in the most carnal and sinful way, but God's providence continues to shines through and will fulfil His plan. God is infinitely wise, and makes no mistake.

Thought: God's is faithful even when man is unfaithful.
Prayer: Lord, may I learn to trust in Thy faithfulness and sovereignty.

Genesis 39:1-23
Memorise Genesis 39:2-3

"The Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper"

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE BLESSINGS OF GOD'S PRESENCE?

The narrative now returns to Joseph. He was now in Egypt, as a slave to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard. Despite being in a foreign land, far from friends and family, and all alone with no one to be accountable to, Joseph maintained a wonderful and blameless testimony. How was this possible? How did this young 17 year old youth not give up in despair and succumb to the temptations all around him? It was only because he knew that the Lord was with him, that he was able not only to survive but to thrive in this new environment that he was thrown into.

This understanding of God's presence strengthened Joseph, and enabled him to do his best despite his adverse circumstances. He did this not to please his new master, but to please the master whom he had always been serving – God. Through his diligent and consistent service, even Potipher acknowledged that the Lord was with him, and because of that, "Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand" (Genesis 39:3).

Joseph was also able to resist temptation. As he served in his master's household, he soon caught the attention of his master's wife, who repeatedly demanded that he lie with her. Despite all that, he remained steadfast and refused to yield, for he told her "how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:8). He knew that above all, he must continue to stay true to his convictions, for God above was watching, and knew all things.

When it seemed things could not get any worse, Joseph was accused of a crime he never committed and was cast into jail. Even in such circumstances, he remained faithful in whatever duties assigned to him. Yet the Lord never forsook him, for "the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Genesis 39:21). He was soon promoted to a position of trust despite the grave nature of his alleged crime, and had all the other prisoners put under his charge. Indeed what a testimony of a young man who walked with the Lord. Dear teen, will you be like Joseph?

Thought: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" – God
Prayer: Lord, I thank Thee for the wonderful promise of Thy presence.

Genesis 40:1-23
Memorise Psalm 37:3-7
"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him"

WOULD YOU WAIT FOR GOD'S TIMING?

As Joseph was languishing in prison, a strange twist of events brought two high ranking officials of Pharoah's court – his chief butler and baker, under his charge. For some reason or other they had offended Pharoah, and like Joseph, they were now cast into prison. It was at this moment that God then intervened in a miraculous way to cause both of them to dream dreams in a single night. The dreams certainly left an impression upon them, and they were desperate to know what the interpretation was. In knowing about their situation, Joseph took this as an opportunity to witness for the Lord, telling them, "do not interpretations belong to God?" (Genesis 40:8).

After they recounted the dreams to him, Joseph then interpreted the dreams for them. He told the butler that in three days, he would be released from prison and then restored to his former position. The message for the baker was not so good, for the interpretation was that in three days he would be hung to die, and birds would eat his flesh. Joseph also requested the butler to "think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house" (Genesis 40:14). He saw this as an opportunity to plead to Pharaoh for clemency, for he had been unjustly imprisoned, and he wanted out!

True enough, exactly as Joseph had predicted, Pharaoh released and restored the butler, but hanged the baker (Genesis 40:20-22). Joseph must have been hopeful, and thought to himself that any day now, someone would call for him and he would be free! After all he had done the chief butler such a huge favour. However, Joseph's request was not met. The chief butler forgot about Joseph, and failed to make any mentioned of him to the Pharaoh. Joseph waited, but the day never came. Was he frustrated? Perhaps. He had gotten his hopes up, only to be disappointed again. In fact, he would have to wait for two more long years in prison. Two years at the prime of his life, where he could be out there achieving so much. Yet there he was, languishing in his prison cell, wondering what this was all about. But was it a waste? Had God abandoned him? Realize that God's timetable is always the best. God had His perfect plan, and knew that now was not the right time for his freedom. Yes Joseph will be released, but it would only be God's doing, and not through Joseph's own request.

Thought: When does time become wasted time?
Prayer: Lord, may I have the faith to wait upon Your timing for my life.

WHO CONTROLS OUR PROMOTIONS?

