

Service in the life of Abraham

BIBLE BASICS

The Four Stages of Abraham's Spiritual Journey

Abraham, revered as one of God's most devoted servants and the father of many nations, embarked on a profound spiritual journey marked by distinct stages. Each stage played a pivotal role in shaping his unwavering faith and solidifying his covenant with the Lord.

Stage	Key Events	Significance
Call to Work and Mission (Gen. 12-14)	Abraham's divine encounter and call to leave his homeland	Sets the stage for Abraham's unwavering faith and obedience
The Covenant of God (Gen. 15-16)	God's promise of an heir through Sarah and the establishment of a covenant	Tests Abraham's faith and solidifies his role as the father of many nations
The Sealed Covenant (Gen. 17-21)	Circumcision as a physical reminder of the covenant between God and Abraham	Symbolizes Abraham's willingness to obey God's commands and demonstrates his unwavering trust in divine promises
The Perfection of Faith (Gen. 22-25)	God's command for Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice	Ultimate test of Abraham's faith, demonstrating his profound love for God and His promises

Through these four stages, Abraham's faith was tried, proven, and perfected. His unwavering trust in God and his commitment to the covenant laid the foundation for the nation of Israel and became a testament of faith for generations to come. Abraham's spiritual journey serves as a reminder of the transformative power of faith and the importance of surrendering our hearts and lives to the divine will.

The Call to Work & Mission: His Family

Abram, later known as Abraham, was born into a family that worshiped other gods. His father, Terah, and his ancestors had lived on the other side of the River Euphrates in the ancient city of Ur, located in the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). Ur was a prosperous and advanced city, known for its ziggurats, temples, and trade. However, the spiritual atmosphere in Ur was characterized by

polytheism and idolatry. According to Joshua 24:2, God spoke to Joshua, the leader of the Israelites, about the origins of Abraham's family. God reminded the Israelites that Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, had served false gods in Ur before being called by God to follow Him. "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.'" (Joshua 24:2)

From Ur, Abram and his family migrated to Haran, a city in ancient northern Mesopotamia, located about 600 miles (975 kilometers) northwest of Ur. Haran was also a significant city and a center of trade and culture. It is believed that Abram spent a significant part of his life in Haran, where he continued to worship the God of his ancestors. However, God had a special plan and calling for Abram. He revealed Himself to Abram and instructed him to leave his country, his family, and his father's house and go to a land that God would show him. This marked the beginning of Abram's journey of faith and his transformation into the father of the nation of Israel.

The Call to Work & Mission: His Country, Ur of the Chaldees

Ur of the Chaldees was the land where Abraham was born. It was an idolatrous country, where even the children of Eber, who was a descendant of Noah, had fallen into idolatry. This should serve as a reminder to those who have received the grace of God and become heirs of the promised land of Canaan not to forget their humble beginnings and the sinful state in which they were born.

Abraham's departure from Ur of the Chaldees, accompanied by his father Terah, his nephew Lot, and the rest of his family, was an act of obedience to the call of God. The details of this call are recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. In this chapter, however, we find Abraham and his family in Haran, a place located about halfway between Ur and Canaan. They remained in Haran until Terah's death, possibly because the old man's age and infirmities prevented him from continuing the journey.

It is important to note that reaching Haran does not necessarily mean reaching Canaan. One may be on the way to the promised land, but simply fall short. Many people come close to the kingdom of God but never fully enter it. They may make some progress in their spiritual journey, but they fall short of the ultimate destination.

The Call to Work & Mission: Fourfold Command; Fourfold Promise

In Genesis 12:1-3, God's covenant with Abraham begins with a profound calling that unfolds a magnificent destiny for him and his descendants. It's a fourfold command accompanied by a fourfold promise that sets the stage for the unfolding of God's redemptive plan.

"Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." God commanded Abraham; "Get out of your country". This command was a radical departure from everything familiar to Abraham. He had to leave behind his homeland, his extended family, the comforts of his father's house and go to an unknown land.

But embedded in this command was a set of glorious promises: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing." God's promise of making Abraham

a great nation spoke of the formation of a people who would carry His blessing to the world. The promise of blessing was further amplified with the declaration, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you." God's protection and favor would be extended to those who honored Abraham and his descendants, while those who opposed them would face consequences. Finally, the grandest promise resonated through the words, "and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This promise hinted at the coming of a Savior from Abraham's lineage who would bring blessing to all nations, fulfilling God's redemptive purpose for humanity.

Abraham's faith determined his obedience. Hebrews 11:8 testifies that "By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going." God reaffirmed His covenant with Abraham at the age of 75, reiterating the fourfold command and promise (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham, alongside his wife Sarai (later renamed Sarah) and his nephew Lot, obediently set out for Canaan, known as Israel today.

During their journey, God appeared to Abraham and declared, "to your offspring I will give this land" (Genesis 12:7). This promise highlighted the fact that the life of asceticism, a willingness to leave everything behind for a higher purpose, is not confined to monasticism but can encompass the lives of ordinary people like Abraham, who was married and had a family. Abraham's life and decisions exemplifies how faith and obedience go hand in hand. His journey reminds us that when God calls us to a path that may seem uncertain or challenging, we can trust in His promises and step out in faith, knowing that He will guide and bless us.

The Call to Work & Mission: The Call of Abram

Obedient to the call, Abram gathered his family and set out on a transformative journey towards the land of Canaan. Accompanied by his father Terah, his grandson Lot, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, Abram embarked on a pilgrimage that would shape the course of history. Yet, their journey encountered an unexpected pause as they arrived in Haran. There, they settled down and remained for an extended period. "And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there". (Genesis 11:31)

According to St. Stephen's in Acts 7:2-3, it was God's word to Abraham that had initiated the family's move. They had set out for Canaan, "but when they came to Haran, they settled there." They stopped and settled. Why? The reasons for their prolonged stay in Haran remain shrouded in mystery. Some believe that Abram waited for his father, Terah, to pass away before continuing the journey. Others suggest that practical considerations, such as the need to gather provisions or organize their belongings, may have influenced their decision. Regardless of the specific reasons, it is clear that Abram and his family spent a significant amount of time in Haran.

Abram, a man of unwavering faith and trust in God, continued to yearn for the fulfillment of the divine promise. Despite the delay, he remained steadfast in his devotion. Notably, during his time in Haran, Abram constructed an altar, demonstrating his reverence for God and his commitment to worship. In contrast, Terah, Abram's father, had spent much of his life entangled in idolatry and sin. As the patriarch of the family, Terah had the opportunity to lead his household towards righteousness. However, he failed to embrace the truth and worship the one true God. Consequently, Terah's journey

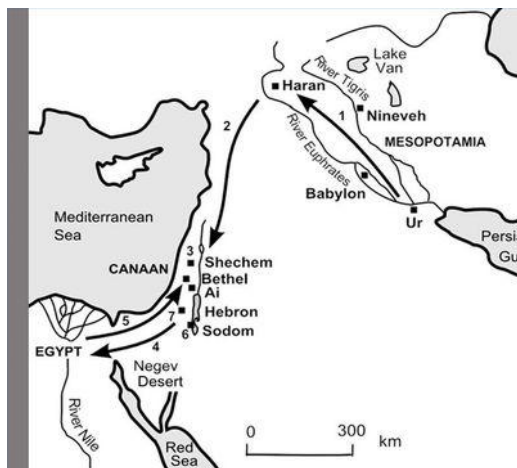
towards the promised land was cut short. He lived and wasted most of his energetic years to worship idols. At the end of his life, he had no more strength to walk. He was unable to complete the pilgrimage, remaining in Haran until the end of his days.

The story of Terah serves as a cautionary example, highlighting the importance of embracing God's call without hesitation. It reminds us that procrastination and double-mindedness can hinder our progress on the spiritual path. Abram, on the other hand, stands as an exemplar of faith and obedience. His unwavering trust in God and his willingness to follow the divine command, even without knowing the exact destination, exemplify the essence of a life surrendered to the will of the Almighty.

The Call to Work & Mission: The Journey to Canaan

Reviewing the journey to Canaan, the calling begins in Ur of Mesopotamia where Terah and his family, including his sons Abram and Nahor, as well as his grandson Lot, made the decision to leave their homeland. They followed the course of the Euphrates River upstream, traveling to Haran. (Genesis 11:27-32) At Haran, God extended a call to Abram, instructing him to "leave your country... and go to the land that I will show you." He established a covenant agreement with Abram, promising to grant his family the 'promised land' of Canaan. With their tents and flocks, Abram and his nephew Lot set out toward Canaan. (Genesis 12:1-5)

Upon reaching Canaan, Abram erected an altar by the sacred tree of Moreh at Shechem. (Genesis 12:6-7) As explained by Ambrose of Milan, "where there is Bethel, that is, the house of God, there is also the altar. Where there is the altar, there is also the calling on the name of God. It is not by chance that he made such great progress. He hoped with the help of God. The athlete of God exercised and strengthened himself in adversity. He went into the desert."



Abram then moved to the hill country situated between Bethel and Ai, followed by a journey southward toward the Negev Desert. Compelled by drought and famine, Abram and Sarai embarked on a journey along the Way of Shur, leading them to the well-watered lands of the Nile Delta in Egypt. (Genesis 12:8-20) However, circumstances

forced Abram and Sarai to flee Egypt, finding refuge in the hill country near Bethel. (Genesis 13:1-9) Subsequently, Abram and Lot decided to separate. Lot chose the fertile and well-watered Jordan Valley, setting up his tent near Sodom. (Genesis 13:10-13) Meanwhile, Abram relocated to the great oaks of Mamre near Hebron, where he built another altar. (Genesis 13:18) Abram's displayed clear willingness to leave his comfort zone and embrace the unknown. Exemplary of the unwavering faith that God desires from His followers.

The Covenant of God: Covenant vs. Contract

To properly contemplate the significance of God's covenant with Abraam, we first must clearly understand the meaning of a covenant? Is it a contract? How do the two compare? Let us first dive into a contract. A contract is a binding and solemn agreement made by two or more parties and involving mutual responsibilities.

Typically, a contract is an agreement between two or more parties where each party seeks a benefit the other can provide. In other words, contracts are centered on getting something from someone else. Generally, contracts have very specific terms and conditions. Each party agrees to complete certain actions and failure to do so violates the contract and offers the other party or parties the opportunity to escape from their obligations.

Think of a mortgage: when you buy a house, you take out a mortgage to pay for it. If you have ever bought a house with a mortgage, you know how many papers you have to sign as part of the contract! In essence, the bank buys out your house for you and allows you to live in it while you repay them on the schedule set forth in the contract. Each month, you are to pay a certain amount of money and as long as you do so, keep the home insured, pay property taxes, and so forth, you are allowed to live in it. You want a home. The bank wants to make money. That is why both enter into the contract. Both have obligations which make the contract binding, but if any fail to meet those obligations, the other party can void the contract.

Additionally, think of a health club membership: when you join a health club, you generally sign a contract whereby you promise to pay your monthly dues, clean off the equipment after use, and so forth. In turn, the club promises to keep up the facilities and equipment, provide classes, and so forth. You entered the contract so that you can have a place to work out. The health club entered because it wants to make money.

In the same way, the covenant entails similar parameters. However, there are different kinds of covenants in the Holy Bible: there is the unconditional covenant, such as the Noahic covenant, promising to never to flood the earth again. There is also the conditional covenant, which leads to a concession of sorts; an example of this would be the Mosaic covenant, wherein the people promised to obey the Law, and God shared a series of blessings based on their obedience and curses based on their disobedience.

A covenant however has a key difference. When I sign a covenant with God, to marry my spouse and I try go to the court to dissolve the marriage and the judge confirms the marriage is dissolved; there is a major flaw. He has no right to dissolve a covenant that I did not make with him. I did not make a covenant with the judge. I made a covenant with God. I wrote the covenant with God. When does it end? It does not end. Covenants, promises of God, are eternal, whether conditional or not. The covenant is between a greater and a lesser, and should therefore not be broken.

It is humbling, that the greater God, the eternal, the creator, is willing to bind Himself in a non-breakable covenant with His creation. He is showing signs of fidelity, loyalty, and love. I might be 100% committed to the contract obliged, but not 100% confident in the other person. But in God we have full confidence. The question is the commitment on our part. However, covenants are not a legal issue, they are family bonds. For instance, when Adam says: she is flesh of my flesh, bone of my bones,

he is uttering the covenant. Or, when Jesus offers us his blood and says: take drink of it all of you for this is the Blood of the New Covenant, this essentially makes us His family.

