



Women's Devotional Bible

T H E M E S S A G E

EUGENE H. PETERSON

with insights and reflections by women for women



The Message is a contemporary rendering of the Bible from the original languages, crafted to present its tone, rhythm, events, and ideas in everyday language.





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EUGENE H. PETERSON

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INTRODUCTION TO THE MESSAGE WOMEN'S DEVOTIONAL BIBLE

When Eugene Peterson crafted *The Message*, he was a pastor, writing with real women and men he loved in mind. Having invested in his congregation for decades, he found many of them indifferent to the Bible, or bored, or confused. He longed for this family of faith to *encounter* God through the Bible—and, in doing so, find themselves in God's story.

From that longing, *The Message* was born: the words of God in the language of real people, with the metaphors of our modern life.

It was out of a similar longing that we dreamed of creating a devotional Bible for women, drawing on the experiences and insights of women. Our experience parallels Peterson's—but with a twist. We hear women grieving or startled by certain stories they find in the Bible or hear in their churches. We scratch our heads over the lack of women in these pages or feel angered by stories of women's voices silenced and their bodies harmed. Some of us wonder how a book featuring an abundance of male scribes and characters, and centered on a God who came to earth as a *man*, could have good news for women.

Still others have suffered from the Bible being weaponized, misused to suppress or harm women. Many women long for God's Word but are excluded from in-depth study and theology, offered instead shallow teaching, lessons on joyful living and domestic duties.

Yet we are convinced that the Bible *is* good news for women—for *all* women. In this holy, God-breathed book, there is light and life, truth and teaching that is valuable for us today. *Because of this*, the women of the Bible deserve space for their stories to rise to the surface and catch our attention—and women reading the Bible deserve to be better equipped to study it than we historically have been.

We envisioned devotional content that went deep, illuminating and extrapolating the text, interspersed alongside the accessible words of *The Message*. This would be a no-holds-barred project: No question would be silenced, no difficult topic given shallow treatment. We would name the hard things *and* we would be faithful to the text. We would look the painful stories in the eye, and we would not flinch, choosing—like Jacob—to wrestle with God as long as it took until God blessed us, seeking the heart of God from first to last.

To do this, we gathered dozens of women: authors, scholars, ministers, pastors. With one foot in God's Word and the other in our complicated, multidimensional lived experiences, each writer contributed her study, story, and expertise. We endeavored to honor the sacred words of the Bible, the Spirit, who has guarded these words, and the women whose stories they tell. We aimed to be worthy of this description: *thoughtful, soulful, diverse*.

We wrote for women whose guards go up at Christian content marketed specifically to them, expecting caricature and superficial connections. We sought to highlight the biblical women whose courage and conviction—whether in birthing screaming children or assassinating napping generals—form the bedrock of our faith. Digging into the oft-overlooked deep tracks of the Bible, we considered the sometimes-invisible women who are our mothers and sisters in the faith.

We identified women throughout the Bible—some well known, others nameless—and told their stories. There is much of God's truth in their lives that we tend to miss, gloss over, or allow to sit dormant. We sought to bring these women closer to center stage, giving them space and light, asking what we could learn from their lives and the ways God met and used them. We considered what life was like in their shoes and what they have to teach us today.

We identified topics woven throughout the Bible that are especially relevant to women today—but we intentionally did not focus on or limit ourselves to “women's issues.” Yes, women look to the Bible for help with female experiences, but we also wanted to consider things common to all humanity—seeking God's presence, finding the courage to stand for justice against oppression, considering the problem of evil.

Furthermore, women bring questions to the Bible that male commentators have not fully understood, much less addressed: How does the male-centered backdrop of the ancient world impact the ways we view women today? What should we make of how often women in the Bible are portrayed predominantly in sexual or reproductive roles: wife, mother, temptress, barren woman? What do we do with the depictions of violence against women? With incidences of degrading or dehumanizing language toward women? How can women see themselves in God's good story when women's voices are so rarely heard there?

What emerged from this effort is beauty, strength, and courage. These devotions hold words that are honoring and challenging, faithful and true.

We pray this project will be a gift to you who pick it up to read. The entries may be written by and for women, but *all* are invited to learn alongside us, men and women alike. We pray that you will see a fresh glimpse of the God who formed all people in God's own image, who has seen and uplifted women from the very beginning. We pray that you will find your own stories told and honored here, your own questions asked. We pray that you will find moments of wrestling and moments of rest. We pray that you will find *God*, fully and joyfully.

From the original Garden in Genesis to the healing leaves of the tree in Revelation, the Bible consistently pushes against patriarchal demands. Over and over again, it is not the firstborn who is chosen (as primogeniture required) but the second; not the stronger but the weaker; not the desired but the unnoticed. The women who appear in these pages boldly and creatively use every tool at their disposal to outwit the powerful who oppress them. It is often these women who turn the tide, whose inspired rebellion forms the foundation of God's redemption: the Hebrew midwives in Exodus, Rahab the spy in Joshua, Mary the mother of Jesus, the woman at the well, and the women who joined Jesus' ministry, who followed him all the way to the empty tomb.

Will you join this mighty throng of God's daughters and take your place in God's kingdom? If you're ready, just turn the page. There's so much we're eager to show you.

THE MESSAGE WOMEN'S DEVOTIONAL BIBLE TEAM



HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE MESSAGE WOMEN'S DEVOTIONAL BIBLE

The Message Women's Devotional Bible is designed to help you read the Bible more deeply and thoughtfully, let the wisdom of the Scriptures seep more fully into your spirit, and consider afresh how the Bible speaks to women in our time. Several features will support your Bible-reading experience.

INTRODUCTIONS. At the beginning of each Bible book (or, in some cases, collection of books) and each section of Scripture is a brief essay by Eugene H. Peterson, pastor, poet, and translator of *The Message*. These have proven over time to give a useful thirty-thousand-foot view of the various Bible books in a literary section.

Added to the section introductions are short paragraphs speaking specifically to where the literary section draws especially near to the experiences and concerns of women. A general introduction to the Bible and its relationship and relevance to women is also included on the preceding pages.

DEVOTIONAL ENTRIES. Our diverse group of contributors has written 320 short meditations inspired by Scripture. They're designed to help you process what's happening in a passage, or what might be happening in you as you read that passage. And many of them speak to realities far beyond the passages themselves—in the family of God and in the world as women. A list of these entries and where they're located is included in the back.

CHARACTER PROFILES. The Bible's people are as helpful to know and understand as its teachings and stories. Our contributors have written fifty profiles of women (and a couple of men) you'll encounter as you engage with the Scriptures. We don't know the names of some of them, but they are known by God, and they help us know God better.

SENSITIVE TREATMENTS OF SENSITIVE PASSAGES. The Bible is filled with stories of people who, in turning away from God, turn toward violence, sexual harm, abuse, oppression, and other dehumanizing acts. The Word of God isn't just true; it's honest. Some of these passages can be difficult to read, and especially so for people who have suffered significant harm through the sin of others. Please know that the writers of these devotional entries and character profiles have taken special care to treat sensitive passages sensitively, allowing space and special concern

for those who struggle, allowing space and special concern for you to struggle *with* God, not against God. On each entry that addresses these passages, you'll find this note of caution:

This entry and the passage it addresses involve highly sensitive topics that might be triggering to some readers. If that is you, be gentle with yourself.

You might choose to wait to read these entries until you feel better prepared or skip them altogether. The indexes in the back indicate entries that the editors have determined may be triggering.



Of course, the most significant and important feature of this or any Bible is the Bible itself. We open this book and find that on page after page it catches us off guard, surprises us, and draws us into its reality, pulls us into a fuller participation with the God who created us and cares for us. We engage ourselves fully with this text so that we might be transformed and so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. We hope this resource supports you in this—and every—journey God is inviting you into.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MESSAGE

Reading is the first thing, just reading the Bible. As we read we enter a new world of words and find ourselves in on a conversation in which God has the first and last words. We soon realize that we are included in the conversation. We didn't expect this. But this is precisely what generation after generation of Bible readers do find: The Bible is not only written about us but to us. In these pages we become insiders to a conversation in which God uses words to form and bless us, to teach and guide us, to forgive and save us.

We aren't used to this. We are used to reading books that explain things, or tell us what to do, or inspire or entertain us. But this is different. This is a world of revelation: God revealing to people just like us—men and women created in God's image—how God works and what is going on in this world in which we find ourselves. At the same time that God reveals all this, God draws us in by invitation and command to participate in God's working life. We gradually (or suddenly) realize that we are insiders in the most significant action of our time as God establishes his grand rule of love and justice on this earth (as it is in heaven). "Revelation" means that we are reading something we couldn't have guessed or figured out on our own. Revelation is what makes the Bible unique.

And so just reading this Bible, *The Message*, and listening to what we read, is the first thing. There will be time enough for study later on. But first, it is important simply to read, leisurely and thoughtfully. We need to get a feel for the way these stories and songs, these prayers and conversations, these sermons and visions, invite us into this large, large world in which the invisible God is behind and involved in everything visible and illuminates what it means to live here—really live, not just get across the street. As we read, and the longer we read, we begin to "get it"—we are in conversation with God. We find ourselves listening and answering in matters that most concern us: who we are, where we came from, where we are going, what makes us tick, the texture of the world and the communities we live in, and—most of all—the incredible love of God among us, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Through reading the Bible, we see that there is far more to the world, more to us, more to what we see and more to what we don't see—more to

everything!—than we had ever dreamed, and that this “more” has to do with God.

This is new for many of us, a different sort of book—a book that reads us even as we read it. We are used to picking up and reading books for what we can get out of them: information we can use, inspiration to energize us, instructions on how to do something or other, entertainment to while away a rainy day, wisdom that will guide us into living better. These things can and do take place when reading the Bible, but the Bible is given to us in the first place simply to invite us to make ourselves at home in the world of God, God’s Word and world, and become familiar with the way God speaks and the ways in which we answer him with our lives.



Our reading turns up some surprises. The biggest surprise for many is how accessible this book is to those who simply open it up and read it. Virtually anyone can read this Bible with understanding. The reason that new translations are made every couple of generations or so is to keep the language of the Bible current with the common speech we use, the very language in which it was first written. We don’t have to be smart or well-educated to understand it, for it is written in the words and sentences we hear in the marketplace, on school playgrounds, and around the dinner table. Because the Bible is so famous and revered, many assume that we need experts to explain and interpret it for us—and, of course, there are some things that need to be explained. But the first men and women who listened to these words now written in our Bibles were ordinary, everyday, working-class people. One of the greatest of the early translators of the Bible into English, William Tyndale, said that he was translating so that the “boy that driveth the plough” would be able to read the Scriptures.

One well-educated African man, who later became one of the most influential Bible teachers in our history (Augustine), was greatly offended when he first read the Bible. Instead of a book cultivated and polished in the literary style he admired so much, he found it full of homespun, earthy stories of plain, unimportant people. He read it in a Latin translation full of slang and jargon. He took one look at what he considered the “unspiritual” quality of so many of its characters and the everydayness of Jesus, and he contemptuously abandoned it. It was years before he realized that God had not taken the form of a sophisticated intellectual to teach us about highbrow heavenly culture so we could appreciate the finer things

of God. When he saw that God entered our lives as a Jewish servant in order to save us from our sins, he started reading the book gratefully and believingly.

Some are also surprised that Bible reading does not introduce us to a “nicer” world. This biblical world is decidedly not an ideal world, the kind we see advertised in travel posters. Suffering and injustice and ugliness are not purged from the world in which God works and loves and saves. Nothing is glossed over. God works patiently and deeply, but often in hidden ways, in the mess of our humanity and history. Ours is not a neat and tidy world in which we are assured that we can get everything under our control. This takes considerable getting used to—there is mystery everywhere. The Bible does not give us a predictable cause-effect world in which we can plan our careers and secure our futures. It is not a dream world in which everything works out according to our adolescent expectations—there is pain and poverty and abuse at which we cry out in indignation, “You can’t let this happen!” For most of us it takes years and years and years to exchange our dream world for this real world of grace and mercy, sacrifice and love, freedom and joy—the God-saved world.

Yet another surprise is that the Bible does not flatter us. It is not trying to sell us anything that promises to make life easier. It doesn’t offer secrets to what we often think of as prosperity or pleasure or high adventure. The reality that comes into focus as we read the Bible has to do with what God is doing in a saving love that includes us and everything we do. This is quite different from what our sin-stunted and culture-cluttered minds imagine. But our Bible reading does not give us access to a mail-order catalog of idols from which we can pick and choose to satisfy our fantasies. The Bible begins with God speaking creation and us into being. It continues with God entering into personalized and complex relationships with us, helping and blessing us, teaching and training us, correcting and disciplining us, loving and saving us. This is not an escape from reality but a plunge into more reality—a sacrificial but altogether better life all the way.



God doesn’t force any of this on us: God’s Word is personal address, inviting, commanding, challenging, rebuking, judging, comforting, directing—but not forcing. Not coercing. We are given space and freedom to answer, to enter the conversation. For more than anything else the Bible invites our participation in the work and language of God.

As we read, we find that there is a connection between the Word Read and the Word Lived. Everything in this book is live-able. Many of us find that the most important question we ask as we read is not “What does it mean?” but “How can I live it?” So we read personally, not impersonally. We read in order to live our true selves, not just get information that we can use to raise our standard of living. Bible reading is a means of listening to and obeying God, not gathering religious data by which we can be our own gods.

You are going to hear stories in this book that will take you out of your preoccupation with yourself and into the spacious freedom in which God is working the world's salvation. You are going to come across words and sentences that stab you awake to a beauty and hope that will connect you with your real life.

Be sure to answer.

Eugene H. Peterson

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EUGENE H. PETERSON was a pastor, scholar, writer, and poet. After teaching at a seminary and then giving nearly thirty years to church ministry in the Baltimore area, he created *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*—a vibrant Bible translation that connects with today's readers like no other. It took Eugene a full ten years to complete. He worked from the Greek and Hebrew texts to ensure authenticity. At the same time, his ear was always tuned to the cadence and energy of contemporary English.

For his work on *The Message*, he received the prestigious ECPA Gold Medallion Book Award.

Eugene served as Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, BC, retiring in 2006. He spent his final years in Montana with his beloved wife, Jan.

THE
OLD
TESTAMENT





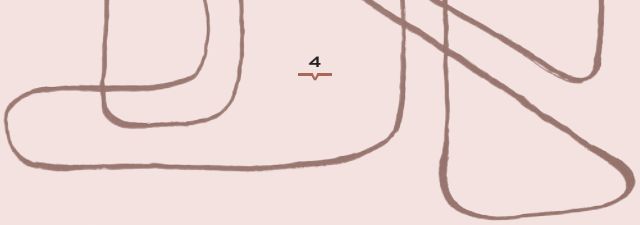
An enormous authority and dignity have, through the centuries, developed around the first five books of the Bible, commonly known as the Books of Moses. Over the course of many centuries, they have prompted a truly astonishing amount of reading and writing, study and prayer, teaching and preaching.

God is the primary concern of these books. That accounts for the authority and the dignity. But it is not only God; we also get included. That accounts for the widespread and intense human interest. We want to know what's going on. We want to know how we fit into things. We don't want to miss out.

The Books of Moses are made up mostly of stories and signposts. The stories show us God working with and speaking to men and women in a rich variety of circumstances. God is presented to us not in ideas and arguments but in events and actions that involve each of us personally. The signposts provide immediate and practical directions to guide us into behavior that is appropriate to our humanity and honoring to God.

The simplicity of the storytelling and signposting in these books makes what is written here as accessible to children as to adults. But the simplicity (as in so many simple things) is also profound, inviting us into a lifetime of growing participation in God's saving ways with us.

The image of human growth suggests a reason for the powerful pull of these stories and signposts on so many millions of men, women, and children to live as God's people. We can sketch the five books as five stages of growth in which God creates first a cosmos and then a people for his glory.



