

The background features a faded, historical map of Africa with various geographical names and a compass rose. On the left side, there is a branch with green leaves and several red and yellow apples. The title is centered in a large, dark green, serif font.

EAST OF EDEN

Finding Our Way Home

A Study of Genesis by Stan Key

Volume 3
Answer Guide



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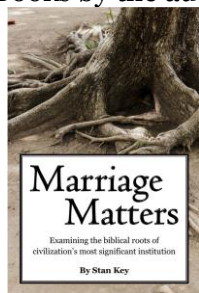
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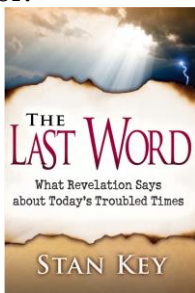
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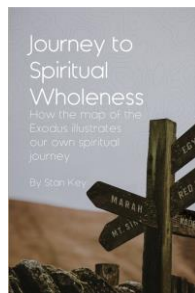
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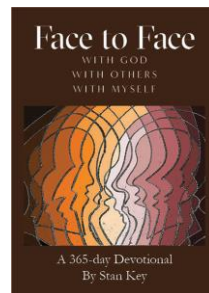
The Last Word



Jeremiah: Fire in His Bones



Journey to Spiritual Wholeness



Face to Face

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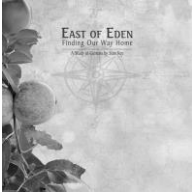
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East of Eden

Finding Our Way Home

A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

AN OLD MAN GETS A NEW START

Genesis 17:1–27

I. Is this all there is?

A. The promises of God.

So far, on four separate occasions, God has made a series of amazing promises to Abraham. These promises are freely offered and seem to be **unilateral** and **unconditional**. Note how often God says, “I will.”

- Genesis 12:1–4 (age 75)—*I will* make you a great nation . . . *I will* bless you . . . *I will* make your name great . . . In you all nations will be blessed.
- Genesis 12:7—“To your offspring *I will* give this land.”
- Genesis 13:14–17—*I will* give you the land . . . *I will* make your offspring as the dust of the earth . . . Walk through the land; *I will* give it to you.
- Genesis 15:1–21—Your reward shall be great . . . Your very own son will be your heir . . . Count the stars: so shall your offspring be . . . To your offspring *I will* give this land.

We can summarize God’s promise to Abraham under three basic headings:

1. You will have many **descendants**—millions!
2. Your descendants will possess **Canaan** (the Promised Land/the Holy Land).
3. You will be a blessing to **all nations** of the world.

B. The response of faith.

Though it would be wrong to call Abraham’s response **passive** (he *left* Ur, he *followed* the Call, he *walked* with God, etc.), his primary response was to simply take God at his word and assume that he meant what he said. In other words, Abraham **believed** God. This is precisely the response that God was looking for! “And Abraham believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him as **righteousness**” (Gn 15:16).

C. Fast-forward twenty-five years. Let’s look to see how things are working out for Abraham and Sarah. Is it profitable to put your trust in the promises of God?

1. As for the promise of land.

It still belongs to the **Canaanites** (Gn 12:6) and has periodic **famines** (Gn 12:10). It is not even adequate to support Abraham’s and Lot’s flocks at the same time (Gn 13:5–13). Sometimes, the land is a battlefield where kings wage war and take captives and plunder (Gn 14). When Abraham dies, the only piece of real estate he will own is a **burial plot**, the Cave of Machpelah (Gn 23).

Lesson: The Promised Land isn’t quite what I expected. I left Ur for *this*?

2. As for the promise of descendants.

When the promises first came, Abraham and Sarah were **old** (75 and 65) and Sarah was **barren** (Gn 11:30). The years have ruled out both nephew Lot (see Gn 13) and servant Eliezer of Damascus (see Gn 15:2) as possible “sons” and heirs. When Abraham is 86, Sarah suggests they have a son vicariously through

the Egyptian slave Hagar (see Gn 16). But this created a disaster; Ishmael was a **donkey** of a man (Gn 16:12).

Lesson: I don't understand it, but God just hasn't kept his end of the deal on this promise. Maybe this promise is for heaven.

3. As for being a blessing to the nations.

Abraham brought affliction and **plagues** on the land of Egypt because of lying about his wife (see Gn 12:10–20). He also was involved in warfare with kings who had invaded Canaan (see Gn 14).

Lesson: I can't deal with the dysfunction in my own family much less think about being a blessing to anyone else!

D. Is that all there is?

1. Now, in Genesis 17, twenty-five years have passed. Abraham is 99 and Sarah is 89. And though Abraham continues in a **right relationship** with God (justified by faith), nothing much has changed. His wife is still old and barren. Canaan is still in the hands of the Canaanites. And his family dysfunctions and lame attempts to help God fulfill his promises only create more problems for everyone around him.
2. Perhaps you can identify with Abraham and Sarah. After decades of believing the promises of God, perhaps your life is little different than when you first began the journey. Though you don't doubt your relationship with God, you realize that your life is rather **monotonous, predictable, and unfruitful**. There is no skip in your step or song in your heart; no fire in the belly. *Is this all there is to salvation?* Maybe the opening words of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* speak to your heart:

Midway along the journey of our life, I woke to find myself in a dark wood, for I had wandered off from the straight path.

3. Abraham needs a **fresh work of grace**! Genesis 17 is a picture of how God gave an old man a new start. Long before the Bible gives a doctrinal explanation of **entire sanctification** (Rom 1–8, 1 Thes, etc.), it gives us a flesh and blood illustration.¹ Though Abraham is clearly justified by faith (Gn 15), he continues to **walk in the flesh** (Gn 16). So God brings him to a place where a deeper work of grace can be done in his heart.
4. Genesis 17 is **pregnant** with significance. Notice that Abraham's justification was accomplished when "the word of the Lord" came to him (Gn 15:1, 6). However, sanctification can only be realized when the Lord himself appears (Gn 17:1). Though this chapter will repeat the three-fold promise of children, land, and global blessing, there are at least five things that are dramatically new!

II. Five New Beginnings

A. A new **understanding of God**.

1. You would think that a man who had been walking with God for **25 years** would know him rather well. But as in **marriage**, you can live with someone for decades and still discover dimensions of personhood that are completely unknown! At age 99, Abraham gets a fresh revelation of who the God he

¹ We'll have an even clearer illustration in the life of Jacob in his wrestling match with the angel of the Lord (Gn 32).

worships truly is. William Temple's words are helpful: "If your **concept of God** is wrong, then the more you worship this deity, the more dangerous you become to yourself and to others."

2. "I am El Shaddai" (Gn 17:1). "God Almighty"—He is **all-sufficient**, he is all you need when you need it! This is more than a title or label, it approaches a personal name.² There is a huge difference in knowing someone by their title and knowing them by their name. It appears that for 25 years Abraham had basically known "God" as just that, "the Deity," "the Man Upstairs." The relationship was authentic but a bit **impersonal**. In telling Abraham his name, God is giving him access to his heart.
3. Perhaps Abraham's relationship with God prior to this had been rather **mercenary**, calculating ("What's in it for me?"). God had promised Abraham land, children, blessings and international influence. And Abraham said, "Well, sure!" Now, God wants to explore the **motives** of Abraham's faith. Do you love me... or do you love my gifts? A. B. Simpson captures this dynamic powerfully in a hymn entitled *Himself* (1891).

*Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord;
Once it was the feeling, now it is his Word;
Once his gift I wanted, now, the Giver own;
Once I sought for healing, now Himself alone.*

*Once it was my working, his it hence shall be;
Once I tried to use him, now he uses me;
Once the pow'r I wanted, now the Mighty One;
Once for self I labored, nor for him alone.*

B. A new **identity**.

1. When God gives someone a new name, it is full of significance and indicates a fresh start and often a **transformation** of character. "Abram" (exalted father) becomes "Abraham" (father of a multitude). The real significance is perhaps not so much in the nuances of meaning as in the act of renaming itself. God is giving this old geezer the chance to start again by discovering how grace can still transform the heart.
2. Notice how Abraham's new identity is discovered only *after* he comes to a fresh understanding of God's identity. We **find ourselves** only when we find God! We find ourselves when we **lose ourselves** in him. We see these truths most dramatically at the burning bush when Moses screamed at God, "Who am I?" God's answer reveals the truth about every person's search for identity: "I will be with you" (see Ex 3:11–12).
3. Sarai also gets a new name (Gn 17:15) as will others in the unfolding story, most notably Jacob (see Gn 32:28).

C. A new **sense of humor**.

1. In Genesis 17:3, Abraham "fell on his face" in worship. But when he heard that his 90-year-old wife was going to become pregnant, he "fell on his face and

² It was at the burning bush many centuries later that God would finally reveal his personal name to Moses (Ex 3:13–15). God explained this situation in these words: "I am the LORD [Yahweh]. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty [El Shaddai], but by my name the Lord [Yahweh] I did not make myself known to them" (Ex 6:2-3).

laughed” (Gn 17:17). Apparently, the mental image of old Sarah waddling about the geriatric center pregnant was just too much, and he fell on the floor **doubled over** in laughter. I think he laughed so hard his dentures fell out.

2. Think about this. It has probably been 25 years since Abraham had had a really good belly laugh. Life had been **hard** with travel, kidnappings, famines, wars, and family conflict. Not to mention all the problems that come with old age: arthritis, back aches, trips to the pharmacy, doctors’ appointments, hearing aids, bifocals—But this thing God was proposing was **hilarious!** Just imagine it:
 - Sarah looking under her bifocals as she does a Google search on her smart phone shouting at her deaf husband: “Hey Abe, how do you spell gynecology?”
 - Abraham with his walker going to Kroger, asking the clerk where the pickles are.
 - Abe and Sarah attending birth training classes.
 - Sarah going to the nursery department after church to pick up baby Isaac when the lady in charge says, “Oh hello, are you Isaac’s great-grandmother?”
 - Abraham was perhaps the only man in history who paid his maternity bills with a Social Security check.
 - I picture Abe and Sarah on the front porch, rocking baby Isaac while Sarah nurses him. Abe winks, and then they both just fall over laughing.
3. Far from rebuking Abraham for his laughter, **God is laughing too**. Don’t tell me that God doesn’t have a sense of humor! I think all creation was laughing. So, God said, “Let’s give this baby a name that memorializes this new sense of humor forever. Let’s call him Isaac—‘he laughs.’”
4. One final note: don’t confuse Abraham’s laugh with **Sarah’s laugh**. Not all laughter is the same, not all humor is God honoring! God was pleased with Abraham’s laughter but he rebuked Sarah for hers.

They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” The LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.” (Genesis 18:9–15)

D. A new **sacramental symbol**.

1. Genesis 17:9–14 explains the meaning of **circumcision** and Genesis 17:23–27 tells how Abraham carried out the divine command. God had already made the covenant with Abraham (see Gn 15) but now he is establishing the **sign of the covenant**. A rainbow was the sign of the covenant with Noah, and now circumcision is a sign of the Abrahamic covenant. The sign does not produce

the reality, but it bears witness to it. Beware of confusing the sign with the **reality** to which it points.

2. Time forbids us to talk about the powerful meaning attached to the many elements involved in this sacred symbol:
 - Given to tiny **children** before they are able to decide for themselves.
 - Give to **males** only.
 - The place of the sign means it is related to sexuality, masculinity, and reproduction.
 - The mark is physical, literally in the flesh.
 - The mark is **permanent** and cannot be undone.
 - The sacrament of circumcision in the Old Covenant seems to parallel the sacrament of **baptism** in the New Covenant.
3. The most important thing to know about circumcision is that the *physical act* is little more than formalistic, meaningless religiosity unless it indicates a **spiritual reality** that has occurred in the heart. In what could be called the climactic statement of the entire Torah (Pentateuch), Moses puts the matter succinctly:

And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (Deuteronomy 30:6)

E. A new **commandment**.

1. “Be blameless” (Gn 17:1). The Hebrew word *tamim* means complete, whole, **undivided**, simple. The word is translated in the KJV as **perfect**. To be perfect is to have a heart wholly devoted to God, no inner division, no double-mindedness. God had commanded Abraham to leave his home, to travel to Canaan, to not be afraid, to be circumcised, etc. But this commandment to “be perfect” was new. What can it mean?
2. In chapter 16 we saw how Abraham, though right with God (justified by faith), was still **walking in the flesh** when he gave birth to Ishmael. God is telling Abraham that he is interested in more than belief and more than a right status with God. What God really wants is our **wholehearted** surrender and love—a heart to heart relationship.
3. The command includes the words “Walk before me,” meaning to walk in the presence of **my face**. God wants to be face-to-face in wholehearted intimacy with Abraham. This is what perfection is all about; not a perfection of performance but a **perfection of love**. “Purity of heart is to will one thing” (Kierkegaard).
4. But how does our heart become wholly his? That is what **entire sanctification** is all about. It is a command to **be** something more than to do something. God is preparing Abraham for his ultimate test, when he will determine whether his heart is wholly devoted to him. “Take you son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering . . .” (Gn 22:2).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the dangers Christians face after decades of believing the promises? How does Abraham encourage us to know how to respond to such dangers?
2. Do you agree with the author's opinion that Genesis 17 is an Old Testament depiction of the doctrine of entire sanctification? Why or why not?
3. Describe a time in your life when God gave you a new start, a fresh beginning? What spiritual impact did it have on your life?
4. Which of the five new beginnings spoke most powerfully to you (a new understanding of God, a new identity, a new sense of humor, a new sacramental symbol, or a new commandment)? Explain.
5. What can be done to keep sacraments from becoming dead rituals?

