

Genesis Devotions

Genesis 1—June 4, 2007

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

2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

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

6 And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." 7 So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so.

12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

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

20 And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." 23 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

24 And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, ^[b] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

*27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

This is a long reading, so it will be a short devotion. Here we see the power of God's Word. God speaks, and it is. "*Let there be*" is not a wish; "*Let there be*" is a command that works the very thing that is commanded. So also, when God says, "*Believe,*" He works the faith that believes as a gift.

The same God that worked the wonders of creation is the same God who works the wonders of salvation. The same Spirit here hovering over the waters rested above the Son's head, and still directs us to Him through the Gospel. The same Father who gave us all the world that He called "*good*" for no other reason than that He loved the human race even before its conception and wanted to bless it, still gives us every good and perfect gift from above, not because we deserve it, but because He loves us and wants to bless us. And just as our salvation has been worked by the Son, so also in creation the writer to the Hebrews tells us: "*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe*" (1:1,2).

We are a special people. Even the angels marvel at God's love for us. No other creature in existence can boast of being the object of such divine grace and charity. No other creature has received such bounty. We have been given the world. We have been given each other. We have been given the gift of marriage and children. We have been given a renewed relationship with our creating God, with the Father through the Son by the Spirit. What a powerful Word our Lord has! May we be ever quick to hear and heed it!

Genesis 2—June 5, 2007

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3 And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens- 5 and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, 6 but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground- 7

the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

8 Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush.¹ 14 The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said,

*"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."*

24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

"Then [Jesus] said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'" (Mark 2:27). The order in which Moses records these things is interesting. He ends chapter one with the creation of man, then mentions the Sabbath, and then returns, like a slow-motion replay, to the creation of man. We are the height of God's creation and we are the focus of the Sabbath, that is, we are the intended recipients of God's rest, especially in Christ, and God's Word, made manifest in Christ. The Sabbath is God's gift to us.

The creation of the human race is so important that Moses returns to it in chapter two in order to stress some key points regarding it. First, God had planted Paradise for us to enjoy in union with Him. God's desire was for full communion with us. This beauty of Paradise confessed the beauty of the relationship Adam and Eve were to have with their Creator.

Second, God's relationship with us from the beginning involved receiving and worshipping. Adam and Eve received every good thing the Lord has made for them. They worshipped by keeping God's one command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A tree was central to their relationship, as was water. Remember that for later.

Third, mankind was created to work. Now, this work was not a burden, but a joy, yet it was still work. Man had a purpose. Adam and Eve lived their faith and served God and each other through their vocations, that is, the roles, duties, and the place in which God had placed them.

Fourth, mankind was created for mankind. That is, we are social beings. Adam was to love Eve. Eve was to love Adam. And they were to expand the social framework of the human race by multiplying, by creating brothers and sisters in humanity and in faith in the Creator. The way in which God went about bringing Eve to Adam demonstrated the special kinship husband and wife, man and woman, and all of humanity are to have with one another. Marriage is the highest form of this kinship and also, as we see later in Ephesians, the closest thing we have to the relationship between Christ and the Church. While we are to love all men and women, marriage provides a unique and wonderful setting for showing the love we were created to show and breed. Yet love for God must always be first. Paradise was lost when love for one's self or for one's spouse was placed above love for God and His command, and true love for each other always lacks when love for God is absent or waning.

Fifth, where there is no sin, there is no shame. We were created to be without sin. In the next chapter, as sin enters the world, we will see not only death but shame arrive, and rightly so. There is nothing worse than a sinner losing the ability to blush. It is a sign of hardening. Only forgiveness can remove shame, and, even then, in this life there is no return to the innocence lost in Paradise. That awaits the new Paradise.

If you have time, read Revelation 22. Notice how Paradise gained in Christ resembles Paradise lost in Adam. Rejoice in the saving work of your God and Lamb. All that was lost is restored. All that was darkened is enlightened. St. John writes there, *"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and His servants."* We may have fallen, but God has picked us up, even as He picked up His cross and carried it!

Genesis 3:1-15—June 6, 2007

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave

some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all the livestock

and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

15 And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;

he will crush your head,

and you will strike his heel."

Satan leads Eve to question God's Word. He leads her to question God's motive for giving it. He leads her to question the truth of it. He leads her to question the seriousness of the matters with which it deals. Satan leads Eve to question God's Word, and it's all downhill from.

Eve could only defend herself according to her knowledge of God's Word, and we see right away that even this one command of the Lord was not firm in her mind. She adds, "*And you must not touch it.*" Perhaps Eve's motivation was sincere here. Maybe she thought that, if it was best not to eat the fruit, it was best not even to touch it, it was best just to stay away. Or perhaps Satan's temptation was already working. Maybe she was making God a taskmaster when He really was her loving Guardian. Maybe she was trying to convince herself the Lord's command was foolish, trite, or cumbersome. We don't know, but we do know that she could have used some more time to study. But time is always at a premium. The serpent already had his foot in the door—well, you know what I mean.

Satan, as is often the case, knows God's Word better than God's people. We know his act won't work with Jesus in the fourth chapter of Matthew, but Jesus did something we many times fail to do: He took God and His Word seriously. And so when Eve heard, "*You will not surely die,*" when she heard, "*For God knows that when you eat of it... you will be like God,*" she perked her ears up instead of covering them and walking the other way.

It's not easy to be in the Word as we ought. Our days are busy and, even when they slow down, still full of distraction. Often, the Word takes thought we don't feel capable of giving when we are burnt out or groggy. Perhaps we mean well, have the Bible sitting by the bed, but our eyes grow heavier as we do our best to read, and, afterward, we remember little. It's not easy to be in the Word as we ought, but it of utmost importance.

Sin had devastating consequences. Adam and Eve realized their nakedness and tried to hide it with a thrown together mishmash of fig leaves. Then, even worse than trying to hide their nakedness in such sorry fashion, they tried to hide from God. We cannot imagine how this must have pained our heavenly Savior. The trophies of His creation hide in newfound shame. And then the blame game starts. Adam points at Eve, and, even worse, at God. *"The woman YOU put here..."* The woman points at the serpent. *"The serpent deceived me."* And the blaming has never stopped since. Just listened to a married couple when the bills are tight, to a pair of siblings when something gets broken during playtime, to two pastors when there's a problem in the church body.

Tomorrow we see the consequences of sin for man and woman. But, in between now and then, even as we ponder how far we have fallen, let us not forget God's promise in the middle of it all. Just as the Sabbath was placed between the creation of man and the replay of his creation, so also the promise of a Savior, our eternal Sabbath, is placed between the first manifestations of the consequences of sin and God's further elaboration on consequences to come. When man reaches his lowest our God, to whom is glory in the highest, decided to put on His sandals, or, rather, to put on his sandals.

The cross stands in the middle, standing out on the craggy heap of nakedness and thorns and death that the human race had built with Satan's assistance. In Jesus, who filled the devil's ears with God's Word, rightly divided, before He crushed his arrogant head with His humble obedience to death, even death on a cross, we have forgiveness. In Jesus, we have every reason to dig back into God's promises. Even as we consider where we have fallen short in the pattern of our parents in Paradise, remember how Jesus didn't, so that we would have, not only a Paradise lost to mourn, but also a Paradise gained to celebrate.

Genesis 3:16-24—June 7, 2007

To the woman he said,

*"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you."*

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

*"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.*

*18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.*

*19 By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food*

*until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return."*

20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. 21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. 22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." 23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Eve's punishment comes first. Children remain a blessing, as they were to be before the Fall, but now childbirth would be painful. Yet every pain would also remind her of the promise. Her Offspring would be her Savior. Through Mary, Eve's daughter, Jesus, Eve's long-awaited Son, would come to crush the serpent's head. She would also have to put up with her husband, which, as many a wife has learned, is seldom easy. Marriage remains a blessing, as it was to be before the Fall, but both parties involved in marriage were now sinful, which would lead to tensions and to the husband's occasional abuse of his headship—even as the wife would also serve contrary to God's intention—so that even Christian husbands at times do not lead and love as Christ leads and loves the Church but, instead, in selfishness and laziness. Yet even in this abuse of headship there is a reminder of the promise, as the perfect Head would come to lead the Church, His bride, out of this sorrow and suffering and into the blessedness of the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb.

Adam's punishment comes next. He had listened to his wife, which is not always a bad thing, but in this case was. Because he participated in disobedience, he now participates in the disarray disobedience brings. His work, before a blessing and a joy, would be cumbersome, would drain him of his energy and, often, of his joy. The ground would produce thorns and thistles. By the sweat of his brow he would feed himself and his family. And then he would die. Hardly a happy tale. Yet even in this there are traces of the promise. One would come to conquer death, wearing Adam's cursed thorns upon His brow, to take sin away and restore Paradise. Christ would, like Adam, return to the earth, but would not see decay, and, walking out of His tomb would open the gates of heaven for all believers. May we all, men and women, as we bear up under the curses of our sins, always remember in such times to remember the promise, the hope of Him to come!

God made new clothes for our first parents. Death entered the world through sin, and now garments of skin, the products of death, are used to clothe sin's shame, to cover their nakedness. And in His love, God kicked them out of Paradise. Why in love? Because if they had eaten of the tree of life they would have lived forever in sin and in this fallen world. God had a new Paradise planned for them already, one that was found outside of Eden and on the other side of death, and so they are banished, and the Garden is guarded by a cherubim with a flaming sword.

Forbidden to eat from that tree of life in the Garden of Eden, God has planted a new tree of life for us. His Son hung on it, the eternal fruit of God's love, the blossomed

seed of Eve, of Abraham, of David. Let us eat of it often and richly to live forever, not in the misery of this life, but in the joy of the life to come.

Genesis 4—June 18, 2007

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." 2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." ^[a] And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

10 The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

13 Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. 14 Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

15 But the LORD said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. 16 So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

17 Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. 18 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

19 Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. 20 Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. 21 His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. 22 Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

23 Lamech said to his wives,

*"Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
wives of Lamech, hear my words.
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for injuring me.*

*24 If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times."*

25 Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." 26 Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh.

At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.

Eve finally had a son. Luther, when he translates this, implies that Eve thinks this is the Messiah that has been born to her. Far from the case! Later, Eve gives birth to another son, Abel. Cain means, "brought forth." Abel means "breath," or "meaningless," a word Solomon uses several times in Ecclesiastes. Cain is the firstborn son, brought forth from Eve, and, unfortunately, brought forth in the sin into which Adam and Eve had now fallen. And what does his sinful nature produce? Sin. He makes Abel's life a breath, declares it meaningless. Here we see already the nasty cycle of sin, repeated in so many of our families, as we inherit, not only the family name, but many of the family weaknesses and proclivities to sin.

Cain farmed. Abel tended flocks. The LORD did not prefer one above the other, just as He does not prefer the pastor over the plumber or the teacher over the technician. With time, both brought forth offerings from their occupations. The LORD looked with favor on Abel's, but not on Cain's. It was a matter of motivation. The Lord loves a cheerful giver, and the only offerings He wants are offerings of faith. Had Cain brought firstfruits of the soil? We're not told, and it doesn't matter. His reason for bringing what he brought was not genuine thankfulness, and his motivation was not faith. His reaction says as much.

The LORD looked with favor on Abel's sacrifice. The Hebrew actually simply says that the LORD looked at it. And He did not look at Cain's. Just as the prayers of the unbeliever do not reach the Lord's ears, so offerings of the unbeliever do not reach His eyes. The LORD cannot be bribed. He can only be praised and thanked.

This would have been a good time for self-examination for Cain. This would have been a good time for repentance. But, instead, Cain persisted in the path to destruction and became angry. Cain's spiritual sickness couldn't be his own fault. No, it was Abel's spiritual health that must be destroyed. And isn't that what those trapped in sin would most often prefer, that is, to bring others into the mess rather than to seek help in getting out?

But our Lord is gracious. *"Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."* The LORD lovingly calls Cain to faith and the faithfulness it produces. The LORD wants Cain's love as well as Abel's. The LORD wants to look upon Cain just as He had looked upon his brother. Remember that. Learn it well. Our response to sin is not to shovel deeper, but to climb out, because the Lord longs to lift us up.