Genesis is Conception. After establishing the basic elements by which he will do his work of creation and salvation and judgment in the midst of human sin and rebellion (chapters 1–11), God conceives a people. He will reveal himself to them—and through them, over time, to everyone on earth—as a God of salvation. God begins small, with one man: Abraham. The embryonic People of God grow in the womb. Gradually details and then more details become evident as the embryo takes shape: Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The pregnancy develops. Life is obviously developing in that womb, but there is also much that is not clear and visible. The background history is vague, the surrounding nations and customs veiled in a kind of mist. But the presence of life, God-conceived life, is kicking and robust.

Exodus is Birth and Infancy. The gestation of the People of God lasts a long time, but finally the birth pangs start. Egyptian slavery gives the first intimations of the contractions to come. When Moses arrives on the scene to preside over the birth itself, ten fierce plagues on Egypt accompany the contractions that bring the travail to completion: At the Red Sea the waters break, the People of God tumble out of the womb onto dry ground, and their life as a free People of God begins. Moses leads them crawling and toddling to Sinai. They are fed. God reveals himself to them at the mountain. They begin to get a sense of their Parent. They learn the language of freedom and salvation—a word here, a word there, the Ten Words (Commandments) as a beginning, their basic vocabulary. The signposts begin to go up: Do this; don't do that. But the largest part of their infant life is God, the living God. As they explore the deep and wide world of God, worship becomes their dominant and most important activity. An enormous amount of attention is given to training them in worship, building the structures for worship, mastering the procedures. They are learning how to give their full attention in obedience and adoration to God.

Leviticus is Schooling. As infancy develops into childhood, formal schooling takes place. There's a lot to know; they need some structure and arrangement to keep things straight: reading, writing, arithmetic. But for the People of God the basic curriculum has to do with God and their relationship with him. Leviticus is an almost totally audiovisual book, giving a picture and ritual in the sacrifices and feasts for the pivotal ways in which God's people keep alert and observant to the ways their relationship with God goes awry (sin) and the ways they are restored to forgiveness and innocence (salvation). Everyday life consists of endless and concrete detail, much of it having to do with our behavior before God and with one another, and so, of course, Leviticus necessarily consists also of endless detail.

Numbers is Adolescence. The years of adolescence are critical to understanding who we are. We are advanced enough physically to be able, for the most part, to take care of ourselves. We are developed enough mentally, with some obvious limitations, to think for ourselves. We discover that we are not simply extensions of our parents and we are not just mirror images of our culture. But who are we? Numbers asks, *Who are we as the People of God?* The People of God in Numbers are new at these emerging independent operations of behaving and thinking and so inevitably make a lot of mistakes. Rebellion is one of the more conspicuous mistakes. They test out their unique identity by rejecting the continuities with parents and culture. It's the easiest and cheapest way to "be yourself," as we like to say. But it turns out that there isn't much to the "self" that is thus asserted. Maturity requires the integration, not the amputation, of what we have received through our conception and birth, our infancy and schooling. The People of God have an extraordinarily long adolescence in the wilderness—about forty years of it.

Deuteronomy is Adulthood. The mature life is a complex operation. Growing up is a long process. And growing up in God takes the longest time. During their forty years spent in the wilderness, the People of God developed from their birth on the far shore of the Red Sea and were carried and led and nourished and protected under Moses to the place of God's revelation at Sinai—taught and trained, disciplined and blessed. Now they are ready to live as free and obedient men and women in the new land, the Promised Land. They are ready for adulthood, ready to be as grown up inwardly as they are outwardly. They are ready to live as a free people, formed by God, as a holy people, transformed by God. They still have a long way to go (as do we all), but all the conditions for maturity are there. The book of Deuteronomy gathers up that entire process of becoming the People of God and turns it into a sermon and a song and a blessing. The strongest and key word in Deuteronomy is *love*. Love is the most characteristic and comprehensive act of the human being. We are most ourselves when we love; we are most the People of God when we love. But love is not an abstract word defined out of a dictionary. In order to love maturely we have to live and absorb and enter into this world of salvation and freedom, find ourselves in the stories, become familiar with and follow the signposts, learn the life of worship, and realize our unique identity as the People of God who love.



The Books of Moses are foundational to the sixty-one books that follow in our Bibles. A foundation, though, is not a complete building but rather the anticipation

of one. An elaborate moral infrastructure is provided here for what is yet to come. Each book that follows, in one way or another, picks up and develops some aspect of the messianic salvation involved in becoming the People of God, but it is always on this foundation. This foundation of stories and signposts has proven over and over to be solid and enduring.



A note on translating the name of God: In the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the generic name of divinity used by both Israel and its neighbors is translated “God” (or “god”). But the unique and distinctively personal name for God that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:13-14) I have translated as “GOD.” The Jewish community early on substituted what we would translate as “LORD” for the unique name out of reverence (because our lips are not worthy to speak the name) and caution (lest we inadvertently blaspheme by saying God’s name in vain). Most Christian translators continue that practice.



Reading the Books of Moses, women may face a challenge: Our stories are largely untold or underrepresented; the few women we encounter are portrayed with patriarchal assumptions.

Yet Eve was created “godlike” (Genesis 1:27). Hagar, a slave, was the first to name God. Zelophehad’s daughters argued for their inheritance rights before Moses, and God declared that they were right. Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed, and Miriam worked to save a family—and liberated a nation. Simply trying to survive, God’s daughters forever changed the trajectory of our redemption story.



Genesis

GOD FIRST AND LAST

First, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living. If we don't have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get *our* lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at center and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.

Genesis gets us off on the right foot. "First this: God" (Genesis 1:1). Genesis pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled. It gives us a vocabulary for speaking accurately and comprehensively about our lives—where we come from and where we are going, what we think and what we do, the people we live with and how to get along with them, the troubles we find ourselves in and the blessings that keep arriving.

Genesis uses words to make a foundation that is solid and true. Everything we think and do and feel is material in a building operation in which we are engaged all our lives long. There is immense significance in everything that we do. Our speech and our actions and our prayers are all, every detail of them, involved in this vast building operation comprehensively known as the kingdom of God. But we don't build the foundation. The foundation is given. The foundation is firmly in place.

Jesus concluded his most famous teaching by telling us that there are two ways to go about our lives—we can build on sand or we can build on rock. No matter how wonderfully we build, if we build on sand it will all fall to pieces like a house of cards. We build on what is already there, on the rock. Genesis is a verbal witness to that rock: God's creative acts, God's intervening and gracious judgments, God's call to a life of faith, God's making a covenant with us.

God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them
reflecting our nature

So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,

And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."

God created human beings;
he created them godlike,
Reflecting God's nature.

He created them male and female.

God blessed them:

“Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!

Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.”

GENESIS 1:26-28

But Genesis presents none of this to us as an abstract, bloodless truth or principle. We are given a succession of stories with named people—people who loved and quarreled, believed and doubted, had children and married, experienced sin and grace. If we pay attention, we find that we ourselves are living variations on these very stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The stories show clearly that we are never outsiders or spectators to anything in Heaven and Earth. God doesn't work impersonally from space; he works with us where we are, as he finds us. No matter what we do, whether good or bad, we continue to be part of everything that God is doing. Nobody can drop out; there's no place to drop out to. So we may as well get started and take our place in the story—at the beginning.

HEAVEN AND EARTH

1 1-2 First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

3-5 God spoke: "Light!"
And light appeared.
God saw that light was good
and separated light from dark.
God named the light Day,
he named the dark Night.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day One.

6-8 God spoke: "Sky! In the middle of
the waters;
separate water from water!"
God made sky.
He separated the water under sky
from the water above sky.
And there it was:
he named sky the Heavens;
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Two.

9-10 God spoke: "Separate!
Water-beneath-Heaven, gather into
one place;
Land, appear!"
And there it was.
God named the land Earth.
He named the pooled water Ocean.
God saw that it was good.

11-13 God spoke: "Earth, green up! Grow
all varieties
of seed-bearing plants,
Every sort of fruit-bearing tree."
And there it was.
Earth produced green seed-bearing
plants,
all varieties,
And fruit-bearing trees of all sorts.
God saw that it was good.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Three.

14-15 God spoke: "Lights! Come out!
Shine in Heaven's sky!
Separate Day from Night.
Mark seasons and days and years,
Lights in Heaven's sky to give light
to Earth."
And there it was.

16-19 God made two big lights, the larger
to take charge of Day,
The smaller to be in charge of Night;
and he made the stars.
God placed them in the heavenly sky
to light up Earth
And oversee Day and Night,
to separate light and dark.
God saw that it was good.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Four.

20-23 God spoke: "Swarm, Ocean, with fish
and all sea life!
Birds, fly through the sky over Earth!"
God created the huge whales,
all the swarm of life in the waters,
And every kind and species of flying
birds.
God saw that it was good.
God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce!
Fill Ocean!
Birds, reproduce on Earth!"
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Five.

24-25 God spoke: "Earth, generate life!
Every sort and kind:
cattle and reptiles and wild animals—
all kinds."
And there it was:
wild animals of every kind,
Cattle of all kinds, every sort of reptile
and bug.
God saw that it was good.

26-28 God spoke: "Let us make human
beings in our image, make them
reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in
the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the
face of Earth."
God created human beings;
he created them godlike,
Reflecting God's nature.
He created them male and female.
God blessed them:
"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth!
Take charge!
Be responsible for fish in the sea and
birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on
the face of Earth."

The Spirit Brooded

The Bible opens with a beautifully evocative image. Everything that was and would be was dark nothingness—but God’s Spirit was waiting, ready. Some translations say the Spirit *hovered*, but here we read that God’s Spirit *brooded*. Like a bird.

Would-be mother birds brood when they are ready to create new life. Ceasing from other daily pursuits, they pivot their bodies and attention to their eggs, to the birthing process about to begin.

So, according to this passage, before the moment of Creation, God’s Spirit—like a mother bird—was focused and ready. Precious creation was coming; new life would require protection and nurture.

This is our origin story. This is where it all began. Moreover, this is our first view of our loving, creative, nurturing God.

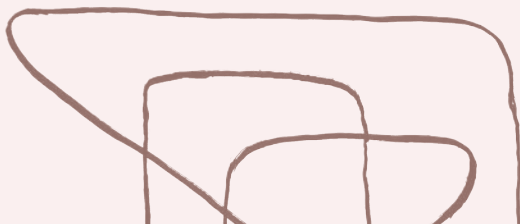
Recently, I snuck onto my porch, tiptoeing through snowy patches in slippers. Inside, my kids were perilously close to an argument. The radio was reporting another fire. I hadn’t yet figured out what to feed us all for dinner. But I felt pulled to the porch for a quiet ritual of spilling food into the hanging bird feeders. “Come, beloved friends and neighbors. Fill your bellies. Sing on this bleak midwinter day.”

My heart was exhausted. My bones were weary. Work awaited me. But I couldn’t help myself.

I closed my eyes, and these first sacred words washed over me. “God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don’t see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God’s Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss” (Genesis 1:1-2).

I long to rest in that quiet nothingness, wrapped in holy darkness, where God’s Spirit hovered, silently dreaming, brooding, yearning for the creation that had not yet begun. But God’s Spirit still hovers here and now over all that has been set in motion, of all that is still to come. God’s creative, nurturing presence lingers in messy sinks and highways full of cars, hums in the wind and dances in the forest. God’s Spirit haunts our footsteps and keeps watch while we slumber. In our anxiety and rage and tears, God is there. In the chaos and the mess, when we are hopeful and when we are hopeless, the Spirit is there.

God’s Spirit is brooding, creating, protecting—when we put hands in the dirt laying seeds that will grow into food; when we clasp dear hands as beloved ones breathe their long, labored final breaths; when we join our collective hands and voices crying out for justice. In the ordinary and extraordinary, God’s Spirit is there, attentive, waiting, ready to bring forth new life.



29-30 Then God said, “I’ve given you every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth
And every kind of fruit-bearing tree, given them to you for food.
To all animals and all birds, everything that moves and breathes, I give whatever grows out of the ground for food.”
And there it was.

31 God looked over everything he had made;
it was so good, so very good!
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Six.

2 1 Heaven and Earth were finished, down to the last detail.

2-4 By the seventh day
God had finished his work.
On the seventh day
he rested from all his work.
God blessed the seventh day.
He made it a Holy Day
Because on that day he rested from his work,
all the creating God had done.

This is the story of how it all started,
of Heaven and Earth when they
were created.

ADAM AND EVE

5-7 At the time GOD made Earth and Heaven, before any grasses or shrubs had sprouted from the ground—GOD hadn’t yet sent rain on Earth, nor was there anyone around to work the ground (the whole Earth was watered by underground springs)—GOD formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The Man came alive—a living soul!

8-9 Then GOD planted a garden in Eden, in the east. He put the Man he had just made in it. GOD made all kinds of trees grow from the ground, trees beautiful to look at and good to eat. The Tree-of-Life was in the middle of the garden, also the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil.

10-14 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden and from there divides into four rivers. The first is named Pishon; it flows through Havilah where there is gold. The gold of this land is good. The land is also known for a

sweet-scented resin and the onyx stone. The second river is named Gihon; it flows through the land of Cush. The third river is named Hiddekel and flows east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 GOD took the Man and set him down in the Garden of Eden to work the ground and keep it in order.

16-17 GOD commanded the Man, “You can eat from any tree in the garden, except from the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil. Don’t eat from it. The moment you eat from that tree, you’re dead.”

18-20 GOD said, “It’s not good for the Man to be alone; I’ll make him a helper, a companion.” So GOD formed from the dirt of the ground all the animals of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the Man to see what he would name them. Whatever the Man called each living creature, that was its name. The Man named the cattle, named the birds of the air, named the wild animals; but he didn’t find a suitable companion.

21-22 GOD put the Man into a deep sleep. As he slept he removed one of his ribs and replaced it with flesh. GOD then used the rib that he had taken from the Man to make Woman and presented her to the Man.

23-25 The Man said,
“Finally! Bone of my bone,
flesh of my flesh!
Name her Woman
for she was made from Man.”
Therefore a man leaves his father and
mother and embraces his wife.
They become one flesh.
The two of them, the Man and his
Wife, were naked, but they felt
no shame.

3 1 The serpent was clever, more clever than any wild animal GOD had made. He spoke to the Woman: “Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the garden?”

2-3 The Woman said to the serpent, “Not at all. We can eat from the trees in the garden. It’s only about the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘Don’t eat from it; don’t even touch it or you’ll die.’”

4-5 The serpent told the Woman, “You won’t die. God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you’ll see what’s really going on. You’ll be just like God, knowing everything, ranging all the way from good to evil.”

God's Image

For anyone on social media, *image* is an all-too-familiar concept. The images we encounter are carefully crafted, religiously cultivated, and notoriously difficult to repair. They provide us with a means of knowing and understanding each other—at least, the parts of ourselves we choose to share.

But the idea of being made in someone else's image? That notion is foreign to us, like looking in a mirror and seeing someone else's face looking back. When Genesis 1 tells us we are image bearers of God, it means that some part of God has been bestowed on us. The resemblance isn't necessarily physical, like when a child resembles her parents. More likely, since God is spirit, the resemblance is internal, a watermark stamped on our souls.

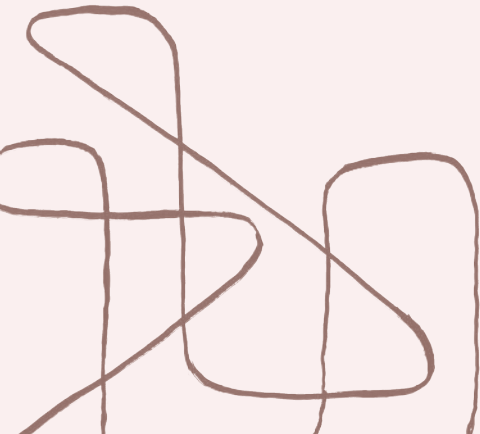
Even more wondrous is the idea that we bear the image of the *triune* (existing in three persons) God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—a multifaceted God who said, “Let us make human beings in *our* image, make them reflecting *our* nature” (Genesis 1:26, emphasis added).