Joseph was probably now at the very lowest point of his life. From the favourite son of his father; he went to being a slave in a foreign land. Yet he persevered and worked hard, and was promoted to be the chief servant in his master's house. But then he was falsely accused of raping his master's wife, and was cast into prison. Even then he never gave up, but continued to maintain a good testimony, such that he was again promoted to be become the chief of prisoners. After the incident of the butler and baker, Joseph must have thought that this was now his opportunity to be freed and have his name cleared. However, the exoneration never came. In the next two years that ensued, all he heard was silence.

Then suddenly, at Pharaoh's request, he was whisked from his prison cell, shaved, changed and brought before Pharaoh himself! What an amazing turn of events. Pharaoh had dreamt a dream that no one could interpret, and only now did the butler tell Pharaoh about this young Hebrew man who could interpret dreams. And now standing before the King of Egypt, Joseph was told to explain what Pharaoh's dream was all about. Even in such circumstances, Joseph maintained his testimony, and also his composure, and dared to contradict Pharaoh and tell him that "it is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace" (Genesis 41:16). He remained resolute in his faith that God was in control, and he openly declared that to the one who was regarded in Egypt to be a demi-god.

After Pharaoh recounted his dream, Joseph gave the interpretation, and told him that this was a message from God, and God is the one who will bring it to pass (Genesis 41:25, 32). He also advised Pharaoh on how he was to prepare for the coming years of plenty and of famine. Pharaoh recognized the wisdom in this young man, and there and then appointed him to be his second in command. Thus in a single day, Joseph went from being a prisoner to become the second most powerful man in Egypt! This was certainly beyond Joseph's wildest expectations. It is a turn of events that he could never have imagined nor engineered for himself. Truly promotion comes from the Lord! Joseph simply trusted in the Lord and lived a life of obedience, and God took care of the rest. Yet what is most important is not the material and physical blessings, but rather living in the will of God.

Thought: If God is in control, why worry?
Prayer: Lord, may I learn to do my best, and not worry about the results.

Genesis 42:1-38
Memorise James 5:16
"We are verily guilty concerning our brother"

ARE YOU LIVING WITH THE BURDEN OF SIN?

After seven years of abundance had passed, the time of famine started. Back in Canaan, Jacob and his family too felt its effects. More than 20 years had passed since they told their brother into slavery. Hearing of the stores of grain in Egypt, Jacob sent his ten older sons to buy food from the storehouses which were under the charge of Joseph. He kept his youngest son Benjamin back with him, for he had not forgotten his loss of Joseph.

Thus Joseph meets his brothers for the first time in more than twenty years, though only the former recognizes the latter. Joseph decided to put his brother through some tests, to see if they had matured and repented of their past transgressions, or were they still the same malicious, proud and devious brothers that sold him away 20 years ago. He accused them of espionage and cast them into prison. He demanded that their youngest brother be brought also as proof that their story was true. As they discussed this matter amongst themselves (not knowing that Joseph could understand their Hebrew tongue), their conscience pricked them, as their current predicament must have reminded them of what they did to Joseph. They said one to another, "we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress come upon us" (Genesis 42:21).

In hearing this, Joseph turned from them and wept, overwhelmed by the mix of emotions he must have been experiencing. He bound Simeon, and then instructed his servants to give his brothers the food they needed, and also to return them the money for the grains. This was only discovered after they left, and they were afraid, exclaiming "what is this that God hath done unto us!" (Genesis 42:28). Again, their guilty conscience surfaced. It seemed that this matter continued to weigh heavily on their minds, and they were constantly looking over their shoulder, almost expecting a just recompense from God for the sin that they had committed. Yet they never confessed their sin and deception to their father, allowing him to continue to grieve. They never truly repented, but only discussed the matter between themselves, perhaps thinking that if they continued to hide it, the sin would just go away. Dear teen, is this how you live as well?

Thought: Is it true repentance if we don't confess?
Prayer: Lord, may I be quick to confess and repent of all my sins.

CAN PEOPLE CHANGE FOR THE BETTER?

After the corn that they had received from their first trip had run out, they need to return to Egypt to get some more. The brothers knew that they had to bring Benjamin along (Genesis 52:15-16), lest they be imprisoned again, or worse still, be sentenced to death! Judah was quick to speak up to vouch for the safety of Benjamin, offering his own life as surety for him. In this we see that Judah has indeed matured, from being the carnal opportunistic brother who suggested that Joseph be sold, to the responsible and caring son and brother that he now was. Jacob reluctantly agreed to this, and wisely instructed them to bring both presents and double the amount of money to pay for both the previous and the present lots of food.