The Covenant of God: The Promise of an Heir

The Hebrew word 'b-rith,' which translates to "covenantal oath," encapsulates a deep commitment within familial relationships, such as father-son and husband-wife. It originates from the Akkadian term 'biritu,' signifying a fetter or bond. An oath of this magnitude entails three essential requirements.

Firstly, a swearing or an oath is necessary. The Hebrew Bible depicts it as a binding relationship rooted in commitment, involving promises, obligations, and durability.

Secondly, the covenant must be established between a greater and a lesser entity. A prime example is the covenant between God and Israel, emphasizing God's unconditional love and care for Israel, while Israel's obligations to God are conditional. The greater entity promises to unconditionally care for and love the lesser entity, with the lesser entity responding with conditional obligations. Both perspectives emphasize human responsibility, but the conditional interpretation places greater emphasis on Israel's success or failure in fulfilling its obligations.

Additionally, covenants are not limited to divine relationships. They can be formed between friends, families, and socio-political groups. Examples include the covenant between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:3), the covenant between Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31:49-50), the covenant between the Israelites and Gibeonites (Joshua 9:3-27), and the covenant between David and the elders of Israel (2 Samuel 5:3).

The Covenant of God: The Covenant with Abraham

Understanding such a meaning behind the covenant of God was of primordial importance to the testament of Abraham's life and faith. Abraham must of understood this concept and that the promises of God were never to be broken. And as such, when God promised:

- Land: "To a land that I will show you" (v1)
- People: "I will make you a great nation" (v2)
- Name: "And make your name great" (v3)

God talked with him, nearly 14 years after the first promise, saying: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Genesis 17:1-8). His promises never changes. A key factor in Abraham's faith.

The Sealed Covenant

“And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; 11 and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. 13 He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”” (Genesis 17:9-14)

This passage holds profound significance, as it encapsulates the establishment of a sacred covenant between God and Abraham, a covenant that is both sealed and confirmed through the act of circumcision. According to this passage, accepting God's covenant, which is everlasting in nature, requires an individual to undergo circumcision. The covenant between God and Abraham serves as a testament to the profound relationship between God and humanity. Through circumcision, individuals enter into this covenant, acknowledging their commitment to God and His commandments.

The act of circumcision symbolizes the dedication of one's life to God. It represents the removal of impurities, the purification of the flesh, and the acceptance of God's covenant. By undergoing circumcision, individuals demonstrate their willingness to align themselves with God's will and to live in accordance with His precepts. Moreover, it identifies individuals as members of God's chosen people and establishes a sense of unity and solidarity among those who share this unique spiritual bond. The covenant, symbolized by circumcision, becomes a source of identity, purpose, and direction for those who embrace it.

The Sealed Covenant: A Comparison of Abraham and Lot

Abraham and his nephew, Lot, were very different in a multitude of ways: “please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.” (Genesis 13, 19) We shall be comparing how two people live the covenant. Abraham, on one hand, is rooted in mercy and kindness that offers to the other everything.

St. John Chrysostom speaks of qualities of Abram, the prominent in dignity, how he was not disturbed, as his nephew accepted to be given the right to choose, and took for himself the first portion, leaving to his uncle the second best portion, saying, “when it ended up for the older to lose his first portion, he did not get angry, ... but was satisfied with his second-best portion. When his younger nephew did him wrong, he loved him, and gave him help in the time of need.” He also says “Abram, not seeking his own

benefit, but that of others, put himself in harm's way; and interceded on behalf of those, with whom he had no relationship ... His nephew on the other hand, hearing his uncle saying, "If you take the left, I will go to the right," he accepted the right to choose, and sought his own benefit, to lose eventually all his possessions, as the whole region burnt up (Genesis 19;) while all the surrounding regions came to no harm."

Abraham	Lot
Abraham is a man of faith. (Hebrews 8:11)	Lot has to see to believe.
Abram lifted his eyes to recall Eden that man was deprived of because of the envy of the devil; so he embraced Lot saying to him: "We are brethren," (Genesis 13: 8,) Abraham's heart drew to brotherly love.	Lot, on the other hand, lifted his eyes "To see all the plains of Jordan that were well watered everywhere." (Genesis 13: 10) Lot's heart drew to selfishness.
God picked out the land for Abraham. (Genesis 13:14-15)	Lot picked out his land for himself. (Genesis 11:13)
The Bible emphasizes that Abraham was a man of prayer. (Genesis 17:20, Genesis 18:22-33)	The Bible does not mention that Lot prayed, as a result he symbolizes a spiritually cold believer.
He lived as a stranger in the world (tent). And the altar symbolized his communion and love with God.	Lot had a house in Sodom. (Genesis 19:1-9)
Abraham feared the Lord and as a result God revealed to him His plans for Sodom. (Genesis 18:17, Psalms 25:14)	Lot was indifferent towards God.
Abraham could differentiate between holy and wicked people.	Lot could not differentiate between good and wicked people. He called the people of Sodom his brethren, (Genesis 18:7.)
Abraham was a joyful believer and saw the coming of Jesus Christ. (John 8:56)	Lot's soul was tormented from day to day. (2 Peter 2:8)
Abraham's life was a witness to everyone around him, even his servants believed in God and were men of prayer. (Genesis 24) He also wanted Isaac to marry a believing woman.	The life of Lot was not a good example to his daughters and wife.
Abraham lived with God so he was called His friend. (Isaiah 41:8)	Lot gave his daughters to wicked people in marriage.
Abraham was about to sacrifice his son, believing that God can raise him back up from the dead, (Hebrews 11:17-19,) therefore, he is an example of faith.	Lot lived with wicked people and as a result his family was corrupted. (1 Corinthians 15:33)
God ties His name with Abraham. (Genesis 28:13, Exodus 3:6)	God did not associate His name with Lot's name.
Abraham was good at speaking with people. He was very respectful with Lot in Genesis 13:8. Isaac learned how to pray from his father. He learned how to dig wells which portrays the life of diligence. He learned how to build altars which portrays a fellowship with God. (Genesis 26:25.)	Lot was not good at speaking, he did not say anything right to the wicked people and he was arguing with the angels who were trying to get him out of Sodom. (Genesis 19:7-8)
Abraham lived in Canaan since it was God's will.	Lot lived in Sodom according to his own will.

The Sealed Covenant: The Promise

Our Lord promised Abraham's wife a child: "and shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!" Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him." (Genesis 1:17-19) Abraham certainly understood the meaning and promises of God cannot and will not be broken. This conviction and understanding set stage for what came next.

The Perfection of Faith: Faith is Tried in the Offering of Isaac

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." (Genesis 21:12)

Let us examine it again. If God comes to you and asks of you the person most valued to you. Your son. Which you spent years trying to get. And he tells you to bring that person to your dining table. Bring the hardest and biggest knife in the kitchen, sacrifice him, let him bleed and after you finish burning him up please. What would you say? Realistically, many of us would say no. But Abraham was a man of great faith.

He had trust beyond measure. God cannot lie. It is through Isaac that He will have many generations. Abraham knew the unbreakable covenant of God. He had this faith in it, that was unquestionable. He knew God. Even if he went through every single step, and actually completely burned him. God will have to take the ashes and reform him. Why? Because God promised. His obedience was proportional to his faith! Do not take things always as they seem. Trust in the promises of our Lord.

This is precisely what St. Paul told the Hebrews: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." That Abraham knew the promise of God cannot be broken even to the point that he would raise him up.

The Perfection of Faith: Faith is Perfected in the Offering of Isaac

"Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (Genesis 22:15-18)



Review Questions

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1. How many stages are there in Abhraham's spiritual journey? (A: There are four.)
 2. What are the stages? (A: The stages are getting called to his work and mission, the promise of an heir and covenant which was then sealed through circumcision. Lastly, his faith was tried, proved, and perfected in the offering of Isaac to the Lord.)
 3. What is a covenant? (A: It is a contract or agreement made by two or more parties and involving mutual responsibilities.)
 4. List three differences between Abhrahm and his nephew, Lot. (Sample A: Abraham lived according to where God advised, whereas Lot lived wherever he pleased. Abhraham wanted Isaac to marry a woman of faith, while Lot gave his daughters to wicked people; lastly, Abraham was very good at speaking, whereas Lot was not.)
 5. What was the promise made to Abraham? (A: He was promised his wife, who was old, would bear a child to be his heir.)

Service in the life of Isaac

BIBLE BASICS

Who Was Isaac?

Isaac, the son of Abraham and his wife Sarah, was born as a result of God's promise to Abraham that he would have countless descendants, and his birth brought great joy to his parents, particularly Sarah, whose laughter upon hearing the news earned him his name, which means "he will laugh." He holds, till today, a significant place as one of the patriarchs and is revered by both Jews and Christians alike. Unlike his father Abraham and his son Jacob, whose names were changed by God, Isaac's name remained unchanged throughout his life. Additionally, he was the only patriarch who never left the land of Canaan.

Isaac's role in the Old Testament extends beyond his historical significance. He serves as a representation of Christ, foreshadowing the sacrifice of Jesus. In the book of Hebrews, St. Paul draws a parallel between Isaac and Christ, emphasizing that Abraham, in faith, offered up Isaac as a sacrifice, just as God the Father offered up His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ: "by faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." (Hebrews 11:17-19) This comparison highlights Isaac's role as a type or symbol of Christ. Isaac's faith and trust in God are exemplified in the story of his near-sacrifice on Mount Moriah. "Isaac, with perfect confidence, as if knowing what was to happen, cheerfully yielded himself as a sacrifice. (Clement of Rome) " Isaac's obedience and devotion to his father and to God, mirrored the obedience and humility of Jesus Christ, who willingly laid down His life, carrying his own cross, for the salvation of humanity. (Hebrews 11:17-19).

"Accordingly, to begin with, Isaac, when led by his father as a victim, and himself bearing his own "wood," was even at that early period pointing to Christ's death; conceded, as He was, as a victim by the Father; carrying, as He did, the "wood" of His own passion." - Tertullian

Carry the Cross of Service

As Abraham prepared to offer his son as a burnt offering, Isaac willingly carried the wood for the sacrifice, demonstrating his commitment to serve his father and fulfill God's command. "So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together." (Genesis 22:6) This act of service represents more than just a physical burden. It symbolizes the spiritual cross that we are called to carry as servants of Christ. When we engage in service, we embrace the responsibility of bearing the burdens of others, even if they are not our own. This requires a spirit of selflessness and a willingness to put the needs of others before our own.

Moreover, the cross of obedience comes into play when we respond to the requests of our spiritual fathers, service coordinators, or our heavenly Father. By submitting to their guidance and direction, we acknowledge that their wisdom and experience can help us grow in our faith and become better disciples. In our own trials and challenges, we are called to carry our wood or cross, just as Isaac did. This means embracing our responsibilities and obligations, even when they seem difficult or overwhelming. It requires perseverance, resilience, and a deep trust in God's plan for our lives. We are called to carry our wood/cross in order to be true disciples of Christ: "and whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:27)

Isaac's obedience led him to gain the honor of being a symbol of Christ. In the same way, our service to others can make us living symbols of Christ's love and compassion. However, there may be certain aspects of our character or shortcomings that hinder us from carrying the wood effectively. These could include pride, selfishness, or a lack of humility. What things about our character or shortcomings may hinder us from carrying the wood? Will we be symbols of Christ in our own service?

Origen elaborates on this matter by comparing Isaac's carrying of the wood to Christ's carrying of his own cross. He emphasizes that Isaac's willingness to participate equally with the priesthood in this act signifies his role as both victim and priest: "that Isaac carries on himself 'the wood for the burnt offering' is a figure, because Christ also 'himself carried his own cross,' and yet to carry 'the wood for the burnt offering' is the duty of a priest. He therefore becomes a victim and priest. But what is added also is related to this: 'and they both went off together.' For when Abraham carries the fire and knife as if to sacrifice, Isaac does not go behind him but with him, that he might be shown to contribute equally with the priesthood itself." (Homilies on Genesis 8.6) This foreshadows the dual nature of Christ, who offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins while also serving as our eternal High Priest.

St. Clement of Alexandria further expounds on this typology, drawing parallels between Isaac and the Lord. He notes that Isaac, like Christ, was a son, a victim, and a bearer of wood. While Isaac's sacrifice was not consummated, it prefigured the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross: "Isaac is another type too (he can easily be taken in this other sense,) this time of the Lord. He was a son, just as is the Son (he is the son of Abraham; Christ, of God.) He was a victim, as was the Lord, but his sacrifice was not consummated, while the Lord's was. All he did was to carry the wood of his sacrifice, just as the Lord bore the wood of the cross. Isaac rejoiced for a mystical reason, to prefigure the joy with which the Lord has filled us, in saving us from destruction through his blood." (Christ the Educator 1.5-2.3)

By reflecting on these ancient interpretations, we gain a deeper understanding of the significance of service and obedience in our Christian walk. As we carry our own crosses, we participate in the redemptive work of Christ and become living witnesses to his love and grace.