First, we carry the image of God the Father, who establishes and holds all authority. God has given us responsibility over the earth and all that lives in it, as well as an inexhaustible capacity to create. We are imaginative, thinking stewards who reflect God's nature.

Second, we bear the image of the Son of God, who took on our humanity, understands our weaknesses, and sacrificed himself for us. He gave up the privileges that were rightfully his, choosing instead to walk the earth in a fragile body. In the same way, we are invited to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, willing to do whatever God asks of us.

Third, the Holy Spirit is the ever-present breath of God: comforter, counselor, intercessor. We reflect this in our relationships as we draw near to others to care for them—a meal for a sick friend, wisdom for a questioning heart, prayer for someone in need.

The image of God is lived out in us daily. Every person we meet bears witness to the Divine. Next time you look in a mirror, or into the eyes of someone else, look for the watermark, the unmistakable reflection of our triune God.



6 When the Woman saw that the tree looked like good eating and realized what she would get out of it—she'd know everything!—she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate.

7 Immediately the two of them did “see what’s really going on”—saw themselves naked! They sewed fig leaves together as makeshift clothes for themselves.

8 When they heard the sound of GOD strolling in the garden in the evening breeze, the Man and his Wife hid in the trees of the garden, hid from GOD.

9 GOD called to the Man: “Where are you?”

10 He said, “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid.”

11 GOD said, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from that tree I told you not to eat from?”

12 The Man said, “The Woman you gave me as a companion, she gave me fruit from the tree, and, yes, I ate it.”

GOD said to the Woman, “What is this that you’ve done?”

13 “The serpent seduced me,” she said, “and I ate.”

14-15 GOD told the serpent:

“Because you’ve done this, you’re cursed, cursed beyond all cattle and wild animals,

Cursed to slink on your belly and eat dirt all your life.

I’m declaring war between you and the Woman,

between your offspring and hers. He’ll wound your head, you’ll wound his heel.”

16 He told the Woman:

“I’ll multiply your pains in childbirth; you’ll give birth to your babies in pain. You’ll want to please your husband, but he’ll lord it over you.”

17-19 He told the Man:

“Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree

That I commanded you not to eat from, ‘Don’t eat from this tree,’

The very ground is cursed because of you; getting food from the ground

Will be as painful as having babies is for your wife;

you’ll be working in pain all your life long.

The ground will sprout thorns and weeds, you’ll get your food the hard way, Planting and tilling and harvesting, sweating in the fields from dawn to dusk,

Until you return to that ground yourself, dead and buried;

you started out as dirt, you’ll end up dirt.”

20 The Man, known as Adam, named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all the living.

21 GOD made leather clothing for Adam and his wife and dressed them.

22 GOD said, “The Man has become like one of us, capable of knowing everything, ranging from good to evil. What if he now should reach out and take fruit from the Tree-of-Life and eat, and live forever? Never—this cannot happen!”

23-24 So GOD expelled them from the Garden of Eden and sent them to work the ground, the same dirt out of which they’d been made. He threw them out of the garden and stationed angel-cherubim and a revolving sword of fire east of it, guarding the path to the Tree-of-Life.

4 1 Adam slept with Eve his wife. She conceived and had Cain. She said, “I’ve gotten a man, with God’s help!”

2 Then she had another baby, Abel. Abel was a herdsman and Cain a farmer.

3-5 Time passed. Cain brought an offering to GOD from the produce of his farm. Abel also brought an offering, but from the firstborn animals of his herd, choice cuts of meat. GOD liked Abel and his offering, but Cain and his offering didn’t get his approval. Cain lost his temper and went into a sulk.

6-7 GOD spoke to Cain: “Why this tantrum? Why the sulking? If you do well, won’t you be accepted? And if you don’t do well, sin is lying in wait for you, ready to pounce; it’s out to get you, you’ve got to master it.”

8 Cain had words with his brother. They were out in the field; Cain came at Abel his brother and killed him.

9 GOD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?”

He said, “How should I know? Am I his babysitter?”

10-12 GOD said, “What have you done! The voice of your brother’s blood is calling to me from the ground. From now on you’ll get

nothing but curses from this ground; you'll be driven from this ground that has opened its arms to receive the blood of your murdered brother. You'll farm this ground, but it will no longer give you its best. You'll be a homeless wanderer on Earth."

13-14 Cain said to GOD, "My punishment is too much. I can't take it! You've thrown me off the land and I can never again face you. I'm a homeless wanderer on Earth and whoever finds me will kill me."

15 GOD told him, "No. Anyone who kills Cain will pay for it seven times over." GOD put a mark on Cain to protect him so that no one who met him would kill him.

16 Cain left the presence of GOD and lived in No-Man's-Land, east of Eden.

17-18 Cain slept with his wife. She conceived and had Enoch. He then built a city and named it after his son, Enoch.

Enoch had Irad,

Irad had Mehujael,

Mehujael had Methushael,

Methushael had Lamech.

19-22 Lamech married two wives, Adah and Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal, the ancestor of all who live in tents and herd cattle. His brother's name was Jubal, the ancestor of all who play the lyre and flute. Zillah gave birth to Tubal-Cain, who worked at the forge making bronze and iron tools. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

23-24 Lamech said to his wives,

Adah and Zillah, listen to me;

you wives of Lamech, hear me out:

I killed a man for wounding me,

a young man who attacked me.

If Cain is avenged seven times,

for Lamech it's seventy-seven!

25-26 Adam slept with his wife again. She had a son whom she named Seth. She said, "God has given me another child in place of Abel whom Cain killed." And then Seth had a son whom he named Enosh.

That's when men and women began praying and worshipping in the name of GOD.

THE FAMILY TREE OF THE HUMAN RACE

5 1-2 This is the family tree of the human race: When God created the human race, he made it godlike, with a nature akin to God. He created both male and female and blessed them, the whole human race.

3-5 When Adam was 130 years old, he had a son who was just like him, his very spirit and image, and named him Seth. After the birth of Seth, Adam lived another 800 years, having more sons and daughters. Adam lived a total of 930 years. And he died.

6-8 When Seth was 105 years old, he had Enosh. After Seth had Enosh, he lived another 807 years, having more sons and daughters. Seth lived a total of 912 years. And he died.

9-11 When Enosh was ninety years old, he had Kenan. After he had Kenan, he lived another 815 years, having more sons and daughters. Enosh lived a total of 905 years. And he died.

12-14 When Kenan was seventy years old, he had Mahalalel. After he had Mahalalel, he lived another 840 years, having more sons and daughters. Kenan lived a total of 910 years. And he died.

15-17 When Mahalalel was sixty-five years old, he had Jared. After he had Jared, he lived another 830 years, having more sons and daughters. Mahalalel lived a total of 895 years. And he died.

18-20 When Jared was 162 years old, he had Enoch. After he had Enoch, he lived another 800 years, having more sons and daughters. Jared lived a total of 962 years. And he died.

21-23 When Enoch was sixty-five years old, he had Methuselah. Enoch walked steadily with God. After he had Methuselah, he lived another 300 years, having more sons and daughters. Enoch lived a total of 365 years.

24 Enoch walked steadily with God. And then one day he was simply gone: God took him.

25-27 When Methuselah was 187 years old, he had Lamech. After he had Lamech, he lived another 782 years. Methuselah lived a total of 969 years. And he died.

28-31 When Lamech was 182 years old, he had a son. He named him Noah, saying, "This one will give us a break from the hard work of farming the ground that GOD cursed." After Lamech had Noah, he lived another 595 years, having more sons and daughters. Lamech lived a total of 777 years. And he died.

32 When Noah was 500 years old, he had Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

GIANTS IN THE LAND

6 1-2 When the human race began to increase, with more and more daughters being born, the sons of God noticed that the daughters of men were beautiful. They

The Last Word Will Always Be *Love*

In the beginning, there was wholeness.

Genesis 1–2 describes God creating the world to operate in harmony. Plants and animals coexisted in relationship with dry land and water. Man and woman lived in community with each other, their partnership showing forth the image of God. God placed them in the Garden to care for it—and the first humans enjoyed an intimacy with the God who walked through the Garden and found all of it very good. All life was created to exist in this overlapping relationship of goodness.

But Genesis 3 changed all that. By Genesis 3, this wholeness had been replaced by separation and shame.

The entry of sin into the world is sometimes referred to as “the Fall” because in this moment the shalom—the wholeness and well-being—of all relationships in creation fell from their original state. But two things are important to note: (1) God never gave up on the original vision and (2) shame doesn’t have the last word.

Genesis 3 describes *not* God’s desire for humanity but the struggles we all face. This passage depicts a moment of sadness when the image of God became distorted, when humanity chose our own way instead of God’s. God created man and woman to flourish in side-by-side partnership, but in the aftermath of the Fall, this mutuality is no longer instinctive. Instead, as the second half of Genesis 3:16 says, “You’ll want to please your husband, but he’ll lord it over you.” Conflict and hierarchy instead of peace and equality.

Still, God’s vision of goodness and wholeness for the created world remains. As people who bear the divine image, we are called to work together *toward* this wholeness. After Adam and Eve hid out of shame, God continued pursuing the original vision of relationship and love. Despite human sin, God clothed and cared for them. Shame made them believe they were unworthy of such love and care, but God continued to love them through their shame.

God loves us through our shame, too, not giving up on us or letting go of the commitment to wholeness and goodness. God is still caring for you, clothing you. Today, receive God’s love, a love that sees through your shame. The Fall did not erase your *very-goodness* but initiated God’s move to restore and renew the world. We have been called to participate in this renewal.

It will be a struggle. Our inclination toward sin will sometimes get in the way. But the Fall and shame do not get the last word. The last word will always be *love*.



 EVE

In Hebrew, the name for Eve, *Khavvah*, sounds similar to a word that means “to breathe,” “to live,” or “to give life.” Eve was the first woman, the first mother. Since we read translations or paraphrases of Scripture through the lens of our own culture, we can miss the nuances drawn from the original Hebrew. Before Adam called the first woman “Eve,” he called her *ishah*. The word *ish* means “man,” so we might read this as “Wow! Someone like me!” They shared bone, blood, and flesh. Eve was a kindred soul.

Another Hebrew word that illumines the character of Eve is *ezer*, a word used twenty-one times in the Hebrew Scriptures, most often in reference to God as a helper to the Israelites. Scholars propose that *ezer* means “helper,” “rescuer,” “defender,” and “warrior.” When God created Eve, God dreamed of symbiosis, collaboration, and unity. Eve, along with Adam, was tasked with caring for, cultivating, and protecting creation as she and her husband moved with God in the Garden.

Genesis offers few stories about Eve, although we may imagine what it was like for her to be tempted and exiled from her home, the wonderful, life-giving Garden. As her daughters, we may experience the mystery of childbirth, echoing her awe as we partner with God to create new life. We may echo her despair upon learning that her worst fears for her children had come true. As humans, we intrinsically know the joy and pain of this first woman.

Every person on earth is linked to Eve, honored mother—and for us as women, this thread may be even more evident as we experience rites of passage alongside women throughout the ages. With Eve, we, too, look toward an ultimate restoration of beauty, peace, and renewed relationship with God, with creation, and with each other.

looked them over and picked out wives for themselves.

3 Then GOD said, “I’m not going to breathe life into men and women endlessly. Eventually they’re going to die; from now on they can expect a life span of 120 years.”

4 This was back in the days (and also later) when there were giants in the land. The giants came from the union of the sons of God and the daughters of men. These were the mighty men of ancient lore, the famous ones.

NOAH AND HIS SONS

5-7 GOD saw that human evil was out of control. People thought evil, imagined evil—evil, evil, evil from morning to night. GOD was sorry that he had made the human race in the first place; it broke his heart. GOD said, “I’ll get rid of my ruined creation, make a clean sweep: people, animals, snakes and bugs, birds—the works. I’m sorry I made them.”

8 But Noah was different. GOD liked what he saw in Noah.

9-10 This is the story of Noah: Noah was a good man, a man of integrity in his community. Noah walked with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11-12 As far as God was concerned, the Earth had become a sewer; there was violence everywhere. God took one look and saw how bad it was, everyone corrupt and corrupting—life itself corrupt to the core.

13 God said to Noah, “It’s all over. It’s the end of the human race. The violence is everywhere; I’m making a clean sweep.

14-16 “Build yourself a ship from teakwood. Make rooms in it. Coat it with pitch inside and out. Make it 450 feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high. Build a roof for it and put in a window eighteen inches from the top; put in a door on the side of the ship; and make three decks, lower, middle, and upper.

17 “I’m going to bring a flood on the Earth that will destroy everything alive under Heaven. Total destruction.

18-21 “But I’m going to establish a covenant with you: You’ll board the ship, and your sons, your wife and your sons’ wives will come on board with you. You are also to take two of each living creature, a male and a female, on board the ship, to preserve their lives with you: two of every species of bird, mammal, and reptile—two of everything so as to preserve their lives along with yours. Also

get all the food you’ll need and store it up for you and them.”

22 Noah did everything God commanded him to do.

7 1 Next GOD said to Noah, “Now board the ship, you and all your family—out of everyone in this generation, you’re the righteous one.

2-4 “Take on board with you seven pairs of every clean animal, a male and a female; one pair of every unclean animal, a male and a female; and seven pairs of every kind of bird, a male and a female, to insure their survival on Earth. In just seven days I will pour rain on Earth for forty days and forty nights. I’ll make a clean sweep of everything that I’ve made.”

5 Noah did everything GOD commanded him.

6-10 Noah was 600 years old when the floodwaters covered the Earth. Noah and his wife and sons and their wives boarded the ship to escape the flood. Clean and unclean animals, birds, and all the crawling creatures came in pairs to Noah and to the ship, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah. In seven days the floodwaters came.

11-12 It was the six-hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month that it happened: all the underground springs erupted and all the windows of Heaven were thrown open. Rain poured for forty days and forty nights.

13-16 That’s the day Noah and his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, accompanied by his wife and his sons’ wives, boarded the ship. And with them every kind of wild and domestic animal, right down to all the kinds of creatures that crawl and all kinds of birds and anything that flies. They came to Noah and to the ship in pairs—everything and anything that had the breath of life in it, male and female of every creature came just as God had commanded Noah. Then GOD shut the door behind him.

17-23 The flood continued forty days and the waters rose and lifted the ship high over the Earth. The waters kept rising, the flood deepened on the Earth, the ship floated on the surface. The flood got worse until all the highest mountains were covered—the high-water mark reached twenty feet above the crest of the mountains. Everything died. Anything that moved—dead. Birds, farm animals, wild animals, the entire teeming exuberance of life—dead. And all people—dead. Every living, breathing creature that lived on dry land

Always a Thread of Redemption

In the early verses of Genesis 6, we read a startling story. The “sons of God” took the “daughters of men” as wives. There were “giants in the land” (Genesis 6:2, 4).

This reads like something out of the mythology novels my boys enjoy so much. What is going on? What are we to make of one of the most obscure sections of Scripture?

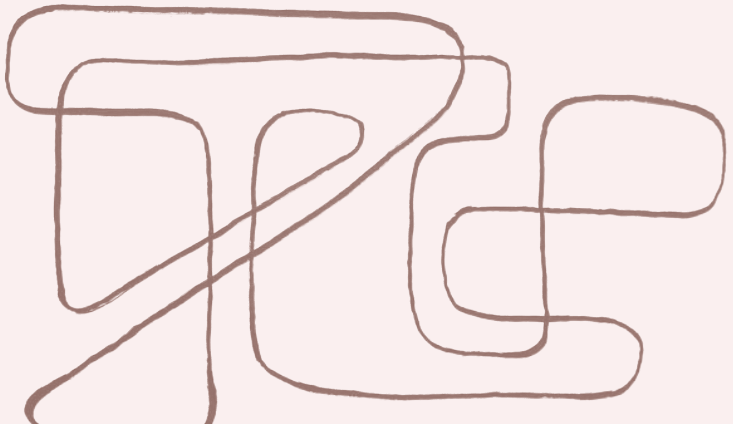
It’s easy to focus on all the possibilities, to imagine we must parse out each interpretation in order to *know*. I think of *knowing* as a stack of flash cards—information to stick into my head—but knowing facts can be different from grasping the point. We are finite creatures and will not always fully make sense of every part. Yet as we allow Scripture to read us, we may still imbibe the drama of God’s work in the world.