Cain grabbed the shovel, though. He killed his brother, but Cain's sin did not die by silencing him who reminded Cain of it. No, Cain's sin multiplied. We see at the end of the chapter that his sin multiplied beyond anything he could have imagined as his ancestral line would not only repeat his transgression many times over, but boast of it, as Lamech does. Fathers, mothers, this is no subtle hint Moses' sets before us. This is a stern warning. Sin's cycle is vicious, and the more you feed it, the more it destroys. What of your family's heritage will your sons pass on? Let us pray it will be the adoption as sons we've received in Holy Baptism.

The chapter ends with hope. Adam and Eve have a new son, Seth. Seth had a son. Seth established a family line. *“And at that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.”* This is how believers are described in Genesis. The faith was passed on and the promise persisted. May God grant us faithful families with such a blessed legacy as this! May the Lord forgive us through the Son to come who will raise Abel from his grave, together with all who call out to Him! May that hope be the motivation for all we offer Him!

Genesis 5—June 19, 2007

This is the written account of Adam's line.

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "man."

3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. 4 After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 5 Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.

6 When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh. 7 And after he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters. 8 Altogether, Seth lived 912 years, and then he died.

9 When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. 10 And after he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters. 11 Altogether, Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died.

12 When Kenan had lived 70 years, he became the father of Mahalalel. 13 And after he became the father of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and had other sons and daughters. 14 Altogether, Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died.

15 When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he became the father of Jared. 16 And after he became the father of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and had other sons and daughters. 17 Altogether, Mahalalel lived 895 years, and then he died.

18 When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. 19 And after he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 20 Altogether, Jared lived 962 years, and then he died.

21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. 22 And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

25 When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech. 26 And after he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and had other sons and daughters. 27 Altogether, Methuselah lived 969 years, and then he died.

28 When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. 29 He named him Noah and said, "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed." 30 After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. 31 Altogether, Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died.

32 After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.

I have to admit that I've always had a hard time wrapping my head around the ages listed here. There are all kinds of explanations out there, which attempt either to prove their viability, or to explain them away. I think, however, that it is enough to let

them stand and save our questions for heaven. It would appear that as sin took a toll on the world, it took a toll on the body, which would make sense, since how many diseases and other causes for death aren't a result of fallen human behavior or environment?

In the last chapter, we saw the line of Cain, a nasty cycle of disobedience. Now we see the line of Seth, that is, the line of those that called on the name of the LORD. Two people stand out in this line. First, Enoch (v. 24). Enoch breaks the pattern of *"and then he died"* at the end of each paragraph. Enoch, together with Elijah, has the unique honor of never having died. He walked with God in life, and then was taken to heaven. Lamech, seventh in the line of Cain, boasted of his murderous deeds and designs. Enoch, seventh in the line of Seth, boasted in nothing but His God.

The second person to stand out is Noah. Knowing what comes next, our ears perk up at his name. *"He will comfort us..."* It would seem that Noah would bring the opposite of comfort, since he would announce the destruction of the world. Yet Noah's message was both law and Gospel. God would destroy the impenitent, but He invited those who would repent to safety in the ark. And we have the same comfort. The same Lord who warns the wicked, invites the sinner to Christ and His Church, to safety, as the same waters that kill bring life for the believer. And Noah's life stands as a comforting testimony to this. We see the his faults and the faults of his family, but we also see the Lord's faithfulness to this man who held to His promise through faith.

This chapter, at first glance, seems one of those to rush through. Yet there is cause to stop and ponder. Here we see the transmission of the faith, and the consequences of this passing on of God's promises. Here we see the Church's family tree, for all the faithful are sons and daughters of Seth, heirs of the comfort that comes from God alone. And in Jesus, we see Seth's greatest son, who delivers us, not only through the waters of the Flood, but through death itself.

Genesis 6—June 20, 2007

When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. 3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."

4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. 6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. 7 So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

9 This is the account of Noah.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. 10 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. 12 God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 13 So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. 14 So

make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. 15 This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. 16 Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. 17 I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. 19 You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. 20 Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. 21 You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."
22 Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

I doubt that any of us could bear the sadness that must have filled our God as He watched His creation. *"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain."* With each generation, the wickedness increases, the sinful nature expresses itself more creatively and boldly. And now, in just the sixth chapter of Genesis, we see the sons of God, that is, the believers, already trading their heritage from the Lord for the pleasures of the flesh. The beauty of the sons of men becomes more important than their faith, or lack thereof. And as the faithful intermarry with the unfaithful, they lose their saltiness instead of salting a dying world. And, for that reason, God is forced to punish those who will not seek His mercy. There is warning in that for all of us.

God is a God who warns. He never acts without warning. Over and over again, He calls us back to the fold, He longs to grant us repentance. He the warning. See the writing on the wall when your life starts to look too much like the sons of men. God has made you His own sons and daughters. Don't trade that for anything, no matter how beautiful it may seem. Rather, fill the hearts of the angels with joy as the Good Shepherd places you on His sturdy shoulders to return you to the fold. Let the waters be for you, not destruction, but eternal cleansing. There is room in the ark of the Church for you. Remain in that ark, and you will reach heaven's port safely.

Genesis 7—June 21, 2007

The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. 2 Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, 3 and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. 4 Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made."

5 And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.

6 Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. 7 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. 8 Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures

that move along the ground, 9 male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. 10 And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

13 On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. 14 They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. 15 Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. 16 The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in.

17 For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. 18 The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. 19 They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. 20 The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. 21 Every living thing that moved on the earth perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. 22 Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. 23 Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

24 The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

The righteous gathered in the ark. The righteous gather in the Church. And the righteous are saved. Righteous how? Righteous through faith in the promise of God. Righteous why? To serve and glorify God.

It rained for forty days and forty nights. The number forty is everywhere in the Bible. Forty is the number of repentance. Immediately after His Baptism, Jesus heads to the wilderness for forty days. So also this life is our forty days of trials.

But the LORD shut them in. They could have felt caged, but they knew better. They were shut in, not to be encumbered, but to be protected. Outside was death and destruction. Inside was safety. And our Lord has shut us in. We are sheep in the fold. He is the gate, not to encumber us, but to protect us. Outside the fold are wolves, death, and destruction. Outside the fold, the devil prowls like a roaring lion, eager to devour.

Only Noah was left, and those with him. Talk about a remnant. Sometimes we feel alone as Christians in an unspiritual world, but imagine being Noah. Yet God's Church lived on and live out God's loving plan, even when it had no idea it was doing so. Eight in the ark and twelve in the upper room, yet the ark and the upper room were the place to be. Numbers are all wet sometimes.

Are you in the ark? Are you shut in? Are you walking lockstep with the masses? These are important questions. And Jesus is the answer. Hear His voice. He calls you to safety. He promises protection. Stick with Him, even if only a few others are doing the same. The dove alights on Him. He is your peace. The wolves run from Him in

terror. He is your life. He's lasted forty days with that roaring lion, and sent him whimpering to hell. He is your hope. Get in the ark.

Genesis 8—June 25, 2007

1 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. 2 Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. 3 The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, 4 and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5 The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible.

6 After forty days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark 7 and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. 8 Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. 9 But the dove could find no place to set its feet because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. 10 He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. 11 When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. 12 He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

13 By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. 14 By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

15 Then God said to Noah, 16 "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. 17 Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it."

18 So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. 19 All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. 21 The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

*22 "As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease."*

After forty days, Noah opened the window. God had remembered him after this time of testing and tribulation. After forty days, came new hope. On the eighth day,

Noah left the ark, just as on the eighth day, the first Sunday of a new week, Christ left the grave. The dove had come bearing an olive branch, a sign of peace and hope, even as a dove hovered over Christ at His Baptism, pointing us to Him who went from the Upper Room to the Mount of Olives where He was tested and arrested for our deliverance from death, for our peace through the forgiveness of sins, for our hope for eternal life. And, while the math might be confusing, the answer is clear as day: you, like Noah, live to see another day, to see the eternal Day God has prepared for you.

The fallen nature of man did not change while Noah was on the ark. Even at the end of this chapter, the LORD says ever inclination of his heart is evil from childhood, the same as it had been before. But fallen man's relationship to the LORD had changed. Noah had believed God, and God, for that reason, regarded Noah as righteous.

Noah had gone the forty days and emerged from what would have been his watery grave without the Lord's promise for a new beginning, on the first day of the first month. And, as Noah did so, he offered sacrifices of praise and thanks. May we do the same. *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship,"* St. Paul encourages. And why shouldn't you? You have passed through the waters for a new beginning. This is your first day of the first month. By God's promise, Christ's death became your own death in the watery grave of your Baptism, and, just as Christ did not remain in His own grave long, you also did not emerge from those waters dead, but alive. The same waters that drowned your old Adam brought Christ to life within you, as a new man or woman, brought peace and hope, brought a new relationship with God, even as the old fallen nature clung to your flesh. God has remembered you. So St. Paul is right: *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship."*

Genesis 9—June 26, 2007

1 Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. 2 The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. 3 Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

4 "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. 5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

*6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made man.*

7 As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 9 "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you 10 and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. 11 I establish my covenant with you:

Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

17 So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

18 The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) 19 These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth.

20 Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. 21 When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. 22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. 23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness.

24 When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, 25 he said,

*"Cursed be Canaan!
The lowest of slaves
will he be to his brothers."*

26 He also said,

*"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem!
May Canaan be the slave of Shem.*

*27 May God extend the territory of Japheth;
may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,
and may Canaan be his slave."*

28 After the flood Noah lived 350 years. 29 Altogether, Noah lived 950 years, and then he died.

The blood is sacred. God makes that clear to Noah. He was not to eat the blood of beasts, and he and his descendants were definitely not to shed the blood of men. God did not want a rerun to the Cain and Abel episode. Life is in blood, and life is a gift never to be taken for granted.

Do you treasure the blood? Do you recognize the life in it? Do you understand that not all the blood of beasts could compare to the blood of men, to the blood of the Son of Man, to the blood of God? Do you rejoice that God has loved you enough to give that very blood for you?

They were not to eat the blood, because life was in the blood, and life was a gift never to be taken for granted. We are to drink the Blood, because life is in the Blood, and life is a gift never to be taken for granted. We have killed our Brother, who offered the better sacrifice, who walked with God and knew His favor. Yet we have not received

the mark of Cain. No, we have been marked with the very Blood of the Lamb for the forgiveness of sins.

We were made in the image of God, but by our sin we lost that image. Yet Christ has made us part of the family again, and family shares a resemblance. Christ is renewing us in His image. Rather than destroying us again, for we remained as sinful as before the Flood, the Father sent the Son to redeem us.

We, like Ham, have not respected our Father as we ought, yet our Father has esteemed us above the angels and given us a brother to teach us the obedience of a son. While Ham looked upon the nakedness of his father and was cursed, the heavenly Father sent His Son to die naked on the cross that we might be blessed. We are sons of Shem through faith. May we like Shem show the respect to our Father that is due Him, namely, may we believe His promise and rejoice in His covenant.

The Blood is sacred. God makes that clear to us. He has caught this fruit of the cross in countless chalices for us to drink down life in order to live in grace. Christ has offered the better sacrifice and been slain by His brothers. But His Blood calls out still today, not to condemn, but to absolve. Life is in His Blood, and life is a gift never to be taken for granted.

Genesis 10—June 27, 2007

1 This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

2 The sons of Japheth:

Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras.

3 The sons of Gomer:

Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah.

4 The sons of Javan:

Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittim and the Rodanim. 5 (From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.)

6 The sons of Ham:

Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan.

7 The sons of Cush:

Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteca.

The sons of Raamah:

Sheba and Dedan.

8 Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD." 10 The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar. 11 From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah 12 and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

13 Mizraim was the father of

the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, 14 Pathrusites, Casluhites (from whom the Philistines came) and Caphtorites.

15 Canaan was the father of

Sidon his firstborn, and of the Hittites, 16 Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, 17 Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, 18 Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites.

Later the Canaanite clans scattered 19 and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.

20 These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

21 Sons were also born to Shem, whose older brother was ^[1] Japheth; Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber.

22 The sons of Shem:

Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram.

23 The sons of Aram:

Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshech.

*24 Arphaxad was the father of Shelah,
and Shelah the father of Eber.*

25 Two sons were born to Eber:

One was named Peleg, because in his time the earth was divided; his brother was named Joktan.

26 Joktan was the father of

Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 27 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 28 Obal, Abimael, Sheba, 29 Ophir, Havilah and Jobab. All these were sons of Joktan.