One Mind Submission

In the narrative of Isaac and Abraham, Isaac demonstrates profound submission to his father's will. Faced with an enigmatic inquiry about the whereabouts of the lamb for a burnt offering, Isaac trusts in Abraham's response, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." This exchange underscores Isaac's unwavering faith and willingness to accept his father's guidance without question or hesitation. "But Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am,

my son.” Then he said, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” And Abraham said, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” So the two of them went together. (Genesis 22:7-8) Isaac's submission extended beyond this particular incident. Notably, his wife was chosen for him by his father, further emphasizing his commitment to his father's desires. This level of submission is a powerful example for those seeking to serve in any capacity.

In the context of service, submitting oneself to the will of the Father is paramount and by extension to the spiritual father of the church. We may encounter tasks that challenge our understanding or appear nonsensical. However, like Isaac, we must trust that God's plan and purpose are for the greater good of all involved. By submitting ourselves, we not only honor His sovereignty but also recognize that His wisdom and perspective far exceed our own. This act of submission allows us to surrender our limited understanding and embrace a deeper level of faith. Moreover, the submission fosters unity and harmony within the service. When servants collectively align their hearts and minds with His purpose, we create an environment where everyone's gifts and talents can flourish. Those who serve and those who are served alike benefit from the transformative power of submission.

The example of Isaac's submission serves as a reminder that true service begins with humility and trust. By surrendering our agendas and preconceived notions, we open ourselves up to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is in this spirit of submission that we discover the fullness of our purpose and make a lasting impact for the Kingdom of God.

Resorting to Prayer

When observing Isaac's behavior and devotion, Origen illuminates the profound significance it holds for our understanding of both Isaac's relationship with our Lord and his father, Abraham. At a pivotal moment, Isaac addresses Abraham, his father, uttering a single word, "Father." This simple word, spoken by the son who is about to be sacrificed, pierces Abraham's heart like a sharp blade. Despite Abraham's unwavering faith, his paternal emotions surge within him as he responds with tender affection, "What is it, son?" In his reply, Isaac raises a question that cuts to the core of the situation, "Behold the fire and the wood. Where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"

Origen draws our attention to the importance of prayer in the midst of suffering and service. He suggests that when we find ourselves in the thick of challenging circumstances, we should emulate Isaac's example by lifting up our hearts in prayer each step of the way and say “Father”. Through prayer, we can connect with our Creator and seek His guidance and strength. God's provision is always available to those who trust in Him and seek His will. Just as Abraham and Isaac trusted in God's plan, we too can have faith that God will provide the solutions and resources we need to navigate difficult and demanding situations.

Shining Example of Faithfulness

Isaac stands out among the heroes of the Old Testament as a shining example of faithfulness. In an era when polygamy was prevalent, Isaac remained devoted to his wife, Rebekah, never taking any concubines. We hear of David and Solomon who had many, even Jacob, Isaac's own son. This unwavering commitment to his family serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of faithfulness in our own lives.

St. Ambrose, in his treatise "Isaac, Or the Soul," eloquently expounds on Isaac's faith and its profound significance. He describes Isaac's faithfulness to his being "full of grace and a fountain of joy", a source of spiritual blessings and joy. To this fountain, Rebekah came to fill her water jar, symbolizing the soul's thirst for wisdom and knowledge of God. To this fountain of faithfulness, the served child will roam towards the faithful servant. Even the soul of the prophets, like David, yearns for this fountain, seeking to quench its thirst with the richness of God's knowledge. Through this spiritual refreshment, the soul can wash away the impurities of foolishness and embrace the transformative power of divine wisdom.

“and so Isaac is good and true, for he is full of grace and a fountain of joy. To that fountain came Rebekah to fill her water jar. For Scripture says that “going down to the fountain she filled her water jar and came up.” And so the church or the soul went down to the fountain of wisdom to fill its own vessel and draw up the teachings of pure wisdom, which the Jews did not wish to draw from the flowing fountain. Listen to him as he says who that fountain is. “They have abandoned me, the fountain of living water.” The soul of the prophets ran thirsting to this fountain, even as David says, “My soul has thirsted after the living God,” that he might fill his thirst with the richness of the knowledge of God and might wash away the blood of foolishness with watering of spiritual streams.” (Isaac, Or the Soul 1.2)

The Church, or the individual soul, seeks to "fill its vessel" with this wisdom. In contrast, the Jews who "did not wish to draw" from this fountain, rejected of divine wisdom. Isaac's faithfulness serves as an enduring testament to the strength and beauty of true faithfulness. By emulating Isaac's faithfulness, we can bring joy and fulfillment to our own lives and the lives of those around us.

The Impact of Conduct

The story of Isaac in Genesis 26:6-9 teaches the servant mindfulness of our conduct, lest we inadvertently become stumbling blocks to their spiritual growth. While dwelling in Gerar, Isaac, fearing for his life, misrepresented his wife Rebekah as his sister to the men of the place. He harbored the misconception that his wife's beauty would incite the men to murder him in order to possess her.

“so Isaac dwelt in Gerar. And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, “She is my sister”; for he was afraid to say, “She is my wife,” because he thought, “lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold.” Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, [a]showing endearment to Rebekah, his wife. Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Quite obviously she is your wife; so how could you say, ‘She is my sister?’” Isaac said to him, “Because I said, ‘Lest I die on account of her.’” (Genesis 26:6-9)

However, Isaac's deception proved short-sighted and ultimately futile. King Abimelech of the Philistines, observing Isaac's affectionate behavior towards Rebekah through a window, confronted him, exposing his lie. Isaac's fear of death, rather than protecting him, had led him to compromise his integrity and betray his wife's trust.

This incident serves as a reminder that our shortcomings can have far-reaching consequences, not only for ourselves but also for those around us. When we yield to fear or temptation, we not only damage our own spiritual well-being but also potentially hinder the spiritual progress of others. Moreover, as leaders in the church, we must be especially vigilant in guarding against any conduct that could potentially harm or mislead those under our care. This includes not only avoiding blatant sins but also being mindful of our words, attitudes, and actions, ensuring that they are always in line with the teachings of Scripture and the example set by Christ.

Strive to Persevere

In the days of Abraham, the Philistines stopped all the wells and filled them all with earth. The Philistines' actions in stopping the wells was a strategic maneuver to assert dominance and control over Abraham and his people. By limiting access to vital water resources, they sought to weaken them, making them vulnerable and dependent. However, Isaac did not just settle to the circumstance as something beyond him. Yet, rather, in perseverance, Isaac dug wells serving as a profound inspiration to our spiritual journey towards personal growth and transformation.

“Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham, his father, and they had filled them with earth. And Abimelech said to Isaac, “go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.” Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them. Also Isaac’s servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen, saying, “The water is ours.” So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah. And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, “For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.” (Genesis 26:15-22)

The Philistines, symbolizing the obstacles and challenges we encounter, had stopped up the wells dug by Abraham, Isaac's father, filling them with earth and cutting off the life-giving source of water. This act represents the ways in which our spiritual wells can be blocked by negative influences, hindering our spiritual progress.

Isaac's response to this challenge becomes a model for us. He does not give up or become discouraged. Instead, he sets out to dig again the wells that his father had dug, demonstrating his determination to reclaim his spiritual heritage and restore the flow of living water. Isaac's perseverance is not without its obstacles. He encounters opposition from the herdsmen of Gerar, who quarrel over the water and attempt to claim it as their own. This conflict parallels the internal struggles and external pressures we may face as we seek to deepen our spiritual understanding.

Isaac's response to these challenges is instructive. He does not retaliate or engage in conflict but instead continues to dig new wells. Each well he digs represents a deeper level of spiritual insight and

understanding. The names he gives to these wells—Esek ("contention"), Sitnah ("hatred"), and Rehoboth ("room")—reflect the journey of spiritual growth and purification (Genesis 26:15-22) .

Origen, a renowned early Christian theologian, interprets Isaac's story as a metaphor for spiritual transformation. He emphasizes that when we faithfully perceive the message of the wells, Isaac works within us, cleansing our hearts from earthly perceptions and opening us up to spiritual understanding. "If therefore you also hearing these words today should faithfully perceive what is said, Isaac would work also in you; he would cleanse your hearts from earthly perceptions. And seeing these mysteries that are so great to be lying hidden in the divine Scriptures, you progress in understanding, you progress in spiritual perceptions. You yourselves will also begin to be teachers, and "rivers of living water" will proceed from you. For the Word of God is present, and this now is his work, that he might remove the earth from the soul of each of you and open your spring. For he is within you and does not come from without, just as "also the kingdom of God is within you." Origen's words remind us that the journey of spiritual growth is an internal one, requiring our diligent effort to remove the "earth" from our souls and allow the living water of God's Word to flow through us.

St. Ambrose, another early Church Father, further expands on this allegory. He views Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as fountains of faith and devotion, symbolizing the potential within each of us to become sources of spiritual nourishment for others. "For Abraham dug wells and Isaac too—that is, the mighty patriarchs—and Jacob also, as we find in the Gospel, as if they were fountains of the human race, and specifically fountains of faith and devotion. For what is a well of living water but a depth of profound instruction? On this account Hagar saw the angel by a well and Jacob found his wife Rachel by a well; Moses too earned the first rewards of his future marriage beside a well . Therefore Isaac undertook to open wells out of a depth of vision and in good order, so that the water of his well might first wash and strengthen the reasoning faculty of the soul and its eye, to make its sight clearer." St. Ambrose draws a connection between the wells and significant biblical events, such as Hagar's encounter with the angel, Jacob's meeting with Rachel, and Moses' courtship of Zipporah. These examples highlight the transformative power of spiritual wells, which can provide clarity, guidance, and refreshment on our spiritual journeys.

Isaac's perseverance in digging wells invites us to reflect on our own commitment to spiritual growth and renewal. It reminds us that the journey of faith is not without challenges but that through perseverance, we can uncover the hidden springs of living water within ourselves and become channels of grace for others.

Embodying the virtues of Isaac

In essence, we should all endeavor to embody the virtues that characterized Isaac, becoming a "type of Christ" in our own lives. This transformation begins with carrying our cross, a symbol of embracing the challenges and difficulties that come our way. By submitting to the will of God, we surrender our own desires and ambitions, recognizing that His plan is perfect and ultimately leads to our greatest good.

Prayer becomes a vital tool in this journey, as we seek communion with God and align our hearts with His. Regular and heartfelt prayer allows us to express our gratitude, confess our sins, and receive divine guidance. Being a shining example of faithfulness becomes, to others, a fountain of

nourishment. is another essential aspect of following Christ's example. Whether it's through acts of kindness, serving, or simply being a listening ear, our actions should reflect the love and compassion we have received from God.

Recognizing and acknowledging our shortcomings is also crucial for spiritual growth. It's not about self-condemnation but rather a humble understanding of our limitations and need for God's grace. As we embrace our flaws, we become more dependent on His strength and forgiveness. Finally, perseverance is a hallmark of Isaac's devotion and should be ours as well. The narrow gate that leads to eternal life requires sacrifice, discipline, and unwavering commitment. It's not a path for the faint-hearted, but for those who are willing to endure the challenges, the rewards are unimaginable.

The journey of becoming a "type of Christ" is not without its trials and tribulations. There will be times of doubt, temptation, and suffering. However, we must remember that God's grace is sufficient and His love knows no bounds. By carrying our cross, submitting to His will, praying often, serving faithfully, acknowledging our shortcomings, and persevering through adversity, we can experience the transformative power of Christ's love and become shining examples of His light in the world.



Review Questions

1. List three of the many qualities we should try to learn from Isaac. (A: Carrying the cross of service, praying, and persevering.)
2. Who were Isaac's children and father, respectively? (A: Jacob, Esau, and Abraham.)
3. List one instance of Isaac's perseverance. (A: He persevered during the incident with the wells and the Philistines.)
4. Who are two sources for in depth analysis of father Isaac? (A: Origen and St. Ambrose.)
5. True or false? Isaac was an independent person and married who he chose for himself. (A: False)

Service in the life of Jacob

BIBLE BASICS

Clutching the Heel

Jacob, the son of Isaac and Rebekah, was born into a patriarchal family filled with spiritual symbolism. His twin brother, Esau, emerged from the womb first, granting him the status of the firstborn. However, Jacob's name, meaning "supplanter," hinted at the intricate dynamics that would unfold throughout his life.