One thing we do know: Genesis is a story about God. It is about God as the primary actor in a cosmic drama of creation. God created and called the world good and gave limits so that creation and creatures would flourish. Yet we, like our first parents, transgress those limits, choosing instead to define good and evil for ourselves. In his introduction to Genesis, Eugene Peterson reminds us that rebellion is “the easiest and cheapest way to ‘be yourself’” (page 5).

Yet even in the beginning, seeds of redemption were sown.

We may not know who these men, women, and giants were. What we do know is that here, as in Genesis 3 and today, rebellion is part and parcel of the human heart. Wickedness leads to suffering, yet there is always a thread of redemption. In the midst of judgment, there is always a salvific line.

This ancient book will not always behave the way we want it to. The Scriptures will not conform to our preferred, modern categories and questions. Yet as we study Scripture, even when we don’t *know* in the ways we want to know, we can be confident that God is good; that God created men and women and called them good; that we find a million ways to rebel against God as our king, and yet still God’s redemption is freely given. We can situate our knowing within the all-knowingness and trustworthiness of Scripture’s true center: our loving creator-God.



died; he wiped out the whole works—people and animals, crawling creatures and flying birds, every last one of them, gone. Only Noah and his company on the ship lived.

24 The floodwaters took over for 150 days.

8 1-3 Then God turned his attention to Noah and all the wild animals and farm animals with him on the ship. God caused the wind to blow and the floodwaters began to go down. The underground springs were shut off, the windows of Heaven closed and the rain quit. Inch by inch the water lowered. After 150 days the worst was over.

4-6 On the seventeenth day of the seventh month, the ship landed on the Ararat mountain range. The water kept going down until the tenth month. On the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains came into view. After forty days Noah opened the window that he had built into the ship.

7-9 He sent out a raven; it flew back and forth waiting for the floodwaters to dry up. Then he sent a dove to check on the flood conditions, but it couldn't even find a place to perch—water still covered the Earth. Noah reached out and caught it, brought it back into the ship.

10-11 He waited seven more days and sent out the dove again. It came back in the evening with a freshly picked olive leaf in its beak. Noah knew that the flood was about finished.

12 He waited another seven days and sent the dove out a third time. This time it didn't come back.

13-14 In the six-hundred-first year of Noah's life, on the first day of the first month, the flood had dried up. Noah opened the hatch of the ship and saw dry ground. By the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the Earth was completely dry.

15-17 God spoke to Noah: "Leave the ship, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives. And take all the animals with you, the whole menagerie of birds and mammals and crawling creatures, all that swarming extravagance of life, so they can reproduce and flourish on the Earth."

18-19 Noah disembarked with his sons and wife and his sons' wives. Then all the animals, crawling creatures, birds—every creature on the face of the Earth—left the ship family by family.

20-21 Noah built an altar to God. He selected clean animals and birds from every species and offered them as burnt offerings on the

altar. God smelled the sweet fragrance and thought to himself, "I'll never again curse the ground because of people. I know they have this bent toward evil from an early age, but I'll never again kill off everything living as I've just done.

22 For as long as Earth lasts,
planting and harvest, cold and heat,
Summer and winter, day and night
will never stop."

9 1-4 God blessed Noah and his sons: He said, "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill the Earth! Every living creature—birds, animals, fish—will fall under your spell and be afraid of you. You're responsible for them. All living creatures are yours for food; just as I gave you the plants, now I give you everything else. Except for meat with its lifeblood still in it—don't eat that.

5 "But your own lifeblood I will avenge; I will avenge it against both animals and other humans.

6-7 Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans let his blood be shed,
Because God made humans in
his image
reflecting God's very nature.
You're here to bear fruit, reproduce,
lavish life on the Earth, live
bountifully!"

8-11 Then God spoke to Noah and his sons: "I'm setting up my covenant with you including your children who will come after you, along with everything alive around you—birds, farm animals, wild animals—that came out of the ship with you. I'm setting up my covenant with you that never again will everything living be destroyed by floodwaters; no, never again will a flood destroy the Earth."

12-16 God continued, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and everything living around you and everyone living after you. I'm putting my rainbow in the clouds, a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth. From now on, when I form a cloud over the Earth and the rainbow appears in the cloud, I'll remember my covenant between me and you and everything living, that never again will floodwaters destroy all life. When the rainbow appears in the cloud, I'll see it and remember the eternal

covenant between God and everything living, every last living creature on Earth.”

17 And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I’ve set up between me and everything living on the Earth.”

18-19 The sons of Noah who came out of the ship were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These are the three sons of Noah; from these three the whole Earth was populated.

20-23 Noah, a farmer, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank from its wine, got drunk and passed out, naked in his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw that his father was naked and told his two brothers who were outside the tent. Shem and Japheth took a cloak, held it between them from their shoulders, walked backward and covered their father’s nakedness, keeping their faces turned away so they did not see their father’s exposed body.

24-27 When Noah woke up with his hangover, he learned what his youngest son had done. He said,

Cursed be Canaan! A slave of slaves,
a slave to his brothers!
Blessed be GOD, the God of Shem,
but Canaan shall be his slave.
God prosper Japheth,
living spaciouly in the tents of Shem.
But Canaan shall be his slave.

28-29 Noah lived another 350 years following the flood. He lived a total of 950 years. And he died.

THE FAMILY TREE OF NOAH’S SONS

10 1 This is the family tree of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. After the flood, they themselves had sons.

2 The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras.

3 The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, Togarmah.

4-5 The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, Rodanim. The seafaring peoples developed from these, each in its own place by family, each with its own language.

6 The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, Canaan.

7 The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, Sabteca.

The sons of Raamah: Sheba, Dedan.

8-12 Cush also had Nimrod. He was the first great warrior on Earth. He was a great hunter before GOD. There was a saying, “Like Nimrod, a great hunter before GOD.” His kingdom got its start with Babel; then Erech, Akkad, and Calneh in the country of Shinar. From there he went up to Asshur and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and the great city Calah.

13-14 Egypt was ancestor to the Ludim, the Anamim, the Lehabim, the Naphtuhim, the Pathrusim, the Casluhim (the origin of the Philistines), and the Kaphtorim.

15-19 Canaan had Sidon his firstborn, Heth, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Later the Canaanites spread out, going from Sidon toward Gerar, as far south as Gaza, and then east all the way over to Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and on to Lasha.

20 These are the descendants of Ham by family, language, country, and nation.

21 Shem, the older brother of Japheth, also had sons. Shem was ancestor to all the children of Eber.

22 The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

23 The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, Meshech.

24-25 Arphaxad had Shelah and Shelah had Eber. Eber had two sons, Peleg (so named because in his days the human race divided) and Joktan.

26-30 Joktan had Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab—all sons of Joktan. Their land goes from Mesha toward Sephar as far as the mountain ranges in the east.

31 These are the descendants of Shem by family, language, country, and nation.

32 This is the family tree of the sons of Noah as they developed into nations. From them nations developed all across the Earth after the flood.

“GOD TURNED THEIR LANGUAGE INTO ‘BABBLE’”

11 1-2 At one time, the whole Earth spoke the same language. It so happened that as they moved out of the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled down.

3 They said to one another, “Come, let’s make bricks and fire them well.” They used brick for stone and tar for mortar.

4 Then they said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches Heaven. Let’s make ourselves famous so we won’t be scattered here and there across the Earth.”

5 GOD came down to look over the city and the tower those people had built.

6-9 GOD took one look and said, “One people, one language; why, this is only a first step. No telling what they’ll come up with next—they’ll stop at nothing! Come, we’ll go down and garble their speech so they won’t understand each other.” Then GOD scattered them from there all over the world. And they had to quit building the city. That’s how it came to be called Babel, because there GOD turned their language into “babble.” From there GOD scattered them all over the world.



10-11 This is the story of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he had Arphaxad. It was two years after the flood. After he had Arphaxad, he lived 500 more years and had other sons and daughters.

12-13 When Arphaxad was thirty-five years old, he had Shelah. After Arphaxad had Shelah, he lived 403 more years and had other sons and daughters.

14-15 When Shelah was thirty years old, he had Eber. After Shelah had Eber, he lived 403 more years and had other sons and daughters.

16-17 When Eber was thirty-four years old, he had Peleg. After Eber had Peleg, he lived 430 more years and had other sons and daughters.

18-19 When Peleg was thirty years old, he had Reu. After he had Reu, he lived 209 more years and had other sons and daughters.

20-21 When Reu was thirty-two years old, he had Serug. After Reu had Serug, he lived 207 more years and had other sons and daughters.

22-23 When Serug was thirty years old, he had Nahor. After Serug had Nahor, he lived 200 more years and had other sons and daughters.

24-25 When Nahor was twenty-nine years old, he had Terah. After Nahor had Terah, he lived 119 more years and had other sons and daughters.

26 When Terah was seventy years old, he had Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

THE FAMILY TREE OF TERAH

27-28 This is the story of Terah. Haran had Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Haran had Lot. Haran died before his father, Terah, in the country of his family, Ur of the Chaldees.

29 Abram and Nahor each got married. Abram’s wife was Sarai; Nahor’s wife was Milcah, the daughter of his brother Haran. Haran had two daughters, Milcah and Iscah.

30 Sarai was barren; she had no children.

31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot (Haran’s son), and Sarai his daughter-in-law (his son Abram’s wife) and set out with them from Ur of the Chaldees for the land of Canaan. But when they got as far as Haran, they settled down there.

32 Terah lived 205 years. He died in Haran.

ABRAM AND SARAI

12 1 GOD told Abram: “Leave your country, your family, and your father’s home for a land that I will show you.

2-3 I’ll make you a great nation and bless you.

I’ll make you famous; you’ll be a blessing.

I’ll bless those who bless you; those who curse you I’ll curse.

All the families of the Earth will be blessed through you.”

4-6 So Abram left just as GOD said, and Lot left with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot with him, along with all the possessions and people they had gotten in Haran, and set out for the land of Canaan and arrived safe and sound.

Abram passed through the country as far as Shechem and the Oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites occupied the land.

7 GOD appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your children.” Abram built an altar at the place GOD had appeared to him.

8 He moved on from there to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent between Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. He built an altar there and prayed to GOD.

9 Abram kept moving, steadily making his way south, to the Negev.

10-13 Then a famine came to the land. Abram went down to Egypt to live; it was a

hard famine. As he drew near to Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, “Look. We both know that you’re a beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you they’re going to say, ‘Aha! That’s his wife!’ and kill me. But they’ll let you live. Do me a favor: tell them you’re my sister. Because of you, they’ll welcome me and let me live.”

14-15 When Abram arrived in Egypt, the Egyptians took one look and saw that his wife was stunningly beautiful. Pharaoh’s princes raved over her to Pharaoh. She was taken to live with Pharaoh.

16-17 Because of her, Abram got along very well: he accumulated sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, men and women servants, and camels. But God hit Pharaoh hard because of Abram’s wife Sarai; everybody in the palace got seriously sick.

18-19 Pharaoh called for Abram, “What’s this that you’ve done to me? Why didn’t you tell me that she’s your wife? Why did you say, ‘She’s my sister’ so that I’d take her as my wife? Here’s your wife back—take her and get out!”

20 Pharaoh ordered his men to get Abram out of the country. They sent him and his wife and everything he owned on their way.

13 1-2 So Abram left Egypt and went back to the Negev, he and his wife and everything he owned, and Lot still with him. By now Abram was very rich, loaded with cattle and silver and gold.

3-4 He moved on from the Negev, camping along the way, to Bethel, the place he had first set up his tent between Bethel and Ai and built his first altar. Abram prayed there to God.

5-7 Lot, who was traveling with Abram, was also rich in sheep and cattle and tents. But the land couldn’t support both of them; they had too many possessions. They couldn’t both live there—quarrels broke out between Abram’s shepherds and Lot’s shepherds. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living on the land at the time.

8-9 Abram said to Lot, “Let’s not have fighting between us, between your shepherds and my shepherds. After all, we’re family. Look around. Isn’t there plenty of land out there? Let’s separate. If you go left, I’ll go right; if you go right, I’ll go left.”

10-11 Lot looked. He saw the whole plain of the Jordan spread out, well watered (this was before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah), like God’s garden, like Egypt, and stretching

all the way to Zoar. Lot took the whole plain of the Jordan. Lot set out to the east.

11-12 That’s how they came to part company, uncle and nephew. Abram settled in Canaan; Lot settled in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent near Sodom.

13 The people of Sodom were evil—flagrant sinners against God.

14-17 After Lot separated from him, God said to Abram, “Open your eyes, look around. Look north, south, east, and west. Everything you see, the whole land spread out before you, I will give to you and your children forever. I’ll make your descendants like dust—counting your descendants will be as impossible as counting the dust of the Earth. So—on your feet, get moving! Walk through the country, its length and breadth; I’m giving it all to you.”

18 Abram moved his tent. He went and settled by the Oaks of Mamre in Hebron. There he built an altar to God.

14 1-2 Then this: Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim went off to war to fight Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zoar.

3-4 This second group of kings, the attacked, came together at the Valley of Siddim, that is, the Salt Sea. They had been under the thumb of Kedorlaomer for twelve years. In the thirteenth year, they revolted.

5-7 In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him set out and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh Kiriathaim, and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El Paran on the far edge of the desert. On their way back they stopped at En Mishpat, that is, Kadesh, and conquered the whole region of the Amalekites as well as that of the Amorites who lived in Hazazon Tamar.

8-9 That’s when the king of Sodom marched out with the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zoar. They drew up in battle formation against their enemies in the Valley of Siddim—against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five.

10-12 The Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits.

Sarai Commodified

This entry and the passage it addresses involve highly sensitive topics that might be triggering to some readers. If that is you, be gentle with yourself.

Sarai is introduced as Abram's wife with one defining footnote: She was barren (Genesis 11:30). But God had a plan for her, made clear in a promise to Abram: "I'll make you a great nation and . . . give this land to your children" (Genesis 12:2, 7). Children. Home. Future. It was a wonderful promise. But when famine came to the land, fear and survival usurped faith, and the couple fled to Egypt, the land of plenty.

Sarai is not the focal point of this perilous story; her beauty is. Sixty-five and stunning, Sarai posed a threat to her husband in a foreign land where he might be killed to clear Pharaoh's path to take her for himself. Afraid, Abram concocted a plan for his own protection. It hinged on taking advantage of Sarai, without considering the additional cost to her. "Do me a favor," Abram propositioned, asking that she exchange her body and identity for his safety (Genesis 12:13).

Sarai, the barren woman. Sarai, the beautiful woman. Sarai, the valued wife of Abram? Not so much. Sarai's exterior beauty held value in the economies of powerful men. She could only conclude that her character, comfort, and companionship did not carry the same weight.

Having grown up like her sibling, Abram would have known Sarai well. Perhaps he knew Sarai as strong, clever, capable of caring for herself, or quick to take matters into her own hands (as she would later, in Genesis 16). Regardless, Abram didn't consider Sarai or consult God before plunging forward. Instead, he treated Sarai as a commodity. He permitted unbelief and fear to dictate a course of deception, a natural progression toward disintegration and disconnection.

Did Sarai agree to the plan? Did she have a real voice in the matter? Whether or not she was taken against her will, this injustice was against God's will. God sent a plague to open the eyes of the deceived, consequently opening the doors for Sarai's release. Pharaoh understood this sign as the power of God, and it's likely he asked Sarai for the entire truth about her relationship with Abram. How intriguing that God's redemptive plan included Pharaoh's obedience and Sarai's voice in a story where she is a silent character.

Perhaps the plagues opened Sarai's eyes, too, pulling free the lie that she was nothing more than a beautiful object. God's rescue demonstrated her worth and value, proved her priority as a being loved, treasured, and seen by God.