After they arrived in Egypt and nervously tried to explain their perceived confusion over their previous payment, Joseph dismissed their concerns and invited them for lunch. He asked after their father and had a happy meal together with them. The brothers must have felt very relieved and comforted, but at the same time confused over the special treatment they were receiving. Then, before they left, Joseph again gave special instructions to provide them with food, and also to return their money. He also told them to plant his own personal silver cup in Benjamin's sack in order that he might test them one final time.

And so as they went on their way, Joseph sent his steward to overtake them and accuse them of the theft. In accordance to his plan, the cup was found in Benjamin's bag, and the punishment for that was that he would have to stay in Egypt as Joseph's bondsman. This was to recreate a scenario much like how it was for Joseph 20 years ago. He wanted to see how the brothers would react. Would they be willing to sacrifice another brother for their own selfish sake, and allow their father to suffer another agonizing loss?

Their response in this instance was a good one. Straightaway Judah makes an impassioned plea for the freedom of Benjamin, and offered himself in his place. It was clear to Joseph that he now had a sincere care and concern for his father, and was willing to give up his own life for his brother's. His brothers had changed, and Joseph was finally ready to reveal himself to them, and receive them as brothers once again.

Thought: We can all change, but only by the grace and mercy of God.
Prayer: Lord, may You mould me to be more like Christ each day.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND GOD'S PROVIDENCE?

The time had come for Joseph to finally reveal himself to his brothers. He had tested them twice, and they have shown that they have indeed changed. They were not the jealous deceptive and cruel brothers from before, but had now matured, and were willing to take responsibility for their actions. Unable to contain himself any longer, Joseph told them "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt" (Genesis 45:4). At this point, he could have chosen to berate them, to rebuke them for their most heinous betrayal, of how they had ruined his life and plunged him into the depths of misery for so many years. He could have been angry, bitter and resentful for all that they had so thoughtlessly put him through. Yet he did not. Instead of words of wrath, he had only words of comfort and assurance. Instead of vengeance, he had forgiveness and reconciliation. How was he able to do that? How was he able to put all those years of hurt behind him? The secret was that he understood the providence of God. He understood that God was the one who sent him to Egypt for a good purpose. He understood that it was necessary for him to endure all those sufferings in order that God's plan be fulfilled. He may not have enjoyed the process, but he saw and understood the bigger picture of God's sovereign hand guiding him each step of the way. He knew God was with him, and that enabled him to remain strong in the face of adversity. Thus he was able to tell his brothers "therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life... and God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Genesis 45:5,7). He understood how this was necessary in order for God's covenant with Abraham Isaac and Jacob be fulfilled, that they would be safe in the land of Egypt and be able to weather through the famine.

And so the brothers returned to tell Jacob of all that had transpired, and Jacob was reunited with his beloved son. He and his family were relocated to the land of Goshen in Egypt where they were amply provided for and saved from the famine. This is where they stayed for the next four hundred years, though in Egypt but separate as a people, fulfilling God's prophecy to Abraham in Genesis 15:13. Likewise for us, God is the one guiding us though every step of our lives, and through His perfect providence, he will always have a perfect plan for our lives.

Thought: Remember the promise of Romans 8:28
Prayer: Lord, grant me the faith to believe in Thy providence for my life.

HOW DID GOD FORM THE NATION OF ISRAEL?

Before Jacob left Canaan to journey down to Egypt, he first came to Beersheba (ref. Genesis 28:10, 21:31) and offered sacrifices unto the Lord. There, God appeared to him in a vision and told him "I am the God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely being thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes" (Genesis 46:3-4). God was assuring him that it was indeed God's will for his family to move to Egypt, for Egypt will be like the womb that will birth the great nation that He had promised. Indeed we would realize that the conditions in Goshen were perfect for the families of Jacob's children to flourish into the people that would eventually form the nation.