The God of Abraham Praise

By Thomas Olivers (1760); based on *The Yigdal* of Daniel ben Judah

*The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above;
Ancient of Everlasting Days, and God of Love;
Jehovah, great I AM! by earth and heaven confessed;
I bow and bless the sacred name forever blest.*

*The great I AM has sworn; I on this oath depend.
I shall, on eagle wings upborne, to heaven ascend.
I shall behold God's face; I shall God's power adore,
and sing the wonders of God's grace forevermore.*

*The God who reigns on high the great archangels sing,
and "Holy, holy, holy!" cry "Almighty King!
Who was, and is, the same, and evermore shall be:
Jehovah, Lord, the great I AM, we worship thee!"*

*The whole triumphant host give thanks to God on high;
"Hail, Father, Son and Holy Ghost!" they ever cry.
Hail, Abra'm's God and mine! I join the heav'nly lays;
all might and majesty are Thine, and endless praise.*



East of Eden

Finding Our Way Home
A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?

Genesis 18:1–33

I. Too Hard for God?

The key verse that unlocks the message of Genesis 18 is verse 14: “Is anything too hard [difficult, impossible, wonderful] for the Lord?” Notice that God himself is the one asking the question! This is not a **rhetorical** question. Though some may think the answer is obvious, think again.

A. *On the one hand*, the Bible underscores the **omnipotence** of God. In fact, in the previous chapter God had given a new revelation of himself to Abraham by saying “I am **God Almighty** [El Shaddai]” (Gn 17:1).

1. On numerous occasions the Bible emphasizes God’s absolute power over all creation:

- “I know that you can do **all things**, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2).
- “Our God is in heaven; he does **whatever** pleases him” (Ps 115:3 NIV).
- “He does according to **his will** among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” (Dan 4:35).
- “[God’s Son] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he **upholds the universe** by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3).

2. Note that Genesis 18:14 asks a question, but on at least three other occasions, the Bible puts these same words in the form of an emphatic statement: “Nothing is **too hard** for you” (Jer 32:17); “With God **all things** are possible” (Mt 19:26); “For nothing will be **impossible** with God” (Lk 1:37).

B. *But on the other hand*, the material in Genesis 18 suggests that there may be something El Shaddai cannot do! The chapter is divided into two sections, which dramatically places the question before us:

1. Genesis 18:1–15. Is God powerful enough to enable a 90-year-old woman like Sarah to get pregnant? The answer is **Yes!**

If God can cause a donkey to talk, make an axe head float, divide the Red Sea, make the sun stand still, heal the lame, cleanse the leper, and raise the dead—he can make an old, post-menopausal lady pregnant. Piece of cake!

2. Genesis 18:16–33. Is God powerful enough to save a wicked city like Sodom? The answer is **hmm, I’m not so sure.**

The challenge in answering this question comes in how we understand three important doctrines. Abraham must come to grips with these realities if he is to be a blessing to the nations and a true child of the covenant:

- a. What does **divine omnipotence** look like? When it comes to enabling Sarah to become pregnant, it looks one way. But when it comes to saving a city like Sodom, it looks very different. Can divine power save those who don’t want to be saved?

- b. How deep is the problem of **human sin**? When humans, made in the image of God, harden in unbelief and willful disobedience, is there a point beyond which they cannot be saved? A point of no return? Can human persons **resist** sovereign grace? *Is anything too hard for El Shaddai*? God himself seems to want to know—and apparently, he needs his friend Abraham to help him find the answer.
- c. What does **justice** look like in a fallen world? “Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gn 18:25). Is it just to slay the innocent with the righteous? Is it just to let the wicked remain unpunished? How can God save sinners and remain just? But how can he destroy sinners and maintain his love? This is the **divine dilemma**.

II. Read Genesis 18.

A. Part One—verses 1–15. Three visitors and an amazing promise.

1. “The Lord appeared to Abraham . . . and behold, three men were standing in front of him” (Gn 18:1–2). God visits Abraham in the form of **three persons**. Is it the Lord and two angels? Is it a threefold manifestation of God? Regardless of how we understand this **theophany**, the appearance is fully consistent with the orthodox teaching about God’s triune personhood.
2. Abraham and Sarah extend gracious **hospitality** to these three strangers. Did they realize who they were entertaining? “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained **angels** unawares” (Heb 13:2). “The spirit of hospitality consists in this, that in or with the stranger, we receive the Lord himself.”¹
3. These heavenly visitors are obviously on a mission. God is passing by Abraham’s tent headed toward **Sodom**. Why does he stop?
 - He wants to announce that in 12 months’ time, Sarah will have a baby boy!
 - He also wants to discuss with Abraham his plans for Sodom. He is looking for more than a meal. God is looking for an **intercessor**!
4. Sarah’s laugh is a cynical chuckle of **unbelief** (Gn 18:12). Unlike Abraham’s laugh earlier (see Gn 17:17) at the hilarity of grace that would enable an old couple to have a baby, Sarah’s laugh brings the Lord’s disapproval (Gn 18:13–15).

B. Part Two—verses 16–33. Abraham stands between God and Sodom.

1. The visitors leave Abraham’s tent and walk toward Sodom. God explains that the sin of Sodom is so serious that he himself has come down to **investigate**, to see if things are as bad as he has heard (Gn 18:20–21).
2. “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” (Gn 18:17). To whom is God asking this question? Apparently, to **himself**! God is talking to himself—the three visitors are discussing the matter among themselves. We see other examples in Scripture of when God talks to himself: Gn 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8. Those who are friends with God get close enough to him to be able to **overhear** what he says as he talks to himself.²

¹ Chambers, *Not Knowing Whither*, 885.

² As we will see in the closing section, being close enough to God to listen to his heart, to overhear conversations within the triune Godhead, is the *only* sure foundation for all intercessory prayer.

3. The *reason* God reveals to Abraham what he is about to do is interesting:
- Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and **all the nations** of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and **justice** . . . (Genesis 17–19)*

In other words, God is revealing his plans to destroy Sodom because if Abraham's family is indeed to be a blessing to the world, they absolutely must understand not only personal righteousness (see Gn 15:6) but also **social justice!** God is sharing with Abraham how a righteous and loving God deals with wicked cities (nations, communities, families, etc.) like Sodom. It is **crucial** that Abraham understand this!

4. The conversation between Abraham and God is passionate, bold, and **confrontational**. Abraham is in God's face, challenging the Judge of all the earth concerning the justice of destroying innocent people.³ More to the point, God is inviting Abraham to share the **responsibility** for what ultimately happens to Sodom. God is making Abraham his partner in determining the outcome.⁴
5. Abraham negotiates with God concerning the number of people in the righteous **remnant** necessary to save the city. What about 50? 45? 40? 30? 20? 10? Why did he stop at ten?
- Perhaps because there were 10 people in Lot's family (Lot and wife, his two unmarried sons, two unmarried daughters, and two married daughters and sons-in law. See Gn 19:8, 12, 14).
 - Perhaps because it was apparent to Abraham that the conversation was over. Verse 33 makes it clear that *God* (not Abraham) stopped the conversation.

But it is **dubious** whether Lot and his family could be considered a righteous remnant. God does indeed answer Abraham's prayer: he takes Lot out of Sodom, but there is no indication that Sodom has been taken out of Lot (see Gn 19:30–38).

III. Five Characteristics of Intercessory Prayer

There are other examples of intercession in the Bible: Samuel (1 Sm 7:5–9; 12:19–25), Elijah (1 Kgs 17:17–23), Elisha (2 Kgs 4:33; 6:15–20), Job (Job 42:7–9), Amos (Amos 7:1–6), and especially Moses (Ex 32:11–13, 31–34; Nm 12:11–13; 14:13–19). The ultimate illustration of intercession is, of course, **the cross** of Christ, where Jesus stood in the gap, between a holy God and human sinners, and did a work that preserved both divine justice and love. Looked at together with this first and most famous example of Abraham praying for Sodom, we can highlight five characteristics of the ministry of intercession:

³ See Jeremiah 12:1–4 for a similar passionate questioning of God's justice. And see Exodus 32:12 where Moses tells God to "repent" of the "evil" he is about to commit against the sinful Hebrew people.

⁴ In 1 Corinthians 6:2–3 Paul says, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" Most Christians in fact do *not* know this! But Abraham's descendants, like the patriarch, are invited by God himself to help determine the future of our wicked world.

A. The origin of intercessory prayer: **God**.

1. Though Abraham has a burden for Sodom, his compassion is *not* the origin of his intercession. God is the one who shared with Abraham his decision to destroy the city and **invited** him into a discussion **already occurring** within the triune Godhead (see Gn 18: 17, 20–22).
2. Intercessory prayer is not really man begging God to do (or not do) something. Rather it is God sharing his **inner turmoil** and pain with a **friend**. Only a friend can really stand in the gap because he/she knows intimately both the heart of God and the human crisis. Abraham was God's friend (Jas 2:23).
3. Interceding for others thus becomes not so much a personal pleading for God to have mercy but rather allowing God to borrow your heart so that he can **talk to himself** through you! Intercessory prayer thus can be understood as God talking to himself through the medium of a human heart.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26–27)

B. The nature of intercessory prayer: **wrestling with God**.

1. Most translations say that “Abraham still stood before the Lord” (Gn 18:22), but there is some manuscript evidence that it may have been *God* who was standing before Abraham.⁵ But whether Abraham is blocking God's path or God is blocking Abraham's, the message is the same: intercession is confrontational, conflictual, at times, **argumentative**. Would you spare the city for 50 righteous? What about 30? Etc.
2. Perhaps the most startling example of the messy, in-your-face nature of intercession is seen in Moses' intercession for the people of Israel after their sin with the golden calf. At times, the conversation sounds more like a **shouting match** than a prayer (Ex 32:7–14).
3. Intercession is not a **passive** acquiescence to the **preordained** will of God: “Thy will be done.” That is more Islamic than Christian. True intercession is wrestling with God: “Give me children, or I die!” (Gn 30:2). “I will not let you go unless you bless me” (Gn 32:26). Submission to the will of God comes **at the end** of intercession, not the beginning. “It is an insult to sink before God and say, ‘Thy will be done’ when there has been no intercession.”⁶

C. The power of intercessory prayer: causes God to **change his mind**.

1. When God announced his plans to destroy Sodom, Abraham might well have responded: “Well, since you have already told me your will to destroy the city, I suppose my role is to accept it. Thy will be done.” But no, Abraham boldly told God that he wanted him to do differently than he was planning to do. He was asking God to change his mind, to **repent**. “God instituted prayer to impart to his creatures the dignity of causality.”⁷

⁵ See discussion in Victor Hamilton's commentary, 23.

⁶ Chambers, *Not Knowing Whither*, 887.

⁷ Pascal, 320.

2. Though the Bible tells us that God does not change his mind/repent (Nm 23:19), there are several occasions where he, in fact, does!
 - Exodus 32:7–14. “And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people” (14).
 - 1 Samuel 15. “And the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel” (see verses 11, 29, 35).
 - Jonah 3. When God saw how the Ninevites repented from their evil ways, then he repented from his plan to destroy the city (9–10).
 3. In Genesis 18, God continues with his plan to destroy Sodom, but we learn that he was at least open to the possibility of a **different outcome**.
- D. The content of intercessory prayer: the **glory of God**.
1. Far from being a plea for some **personal agenda** he may have, Abraham’s prayer was foundationally a cry for God to vindicate his Name, his justice, his glory: “Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gn 18:25).
 2. True intercessory prayer is never ultimately about the petitioner’s private preferences. Rather it is about **God’s glory** among the nations, God’s promises being fulfilled, God’s reputation seen through our lives.
- E. The cost of intercessory prayer: complete **self-giving love**.
1. Abraham had already risked everything once when he saved Lot and his family (see Gn 14). Now he is **risking his relationship** with El Shaddai to stand in the gap for his nephew.
 2. Intercessory prayer is the **costliest** of all forms of prayer:
 - “But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of our book that you have written” (Ex 32:32).
 - “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom 9:2–3).
 3. François Fénelon said: “Intercessory prayer is only another name for **love**.”

IV. Conclusion

Now we can understand why intercessory prayer is so **rare**. But if God can find one intercessor, **just one**, then human history can be different.

And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. (Ezekiel 22:30)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What did you learn tonight about divine power (omnipotence)? What does it look like? How is it manifested?
2. What did you learn tonight about intercessory prayer? Have you ever known a true intercessor? Do you want to be one?
3. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

All Glory Be to Christ

By Dustin Kensrue
(sung to “Auld Lang Syne”)

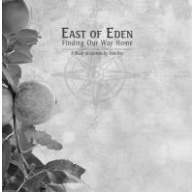
*Should nothing of our efforts stand, no legacy survive
Unless the Lord does raise the house, in vain its builders strive
To you who boast tomorrow's gain, tell me what is your life
A mist that vanishes at dawn, all glory be to Christ!*

Refrain:

*All glory be to Christ our king! All glory be to Christ!
His rule and reign will ever sing, all glory be to Christ!*

*His will be done, His kingdom come, on earth as is above
Who is Himself our daily bread, praise Him the Lord of love
Let living water satisfy, the thirsty without price
We'll take a cup of kindness yet, all glory be to Christ! [Refrain]*

*When on the day the great I Am, the faithful and the true
The Lamb who was for sinners slain is making all things new
Behold our God shall live with us and be our steadfast light
And we shall ere his people be, all glory be to Christ! [Refrain]*



East of Eden

Finding Our Way Home
A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

ABRAHAM HAD TWO SONS

Genesis 21:1–21; Galatians 4:21–31

I. Learn to Discern

A. *To Tell the Truth.*

In a popular TV game show of the 1960s, four celebrity panelists questioned three contestants, trying to determine which one was the “central character” whose unusual occupation or experience had been explained earlier in the show. The two imposters would lie, but the central character had to tell the truth. The panelists would vote for the contestant they thought was telling the truth, then the host would ask, “Will the real [person’s name] please stand up?” **Discerning the truth** was not easy!