Sarai was returned to her husband, and the two were sent away—but perhaps we can see the residual effects of being devalued and exchanged in the subsequent chapters of Sarai's life, in her quick reactions of control, blame, and cynicism. She had been the victim of commodification, and she would in turn commodify others. Deep wounds do not easily heal.



When the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, they fell into the tar pits, but the rest escaped into the mountains. The four kings captured all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, all their food and equipment, and went on their way. They captured Lot, Abram's nephew who was living in Sodom at the time, taking everything he owned with them.

13-16 A fugitive came and reported to Abram the Hebrew. Abram was living at the Oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and Aner. They were allies of Abram. When Abram heard that his nephew had been taken prisoner, he lined up his servants, all of them born in his household—there were 318 of them—and chased after the captors all the way to Dan. Abram and his men split into small groups and attacked by night. They chased them as far as Hobah, just north of Damascus. They recovered all the plunder along with nephew Lot and his possessions, including the women and the people.

17-20 After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and his allied kings, the king of Sodom came out to greet him in the Valley of Shaveh, the King's Valley. Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine—he was priest of The High God—and blessed him:

Blessed be Abram by The High God,
 Creator of Heaven and Earth.
 And blessed be The High God,
 who handed your enemies over to you.

Abram gave him a tenth of all the recovered plunder.

21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me back the people but keep all the plunder for yourself."

22-24 But Abram told the king of Sodom, "I swear to GOD, The High God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, this solemn oath, that I'll take nothing from you, not so much as a thread or a shoestring. I'm not going to have you go around saying, 'I made Abram rich.' Nothing for me other than what the young men ate and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; they're to get their share of the plunder."

2-3 Abram said, "GOD, Master, what use are your gifts as long as I'm childless and Eliezer of Damascus is going to inherit everything?" Abram continued, "See, you've given me no children, and now a mere house servant is going to get it all."

4 Then GOD's Message came: "Don't worry, he won't be your heir; a son from your body will be your heir."

5 Then he took him outside and said, "Look at the sky. Count the stars. Can you do it? Count your descendants! You're going to have a big family, Abram!"

6 And he believed! Believed GOD! God declared him "Set-Right-with-God."

7 GOD continued, "I'm the same GOD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldees and gave you this land to own."

8 Abram said, "Master GOD, how am I to know this, that it will all be mine?"

9 GOD said, "Bring me a heifer, a goat, and a ram, each three years old, and a dove and a young pigeon."

10-12 He brought all these animals to him, split them down the middle, and laid the halves opposite each other. But he didn't split the birds. Vultures swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram scared them off. As the sun went down a deep sleep overcame Abram and then a sense of dread, dark and heavy.

13-16 GOD said to Abram, "Know this: your descendants will live as outsiders in a land not theirs; they'll be enslaved and beaten down for 400 years. Then I'll punish their slave masters; your offspring will march out of there loaded with plunder. But not you; you'll have a long and full life and die a good and peaceful death. Not until the fourth generation will your descendants return here; sin is still a thriving business among the Amorites."

17-21 When the sun was down and it was dark, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch moved between the split carcasses. That's when GOD made a covenant with Abram: "I'm giving this land to your children, from the Nile River in Egypt to the River Euphrates in Assyria—the country of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaim, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites."

15 **1** After all these things, this word of GOD came to Abram in a vision: "Don't be afraid, Abram. I'm your shield. Your reward will be grand!"

16 **1-2** Sarai, Abram's wife, hadn't yet produced a child.

She had an Egyptian maid named Hagar. Sarai said to Abram, "GOD has not seen fit

Hagar Commodified

This entry and the passage it addresses involve highly sensitive topics that might be triggering to some readers. If that is you, be gentle with yourself.

When we enter the story of Genesis 16, we might be tempted to center on Sarai's predicament. After all, the text introduces her as the protagonist. Sarai was Abram's wife, who waited more than a decade for God to deliver on the promise to give her a family.

But as we dig into the story, we discover that it is as much about Hagar—the Egyptian servant girl—as it is her childless mistress. Hagar, our best supporting actress, comes center stage in this portion of the biblical narrative. At this point, Sarai had decided that she was weary of waiting on God. Since God had “not seen fit” to let Sarai have a child, she had a scheme of her own. She offered Hagar to her husband so Sarai could “get a family from her” (Genesis 16:2).

Sarai had experienced commodification and now in turn commodified Hagar, treating her not as a fellow image bearer and sister but as a slave and baby maker. After learning that Hagar was pregnant, Sarai became so abusive that Hagar ran away to the wilderness. You know it's bad when the desert floor is a safer place to land than your own home.

Truth be told, this young, pregnant mama was thousands of miles away from any sense of home. Hagar was Egyptian, likely having been given to Abram's family by Pharaoh back in Genesis 12. She was an outsider traveling as a maid with Sarai and Abram. At this point, she had been abused and sexually exploited. Hagar was an outcast, wandering in the desert alone.

Everything seemed to be heading in a downward spiral for Hagar until an angel of God, who is sometimes understood to be the preincarnate Christ, found her in the desert and asked, “What are you doing here?” (Genesis 16:8).

God, of course, knew what Hagar was doing there but took time to listen to her story, allowing her the dignity of naming her own situation.

God met Hagar in her misery with mercy and tender care. God adjusted the lens of her suffering and gifted her a new perspective. God guided her to the next right step, urging her to go back to her mistress and promising to bless her in the future with family. God didn't take away her trials but was present with her as she faced them.

Hagar was once invisible but now was seen. She named God *El Roi*, “the God who sees” (Genesis 16:13). God did not commodify her. God cared for her. God valued her as a daughter. God empowered her.

God sees you today in your desert place and cares deeply about your story too. Just as God found Hagar in the wilderness, God is coming swiftly today to remind you that God is *El Roi*, the God who sees you in your suffering, who empowers and dignifies you—and who is present with you.



to let me have a child. Sleep with my maid. Maybe I can get a family from her.” Abram agreed to do what Sarai said.

3-4 So Sarai, Abram’s wife, took her Egyptian maid Hagar and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. Abram had been living ten years in Canaan when this took place. He slept with Hagar and she got pregnant. When Hagar learned she was pregnant, she looked down on her mistress.

5 Sarai told Abram, “It’s all your fault that I’m suffering this abuse. I put my maid in bed with you and the minute she knows she’s pregnant, she treats me like I’m nothing. May GOD decide which of us is right.”

6 “You decide,” said Abram. “Your maid is your business.”

Sarai was abusive to Hagar and Hagar ran away.

7-8 An angel of GOD found her beside a spring in the desert; it was the spring on the road to Shur. He said, “Hagar, maid of Sarai, what are you doing here?”

She said, “I’m running away from Sarai my mistress.”

9-12 The angel of GOD said, “Go back to your mistress. Put up with her abuse.” He continued, “I’m going to give you a big family, children past counting.

From this pregnancy, you’ll get a son:

Name him Ishmael;

for GOD heard you, GOD answered you. He’ll be a bucking bronco of a man, a real fighter, fighting and being fought, Always stirring up trouble, always at odds with his family.”

13 She answered GOD by name, praying to the God who spoke to her, “You’re the God who sees me!

“Yes! He saw me; and then I saw him!”

14 That’s how that desert spring got named “God-Alive-Sees-Me Spring.” That spring is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

15-16 Hagar gave Abram a son. Abram named him Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar gave him his son, Ishmael.



17 1-2 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, GOD showed up and said to him, “I am The Strong God, live entirely before me, live to the hilt! I’ll make a covenant between us and I’ll give you a huge family.”

3-8 Overwhelmed, Abram fell flat on his face.

Then God said to him, “This is my covenant with you: You’ll be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Abram, but Abraham, meaning that ‘I’m making you the father of many nations.’ I’ll make you a father of fathers—I’ll make nations from you, kings will issue from you. I’m establishing my covenant between me and you, a covenant that includes your descendants, a covenant that goes on and on and on, a covenant that commits me to be your God and the God of your descendants. And I’m giving you and your descendants this land where you’re now just camping, this whole country of Canaan, to own forever. And I’ll be their God.”

9-14 God continued to Abraham, “And you: You will honor my covenant, you and your descendants, generation after generation. This is the covenant that you are to honor, the covenant that pulls in all your descendants: Circumcise every male. Circumcise by cutting off the foreskin of the penis; it will be the sign of the covenant between us. Every male baby will be circumcised when he is eight days old, generation after generation—this includes house-born slaves and slaves bought from outsiders who are not blood kin. Make sure you circumcise both your own children and anyone brought in from the outside. That way my covenant will be cut into your body, a permanent mark of my permanent covenant. An uncircumcised male, one who has not had the foreskin of his penis cut off, will be cut off from his people—he has broken my covenant.”

15-16 God continued speaking to Abraham, “And Sarai your wife: Don’t call her Sarai any longer; call her Sarah. I’ll bless her—yes! I’ll give you a son by her! Oh, how I’ll bless her! Nations will come from her; kings of nations will come from her.”

17 Abraham fell flat on his face. And then he laughed, thinking, “Can a hundred-year-old man father a son? And can Sarah, at ninety years, have a baby?”

18 Recovering, Abraham said to God, “Oh, keep Ishmael alive and well before you!”

19 But God said, “That’s not what I mean. Your wife, Sarah, will have a baby, a son. Name him Isaac (Laughter). I’ll establish my covenant with him and his descendants, a covenant that lasts forever.

20-21 “And Ishmael? Yes, I heard your prayer for him. I’ll also bless him; I’ll make sure he has plenty of children—a huge family. He’ll

God and Laughter

Sarah, Abraham, Isaac. We know those names. Behind each one is the transformative power of God and laughter.

God gave Abram and Sarai new names, promising them a son even in their nineties. Understandably, they both laughed.

Imagine how Sarai's hope would have jumped at God's long-ago promise, that their descendants would make a great nation, a blessing for the whole earth. Month after month, year after year, she would have expectantly thought, *Maybe this time*. Disappointment came in regular intervals, and she must have lost hope bit by bit. Wouldn't you?

But God's promise was renewed. God gave Abram and Sarai new names, telling *Abraham* that *Sarah* would have a child. Abraham snickered. *Now? Really?* Frankly, it was laughable; as if to emphasize the absurdity, they were to name their child Isaac: *Laughter*.

This time God's promise to Sarah wasn't inferred from God's promise to Abraham. This time God said, "Kings of nations will come from *her*" (Genesis 17:16, emphasis added). Later, when God told them that Isaac would be born within a year, it was Sarah's turn to chuckle. It was beyond impossible. But God countered, "Is anything too hard for GOD?" (Genesis 18:14).

With her new name, God identified the character Sarah had developed through life's difficulties. *Sarah* is a modified form of *Sarai*—the change subtle but significant. Some scholars believe both names mean "princess," but *Sarai* has a connotation of contentiousness or quarrelsomeness, while *Sarah* suggests the more positive meaning of "chieftainess" or "noblewoman." In other words, Sarah had grown out of her contentiousness and into the noble matriarch of a nation.

We have all faced disappointment, suffering, and heartbreak. Like Sarah, our faithful endurance mingles with doubt. Sarah's new name demonstrated that her life's greatest struggle would lead to its supreme blessing. She would be the matriarch—and she would laugh joyfully!



father twelve princes; I'll make him a great nation. But I'll establish my covenant with Isaac whom Sarah will give you about this time next year."

²² God finished speaking with Abraham and left.

²³ Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all his servants, whether houseborn or purchased—every male in his household—and circumcised them, cutting off their foreskins that very day, just as God had told him.

²⁴⁻²⁷ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised. His son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised. Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised the same day together with all the servants of his household, those born there and those purchased from outsiders—all were circumcised with him.

18 ¹⁻² God appeared to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent. It was the hottest part of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing. He ran from his tent to greet them and bowed before them.

³⁻⁵ He said, "Master, if it please you, stop for a while with your servant. I'll get some water so you can wash your feet. Rest under this tree. I'll get some food to refresh you on your way, since your travels have brought you across my path."

They said, "Certainly. Go ahead."

⁶ Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. He said, "Hurry. Get three cups of our best flour; knead it and make bread."

⁷⁻⁸ Then Abraham ran to the cattle pen and picked out a nice plump calf and gave it to the servant who lost no time getting it ready. Then he got curds and milk, brought them with the calf that had been roasted, set the meal before the men, and stood there under the tree while they ate.

⁹ The men said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?"

He said, "In the tent."

¹⁰ One of them said, "I'm coming back about this time next year. When I arrive, your wife Sarah will have a son." Sarah was listening at the tent opening, just behind the man.

¹¹⁻¹² Abraham and Sarah were old by this time, very old. Sarah was far past the age for having babies. Sarah laughed within herself,

"An old woman like me? Get pregnant? With this old man of a husband?"

¹³⁻¹⁴ God said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh saying, 'Me? Have a baby? An old woman like me?' Is anything too hard for God? I'll be back about this time next year and Sarah will have a baby."

¹⁵ Sarah lied. She said, "I didn't laugh," because she was afraid.

But he said, "Yes you did; you laughed."

¹⁶ When the men got up to leave, they set off for Sodom. Abraham walked with them to say good-bye.

¹⁷⁻¹⁹ Then God said, "Shall I keep back from Abraham what I'm about to do? Abraham is going to become a large and strong nation; all the nations of the world are going to find themselves blessed through him. Yes, I've settled on him as the one to train his children and future family to observe God's way of life, live kindly and generously and fairly, so that God can complete in Abraham what he promised him."

²⁰⁻²¹ God continued, "The cries of the victims in Sodom and Gomorrah are deafening; the sin of those cities is immense. I'm going down to see for myself, see if what they're doing is as bad as it sounds. Then I'll know."

²² The men set out for Sodom, but Abraham stood in God's path, blocking his way.

²³⁻²⁵ Abraham confronted him, "Are you serious? Are you planning on getting rid of the good people right along with the bad? What if there are fifty decent people left in the city; will you lump the good with the bad and get rid of the lot? Wouldn't you spare the city for the sake of those fifty innocents? I can't believe you'd do that, kill off the good and the bad alike as if there were no difference between them. Doesn't the Judge of all the Earth judge with justice?"

²⁶ God said, "If I find fifty decent people in the city of Sodom, I'll spare the place just for them."

²⁷⁻²⁸ Abraham came back, "Do I, a mere mortal made from a handful of dirt, dare open my mouth again to my Master? What if the fifty fall short by five—would you destroy the city because of those missing five?"

He said, "I won't destroy it if there are forty-five."

²⁹ Abraham spoke up again, "What if you only find forty?"

┌ LOT'S WIFE ┐

We don't even know her name, but Lot's wife was a woman Jesus says we should never forget. When teaching the disciples about the Son of Man's coming, Jesus said, "Remember what happened to Lot's wife! If you grasp and cling to life on your terms, you'll lose it, but if you let that life go, you'll get life on God's terms" (Luke 17:32-33). To understand why Jesus referenced this nameless woman, we can go back to the day God sent angels to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

When the angels urged Lot's family to leave, they gave a vital command: "Don't look back!" (Genesis 19:17).

Scripture tells us that Lot's wife looked back.

We easily condemn her without considering the difficulty of the angels' command. Was Lot's wife grieving for her neighbors? Was she longing for one more chance to convince her daughters' fiancés to join them? What was going through her mind as the angels dragged her away from her comfort zone?

When God had told Abram to pack his go bag—to leave everything and everyone behind and follow God—Abram had responded with no hesitation and no looking back (Genesis 12:1-6). Why? "He believed! Believed GOD!" (Genesis 15:6).

Did Lot's wife look back because she doubted that God would care for her?

We can make assumptions or excuses for Lot's wife. We can criticize or understand her reaction. But no matter how we choose to view this nameless woman, her story tells us something about God: God is merciful and just.

Lot's wife couldn't turn around and make things right. But because of Jesus, we can turn toward God. We can rely on the Spirit for the power we need to grieve our losses and move forward to receive God's grace.

“Neither will I destroy it if for forty.”

³⁰ He said, “Master, don’t be irritated with me, but what if only thirty are found?”