30 The region where they lived stretched from Mesha toward Sephar, in the eastern hill country.

31 These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

32 These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.

Not the most exciting section, but interesting nonetheless. Notice that, just as before the Flood, so also after the Flood, the Gospel will be better preserved in some lines than others. This is a reason for all of us to give thanks for those in our own families who have handed down this treasure to us, who have left us the best inheritance one can leave. This is encouragement for all us to remember that it is never too late for us to start passing on the same to our loved ones as the most precious gift one can give.

As with every chapter of Scripture, so with this one: we cannot help but call Christ to mind. Just as the Gospel was passed along through certain lines, so also Christ would be born from one. Through Shem, we receive Christ. Our divine Savior would come through the human family. Salvation is as down-to-earth as a family tree, as DNA. Our Savior is part of a family, even as He has become part of our own families. Family is a gift from God, foundational to the health of society and the future, a blessing providing and fulfilling much of what matters in life. Sure, Christ could find much fault in those from whom He drew His human lineage, just as we can fault with each other within our household or extended family. But rather than finding fault, Christ chose to bring blessing. Yes, through the law Christ spoke as God to His fathers with admonition and warning. But He did so out of love, and may we speak admonition and warning when necessary in the same way. And may we always see our fellow family members as Christ saw His: as opportunities to love, as treasures to cherish, as blessing onto which to hold.

You are a part of a family. You are a part of God's family. What a marvelous gift from God! What a reason to celebrate life and each other! What an opportunity to reflect the love of Christ for sinners as a sinner loved by God among sinners in need of love!

Genesis 11—June 28, 2007

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building.

6 The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

8 So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

10 This is the account of Shem.

Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad. 11 And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

12 When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Shelah. 13 And after he became the father of Shelah, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

14 When Shelah had lived 30 years, he became the father of Eber. 15 And after he became the father of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

16 When Eber had lived 34 years, he became the father of Peleg. 17 And after he became the father of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

18 When Peleg had lived 30 years, he became the father of Reu. 19 And after he became the father of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

20 When Reu had lived 32 years, he became the father of Serug. 21 And after he became the father of Serug, Reu lived 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

22 When Serug had lived 30 years, he became the father of Nahor. 23 And after he became the father of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

24 When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah. 25 And after he became the father of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

26 After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

27 This is the account of Terah.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. 28 While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. 29 Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. 30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no children.

31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.

32 Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.

Our first parents fell into sin when they wanted to become like God, and ever since then little has changed. We love to play God, to place ourselves in the center of the world, to make decisions God has reserved for Himself, to expect others to serve us, to have, not one day in our honor, but seven. We can hardly watch the news without seeing new towers built every day. We can hardly honestly examine our lives without seeing ourselves climbing them, like King Kong, eager to experience the view from the top. But, just as our desire to become like God has not changed, neither have the results: they are always disastrous, whether Stalinism and Nazism, abortion and euthanasia, or the personal dilemma and disasters of our lives crafted by our desire to go it alone or to trump God's will with our own.

In love, God confused their language. A world where man becomes God is hell on earth. No, God longs to give us, renewed and restored, the world where God became man. And when we look at the track records, ours and His, it's hard not to agree with Him. Compared with His eternal wisdom and foresight, even our best-laid plans are terribly shortsighted. Compared with His mercy and grace, even our most selfless hopes are selfish. If we want to climb to heaven, we'd best not climb a tower. No, let us take a hold of the cross, our only stairway to heaven.

We may be confused, but life is less confusing when God is God and we are us. That's how He intended it, and He intended it that way for our good. Our first parents lost Paradise by their desire to be like God. We have regained Paradise by God's desire to make us again what we were made to be in the first place: the prize of His creation. And what more could we want to be. You are God's prized possession. He will take care of you. His will is always best. His language is not always easy, but His message of new life in His Son is always clear. Spend your life learning His language of love. It will come in handy on the top of that stairway.

Genesis 12—June 29, 2007

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

2 "I will make you into a great nation

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you,

and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you."

4 So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

8 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. 9 Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. 11 As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. 12 When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."

14 When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman. 15 And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. 16 He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels.

17 But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. 18 So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" 20 Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

The LORD told Abram to go into the wilderness. There was a great people awaiting him. There was blessing. No, there was no outline. There was no itinerary. Go! And Abram went. Along the way, he faced obstacles. Sometimes he stuck with the simple instructions the LORD had given him. Sometimes he improvised, bending the truth to avoid the uncomfortable.

The LORD told our Lord, THE LORD, to go into the wilderness. There was a great people awaiting him. There was blessing. Unfortunately, there was an outline. There was an itinerary. It included more than enough to turn Him around and send Him back to the place from which He'd come. But He went. Go! All His Father had to do was say it, and He did. He never improvised. He bowed His head. He bore the crosses. He bore THE cross. He spoke the truth, even at his own expense.

He was the Seed of Abraham. He was the Son of this promise given to the patriarch. He was the fruit of the wilderness. He was obedience perfected over generations. And He is yours, even as Abram is. He is your Brother, even as Abram is your father, not genealogically, but spiritually. God has not called you to leave what is to go to what is not. God has not called you into the wilderness. No, He has called you to faith. Could that bring you where you least expected? Perhaps. Could that place you in awkward situations? Perhaps. Will you ever stand there alone? The answer to that is a resounding no. God goes with those He calls. Christ goes before those who follow. There is no longer any wilderness. There is only the well-trod path of patriarchs and the Savior. So put on your sandals with joy. Your name is great, for God has placed His name on you. You are blessed, for you are children of promise.

Genesis 13—July 3, 2007

1 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. 2 Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

3 From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier 4 and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

5 Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6 But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. 7 And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

8 So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

10 Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: 12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

14 The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. 17 Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

18 So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the LORD.

Sometimes the godly get the bad lot. It sure seems that way at least. How often doesn't it seem the wicked prosper while the faithful suffer? But Abram knew better. He knew that no matter what lot Lot chose, his own lot would be enough, because he cast his lot with the LORD. That's a lot of lots, but the Lord gives a lot, so get used to it.

God's promise was going to come true no matter what. Abram knew that. And by choosing less with the Lord, he received more. While Lot's land looked promising, we know the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and, if we don't, we'll get to it soon. Sometimes what looks like the best acreage only produces weeds.

What has been your lot? Has it been less than stunning as of late? Is it not what you would choose if given the choice? Well, remember Abram. Better a lot with the Lord than a lot with the world. Abram ended up rescuing Lot (sorry to be a spoiler), and what was once fruitful land was sulfured to barrenness. Hopefully, you get the point. The main factor in the value of a lot is the Lord, not the realtor's stats.

Move your tents and build an altar when your lot changes. The Lord is still with you, and with Him there is always enough. There is a future, even when it seems bleak. We are Abraham's children after all, and not Lot's, because we also follow the Lord of

promise. Sure, we might have to wait for the best part, but little worth having doesn't come without a wait. So follow Abraham and His offspring, and find in Christ, who bore His lot all the way to the cross and grave, the ultimate Promised Land. Yeah, the road may be rocky. But if it weren't, that'd be the first sign you weren't walking with the one who opened the gates to the perfect lot on the rocky hill of the skull. So cheer up. It may seem you are a slumlord, but you're standing on the best investment of all: Jesus Christ.

Genesis 14, July 9, 2007

At this time Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim 2 went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). 3 All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (the Salt Sea). 4 For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

5 In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emities in Shaveh Kiriathaim 6 and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert. 7 Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazazon Tamar.

8 Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim 9 against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. 10 Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills. 11 The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. 12 They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

13 One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. 14 When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

17 After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying,

*"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.*

*20 And blessed be God Most High,
who delivered your enemies into your hand."
Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."

22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath 23 that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' 24 I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."

We see how richly the LORD had blessed Abram even as he was a wandering foreigner. He had allies. He had trained men. For this reason, he was able to rescue his nephew Lot. As we will see over and over again with Moses, Joshua, the judges, and Israel's kings, the battle does not belong to the largest army when the LORD is involved. The battle belongs to the LORD. Abram is called "the Hebrew" here, which was a pejorative, a put-down. Abram was just a Hebrew, an outsider, a nothing, which is how the ancients used the word, and yet with the LORD Abram would be the victor.

Melchizedek is perhaps one of the most fascinating men in the Old Testament, partly because he is so mysterious. Melchizedek was king of Salem, which would later be called Jerusalem. He was not only a king, but a priest. Abram even pays Melchizedek the priestly tribute, the tithe, or tenth. Melchizedek recognizes God's hand upon Abram and acknowledges it.

The New Testament compares this king to Christ. Christ, as our great and final High Priest, whose origins are from of old and who has come from Judah and not Levi, from outside the priestly line, is a priest in the order of Melchizedek. He is our Prophet, Priest, and King, and all rightly pay him the priestly tribute of a life lived to His glory. His final sacrifice has brought us the ultimate blessing, as He who is the Seed of Abram is at the same time the better Melchizedek. How blessed we are, therefore, to be heirs of both in Him.

If you have time tonight, read Hebrews 7 and see what the writer to the Hebrews says about Jesus and Melchizedek there.

Genesis 15—July 11, 2007

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

"Do not be afraid, Abram.

*I am your shield,
your very great reward. "*

2 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit^d my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

7 He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

9 So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."

10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. 11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. 13 Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. 15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. 16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates- 19 the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20 Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21 Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

The LORD had given Abram so much, but the one thing He had promised him, the main reason Abram left everything and ventured into this foreign land was still lacking. Abram had no son, no heir. Abram had just won an amazing battle. Few would have expected it. Kings were rescued by a nomad. But still Abram's faith was obsessed with that with which faith ought to be obsessed: God's promise.

The LORD repeated His promise. As numerous as the stars would Abram's offspring be, and they are, as millions of children of his faith have lived and died and yet live upon this earth. "*Abram believe the LORD, and He credited it to Him as righteousness.*" He is the father of all who believe, St. Paul tells us (read Romans 4 if you're bored tonight). And may the LORD grant us, Abram's children, hands just as stubborn to hold to His Word.

The LORD is very detailed with Abram. It would be a while yet, but the land would be his through his offspring. The LORD alludes to the captivity in Egypt and the exodus. There would be hardship. The LORD sets the timeline. It would take some time. And Abram believes. It is far off, but Abram sees through faith, and Abram rejoices in fulfillment to come. The LORD will do all this. Abram is simply to believe and follow. The LORD's arm is strong, even if Abram's eyes are at times short-sighted with doubt. God does not promise and not act. God's promise is money in the bank.

The LORD has given much to us. Think back to Luther's explanation of the First Article again and remember all that the LORD has given us. But may none of this ever pry our eyes from the promise. The LORD has given us Christ, the offspring of Abram, and in Christ the forgiveness of sins, and with that forgiveness heaven, the Promised Land. No matter what else we may win or have, this is what matters most. If we gain everything else but lose this promise, we've lost it all. Faith rests in promises. You have Christ. You have forgiveness. Sure, there will be hardship. Sure, heaven is going to

take some time. But believe God, and it will be credited to you as righteousness. And then give thanks for all the rest as well.

Genesis 16—July 19, 2007

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

6 "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

7 The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her."

10 The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."

11 The angel of the LORD also said to her:

*"You are now with child
and you will have a son.
You shall name him Ishmael,
for the LORD has heard of your misery.*

*12 He will be a wild donkey of a man;
his hand will be against everyone
and everyone's hand against him,
and he will live in hostility
toward all his brothers."*

13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." 14 That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

15 So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

If you want to make a mess of your life, may I suggest two things: act outside of the one man with one woman arrangement of marriage (whether by having sex outside of marriage or by polygamy) or try to help God's promises along when you think He's taking too long with them. If you really want a mess, combine the two. While some indeed did practice polygamy in the Old Testament, it never worked out well and always caused dissension and, even worse, many times caused a gradual fall from faith. While God has at times used men to bring about the fulfillment of His promises, it has never

worked out well when men have decided they were the ones God was going to use and they knew the way God was going to use them, all of this, of course, without any word from God. God has set the pattern for our marriage. God has set the plan for His promises.