B. Will the real child of the covenant please stand up?

Genesis tells a series of stories where the reader must discern which son/daughter is the true, authentic carrier of God’s work in the world. Discerning the true from the false is **harder than you think!** Cain or Abel? Ham or Shem or Japheth? Ishmael or Isaac? Jacob or Esau? Leah or Rachel? Joseph or Judah or one of the other brothers?

C. Ishmael and Isaac (Gn 21:1–21; Gal 4:21–31).

Abraham had **two** sons. Though they had much in common (similar DNA, behaviors, beliefs, resemblance, circumcision, etc.) don’t be fooled! Only one of these men was the true son of the covenant. Jesus told a parable about **weeds** and **wheat** growing together “until the harvest” when they would be finally separated; the weeds to be burned and the wheat to be gathered into the master’s barn (Mt 13:24–30). Discerning the difference between wheat and weeds is a matter of **life and death**.

D. Our Scripture tonight will educate us in how to **learn to discern**. Such wisdom will enable us to be better equipped to see the truth concerning:

- The ongoing global conflict between **Jews**, **Muslims**, and **Christians** (all claiming to be children of Abraham).
- The presence of such a wide diversity of people who call themselves **Christians** (Catholics, Orthodox, social justice, liberation theologians, gay activists, racists, NRA enthusiasts, nutritionists, etc.).
- Most importantly, to protect us from **self-deception**; to recognize the potential in our own warped and ego-centric hearts to pervert the grace of God and distort the meaning of what it means to be a child of the covenant. Being a child of Abraham is not enough! Don’t forget that Abraham had *two* sons.

II. Genesis 21:1–21

The Birth of Isaac	The Expulsion of Ishmael
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Isaac is born (Abraham is 100; Sarah is 90).• God keeps his promise (<i>hesed</i>)• “God has made laughter for me” (Sarah)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ishmael is a threat to Isaac• Sarah demands that Hagar and Ishmael be “cast out”• Abraham is grieved but God confirms Sarah’s decision• God blesses Ishmael too!
Gn 21:1–7	Gn 21:8–21

Notes of the text:

- A. Great is Thy faithfulness! It took **25 years** of waiting and a miracle touch on a post-menopausal woman, but God fulfilled his promise. Sarah had a baby! The Hebrew term that speaks of God's faithfulness is *hesed*. Though translated in a wide variety of ways (mercy, grace, lovingkindness), the basic meaning is "**covenant faithfulness**." God is utterly reliable. What he promises, he will do. His *hesed* endures forever (see Ps 136).

It is amazing that as important as this word is (occurring some three hundred times in all its forms in the Old Testament), there is no known cognate in any other Semitic language. It is as though the Hebrews have had to create a term for a concept that is unknown elsewhere in the world around them.¹

- B. Isaac is **circumcised** when he was eight days old (Gn 21:4). Ishmael had been circumcised earlier when he was 13 years old (Gn 17:25).
- C. Depending on the age of weaning, Ishmael was a teenager (15–17) and Isaac was an infant (2–4) when this story takes place.
- D. What was Ishmael doing that caused such a strong reaction from Sarah? The text says simply that he was "laughing" (ESV), "mocking" (NIV). Was he clowning, horsing around? Telling jokes? The Septuagint and Vulgate add the words "with her son" but this is not in the original Hebrew. If Ishmael was **innocently** "playing" with Isaac, then Sarah's anger was perhaps prompted by the presumed equality between the two boys, as if a lower caste slave child could be a peer to her son.

It seems more likely that Ishmael was **abusing** Isaac in some way: perhaps mocking, insulting, making fun, or bullying him. Some think there may even be a hint of sexual abuse between a teen and an infant sibling.² Paul interprets Ishmael's behavior toward Isaac as a form of "**persecution**" (see Gal 4:29).

- E. In what feels like an angry, ugly moment of self-protectiveness, Sarah demands that Hagar and Ishmael be "cast out" (Gn 21:10). Although her **motives** may have been wrong (jealousy, hatred, favoritism, etc.), her **instincts** were right—God, somewhat surprisingly, confirmed this! Ishmael's presence was a real threat to the work of God in the world.
- F. Abraham must **give up (sacrifice)** Ishmael. Losing this son is painful for Abraham. Note: before Abraham was ready for his final test where he was asked to sacrifice the child of promise (see Gn 22), he first had to sacrifice the child of flesh!

III. Galatians 4:21–31.

- A. Paul is writing to a church that is being influenced by a teaching that says that faith in Jesus Christ is **not enough**. One must *also* obey the commandments given by Moses on Mount Sinai in order to be in right relationship (justified) with God: circumcision, Sabbath, dietary rules, etc. In other words, to be a Christian one must obey certain rules, follow certain ceremonies, recite certain words, etc. There are

¹ Kinlaw, 172–173.

² The Hebrew word "play" used here sometimes has a definite sexual connotation (see Gn 26:8; 39:17; Ex 32:6).

litmus test issues that will show everyone whether you are a true child of the covenant or not. Faith alone is inadequate. It is faith plus **works**.

- B. Paul explains that he is using the story of Genesis 21 **allegorically**. That is, he is using an historical story to teach a spiritual truth, a deeper meaning. What happened to Hagar and Sarah long ago in Canaan is related to what is happening in the Galatian church centuries later—and in our lives in America today. This is a **remarkable** way to interpret the Old Testament!³
- C. As a theologically trained pharisee, Paul had been taught to **begin** his understanding of how to be right with God (justified) by starting with Moses and the Law (Torah) at **Mount Sinai**. Being right with God means we must keep the rules. Isn't this self-evident? But after meeting Jesus on the Damascus Road, Paul experienced a revolution in the way he read the Bible. In **rereading** the Old Testament, he was shocked to learn from the Torah itself, that Abraham was in a right relationship with God 430 years *before* the Law was even given on Sinai (see Gal 3:16–18). In rereading the Old Testament, Paul realized that he had **misunderstood** the message. Being right with God had always been a matter of faith—and faith alone. Abraham was Exhibit A (see Gn 15:6, etc.).
- D. Paul is not contrasting Christians with Jews. His contrast is between followers of Jesus Christ who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit, those under the Law and those under grace. To drive his point home, Paul develops a **contrast** between Hagar and Sarah. These women represent two very different ways to understand how we are to be in a relationship with God. One is by works and the other is by grace.

Under the Law	Under Grace
Hagar—the slave	Sarah—the wife
Ishmael	Isaac
Born according to the flesh	Born according to the Spirit
Natural life	Supernatural life
Old Covenant	New Covenant
Sinai—the present Jerusalem	The Jerusalem above
Bondage	Freedom
Walks in the flesh	Walks in the Spirit
The Law	The Promise
Works	Faith
Persecutor	Persecuted
Will be cast out	Received the inheritance

³ We see a similar interpretive (hermeneutical) approach in 1 Corinthians 10:1–13 where Paul twice says that these Old Testament stories are “examples” (vv. 6, 11). The Greek word is *typos* (types). Christians today miss a huge blessing when they do not learn to read the Old Testament as Paul did. “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom 15:4).

IV. Applying Paul's Sermon

A. **Listen** more closely to the Old Testament

"Tell me . . . do you not listen to the law?" (Gal 4:21). "For it is written . . ." (Gal 4:27 where he quotes Isa 54:1). Paul is not inventing new ideas. He is simply reading the Old Testament in a new way.⁴

Application: Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit so that you can open my eyes to behold the deeper meaning in your inspired Word.

B. Beware of **falling back** into slavery again.

- "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal 3:3).
- "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain" (Gal 4:9).
- "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are **severed** from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have **fallen** away from grace. . . . You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (Gal 5:1-4, 7).

Application: Have I become attached and influenced by another "mother." Have I begun to think that my behavior, actions, religious disciplines, ceremonies or correctness of doctrine make me right with God? Have I begun to judge others as if this were so? Have I permitted litmus test issues to determine what it means to be right with God?

C. **Walk** by the Spirit.

*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.... If we live by the Spirit, let us also **keep in step** with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16-25)*

Application: When I look at the list of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, which list best characterizes my life? What can I do to ensure that the fruit of the Spirit becomes manifest in my life?

⁴ Think of the many occasions in which Jesus used irony with the pharisees (PhDs in Biblical Studies) by saying, "Haven't you read . . . ?" (Mt 12:3; 19:4; 21:42; etc.).

D. **Crucify** the flesh

Only a radical response will be adequate when one discovers that one has slipped back under the tyranny of the law and allowed Hagar to be one's mother! "**Cast out** the slave woman and her son . . ." (Gal 4:30).

- "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).
- "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24).
- "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14).

Application: Can I point to a time in my life when the fleshly part of me (selfish ambition, ego-centricism, the desire to get my own way) has been dealt a death blow? If the works of the flesh are still manifest in my life, is it not time to ask God for a radical cure?

E. Keep the **main thing** the main thing.

- "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only **faith working through love**" (Gal 5:6).
- "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall **love your neighbor** as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another" (Gal 5:13–15).
- "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a **new creation**. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal 6:15–16).

Application: Have I forgotten that faith working through love is what the gospel is all about? Have I neglected to love my neighbor? Do I read the Bible in a way that causes me to miss the fact that love (*agape*) is the point of it all?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you currently read the Old Testament and listen to its stories? Has this lesson made you think differently about the Old Testament?
2. Tell a story from your own life experience when it was very difficult to discern the true children of God from the false. What did you learn?
3. Describe a Christian situation you have known that had reverted to being "under law" more than "under grace." What happened?
4. In your Christian community, are there certain "litmus test" issues that are understood to distinguish those who are "in" from those who are "out"? Talk about this.
5. Did this lesson help you to discern any places in your own life where you are walking according to the flesh? What do you plan to do about it?

Not Under Law, But Under Grace

By Thomas O. Chisholm
(sung to the tune of "He Leadeth Me")

*I well remember when I saw
Myself condemned before the law,
Heard Sinai's awful thunders roll,
While fear possessed my trembling soul.*

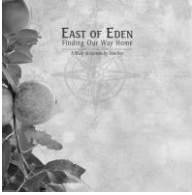
*Refrain:
"Not under law," that could not save,
But doomed me to a hopeless grave;
"But under grace," where I am free
Through Jesus Christ who died for me.*

*'Twas then in sore dismay I turned,
And sought the mercy I had spurned;
'Twas then, by faith, mine eyes could see
Christ dying on the Cross for me. [Refrain]*

*That rapturous hour I'll ne'er forget,
When God forgave me all my debt,
And, what the law could ne'er have done,
His grace accomplished by His Son. [Refrain]*

*No more the threatening law I dread,
But I have constant peace instead.
And live, through Him who took my place,
"Not under law but under grace." [Refrain]*

*No condemnation now have I,
Unclouded sunshine fills my sky;
Mine is a happy dwelling place,
"Not under law but under grace." [Refrain]*



East of Eden

Finding Our Way Home

A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

ABRAHAM'S FINAL EXAM

Genesis 22:1–19

I. The most sacred of all mountains

A. Abraham, Abraham! (Gn 22:11).

When God calls someone's name **twice**, you know something out of the ordinary is taking place!

- *Jacob, Jacob* (Gn 46:2). “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt . . .” (v. 3).
- *Moses, Moses* (Ex 3:4). “Take your sandals off your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (v. 5).
- *Samuel, Samuel* (1 Sm 3:10). “I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the ears of everyone who hears it will tingle” (v. 11).
- *Simon, Simon*. “Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat” (Lk 22:31).
- *Jerusalem, Jerusalem* (Mt 23:37). “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate” (Mt 23:37–38).
- *Saul, Saul*. “Why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4).
- *Martha, Martha*. “You are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary . . .” (Lk 10:41–42).
- *Eloi, Eloi*. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34).

B. Few chapters in the Bible equal Genesis 22 in importance. For agnostics and cynics, it confirms their worst fears: God is cruel, capricious, egotistical, irrational, and guilty of child abuse. But for those who have eyes to see, this chapter is one of the clearest presentations of **the Gospel** ever written.¹ Here, we are on **holy ground**.

1. The **place** is holy. Mount Moriah (and the region around it) is uninhabited. But centuries later, this will be the site of **Solomon's Temple** in Jerusalem (see 2 Chron 3:1). Far more than Mount Sinai, *this mountain* (the place of worship, sacrifice, substitution, the lamb) will be the most holy place for the people of God.
2. The **persons** are holy. Abraham and Isaac are patriarchs for the people of God. Their beliefs and actions set the standard for what it means to be a child of the covenant.
3. The **action** is holy. This chapter, set at the beginning of the story of salvation told in the Bible, introduces us to concepts that are foundational to spiritual wholeness: faith, sacrifice, worship, substitution, parenting (father/son relationship).

¹ We have already seen how Paul used the story of Hagar and Sarah (Gn 21) to teach about two covenants (works and faith, law and grace, flesh and Spirit) in Galatians 4:21–31. We are learning that many Old Testament stories are types (symbols, allegories) of realities that are only understood fully through the revelation of God we get in the New Testament (the incarnation, atonement, resurrection, etc.).

II. Brief commentary on the text.

A. This is a **test** (Gn 22:1).

1. It is important to distinguish between a “test” and a “**temptation**.” The purpose of a temptation is sinister: to make one stumble and fall. Satan is the tempter (Rv 12:9), not God (Jam 1:13).
2. God often “tests” (proves, tries, disciplines, educates) his children.² He does this, not because he is sadistic, but to **reveal** their true character, to **burn away** what is impure, to **prepare** them for the journey ahead.
3. The text is clear that God is testing the depth of Abraham’s **trust**: “Now I know that you fear [have awe, reverence] God” (Gn 22:12). Although Abraham had already trusted God to the extent that he left everything and stepped out into the unknown in obedience, he had **never** been tested like this!