“No, I won’t do it if I find thirty.”

³¹ He pushed on, “I know I’m trying your patience, Master, but how about for twenty?”

“I won’t destroy it for twenty.”

³² He wouldn’t quit, “Don’t get angry, Master—this is the last time. What if you only come up with ten?”

“For the sake of only ten, I won’t destroy the city.”

³³ When GOD finished talking with Abraham, he left. And Abraham went home.

19¹⁻² The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening. Lot was sitting at the city gate. He saw them and got up to welcome them, bowing before them and said, “Please, my friends, come to my house and stay the night. Wash up. You can rise early and be on your way refreshed.”

They said, “No, we’ll sleep in the street.”

³ But he insisted, wouldn’t take no for an answer; and they relented and went home with him. Lot fixed a hot meal for them and they ate.

⁴⁻⁵ Before they went to bed, men from all over the city of Sodom, young and old, descended on the house from all sides and boxed them in. They yelled to Lot, “Where are the men who are staying with you for the night? Bring them out so we can have our sport with them!”

⁶⁻⁸ Lot went out, barring the door behind him, and said, “Brothers, please, don’t be vile! Look, I have two daughters, virgins; let me bring them out; you can take your pleasure with them, but don’t touch these men—they’re my guests.”

⁹ They said, “Get lost! You drop in from nowhere and now you’re going to tell us how to run our lives. We’ll treat you worse than them!” And they charged past Lot to break down the door.

¹⁰⁻¹¹ But the two men reached out and pulled Lot inside the house, locking the door. Then they struck blind the men who were trying to break down the door, both leaders and followers, leaving them groping in the dark.

¹²⁻¹³ The two men said to Lot, “Do you have any other family here? Sons, daughters—anybody in the city? Get them out of here, and now! We’re going to destroy this place. The outcries of victims here to GOD are deafening; we’ve been sent to blast this place into oblivion.”

¹⁴ Lot went out and warned the fiancés of

his daughters, “Evacuate this place; GOD is about to destroy this city!” But his daughters’ would-be husbands treated it as a joke.

¹⁵ At break of day, the angels pushed Lot to get going, “Hurry. Get your wife and two daughters out of here before it’s too late and you’re caught in the punishment of the city.”

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ Lot was dragging his feet. The men grabbed Lot’s arm, and the arms of his wife and daughters—GOD was so merciful to them!—and dragged them to safety outside the city. When they had them outside, Lot was told, “Now run for your life! Don’t look back! Don’t stop anywhere on the plain—run for the hills or you’ll be swept away.”

¹⁸⁻²⁰ But Lot protested, “No, masters, you can’t mean it! I know that you’ve taken a liking to me and have done me an immense favor in saving my life, but I can’t run for the mountains—who knows what terrible thing might happen to me in the mountains and leave me for dead. Look over there—that town is close enough to get to. It’s a small town, hardly anything to it. Let me escape there and save my life—it’s a mere wide place in the road.”

²¹⁻²² “All right, Lot. If you insist. I’ll let you have your way. And I won’t stamp out the town you’ve spotted. But hurry up. Run for it! I can’t do anything until you get there.” That’s why the town was called Zoar, that is, Smalltown.

²³ The sun was high in the sky when Lot arrived at Zoar.

²⁴⁻²⁵ Then GOD rained brimstone and fire down on Sodom and Gomorrah—a river of lava from GOD out of the sky!—and destroyed these cities and the entire plain and everyone who lived in the cities and everything that grew from the ground.

²⁶ But Lot’s wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt.

²⁷⁻²⁸ Abraham got up early the next morning and went to the place he had so recently stood with GOD. He looked out over Sodom and Gomorrah, surveying the whole plain. All he could see was smoke belching from the Earth, like smoke from a furnace.

²⁹ And that’s the story: When God destroyed the Cities of the Plain, he was mindful of Abraham and first got Lot out of there before he blasted those cities off the face of the Earth.

³⁰ Lot left Zoar and went into the mountains to live with his two daughters; he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He lived in a cave with his daughters.

Depravity, Trauma, and Mercy

This entry and the passage it addresses involve highly sensitive topics that might be triggering to some readers. If that is you, be gentle with yourself.

The story of Lot and his daughters is the kind most of us would rather avoid. It is, after all, steeped in levels of depravity we don't know how to make sense of. And yet, when stories like this one appear in the Scriptures, we'd do well to *not* look away but instead to consider, *What does this story teach us about humanity and—most importantly—about God?*

The answer can be hard to figure out if we only look through the lens of *sin* and not something else clearly at work here: *trauma*. Specifically, the way trauma affects us physically, mentally, and spiritually. If you've ever experienced any kind of trauma, you know that no matter how major or minor, no matter how recent or distant, trauma can affect our minds, bodies, and spirits. In fact, recent studies reveal that trauma doesn't even need to be experienced *personally* to have this impact. The effects of trauma can be generational, passed down through our DNA.

This was equally true in biblical times. Our modern understanding of trauma is helpful to keep in mind when we read certain Bible stories—especially ones like the story of Lot's daughters. While at the surface their story is a study in human depravity, it is also a study in trauma upon trauma.

Consider all they endured: Offered up as sexual substitutes—by their father! Watching their hometown—friends, neighbors, fiancés—destroyed! Seeing their mother turned to salt! And this is only the trauma we read about in Scripture; we can only imagine the horrors they'd witnessed growing up in Sodom.

While trauma does not excuse sin, understanding its effects does help put things in perspective, particularly when we read of the horrifying decision Lot's daughters made to get their dad drunk so he would impregnate them.

Reading this story through the lens of trauma fuels our compassion. After all, not only had these women lived through horror, but they were also women in the ancient world without husbands or children; they faced a vulnerable, trauma-filled future without a family line to support them. As disturbing and hard to understand as their actions were, these women did what they felt they had to do in the face of tragedy and trauma.

Like in many stories in Scripture, the brutal honesty in the story of Lot's daughters invites us to respond with both repulsion and sympathy, with confusion and mercy. After all, this isn't a prescriptive story. This Scripture isn't telling us how things should be done. Instead, the story of Lot's daughters is one of broken triumph, of carrying on in the face of trauma, and of God being with us, despite ourselves, through it all.



31-32 One day the older daughter said to the younger, “Our father is getting old and there’s not a man left in the country by whom we can get pregnant. Let’s get our father drunk with wine and lie with him. We’ll get children through our father—it’s our only chance to keep our family alive.”

33-35 They got their father drunk with wine that very night. The older daughter went and lay with him. He was oblivious, knowing nothing of what she did. The next morning the older said to the younger, “Last night I slept with my father. Tonight, it’s your turn. We’ll get him drunk again and then you sleep with him. We’ll both get a child through our father and keep our family alive.” So that night they got their father drunk again and the younger went in and slept with him. Again he was oblivious, knowing nothing of what she did.

36-38 Both daughters became pregnant by their father, Lot. The older daughter had a son and named him Moab, the ancestor of the present-day Moabites. The younger daughter had a son and named him Ben-Ammi, the ancestor of the present-day Ammonites.



20 1-2 Abraham traveled from there south to the Negev and settled down between Kadesh and Shur. While he was camping in Gerar, Abraham said of his wife Sarah, “She’s my sister.”

2-3 So Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and took her. But God came to Abimelech in a dream that night and told him, “You’re as good as dead—that woman you took, she’s a married woman.”

4-5 Now Abimelech had not yet slept with her, hadn’t so much as touched her. He said, “Master, would you kill an innocent man? Didn’t he tell me, ‘She’s my sister’? And didn’t she herself say, ‘He’s my brother’? I had no idea I was doing anything wrong when I did this.”

6-7 God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know your intentions were pure, that’s why I kept you from sinning against me; I was the one who kept you from going to bed with her. So now give the man’s wife back to him. He’s a prophet and will pray for you—pray for your life. If you don’t give her back, know that it’s certain death both for you and everyone in your family.”

8-9 Abimelech was up first thing in the morning. He called all his house servants

together and told them the whole story. They were shocked. Then Abimelech called in Abraham and said, “What have you done to us? What have I ever done to you that you would bring on me and my kingdom this huge offense? What you’ve done to me ought never to have been done.”

10 Abimelech went on to Abraham, “Whatever were you thinking of when you did this thing?”

11-13 Abraham said, “I just assumed that there was no fear of God in this place and that they’d kill me to get my wife. Besides, the truth is that she is my half sister; she’s my father’s daughter but not my mother’s. When God sent me out as a wanderer from my father’s home, I told her, ‘Do me a favor; wherever we go, tell people that I’m your brother.’”

14-15 Then Abimelech gave Sarah back to Abraham, and along with her sent sheep and cattle and servants, both male and female. He said, “My land is open to you; live wherever you wish.”

16 And to Sarah he said, “I’ve given your brother a thousand pieces of silver—that clears you of even a shadow of suspicion before the eyes of the world. You’re vindicated.”

17-18 Then Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his maid-servants, and they started having babies again. For God had shut down every womb in Abimelech’s household on account of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.



21 1-4 God visited Sarah exactly as he said he would; God did to Sarah what he promised: Sarah became pregnant and gave Abraham a son in his old age, and at the very time God had set. Abraham named him Isaac. When his son was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him just as God had commanded.

5-6 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born.

Sarah said,

God has blessed me with laughter
and all who get the news will laugh
with me!

7 She also said,

Whoever would have suggested
to Abraham

that Sarah would one day nurse
a baby!

Yet here I am! I've given the old man
a son!

⁸ The baby grew and was weaned. Abraham threw a big party on the day Isaac was weaned.

⁹⁻¹⁰ One day Sarah saw the son that Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, poking fun at her son Isaac. She told Abraham, "Get rid of this slave woman and her son. No child of this slave is going to share inheritance with my son Isaac!"

¹¹⁻¹³ The matter gave great pain to Abraham—after all, Ishmael was his son. But God spoke to Abraham, "Don't feel badly about the boy and your maid. Do whatever Sarah tells you. Your descendants will come through Isaac. Regarding your maid's son, be assured that I'll also develop a great nation from him—he's your son, too."

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Abraham got up early the next morning, got some food together and a canteen of water for Hagar, put them on her back and sent her away with the child. She wandered off into the desert of Beersheba. When the water was gone, she left the child under a shrub and went off, fifty yards or so. She said, "I can't watch my son die." As she sat, she broke into sobs.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ Meanwhile, God heard the boy crying. The angel of God called from Heaven to Hagar, "What's wrong, Hagar? Don't be afraid. God has heard the boy and knows the fix he's in. Up now; go get the boy. Hold him tight. I'm going to make of him a great nation."

¹⁹ Just then God opened her eyes. She looked. She saw a well of water. She went to it and filled her canteen and gave the boy a long, cool drink.

²⁰⁻²¹ God was on the boy's side as he grew up. He lived out in the desert and became a skilled archer. He lived in the Paran wilderness. And his mother got him a wife from Egypt.

²²⁻²³ At about that same time, Abimelech and the captain of his troops, Phicol, spoke to Abraham: "No matter what you do, God is on your side. So swear to me that you won't do anything underhanded to me or any of my family. For as long as you live here, swear that you'll treat me and my land as well as I've treated you."

²⁴ Abraham said, "I swear it."

²⁵⁻²⁶ At the same time, Abraham confronted

Abimelech over the matter of a well of water that Abimelech's servants had taken. Abimelech said, "I have no idea who did this; you never told me about it; this is the first I've heard of it."

²⁷⁻²⁸ So the two of them made a covenant. Abraham took sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech. Abraham set aside seven sheep from his flock.

²⁹ Abimelech said, "What does this mean? These seven sheep you've set aside."

³⁰ Abraham said, "It means that when you accept these seven sheep, you take it as proof that I dug this well, that it's my well."

³¹⁻³² That's how the place got named Beersheba (the Oath-Well), because the two of them swore a covenant oath there. After they had made the covenant at Beersheba, Abimelech and his commander, Phicol, left and went back to Philistine territory.

³³⁻³⁴ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and worshiped GOD there, praying to the Eternal God. Abraham lived in Philistine country for a long time.



22 ¹ After all this, God tested Abraham. God said, "Abraham!"

"Yes?" answered Abraham. "I'm listening."

² He said, "Take your dear son Isaac whom you love and go to the land of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I'll point out to you."

³⁻⁵ Abraham got up early in the morning and saddled his donkey. He took two of his young servants and his son Isaac. He had split wood for the burnt offering. He set out for the place God had directed him. On the third day he looked up and saw the place in the distance. Abraham told his two young servants, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I are going over there to worship; then we'll come back to you."

⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and gave it to Isaac his son to carry. He carried the flint and the knife. The two of them went off together.

⁷ Isaac said to Abraham his father, "Father?"

"Yes, my son."

"We have flint and wood, but where's the sheep for the burnt offering?"

⁸ Abraham said, "Son, God will see to it that there's a sheep for the burnt offering." And they kept on walking together.

9-10 They arrived at the place to which God had directed him. Abraham built an altar. He laid out the wood. Then he tied up Isaac and laid him on the wood. Abraham reached out and took the knife to kill his son.

11 Just then an angel of God called to him out of Heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”
“Yes, I’m listening.”

12 “Don’t lay a hand on that boy! Don’t touch him! Now I know how fearlessly you fear God; you didn’t hesitate to place your son, your dear son, on the altar for me.”

13 Abraham looked up. He saw a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. Abraham took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

14 Abraham named that place God-Yireh (God-Sees-to-It). That’s where we get the saying, “On the mountain of God, he sees to it.”

15-18 The angel of God spoke from Heaven a second time to Abraham: “I swear—God’s sure word!—because you have gone through with this, and have not refused to give me your son, your dear, dear son, I’ll bless you—oh, how I’ll bless you! And I’ll make sure that your children flourish—like stars in the sky! like sand on the beaches! And your descendants will defeat their enemies. All nations on Earth will find themselves blessed through your descendants because you obeyed me.”

19 Then Abraham went back to his young servants. They got things together and returned to Beersheba. Abraham settled down in Beersheba.



20-23 After all this, Abraham got the news: “Your brother Nahor is a father! Milcah has given him children: Uz, his firstborn, his brother Buz, Kemuel (he was the father of Aram), Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.” (Bethuel was the father of Rebekah.) Milcah gave these eight sons to Nahor, Abraham’s brother.

24 His concubine, Reumah, gave him four more children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.



23 1-2 Sarah lived 127 years. Sarah died in Kiriath Arba, present-day Hebron, in the land of Canaan. Abraham mourned for Sarah and wept.

3-4 Then Abraham got up from mourning his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites: “I

know I’m only an outsider here among you, but sell me a burial plot so that I can bury my dead decently.”

5-6 The Hittites responded, “Why, you’re no mere outsider here with us, you’re a prince of God! Bury your dead wife in the best of our burial sites. None of us will refuse you a place for burial.”

7-9 Then Abraham got up, bowed respectfully to the people of the land, the Hittites, and said, “If you’re serious about helping me give my wife a proper burial, intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar. Ask him to sell me the cave of Machpelah that he owns, the one at the end of his land. Ask him to sell it to me at its full price for a burial plot, with you as witnesses.”

10-11 Ephron was part of the local Hittite community. Then Ephron the Hittite spoke up, answering Abraham with all the Hittites who were part of the town council listening: “Oh no, my master! I couldn’t do that. The field is yours—a gift. I’ll give it and the cave to you. With my people as witnesses, I give it to you. Bury your deceased wife.”

12-13 Abraham bowed respectfully before the assembled council and answered Ephron: “Please allow me—I want to pay the price of the land; take my money so that I can go ahead and bury my wife.”

14-15 Then Ephron answered Abraham, “If you insist, master. What’s four hundred silver shekels between us? Now go ahead and bury your wife.”

16 Abraham accepted Ephron’s offer and paid out the sum that Ephron had named before the town council of Hittites—four hundred silver shekels at the current exchange rate.

17-20 That’s how Ephron’s field next to Mamre—the field, its cave, and all the trees within its borders—became Abraham’s property. The town council of Hittites witnessed the transaction. Abraham then proceeded to bury his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah that is next to Mamre, present-day Hebron, in the land of Canaan. The field and its cave went from the Hittites into Abraham’s possession as a burial plot.