God is merciful. He takes care of Hagar after Abram and Sarai's foolishness leaves her high and dry (not that Hagar's haughtiness hadn't helped dig her hole a little deeper as well). While Abram and Hagar's infidelity would produce lasting dissension through her rebellious son, God nonetheless promised to be with her. Sin would bring consequences. But God, in His mercy, would care for her in the midst of those consequences, even as He would care for Abram.

Leave God's promise alone. Spend less time working it out and more time believing it. Spend less time critiquing and more time rejoicing. Abram's promised son did come, and through Him God's promised Son did come. You have the fulfillment of the promise. Hold on to Him, and let Him be your rock and comfort as you await the fulfillment of God's other promises. Sure, the timing may seem off at times, but that's just because our clock is fast. Things move slower in eternity, slowly but surely, and surely God will not forget or fail us.

Genesis 17:1-8—August 28, 2007

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. 2 I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old." Talk about a wait. We get frustrated in the drive-thru at McDonalds. Abram was ninety-nine years old, having wandered in the wilderness for longer than he could remember, and now—now!—it seems that his long-awaited son of promise might be on his way. Just for a little more perspective, it had been thirteen years since Ishmael, the son of Abram's trying to help God's promise along, had been born—that was our last devotion (Genesis 16), which, to some of you, may seem like thirteen years ago as well. *"When Abram was ninety-nine years old."* Patience, brothers and sisters.

"Abram fell facedown." What else can we do when faced with a holy God and an impossible task? God says, *"Be perfect."* That's not the kind of thing you toss an "ok" at and then move on with your day. *"Be perfect"* is the kind of thing that sinks your heart into your stomach, because the sinner knows it's not in him—Ishmael was living, breathing proof of that. But perfect is what Abram would be, not in himself, but in Christ. Don't forget the words of Genesis 15, when God had made a similar promise. *"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."* Through his Descendant, Abram would be what he could not be on his own: perfect in God's sight.

Through faith, the perfect nod of the head to God's promise, God would see in Abram His faithful servant.

"I will make you very fruitful." Think back again. I know it's been a while, and I'm sorry I've fallen so behind in the devotions, but try. Think back to Genesis 1, *before* the Fall. *"Be fruitful and multiply,"* God said. *"Fruitful."* That's how God intended us to be, and that is what God would make Abram. What a blessing children are! God has given us the joy of populating heaven by bringing little wretch after miserable sinner to the font. In a day and age that marvels at a handful of children in one family, that sometimes even views reproducing as being irresponsible, as if God is going to let us run out of real estate, it's important for us to remember the blessings of fruitfulness, it's important for us to remember that our heavenly Father's family is never too big, His house is never too full. Many today say a lack of fruit will be our downfall, as the West ages and dies without sufficient offspring to support them. Who knows? I do know, however, that our downfall would have been certain had Abram not been fruitful, for we would have been without Isaac, which means we would have been without Jacob, which means we would have been without Ruth, without Jesse, without David, without Mary, without... well, you get the point. *"I will make you very fruitful."* In Christ, God gives us, who after the Fall had little reason to bring children into but a fallen world, a new hope and a new reason to rejoice with each little one, for we may be sojourners in a fallen world, as Abram sojourned in the wilderness, but we have a Promised Land, a land promised to our offspring as well.

"As for me, this is my covenant with you." Isn't how our Lord speaks comforting? *"As for me."* He's money in the bank. There is no wavering, no shred of cause for doubt. *"As for me."* And that *"as for me"* is all for you. When struck by doubt, when stung with the guilt of your sins, when troubled by harm you've cause with your selfishness, turn to the LORD and listen: *"As for me."* He's still there. His promise is still certain. Let your faith be certain as well. Like Abram, who went from Genesis 15 to 16, that is, from faith to doubt, from obedience to disobedience (or at least imperfect obedience), press on to Genesis 17. Hear the LORD repeat His promise, receive that promise through faith, and put foot before foot again on your earthly pilgrimage. *"As for me."* And He's all for you, and He always will be. May He grant us grace to be all for Him as well.

Genesis 17:9-27—August 29, 2007

Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. 10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. 13 Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

15 God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. 16 I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I

will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

17 Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!"

19 Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. 21 But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year." 22 When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

23 On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. 24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, 25 and his son Ishmael was thirteen; 26 Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day. 27 And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

God would mark His covenant with a sign. Sound familiar? Water on the head, bread and wine in the mouth...anything? God marks great things by simple means, but He marks them nonetheless. And so every male among them who was eight days old was to be circumcised. Notice: among them, eight days old. They didn't have to go up in front of the congregation and give a testimonial. They didn't have to make a decision. They didn't have to come to Christ—they couldn't crawl, let alone walk, even if they wanted to do so. No, they were brought. They were brought by those among whom they were born and lived. Their parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbors and friends were to see to it that they were brought into the covenant. And they were, with a snip of the flesh and the reading of a promise.

How blessed are we! We too have experienced the same. We have been born among them, or, at the least, brought among them later in life. And the sign given us as a seal of the covenant is not only for males, but for all. It is given with the promise, now looking back instead of forward. What Abraham looked toward in faith we look back at in the same. And, by God's grace, we have the added blessing that we get to see how it all unraveled in the past, even as we look forward its eternal benefits.

Abraham laughed. May we do the same, not in disbelief, but in the bliss of the forgiveness of sins. What could God possibly do with an old man well past his prime? We see here that He could do a lot. What could God do with a poor and miserable sinner like me? Who are we to entertain misgivings that He can do a lot, just as He's promised.

Sarai was to have a new name. She was to be Sarah, as Saul became Paul, as Simon became Cephas, which means Peter. You may not have a new name, but you are a new person. You are a child of God. You are a part of the great nation. You are a member of the household of God. As such, you may be called down winding paths on journeys of faith, but the One who's called you will be the One who guides you, who brings you home. And if the devil ever gets you to second-guess your Father, remember the signs. Touch your forehead. Taste and see that the Lord is good. God

marks the greatest things with the simplest signs, but sometimes simplest signs make the biggest difference.

Genesis 18:1-15—September 4, 2007

1 The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. 2 Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

3 He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. 4 Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. 5 Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread."

7 Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. 8 He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

9 "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him.

"There, in the tent," he said.

10 Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. 11 Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

13 Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son."

15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."

But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

When the LORD visits, it's something to celebrate. Abraham knew that. He went to prepare a feast for his visitors, one of whom was the LORD Himself. When the LORD visits, big things are in the making. Abraham knew that. Surely he was eager to find out what it would be. Surely it would be some sort of promise—it always was. And a promise goes best with a nice meal. That's one thing a Bible reader quickly notices.

"Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way," Abraham said. It was a nice gesture. And I am sure it was a nice meal. But the LORD prefers doing the refreshing Himself. His promise would be the most refreshing meal that day. Abraham and Sarah would have their child, and they would have him soon. When the LORD visits nothing remains the same, even as so very much does (same camels, same wilderness, same companions, but all different nonetheless).

"Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way." That is what the LORD says to you when He visits. He makes Abraham's words His own. He comes with promises—promises of mercy, of love, of hope, of protection,

of guidance, of a way out of temptation and a way to stand under the weight of a burden. He comes with promises, with Bread of Life, and marks that promise with a meal: *"Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way."*

Sometimes those promises seem doomed, obstructed by countless obstacles, at least in our line of sight, but the LORD doesn't deal in sometimes. The LORD deals in ages of ages, in all time, and knows how to accomplish what He desires, and what He desires is always good. When you are tempted to laugh, cry, or simmer as one of His promises hits your ears, remember the LORD's reminder to Sarah: *"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"* You know the answer, and so does He. Nothing is too hard for him. His arm is never too short to save—no, outstretched those arms took hold of the sin of all the world at once and nailed it to the tree to which sinners had nailed Him.

When the LORD visits, it's something to celebrate. And He visits often, every time the binding on your Bible breaks, every time words of Absolution are spoken, every time the table is set with the Feast. Every day is a party for the Christian, at least every day we spend with this Guest.

Genesis 18:16-33—September 5, 2007

When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. 17 Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 19 For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

20 Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. 23 Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

26 The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

27 Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, 28 what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?"

"If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

29 Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?"

He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."

30 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?"

He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

31 Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?"

He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."

32 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?"

He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

33 When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Today we see how inclined the ear of our Lord is to the prayer of the righteous. The Almighty lends His ear to the humble and listens attentively and with interest. All He asks is that Abraham be bold, and Abraham was, as well he should be, for through His Seed he had this blood-bought privilege, as we hear in the Book of Hebrews, "*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*" (Hebrews 4).

The Christian talks to God as Father, as the One who will not give a stone when asked for bread or a snake when asked for a fish. "*Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*" (Matthew 7). We approach this heavenly Father with sincere humility and reverent fear, but not with the fear of a neglected or abused child—no, with the humility and reverent fear that acknowledges the greatness of our divine Father and looks up to Him as a child looks up to his earthly father, who, at the time at least, he is sure is the best, strongest, smartest man alive. The best part is that, with regard to our heavenly Father, we need not grow out of such a view, because our estimation of Him is correct.

"*As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live*" (Ezekiel 33). And the children are like their Father. We have a wonderful privilege. We may go before the Almighty with Blood-bought boldness and confidence. Take your concerns to Him. Hear His reply, and rejoice in it, whatever it may be, for no mind can fathom the wisdom, holiness, love, and justice of our God. And go to Him, not only on your own behalf, but on behalf of those around you. Write down the names and needs of your neighbors. Pray through them. Pray the church directory. Pray the office phone list. Pray the softball team roster. There is always more for which to pray than time in which to pray it, so prayer ought never be boring. There's plenty to fill the time.

And as you pray, and even when you aren't praying, at least not with your lips, although surely with the continued sigh of faith in your heart, be assured that Another prays for you. As Abraham interceded for Sodom, his Seed intercedes for you, continuing the "*Father, forgiven them*" of the cross and adding to it. With Job, we can console ourselves, "*Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend*" (Job 16). With the Apostle we can exult, "*Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us*" (Romans 8).

James puts it nicely, "*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*" (James 5). In Christ, you are righteous. His sacrifice has graced your lips that they might pour forth praises together with prayers. Your tongue is capable of more than you

know, because when you speak, you have His ear. And, even more, He speaks with you. *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"* And the prayer of THE Righteous Man is powerful and effective. And He prays for you. Pray with Him, for yourself and for each other, because the voice of faith strikes perfect harmony with Him on whom faith rests.

Genesis 19:1-29—September 6, 2007

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. 2 "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning."

"No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square."

3 But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. 4 Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. 5 They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."

6 Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7 and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. 8 Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

9 "Get out of our way," they replied. And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

10 But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. 11 Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

12 The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, 13 because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

15 With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished."

16 When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them.

17 As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"

18 But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, please! 19 Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. 20 Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared."

21 He said to him, "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. 22 But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoar.)

23 By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. 24 Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. 25 Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. 26 But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

27 Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. 28 He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

29 So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

This text isn't really studied until it isn't merely swung, but most importantly swallowed, and it can only be swallowed as a bitter pill, and not in an attempt to make me feel better about myself. Sin is exposed as what it is in this text: deadly. God's wrath is revealed for all to see what it brings: death. And we dare not think this is just a condemnation of sodomy. This is a condemnation of sin. This is a judgment on the squandering of one's time of grace.

Let's make no bones about it. Homosexual sex is sin. It is a sinful as sin can be. It is unnatural and contrary to the will of God. But it does not stand alone in those categories. It is part of a list comprised of many of our own transgressions. Homosexual sex is wrong for the same reason lying is wrong: it is not how God intended the crown of his creation to behave and interact. So, yes, we must guard against the unfettered and perilous sexual agenda permeating our society at this time, which pushes promiscuity of every kind and pleasure divorced from a mutual promise of commitment or procreation, but we must not fall into the trap of thinking that one person's sin is more dangerous than another's, that that person's sin is more dangerous than mine.

The wages of sin is death. Sin includes every sin. Every sin bears the same name and brings the same condemnation, and that condemnation is embraced, whether wittingly or unwittingly, by the impenitent, that is, by those untroubled by their sin, unwilling to confess its sinfulness and strive against it, by those who feel no need for the mercy of God.

These fires weren't just for Sodom. These fires were and are a warning to all who are tempted to follow their sinful passions before the Shepherd's pleas. There is no room for sin in heaven. That is why Jesus came. We must be washed to stand before God. We must be dressed in innocence to behold His face. We must be dead to sin to live with Him in Paradise. Sin cast us out of Paradise and forgiveness will bring us back.