B. Each word of Genesis 22:2 seems intended to press home the reality, to drive deeper the knife.

- *Your son*—the one you waited for 25 years; the miracle gift of God.
- *Your only son*—Ishmael is not your (real) son. You have only one!
- *Isaac*—laughter.
- *Whom you love*. This is the first time the word “love” occurs in the Bible!

C. “And offer him as a *burnt offering . . .*” (Gn 22:2). The Hebrew term *olah* is the origin of the English word “**holocaust**.” Leviticus 1:3ff. explains that this offering is **totally consumed** by flames on the altar; it is literally turned into smoke and ashes. Leon Kass formulates God’s question to Abraham in these terms:

*Will you walk reverently and wholeheartedly before God even if it means sacrificing all benefits promised for such conduct? Do you fear and revere God more than you love your son—and through him, your great nation, great name, and great prosperity?*³

D. When God announced his plans to destroy Sodom, Abraham **pleaded** with God to reconsider (see Gn 18:16–33). But here, Abraham says nothing. He rises early, saddles his donkey, and promptly obeys. Apparently, he knew that on this matter, there was to be no discussion. According to Hebrews 11:17–19, he “considered that God was able even to **raise him** from the dead . . .”

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. —The Serenity Prayer

E. God stops Abraham from killing his son. Though we know that God is adamantly opposed to child sacrifice,⁴ he lets the drama play out to the last second before he intervenes. As a substitute for Isaac, God provides a **lamb**; technically, God provides a **ram**—the *father* of a lamb (Gn 22:7–8, 13–14). Apparently, the ram had been there

² A rich study awaits those who make the effort to search the many occasions in Scripture when God tests his children. For example, see Ex 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Dt 8:2; Jgs 3:1–4; 2 Chr 32:31; 1 Cor 10:13; Jas 1:2–3; 1 Pt 1:6–76.

³ Kass, 337.

⁴ The Bible is categoric in its abhorrence of child sacrifice and announces divine judgement on the surrounding nations where such abominable deeds were practiced. See for example, Lv 18:21; 20:1–5; Jer 7:30–31.

all along, but Abraham was able to see it only **after** he had come to a point of full surrender. Abraham names the place *Yahweh-jireh* (the Lord will provide).

- F. Once Abraham has passed the test, God renews the covenant promises (Gn 22:15–19). God will bless Abraham, give him innumerable descendants and make him a blessing to the nations. But this time God adds something new. He confirms the covenant promise with an **oath**. “By myself I have sworn . . .”

*For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” . . . For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things (the **promise** and the **oath**), in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. (Hebrews 6:13–18)*

III. A Text for Meditation

Though I love to preach hard-hitting sermons on full surrender from Genesis 22 (Is your all on the altar?), I feel constrained to take a more **contemplative** approach in this study. Let's prayerfully absorb the deep meaning of this story from the perspective of the three main characters.

- A. *Abraham*. Put yourself in his sandals and imagine what it must have been like.
1. Think again on Abraham's walk of faith prior to this moment; how he had left **everything**, trusting in the promises of God—for 30–40 years!
 2. Think again of how Abraham had fathered **Ishmael** (the child of flesh)—how he loved him and then was forced to let him go.
 3. Think of the mind-boggling, breath-taking, heart-stopping command that came from God: *Take your **only son**, the one you love so much, the one named Laughter, and make a holocaust of him; turn him to smoke and ashes!*

Describe your reaction to this command (feelings, questions, emotions):

Abraham obeyed, he believed, he put his all on the altar. He thus became a hero of the faith and **set the standard** once and for all for what it means to believe in God.

Abraham was great with that power whose strength is powerlessness, great in that wisdom whose secret is folly, great in that hope whose outward form is insanity, great in that love which is hatred of self . . . I cannot understand Abraham, I can only admire him.⁵

- B. *Isaac*. It is hard to be a father, but it is also hard to be a son. Put yourself in Isaac's sandals and imagine what it must have been like.
1. Isaac was **old enough** (aged 18–30) to understand what was happening and to either run away or resist (Abraham was an old man, perhaps 130).

⁵ Kierkegaard, 50, 136.

2. Isaac was no **victim**. He was a **willing** sacrifice.
3. This passage is not just about what it means to be a father. Just as importantly, it is about what it means to be a son. Is this what the sacrament of **circumcision** was all about?
4. In answer to his question about the lamb, Abraham said, "**God** will provide a lamb" (Gn 12:8). Isaac would always remember that his father taught him to put his trust *not* in his father, but in the Lord!
5. Isaac learned an amazing lesson: though his father loved him with passionate devotion, he loved God **more**!
6. Isaac is just as much a hero of the faith in this chapter as is his father.

Imagine yourself as Isaac during the three day walk with Abraham to Moriah. What are you thinking? What are you feeling?

- C. *The Lord*. What kind of God would give a test like this? Is he cruel? capricious? irrational? Or is there more going on than is going on?
1. It is impossible to miss the foreshadowing of **Calvary** in the drama played out on the neighboring mountain. Abraham and Isaac are not the only Father/Son team involved.
 - a. Isaac **carried the wood** for the sacrifice up the mountain (Gn 22:6; see Jn 19:17).
 - b. When John the Baptist introduced Jesus as "the **Lamb of God**" (Jn 1:29), he was surely thinking of Genesis 22.
 - c. The **loving relationship** between Father and Son as they work in unison is a profound picture into the triune purposes of God in the atonement worked out on the cross.
 2. Elie Wiesel (Jewish holocaust survivor and author) writes with perhaps greater wisdom than he knows concerning Genesis 22:

*And so the father and the son walked away together—the one to bind and the other to be bound, the one to slaughter and the other to be slaughtered—sharing the same allegiance to the same God, responding to the same call. The sacrifice was to be their joint offering; father and son had never before been so close.*⁶
 3. Better yet, words from the New Testament help us to understand how Mount Calvary and Mount Moriah go together:
 - a. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his **only Son**, that whoever believe in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).
 - b. "He who did not spare his own Son but **gave him up** for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom 8:32).

⁶ Wiesel, 88.

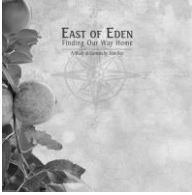
- c. "For this reason the Father loves me, because **I lay down my life** that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn 10:17–18).
 - d. "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mk 14:36).
 - e. "Although he was a son, he **learned obedience** through what he suffered" (Heb 5:8).
4. A sermon by Henry Clay Morrison (1857–1942), as told by Dennis Kinlaw, gives a poignant description of what is really going on in Genesis 22.

The Triune God was looking on at the sacrifice of Isaac. One member of the Godhead said to another one, "This is not the last time we're going to be on this mountain, is it?" And the First Person of the blessed Trinity said, "No, it will be about two thousand years and we will be back, right here." And the Second Person of the blessed Trinity said to the First Person, "And when we come back next time, it's not going to one of them on that altar, is it?" And the First Person of the blessed Trinity said, "No, when we come back the next time it won't be one of them—it will be one of Us." And then the Second Person of the blessed Trinity said to the First, "And when they put me on that altar of sacrifice, are you going to say, "Stop, don't touch the lad?" And the Father said, "No. We never ask them to do in symbol what we haven't been willing to do in reality."⁷

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. With which character do you more identify: Abraham or Isaac? Is God asking you to surrender something you love? Or perhaps do you feel that *you* are the one being sacrificed?
2. Is your all on the altar? Does God have you in some kind of a "test" to make sure that you do indeed come to a place of full surrender?
3. How important is it for children to understand that though their parents love them dearly, they love God more?
4. What is the meaning of the ceremony at church when children are dedicated to the Lord?
5. Describe the loving unity of the Father and the Son as one is the Offeror and the other is the Offering. Which one suffers the most? How does this act of worship make possible the salvation of the world?

⁷ Kinlaw, 190.



East of Eden

Finding Our Way Home
A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

Genesis 24

Abraham's story is about to end. He is old and approaching death. But before his final exit, two matters of vital importance must be treated: Sarah must be **buried**, and Isaac must be **married**. This study will focus primarily on the second.

- I. Sarah's death and burial (Genesis 23; read verses 1–4)
 - A. Beyond causing great grief, Sarah's death posed two very important questions for Abraham:
 - What to do with the **body**? (the question of burial customs)
 - **Where** should she be buried? (the question of the Promised Land)
 - B. Though the passage is more descriptive than **prescriptive**, Abraham's treatment of Sarah's dead body laid the foundation for how God's people handle **death**. In marked contrast to the customs of other nations, Abraham's actions were a simple yet powerful testimony that has had a profound influence on human history.
 1. Sarah was not:
 - a. **Mummified** as in Egypt (an attempt to deny the finality of death).
 - b. **Cremated** as in Hinduism (treating the body as inconsequential).
 - c. Placed in an impressive stone **monument** or mausoleum (elevating her in death to almost divine status).
 2. Rather, Sarah was laid bodily to rest in the ground, in a cave. Her body was treated with **respect** while recognizing the **finality** of death ("for you are dust, and to dust you shall return"—Gn 3:19). These simple gestures had a profound influence on all of Abraham's children in several important ways:
 - a. Our response to death is markedly **different** from Canaanites, Egyptians, etc.
 - b. We show respect for the body: neither degrading it as if it were a worthless shell nor elevating it as divine. Pope John Paul's influential "**Theology of the Body**" is a logical outgrowth of this kind of worldview.
 - c. Abraham's treatment of Sarah's dead body also helped lay the foundation for the New Testament teaching about the **resurrection of the body**. While many religions believe in *the immortality of the soul*, the gospel of Jesus proclaims the resurrection of the body!
 - C. Though God had promised all of Canaan to Abraham, he owned nothing. He was a "sojourner and a foreigner" (Gn 23:4). The purchase of the cave of Machpelah is of supreme importance because it is his only **official claim** to the Promised Land. Note well that the conquest of Canaan begins with a place to die, a **grave**! For 400 years, this piece of real estate will be the sole legal claim to Canaan.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:24)

II. A wife for Isaac (Genesis 24; read verses 1–4, 7, 10–15, 50–51, 62–67)

- A. This is the **longest** chapter in Genesis. More space is devoted to the love story of Isaac and Rebekah than to the creation of the world! Everyone loves a romance, and this is one of the greatest love stories in history.
- B. This is the first of three stories in the Pentateuch about a man meeting a woman at a well. Each story is **pregnant** with significance: Isaac and Rebekah (Gn 24), Jacob and Rachel (Gn 29:1–14), and Moses and Zipporah (Ex. 2:15–21). Note the common themes in these stories:
 - 1. A man visits a **foreign land** and meets a woman at a well.
 - 2. The woman runs home to **tell her family** and friends about the man she met.
 - 3. The encounter leads to a **marriage** that changes history.

Do the Scriptures hint at this reality when we read of how **Jesus** met a woman at the well (Jn 4)? Christ is looking for his bride!

- C. If ever there was a marriage made in heaven, this is it! Though the servant uses some unconventional methods for discerning the divine will,¹ the **providential** hand of God is clear. Even Laban recognized that “this thing has come from the Lord” (Gn 24:50).
- D. Before he dies, Abraham knows that finding the right wife for his son is **indispensable**. All the covenant promises will be null and void if the faith is not passed on to the next generation. Thus, the right wife must be found, children must be born, and the covenant must be established with children, grandchildren, etc.

III. Marriage in Genesis

Genesis 24 underscores the **supreme importance** of marriage, both in God’s global plan for human history and his individual plan for you and for me. Though some are called to **singleness**, this must not obscure the fact that God wants to accomplish his purposes for Planet Earth primarily both in and through families. In twenty-first century America, the battle for the family is perhaps the greatest battle we face!

- A. The definition of marriage.
 - 1. **One man and one woman** in a forever covenant of love (Gn 1–2). Abraham lived in a world where **sexual perversity** was the norm (Sodom, etc.). American culture, in a similar manner, is working to normalize the abnormal, to legitimize the illegitimate. The biblical picture of marriage has suddenly become controversial. Though the Supreme Court may pretend there are alternative definitions, God has fixed forever the definition of marriage.
 - 2. *The basic **building block** of civilization.* Note that in the Garden of Eden there is no **government** and not even a **church**. There is only a family. When the family fails, the substitutes rush in to fill the vacuum (big government, social programs, etc.). As the family withers, the state grows.
 - 3. *The **culmination** of human history.* Not only does human history begin with a wedding, it ends with one! Revelation 19–22 tells us that after the Great Prostitute, Babylon, has been destroyed, the New Jerusalem will appear

¹ In asking God for a “sign” (see Gn 24:12–14), the servant reminds us of Gideon’s famous “fleece” (Jdg 6:36–40). Though questionable as a normal method for discerning God’s will, asking for such signs has a long history—even in the Bible.

“prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rv 21:2). Christ, the Groom, will marry his bride, **the Church**. And they will live happily ever after!