In allegorical terms, Isaac represents Christ, while Rebekah symbolizes the church. Their union results in the birth of two contrasting children — one representing good and the other evil. This allegory reflects the reality of the church, where both righteous and sinful individuals engage in an ongoing struggle. The hope lies in the transformation of all towards goodness.

Jacob's birth was not merely a physical event but a foreshadowing of his life's trajectory. As he emerged from the womb, clutching Esau's heel, it hinted at his future actions and the complex relationship between the twins. This symbolic act mirrored the spiritual journey of believers, who often grapple with their own inner struggles and dualities.

Despite being the second-born, Jacob was chosen by God to carry forth the covenant promises made to Abraham. This choice underscores the sovereignty of God and the unexpected ways in which He works His purposes. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord." (Isaiah 55:8 NKJV) Jacob's life became filled with events of trials, triumphs, and spiritual growth. He experienced deception, betrayal, and reconciliation, ultimately maturing into a man of faith and humility. His story serves as a reminder that God can transform even the most flawed individuals, using their weaknesses to accomplish His divine purposes.

In Times of Conflict, Turn to God

When conflict arises within the church, it reverberates throughout the entire congregation, causing turmoil and unease. In the biblical narrative, we find the account of Rebekah and how she sought to understand the conflict raging within her womb. "But the children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If all is well, why am I like this?' So she went to inquire of the Lord" (Genesis 25:22).

To understand what was happening inside her, Rebekah "went to inquire of the Lord." Rebekah's proactive response to the conflict within her is a testament to her deep faith and unwavering trust in divine guidance. She recognized that the turmoil she experienced was not merely physical but spiritual, and thus she sought answers from the Lord. The fathers of the church offer two distinct interpretations of Rebekah's actions.

According to one interpretation, Rebekah's "went" symbolizes her dedication to fervent prayer. She withdrew into the depths of her spiritual life, seeking understanding and clarity from God. By immersing herself in prayer, Rebekah sought to align her heart and mind with the divine will, trusting that God would reveal the truth to her. Origen further explains that Rebekah's journey represents a transformative process of spiritual growth and development. He suggests that she "passed over from one life to another, from one deed to another, from good things to better. She proceeded from profitable things to more profitable. She hastened from holy things to holier."

In this interpretation, Rebekah's "went" is a metaphor for her spiritual journey, as she moved from a state of confusion and uncertainty to a deeper understanding of God's plan in prayer. Origen emphasizes the progressive nature of spiritual growth, highlighting that Rebekah's journey was not merely about gaining knowledge but about the transformation of her heart and soul in prayer.

Alternatively, according to the next interpretation, Rebekah sought guidance from the elders and prophets, as was customary in the Old Testament. According to St. Ephrem the Syrian, Rebekah approached Melchizedek, a mysterious figure often associated with wisdom and priestly authority. St. Ephrem explains, "She went to inquire of the Lord, and it was told to her, 'two nations are in your womb,' that is, the Edomite and Hebrew nations. To whom did she go to inquire? It was to Melchizedek that she went to inquire, as we mentioned above in the genealogy of Melchizedek."

Rebekah's actions serve as a reminder that in times of conflict and uncertainty, we too should seek the wisdom of our spiritual leaders and dedicate time to prayer, fasting, and spiritual practices. By turning to the Lord and aligning ourselves with His will, we can find clarity amidst the chaos and experience the transformative power of His love and guidance.

The Different Pursuits of the Mind

In the realm of Genesis, two brothers, Jacob and Esau, emerged with distinct personalities and talents. While Esau, a skilled hunter, thrived in the wilderness, Jacob, a mild-mannered individual, preferred the comfort of tents: "So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents." (Genesis 25:27) Jacob and Esau were the same in everything, but with different talents. One is a doer the other a thinker, meaning one is not better than the other, and both were needed. The difference lies, however, in what they valued.

One fateful day, as Esau returned from a tiring day of hunting, hunger gnawed at his core. Spotting Jacob cooking a delectable stew, the aroma tantalizing his weary senses, Esau implored, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am exhausted." Sensing an opportunity, Jacob proposed a trade: "Sell me your birthright in exchange for a bowl of stew."

Esau, consumed by immediate gratification and lacking self-control, readily agreed. "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?" he exclaimed. Little did he know the profound spiritual significance of his birthright—a blessing that held the promise of God's favor and inheritance. In haste, Esau relinquished his birthright to Jacob for a mere bowl of stew. (Genesis 25:29-34)

This impulsive act underscores the importance of self-control in our Christian walk. St. Augustine speaks on this plight saying, "no one becomes spiritual without first having been 'of the flesh' or

materialistic. But if they persist in “the mind of the flesh,” they will always be Esau. If, however, they become spiritual, they will then be the younger son. But then the junior will be the senior; the other takes precedence in time, this one in virtue.” When St. Augustine wisely observes, “no one becomes spiritual without first having been ‘of the flesh’ or materialistic”, he depicts Esau's lack of self-control rendered his hard labor in the field futile, for a Christian's character is defined, in part, by their ability to resist immediate temptations and desires.

In contrast, Jacob, though initially obtaining the birthright through questionable means, recognized its spiritual value. He understood that earthly possessions and immediate gratification should not outweigh eternal blessings. This distinction highlights the significance of engaging in spiritual practices in our own lives. Without them, our service to God becomes void, as we misunderstand its true purpose.

St. Augustine further elaborates on this dichotomy, stating, “If they persist in ‘the mind of the flesh,’ they will always be Esau. If, however, they become spiritual, they will then be the younger son. But then the junior will be the senior; the other takes precedence in time, this one in virtue.”

In essence, Esau represents those who prioritize worldly desires over spiritual pursuits, while Jacob symbolizes those who, despite their shortcomings, ultimately recognize the importance of God's blessings. Their story serves as a cautionary tale, reminding us that true fulfillment and spiritual growth can only be found when we prioritize our relationship with God above all else.

Bias and Favoritism

In Genesis 25:28, Isaac and Rebekah's favoritism towards their sons, Jacob and Esau, is evident. “And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.” (Genesis 25:28) St. Ambrose offers a critical commentary on the potential consequences of such partiality in parenting. He emphasizes the importance of treating all children with equal devotion, regardless of personal preferences or perceived differences:

“we ought not to leave his parents without an excuse for having preferred their younger son to the elder. At the same time we must take care so that no one, in turning to their example, would make an unfair judgment between his sons or suppose that he should love the one and esteem the other less. From this line of conduct fraternal hatreds are aroused, and the crime of fratricide is contrived to gain a worthless sum of money. Let children be nurtured with a like measure of devotion. Granted that one's love may fasten more upon some trait in a child who is more agreeable or similar to oneself, the exercise of justice ought to be the same in regard to all. The more that is given to the child that is loved and who seeks his brothers' love, the more is taken away from the one who is burdened with jealousy at the unfair preference. Esau threatened that he would kill his brother. Neither the fact of brotherhood nor respect for their parents kept him from his fratricidal madness. He grieved that the blessing had been snatched away from him, whereas he should have proved himself worthy of it by forbearance rather than by crime.”

St. Ambrose acknowledges that parents may naturally feel closer to a particular child due to shared traits or compatibility. However, he cautions against allowing this natural inclination to influence one's actions or behavior toward the children. He warns that favoritism can lead to feelings of jealousy, resentment, and hatred among siblings, which can escalate into tragic outcomes like fratricide, as seen in the case of Esau and Jacob.

The story of Esau's murderous threat against his brother illustrates the destructive power of favoritism. Despite their shared familial bond and the love of their parents, Esau's jealousy and anger at being deprived of the blessing drove him to contemplate killing his brother. St. Ambrose emphasizes that not even the sacred bond of brotherhood or respect for parental authority could deter Esau from his fratricidal rage.

St. Ambrose's criticism serves as a reminder of the importance of treating all children fairly and equitably, regardless of their differences. He encourages parents to nurture their children with equal devotion and to exercise justice in all their interactions. By doing so, they can help foster a harmonious and loving family environment, preventing the destructive consequences of favoritism and promoting unity and peace among siblings.

The same can be said of servants towards children they serve. Naturally, they may feel a natural inclination towards some as opposed to others. However, it is crucial for these servants to recognize and manage these inclinations to ensure that all children receive equitable care, attention, and support. Favoritism, even if unintentional, can have negative effects on the children involved. Those who are perceived as favorites may develop a sense of entitlement or superiority, while those who feel neglected or overlooked may experience feelings of lack of belonging in the church, inadequacy, resentment, or low self-esteem. Servants are called to actively work to overcome any biases or preferences they may have in order to treat all children with fairness, respect, and compassion, regardless of their personalities, abilities, or backgrounds.

Blessing of the Service Takes Work

Though the story of Rebekah and Jacob's deception may be overshadowed, St. John Chrysostom offers a profound symbolic understanding beyond mere condemnation of their actions. In receiving divine blessings, efforts were still enacted by Jacob in preparing the food and covering himself with Esau's clothes. He had to kill the goats, use the skin to cover himself, put on Esau's clothes, present the food. According to St. John Chrysostom, this represented an important contribution in order to receive the divine blessings: "...whereas we contribute our utmost, we enjoy in generous measure as well cooperation from God...It is neither the case that everything is due to help from on high (rather we, too, must contribute something), nor on the other hand does he require everything of us, knowing as he does the extra-ordinary degree of our limitations. On the contrary, out of fidelity to his characteristic love and wishing to find some occasion for demonstrating his own generosity, he awaits the contribution of what we have to offer."

St. John emphasizes that while God's help is essential, it is not exclusive. He expects us to make an effort, to put in the work, and to cooperate with His grace. This cooperation is not a matter of earning

God's favor but rather an act of faith and obedience. It is through our limited efforts that God's generosity and love are fully manifested.

While the deception itself was not justified, the story serves as an illustration of how even our small efforts can be rewarded with abundant blessings from above. The act of putting on different clothes symbolizes the transformation from the old man to the new one. The goat's skin, used to mimic Esau's hairy skin, in the Old Testament sacrificial system, often represented sin and its consequences. By covering himself with the goat's skin, Jacob, foreshadows the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, who bore the sins of humanity on the cross. Thus, his work shed the old nature and embraced the new identity in Christ. Covering oneself with the cloak of Christ, represented by the goat's skin, signifies the protection and righteousness that come from trusting in Him.

Jacob's elaborate scheme, while successful in securing the earthly blessing, ultimately led to years of strife and exile. This serves as a reminder that true and lasting blessings are not obtained through manipulation or deceit but through alignment with God's will and purposes. Yet, as previously mentioned, even our seemingly insignificant efforts, when aligned with God's purposes, can lead to abundant blessings. While Jacob's actions were flawed, his desire for the blessing reveals a yearning for spiritual inheritance. This yearning, when directed towards God, is always met with an outpouring of His grace and favor. The blessings received by Jacob were not just material but mainly spiritual. They included the promise of a numerous offspring, the inheritance of the land, and the assurance of God's presence and protection.

Find Comfort in the Rock

In Genesis 28:11-12, we witness a profound moment in Jacob's life as he journeys to exile. As dusk settled in, he sought a place of rest, finding solace on a simple stone that served as his pillow for the night. "And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." (Genesis 28:11-12)

St. John Chrysostom highlights Jacob's grateful spirit, emphasizing that his unassuming nature and willingness to make do with what was available made him worthy of a remarkable vision. Our Lord, recognizing a humble disposition, displays his care and favor. His approach teaches us to approach God in hardship and find solace in Him through thanksgiving even in the most minute of gifts. That even a rock, was turned into a blessing by a humble outlook.

St. John Chrysostom, in his teachings, draws our attention to the profound humility and gratitude exemplified by Jacob. He underscores the significance of Jacob's simple and unpretentious nature. When Jacob, using a mere stone for a pillow, slept on the bare ground, it was not seen as a sign of deprivation, but rather as a testament to his grounded spirit. This lack of attachment to material comforts and his acceptance of his circumstances, according to Chrysostom, was precisely what made Jacob worthy of receiving a divine vision.

"See the young fellow's hardy spirit: He used the stone as a pillow and slept on the ground. Consequently, since he was imbued with common sense and a hardy attitude and was free of all human pretense, he was found worthy of that

remarkable vision. Our Lord is like that, you see: When he sees a dutiful soul that makes no account of present realities, he demonstrates his own great care for him.”