And so Genesis 46:8-27 gives us a full listing of all the sons of Jacob and their children. All in all there were 70 of them that settled in the land of Goshen. There, they would be amply provided for even in the midst of the famine. With food stocks in the whole region running low, Joseph was not just the second most powerful man in Egypt, but also of all the nations around them. He would certainly see to it that his family would be well taken care of. Furthermore, here in Goshen, they would have the luxury of growing and flourishing in isolation. They would not have to fear enemies invading or encroaching into their lands, for they were protected by the mighty Egyptian army. They would also not fear a repeat of the incident with Shechem, for as shepherds, they were an abomination unto the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34). They could be certain that there would be no risk of intermingling and intermarriage between the Egyptians and the Israelites. They would be a pure people, entirely of Abraham's seed. Over the next four hundred years, they would go from being a single family to become the people that God would then bring out of Egypt and into the Promised Land once again. He would certainly fulfil His promise to Abraham, that they will certainly "come out with great substance" (Genesis 15:14). But that would all happen in God's stipulated timing, at God's appointed hour. For now, God's will for them was to enter into Egypt, and so they did. Just as it was not a mistake for Joseph to be sold into Egypt as a slave, likewise it was no mistake that God would bring his whole family there, and use Egypt to turn Israel from just a small family, to become a powerful nation.

Thought: God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform.
Prayer: Lord, may I never doubt Your plan and purpose for my life.

HOW WAS JOSEPH BLESSED?

Jacob was now an old man. He had finally been reunited with his beloved son Joseph, whom he had been separated from for so many years. His family had settled down comfortably in the land of Goshen, and he was assured that they would be well taken care of. 17 years had already passed since they came to Egypt, and they had prospered and began to multiply exceedingly (Genesis 47:27). He knew that the time he had left on this earth was limited, and wanted to bless his children before he was to leave.

Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Knowing that his father's passing was soon, he brought his sons before their grandfather to seek his blessings. Although he was old and weak, his mind was still very alert. He told Joseph: "And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine (Genesis 48:5). Basically he was receiving his grandsons and elevating them to be as equal to the rest of his sons! Each of Joseph's sons will have a tribe to their name, just as Reuben and Simeon would. What a great blessing and a fitting reward for one as faithful and God fearing as Joseph.

Then, as Joseph brought the two sons forward to be blessed, Jacob deliberately crossed his arms, desiring to bless Ephraim the younger with the greater blessing. This was something which though unusual, was an act of faith, for Hebrews 11:21 tells us that it was by faith that Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph. He must have known that Ephraim would in time to come be the greater and more prominent tribe. Thus he said of Manasseh "he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations" (Genesis 48:19).

In time to come, we will see both of them becoming large and powerful tribes in Israel. Manasseh had the most land of any tribe, but Ephraim would have the most prominence. When the kingdom split after Solomon, the Northern Kingdom of Israel would at times be also named Ephraim – for they were the strongest tribe in the north. Indeed Joseph had a great reward for his faithfulness. The Lord never forgets!

Thought: What blessings can we look forward to if we are faithful?
Prayer: Lord, may I learn to be faithful like Joseph was.

DID GOD HAVE A PLAN FOR ISRAEL?

After blessing Joseph's two sons and elevating them to the status of sons, Jacob then called the rest of his sons together that he may give them their blessings. Note that the blessings that these patriarchs dispensed were not just nice sounding platitudes and well-wishes. As representatives of God to their families, the blessings that they impart were prophetic in nature, and would be fulfilled to the very letter in accordance to God's will.

Reuben as the firstborn should have been the chosen heir of Jacob, the one through whom the messianic promise would have continued through. However because of the terrible sin of incest (Genesis 35:22), he was judged "unstable as water, thou shalt not excel;" (Genesis 49:4). True enough, Rueben never became a very prominent tribe, and little would be said of them. Because of their treachery and deceit in killing the entire city of Salem in Genesis 34, both Simeon and Levi were described as "instruments of cruelty", and their inheritance will be that "I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel" (Genesis 49:7). For Simeon, it was a judgment, for they very quickly became assimilated into Judah's territory, and like Reuben, not much was known of them. However for Levi, because they later stood on the Lord's side on the incident of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), they were blessed in becoming God's special servants in the temple of the Lord. Yes they did not have their own land and were scattered throughout Israel, but it was not a curse but a blessing to be able to serve the Lord in that manner. Judah the 4th oldest son, then became the chosen one from whom the Messiah would come, and therefore it is said of him "thou art whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee" (Genesis 49:8). King David, and later the Lord Jesus Christ would be from the tribe of Judah, and thus the sceptre of rule shall not depart from Judah, and he will be a powerful tribe.