B. The purpose of marriage.

1. **Sanctification.** God is more interested in our holiness than in our happiness. Marriage/family is the primary tool he uses to accomplish this purpose. Marriage is a union of **differences**: the two become one. Male and female living together is a recipe for conflict and stress—by definition! A union of sameness (homosexual “marriage”) may have less conflict, but it is barren. Thus, every husband and wife are **incompatible**.² They complete what is lacking in each other. If what you want out of life is tranquility and the absence of conflict, I certainly don’t recommend marriage!
2. **Multiplication.** The first commandment: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth.” Marriage is more than a romance between two lovers. The two become one so that the one can become three... four... five... etc. But God is interested in more than the quantity of children. He is interested in their **quality**!
 - “For I have chosen him [Abraham], so that he will **direct** his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just . . .” (Gn 18:19).
 - “is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? **Godly offspring**. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth” (Mal 2:14–15).
3. **Illustration.** It was “not good” for Adam to be alone (Gn 2:18) because, alone, he could not **reflect the image** of the triune God who had created him (see Gn 1:26—“Let us make man in our image”). God is three, yet one. In marriage, we are two, yet one. When a couple (and family) learn how to be separate persons united by love, the world gets a picture of what God is like. When Paul gives his most profound teaching on marriage, he concludes: “This is a profound mystery, but I’m talking about **Christ and the church**” (Eph 5:32 NIV).

C. The reality of marriage. How it works (or doesn’t).

1. *Marry the **right person**.* Genesis 24 reminds us of the importance of not marrying outside the faith! “You will not take a wife for my son from the Canaanites” (Gn 24:3). “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14). The Bible does *not* prescribe a **formula** for how to find the right person (whether by dating, courtship, arranged marriages, etc.).³ Apparently, there is freedom to use methods that are culturally appropriate. But the warning against marriage to an unbeliever is absolute and transcultural!
2. *Which comes first: **love** or **marriage**?* “Isaac took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her” (Gn 24:67). Many might think this is backwards.

² Even secular philosophers have understood this principle. For example, Socrates said, “By all means marry. If you get a good wife, you’ll be happy. If you get a bad one, you’ll become a philosopher.”

³ In Scripture, sometimes parents choose a wife for their son (Gn 21:21; 38:6). Sometimes parents choose a husband for their daughter (Ruth 3:1–2; 1 Sm 18:21). Sometimes a man chooses his own wife and then seeks parental approval (Gn 34:4–8; Jdg 14:2). Sometimes a woman is given a choice in the matter (Gn 24:58). Sometimes children marry against their parents’ wishes in open rebellion (Gn 26:34–35; 28:6–9).

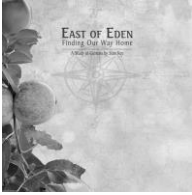
Shouldn't it say, "Isaac loved Rebekah, and he took her to become his wife." Do we marry the one we love? Or do we love the one we marry?

When "love" is understood as *eros* rather than *agape*, marriage is on a very shaky foundation. Chip Ingram describes what he calls the "Hollywood Formula" for a successful marriage. There are four steps:

- Step 1. Find the right person.
 - Step 2. Fall in love.
 - Step 3. Fix all your hopes and dreams on this person.
 - Step 4. If failure occurs, repeat steps 1, 2, and 3.
3. *Even marriages made in heaven **struggle** to survive.* Though Isaac and Rebekah clearly marry according to the will of God, their marriage (as we will soon see) will be characterized by dysfunction and strife. This is true for **every couple** in Genesis. Just because God leads two people to be married doesn't mean they won't struggle to make it work!
 4. *The last **best hope**.* Though the Bible does not hide the struggles and pains of married life and the drama and disappointments of raising a family, it continues to affirm in the strongest manner possible that the family is the last and best hope for life on Planet Earth!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Today, is it obvious to you that Christians have a different attitude toward death and dying than do non-Christians? Are our burial practices different? Is this important?
2. Have you ever asked God for a "sign" in trying to determine his will? What happened? What did you learn?
3. How does marriage help to produce holiness? How does family life work to help sanctify the family members?
4. Which comes first: love or marriage?
5. Why is our culture so confused about marriage? What should you do about it?



East of Eden

Finding Our Way Home

A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

THE FAMILY TREE

Genesis 26

I. It Is Well, Well, Well with My Soul—Genesis 26

A. Examine the text

1. The Lord appears to Isaac (Gn 26:1–5).
 - a. Famine in Canaan—Don't go to Egypt (like your **daddy** did).
 - b. God renews the covenant he had made with Isaac's **daddy**.
 - c. God blesses Isaac because of his **daddy's** obedience
2. Out of fear, Isaac tells the Philistines that Rebekah is his **sister** (Gn 26:6–11).

His daddy had pulled this stunt **twice** before: with Pharaoh in Egypt (Gn 12:10–20) and with Abimelech¹ in Gerar (Gn 20:1–17). Though there are obvious differences in the three incidents, the similarities are striking: a patriarch visits a pagan land and, to protect himself, pretends his wife is his sister; this invites God's judgment on the land and brings a strong moral rebuke from the pagan king.
3. Isaac prospers and the Philistines become jealous (Gn 26:12–22).
 - a. Isaac's prosperity is credited to the **Lord's blessing**, not to his business savvy.
 - b. **Jealousy** caused the Philistines to plug up with dirt the wells² that Abraham had dug earlier and then tell Isaac to leave their territory.
 - c. Isaac **redigs** the wells his daddy had dug and names them the same names.
 - d. In his book entitled **Revival** (Crossway, 1987), Martyn Lloyd-Jones uses Genesis 26:17–18 as a text to call God's people to clear out the "Philistine" rubbish and drink again from the living water that Father Abraham made possible. See pages 21–91.
4. God appears again to Isaac at Beersheba (Gn 26:23–25). "I am the God of Abraham your **father**. . . ." Isaac responds by building an **altar** (his first and only altar) and digging another well.
5. Abimelech and Isaac make a **covenant** (Gn 26:26–33).
 - a. "We see plainly that the Lord is with you . . ." (Gn 26:28).³

¹ Both Abraham (Gn 20) and Isaac (Gn 26) tell a pagan king named Abimelech that their wife is their sister. The two incidents are about 75 years apart, so it is unlikely the two Abimelechs are the same person. It could be a father and son (or grandson) with the same name or just evidence of the custom of kings having the same name.

² In the Middle East, then as now, a well was a sign of prosperity and blessing. Rather than taking by force the wells that Abraham had dug, envy and jealousy caused the Philistines to stupidly fill them in with dirt—an act of sabotage (terrorism?) that hurt them as much as it hurt the Hebrews.

³ Other examples of pagans who recognized the blessing of God on Israel include: Jethro (Ex 18:10–11), Rahab (Jos 2:9–11), and Namann (2 Kgs 5:15).

- b. The similarities between this covenant and the one Abraham (Isaac's daddy) made with an earlier Abimelech (and Phicol) at Beersheba are striking (see Gn 21:22–34).
- B. Department of Redundancy Department
1. Isaac's life seems like an **echo** of his father's life: the same issues (famine), temptations (go to Egypt, say wife is sister), wells, neighbors (Abimelech), and locations (Beersheba).
 2. The text seems to underscore the reality that all Isaac's blessings are the result of his **daddy's** faithful obedience and that the God he worships is his **daddy's** God (second-hand faith?).
 3. It's tough being **the son** of a great man, so that your **identity** is shaped by someone else. Isaac's story is sandwiched between Abraham (14 chapters) and Jacob (26 chapters). Genesis 26 is the single chapter that tells us about Isaac's contribution to history. His story is short and **unspectacular**. While God told Abraham to "Go!" (Gn 12:1–3), he told Isaac to "Stay!" (Gn 26:2). While other patriarchs took exciting journeys, fought important battles, and accomplished great deeds, Isaac basically stayed home and dug wells. Like an acorn that falls from a mighty oak tree, his life was lived in the **shadow** of his father Abraham. It's hard to find a great man who had a great son.

II. The Three Chairs

A. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob⁴

Genesis gives a surprising amount of information about these three men, the patriarchs. Apparently, God wants us to think deeply about what happens to the faith when it gets **passed/transmitted** from one generation to the next. In a relay race, the key moment is when the baton is passed from one runner to the next.

B. Father Abraham (Gn 12–25).

1. General characteristics of a first-generation believer:
 - a. Knows firsthand the reality of raw **paganism** and idolatry.
 - b. Has a **conversion** that is clear and dramatic.
 - c. Knows God; has a personal **relationship** with him.
 - d. Has a faith that is vibrant, bold, **passionate**.
 - e. Whole-hearted, full commitment, total consecration, **absolute surrender**.
 - f. Thinks **everyone** should know God.
2. Abraham's life is characterized by **altars**: at Shechem (Gn 12:6–7), at Bethel (Gn 12:8), at Hebron (Gn 13:14–18), and at Moriah (Gn 22:1–2, 9). An altar is a place of **sacrifice**, thanksgiving, worship, and **communion** with God.

C. Isaac—the son (Gn 21–35, especially chapter 26).

1. General characteristics of a second-generation believer:

⁴ It is important to note how Genesis includes the story of Joseph (chapters 37–50)—a fourth chair. Though not one of the three patriarchs, Joseph illustrates how a fourth-generation believer rediscovers the first-generation passion for God and commitment to God's will that his great-grandfather knew.

- a. Born into a family where prayer, faith, Scripture, and church are the **norm**.
 - b. Paganism is an “outside” evil, to be avoided at all costs—and we have family **rules**, practices, and rites to follow so that we don’t fall back into the evil of worldliness.
 - c. Our family is **blessed** in every way. Daddy is not a drunkard or a gambler. He works hard and loves his family. And God has blessed us materially.
 - d. We practice our faith and live moral lives because that is what our **parents** taught us to do. Tradition. We may not be passionate about God but we do worship and respect him.
2. Isaac’s life is characterized by **wells**: at Esek, Sitnah, Rehoboth, and Beersheba (Gn 26:17–25, 32). A well is a place of prosperity, a place where the blessings of life can be **enjoyed**.
- D. Jacob—the grandson (Gn 25–50).
1. General characteristics of a third-generation believer:
 - a. Detecting the lukewarm, double-minded, respectable, predictable religion of his father, he fails to see the vital importance of faith in God and concludes it is a “**department**” of life (similar perhaps to “exercise,” “civil involvement,” “religion”; useful for emergencies).
 - b. This generation finds it easy to **rebel** and reject the teachings of their parents and grandparents. They can quickly slip into practices and behaviors that would be **shocking** to their grandparents: immorality, alternate lifestyles, marrying outside the faith, worldliness, selfish ambition, etc.
 2. Jacob’s life is characterized by **pillars**: at Bethel to commemorate his dream of the stairway to heaven (Gn 28:16–22; 35:9–15), at Mizpah/Galeed to commemorate his covenant with Laban (Gn 31:43–49), and at Bethlehem to mark the grave of Rachel (Gn 35:16–20). A pillar resembles an altar and has an air of religiosity, but it has a totally different purpose. Like a shrine, memorial, or **historical marker**, a pillar commemorates something that happened to our ancestors long ago.
- E. Fill in the chart on page 36.

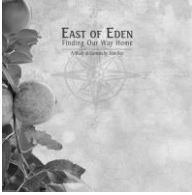
III. Make It Personal

- A. Think about your own family tree: In which chair do you sit?
- As with Goldilocks, only one chair is “just right”—the **first-generation** kind of relationship with God. Although the **drift** toward spiritual mediocrity is a constant pull toward the kind of lukewarm faith that Jesus condemns (Rv 3:16), this downward trend is not inevitable. It can be resisted! We don’t have to wait until a “Joseph generation” arises to rediscover **Abrahamic faith**.
- B. Think about your children (and, if you have them, grandchildren). As a result of this study, how will your prayers for them be different?

The Three Chairs

*So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation,
your power to all those to come. (Psalm 71:18)*

	First Generation	Second Generation	Third Generation
Person	Abraham	Isaac	Jacob
Symbol	Altar	<u>Well</u>	<u>Pillar</u>
God	Relationship	<u>Religion</u>	<u>Duty</u>
Heart	Whole-hearted	<u>Half-hearted</u>	<u>Hard-hearted</u>
Character	Holy	<u>Moral/Nice</u>	<u>Selfish</u>
Passion	Seeks the blessing	<u>Enjoys the blessing</u>	<u>Demands the blessing</u>
Experience	Knows God	<u>Knows about God</u>	<u>Doesn't know God</u>
Focus	To please God	<u>To please others</u>	<u>To please self</u>
World	Lives for other world	<u>Lives in two worlds</u>	<u>Lives for this world</u>
Bible	Eats the Bible	<u>Believes in the Bible</u>	<u>Owns a Bible</u>
Evidence of second work of grace	Yes—Gn 17 Name change	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes—Gn 32 Name change</u>



East of Eden

Finding Our Way Home

A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

MAMA'S BOY

Genesis 25:19–34; 27:1–28:9

- I. Meet Patriarch #3—Jacob (Gn 25:19–36:43)
- A. He is named “Jacob” (the **deceiver**, the heel-grabber, the one who trips from behind) for a reason! His life is characterized by a series of conflicts in which he seeks to **control** and manipulate others.

Jacob vs. Esau	Jacob vs. Laban	Jacob vs. God
Jacob deceives.	Jacob is deceived.	Jacob is transformed.
Gn 25–28	Gn 29–31	Gn 32–36

- B. Our passage (Gn 25:19–34; 27:1–28:9) is composed of three parts:
- Jacob’s miracle birth and God’s **prophecy** (Gn 25:19–28).
 - Note well the prophetic announcement: “the older will serve the younger” (Gn 25:23).¹ This is not the only place in the Bible where God **reverses** the natural order: Isaac and Ishmael, Joseph and his brothers, David and his brothers, etc.
 - Does God’s choice of Jacob smack of divine **favoritism** or perhaps fatalistic **determinism**? Does this mean the players have no choice, no free will of their own? Note:
 - God is forecasting a **role** Jacob and Esau will play, *not* their salvation.
 - The text makes clear that both boys make choices for which they are fully **responsible**.
 - Foreknowledge** is not foreordination. To know in advance that something will happen does not mean that one makes it happen.² Romans 8:29 says it best: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son”
 - Our election is conditioned by our **choices** which are conditioned by God’s sovereign and prevenient **grace**!³ In other words, I am a child of God *not* because I chose him but because he chose me (Jn 15:16).
 - Two destructive dynamics contribute to this family’s dysfunction:
 - Sibling **rivalry**. It begins in the womb and continues in the struggle for the birthright and then the blessing.