Don't just swing this text at others. Swallow the bitter pill. This is what awaits the impenitent, those who toy with sin like a kitten with yarn instead of fleeing it like a cat catching site of a pitbull. But take heart. You don't merely have something to flee from. You have Someone to flee to. You have Christ, the Deliverer from sin and the Guarantee of a new inheritance, a new city, a new life. Like Lot, walk to him, and, unlike his wife, don't look back. You're not losing anything when you walk away. No, you're gaining everything and more.

Genesis 19:30-38—September 7, 2007

Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave. 31 One day the older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man around here to lie with us, as is the custom all over the earth. 32 Let's get our father to drink wine and then lie with him and preserve our family line through our father."

33 That night they got their father to drink wine, and the older daughter went in and lay with him. He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

34 The next day the older daughter said to the younger, "Last night I lay with my father. Let's get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and lie with him so we can preserve our family line through our father." 35 So they got their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went and lay with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

36 So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. 37 The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. 38 The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

How quickly the saved sin! How quickly the forgiven fall! How could this be? It seems so inconsistent, doesn't it? And it is, but it is nothing new.

As is often the case, the daughters' intention was not in itself sinful. Preserving the family line is a good thing. But the means were hardly appropriate. Abraham too had wanted to preserve the family line. Sarai told him to lie with Hagar. You remember how that worked out. God would not bless that birth. No, Abraham's line would be preserved and prospered through the son that God would give Him, the promised son, the son of God's promise, received through faith, neither helped nor nudged along by doubt.

And now Lot's daughters exhibit the same lack of faith. God could, and perhaps would, have given them husbands in the near future. They had no way to know that God didn't have that on his daily planner. But they didn't want to wait. They didn't want to gamble on God's hands. They wanted to take their future into their own. And so they do the unthinkable in what they think is the most well-thought way.

How quickly do the saved sin? You know the answer. How quickly do the forgiven fall? You know the answer. We both do, and we are ashamed to speak it, or at least shouldn't we be? Delivered from the fires, Lot's family seems to run back to it, and we too sometimes long for the smell of sulfur. But, while there may be barbeque in heaven (I sure hope so), heaven has no room for the barbequed.

Praise be to God, eternally wise and merciful, because His Son has gone into the flames. He has gone into the flames to tell the devil, "Hands off!" He has gone into the flames to tell the vanquished, "Game over!" He has gone into the flames that He might lead us away from them and into the safety of His fold. He tosses bucket after bucket of baptismal water upon you to cool you down when temptation burns, to put out the flaming darts of the devil and your searing conscience, to He bring you again through His death and resurrection to your own death to sin and resurrection to new life as we daily sorrow over our sin and take hold of God's pity anew.

How quickly the saved are salvaged! How quickly the forgiven are restored! And they are salvaged, they are restored, not to sin, not to fall, but to serve. God has His daily planner, and you have His promises. Everything is in place. What more could we possibly need to know?

Genesis 20—September 8, 2007

Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, 2 and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.

3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."

4 Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? 5 Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands."

6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. 7 Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die."

8 Early the next morning Abimelech summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. 9 Then Abimelech called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done." 10 And Abimelech asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?"

11 Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' 12 Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. 13 And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother." ' ' "

14 Then Abimelech brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. 15 And Abimelech said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like."

16 To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand shekels¹ of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated."

17 Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again, 18 for the LORD had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah.

"God's gonna get me in trouble." It sounds horrible to say it, but we've all thought it. "God's led me right into the firing line this time." We hate to admit it, but it's crossed our minds. When something blasphemous is spoken, when the group praises what God condemns, when the crowd is heading in one direction, and it's not to the next Bible verse, we've second-guessed. "If I do say what God says, if I do what God would have me do, if I walk in Christ's sandals on this path, well, it's just not going to be good for me. I have responsibilities. I have to look out for my family. I have a reputation to

uphold. I can't afford to lose these friends." Tell me you haven't thought it and I'll tell you you've never thought.

Abraham thought it. He was in a tight spot. He was sure that Sarah would be his undoing. Why did he have to go and marry a looker. She was a perfect catch, and when Abimelech caught her, he'd have little use for the suckerfish swimming at her side. No, he had to look out for himself. I'm sure he even convinced himself he was looking out for Sarah—sure, that is, if he was as shrewd as I am. Why make God work so hard to protect him? Why not make God's job easier by looking out for himself? Surely God would be cool with that, wouldn't He?

Abimelech means "the king is my father." Abraham means "the father of many." No matter who Abimelech's dad might be, Abraham had the King on his side. It was the King, after all, who had promised Abraham that he too would be a father, and not just the father, but the father of many, and not just the father of many, but the father of the One, the One promised to Eve, the One who'd bring blessings to the nations. Abimelech had power in his genes, but Abraham's genes would be in the Power of God, seated at the right hand of the Father. But things didn't look that way now. The boss looked bigger than God when the paycheck was on the line.

Your Father is the King. No one is bigger than He is. No one is more powerful. He may get you in trouble, but there is never trouble he can't solve. He may get you in a tight spot, but there is never a tight spot he can't stretch to fit your waistline (even for us husky boys). It may not always be good for you to follow Him, but following Him is always what is good. You have your family to look after, after all, and you want to lead them away from the Family. You have a reputation to uphold: the name of Christ. You can't afford to lose these Friends: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And, when it all comes down to it, the only suckerfish is the one that swims out of the school of the Savior when the waves get rough. Jesus has turned the cross to glory, so why should we hesitate when He gives us a cross. What better for us to bear than the sign of our victory, the anchor of our hope? You are the Lamb's bride, and He's no Abraham. He's proud to tell the world you are His.

Genesis 21:1-7—September 10, 2007

1 Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. 2 Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. 3 Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. 4 When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

6 Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." 7 And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

The fulfillment of the promise turns laughter of skepticism into joyous laughter of faith. This text is one of the most marvelous in Scripture. God sends Abraham's son. Listen to a portion again: "*Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him.*" Everything in this is marvelous. She became pregnant (check). She bore a son to Abraham (check). At the very time God had promised him

(check). When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him (check). As God commanded him (check). God's faithfulness breeds faithfulness in God's people. As God keeps His Word to Abraham and Sarah, Abraham and Sarah keep His Word through faith. God gives the son. They circumcise. They mark him with the covenant.

I just can't read this without thinking of Galatians and Christmas:

So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

Christ was born of a woman, on time, and as the fulfillment of a longstanding promise. He too was circumcised, as God commanded, and by His death and resurrection, He has given a new circumcision, Holy Baptism, far superior to the first. His birth changed everything. Doubt turns to joyous faith when we hear of it. God's faithfulness breeds our faithfulness.

Imagine being Abraham and Sarah that day. Now stop imagining. You are. You are the heirs of that birth of Isaac, and, more importantly, you are heirs of the birth of Christ. You've seen history unfurled in brilliant splendor. God has kept His Word to us, and for us. How can we not now strive to do the same, not to top off, polish, or perfect the promise, but because God has already done just that?

Genesis 21:8-21—September 11, 2007

8 The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. 9 But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, 10 and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. 12 But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring^j will be reckoned. 13 I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

14 Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.

15 When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob.

17 God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. 18 Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

20 God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.

21 While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

People at times will assert that polygamy, or having multiple wives or concubines, is no big deal, because, after all, people in the Bible practiced it. First of all, yes, in the OLD Testament, some did. Second, Jesus nonetheless reaffirmed the one man with one woman arrangement instituted in Genesis in His teaching. Third, when men did practice polygamy in the Bible, it never worked out well. If you need proof, read the Bible. It's a win-win. You get to read the Bible and you can put such tired old arguments to rest.

Jacob was tricked into having two wives by his father-in-law and it was a constant source of tension throughout his life. Samuel was born of a mother who had, like Sarah, been mocked by her husband's other wife while she could not bear a child. David's many wives likely fueled the attitude that both led him to commit adultery with Bathsheba and contributed to him thinking he could get away with it. It was also rivalry between the sons of David's various wives that almost brought the kingdom to its knees. Solomon presumably fell from Faith through the many false faiths of his wives so that we do not know if he was saved in the end or not. One man with one woman clearly is enough to keep one's hands full. When any of us Christian gentlemen can properly care for and love the one lovely gift from God joined to us in Christian marriage, then we can worry about finding another. Just a hint, however: don't get your hopes up, because we Christian gentlemen aren't nearly the gents we like to think ourselves at times.

We see in our lesson today another human arrangement inconsistent with God's arrangement going wrong. But let's not make Abraham wear the dunce cap alone. Sarah played a fiddle in this band as well. She is the one who suggested Abraham have a child with Hagar, and now what is she doing? She's telling Abraham to send Hagar away, as if he alone made this mess. Talk about a guy feeling like he just can't win!

Understandably, Abraham is concerned. He wants to provide for his son Ishmael. He wants to take responsibility for his actions and commitments. Fortunately, God steps in. *"Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."* God would provide for Hagar and Ishmael for Abraham. Remember that. God will provide. When Abraham is called to sacrifice Isaac not long after that, we'll learn that truth again. God will provide. When Jesus carries His wood up the hill to His death, we'll see that truth raised up for all to see. God will provide.

You may or may not know it, but Islam reverses things here. In the Koran, written thousands of years after the Bible, Mohammed contends the Bible got it wrong, or rather, that the Jews and Christians corrupted it, and makes Ishmael the favored son. And we all want to be the favorite, don't we? And we can be. If Mohammed or anyone else wants to be the favored son, faith, not a revision of Scripture, is the answer. All who believe in the favorite Son, Jesus Christ, the offspring of Abraham through Isaac and so many others, are also the offspring of Abraham, the sons and daughters of Isaac and the beloved son or daughter of God. Ishmael was not lost, that is, so long as he never lost faith. Rather, through the promise which brought Isaac from Sarah's womb, Ishmael was just as blessed as his brother and Hagar was mother to no less a child than Sarah—but that was, not

through DNA, but through the promise of God that made Isaac so central to God's plans.

No matter how many wives some in the world may want, Christ has one Bride. The son of Abraham and the Son of God, He has wed Himself to the Church, to you. His eyes don't wander. He longs for no one else. He is content with His beloved, dressed in the white of His resurrection, washed in the Blood of His cross. You are part of that Church through faith, the same faith that makes you Abraham's son or daughter. Rejoice that you have One who so loves you, One who will provide, One who never breaks a promise. You are part of the family of God, with a seat at the family table and a name on the family tree. Give thanks for such a Father, such a Bridegroom, such brothers and sisters, and show the same love as father or mother, as bridegroom or bride, as brother or sister with your family here below, both the immediate family in your house, and the extended family in God's house.

Genesis 21:22-34—September 12, 2007

At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do. 23 Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you."

24 Abraham said, "I swear it."

25 Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized. 26 But Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today."

27 So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty. 28 Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, 29 and Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?"

30 He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well."

31 So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there.

32 After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines. 33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God. 34 And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

God preserves His people. In the face of great obstacles, He stands with His children. Wells might not seem like a big deal, but spend a day in Israel without water and you might trade whatever's behind door number one, no matter how grand, for a glass of water. People need water. Livestock need water. Abraham and his household were people with livestock. This was no squabble over the remote control. This was life and death stuff.

By all accounts and for all purposes, Abraham was the little dog in the fight. Even more, he didn't have much of a bark. He was not a warlord, though he'd fought and won a few battles. He was not conquistador. He was a nomadic pilgrim. Yet Abimelech comes to Abraham and asks for peace, like the US approaching Belize. Abimelech was a smart man. He knew Yahweh plus anybody is a

championship team, a dynasty to be reckoned with for generations, and Abraham wasn't just anybody, he was Abraham, the father of many, many who were promised a home in Abimelech's realm.

Still today, the Church faces great obstacles and bigger dogs. Still today, the Church doesn't have much bark. Still today, we face bigger issues than the remote control. We face issues of life and death. We are still nomadic pilgrims. But Yahweh plus anybody is a championship team, a dynasty to be reckoned with for generations, and we aren't just anybody, we are children of God on the way to the Promised Land. We may not have bottled water, but we will have water. We may not have cinnamon toast, but we will have our daily bread. And, even more, in all of it, we will have the living waters promised to that Samaritan at Jacob's well, we will have the Bread of Life from heaven come to feed the weary soul. And so we plant the tree of the cross before us and call on the name of the LORD, the eternal God.