Chrysostom's interpretation reveals a deeper spiritual truth: God's favor often rests upon those who approach life with a sense of humility and contentment. It is not the pursuit of worldly possessions or the clamor for recognition that attracts divine grace, but rather a quiet and unassuming heart that is open to recognizing God's presence even in the simplest of things. Chrysostom's words echo a timeless lesson: Our Lord is drawn to those who, like Jacob, possess a "dutiful soul" and do not become overly preoccupied with the "present realities." When we are able to detach ourselves from the anxieties and demands of the material world, we create space within ourselves for a deeper connection with the divine. In this state of openness, even the most ordinary experiences can become imbued with blessings. The stone serves as a powerful reminder that blessings can be found in unexpected places. The very rock that Jacob used as a pillow became a symbol of divine encounter. Psalm 137 similarly expresses a similar thought: “Happy the one who takes and dashes Your little ones against the rock!” (Ps 137:9) “That is to say, shall dash all corrupt and filthy thoughts against Christ” (St. Ambrose)

St. Jerome further expounds on Jacob's asceticism, drawing attention to his challenging circumstances. Fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau, Jacob found support and comfort in a stone. This stone, symbolic of Christ, becomes a source of strength for those facing persecution. However, for the unbelieving Jew, it poses a stumbling block, leading to potential downfall: “consider our ascetic [Jacob]: he was running away from a very cruel man; he was fleeing his brother, and he found help in stone. That stone is Christ. That stone is the support of all those who suffer persecution, but to the unbelieving Jew, it is “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of scandal.”

When we accept trials and tribulations we learn to find comfort and rest in the rock of Christ. When we choose to rely solely on God, He turns even the hardest, (rock), situations into experiences of comfort and rest. The rock will then humble those seeking salvation but grind to powder those who choose to do evil. In the same way, Jacob sees heaven when: he runs away from evil, (escaping his brother Esau), discards the comforts and cares of this world, (sleeping on a rock), and obeys God, (following the instruction of his parents)

The narrative underscores the significance of accepting trials and tribulations as opportunities for growth. When we choose to rely solely on God, even the most challenging situations, such as the rock, can transform into experiences of comfort and rest. The stone acts as a metaphor, humbling those seeking salvation while grinding to dust those who embrace evil. In Jacob's case, his journey unfolds as he runs away from evil while escaping his brother, discards the allure of worldly comforts while sleeping on a rock, and obey God in following the instructions of his parents. These acts of obedience and self-sacrifice set pace to allow him to perceive the ladder reaching up to heaven.

Turn the Rock into an Altar

When we face challenges and difficulties in life, it is all too easy to become discouraged and overwhelmed. However, the story of Jacob in Genesis 28:18-22 offers a powerful reminder that even in the midst of trials, we can find hope and transformation. Jacob after he had experienced his fair share

of trials and tribulations in fleeing from his home, and using a stone as a pillow to rest for the night, realized that this stone was more than just a rock. It was a symbol of his encounter with God. In a dream, Jacob had seen a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending. And God had spoken to him, promising to be with him and to bless him. Jacob awoke from his dream feeling a sense of awe and reverence. He realized that the stone he had used as a pillow was a sacred object, a place where he had encountered the presence of God.

So, Jacob took the stone and set it up as a pillar. He poured oil on top of it and called the place Bethel, which means "house of God." He then made a vow to God, promising to worship him and to give him a tenth of everything he received.

“then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.” (Genesis 28:18-22)

As we face our own trials and tribulations, we can learn from Jacob's example. We can learn to turn our rocks into altars, places where we encounter God and where we make vows of faithfulness to him. And we can learn to trust that God is always with us, even in the midst of our darkest moments. When we sacrifice ourselves to God through long suffering and prayer, we will have something to show for, as our Lord always looks out for our best interests. He will never leave us or forsake us, and he will always work for our good. So, let us not be discouraged by our trials, but let us instead see them as opportunities to grow closer to God and to experience his transforming power.

Love Reduces Work and Time

Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, “I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter.” And Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me.” So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.” (Genesis 29:18-20)

Jacob's love for Rachel serves as a profound allegory of the relationship between Christ and His church. Rachel, in this context, symbolizes the church, representing the collective body of believers united in faith. The number seven, often associated with perfection and completeness, holds significant meaning in this story.

When we serve Christ and His people with genuine love, our service becomes a testament to the perfection of our devotion. As Jacob served Laban for seven years to obtain Rachel's hand in marriage, his love for her made the arduous labor seem like a short time. Similarly, when we serve Christ and the church out of love, the challenges and sacrifices we encounter become less burdensome, for our hearts are set on a higher purpose.

The allegory of Jacob and Rachel teaches us that true love transcends hardship. When someone is captivated by love's desire, they willingly endure difficulties and dangers, their sole focus being the attainment of their beloved. In the same vein, our love for Christ and His church should motivate us to persevere through trials, knowing that the reward of our service is eternal life and communion with God.

Furthermore, Jacob's love for Rachel highlights the importance of commitment and faithfulness. He remained steadfast in his service to Laban, even when faced with unexpected challenges and disappointments. "You see, when someone is smitten with love's desire, far from seeing any problem, he easily puts up with everything, albeit fraught with danger and much difficulty besides, having in view one thing only—obtaining the object of his desire." (St. John Chrysostom) Our love for Christ and His church should mirror this steadfastness, leading us to persevere in our faith despite life's uncertainties. The allegory of Jacob and Rachel serves as a reminder that our service to Christ and His church is not merely an obligation but an act of love. When we serve with genuine love, our hearts are filled with joy and purpose, and the challenges we encounter along the way become opportunities for growth and sanctification.

Wrestling with God

In the depths of the night, under a veil of stars, Jacob, found himself locked in an intense struggle. Unbeknownst to him, he was grappling with the divine, a Man of unparalleled strength and wisdom. Hours passed, and as dawn approached, the Man realized that He could not overpower Jacob through sheer force. With a deft touch, He struck the socket of Jacob's hip, dislocating it and causing him excruciating pain.

"Let Me go," the Man urged, "for the day breaks."

But Jacob, filled with an unwavering determination, refused to yield. "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" he exclaimed.

Recognizing Jacob's unwavering resolve, the Man inquired, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he replied.

The Man then uttered words that would forever change Jacob's destiny. "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel," He declared. "For you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

A surge of awe and wonder washed over Jacob as he realized the profound significance of this encounter. He yearned to know more about the enigmatic Man with whom he had grappled, so he asked, "Tell me Your name, I pray."

"Why is it that you ask about My name?" the Man replied.

And with a touch of His hand, the Man blessed Jacob. Overwhelmed with emotion, Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning "the face of God," for he had indeed seen God face to face and emerged from the encounter with his life preserved. Jacob limped away from Peniel, forever transformed by his

experience. From that day forward, the children of Israel refrained from eating the muscle that had shrunk on Jacob's hip, a poignant reminder of the divine encounter that had shaped their patriarch's destiny.

Jacob's wrestling match serves as a powerful allegory, encouraging us to tenaciously seek blessings and understanding from God. It teaches us that through prayer, trials, toil of service, and the pursuit of wisdom, we can draw nearer to the divine and receive His transformative touch. Like Jacob, we may not always comprehend the mysteries we encounter, but we can trust that God's grace is sufficient to sustain us on our journey.

Toil for the Sake of Obtaining Virtues

St. Ambrose delves deeper into the spiritual significance of Jacob's wrestling match. He emphasizes that Jacob, having purified his heart and embraced a peaceful disposition, first relinquished his worldly possessions and then engaged in a solitary struggle with God. This act of forsaking worldly attachments, Ambrose argues, brings one closer to the divine image and likeness.

The wrestling with God symbolizes a profound spiritual struggle for virtue. It is a contest against a superior force, with the aim of becoming a more faithful imitator of God. Jacob's unwavering faith and devotion during this struggle led to a divine revelation. God touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, signifying a profound spiritual connection.

“therefore Jacob, who had purified his heart of all pretenses and was manifesting a peaceable disposition, first cast off all that was his, then remained behind alone and wrestled with God . For whoever forsakes worldly things comes nearer to the image and likeness of God. What is it to wrestle with God other than to enter upon the struggle for virtue, to contend with one who is stronger and to become a better imitator of God than the others are? Because Jacob’s faith and devotion were unconquerable, the Lord revealed his hidden mysteries to him by touching the side of his thigh .For it was by descent from him that the Lord Jesus was to be born of a virgin, and Jesus would be neither unlike nor unequal to God. The numbness in the side of Jacob’s thigh foreshadowed the cross of Christ, who would bring salvation to all people by spreading the forgiveness of sins throughout the whole world and would give resurrection to the departed by the numbness and torpidity of his own body. On this account the sun rightly rose on holy Jacob, for the saving cross of the Lord shone brightly on his lineage. And at the same time the Sun of justice rises on the person who recognizes God, because he is himself the everlasting Light.” - St. Ambrose

This connection of touching, Ambrose suggests, foreshadows the lineage of Jesus Christ, who would be born of a virgin descendant of Jacob. The numbness in Jacob's thigh, caused by the touch, is seen as a prefiguration of the crucifixion of Christ. Through his sacrifice on the cross, Christ would bring salvation to all humanity by offering forgiveness for sins and the promise of resurrection. The sun then rising on Jacob, he argues, symbolizes the radiant light of the Lord's saving cross shining upon his lineage. Moreover, the Sun of Justice, which represents God's everlasting light, rises upon those who acknowledge and recognize God.

In essence, St. Ambrose interprets Jacob's wrestling match as a profound spiritual journey of purification, struggle, and divine revelation. It foreshadows the coming of Christ and the salvation he would bring to the world. The symbolism of the sun emphasizes the divine light that shines upon those who seek and recognize God.



Review Questions

1. What should one do in times of conflict? (A: Turn deeper to God and attempt to find comfort in the rock of Christ.)
2. True or false? Jacob wrestled with our Lord. (A: True)
3. True or false? Favoritism in parenting alienates one child and causes their jealousy to grow. (A: True)
4. True or false? Esau's toiling was still accounted for even though he did not have any self control with Jacob. (A: False)
5. True or false? Esau threatened to kill Jacob for taking his birthright. (A: True)

Service in the life of Joseph

BIBLE BASICS

Favored yet Hated

Joseph, a young man, only seventeen years of age, was distinguished and favored by his father. Out of love for Joseph, Jacob made him an ornate robe.

“Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. “Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.” (Gen 37:2-3)

While Jacob set Joseph apart with the robe, Joseph set himself apart with his virtues. St. John Chrysostom says: “Why does he also indicate to us Joseph’s age? For you to learn that his youth constituted no obstacle to virtue and for you to have a complete awareness of the young man’s obedience to his father and his sympathy for his brothers despite their savagery. Despite his being so well disposed to them, Joseph was unable to win them over to concord with him on the grounds of his youth so as to be willing to maintain the bond of love. Instead, they saw from the outset the youth’s inclination to virtue and the father’s favor for him and were prompted to envy him. You see, “they brought false reports about Joseph to their father Israel.” The ornate robe was a metaphor for many things, such as him standing out from his youth, as well as set up to be glorified.

As Joseph then had a dream, and told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. Joseph's dreams serve as a catalyst for the escalating tension between him and his brothers. *“He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it. His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you? His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.”* (Gen 37:5-11) His brothers were consequently filled with envy; they were just blinded and could not be optimistic.

Joseph, favored by his father Jacob, recounts two vivid dreams to his family. In the first dream, Joseph's sheaf of grain stands upright while his brothers' sheaves bow down to it. In the second dream, the sun, moon, and eleven stars bow down to Joseph. These dreams, interpreted as symbols of

Joseph's future dominion over his family, ignite a deep-seated jealousy and resentment within his brothers.

The brothers' reactions to these dreams reveal their underlying insecurities and fears. The brothers' question, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" underscores their apprehension about being subordinate to their younger brother. Their immediate response is to hate him even more, highlighting the destructive power of envy. Jacob's rebuke of Joseph, questioning the audacity of his dream, adds another layer of complexity. While seemingly chastising Joseph, Jacob also "kept the matter in mind," suggesting an underlying recognition of the potential significance of these dreams.

The Cycle of Service and Struggle

The story of Joseph's dreams introduces a broader theme: the cyclical nature of service and struggle. Those who engage in honest and dedicated service often experience periods of intense demand and pressure. This can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed and burdened. Servants across various roles and responsibilities will encounter different challenges and setbacks. These struggles are not indicative of failure but rather a natural part of the cycle of service. Sometimes a servant feels relied on so heavily and then gets pulled on more and more, especially their service is honest, before starting to face many struggles.