¹ We should also notice how the Bible speaks of these preborn infants as persons; as if they were already members of the human family. All those who support abortion should pause to consider! (cf. Ps 139:14–16; Jer 1:5; Lk 1:44; etc.).

² Every parent understands this!

³ Calvinism says that our election is conditioned on God’s sovereign grace alone, downplaying the reality of human responsibility. In such a view, our election becomes *Unconditional* and grace is *Irresistible*, and the atonement is *Limited* only to those who are elect; everyone else is predestined for hell. The elect will, by definition, *Persevere* and cannot turn away and be lost.

- Parental **favoritism** (Gn 25:28). Rebekah's preference seems to be grounded in God's predestined choice. Isaac's preference is based in his love for venison (he prefers the wrong son for a bad reason!).
2. Jacob pressures Esau to **sell** his birthright (*bekora*; Gn 25:29–34).
 - a. Esau is depicted in almost animalistic terms: a slave to his appetites and fixed on **immediate gratification**. Once again, sin enters the story through food (see Gn 3). His birthright was *not* stolen; he *sold* it for a bowl of vegetable soup. He **despised** it (spurned, treated with contempt, had a flippant attitude, considered it as worthless; Gn 26:34).

Esau fell into sin when he was **hungry**. Recovery groups often use the HALT acronym to help people recognize when sin is crouching at the door. If you are Hungry, **Angry**, **Lonely**, or **Tired**—pause, be careful, watch out!
 - b. Though cold and calculating, Jacob does nothing deceitful here. He **manipulates** the situation to get what he wants. He undoubtedly knew that God had chosen him to be the son through which the covenant would continue so his actions reveal his carnal effort to do God's will **man's way** (cf. Gn 16).
 3. Rebekah and Jacob conspire to **steal** the blessing (*beraka*; 27:1–29:8).
 - a. Now that Jacob has the birthright (*bekorah*), he and his mother (Rebekah) conspire to steal the blessing (*beraka*). Both the birthright and the blessing are needed to be the authentic, recognized heir of Abraham and Isaac. Note it well: you cannot have the blessing without the **birthright**.
 - b. Isaac seems to be willfully working at cross-purposes with God's clearly revealed will. But why? The only reason given in the text is that he liked Esau's cooking! He (like his favorite son) is controlled by his **desires**. Rebekah recognizes this and sets out to save the day.
 - c. When Esau discovers that he has been tricked, he tries to reverse his father's decision, but it is **too late**. So, he vows to kill his brother. Rebekah sends Jacob far away for safety. He will be gone for **20 years**, and she will never see him again.
 - d. Finally, Isaac comes to his senses and begins to act like a true patriarch. With full knowledge of what he is doing, he blesses Jacob and instructs him to get the right kind of wife (Gn 28:1–5).

There are four characters in this story and each of them bears some responsibility for the sin and dysfunction that is taking place. Let's examine them one at a time.

II. Esau

- A. Note how Esau's character is on full display.
 1. He despises his birthright (Gn 25:29–34). He places no value on spiritual things. He is controlled by his **desires** and lives for the moment. He doesn't understand delayed gratification.
 2. He **breaks the oath** he swore to his brother (Gn 25:33). Though he had already made a free choice to sell his birthright and swore it to be true, he nevertheless claims to be the child of promise in seeking his father's blessing.

3. He marries **two Hittite wives** against the will of his parents (Gn 26:34–35; 27:46). Later, trying to repair the damage, he marries a cousin (Gn 28:6–9). But this is like closing the barn door after the horses have all escaped.

B. The New Testament confirms Esau's worldliness and carnality.

*See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is **sexually immoral** or **unholy** like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to **repent**, though he sought it with tears. (Hebrews 12:15–27)*

III. Isaac

A. With father Abraham now dead and buried, Isaac is the leader of the tribe and the **only link** in the chain of faith. *Everything* depends on his ability to discern the path to follow and to transmit the covenant to the next generation. He begins well when he prays for his barren wife (Gn 25:21), but after this, his leadership as a patriarch is a big **disappointment**.

- Though God had moved heaven and earth to make sure that he married the right girl (see Gn 24), he watches **passively** as Esau marries Hittite women (Gn 26:34–35; 27:46).
- In making Esau his favorite son, he is either **blind** or willfully intent on doing **the opposite** of what God has clearly commanded. And his motivation for doing so (he liked the way Esau prepared venison) only deepens our questions about Isaac's ability to lead the family.

B. Note how all five of his senses are emphasized and especially how his senses lead him astray:

1. Sight—He is blind (Gn 27:1).
2. Touch—"Your skin **feels** like Esau" (though it was Jacob) (Gn 27:21–23).
3. Taste—"It's good venison" (though it was goat) (Gn 27:25).
4. Smell—"You smell like Esau" (though it was Jacob) (Gn 27:27).
5. Hearing—"The voice is Jacob's voice" (It was!) (Gn 27:22).

All of Jacob's senses lead him astray *except* the sense of **hearing**—and this is the one sense he does not trust! He discredits the one sensory organ (our ears) that is the most reliable for pointing us to the truth. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17); "In the beginning was the Word . . ." (Jn 1:1).

- C. Isaac's character seems to be best described as a **sensualist**; a natural man; a worldly man; carnal. He is controlled by his appetites and trusts in his natural senses. Remember, though Abraham (Gn 17) and Jacob (Gn 32) both bear witness to a "**deeper work** of grace," this is not true for Isaac.
- D. Thankfully (through Rebekah's schemes and manipulations!), Isaac comes to his senses and makes a conscious and willful choice to bless Jacob and ensure that he marries the right woman (Gn 28:1–5). This is Isaac's **finest hour**.

IV. Jacob

- A. Though Jacob is clearly shown to be a scheming, deceitful, manipulative controller, the text is clear that Esau's sins are much worse! At least Jacob wants the **right things** (birthright, blessing) even if he is using the **wrong methods** to obtain them.
- B. Jacob does not yet grasp the implications of what it means to be a child of the covenant. He still believes he can do God's will in the power of the flesh. His self-absorbed, manipulative nature still very much defines his character. It will take **two works of grace** to turn Jacob into Israel (Gn 28, 32).

V. Rebekah

- A. Rebekah had left home and ventured out in faith to marry a man she had never met because she made a **free decision** to trust in the God of Abraham and become part of the covenant family (see Gn 24, especially verse 58). Rebekah's preference for Jacob was not just ugly favoritism. It was motivated by her awareness of God's covenant purposes for her family.
- B. But now she realizes that the head of her home is working *against* the purposes of God. What to do? Rebekah's **dilemma** is this: what to do when your leader is leading you and your loved ones on a path to destruction? Her options were few:
 - 1. **Submit** and let him lead. Go limp. Be quiet.
 - 2. Confront him and try to **talk about it**. Pray together about it. Tell her husband what a fool he was. Take him to counseling.
 - 3. Usurp **authority**. Take charge. Rise up in rebellion. Move out of the bedroom. Threaten divorce.
 - 4. Devise a plan to **trick him** into doing the right thing.

Rebekah chose Option #4. Though her sin is not whitewashed, it is difficult to imagine a better choice. In the light of the other three rascals in this sad story, she is clearly **least guilty**.

The true hero of the story is the courageous, tactful, and above all, lovingly prudent Rebekah, who conducts affairs always with circumspection, often behind the scenes, but in full view of the readers. Thanks to Rebekah, the new way survives a most severe test; thanks to Rebekah and the generations of women who, inspired by her example, followed in her footsteps, it survives at least to the present day.⁴

VI. When Leaders Lead Badly

There are many lessons one could draw from this amazing passage of Scripture, but let's close by putting ourselves in Rebekah's sandals. What would *you* have done in this situation?

- A. Do you consider Rebekah a hero? Why or why not?

⁴ Kass, 401.

- B. Perhaps you are in a situation where you are under the authority of someone (a parent, a husband, a pastor, a boss, a president, etc.) who is leading poorly (making bad choices, passive, etc.). How are you responding? How *should* you respond?
- C. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) used the example of seeing a drunk driver careening down a crowded street. He believed that the first and most important thing to do was not to care for the victims but to stop the driver; even if that means an act of violence.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Share your thoughts concerning the final section (“When Leaders Lead Badly”).
2. Share the one lesson you have learned from this study that has made the greatest impression, and share how you intend to apply that truth in your own personal life situation.

Once to Every Man and Nation

James R. Lowell (1819–1891)

*Once to ev'ry man and nation
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth and falsehood,
For the good or evil side;
Some great cause, some great decision,
Offring each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever
'Twixt that darkness and that light.*

*Then to side with truth is noble,
When we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit,
And 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses
While the coward stands aside.
Till the multitude make virtue
Of the faith they had denied.*

*By the light of burning martyrs,
Christ, Thy bleeding feet we track,
Toiling up new Calv'ries ever
With the cross that turns not back;
New occasions teach new duties,
Ancient values test our youth;
They must upward still and onward,
Who would keep abreast of truth.*

*Tho' the cause of evil prosper,
Yet the truth alone is strong;
Tho' her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own*



East of Eden

Finding Our Way Home

A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Genesis 28:10–22

I. The Importance of Doors

- A. In the Celtic tradition, a **thin place** is a geographic location where it is believed the membrane between this world and the other world is so thin that earth and heaven touch; distance and time collapse and a person becomes suddenly aware of God and his holiness. This theological concept can include:
- Locations—the Garden Tomb, Wesley’s Chapel (London), Hughes Auditorium, the Grand Canyon, etc.
 - Times—Christmas Eve candlelight service, Good Friday service, Easter, etc.
 - Rites and ceremonies—Funerals, Communion, etc.
- B. For Jacob, Bethel (Gn 28:10–22) was a thin place. Here, for the **first time** in his life, he had an encounter with God. Not only was the membrane thin, there was an **open door**, making possible two-way traffic from one world to the other! Jacob saw:
- A **stairway/ladder**—“. . . set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven. . .” (Gn 28:12).
 - A **door**—“This is the gate of heaven” (Gn 28:17).
 - **The Lord** stood above the ladder and spoke to him (Gn 28:13).
- C. The Bible has a lot to say about doors! Isaiah prays that God would “**rend** the heavens” and come down (Is 64:1); make an opening in the “wall” and **bridge the gap** that separates our world from God. Consider:
1. Genesis 3:24 (expulsion from Eden) teaches us that the gate to paradise is locked and **impossible** to enter. What God closes, no man can open!
 2. Genesis 11:1–9 (Tower of Babel) teaches that **human effort** cannot reach the gate of heaven.¹ Such attempts end only in failure, confusion, and judgment.
 3. At Jesus’ baptism, “the heavens were opened” and **the Spirit** descended like a dove and a Voice said, “This is my beloved Son” (Mt 3:16–17).
 4. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus promised, “**Knock** and the door will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7–8).
 5. John 10:9 and 14:6 teach us that Jesus not only shows us where the door is; he **is** the door!
 6. Revelation 19:11–16 proclaims that, one day soon, the door will open so that Jesus, seated on a white horse and followed by his army of saints and angels, will come to earth in **power and glory** to establish his global kingdom; and he shall reign forever and ever (Rv 11:15).
- D. Little wonder that the symbol of “the door” is a powerful image that recurs often in the art and literature of the world.
1. When the flood began, God himself shut the door of **Noah’s ark** (Gn 7:16).

¹ The word “babel” comes from an Akkadian word meaning “gate of god.”

2. *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo (see the Fantine section, “The Fall”). “Have you knocked at *that door*?”
3. *Stairway to Heaven* by Led Zeppelin.
4. *The Last Battle* by C. S. Lewis. The stable door; it’s bigger on the inside!
5. The song in the movie *Frozen*, “Love Is an Open Door.” It begins: “All my life has been a series of doors in my face and then suddenly I bump into you.”
6. *Titanic*. After the ship sinks, Rose is floating on a door!

II. Examine the text

A. The Context.

Jacob’s conversion occurred when his life was **in ruins**. He is running from his brother who wants to kill him. He is headed 500 miles away to Haran to find a wife from people he does not know. He is alone, poor, afraid, guilt-ridden, confused, and anxious. He is **desperate**.

It is a poor thing to strike our colors to God when the ship is going down under us; a poor thing to come to him as a last resort, to offer up ‘our own’ when it is no longer worth keeping. If God were proud, he would hardly have us on such terms: but he is not proud, he stoops to conquer. He will have us even though we have shown that we prefer everything else to him.²

B. The dream (Gn 28:10–13a).

1. Jacob uses a stone for a pillow. Later, this stone is used as a **pillar** to commemorate the event (v 18).³
2. The Hebrew term used to describe the “ladder” (*sullam*) occurs only here in the Bible. The term probably refers to a **stairway** (flight of steps), like those running up the sides of a ziggurat to a temple shrine at the top.
3. In verse 13a, the Hebrew is unclear. Is God standing *at the top* of the ladder (KJV, ESV, NIV) or *by Jacob’s side* at the bottom (CEV, NEB). The **ambiguity** is helpful in showing that the Lord is, at the same time, lofty and distant (One to be feared) as well as close and gentle (One to walk with as a friend).
4. Like all dreams, this one must be **interpreted**. The best way to understand it is to compare this stairway to heaven with the one that ascended the Tower of Babel (Gn 11:1–9).