God preserves His people. In the face of great obstacles, He stands with His children. We may be the little dog in the fight, and we may not have much of a bark, but those who would growl their threats and taunts should make sure to follow the leash all the way to the pierced hand that holds it. We walk in Christ, the Seed of Abraham, and at times He may walk quietly, but He always carries a big stick. *"Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet"* (Psalm 22). He beat those dogs with His big stick then, and He can surely still do so now.

Genesis 22—September 13, 2007

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place *The LORD Will Provide*. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

15 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

19 Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

20 Some time later Abraham was told, "Milcah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor: 21 Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel (the father of Aram), 22 Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel." 23 Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milcah bore these eight sons to Abraham's brother Nahor. 24 His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also had sons: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah.

"On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance." The writer to the Hebrews writes, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (Hebrews 11).

God asked Abraham to do the unthinkable. God asked Abraham what seemed to go against everything God has said so far. Everything had been about this son, and now God wants Abraham to give everything: his own son. Yet Abraham obeys. The same God who creates life in the womb can raise life from the dead.

The son and the donkey approach the hill with Abraham. The son carries the wood on which he would be offered. The father carries the knife and the fire. But where was the lamb? God would provide. The son obeys and continues on the way.

And then they reach the top. The son is bound, laid on the wood. We're not told of any refusal, and attempt at escape—only obedience. Imagine the father's sorrow. Imagine the son's compliant confusion and fear. How horrible this moment was! Why would God do this? "My God, my God, why?" they had to wonder. God will provide.

The knife is raised. Here it is. Isaac's blood would soon shower the wood, the ground, and his father himself. Yet if the father giving the son was God's plan, and God's plan is always good, then the father would give the son.

Then the angel speaks. "Wait, Abraham." God spares the son. The LORD will provide. The LORD always provides, and not a minute too soon, and not a minute too late.

The Son approached His death on a donkey. He carried the wood of His sacrifice up the hill. He was bound to the wood. Surely the faithful waited for an angel, for God to stop the hands of those who prepared to paint His blood on the wood, the ground, and on themselves. But, no, the angels have only spoken of Him to give and not to stop. "You will bear a son," receive! "Gloria," receive! "This is my Son, whom I love," receive. The Father doesn't stop. The Father gives His Son. But surely He who creates life in the womb can call it forth from the dead.

How horrible that moment was! Why would God do this? "My God, my God, why?" It seemed to go against everything God had said so far, even as it fulfilled it. Everything had been about this Son, and now the Father gives everything: His only-begotten Son. And the Son obeys. Imagine the Father's sorrow. Imagine the Son's compliant confusion and fear—but not doubt, never doubt, for He has no sin.

"On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance." "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad," Jesus says (John 8). The Father does what He stopped the father from doing. The LORD provides. *"I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."*

You are the nations. You are the baptized nations. You are the nations taught the precious unfurling of God's promise. You are blessed. God gives. The LORD provides His Son to make you His sons and daughters. His obedience for your disobedience. His death for your death. His life for your life. His obedience is your obedience. His death is your death. His life is your life. A Father and a Son on a hill. A sacrifice never to be forgotten.

Genesis 23—September 17, 2007

Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. 2 She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.

3 Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, 4 "I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead."

5 The Hittites replied to Abraham, 6 "Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead."

7 Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. 8 He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf 9 so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you."

10 Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city. 11 "No, my lord," he said. "Listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead."

12 Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land 13 and he said to Ephron in their hearing, "Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there."

14 Ephron answered Abraham, 15 "Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver, but what is that between me and you? Bury your dead."

16 Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants.

17 So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre—both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field—was deeded 18 to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city. 19 Afterward Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan. 20 So the field and the cave in it were deeded to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site.

Like all the great saints to have walked the earth, with the exception of Enoch and Elijah, Sarah dies and is buried. It is what awaits all of us, unless Christ comes first—and we do pray, “Come, Lord Jesus, come!” After so many years, after so many phases of life, after so many developments in the story of God’s promise, Sarah’s eyes close in death. And so will ours, unless the Lord wills differently. Our will, however, makes little difference in the matter.

The life of the believer is a journey through hilly country. Highs and lows roll, seemingly, seamlessly into each other. Abraham’s life had been no different. He had heard the Lord speak comfort and sorrow. He had known great joy and great loss. This was great loss, but he goes on as one who knows that the Lord is never without a plan. God’s will is always best, even in matters where our will makes no difference. And so Abraham makes plans to bury his beloved in the land promised to her offspring.

While the text makes it seem as though Abraham gets a great deal on the field, the truth is he was taken. The price so tactically and shrewdly offered was excessive. Yet Abraham pays. The Lord had given him the wealth, and even if this piece of the Promised Land came at a high price, the rest, he knew, would come for free through the grace of the Lord, the God of Israel. Ephron did not know it, but his lease was running out. He might as well have sold it all to Abraham, because the Lord would give it to the patriarch’s descendents.

We live in Abraham’s world, if not his land. We’ve walked the hilly country. We, like Sarah, have known the phases of life and the development of God’s promises. We’ve heard messages of comfort and sorrow from the Lord, we’ve experienced great joy and great loss. We’ve even been taken now and again. But in it all, the Lord, the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ, our Savior, has remained the Lord. He has still given more than we deserve and never taken more than we need. We too can take solace in His promises, and, most especially, in the promise of the life to come in the land Christ has ascended to prepare for us.

The grave will not hold us. Our mournful weeping will be converted to tears of joy. Our losses now will only increase our wonder at the great gain to come, for, while much has been overpriced in this life, the greatest treasure has been undersold for thirty silver pieces and then, like Sarah, was buried in the tomb of a rich man, though in His case, as in the case our salvation, at no cost, so that, looking to His hilltop we might walk through the deepest valley with the confidence of a child of Abraham, reassured that what matters is not where the body is buried, but that Jesus is going to raise it.

Genesis 24:1-27—September 18, 2007

Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. 2 He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that

he had, "Put your hand under my thigh. 3 I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, 4 but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."

5 The servant asked him, "What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?"

6 "Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said. 7 "The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land'-he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. 8 If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there." 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter.

10 Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and left, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor. 11 He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water.

12 Then he prayed, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 13 See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. 14 May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'-let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

15 Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. 16 The girl was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever lain with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.

17 The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar."

18 "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.

19 After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking." 20 So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. 21 Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.

22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. 23 Then he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?"

24 She answered him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor." 25 And she added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night."

26 Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD, 27 saying, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and

faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives."

I would venture to say that most of us would be content to shake hands for such an agreement as Abraham makes with his servant here, but the gesture, the placing of the servant's hand under Abraham's thigh, is significant, even if it seems a tad odd to modern sensibilities. The servant's hand was to be near Abraham's loins, because it was through Abraham's seed, through Isaac's seed, and so forth and so on, that the Savior would come. Just as circumcision was an intensely intimate and personal sign and symbol of that promise, so also the sealing of this oath was the same.

St. Paul writes to Timothy, *"But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."* Isaac's wife was no insignificant issue. She was crucial to the plan of salvation, as crucial as Isaac, just as Sarah was as crucial as Abraham, though the husbands and wives had different roles. Rebekah must be a godly woman, faithful to her husband and her LORD, ready to walk through wilderness if that is what the LORD asked, capable, together with Isaac, of instilling the Faith into the hearts of her children by careful instruction and a pious example.

What a blessing marriage is! God brings two separate individuals together as one for their benefit, for the benefit of their children, for the benefit of their neighbor, and for the praise of His name. While rocky—marriages always are, and this one would be as well—marriage, like a diamond, is a marvelously hewn rock, a jewel bestowed upon us by our Maker. It is to marriage that Christ compares His relationship to the Church, and it is through generations of marriages that the Savior came to Bethlehem. As husband serves with selfless love and concern for his wife, as wife submits to her husband, not in inequality—submission, by definition, requires equality, otherwise it is slavery—but in deference to the Lord's will and for the good of the family, a great wonder takes place, a wonder through which God works to multiply His benediction.

Isaac would in many ways prosper in his role, though he would also have marked failures. The same would be true of Rebekah. But the One who brought them together would be the One who would refresh them in hard times. And that is the beauty of Christian marriage: Christian marriage is wed to the marriage of Christ and His Church, which is a marriage, not of convenience, but of clemency and commitment. Husband and wife cannot help but forgive each other when by Christ and with the Church they are forgiven. Husband and wife cannot but serve each other when by Christ and with the Church they are served. Is this always easy? Does this always go smoothly? You know the answer. You've been reading Genesis together with me. But is this possible when the LORD is Lord in the household? You know the answer. You've been reading Genesis together with me.

Genesis 24:28-67—September 20, 2007

28 The girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. 29 Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. 30 As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. 31 "Come, you who are blessed by the LORD," he said. "Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels."

32 So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet. 33 Then food was set before him, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say."

"Then tell us," Laban said.

34 So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. 35 The LORD has blessed my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, and camels and donkeys. 36 My master's wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. 37 And my master made me swear an oath, and said, 'You must not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live, 38 but go to my father's family and to my own clan, and get a wife for my son.'

39 "Then I asked my master, 'What if the woman will not come back with me?'

40 "He replied, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey a success, so that you can get a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father's family. 41 Then, when you go to my clan, you will be released from my oath even if they refuse to give her to you—you will be released from my oath.'

42 "When I came to the spring today, I said, 'O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if you will, please grant success to the journey on which I have come. 43 See, I am standing beside this spring; if a maiden comes out to draw water and I say to her, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar," 44 and if she says to me, "Drink, and I'll draw water for your camels too," let her be the one the LORD has chosen for my master's son.'

45 "Before I finished praying in my heart, Rebekah came out, with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water, and I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.'

46 "She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too.' So I drank, and she watered the camels also.

47 "I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?'

"She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.'

"Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, 48 and I bowed down and worshiped the LORD. I praised the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son. 49 Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn."

50 Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is from the LORD; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. 51 Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has directed."

52 When Abraham's servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground before the LORD. 53 Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother. 54 Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night there.

When they got up the next morning, he said, "Send me on my way to my master."

55 But her brother and her mother replied, "Let the girl remain with us ten days or so; then you may go."

56 But he said to them, "Do not detain me, now that the LORD has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master."

57 Then they said, "Let's call the girl and ask her about it." 58 So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?"

"I will go," she said.

59 So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

*"Our sister, may you increase
to thousands upon thousands;
may your offspring possess
the gates of their enemies."*

61 Then Rebekah and her maids got ready and mounted their camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

62 Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. 63 He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. 64 Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel 65 and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?"

"He is my master," the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself.

66 Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. 67 Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

God works in mysterious ways. In this case, we see it all unfold in detail. Point after point, twist after twist, we are privy to the Lord's counsel. It is easy to be amazed at the coincidences, the circumstances, the answers, and the results. It is truly a wonderful story, one for the ages.

But God works just as mysteriously in our lives and through our lives. We don't get to see it all unfold in detail all the time—sometimes only when we look back years later do we see His hand, and sometimes even then we do not realize all that He has done and worked. But the same God who arranged all this even guides and directs your life as well. Remember Paul's words to the Ephesians, *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* *"Prepared in advance"*—God doesn't gamble, He plots.

Can we reject God's plans? Yes. Do we have a free will in the day to day details of life? For the most part. But can we surprise Him who knows and foresees all things? Nope. And when we act in accord with His will, when we stop fighting His direction, we are part of a drama no less compelling and no less significant than what we've just read above.

Take heart and know that you are not lost in an arbitrary world of inconsequence after absurdity. No, you are part of God's plan. You may not have it mapped out in front of you, but *in Christ* you have an important role, one often improved, but nonetheless leading to a grand finale. The Jesus who came through so many episodes like this grand affair is the same Jesus who, having died to make you part of the cast, with by His resurrection guide your feet and focus your eyes.

Genesis 25:1-11—September 28, 2007

Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2 She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. 3 Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan; the descendants of Dedan were the Asshurites, the Letushites and the Leummites. 4 The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.

5 Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. 6 But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.

7 Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. 8 Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. 9 His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, 10 the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. 11 After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.

And the promise passes from one generation to the next. The father dies, and the son inherits the most important a parent can leave behind: his faith. As Abraham and Sarah rest in their graves, Isaac lives on, continuing their pilgrimage, pressing on toward their inheritance, just as his son, and his son's son will do, generation after generation after generation.