ISAAC AND REBEKAH

24 1 Abraham was now an old man. God had blessed Abraham in every way.

2-4 Abraham spoke to the senior servant in his household, the one in charge of everything he had, “Put your hand under my thigh and

▣ SARAH ▣

Sarah's story is not a simple one. She's remembered in the book of Hebrews as a hero of faith (Hebrews 11:11), yet she appears petty, vindictive, and skeptical at times. We are not offered clear insight into Sarah's feelings, yet they are not difficult to imagine: Excitement and trepidation as she and Abraham followed God into Canaan. The honor of being called. The distinct confidence that flourishes alongside beauty and wealth and position. And the bitter pain of unrealized expectations.

Each passing month reminded Sarah of failure, of God's promise unfulfilled. Did Sarah dwell on the ways her life had not measured up? Her husband repeatedly failed to protect her at her most vulnerable moments. Despite the money and power she had, her heart's deepest desire remained out of reach. What good was any of it when Sarah was barren, and therefore worthless in the reckoning of the ancient world? Life's beauty and success must have been eclipsed by aching emptiness.

But God was patiently and persistently writing a different story over Sarah's life. This story was one of provision, of being chosen, of blessing. When Sarah's body was threatened and objectified, God brought kings to their knees to protect her and bring her home. When Abraham was weak, God was faithful. When Sarah succumbed to jealousy and cruelty over Hagar's growing belly, God demonstrated a generosity extensive enough for both women. And when Sarah—old and worn from trying everything in her power to attain God's promise—finally laughed at the sheer audacity of it, the God of Abraham became the God of Sarah as well. The covenant recorded in Genesis 17 is directed to her, too, as one favored and blessed, a woman with a new name. No longer Sarai the barren, she became Sarah the mother of nations, woman of covenant, blessed by God.

swear by GOD—God of Heaven, God of Earth—that you will not get a wife for my son from among the young women of the Canaanites here, but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac.”

5 The servant answered, “But what if the woman refuses to leave home and come with me? Do I then take your son back to your home country?”

6-8 Abraham said, “Oh no. Never. By no means are you to take my son back there. GOD, the God of Heaven, took me from the home of my father and from the country of my birth and spoke to me in solemn promise, ‘I’m giving *this* land to your descendants.’ This God will send his angel ahead of you to get a wife for my son. And if the woman won’t come, you are free from this oath you’ve sworn to me. But under no circumstances are you to take my son back there.”

9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and gave his solemn oath.

10-14 The servant took ten of his master’s camels and, loaded with gifts from his master, traveled to Aram Naharaim and the city of Nahor. Outside the city, he made the camels kneel at a well. It was evening, the time when the women came to draw water. He prayed, “O GOD, God of my master Abraham, make things go smoothly this day; treat my master Abraham well! As I stand here by the spring while the young women of the town come out to get water, let the girl to whom I say, ‘Lower your jug and give me a drink,’ and who answers, ‘Drink, and let me also water your camels’—let her be the woman you have picked out for your servant Isaac. Then I’ll know that you’re working graciously behind the scenes for my master.”

15-17 It so happened that the words were barely out of his mouth when Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel whose mother was Milcah the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with a water jug on her shoulder. The girl was stunningly beautiful, a pure virgin. She went down to the spring, filled her jug, and came back up. The servant ran to meet her and said, “Please, can I have a sip of water from your jug?”

18-21 She said, “Certainly, drink!” And she held the jug so that he could drink. When he had satisfied his thirst she said, “I’ll get water for your camels, too, until they’ve drunk their fill.” She promptly emptied her jug into the trough and ran back to the well

to fill it, and she kept at it until she had watered all the camels.

The man watched, silent. Was this GOD’s answer? Had GOD made his trip a success or not?

22-23 When the camels had finished drinking, the man brought out gifts, a gold nose ring weighing a little over a quarter of an ounce and two arm bracelets weighing about four ounces, and gave them to her. He asked her, “Tell me about your family? Whose daughter are you? Is there room in your father’s house for us to stay the night?”

24-25 She said, “I’m the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah and Nahor. And there’s plenty of room in our house for you to stay—and lots of straw and feed besides.”

26-27 At this the man bowed in worship before GOD and prayed, “Blessed be GOD, God of my master Abraham: How generous and true you’ve been to my master; you’ve held nothing back. You led me right to the door of my master’s brother!”

28 And the girl was off and running, telling everyone in her mother’s house what had happened.

29-31 Rebekah had a brother named Laban. Laban ran outside to the man at the spring. He had seen the nose ring and the bracelets on his sister and had heard her say, “The man said this and this and this to me.” So he went to the man and there he was, still standing with his camels at the spring. Laban welcomed him: “Come on in, blessed of GOD! Why are you standing out here? I’ve got the house ready for you; and there’s also a place for your camels.”

32-33 So the man went into the house. The camels were unloaded and given straw and feed. Water was brought to bathe the feet of the man and the men with him. Then Laban brought out food. But the man said, “I won’t eat until I tell my story.”

Laban said, “Go ahead; tell us.”

34-41 The servant said, “I’m the servant of Abraham. GOD has blessed my master—he’s a great man; GOD has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, servants and maidservants, camels and donkeys. And then to top it off, Sarah, my master’s wife, gave him a son in her old age and he has passed everything on to his son. My master made me promise, ‘Don’t get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I live. No, go to my father’s home, back to my family, and get a wife for my son there.’ I said to my

master, ‘But what if the woman won’t come with me?’ He said, ‘GOD before whom I’ve walked faithfully will send his angel with you and he’ll make things work out so that you’ll bring back a wife for my son from my family, from the house of my father. Then you’ll be free from the oath. If you go to my family and they won’t give her to you, you will also be free from the oath.’

42-44 “Well, when I came this very day to the spring, I prayed, ‘GOD, God of my master Abraham, make things turn out well in this task I’ve been given. I’m standing at this well. When a young woman comes here to draw water and I say to her, Please, give me a sip of water from your jug, and she says, Not only will I give you a drink, I’ll also water your camels—let that woman be the wife GOD has picked out for my master’s son.’

45-48 “I had barely finished offering this prayer, when Rebekah arrived, her jug on her shoulder. She went to the spring and drew water and I said, ‘Please, can I have a drink?’ She didn’t hesitate. She held out her jug and said, ‘Drink; and when you’re finished I’ll also water your camels.’ I drank, and she watered the camels. I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel whose parents were Nahor and Milcah.’ I gave her a ring for her nose, bracelets for her arms, and bowed in worship to GOD. I praised GOD, the God of my master Abraham who had led me straight to the door of my master’s family to get a wife for his son.

49 “Now, tell me what you are going to do. If you plan to respond with a generous yes, tell me. But if not, tell me plainly so I can figure out what to do next.”

50-51 Laban and Bethuel answered, “This is undeniably from GOD. We have no say in the matter, either yes or no. Rebekah is yours: Take her and go; let her be the wife of your master’s son, as GOD has made plain.”

52-54 When Abraham’s servant heard their decision, he bowed in worship before GOD. Then he brought out gifts of silver and gold and clothing and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave expensive gifts to her brother and mother. He and his men had supper and spent the night. But first thing in the morning they were up. He said, “Send me back to my master.”

55 Her brother and mother said, “Let the girl stay a while, say another ten days, and then go.”

56 He said, “Oh, don’t make me wait! GOD

has worked everything out so well—send me off to my master.”

57 They said, “We’ll call the girl; we’ll ask her.”

They called Rebekah and asked her, “Do you want to go with this man?”

58 She said, “I’m ready to go.”

59-60 So they sent them off, their sister Rebekah with her nurse, and Abraham’s servant with his men. And they blessed Rebekah saying,

You’re our sister—live bountifully!
And your children, triumphantly!

61 Rebekah and her young maids mounted the camels and followed the man. The servant took Rebekah and set off for home.

62-65 Isaac was living in the Negev. He had just come back from a visit to Beer Lahai Roi. In the evening he went out into the field; while meditating he looked up and saw camels coming. When Rebekah looked up and saw Isaac, she got down from her camel and asked the servant, “Who is that man out in the field coming toward us?”

“That is my master.”

She took her veil and covered herself.

66-67 After the servant told Isaac the whole story of the trip, Isaac took Rebekah into the tent of his mother Sarah. He married Rebekah and she became his wife and he loved her. So Isaac found comfort after his mother’s death.

25 1-2 Abraham married a second time; his new wife was named Keturah. She gave birth to Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.

3 Jokshan had Sheba and Dedan.

Dedan’s descendants were the Asshurim, the Letushim, and the Leummim.

4 Midian had Ephah, Epher, Hanoah, Abida, and Eldaah—all from the line of Keturah.

5-6 But Abraham gave everything he possessed to Isaac. While he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons he had by his concubines, but then sent them away to the country of the east, putting a good distance between them and his son Isaac.

7-11 Abraham lived 175 years. Then he took his final breath. He died happy at a ripe old age, full of years, and was buried with his family. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried

▣ REBEKAH ▣

Rebekah was having a miserable pregnancy. What should have been a time of joy after two decades of infertility became an excruciating physical trial. Answered prayer birthed a whole new set of challenges for Rebekah.

Genesis 25:22 tells us that the fraternal twins she carried “tumbled and kicked” within her. The Hebrew word used in this verse (*ratsats*) reflects the violent intensity of the struggle between these babies. It tells us not that the siblings were simply active little gymnasts in utero; they’d gone to war within Rebekah, each trying to crush the other. There was no respite for their depleted mother. The relentless physicality of these battles inside her body drove Rebekah to the precipice of despair.

From there, she plunged headfirst into prayer.

The Bible doesn’t tell us that she sought God to quell the clash within her womb—though certainly her cry to God was a plea for relief. Beyond her desire for physical respite, Rebekah sought better understanding of what was happening within her battered uterus. Before she’d conceived, her husband Isaac had interceded for a child (Genesis 25:21). Now Rebekah sought God for herself, to understand what it would look like to mother this miraculous and challenging answer to prayer.

As Rebekah turned to God amid her body’s turmoil, she discovered the source of strength she would need to mother two very different sons. God showed Rebekah her complicated future: the complexities of sibling rivalry, the subversion of established social order within a family, and the renewing of a promise made to her father-in-law. God was upholding this promise, Rebekah discovered, in her own generation—and in every single generation that came after her.

And it was all taking place inside her body.

him in the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, next to Mamre. It was the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites. Abraham was buried next to his wife Sarah. After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac. Isaac lived at Beer Lahai Roi.

THE FAMILY TREE OF ISHMAEL

12 This is the family tree of Ishmael son of Abraham, the son that Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham.

13-16 These are the names of Ishmael's sons in the order of their births: Nebaioth, Ishmael's firstborn, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah—all the sons of Ishmael. Their settlements and encampments were named after them. Twelve princes with their twelve tribes.

17-18 Ishmael lived 137 years. When he breathed his last and died he was buried with his family. His children settled down all the way from Havilah near Egypt eastward to Shur in the direction of Assyria. The Ishmaelites didn't get along with any of their kin.

JACOB AND ESAU

19-20 This is the family tree of Isaac son of Abraham: Abraham had Isaac. Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan Aram. She was the sister of Laban the Aramean.

21-23 Isaac prayed hard to GOD for his wife because she was barren. GOD answered his prayer and Rebekah became pregnant. But the children tumbled and kicked inside her so much that she said, "If this is the way it's going to be, why go on living?" She went to GOD to find out what was going on. GOD told her,

Two nations are in your womb,
two peoples butting heads while still
in your body.
One people will overpower the other,
and the older will serve the younger.

24-26 When her time to give birth came, sure enough, there were twins in her womb. The first came out reddish, as if snugly wrapped in a hairy blanket; they named him Esau (Hairy). His brother followed, his fist clutched tight to Esau's heel; they named him Jacob (Heel). Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

27-28 The boys grew up. Esau became an expert hunter, an outdoorsman. Jacob was a quiet man preferring life indoors among the tents. Isaac loved Esau because he loved his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29-30 One day Jacob was cooking a stew. Esau came in from the field, starved. Esau said to Jacob, "Give me some of that red stew—I'm starved!" That's how he came to be called Edom (Red).

31 Jacob said, "Make me a trade: my stew for your rights as the firstborn."

32 Esau said, "I'm starving! What good is a birthright if I'm dead?"

33-34 Jacob said, "First, swear to me." And he did it. On oath Esau traded away his rights as the firstborn. Jacob gave him bread and the stew of lentils. He ate and drank, got up and left. That's how Esau shrugged off his rights as the firstborn.

26 1 There was a famine in the land, as bad as the famine during the time of Abraham. And Isaac went down to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar.

2-5 GOD appeared to him and said, "Don't go down to Egypt; stay where I tell you. Stay here in this land and I'll be with you and bless you. I'm giving you and your children all these lands, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. I'll make your descendants as many as the stars in the sky and give them all these lands. All the nations of the Earth will get a blessing for themselves through your descendants. And why? Because Abraham obeyed my summons and kept my charge—my commands, my guidelines, my teachings."

6 So Isaac stayed put in Gerar.

7 The men of the place questioned him about his wife. He said, "She's my sister." He was afraid to say "She's my wife." He was thinking, "These men might kill me to get Rebekah, she's so beautiful."

8-9 One day, after they had been there quite a long time, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out his window and saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah. Abimelech sent for Isaac and said, "So, she's your wife. Why did you tell us 'She's my sister'?"

Isaac said, "Because I thought I might get killed by someone who wanted her."

10 Abimelech said, "But think of what you might have done to us! Given a little more

time, one of the men might have slept with your wife; you would have been responsible for bringing guilt down on us.”

11 Then Abimelech gave orders to his people: “Anyone who so much as lays a hand on this man or his wife dies.”

12-15 Isaac planted crops in that land and took in a huge harvest. GOD blessed him. The man got richer and richer by the day until he was very wealthy. He accumulated flocks and herds and many, many servants, so much so that the Philistines began to envy him. They got back at him by throwing dirt and debris into all the wells that his father’s servants had dug back in the days of his father Abraham, clogging up all the wells.

16 Finally, Abimelech told Isaac: “Leave. You’ve become far too big for us.”

17-18 So Isaac left. He camped in the valley of Gerar and settled down there. Isaac dug again the wells which were dug in the days of his father Abraham but had been clogged up by the Philistines after Abraham’s death. And he renamed them, using the original names his father had given them.

19-24 One day, as Isaac’s servants were digging in the valley, they came on a well of spring water. The shepherds of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s shepherds, claiming, “This water is ours.” So Isaac named the well Esek (Quarrel) because they quarreled over it. They dug another well and there was a difference over that one also, so he named it Sitnah (Accusation). He went on from there and dug yet another well. But there was no fighting over this one so he named it Rehoboth (Wide-Open Spaces), saying, “Now GOD has given us plenty of space to spread out in the land.” From there he went up to Beersheba. That very night GOD appeared to him and said,

I am the God of Abraham your father;
don’t fear a thing because I’m
with you.
I’ll bless you and make your children
flourish
because of Abraham my servant.

25 Isaac built an altar there and prayed, calling on GOD by name. He pitched his tent and his servants started digging another well.

26-27 Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his advisor and Phicol the head of his troops. Isaac asked them,

“Why did you come to me? You hate me; you threw me out of your country.”

28-29 They said, “We’ve realized that GOD is on your side. We’d like to make a deal between us—a covenant that we maintain friendly relations. We haven’t bothered you in the past; we treated you kindly and let you leave us in peace. So—GOD’s blessing be with you!”

30-31 Isaac laid out a feast and they ate and drank together. Early in the morning they exchanged oaths. Then Isaac said good-bye and they parted as friends.

32-33 Later that same day, Isaac’s servants came to him with news about the well they had been digging, “We’ve struck water!” Isaac named the well Sheba (Oath), and that’s the name of the city, Beersheba (Oath-Well), to this day.