Babel’s Tower (Gn 11:1–9)	Jacob’s Stairway (Gn 28:10–22).
Man’s search for God—man reaching up	God’s search for man—God reaching down
Made by man	Made by God
Began in pride and ended in confusion	Began in confusion and ended in humble trust
Failure	Success!
Story ends in judgement	Story ends in blessing

Note: Beware **mystical** interpretations that see the ladder as a means of self-improvement where, by human effort, we can climb higher and reach God and

² Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 77–78.

³ According to some, this stone now can be seen in Edinburgh Castle (Scotland). It is known as the Stone of Scone and is used in the coronation ceremony of British monarchs.

his holiness. This promotion of works righteousness is found in the old spiritual “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.”

C. God speaks to Jacob (Gn 28:13b–15).

1. Surprisingly, God does not rebuke Jacob for his past behaviors. Rather, he outlines a series of **unconditional** promises:
 - I will give the land to you (v 13).
 - I will keep you (v 15).
 - I will bring you back (v 15).
 - I will not leave you (v 15).
2. God’s promise to Jacob repeats God’s promise to Abraham and Isaac. It relates to three primary realities:
 - a. The **land** of Canaan will belong to you and your descendants forever. But Jacob is poor and owns nothing!
 - b. Your **descendants** will be as numerous as the sand. But Jacob is unmarried and has no children!
 - c. You are called to be a **blessing** to the nations. But Jacob only wants to receive the blessing (he just stole it from Esau)!

D. Jacob’s response to the dream (Gn 28:16–22).

1. Realizing he is in the presence of God, Jacob is suddenly afraid. What causes this response?
 - _____.
 - _____.
 - _____.
 - _____.
2. Taking the stone he had used for a pillow, Jacob poured oil on it and set it up as a pillar.⁴ While his grandfather would have surely built an **altar** to commemorate such a divine moment, Jacob marks the occasion with a **plaque** (historical monument).
3. How to respond to God’s gracious appearance and promise? Jacob decides to make a **vow**.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.”
(Genesis 28:20–22)

Though we can rejoice that Jacob has become a “man of prayer,” notice how his manipulative ego-centrism is reflected in his newfound spirituality:

⁴ This is not the only pillar Jacob sets up: see Genesis 31:45 (to commemorate a treaty with Laban) and Genesis 35:20 (to mark the tomb of Rachel). As altars symbolize the life of Abraham and wells the life of Isaac, so pillars symbolize the life of Jacob.

- a. Note the repetition of first-person singular pronouns in his prayer. It's all **about me**.
- b. Note how the prayer is **conditional**: "If God does _____, then I will do _____." It's almost as if Jacob is trying to manipulate God!
- c. The promise to start **tithing** if God keeps his end of the deal, smacks of trying to bargain with God, to strike a deal. Jacob's relationship with God feels almost like a business deal.
- d. Though Jacob now has a relationship with God, he is still the same old Jacob: the controller, manipulator, deceiver. But now, his ego-centrism is cloaked in spirituality! Jacob's first encounter with God ends up being a strange mixture of **piety** and **self-interest!**

III. Lessons Learned

- A. Though Jacob now is clearly converted and has an authentic relationship with God, his **character** has not been changed. He is still Jacob; the deceiver, cheat, manipulator, controller. Though Bethel was a good beginning, it would take Peniel to transform Jacob's character.

Bethel (Gn 28:10–22)	Peniel (Gn 32:2–32)
The house of God	The face of God
This is easy—only believe	This is hard —a wrestling match
Change of status	Change of nature
What God does for me	What God does in me
I'm still the old Jacob	I'm a new creation —Israel
Justification (first work of grace)	Sanctification (deeper work of grace)
It's all about me	It's all about God and his purposes

Charles Williams (1886–1945), one of the Inklings, suggests there are three degrees on the journey of salvation (*He Came Down from Heaven*, 1938). Jacob seems to fit the paradigm perfectly:

1. The old self in the old way (Gn 25–27).
 2. The old self in the **new way** (Gn 28–31).
 3. The **new self** in the new way (Gn 32–36).
- B. Centuries after Jacob's dream, Jesus told Nathanael, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (Jn 1:51). Jesus thus claims to be the stairway Jacob dreamed about. He **bridges the chasm** between God and man and makes it possible to have two-way communication with the living Lord.

Nothing could be a more expressive emblem of the incarnation and its effects: Jesus Christ is the grand connecting medium between heaven and earth, and between God and man. By him, God comes down to man; through him man ascends to God. It appears that our Lord applies the vision in this way himself, first, in that remarkable speech to Nathanael (John 1:51). Secondly, in his speech to Thomas (John 14:6).⁵

⁵ Clarke, regarding Genesis 28:12.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever experienced a “thin place”? Describe it.
2. What theological truth did you receive from comparing Jacob’s ladder with the Tower of Babel?
3. Though Jacob was clearly converted, he was still the old manipulative, egotistical Jacob. Have you known people like Jacob who are a strange mixture of piety and self-interest? Could this describe your own experience as well?
4. Do you believe that a deeper work of grace is available for people like Jacob? Can human nature really be changed? How? When?

If the Lord Our Leader Be

By John Newton

(Tune: “Come, Ye Thankful People, Come”)

*If the Lord our leader be,
We may follow without fear;
East or West, by land or sea,
Home, with him, is everywhere;
When from Esau Jacob fled,
Though his pillow was a stone,
And the ground his humble bed,
Yet he was not left alone.*

*Kings are often waking kept,
Racked with cares on beds of state;
Never king like Jacob slept.
For he lay at heaven’s gate:
Lo! he saw a ladder reared,
Reaching to the heav’nly throne;
At the top the Lord appeared,
Spake and claimed him for his own.*

*Fear not, Jacob, thou art mine,
And my presence with thee goes;
On thy heart my love shall shine,
And my arm subdue thy foes:
From my promise comfort take;
For my help in trouble call;
Never will I thee forsake,
‘Till I have accomplished all.*

*Well does Jacob’s ladder suit
To the gospel throne of grace;
We are at the ladder’s foot,
Every hour, in every place
By affirming flesh and blood,
Jesus heav’n and earth unites;
We by faith ascend to God,
God to dwell with us delights.*

*They who know the Saviour’s name,
Are for all events prepared
What can changes do to them,
Who have such a Guide and Guard?
Should they traverse earth around,
To the ladder still they come;
Every spot is holy ground,
God is there—and he’s their home.*



East of Eden

Finding Our Way Home

A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

THE TASTE OF DECEIT

Genesis 29–31

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1971), to **deceive** means to victimize someone by underhanded means. It involves falsehood or the deliberate concealment or misrepresentation of truth with the intent to lead another person into error or disadvantage. (See how deceit is a recurring theme in our Scripture: Gn 29:25; 31:7, 20, 26, 27, 32, 41).

I. Now, you know what it feels like!

- A. Just as nature runs by certain **laws** (gravity, entropy, four seasons, etc.), so does human life. For example, God has ordained it so that sinners will eventually experience the **bitter fruit** of their wicked deeds: “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Nm 32:23 ESV), “catch up with you” (TLB), “track you down” (MSG).¹
- B. As we have seen, Jacob is the consummate **deceiver** (cheat, con artist, swindler, trickster, controller). He manipulated and deceived his brother and his father (see Gn 25:19–34; 27:1–46). But now, in Genesis 29–31, Jacob experiences for himself what it feels like to be cheated and tricked. He gets a taste of his own medicine. The deceiver is deceived. Though painful, this is a great **blessing**. It leads Jacob to **humility, self-awareness, and repentance**.
- C. Survey of Genesis 29–31.

A night to remember!	Sisters at war	Genetic engineering and Jacob’s prosperity	A nonaggression treaty between two controllers
Gn 29:1–30	Gn 29:31–30:24	Gn 30:25–43	Gn 31:1–55

II. Eros Examined.

- A. “Leah’s eyes were weak [soft, tender, gentle, delicate] but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance” (Gn 29:17). Jacob must **choose** between “beautiful eyes” (that invite him to look into the depths of her soul) and a “curvaceous body” (that awakens him to sensual pleasure). Jacob “**loved Rachel more** than Leah” and the Lord saw that Leah was “hated” (Gn 29:30–31).
- B. Like Jacob, every male will struggle to respond rightly to the feminine beauty around him: will he be **captured** by outward beauty or by inward character? Like Leah and Rachel, every female will struggle with how to **survive and thrive** in a world of powerful men: by outward beauty or by inward character?
- C. Note that on his wedding night, Jacob has no **discernment**; he doesn’t even know the difference between the two women! Yes, it was dark, the bride was veiled, and

¹ Though repentance and receiving God’s forgiveness will deliver from the eternal penalty our sins deserve, it may or may not rescue us from sin’s tragic temporal consequences. A converted alcoholic may go to heaven yet still die early from cirrhosis of the liver.

Jacob may have been drunk. But when a man is controlled by **eros** (selfish love, lust), then all women are the same in the dark.

- D. The Hollywood Formula for love and successful relationships²:
1. Find the **right person**.
 2. **Fall** in love.
 3. Fix your **hopes and dreams** on this person for your future fulfillment.
 4. If failure occurs, **repeat steps 1, 2, and 3**.
- E. The Bible underscores the character qualities of the two women:
1. *Leah*. Her **godly character** is seen primarily in the names she gives to the children born to her:
 - a. Reuben (Gn 29:32)—The Lord has seen my affliction.
 - b. Simeon (Gn 29:33)—The Lord has heard that I am hated.
 - c. Levi (Gn 29:34)—Now my husband will be attracted to me.
 - d. Judah (Gn 29:35)—I will praise the Lord.
 - e. Issachar (Gn 30:17–18)—God has given me my wages.
 - f. Zebulun (Gn 30:19–20)—God has endowed me with a good endowment.
 - g. Gad (through Zilpah; Gn 30:10–11)—Good fortune has come to me.
 - h. Asher (through Zilpah; Gn 30:12–13)—Happy am I.

These names reveal that Leah is a strong and authentic worshipper of Jacob's God. Her trust is in the God of Abraham. Furthermore, **God's favor** on Leah is shown in the fact that two of her sons will provide the most formative and influential leadership in the future nation of Israel:

 - Levi—the **priesthood**.
 - Judah—the **kingship** (through David) and eventually the Messiah.
 2. *Rachel*. The text provides an abundance of evidence that Rachel's beauty is mostly external; on the inside, there is much that is **ugly**:
 - a. When her sister begins to have babies, rather than rejoicing with her or perhaps grieving her own barrenness, Rachel becomes **envious/jealous** (Gn 30:1).³ Aquinas defines envy as "sorrow over another's good." This creates the climate where **competition** will define all family relationships: Who has the most babies? Who is the most loved? Whose kids get the best treatment?
 - b. It is Rachel's idea to give her servant (Bilhah) to Jacob to have a surrogate, adopted child (Gn 30:3–5). She should have known that such behavior created a **disaster** for Jacob's grandparents (see Gn 16).

² Taken from *Love, Sex, and Lasting Relationships* by Chip Ingram, 24–28.

³ Note how the envy between Rachel and Leah has parallels to the envy between Cain and Abel (Gn 4:1–9).

- c. The names that Rachel gives to her (surrogate) children, rather than reflecting gratitude and praise, seem to be tainted with **spite** and vengeful attitudes:
 - Dan (Gn 30:5–6)—God has vindicated me (NIV).
 - Naphtali (Gn 30:7–8)—I have wrestled with my sister and prevailed.
 - Joseph (Gn 30:22–24)—“God has taken away my reproach. . . . May the Lord give me another.”
- d. The story of the mandrakes (Gn 30:14–18) shows that Rachel had a **superstitious** belief in the magical powers of an aphrodisiac (she thinks the fruit will make her fertile). The text makes clear that God alone, not some magical plant, is the source of fertility.
- e. Perhaps the most troubling insight into Rachel’s inner character is seen in her theft of her father’s household gods (see Gn 31:19, 30–35). At least three sins are evident in this act:
 - **Theft**. She stole what was not hers.
 - **Deceit**. She did not consult with her husband before the act and kept it a secret after she did it.
 - **Idolatry**. To pretend that she took the gods out of spite or because of their monetary value seems inadequate. It appears that she took the gods because she believed in their power (protection, provision, etc.).

Conclusion: Rachel’s outward beauty **camouflaged** an inner ugliness. Though she might win a beauty contest, Rachel was a boiling cauldron of envy, competition, vindictiveness, manipulation, superstition, deceit, thievery, and idolatry. Leah, the woman of gentle eyes, was the wife of **character**, the mother of kings and priests—and the Messiah.

III. When Controllers Meet

A. Jacob meets his match.

It makes us smile to think that Jacob lives for **20 years** with a man like Laban. Truly, Jacob had met **his equal**. When Laban said to Jacob, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh” (Gn 29:14), he spoke more truly than he knew.

The humor of God is sometimes tragic; he engineers across our path the kind of people who exhibit to us our own characteristics—not very flattering, is it?⁴

B. Laban’s character is seen in the following incidents:

1. He **deceived** Jacob by giving Leah rather than Rachel on Jacob’s wedding night and then forced him to work another seven years to have Rachel (Gn 29:18–30).
2. Though Laban told Jacob twice to “name his wages” (Gn 29:15; 30:28), he **cheated** him by changing Jacob’s wages ten times (Gn 31:7, 41).
3. Laban practices divination (an occult practice) and worships other gods (see Gn 30:27; 31:19, 30). He is a **sorcerer** and **idolater**.

⁴ Chambers, *Our Portrait in Genesis*, 972.