Be sure to pass down the most important thing you can leave behind. Let the Word spoken through your ears and into your heart proceed from there into the ears of others. Let others continue your pilgrimage, the pilgrimage of your fathers and mothers in the faith. Let others press on toward your inheritance, the inheritance of all the saints who have gone before you.

We are wealthy wanderers in the wilderness of faith, possessing the crown jewel of all eternity: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior. We are part of a long line of heirs. The promise has passed from one generation to the next. Give thanks to God above for those who have gone before you. Pray for those who will come next. Until Christ's coming, so it will go, son of Abraham to son of Abraham, daughter of Sarah to daughter of Sarah, generation after generation after generation.

Genesis 25:12-26—September 25, 2007

12 This is the account of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Sarah's maidservant, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham.

13 These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15 Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. 16 These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve tribal rulers according to their settlements and camps. 17 Altogether, Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people. 18 His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt, as you go toward Asshur. And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.

19 This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, 20 and Isaac was forty years old when he

married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.

21 Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. 22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

23 The LORD said to her,

*"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."*

24 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. 25 The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. 26 After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

Just to make sure that we don't start to wonder if God has taken care of Ishmael as He promised, Moses gives us a quick glimpse to reassure us the Lord's hand is capable and generous. And then Moses moves on to the line of the Savior.

The brothers are born doing what brothers do best: wrestling. From the womb, they are vying for the birthright. Esau, the stronger, rougher, good old boy manages to win the race to the light of day. But Jacob is close on his heels. Really, he's right on his heel, holding on for dear life. And the wrestling wouldn't end for quite some time.

Yet Rebekah had been told that the older will serve the younger. Why would God act so contrary to the custom? Why would he choose the runt? That is just the way God acts. It seems He always has and always will have a soft spot for the underdog. He likes to use the runts, those incapable of the task in the eyes of the world. From Abraham to Jacob to Joseph to Moses to David to Peter to Paul—well, you get the point—the Lord has a proclivity for calling men that will leave no doubt about who it is that is really accomplishing the work of their hands: the Lord Himself.

What a blessing for us then to be small in the eyes of the world! What a joy to be the runt, the underdog! God looks at us and thinks, "He looks perfect. She looks perfect." And He makes us the very living stones with which He builds His Church through the gospel. Why? Forgiven clay makes the best jars. It is through forgiveness that we arrive at perfection. We look perfect in God's Son, the Savior, by whose passion the dry and infertile dust of our hearts is watered in Baptism to be fruitful and productive. Through faith, we are Jacob, clutching the heel of Him who has used it to crush the serpent's head. Never let go, and be glad to be the little brother or sister of Him whose birth has given us the full rights of sons.

Genesis 25:27-34—September 26, 2007

When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. 25 The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. 26 After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

27 The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. 28 Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. 30 He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)

31 Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."

32 "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

33 But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

34 Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright.

Do you despise your birthright? How often wouldn't you have traded it for a bowl of soup? No, how often haven't you traded it for a bowl of soup? Famished, wouldn't you prefer immediate results to eternal rewards? Every sin is in essence the same decision, temporal fruits in exchange for eternal consequences.

Say what you will about Jacob, he had foresight. He knew what mattered. He wanted the birthright. This life was nothing compared to the life to come. Esau was worried about death here and now, and, for that reason, was willing to risk life then and thereafter.

Christ is your birthright. The Bread of Life belongs to you. Don't trade it for anything. Cling to His heel. Don't die, but live. You need not hunt. He is right there in front of you. He is yours. Hold on to Him.

Jacob was born holding on to his birthright. Hang onto yours. You were born to hold onto it, born in the waters of Baptism. Eat and drink. Receive Christ's Body and Blood, your own through faith and in the Lord's Supper. Be full, and know you will live, not because you have made here and now your priority, but because by His sacrifice you have secured your then and there.

Genesis 26:1-11—October 3, 2007

Now there was a famine in the land—besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time—and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. 2 The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. 3 Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. 4 I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws." 6 So Isaac stayed in Gerar.

7 When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful."

8 When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. 9 So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, "She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my

sister'?"

Isaac answered him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her."

10 Then Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us."

11 So Abimelech gave orders to all the people: "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

Like father, like son. God gives His promise to Isaac, the same promise given to his father, that He would be with him, that He would protect him, that He would bless Him. And God did, and Isaac dwelt in the land and prospered.

But then testing came. Just as had happened with Abraham, Isaac got nervous when among the people of the land. His wife was beautiful, and he was afraid one of these gentiles might kill him to have his wife. And so he lied. God had promised. God had spoken the truth. Yet when faced with the opportunity to put that promise to good use, Isaac wavered. He didn't deny the promise outright. He just thought he might help it along. And so he told the people of that land that his wife was instead his sister.

And he got caught, just as had his father. And Abimelech was upset, just as had happened with his father. The king, as had been the case with Abraham, recognized that the LORD was with Isaac and Abimelech did not want to incur the wrath of the LORD, either on himself or on his people. God's promise, God's blessing, in the end delivers Isaac even as Isaac had tried to deliver himself. It was not Isaac who saved his life. It was the LORD, and His association with Isaac, that saved his life.

And you are associated with the LORD. In fact, He has taken your flesh to be your Brother and His Father, through water bearing God's Word, has become your Father. You have His promise. In Christ you are blessed. You need not help His promise along. You need not waver in times of testing. Rather, put His promise to good use. Remember that He is able to work in all things and through all things. Remember that He does not speak empty words, but words that call forth light from darkness, dead men from their graves, and faith from the unbelieving or doubting heart.

You are the LORD's, and for that reason, and no other reason, you are fine, you are safe, you are all right. You may be dropped in the middle of a foreign land and in the face of great danger, you may be submersed in trials and under a cross, but you are the LORD's. He doesn't need your help. You need His, and, praised be His name, He is determined to give it.

Genesis 26:12-35—October 8, 2007

12 Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him. 13 The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. 14 He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. 15 So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth.

16 Then Abimelech said to Isaac, "Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us."

17 So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. 18 Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them.

19 Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. 20 But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. 21 Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. 22 He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land."

23 From there he went up to Beersheba. 24 That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."

25 Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

26 Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. 27 Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?"

28 They answered, "We saw clearly that the LORD was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us'-between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we did not molest you but always treated you well and sent you away in peace. And now you are blessed by the LORD."

30 Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. 31 Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they left him in peace.

32 That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, "We've found water!" 33 He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.

34 When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. 35 They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

Notice the Lord's attention to detail as He provided for the patriarchs. To produce the Savior, the line of the Savior had to survive. To survive, they had to have water. And although at times, as the quarrels never seemed to end and the digging was begun anew again and again, it may have seemed like the Lord, who had blessed Isaac with so much for which to care, was not going to provide him with means by which to take care of it all, the Lord provides, sometimes in unsuspected ways.

And the Lord still provides. As descendants of the promise, we too have been blessed with much. The holy Christian Church throughout the ages has been blessed with countless souls for which to care, and we in our individual vocations have been blessed with ways in which to love and serve our neighbor. But, at times, we can start to wonder if the Lord who has blessed us with so much for which to care will provide the means by which to care for it all. He has, and He will.

We have found waters much more splendid than any waiting at the bottom of some well, waters of which we were in much more desperate need. We have the water of life. We have Holy Baptism, where we are made children of the heavenly Father who is attentive to the needs of His sons and daughters, where we die to sin with the Bread of Life who then feeds us with the food of pilgrims, His own very Body and Blood. And on top of all this, we have our daily bread, often in unsuspected ways. The Lord has

provided, because when it comes to the recipients of His promise, He has a famous attention to detail. Keep digging, even when the quarreling seems endless, and trust that the Lord will bless those and that which He has promised to bless. He's given us His only Son. What is all the rest compared to that?

Genesis 27:1-29—October 9, 2007

1 When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, "My son."

"Here I am," he answered.

2 Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. 3 Now then, get your weapons—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. 4 Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."

5 Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, 7 'Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.' 8 Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: 9 Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. 10 Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies."

11 Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I'm a man with smooth skin. 12 What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing."

13 His mother said to him, "My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me."

14 So he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared some tasty food, just the way his father liked it. 15 Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob. 16 She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. 17 Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.

18 He went to his father and said, "My father."

"Yes, my son," he answered. "Who is it?"

19 Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing."

20 Isaac asked his son, "How did you find it so quickly, my son?"

"The LORD your God gave me success," he replied.

21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not."

22 Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23 He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he blessed him. 24 "Are you really my son Esau?" he asked.

"I am," he replied.

25 Then he said, "My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing."

Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come here, my son, and kiss me."

27 So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said,

*"Ah, the smell of my son
is like the smell of a field
that the LORD has blessed.*

*28 May God give you of heaven's dew
and of earth's richness—
an abundance of grain and new wine.*

*29 May nations serve you
and peoples bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.
May those who curse you be cursed
and those who bless you be blessed."*

It is easy to come down on Jacob for his deception, and I am not commending deception, but we see right from the beginning of this chapter that Jacob was not the only one acting in an untoward fashion. You may or may not remember, but right from the time these twins, Esau and Jacob, were in their mother's womb, God had made clear who was to receive the blessing, who was to be the greater, saying to their mother, when she was wondering why they were always jostling about, *"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."* And that was not all. You may or may not remember that in the same chapter of Scripture, Genesis 25, we encounter this account:

Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)

Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."

"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright.

Jacob was not taking what wasn't rightfully his. Jacob was taking what had been sold to him in a marvelous act of indifference and unbelief by his brother. So, deception aside, it was not Jacob playing fast and loose with God's promise. No, his father, assuming he knew what had been spoken to his wife, and Esau, knowing for sure what he had done for some lentil stew, were the chief culprits in the whole affair. Had Isaac blessed his eldest son, God's will would have been circumvented and the line of the Savior jeopardized. Remember, Esau had not been so far a pious man, but was coarse and infatuated with troublesome foreign women. Even his own mother recognized this.

What this all comes down to is another grand attempt by the people of God to help the promise of God along. It must run in our DNA. Abraham had done it several times. Isaac had done it already before this. Now, Jacob, nervous that God might allow him to be deprived of what was rightfully His according to God's expressed words and will, decides to join the act.

We need not help God's promises along. We need not think that those who would circumvent His will can in the end defeat God's people or His plan. We need not be worried that without us God is going to be in big trouble. No, God is our help in times of need, our refuge from the storms of the world, our might fortress. In such times, we ought not take things into our own hands. Rather, we ought to run back into His hands, we ought to receive from His hands what He promises is what we need to get through it all: His Son, present, active, and given to us through the gospel.

For thousands of years, people tried to help God bring the Savior. When the time was right, God brought Him all on His own, and by His death and resurrection, second-guessed and criticized by so many, He has worked our salvation and nailed His promise of forgiveness, providence, and grace to the cross that we might never lose sight of it. God doesn't need deceivers, we don't have to bait and hook the world or each other, because all He's asked us to do is believe and hold fast to what He's given us. So hold fast, and know that in His simple gifts, in His promise proclaimed in the Word and poured onto your heads and into your mouths in the Sacraments, you have all you need.

God is not a fool. He may collect them, but he is not one. We are but instruments in His hand. The shovel doesn't tell the workman how to dig. The shovel rejoices to be in good hands, and works when and where the workman sets it. Rejoice to be in good hands, and work when and where He has set you.

Genesis 28:1-9—October 11, 2007

1 So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman. 2 Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. 3 May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. 4 May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." 5 Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

6 Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," 7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. 8 Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; 9 so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had.

I think we can all sympathize with a mom and dad wanting their son to marry a good woman, but why is the Old Testament always talking about where one should find

a wife: namely, from among God's people? Weren't there good Canaanite women? The simple answer is no. There were nice Canaanites, I am sure, but no good Canaanites, unless, that is, they had converted to Judaism. As much as someone can be a great friend, neighbor, and citizen without faith, one cannot by God's definition be good without it. We are only good, that is, being restored in the image of Him who created and redeemed us, in Christ, and we are only in Christ through faith.

This is not to say that in the New Testament era, now that Christ has come through the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through David, and so forth, the Christian cannot befriend an unbeliever, or even that it is prohibited to marry an unbeliever—though it may most certainly not be wise—but there is still a genuine concern that the Christian have strong relationships with other Christians, lest their faith be corrupted instead of encouraged and edified.