Likewise for the rest of the tribes, God had a specific reason, purpose and intent for the blessings and prophecies given to them. And so to each of them, "their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them" (Genesis 49:28). God, in His infinite wisdom is always deliberate in his ways, and always in control. He raises one up and puts down. We can but sit back and marvel at His amazing plan, and acknowledge that He is the all-knowing, all-powerful God whom we serve.

Thought: What is God's plan for me?
Prayer: Lord, may I live in according to Your plan and Your will for me.

Genesis 50:1-26
Memorise Genesis 50:20
"Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good"

HOW DID GOD MEAN IT UNTO GOOD?

As we come to the close of our study of the book of Genesis, we realize that we have only but brushed the surface of what is God's amazing and magnificent unfolding drama of His perfect plan of redemption for us. From creation to Jacob's entrance into Egypt spans a time period of about 2000 years. Through this, many significant events in the history of man occurred, of the creation of the world, the fall of man, the judgment through a global flood, the confounding of languages, and the calling and covenant to Abraham Isaac and Jacob. Yet through it all, what we can see is really a comprehensive display of God's goodness, as demonstrated through His faithfulness and sovereignty. God, in His grace and mercy, had arranged all things for the good of man, in order that His plan of redemption might succeed. Despite man's sin, weaknesses and propensity to rebel against Him, yet He never gave up on man, and continued to work out all things for good – for their good, that they might be saved.

This is what Joseph realised through his times of affliction, and also times of plenty. This is what he told his brothers when he first revealed himself to them in Genesis 45, and this is what he again reaffirmed to them after their father's death. His brothers were still afraid that he wanted to take revenge on them, and now that father had died, maybe Joseph would not treat them as kindly anymore (Genesis 50:15). Thus they sent a message to him again asking for his forgiveness, even invoking the name of Jacob in their plea. Joseph was grieved upon hearing this, perhaps due to the memories it evoked, but probably more so because his brothers still could not understand the spiritual significance of what had happened. Thus he again assured them "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20). We must understand that the 'good' mentioned here is not man's understanding of what good is, but really according to God's perfect judgment of goodness. God alone knows what is best for mankind, and so he will certainly bring it to pass. It may seem that 400 years as slaves in a foreign land is not good, at least in man's eyes. But yet in God's plan, it is certainly good, for through their time there, they will grow and multiply, and then see their need for God to cry out to Him. Then He would come and save them with a mighty hand, and craft a nation out of them.

Thought: Is my understanding of good different from God's
Prayer: Lord, may I fully know and appreciate Your goodness to me.

WHAT HAPPENED TO JOSEPH'S BONES?

Joseph and the rest of his family would live out the rest of their days in the foreign land of Egypt. However, Joseph knew that this was certainly not the end of the story – it was only the very beginning! There was still much in store for God's chosen people, as they would eventually become the nation of Israel, from which the Messiah would come forth.

Joseph took God's covenant to Abraham in Genesis 15 seriously, whereby God had promised that though they would "be a stranger in a land that is not theirs" (Genesis 15:13), yet after a period of affliction "afterward shall they come out with great substance" (Genesis 15:14) and return to the land that God promised to them. With that in mind, Joseph instructed his people to carry his bones out from Egypt when they leave and return to the Promised Land. He spoke these words with a confident certainty, knowing that "God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Genesis 50:24). It was a command that he made in faith, as would be testified in Hebrews 11:22, that "by faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones". He knew that God is a covenant keeping God, and just as He had promised, He would certainly bring it to pass, in accordance to His perfect divine plan.

True enough, they did leave Egypt under the leadership of Moses, and they never forgot Joseph's instructions: "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you" (Exodus 13:19). When Israel completed their conquest of Canaan, they fulfilled Joseph's dying wish: "and the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem" (Joshua 24:32).

In all this, we see how God kept His Word, and brought them out of Egypt into the Promised Land. Even though Joseph did not live to see it happen, yet he knew that it would certainly happen, because He trusted in God's Word. Dear teen, do you have the faith to take God at His Word, and know that everything He says is certainly and definitely true?

Thought: What promises of God do I look forward to?
Prayer: Lord, may I look forward to Christ's soon return with certainty and confidence.

Notes

Notes

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