4. When he and Jacob agree on Jacob's severance package (the spotted and striped lambs; Gn 30:34), Laban **steals** the spotted and striped males from the flock (Gn 30:35–36).
 5. Laban's daughters see clearly the manipulative, dishonest, and **abusive** ways of their father and have no desire to live near him any longer. "Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money [the bride price, dowry]" (Gn 31:14–16).
 6. The speech Laban gives (concerning Jacob's departure and taking his daughters, grandchildren, and flocks, pretending to be a victim) is one of the most sanctimonious, self-righteous, and **hypocritical** speeches in the whole Bible (Gn 31:25–30).
- C. Why, oh, why did God arrange things so that Jacob would live with a rascal like Laban for 20 years? What was it the Lord wanted to teach him? What was it Jacob so desperately needed **to learn**?
1. What it **feels like** to be controlled, manipulated, used by others.
 2. To see **himself** (as in a mirror). Self-awareness. How ugly controllers and deceivers really are.
 3. To recognize the capacity for deceit in **other people**; for example, Rachel. And to give them a large measure of sympathy and grace.
 4. To know when it is time to **separate** from abusive people, lest the situation deteriorates beyond repair.
 5. To realize his great need for **a deeper work of grace**.
 6. _____.
 7. _____.
 8. _____.

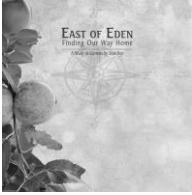
IV. Protection from Self-Deception

- A. No sin is more dangerous than the sin of self-deception, not because this sin is somehow "worse" than other sins but because those who are deceived **don't know** they are deceived. In this respect, the sin of self-deception is like the sin against the Holy Spirit; it is **unforgivable**.
- B. It is terrifying to realize that self-deceit is perhaps the sin that is **easiest** to fall into! It began in the Garden of Eden: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gn 3:13). By nature, we are born with an inherent **predisposition** to assume that our motives and actions are pure. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9).
- C. At least two churches in the New Testament were deceived about their spiritual condition. They were living in **la-la land**.
- Sardis: "You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead" (Rv 3:1).
 - Laodicea: "You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rv 3:17).

- D. Christian **beware!** You are not immune from deception. Seven times in the New Testament we are warned, “Do not be deceived.” These verses call us to **examine ourselves** so that we do not fall prey to the deadliest spiritual condition of all.
1. “*Let no one deceive himself.* If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God” (1 Cor 3:18–19).
Warning: Do I think I am **wise**?
 2. “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? *Do not be deceived:* neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:9–11).
Warning: Is there **unconfessed sin** in my life?
 3. “*Do not be deceived:* Bad company ruins good morals” (1 Cor 15:33).
Warning: Are my **friendships** spiritually healthy?
 4. “*Do not be deceived:* God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal 6:7–8).
Warning: Do I think I am **immune** from the consequences of sin?
 5. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, *deceiving yourselves*” (Jas 1:22).
Warning: Am I doing what I know to be **God’s will**?
 6. “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but *deceives his heart*, this person’s religion is worthless” (Jas 1:26).
Warning: Is my **tongue** under control?
 7. “If we say we have no sin, we *deceive ourselves*, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:8–9).
Warning: Am I unaware of any sin in my life? Do I pretend to be **sinless**?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Give an example of someone you know (no names, please!) whose sin caught up with him/her.
2. Have you ever been treated unfairly? Deceived? Tricked? How did it feel? Did this experience make you more self-aware of how perhaps you have treated others in a somewhat similar manner?
3. Why is self-deception such a dangerous sin?
4. Describe one way that this study has made you more self-aware. What warning do you intend to heed from tonight’s lesson?



East of Eden

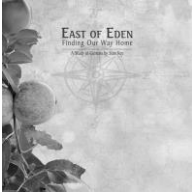
Finding Our Way Home

A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

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East of Eden

Finding Our Way Home
A Study of Genesis with Stan Key

ANSWERS

An Old Man Gets a New Start

- I. (A) unilateral; unconditional; (A1) descendants; (A2) Canaan; (A3) all nations; (B) passive; believed; righteousness; (C1) Canaanites; famines; burial plot; (C2) old; barren; donkey; (C3) plagues; (D1) right relationship; (D2) monotonous; predictable; unfruitful; (D3) fresh work of grace; entire sanctification; walk in the flesh; (D4) pregnant
- II. (A) understanding of God; (A1) 25 years; marriage; concept of God; (A2) all-sufficient; impersonal; (A3) mercenary; motives; (B) identity; (B1) transformation; (B2) find ourselves; lose ourselves; (C) sense of humor; (C1) doubled over; (C2) hard; hilarious; (C3) God is laughing too; (C4) Sarah's laugh; (D) sacramental symbol; (D1) circumcision; sign of the covenant; reality; (D2) children; males; permanent; baptism; (D3) spiritual reality; (E) commandment; (E1) undivided; perfect; (E2) walking in the flesh; wholehearted; (E3) my face; perfection of love; (E4) entire sanctification; be

Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?

- I. rhetorical; (A) omnipotence; God Almighty; (A1) all things; whatever; his will; upholds the universe; (A2) too hard; all things; impossible; (B1) Yes!; (B2) hmm, I'm not so sure; (B2a) divine omnipotence; (B2b) human sin; resist; (B2c) justice; divine dilemma
- II. (A1) three persons; theophany; (A2) hospitality; angels; (A3) Sodom; intercessor; (A4) unbelief; (B1) investigate; (B2) himself; overhear; (B3) all the nations; justice; social justice; crucial; (B4) confrontational; responsibility; (B5) remnant; dubious
- III. the cross; (A) God; (A1) invited; already occurring; (A2) inner turmoil; friend; (A3) talk to himself; (B) wrestling with God; (B1) argumentative; (B2) shouting match; (B3) passive; preordained; at the end; (C) change his mind; (C1) repent; (C3) different outcome; (D) glory of God; (D1) personal agenda; (D2) God's glory; (E) self-giving love; (E1) risking his relationship; (E2) costliest; (E3) love
- IV. rare; just one

Abraham Had Two Sons

- I. (A) Discerning the truth; (B) harder than you think; (C) two; weeds; wheat; life and death; (D) learn to discern; Jews; Muslims; Christians; Christians; self-deception
- II. (A) 25 years; covenant faithfulness; (B) circumcised; (D) innocently; abusing; persecution; (E) motives; instincts; (F) give up (sacrifice)
- III. (A) not enough; litmus test; works; (B) allegorically; remarkable; (C) begin; Mount Sinai; rereading; misunderstood; (D) contrast
- IV. (A) Listen; (B) falling back; fallen; severed; (C) Walk; keep in step; (D) Crucify; Cast out; (E) main thing; faith working through love; love your neighbor; new creation

Abraham's Final Exam

- I. (A) twice; (B) the Gospel; holy ground; (B1) place; Solomon's Temple; (B2) persons; (B3) action
- II. (A) test; (A1) temptation; (A2) reveal; burn away; prepare; (A3) trust; never; (C) holocaust; totally consumed; (D) pleaded; raise him; (E) lamb; ram; after; (F) oath; promise; oath
- III. contemplative; (A1) everything; (A2) Ishmael; (A3) only son; set the standard; (B1) old enough; (B2) victim; willing; (B3) circumcision; (B4) God; (B5) more; (C1) Calvary; (C1a) carried the wood; (C1b) Lamb of God; (C1c) loving relationship; (C3a) only Son; (C3b) gave him up; (C3c) I lay down my life; (C3e) learned obedience

A Marriage Made in Heaven

buried; married

- I. (A) body; Where; (B) prescriptive; death; (B1a) Mummified; (B1b) Cremated; (B1c) monument; (B2) respect; finality; (B2a) different; (B2b) Theology of the Body; (B2c) resurrection of the body; (C) official claim; grave
- II. (A) longest; (B) pregnant; (B1) foreign land; (B2) tell her family; (B3) marriage; (C) providential; (D) indispensable
- III. supreme importance; singleness; (A1) One man; one woman; sexual perversity; (A2) building block; government; church; (A3) culmination; the Church; (B1) Sanctification; differences; incompatible; (B2) Multiplication; quality; direct; Godly offspring; (B3) Illustration; reflect the image; Christ and the church; (C1) right person; formula; (C2) love; marriage; (C3) struggles; every couple; (C4) best hope

The Family Tree

- I. (A1a) daddy; (A1b) daddy; (A1c) daddy's; (A2) sister; twice; (A3a) Lord's blessing; (A3b) Jealousy; (A3c) redigs; (A3d) *Revival*; father; altar; (A5) covenant; (B1) echo; (B2) daddy's; daddy's; B3) the son; identity; unspectacular; shadow
- II. (A) passed/transmitted; (B1a) paganism; (B1b) conversion; (B1c) relationship; (B1d) passionate; (B1e) absolute surrender; (B1f) everyone; (B2) altars; sacrifice; communion; (C1a) norm; (C1b) rules; (C1c) blessed; (C1d) parents; (C2) wells; enjoyed; (D1a) department; (D1b) rebel; shocking; (D2) pillars; historical marker
- III. (A) first-generation; drift; Abrahamic faith; [The Three Chairs table: Second Generation column] Well, Religion; Half-hearted; Moral/Nice; Enjoys the blessing; Knows about God; To please others; Lives in two worlds; Believes in the Bible; No; [Third-Generation column] Pillar; Duty; Hard-hearted; Selfish; Demands the blessing; Doesn't know God; To please self; Lives for this world; Owns a Bible; Yes—Gn 32, Name change

Mama's Boy

- I. (A) deceiver; control; (B1) prophecy; (B1a) reverses; (B1b) favoritism; determinism; (B1b1) role; (B1b2) responsible; (B1b3) Foreknowledge; B1b4) choices; grace; (B1c) rivalry; favoritism; (B2) sell; (B2a) immediate gratification; despised; hungry; Angry; Lonely; Tired; (B2b) manipulates; man's way; (B3) steal; (B2a) birthright; (B2b) desires; (B2c) too late; 20 years
- II. (A1) desires; (A2) breaks the oath; (A3) two Hittite wives; (B) sexually immoral; unholy; repent

- III. (A) only link; disappointment passively; blind; the opposite; (B2) feels; hearing; (C) sensualist; deeper work; (D) finest hour
- IV. (A) right things; wrong methods; (B) two works of grace
- V. (A) free decision; (B) dilemma; (B1) Submit; (B2) talk about it; (B3) authority; (B4) trick him; #4; least guilty

Stairway to Heaven

- I. (A) thin place; (B) first time; open door; stairway/ladder; door; The Lord; (C) rend; bridge the gap; (C1) impossible; (C2) human effort; (C3) the Spirit; (C4) Knock; (C5) is; (C6) power and glory; (D1) Noah's ark
- II. (A) in ruins; desperate; (B1) pillar; (B2) stairway; (B3) interpreted; mystical; (C1) unconditional; (C2a) land; (C2b) descendants; (C2c) blessing; (D2) altar; plaque; (D3) vow; (D3a) about me; (D3b) conditional; (D3c) tithing; (D3d) piety; self-interest
- III. (A) character; [Peniel column] face; hard; nature; in; new creation; Sanctification; God and his purposes; (A2) new way; (A3) new self; (B) bridges the chasm

The Taste of Deceit

deceive

- I. (A) laws; bitter fruit; (B) deceiver; blessing; humility; self-awareness; repentance
- II. (A) choose; loved Rachel more; (B) captured; survive and thrive; (C) discernment; eros; (D1) right person; (D2) Fall; (D3) hopes and dreams; (D4) repeat steps 1, 2, and 3; (E1) godly character; God's favor; priesthood; kingship; (E2) ugly; (E2a) envious/jealous; competition; (E2b) disaster; (E2c) spite; (E2d) superstitious; (E2e) Theft; Deceit; Idolatry; camouflaged; character
- III. (A) 20 years; his equal; (B1) deceived; (B2) cheated; (B3) sorcerer; idolater; (B4) steals; (B5) abusive; (B6) hypocritical; (C) to learn; (C1) feels like; (C2) himself; (C3) other people; (C4) separate; (C5) a deeper work of grace
- IV. (A) don't know; unforgiveable; (B) easiest; predisposition; (C) la-la land; (D) beware; examine ourselves; (D1) wise; (D2) unconfessed sin; (D3) friendships; (D4) immune; (D5) God's will; (D6) tongue; (D7) sinless

I Want a Principle Within

By Charles Wesley (1749)

*I want a principle within
of watchful, godly fear,
a sensibility of sin,
a pain to feel it near.*

*I want the first approach to feel
of pride or wrong desire,
to catch the wandering of my will,
and quench the kindling fire.*

*From thee that I no more may stray,
no more thy goodness grieve,
grant me the filial awe, I pray,
the tender conscience give.
Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make;
awake my soul when sin is nigh,
and keep it still awake.*

*Almighty God of truth and love,
to me thy power impart;
the mountain from my soul remove,
the hardness from my heart.
O may the least omission pain
my reawakened soul,
and drive me to that blood again,
which makes the wounded whole.*



O for a Closer Walk with God

By William Cowper

(Sung to the tune *It Came upon the Midnight Clear*)

*O for a closer walk with God
A calm and heavenly frame
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb.
Where is the blessedness I knew
When I first saw the Lord?
Where is that soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?*

*What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.
Return, O holy Dove! return
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn
And drove Thee from my breast.*

*The dearest idol I have known
Whate'er that idol be
Help me tear it from Thy throne
And worship only Thee.
So shall my walk be close with God
Calm and serene my frame
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb.*



The Francis Asbury Society

PO Box 7

Wilmore, KY 40390

859-858-4222

800-530-5673

fas@francisasburysociety.com

www.francisasburysociety.com