We are part of the Body of Christ through faith, the new Israel, the spiritual Israel, the Church, the sons and daughters of Abraham through His Seed, Jesus. We need each other. It is through meeting together, speaking together, singing together, that the Word works in us to draw us nearer not only to each other, but especially to God.

Have you been fostering such relationships? If you are looking for friends or even for a boyfriend or girlfriend, a candidate for future marriage, have you considered their Christianity, even their Lutheran Christianity, or lack of it, an important criteria, or have you considered it at all? God wants to bless us through each other as we build each other up in God's promises and gather together around His holy Gifts.

We live in a world full of corrupting influences. Cling to those influences that build up. You are members of the Body of Christ. Be active members of that body, lest paralysis set in and the whole Body suffer in that way. Give thanks for the promise given to you as children of the heavenly Father and nurture the faith that receives that promise. You are heirs of Christ and His forgiveness. Rejoice in your inheritance and thus be careful not to squander it like the prodigal son, whether intentionally or unintentionally through the influence of those who do not appreciate it as only a believer can.

Genesis 28:10-22—October 15, 2007

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. 11 When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. 12 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

16 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." 17 He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

18 Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. 19 He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear 21 so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God 22 and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

Jacob had quite the dream, didn't he? A huge stairway, or ladder, reaching to heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it. The Tower of Babel was destroyed for trying to do just that, to reach heaven. What was the difference? This was God's work, while the Tower of Babel was the work of men. The stairway must first come down from heaven to earth and then back from earth to heaven.

In verse 51 of the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John, Jesus says, *"I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."* Jesus is our stairway to heaven. He has come down from heaven, become Man, and then, having lived, died, and risen for us, ascended again to the right hand of the Father. In Jesus, through Jesus, with Jesus we reach heaven, all by God's initiative and His work. He is the pillar of our faith and the rock of our salvation. He is Immanuel, God with us. He is what God has promised. He is the Offspring in whom all the nations are blessed. He is Jesus.

The Tower of Babel was toppled, and it always will be. Whenever men seek to reach heaven by their own initiative and work, they will fail. Heaven must come to us, and in Christ it has. You are children of God's underserved yet equally unfailing love. You are recipients of His grace. Through the forgiveness He has won for you, heaven has been opened. Take heart on this pilgrimage, therefore, and know that He who has begun this work in you will surely bring it to completion, sending innumerable angels up and down along the way to bring His people strength and perseverance, as they wait for His return.

Genesis 29:1-14—October 16, 2007

Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. 2 There he saw a well in the field, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. 3 When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.

4 Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?"

"We're from Haran," they replied.

5 He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?"

"Yes, we know him," they answered.

6 Then Jacob asked them, "Is he well?"

"Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."

7 "Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture."

8 "We can't," they replied, "until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep."

9 While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. 10 When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. 12 He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father.

13 As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. 14 Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood."

They keep finding blessing at the well, don't they? Eliezer found Rebekah for Isaac at the well (Genesis 24). Now Jacob finds Rachel at the well. Same well? Could be. Don't know. But, either way, it's good to be at the well.

Don't believe me? Think ahead to the Samaritan woman (John 4):

Now he had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The heirs of the promise keep going back to the well. Why? For godly wives, so that the promise can live on, be passed down, and fulfilled. Life would come through the contact made at the well. Offspring would be born.

The Samaritan woman found life at the well, at Jacob's well. She found eternal life. She found, not a spouse, but a Man truly her own flesh and blood, her incarnate Savior. "Are you greater than our father Jacob," she asked. Jacob would have been the first to tell her, "Yes," but, thankfully, she quickly learned that on her own.

We are heirs of the promise, the promise passed down, fulfilled, and set before Us for our astonishment and praise, and we have a well worth visiting. Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Water is life. Without it, we're goners. How much more is this water eternal life! Without it, well, you get the point. Drink deeply. Drink often. He from whose pierced side water ran together with blood as a sign and seal of His death for our sins has gladly supplied this water to us. His Word and the Sacraments are a

regular Niagra. Get wet, drink it down, and rejoice that the well will never run dry. It is full of mercy to water His sheep until they reach the green pastures of the Promised Land.

Genesis 29:14-30—October 18, 2007

After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, 15 Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be."

16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. 18 Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."

19 Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her."

22 So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. 23 But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her. 24 And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter as her maidservant.

25 When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

26 Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. 27 Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."

28 And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29 Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. 30 Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

Jacob serves faithfully and in Christian love, and, we will see, that faithfulness and Christian love is used against him by the hypocrite Laban. Jacob had presumably been working for free. Laban approaches him in what seems to be generosity. Jacob makes a simple and reasonable request, since surely it would be God-pleasing and beneficial for these families to be joined. Laban uses that request for his own benefit.

Luther is pretty hard on Jacob in this matter, thinking it frivolous that Jacob would want Rachel instead of Leah, even lustful, because she was more beautiful, but I would respectfully disagree. Leah was the older sister, but Jacob met Rachel first. And Jacob loved Rachel. Our text does not say the only reason he loved her was her appearance, but which of us doesn't appreciate beauty, in fact, not to appreciate beauty is, in a way, not to fully appreciate God's creation. Jacob was looking for a wife, not a tryst. There is no grounds for considering this simple and base lust.

So, once again, notice what happens when Jacob serves faithfully and in Christian love for Laban. He is taken advantage of and duped. Sound familiar? How thankless isn't Christian service in many instances. It seems, many times at least, that we serve to no end. But that is not a problem with Christian service, that is a misunderstanding of it.

Christian service is not fueled by thanks. No, it is fueled by the love of God, freely given to us to be freely given to others. The end and aim of Christian services is always the same: showing thanks to Christ. The end and aim ought never be receiving thanks from others, for, if that is the case, we may be offering service, but not Christian service.

Jacob serves, and his loving service is abused, but do not forget that while Laban takes advantage of it, God blesses it nonetheless. In the end, Jacob walks away with a family, a great flock, and, most important, the promise still intact. While his life is forever complicated by Laban's trickery, his tent is also expanded and God's promise passed down. By the sin of Laban, Jacob, Leah, and Rachel are all burdened, but, by the grace of God, they are also granted relief and hope. Let this be a reminder to us as we serve as well. We serve One who knows what it is to go without gratitude, who was mocked by the very people He came to save, for whom He gave His life, and He will not forget what we in love and thankfulness offer up for Him, not for our salvation, but in response to it. Our service may indeed be abused by many, but it will be blessed and rewarded by Him who sees it all, not with eternal life—that is already ours—but in eternal life, and even in the life we live now. How? We don't always know, but He does, and that is all that matters. And, besides, we don't serve for the reward, we serve for Him who served us for our free and underserved salvation.

Genesis 29:31-35—October 22, 2007

31 When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. 32 Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

33 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon.

34 Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi.

35 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

The LORD's eyes are on the suffering of His people. To many, Leah's plight might seem insignificant in the grand scheme of things, on the long list of world crises. But God is concerned with each of His children, especially as they serve in their vocation. As Leah served as Jacob's wife, even as he loved Rachel more than her, God took care to provide for her, to reward her service in the face of difficulty. He opened her womb and gave her children, children that she recognized were a gift from God's very hand, as the names indicate.

Leah gave birth to Levi, the father of the Old Testament priesthood, and the final child mentioned in this portion of Scripture is Judah. While Jacob's favorite children, Joseph and Benjamin, would come through Rachel, the Savior would come through Leah's child, Judah, whose coming was foreshadowed by the priestly sacrifices of Levi's descendents. God brought our Savior through the wife who served even when her vocation proved loveless, who served in the way God would have her in a situation into which she was cast by the trickery of her brother Laban and what must have

seemed by the most cruel fate. But God uses all of this to give her the joy of her children and to bring for her a Savior through her offspring.

You and your vocation are precious to the LORD as well. At times it may seem loveless. At times you may wonder what good can come of it. But the LORD's eyes are upon you, and He loves nothing more than to work through the faithful labor of His children. And you have the same joy Leah had. You have Christ, now born, crucified and risen. Your plight is not inconsequential or insignificant in the grand scheme of things. Your Father has remembered you. He's given you His only begotten Son. How could He ever forget him or her for whom He has given such a memorable sacrifice?

Genesis 30:1-24—October 29, 2007

1 When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

2 Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?"

3 Then she said, "Here is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family."

4 So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, 5 and she became pregnant and bore him a son. 6 Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan.

7 Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali.

9 When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 10 Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 11 Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad.

12 Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 13 Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

14 During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

15 But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?"

"Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes."

16 So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night.

17 God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18 Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar.

19 Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. 20 Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun.

21 Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

22 Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. 23 She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." 24 She named him Joseph, and said, "May the LORD add to me another son."

Wow! Isn't that what you think when you read this portion of Genesis? What a mess! And this was one of the patriarchs, the members of the Faith Hall of Fame.

Sometimes in Scripture we have to just step back and meditate. It is easy to focus on all that is wrong in this text, and there is a lot. It's easy to see why Jesus reiterates the whole one man and one woman thing in the New Testament, isn't it? This family was talk-show material. But notice something else: God's ear was still open.

These people were believers. Were they believers thrust into a very odd predicament? Yes. Were they believers living in a rather undesirable situation? Yes. But they were believers, and they had got to this point, and they had to proceed from there. Jacob was married to these women, and God hates divorce, and so they were where they were. There are lots of things we can take back in life. Marriage is not one of them. Does that mean we should advocate polygamy today? No. Does that mean a Christian pastor should ever perform a service marrying a man or a woman to a second spouse? No. Jesus' words are clear. Does that mean that a man can actually be married to two women today? No. Polygamy is illegal and, since marriage rests in the realm of the state, there is no such thing as a second wife or husband in our society. But these people lived in a different society, which tolerated, if not promoted, polygamy, and so they were married. And, as a married couple should, they saw children as a blessing, they wanted a full quiver of arrows.

God's ear was open to them in their mess. They were believers, and so, when they prayed in faith, He was listening, and, yes, even blessing them with children. You too may be in a mess. You too may wonder if God is listening. Yes, God is listening. He hears the prayers of the faithful and answers them appropriately. God is the God of Christians, and Christians are sinner-saints in a fallen world, often stuck in the bogs and mires inherent in such an arrangement. Turn to God through Christ in such times. Remember that Christ is Christ crucified for sinners, of which we are all the worst. Call out, and know that God is there to answer in the way that is best. Rejoice that He blesses us even in the midst of the chaos of our lives. Seek to live in the way most consistent with His will to avoid such chaos. And, in all of it, seek His forgiveness, which He is faithful and just to give, because the patriarch and his family are not the only ones in need of a good measure of God's grace.

This is a difficult text, but it is not without its lessons. Let us learn them, and God will explain the rest someday in heaven.

Genesis 30:25-43—October 30, 2007

After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. 26 Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you."

27 But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you." 28 He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them."

29 Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. 30 The little you had before I came has increased greatly,

and the LORD has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?"

31 "What shall I give you?" he asked.

"Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: 32 Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. 33 And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen."

34 "Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." 35 That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. 36 Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks.

37 Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. 38 Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, 39 they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted. 40 Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals. 41 Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches, 42 but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. 43 In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys.

Laban in his greed, after confessing that the LORD had blessed him through Jacob, seeks to rob Jacob blind, and not only Jacob, but his own flesh and blood whom he had given to Jacob in marriage. Money is indeed a root of all kinds of evil, tearing even families apart. One need only witness a battle over an inheritance to see times haven't changed. But the LORD's eyes are always on His children.

The LORD enables Jacob to provide for himself richly. Through these branches of poplar, God blessed Jacob as He punished Laban's greed. After so many years of labor, and so little reward, Jacob would leave with a great flock.

We too often feel slighted, and many times we indeed may be. Let us commit our cause to the LORD. When the devil and our flesh sore oppressed us, He rescued by the death and resurrection of His Son. So also, He will be with us in the lesser burdens and obstacles of life. His schedule may not always be our schedule, and His means may not always be our means, but that is why we call Him God and not ourselves.

As we see God's gracious care, we repent of our own greed, for those times when we did not trust God to bless us through honest service and fair weights, and we recommit ourselves to a life of gratitude and faith, resting upon God's promises of

providence and timetable of justice. The LORD's eyes are on His children. That is both warning and comfort for us who through Baptism have become His heirs.