“My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be impetuous in times of calamity. Cling to him and do not depart, so that your last days may be prosperous. Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable, in the furnace of humiliation. Trust in him, and he will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in him. You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy; do not stray, or else you may fall. You who fear the Lord, trust in him, and your reward will not be lost. You who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy. Consider the generations of old and see: has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed? Or has anyone persevered in the fear of the Lord and been forsaken? Or has anyone called upon him and been neglected? For the Lord is compassionate and merciful; he forgives sins and saves in time of distress.” This will happen to everyone. Everyone in service will go through a stage similar. But everyone’s response will be different. Some may have already gone through one of such trials, others may have not. Some respond positively, while others stay in limbo, stuck, unable ever to yield the fruit of the trial.

Serving the Lord involves facing trials, preparing ourselves by being spiritually ready, with a strong hopeful heart, and staying calm during difficult times. Trials are like a refining fire that purifies our faith. St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 acknowledges the difficulties but emphasizes that these trials do not have the final say: “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” St. Paul faced immense challenges and hardships in his ministry. He was constantly under pressure, facing persecution, and experiencing physical and emotional difficulties yet he maintained resilience and unwavering faith in the face of adversity.

These passages are a powerful reminder that even in the midst of difficulties, we can remain steadfast in the faith. Joseph's life exemplifies these principles. He faced immense trials, beginning with the rejection of his brothers. After Joseph's coat was taken, he essentially was being stripped of all previous glory. He was forced to start his life entirely, in the land of Egypt which was the God of Israel did not reign. There was no family, no familiarity of worship, no community. A devastating situation that many would cry to God in despair. Yet, he did not allow it to waver his faith in our Lord. He remained faithful to God, maintaining a strong heart and calm demeanor. Everyone faces trials, but our responses differ. Some respond positively and grow, while others remain stuck.

Leaving Your Dream with God

Imagine the emotions of Joseph as he goes from his father's favorite son with big dreams, to being sold as a slave to ending up on the slave crew of Potiphar in Egypt. Imagine the emotional turmoil that Joseph must have endured during this period. Stripped of his identity, separated from his loving father, and subjected to the dehumanizing conditions of slavery, his world was turned upside down. It's natural to wonder how he reacted to such a profound injustice. Did he cry out to God in anger? Did he question his faith? Did he harbor feelings of resentment towards his family, or even towards God Himself?

It's plausible to question if Joseph, like any human being in his situation, experienced a whirlwind of negative emotions. Perhaps a surge of anger towards his brothers, a sense of betrayal that cut deep. Maybe questioning God's plan, wondering why he had been allowed to suffer such a cruel fate. It's even possible that he entertained thoughts of revenge, vowing to repay his brothers for their treachery.

What would you have been praying to God during these days? (Genesis 37:12-36) What would your response be? Anger to God? Not caring to God's laws. Hatred to family? Hatred to the world? Just like I was treated, I will do to others? Living out of spite? Imagine those are the emotions he had – let say maybe he had them momentarily and beat them. Wouldn't they linger in the background for years?

These emotions, while understandable, are also dangerous. Resentment and bitterness can fester, poisoning the soul and leading to a cycle of destructive behavior. Joseph, however, did not succumb to these negative impulses. His story is not one of revenge, but of redemption.

Prosperous with God

Despite his trials, Joseph remained steadfast in his faith. He continued to trust in God's plan, even when it seemed incomprehensible. He refused to let bitterness consume him. Instead, he chose a path of with God.

“The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the

Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate." It did not take time for him to be prosperous again. Keeping God by His side, he gains trust in Potiphar's house.

Note here his response to the trial: he kept the Lord by His side. He did not grumble against God. He kept Him and his statutes in his heart. He cared to please God, to the point where Potiphar noticed his integrity and how God remained by his side, thus putting him in charge. He responded to the trial with godly integrity and was accordingly put in charge.

Now, again, integrity, honesty and dedication to God does not come unchallenged. Joseph clearly was victorious over his first trial, a great one for that matter. Yet, now, after defeating the first challenge of having grown up exalted and favored in his family's house, only to be rejected and be found alone, Joseph is about to be threatened for even greater isolation.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

Joseph's story is renowned for his courage to stand firm for his purity. Yet when Potiphar's wife comes and tells him to be with her, he is not only being given a temptation of lust, but much greater; a temptation to not be alone anymore. Having been rejected by his family, being alone in a town where he knew no one, the man who does not cling to God may desire to feel accepted. Potiphar's wife, in some sense, offered this to him. Yet, Joseph's response was unequivocal, he did not feel alone: "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" The presence of God was real before him. In the midst of trial, in the midst of rejection, in the midst of temptation, Joseph knew he was before God. Add to this, that this is the same man who grew up in a house whose brother was filled with evil. It is thus fair that he did not have the knowledge of the law and understanding of the law like we do. He was not as exposed to it as us. But he upheld, somehow, what was right! Recall that 10 commandments were not even written yet! This is an incredible feat.

A Leader in Prison

Through these trials, he recognizes that his success is not self-made. He enters prison, and though he is now even more ostracized and alone, he maintains his integrity and reaffirms God's authority. Although, at each stage before the struggle, Joseph may have felt he had reached the pinnacle of

success, God envisioned a different summit. This principle applies to us as well. He consistently has something extraordinary in store for us. While it may not appear glorious from our perspective, it undoubtedly is from His.

And [Joseph] was there in the prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who *were* in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under *Joseph's* authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made *it* prosper." The make of the best servant: his integrity was phenomenal. he truly accepted whatever state he was put in. We tend to think that I need to plan and fight to be the leader and be ambitious for the services/work, but service is about true honesty with God. - Genesis 39:20-23

Joseph's unwavering integrity is truly remarkable. It serves as a shining example of what it means to be a devoted servant. Joseph's story illustrates a powerful principle: it doesn't matter what task we're given, whether it seems menial or insignificant. The key is to approach every responsibility with a heart of dedication and excellence. Joseph's commitment to doing everything right, even in the dire circumstances of his imprisonment, is a testament to his character.

This unwavering integrity didn't go unnoticed. It paved the way for his promotion to a position of authority within the prison. This transformation highlights a profound truth: when we embrace our circumstances with integrity and a commitment to serving God wholeheartedly, He can use our situations for His purposes and elevate us in due time. Joseph's story resonates with the Apostle Paul's teaching in Philippians 4:11: "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." This contentment doesn't imply passivity or complacency; rather, it reflects a deep-rooted trust in God's sovereignty and a willingness to serve faithfully, regardless of our circumstances.

Joseph displays the make of a great servant. When we approach our roles and responsibilities, whether in the church or in other areas of life, with Joseph's level of integrity and commitment, we open ourselves to God's blessings and guidance. It's not about seeking recognition or demanding specific roles; it's about serving with a pure heart and trusting God to direct our paths. The attitude of "this class or nothing" stands in stark contrast to Joseph's example. It's a reminder that a spirit of entitlement and a focus on personal preferences can hinder our spiritual growth and limit our opportunities to serve effectively. Joseph's story calls us to approach every task, no matter how seemingly insignificant, with a spirit of excellence and a willingness to serve God wholeheartedly. As we do so, we position ourselves to experience God's favor, just as Joseph did. Remember, God sees our hearts and honors our faithfulness. He can use our humble service to accomplish extraordinary things.

Transformed When Hidden

The Lord never abandoned Joseph; St. Ambrose says: "therefore I might say Joseph was happier when he was put into prison, because he was giving witness on behalf of chastity. For modesty is a good gift but one of lesser merit when it involves no risk. Where, however, it is maintained at the risk of one's safety, there it wins a more abundant crown. With his case unheard, his truthfulness unexamined, Joseph is sent into prison as if guilty of a crime. But the Lord did not abandon him even in prison. The

innocent should not be troubled when they are attacked on false charges, when justice is overcome and they are shoved into prison. God visits his own even in prison, and so there is more help for them there, where there is more danger.”

God's providence is never absent, even in the darkest of moments. When St. Ambrose reflects on Joseph's imprisonment, he highlights the sanctity of suffering for righteousness' sake. Joseph's steadfastness in preserving chastity under peril brought him a greater spiritual crown. This teaches that trials for the sake of virtue are not only allowed by God but are avenues for deeper communion with Him. Trials are not a sign of abandonment but an opportunity to experience God's nearness more profoundly. In the prison of unjust suffering, Joseph encountered the sustaining presence of the Lord, showing that God does not merely observe our struggles from afar but enters into them with us.

St. John Chrysostom further elaborates on this theme, likening virtue to a pearl that shines no matter where it is placed. Joseph's ability to thrive, even in a prison cell, reflects the transformative power of divine grace: “you notice how even when Joseph encountered troubles he had no sense of distress; instead, the creative wisdom of God transformed all his distress. Just as a pearl reveals its peculiar beauty even if someone buries it in the mire, so too virtue, wherever you cast it, reveals its characteristic power, be it in servitude, in prison, in distress or in prosperity. So since, even when cast into prison, he won over the chief jailer and received from him control of everything there, let us see in this case as well how Joseph reveals the force of grace coming his way.” (Homilies on Genesis 63.2.) External circumstances cannot diminish the light of a soul rooted in God. Instead, adversity becomes an opportunity to reveal the beauty of God's work within us. Through Joseph, we learn that focusing on God, even in suffering, opens paths for deliverance and transformation, allowing His grace to turn trials into blessings.

The Baker and Cupbearer: The Fruit of Discernment

Joseph's journey reflects the profound spiritual reality of rejection and divine intimacy. Betrayed by his brothers, unjustly accused, cast into prison, and now forgotten even by those he helped, Joseph's life became a testament to the transformative power of communion with God. Despite these layers of rejection, Joseph did not grow bitter or despondent. Instead, he turned to God with complete dependence, his closeness to God refining his soul and granting him the extraordinary gift of discernment.

“We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.” Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.”

When he interpreted the dreams of his fellow prisoners, he humbly declared, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” attributing all wisdom to the Lord rather than himself. Joseph's humility shines even brighter in his appeal to the butler :“But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.” He did not seek to exalt himself or recount his righteousness. His words carried no hint of resentment toward those who wronged him or demands for vindication.

St. John Chrysostom beautifully captures this moment, noting that Joseph's request to be remembered reflects a deep humility and a philosophical disposition. He did not dwell on his innocence or the injustices he endured but asked only for a simple act of mercy: "Joseph's appeal to the butler to remember him and intercede with Pharaoh for him can be interpreted as a sign of his philosophical attitude and his great humility."

This teaches us that true faith does not rely on the acknowledgment of others or visible rewards. Joseph's steadfastness was rooted in a faith that remained unshaken by external circumstances. Even in the depths of prison, he embodied the heart of a servant—humble, faithful, and unwavering in trust that God's providence would prevail in its time. Through Joseph, we see that those who draw near to God are not only upheld in suffering but transformed, their virtues perfected through trials.

Leadership - Vision, Wisdom, Understanding, and Boldness

This peak of discernment stemmed from Joseph's reliance on God and marked the pinnacle of his transformation. His journey exemplifies a profound truth about leadership: true leadership necessitates the destruction of self, a feat Joseph had remarkably accomplished. Consequently, he was ideally prepared to assume a leadership role. Similarly, our capacity for servant leadership is shaped by our experiences with and reliance on God. We must possess vision and a deep desire for our children's well-being, coupled with the wisdom and understanding that come from depending on God.

Our vision as servant leaders should always be focused on a holy objective for the children we serve. Our goal goes beyond a lesson delivery; it's about nurturing their relationship with God and preparing them for future struggles. Like Joseph, we must look ahead, ensuring they have the spiritual sustenance needed to face life's challenges. This sustenance is rooted in reliance on God. Additionally, a deep wisdom and understanding of the Church, as well as its people, is a good quality in any servant or leader.

Joseph's unwavering boldness in acknowledging God, even before the most powerful monarch on earth who worshipped other gods, is a testament to his faith (Genesis 41:25-28). He was unashamed of his God, His sovereignty, and his religion. Are you as bold in speaking on behalf of your Maker and Savior? He was fearless and zealous religiously. There is no vengeance in a successful service. Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it."

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Now hurry back to my father and say to

him, This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay."

In this moment of revelation to his brothers, Joseph's emotional outburst reveals the depth of his feelings. He reassures them, emphasizing that their actions, while hurtful, ultimately served a godly plan. Joseph's humility and unwavering faith in God's plan are evident as he acknowledges, yet again, that it was God, not his brothers, who orchestrated his journey. At this point, Joseph had reached the pinnacle of success, yet he faced a critical juncture where an unwise decision could jeopardize everything. His story serves as a reminder that even in positions of power and influence, our choices must align with our faith and values.

No Vengeance in Service

Joseph's ultimate rise to power in Egypt was not a result of ambition or manipulation. It was a testament to his unwavering faith, his wisdom in interpreting dreams, and his ability to forgive those who had wronged him. As a leader, he demonstrated foresight, compassion, and a deep understanding of human nature. This final stage of servant leadership is characterized by visionary thinking, wise decision-making, and the capacity to forgive and reconcile, even in the face of great hurt.

As a servant leader, you will inevitably encounter differences of opinion and even conflicts with those you serve with. Some may unintentionally cause harm, while others may act with deliberate malice. However, Joseph's response to his brothers offers a powerful example of how to navigate these challenges. His ability to forgive, reconcile, and ultimately lead with wisdom and compassion demonstrates the transformative power of servant leadership. There is no place for revenge in service.

The path to becoming a servant leader is not always easy. It requires courage, humility, and a willingness to learn from both successes and setbacks. However, by embracing these stages of growth and development, we can cultivate the qualities necessary to lead with integrity, wisdom, and compassion. Remember, servant leadership is not about power or control; it's about serving others with a genuine heart and empowering them to reach their full potential.



Review Questions

1. Did Joseph's faith in God ever waver? (A: No)
2. True or false? Joseph became a leader in prison? (A: True)
3. What did the ornate robe represent? (A: It represented him standing out from his youth, as well as being set up to be glorified.)
4. True or false? Joseph always remained unashamed of what he believed in, whether it was accepted or not. (A: True)
5. Who were Joseph's brothers? (A: The sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah.)



Service in the life of Moses

BIBLE BASICS

His Importance

Moses authored the first five books of the Bible, collectively known as the Pentateuch or the Jewish Law. These books, consisting of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, provide a comprehensive account of the origins of the universe, the creation of mankind, the early history of the Israelites, and the establishment of their covenant with God. The Pentateuch serves as the foundational text of Judaism and holds immense significance for Christians as well. It narrates the story of the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt, their journey through the wilderness, and the giving of the Torah, the law of God, on Mount Sinai. Moses stands as a central figure in these narratives, serving as a mediator between God and the Israelites.

His unparalleled status as a prophet is attested to in Deuteronomy 34:10-12, which proclaims that "since then there has not arisen in Israel, a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt before Pharaoh, before all the servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel." (Deuteronomy 34:10-12) This verse underscores Moses' exceptional relationship with God, marked by direct communication and intimate understanding. He was not merely a leader who guided the Israelites out of slavery; he was a prophet who received the Torah—God's sacred law—which forms the foundation of Christian faith. It highlights his role in performing miraculous signs and wonders, both in Egypt before Pharaoh and throughout the Israelites' journey.

Moses is a model of leadership, faith, and service. His life, filled with divine encounter and human struggle, offers profound lessons for understanding the intersection of personal humility, spiritual obedience, and responsibility. We will explore Moses, not simply as a historical figure, but as a servant of God, whose life was marked by his commitment to God's call and his sacrificial devotion to the people entrusted to his care. At the heart of Moses' life and legacy is the theme of service. From his birth to his death, Moses embodies the ideal of a servant leader, one who is both a humble instrument in God's hands and a steadfast guide for a nation in the wilderness. The Exodus narrative, the Ten Commandments, and the covenantal relationship between God and Israel are woven together through Moses' obedient leadership, shaped by his personal encounters with God and his enduring struggles with the people he was called to lead.

Background: Drawn out of Water

Moses was born into a time of great strife and hardship. He was a descendant of the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, born to Amram and Jochebed, both members of the Levitical priestly line. His birth came at a time when the Israelites were suffering under the brutal oppression of the Egyptian

Pharaoh, who feared their growing numbers and subjected them to harsh slavery. The Pharaoh, in an attempt to curb the population of the Israelites, had decreed that all male Hebrew children be thrown into the Nile River to drown. This edict, designed to break the spirit of the Israelites, marked the backdrop of Moses' infancy and early life.

However, God's providence was evident from the very beginning. Moses' mother, Jochebed, in defiance of Pharaoh's decree, placed her son in a basket made of reeds and set him afloat on the Nile, trusting in God's protection. The infant Moses was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter, who, moved by compassion, adopted him as her own and named him Moses, meaning "drawn out of the water." Thus, Moses was raised in the Egyptian royal court, receiving an education and privileges that few could imagine, all while carrying the identity of an Israelite. His early life in Pharaoh's palace was marked by an inherent tension between his Hebrew heritage and the comforts of his royal upbringing.

However, Moses' sense of justice was stirred at an early age. As a young man, he witnessed an Egyptian taskmaster brutally beating a Hebrew slave. In a moment of righteous anger, Moses intervened, killing the Egyptian and hiding his body in the sand. Realizing that his act of defiance could not remain hidden, Moses fled Egypt to escape Pharaoh's wrath, thus beginning a new chapter of his formative life in exile.

Moses spent the next forty years in the land of Midian, where he married Zipporah, the daughter of the Midianite priest Jethro, and became a shepherd. It was during this period of relative obscurity that Moses encountered the famous burning bush on Mount Horeb, where God revealed His name—"I AM WHO I AM"—and called Moses to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of bondage. This godly call marked the beginning of Moses' mission to become the servant of God and the leader of His people.

Moses' journey was not without its challenges, as he faced opposition from both his own people and the Egyptians. However, his unwavering faith and unwavering determination propelled him forward.

Background: Jewish Servitude

The backdrop of Moses' life in Egypt is inseparable from the suffering of the Israelites under Pharaoh's oppressive rule. The Israelites, who had once been honored guests in Egypt under the leadership of Joseph, had become enslaved over time. As years passed, a new pharaoh ascended to the throne who did not know or care about the contributions of Joseph, the Israelite who had once saved Egypt from famine. This pharaoh, driven by fear and prejudice, grew increasingly concerned about the growing population of the Jews. He worried that they might one day challenge his authority or even attempt to take over Egypt.

Pharaoh's fear of their increasing numbers led to brutal labor, forced to build cities and work in the fields under the harshest conditions. Their cries for deliverance reached the ears of God, and it was into this context of suffering that Moses was called.

Moses' role as deliverer and lawgiver is tied to this backdrop of injustice and hardship. The Exodus, the event through which God liberated the Israelites from slavery, was not only a physical liberation but a spiritual one. Through Moses, God demonstrated His sovereignty over Egypt's gods and rulers, culminating in the ten plagues that broke Pharaoh's resistance. The Passover, which commemorates

the final plague, the death of the Egyptian firstborns, became a lasting symbol of God's deliverance and His faithfulness to His covenant.

Through the Exodus, Moses led the Israelites not only out of physical slavery but toward spiritual freedom, a new identity as God's chosen people. The journey through the wilderness, the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, and the establishment of the covenant between God and Israel are all essential elements in Moses' role as both servant and leader.

Background: Prince Moses

The Princess of Egypt, known for her compassion and grace, discovered a baby floating down the river. The infant, wrapped in a basket, had eyes as dark as the night sky and a cry that tugged at her heartstrings. Moved by his plight, the princess took the child into her care, realizing the significance of his name, Moses, which meant "to draw out of the water" in the ancient Coptic tongue.

His sister, Mariam, a clever and watchful soul, observed this act of kindness and approached the princess with a proposal. She suggested finding a Jewish nanny to care for the boy in the palace, ensuring that he would receive the love and care of his own people. The princess, recognizing the wisdom in this request, agreed, and thus, Jochebed, Moses's own mother, became his nanny.

Moses' adoption into Pharaoh's household was nothing short of miraculous. He grew up in the lap of luxury, educated in the wisdom of Egypt and enjoying all the privileges of a royal life. In this regard, Moses was a "prince" of Egypt, receiving the finest education available to one of Pharaoh's own sons. Acts 7:22 describes him as "mighty in words and deeds," indicating that he was well-trained in both the arts of rhetoric and the physical prowess necessary for leadership. His Egyptian upbringing exposed him to the culture, religion, and governance of one of the most powerful empires of the ancient world.

Despite the privileges of his position, Moses never fully severed his ties with his Hebrew heritage. According to Hebrews 11:24-26, when Moses grew up, he chose to identify with the oppressed people of Israel rather than remain in the comfort of the royal court. His awareness of his true identity as a Hebrew would later play a pivotal role in the development of his character and his eventual mission to liberate his people from slavery.

Moses' transformation from prince to fugitive marks a crucial turning point in his life. The Bible tells us that, when Moses was about forty years old, he went out to visit his fellow Hebrews, who were still laboring under the whip of their Egyptian taskmasters. Seeing an Egyptian man beating a Hebrew slave, Moses, in a fit of anger, killed the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand (Exodus 2:11-12). When he discovered that his act of violence was known, Moses feared for his life. Pharaoh sought to kill him, and Moses fled to the land of Midian, a desert region to the east of Egypt.

This moment of crisis marked a significant shift in Moses' life. He left behind his position of power, wealth, and influence, choosing instead the life of a stranger in a foreign land. In Midian, Moses would spend the next forty years of his life as a shepherd, far removed from the grandeur of Egypt. But it was in this period of exile, away from the comforts of royal life, that God began to prepare Moses for the great task that lay ahead. In the solitude of the desert, Moses would encounter the God of his ancestors and receive his divine calling to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of bondage.

His Calling: A New Life

The story of Moses is not simply the story of an individual's rise to leadership; it is, more profoundly, the story of how God, in His sovereign plan, chooses a flawed and unlikely vessel to accomplish His will. Moses' calling at the burning bush marks the moment in his life, where he transitions from an exiled shepherd to the deliverer of Israel. After forty years in the wilderness of Midian, Moses had settled into a quiet life. He married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest, and became a shepherd, tending to the flocks of his father-in-law. Yet, this period of obscurity was not to be the end of Moses' story. The God of his forefathers had not forgotten him, and it was in the desolate wilderness that God chose to reveal Himself in an extraordinary way.

One day, while tending the flocks on Mount Horeb, Moses saw a remarkable sight—a bush that was on fire but not consumed by the flames. This was no ordinary fire; it was a supernatural sign that drew Moses in, compelling him to investigate. As he approached, the voice of God called out to him from within the flames: “Moses, Moses!” (Exodus 3:4). Moses responded, “Here I am,” a phrase that, in the biblical context, signifies openness and readiness to listen. God then instructed Moses to remove his sandals, for he was standing on holy ground. This act of removing his sandals was symbolic of Moses' need to acknowledge the holiness and sacredness of this divine encounter. The ground was holy not because of its physical nature, but because the presence of God Himself had made it so. It was here, in the presence of the holy God, that Moses was about to receive his calling.

“Pass by like Moses, that you may see the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob and that you may see a great vision. This is a great vision, but if you wish to see it, remove the sandals from your feet, remove every bond of iniquity, remove the bonds of the world, leave behind the sandals which are earthly. Likewise Jesus sent the apostles without sandals, without money, gold and silver, so that they would not carry earthly things with them. For the man who seeks the good is praised not for his sandals but for the swiftness and grace of his feet, as Scripture says, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Therefore remove the sandals from your feet, that they may be beautiful for preaching the gospel.” – St. Ambrose of Milan

St. Augustine delves deeper into the symbolism of footwear, equating it with the leather derived from deceased animals. He interprets this directive as a call to abandon "dead works" - actions devoid of spiritual life and purpose: “What are the shoes? Well, what are the shoes we wear? Leather from dead animals. The hides of dead animals are what we protect our feet with. So what are we being ordered to do? To give up dead works. This is symbolically what he instructs Moses to do in his honor, when the Lord says to him, “Take off your shoes. For the place you are standing in is holy ground.” There's no holier ground than the church of God, is there? So as we stand in it let us take off our shoes, let us give up dead works.” The removal of these shoes, as instructed by God to Moses, signifies a profound transformation, a shedding of the old self to embrace a new path.

Similarly, St. Gregory of Nazianzus echoes this sentiment, emphasizing the significance of shedding material attachments when approaching God. “And as to shoes, let him who is about to touch the holy land which the feet of God have trodden, put them off, as Moses did upon the mount, that he may

bring there nothing dead; nothing to come between man and God.” The land of service, likewise cannot be mixed with earthly attachments. We too are called to remove our worldly shoes as we embark on the journey of a spiritual service.

His Calling: Beginning with Divine Revelation

The Lord God then spoke directly to Moses saying: "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." (Exodus 3:6) Moses, a humble shepherd tending his flock, was far from aspiring to leadership. The task of leading the Israelites out of Egypt, across the vast and treacherous Sinai deserts, and into the Promised Land of Canaan seemed overwhelming and beyond his capabilities. Initially, Moses lacked the ambition and determination required for such an undertaking. He doubted his ability to fulfill the role of a guide and leader for the Hebrew people, questioning whether he possessed the necessary qualities and skills. Furthermore, it is uncertain whether Moses, during his youth, displayed any particular interest or inclination towards religious matters. His life as a shepherd in the wilderness had not prepared him for the immense responsibility that now lay before him.

In the midst of the burning bush encounter, Moses learned something of profound significance: the nature of the God who was calling him. When Moses questioned God about His name, asking, “What shall I say to them? Who sent me?” (Exodus 3:13), God revealed Himself in a way that would shape the entire history of Israel—and indeed, the entire biblical narrative. He said:

“I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:14)

This revelation of God’s name, YHWH (often translated as "LORD"), means “I AM” or “I AM WHO I AM.” It is a name that reflects God's eternal, self-existent nature. God is not defined by any outside force; He simply is. This name is the foundation of God’s covenantal relationship with Israel—it affirms that God is the ever-present, unchanging, and self-sustaining Creator who is not bound by time or place.

For Moses, this revelation was not just a theological statement—it was a call to understand the scope and nature of the mission he was about to undertake. The God who had appeared to him in the burning bush was not a distant deity, but the very same God who had made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and who was now about to fulfill those promises by liberating His people. The God who spoke to Moses was not only the God of history but the God of the present—active, involved, and preparing to intervene in the life of Israel.

His Calling: A Reluctant Response

Having revealed His identity, God proceeded to tell Moses of the mission he was to undertake. He was to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of slavery, into a land flowing with milk and honey—a land God had promised to give to their ancestors. In God’s words: “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians...” (Exodus 3:7-8)

This declaration was not just a call to action; it was the unveiling of a divine plan, one that had been in the works since the time of Abraham. God was not sending Moses as a mere political leader or military

general; He was sending Moses as His representative, the instrument of divine deliverance. The Exodus was not just an event in the life of Israel—it was the manifestation of God's covenantal faithfulness.

Moses, however, did not respond to this call with immediate acceptance. Instead, he questioned God's choice of him, expressing reluctance and self-doubt. His first response was, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). Moses felt inadequate for the monumental task before him, believing that his past, his exile, and his apparent lack of power disqualified him from such an important role.

In response, God reassured Moses, not by pointing to Moses' own qualifications, but by emphasizing His own presence and power: "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12). God's promise was clear—Moses was not to rely on his own abilities, but on the certainty of God's presence and divine enablement. Moses continued to protest. His next concern was, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you?'" (Exodus 4:1). To this, God gave Moses signs to authenticate his mission, such as turning his staff into a serpent and his hand becoming leprous (Exodus 4:3-7). Each of these signs was not only a miracle in itself, but also a divine guarantee that Moses' authority came from God and not from his own power.

Despite these assurances, Moses was still hesitant. He expressed his fear of inadequacy, saying, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (Exodus 4:10). Moses, deeply aware of his own limitations, worried that his lack of eloquence would hinder his ability to persuade the Israelites and Pharaoh. In response, God addressed Moses' concerns directly. He reminded Moses that He Himself was the Creator of the human tongue and that He would equip him to speak and act according to His will: "Who gave human beings their mouths? ... Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (Exodus 4:11-12).

At this point, Moses' reluctance reached its peak, and he flatly asked God to send someone else (Exodus 4:13). But God, though angered by Moses' refusal, responded with patience and provision. He allowed Moses to have his brother Aaron as a spokesman, yet the core of the mission remained with Moses: it was he who would lead the people out of Egypt. Moses had no more excuses, and God's will would be accomplished through him, despite his fears and weaknesses.

God Has His Own Plan

God's selection of Moses as His prophet and the deliverer of the Israelites is a profound testament to the divine plan in action, particularly as it highlights the contrast between human perception and divine omniscience. Moses, despite his privileged upbringing in the Egyptian royal court, possessed an innate sense of justice and compassion that would ultimately lead him to fulfill God's purpose for his life.

Moses's early life was far removed from the suffering and oppression of his fellow Hebrews. Raised as an adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, he was immersed in the opulent lifestyle and power structures of the Egyptian ruling class. This environment would not typically foster empathy for the oppressed; in fact, it could easily have bred indifference or even disdain for them. Yet, God had instilled in Moses a

unique sensitivity to injustice and a deep-seated compassion for the vulnerable. This inherent quality manifested itself in his actions, even when he may not have fully understood their significance.

The incident where Moses defended a Hebrew slave from an Egyptian overseer, and his subsequent intervention in a fight between two Israelites, were not merely isolated acts of bravery or impulsiveness. They were clear indications of God's hand at work, shaping Moses's character and preparing him for the monumental task that lay ahead. These incidents foreshadowed his future role as the defender and lawgiver of his people, revealing his inherent qualities of leadership, courage, and compassion.

The narrative of Moses's life serves as a powerful reminder that God's ways are not our ways. His plans often unfold in unexpected ways, and He uses individuals who may not seem outwardly qualified or prepared. God sees beyond human limitations and recognizes the potential within each person. He calls us to trust in His wisdom and to surrender to His will, knowing that He will equip us for the tasks He has set before us.

God is in Control

God's sovereignty and control are consistently displayed throughout the Biblical narrative, particularly in His selection of leaders. Often, He chooses individuals who are overlooked or deemed unqualified by human standards. This is exemplified in the life of Moses, a man with a speech impediment and a history of violence. Despite these perceived shortcomings, God saw Moses' potential and transformed him into a powerful leader, capable of confronting Pharaoh and guiding the Israelites out of Egypt. This transformation highlights God's ability to mold and shape individuals according to His divine will, equipping them with the necessary skills and character traits to fulfill their God-given purpose.

Furthermore, God's control extends beyond individual lives to encompass the orchestration of events and circumstances. He works behind the scenes, aligning situations and opportunities to achieve His divine plan. This is evident in the story of Joseph, where God used Joseph's enslavement and imprisonment to ultimately elevate him to a position of power in Egypt, where he was able to save his family and the surrounding nations from famine. This demonstrates God's ability to weave together seemingly disparate events to accomplish His purposes, showcasing His omniscience and meticulous planning.

God's control is also manifested in the establishment of divine law and order. The giving of the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai exemplifies God's authority and wisdom. These laws served as a guide for the Israelites, shaping their moral and ethical behavior and establishing a foundation for a just and righteous society. Moreover, God's continued guidance and instruction at the Tent of Meeting provided Moses and the Israelites with direction and clarity, demonstrating His intimate involvement in the lives of His people.

God both created a leader in Moses and formed unity within a nation in the desert. Moses proved to be a leader of a certain amount of intolerance to unfairness; and yet would put his people before himself. Moses' compassion for his people surpassed his own desire for personal gain. Instead of hoarding power and glory for himself, Moses displayed a remarkable act of humility. He appointed seventy elders to share his burdens, recognizing the collective wisdom and strength of the community.

Furthermore, Moses displayed a profound trust in God's sovereignty by asking the Lord to appoint the next leader of the Israelite nation.

This act of selflessness serves as a powerful reminder that our service should always be directed towards God, rather than seeking personal recognition or glory. True leadership involves empowering others, sharing responsibilities, and acknowledging that our purpose is ultimately to serve the greater good, as exemplified by the life of Moses.

Endure to the End

Moses' journey was fraught with challenges and wonders. Through divine intervention, Moses possessed extraordinary abilities. He could foretell plagues that would devastate Egypt, a feat that shook the foundations of the mighty Pharaoh's empire. With a mere wave of his staff, he parted the Red Sea, allowing the Israelites to cross on dry land, leaving their pursuers stranded and defeated.

During their arduous journey through the wilderness, Moses witnessed the miraculous manna raining from heaven, a daily provision that sustained the Israelites. He ascended Mount Sinai, where he received the Ten Commandments—the bedrock of their faith and moral code. Moses' profound leadership transformed a group of enslaved people into a devoted nation, united in their worship of God and adherence to the Law.

However, despite Moses' great accomplishments, fate had a different plan for him. He was denied entry into the Promised Land of Canaan—a land flowing with milk and honey, a symbol of God's favor and blessing. The reason for this was a single act of disobedience. In a moment of frustration, Moses struck a rock twice to produce water for the thirsty Israelites, instead of speaking to it as God had instructed. This act of disobedience, though seemingly minor, violated God's command and resulted in Moses being barred from entering the land he had longed for and worked tirelessly to reach.

It is a poignant reminder that even the greatest of leaders, despite their accomplishments and divine favor, are subject to the consequences of their actions. Moses' story serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the importance of obedience and faithfulness to God's commands. His legacy remains as a testament to the power of faith, leadership, and the profound impact one person can have on the course of history.

A call for Perfection

In the midst of a barren desert, where thirst gripped the hearts of the Israelite nation, Moses stood before a towering rock, tasked with providing water for his people. Instead of speaking to the rock as the Lord had instructed, Moses struck it twice with his staff. This act of disobedience had far-reaching consequences. The Lord, witnessing Moses' actions, addressed both him and Aaron: "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." (Numbers 20:12). In that moment, Moses' fate was sealed. He would not be permitted to enter the promised land of Canaan, the land that flowed with milk and honey. The consequences of his disobedience were severe and dire.

Years later, as Moses' life neared its end, a longing filled his heart. He yearned to witness the beauty of the promised land, to gaze upon the pleasant mountains and the majestic Lebanon. With trembling

hands, he approached the Lord once again, pleading, "I pray let me cross over and see the good land beyond Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon." (Deuteronomy 3:25)

But the Lord's response was resolute: "I was angry with you on your account and would not listen to you." (Deuteronomy 3:26). Moses' plea fell on deaf ears. The Lord reminded him of his disobedience at Meribah, where he had struck the rock instead of speaking to it. "Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes for you shall not cross over this Jordan." (Deuteronomy 3:27).

With a heavy heart, Moses ascended Mount Pisgah and gazed upon the promised land from afar. He could see the rolling hills, the lush valleys, and the shimmering waters of the Jordan River. The beauty of the land filled him with a bittersweet joy. Though he could not enter, he knew that his people would inherit the land that he had longed to see.

While Moses' single display of disobedience prevented his entrance into the Promised Land, his greatness far outweighed his punishment; as it must have been intended by God. The Law Moses established through God became known as the Mosaic Law. Moses is mentioned in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament prophet, the Transfiguration with the Lord Jesus Christ talking to Moses and Elijah is recorded in three New Testament Holy Gospels. A leader by God's design, a lawmaker by God's will, and a sinner portrayed by his human weakness made known before the nation he led, Moses persevered to the end and his love to God never failed. "It is neither the faith, nor the love, nor the hope, nor the endurance of one day; Rather, he that endures to the end will be saved..." St. Clement of Alexandria, (c. 195.)

The Lord's Faithful Servant

Moses knew the Lord face to face, held the Ten Commandments in his hands written by the finger of God, and was buried by the Lord himself. He delivered to us the Pentateuch.

Genesis	The creation of the world, the first covenant with Adam and Eve, the Flood, and Abraham's descendants.
Exodus	The escape from Egypt, and the Ten Commandments.
Leviticus	Holiness and Worship.
Numbers	Census spies entering Canaan, Balaam, while Joshua assumes leadership from Moses and prepares the Israelites to enter Canaan.
Deuteronomy	Moses the Prophet's farewell speech before the Israelites move toward and into the land of Canaan.

Filled with Grace

God's plan often unfolds in unexpected ways. Moses, though raised as an Egyptian prince, was called by God to be the leader of a slave people. His reluctance and hesitations remind us that God does not call the qualified, but qualifies the called. Moses' story is a testimony that God uses ordinary, flawed individuals to accomplish extraordinary things. God's calling is not based on our abilities or qualifications, but on His grace and power. Moses was aware of his limitations, but God assured him that His presence would empower him. This promise of divine accompaniment is extended to all who are called by God.

Moses' hesitations remind us that fear, doubt, and insecurity are common human responses when faced with God's call. Yet, God's patience and provision show us that even in our weakness, His strength is made perfect. The success of God's plan does not depend on our own strength, but on our obedience to His will. God's plans are often greater than we can imagine, and His grace is more than sufficient to bring them to fruition. The journey of Moses, from a shepherd in the wilderness to the leader of a nation, shows us that God has a plan for each of us—a plan that, though it may seem daunting, will always be accompanied by His presence and provision.

Although Moses' punishment was not to enter into the Promised Land, perhaps with God, Moses was living its fulfillment long before he could reach it. Moses talked with God face to face and God knew Moses in person.



Review Questions

1. What is the name of the Law Moses established through God? (A: Mosaic Law)
2. Was Moses allowed to enter the promised land? (A: No)
3. What was the promised land named? (A: Canaan)
4. What books did Moses write? (A: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.)
5. What are these first five books called? (A: Pentateuch.)