34-35 When Esau was forty years old he married Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath, daughter of Elon the Hittite. They turned out to be thorns in the sides of Isaac and Rebekah.



27 1 When Isaac had become an old man and was nearly blind, he called his eldest son, Esau, and said, “My son.”

“Yes, Father?”

2-4 “I’m an old man,” he said; “I might die any day now. Do me a favor: Get your quiver of arrows and your bow and go out in the country and hunt me some game. Then fix me a hearty meal, the kind that you know I like, and bring it to me to eat so that I can give you my personal blessing before I die.”

5-7 Rebekah was eavesdropping as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. As soon as Esau had gone off to the country to hunt game for his father, Rebekah spoke to her son Jacob. “I just overheard your father talking with your brother, Esau. He said, ‘Bring me some game and fix me a hearty meal so that I can eat and bless you with GOD’s blessing before I die.’

8-10 “Now, my son, listen to me. Do what I tell you. Go to the flock and get me two young goats. Pick the best; I’ll prepare them into a hearty meal, the kind that your father loves. Then you’ll take it to your father, he’ll eat and bless you before he dies.”

11-12 “But Mother,” Jacob said, “my brother Esau is a hairy man and I have smooth skin.

What happens if my father touches me? He'll think I'm playing games with him. I'll bring down a curse on myself instead of a blessing."

13 "If it comes to that," said his mother, "I'll take the curse on myself. Now, just do what I say. Go and get the goats."

14 So he went and got them and brought them to his mother and she cooked a hearty meal, the kind his father loved so much.

15-17 Rebekah took the dress-up clothes of her older son Esau and put them on her younger son Jacob. She took the goatskins and covered his hands and the smooth nape of his neck. Then she placed the hearty meal she had fixed and fresh bread she'd baked into the hands of her son Jacob.

18 He went to his father and said, "My father!" "Yes?" he said. "Which son are you?"

19 Jacob answered his father, "I'm your first-born son Esau. I did what you told me. Come now; sit up and eat of my game so you can give me your personal blessing."

20 Isaac said, "So soon? How did you get it so quickly?"

"Because your GOD cleared the way for me."

21 Isaac said, "Come close, son; let me touch you—are you really my son Esau?"

22-23 So Jacob moved close to his father Isaac. Isaac felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice but the hands are the hands of Esau." He didn't recognize him because his hands were hairy, like his brother Esau's.

23-24 But as he was about to bless him he pressed him, "You're sure? *You* are my son Esau?"

"Yes. I am."

25 Isaac said, "Bring the food so I can eat of my son's game and give you my personal blessing." Jacob brought it to him and he ate. He also brought him wine and he drank.

26 Then Isaac said, "Come close, son, and kiss me."

27-29 He came close and kissed him and Isaac smelled the smell of his clothes. Finally, he blessed him,

Ahhh. The smell of my son
is like the smell of the open country
blessed by God.

May God give you
of Heaven's dew
and Earth's bounty of grain and wine.

May peoples serve you
and nations honor you.

You will master your brothers,
and your mother's sons will honor you.

Those who curse you will be cursed,
those who bless you will be blessed.

30-31 And then right after Isaac had blessed Jacob and Jacob had left, Esau showed up from the hunt. He also had prepared a hearty meal. He came to his father and said, "Let my father get up and eat of his son's game, that he may give me his personal blessing."

32 His father Isaac said, "And who are you?" "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau."

33 Isaac started to tremble, shaking violently. He said, "Then who hunted game and brought it to me? I finished the meal just now, before you walked in. And I blessed him—he's blessed for good!"

34 Esau, hearing his father's words, sobbed violently and most bitterly, and cried to his father, "My father! Can't you also bless me?"

35 "Your brother," he said, "came here falsely and took your blessing."

36 Esau said, "Not for nothing was he named Jacob, the Heel. Twice now he's tricked me: first he took my birthright and now he's taken my blessing."

He begged, "Haven't you kept back any blessing for me?"

37 Isaac answered Esau, "I've made him your master, and all his brothers his servants, and lavished grain and wine on him. I've given it all away. What's left for you, my son?"

38 "But don't you have just one blessing for me, Father? Oh, bless me my father! Bless me!" Esau sobbed inconsolably.

39-40 Isaac said to him,

You'll live far from Earth's bounty,
remote from Heaven's dew.

You'll live by your sword,
hand-to-mouth,
and you'll serve your brother.

But when you can't take it any more
you'll break loose and run free.

41 Esau seethed in anger against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him; he brooded, "The time for mourning my father's death is close. And then I'll kill my brother Jacob."

42-45 When these words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she called her younger son Jacob and said, "Your brother Esau is plotting vengeance against you. He's going to kill you. Son, listen to me. Get out of here. Run for your life to Haran, to my brother Laban. Live with him for a while until your

brother cools down, until his anger subsides and he forgets what you did to him. I'll then send for you and bring you back. Why should I lose both of you the same day?"

46 Rebekah spoke to Isaac, "I'm sick to death of these Hittite women. If Jacob also marries a native Hittite woman, why live?"

28 1-2 So Isaac called in Jacob and blessed him. Then he ordered him, "Don't take a Canaanite wife. Leave at once. Go to Paddan Aram to the family of your mother's father, Bethuel. Get a wife for yourself from the daughters of your uncle Laban.

3-4 "And may The Strong God bless you and give you many, many children, a congregation of peoples; and pass on the blessing of Abraham to you and your descendants so that you will get this land in which you live, this land God gave Abraham."

5 So Isaac sent Jacob off. He went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

6-9 Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan Aram to get a wife there, and while blessing him commanded, "Don't marry a Canaanite woman," and that Jacob had obeyed his parents and gone to Paddan Aram. When Esau realized how deeply his father Isaac disliked the Canaanite women, he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son. This was in addition to the wives he already had.



10-12 Jacob left Beersheba and went to Haran. He came to a certain place and camped for the night since the sun had set. He took one of the stones there, set it under his head and lay down to sleep. And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground and it reached all the way to the sky; angels of God were going up and going down on it.

13-15 Then GOD was right before him, saying, "I am GOD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. I'm giving the ground on which you are sleeping to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will be as the dust of the Earth; they'll stretch from west to east and from north to south. All the families of the Earth will bless themselves in you and your descendants. Yes. I'll stay with you, I'll protect you wherever you go,

and I'll bring you back to this very ground. I'll stick with you until I've done everything I promised you."

16-17 Jacob woke up from his sleep. He said, "GOD is in this place—truly. And I didn't even know it!" He was terrified. He whispered in awe, "Incredible. Wonderful. Holy. This is God's House. This is the Gate of Heaven."

18-19 Jacob was up first thing in the morning. He took the stone he had used for his pillow and stood it up as a memorial pillar and poured oil over it. He christened the place Bethel (God's House). The name of the town had been Luz until then.

20-22 Jacob vowed a vow: "If God stands by me and protects me on this journey on which I'm setting out, keeps me in food and clothing, and brings me back in one piece to my father's house, *this* GOD will be my God. This stone that I have set up as a memorial pillar will mark this as a place where God lives. And everything you give me, I'll return a tenth to you."



29 1-3 Jacob set out again on his way to the people of the east. He noticed a well out in an open field with three flocks of sheep bedded down around it. This was the common well from which the flocks were watered. The stone over the mouth of the well was huge. When all the flocks were gathered, the shepherds would roll the stone from the well and water the sheep; then they would return the stone, covering the well.

4 Jacob said, "Hello friends. Where are you from?"

They said, "We're from Haran."

5 Jacob asked, "Do you know Laban son of Nahor?"

"We do."

6 "Are things well with him?" Jacob continued.

"Very well," they said. "And here is his daughter Rachel coming with the flock."

7 Jacob said, "There's a lot of daylight still left; it isn't time to round up the sheep yet, is it? So why not water the flocks and go back to grazing?"

8 "We can't," they said. "Not until all the shepherds get here. It takes all of us to roll the stone from the well. Not until then can we water the flocks."

9-13 While Jacob was in conversation with them, Rachel came up with her father's

sheep. She was the shepherd. The moment Jacob spotted Rachel, daughter of Laban his mother's brother, saw her arriving with his uncle Laban's sheep, he went and single-handedly rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of his uncle Laban. Then he kissed Rachel and broke into tears. He told Rachel that he was related to her father, that he was Rebekah's son. She ran and told her father. When Laban heard the news—Jacob, his sister's son!—he ran out to meet him, embraced and kissed him and brought him home. Jacob told Laban the story of everything that had happened.

14-15 Laban said, "You're family! My flesh and blood!"

When Jacob had been with him for a month, Laban said, "Just because you're my nephew, you shouldn't work for me for nothing. Tell me what you want to be paid. What's a fair wage?"

16-18 Now Laban had two daughters; Leah was the older and Rachel the younger. Leah had nice eyes, but Rachel was stunningly beautiful. And it was Rachel that Jacob loved.

So Jacob answered, "I will work for you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."

19 "It is far better," said Laban, "that I give her to you than marry her to some outsider. Yes. Stay here with me."

20 So Jacob worked seven years for Rachel. But it only seemed like a few days, he loved her so much.

21-24 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife; I've completed what we agreed I'd do. I'm ready to consummate my marriage." Laban invited everyone around and threw a big feast. At evening, though, he got his daughter Leah and brought her to the marriage bed, and Jacob slept with her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid.)

25 Morning came: There was Leah in the marriage bed!

Jacob confronted Laban, "What have you done to me? Didn't I work all this time for the hand of Rachel? Why did you cheat me?"

26-27 "We don't do it that way in our country," said Laban. "We don't marry off the younger daughter before the older. Enjoy your week of honeymoon, and then we'll give you the other one also. But it will cost you another seven years of work."

28-30 Jacob agreed. When he'd completed the honeymoon week, Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. (Laban gave

his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid.) Jacob then slept with her. And he loved Rachel more than Leah. He worked for Laban another seven years.

31-32 When GOD realized that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb. But Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and had a son. She named him Reuben (Look-It's-a-Boy!). "This is a sign," she said, "that GOD has seen my misery; and a sign that now my husband will love me."

33-35 She became pregnant again and had another son. "GOD heard," she said, "that I was unloved and so he gave me this son also." She named this one Simeon (GOD-Heard). She became pregnant yet again—another son. She said, "Now maybe my husband will connect with me—I've given him three sons!" That's why she named him Levi (Connect). She became pregnant a final time and had a fourth son. She said, "This time I'll praise GOD." So she named him Judah (Praise-GOD). Then she stopped having children.

30 1 When Rachel realized that she wasn't having any children for Jacob, she became jealous of her sister. She told Jacob, "Give me sons or I'll die!"

2 Jacob got angry with Rachel and said, "Am I God? Am I the one who refused you babies?"

3-5 Rachel said, "Here's my maid Bilhah. Sleep with her. Let her substitute for me so I can have a child through her and build a family." So she gave him her maid Bilhah for a wife and Jacob slept with her. Bilhah became pregnant and gave Jacob a son.

6-8 Rachel said, "God took my side and vindicated me. He listened to me and gave me a son." She named him Dan (Vindication). Rachel's maid Bilhah became pregnant again and gave Jacob a second son. Rachel said, "I've been in an all-out fight with my sister—and I've won." So she named him Naphtali (Fight).

9-13 When Leah saw that she wasn't having any more children, she gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob for a wife. Zilpah had a son for Jacob. Leah said, "How fortunate!" and she named him Gad (Lucky). When Leah's maid Zilpah had a second son for Jacob, Leah said, "A happy day! The women will congratulate me in my happiness." So she named him Asher (Happy).

14 One day during the wheat harvest

The God of Mistreated Women

This entry and the passage it addresses involve highly sensitive topics that might be triggering to some readers. If that is you, be gentle with yourself.

What is it like to be the side character in everyone else's story? Ask Leah.

When Jacob caught sight of Leah's younger sister, Rachel, Leah was nowhere to be seen. Jacob made a strong first impression as he helped water the livestock and showered Rachel with tears, kisses, and stories of shared history. Leah was equally related to the newcomer yet was not included in the passionate overtures. Her absence went unnoticed. Even when Rachel fetched their father, Laban, to welcome this unexpected guest, no one invited Leah. It appears she was left out of every connection forged at the start of this story.

Only during the negotiation over wages do we finally meet Leah. We're given two complimentary details describing Rachel and one less inspiring detail describing Leah. In this marriage arrangement, each daughter was an object exchanged for labor.

Jacob's attraction to Rachel elevated her. She was a commodity, but a *wanted* commodity. Leah lived without the consolation of being wanted. Her suffering increased when her father's trickery forced her into a loveless marriage. This official status brought her out of the shadows, but not in the way she'd likely hoped. As if being overlooked wasn't unpleasant enough, Leah was now an object of scorn.

But in the heartbreak and messiness of Leah's situation, God noticed her. God was mindful of her plight and did something about it. God entered into Leah's disgrace and honored her in a way Leah was sure to understand: God opened her womb and made her fruitful.

Her autonomy was limited, yet Leah began to find her voice. As she named her children, she verbalized her struggle. Each birth was a podium to proclaim God's tender loving care toward her and to lament unmet desires. With her firstborn, Leah declared that God had seen her misery. With her second-born, she declared that God had heard she was unloved. With her third child, she expressed hope that this gift from God would finally bring connection with her husband. While Leah continued to be disappointed, God's kindness reoriented her. In naming her fourth son, Leah turned away from ruminating on her broken relationships and put her attention toward praising God.

In God's eyes, Leah was not a side character. God centered her, sympathizing with her shame and granting her the honor of mothering half the tribes of Israel (see Genesis 30:17-20).

Leah's story is good news to those of us facing unloving relationships or injustice. We are not side characters in God's story. God validates our personhood, honors what others have overlooked, and helps us find our voices. Ask God what you look like from the perspective of the one who watches over you. Consider what God hears while lovingly listening to your thoughts and words. Become aware of God's awareness of your pain, and experience God's loving attention in your difficulty. God is standing by to befriend and tend to you.

Reuben found some mandrakes in the field and brought them home to his mother Leah. Rachel asked Leah, “Could I please have some of your son’s mandrakes?”

¹⁵ Leah said, “Wasn’t it enough that you got my husband away from me? And now you also want my son’s mandrakes?”

Rachel said, “All right. I’ll let him sleep with you tonight in exchange for your son’s mandrakes.”

¹⁶⁻²¹ When Jacob came home that evening from the fields, Leah was there to meet him: “Sleep with me tonight; I’ve bartered my son’s mandrakes for a night with you.” So he slept with her that night. God listened to Leah; she became pregnant and gave Jacob a fifth son. She said, “God rewarded me for giving my maid to my husband.” She named him Issachar (Bartered). Leah became pregnant yet again and gave Jacob a sixth son, saying, “God has given me a great gift. This time my husband will honor me with gifts—I’ve given him six sons!” She named him Zebulun (Honor). Last of all she had a daughter and named her Dinah.

²²⁻²⁴ And then God remembered Rachel. God listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and had a son. She said, “God has taken away my humiliation.” She named him Joseph (Add), praying, “May God add yet another son to me.”



²⁵⁻²⁶ After Rachel had had Joseph, Jacob spoke to Laban, “Let me go back home. Give me my wives and children for whom I’ve served you. You know how hard I’ve worked for you.”

²⁷⁻²⁸ Laban said, “If you please, I have learned through divine inquiry that God has blessed me because of you.” He went on, “So name your wages. I’ll pay you.”

²⁹⁻³⁰ Jacob replied, “You know well what my work has meant to you and how your livestock has flourished under my care. The little you had when I arrived has increased greatly; everything I did resulted in blessings for you. Isn’t it about time that I do something for my own family?”

³¹⁻³³ “So, what should I pay you?”

Jacob said, “You don’t have to pay me a thing. But how about this? I will go back to pasture and care for your flocks. Go through your entire flock today and take out every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb, every spotted or speckled goat. They

will be my wages. That way you can check on my honesty when you assess my wages. If you find any goat that’s not speckled or spotted or a sheep that’s not black, you will know that I stole it.”

³⁴ “Fair enough,” said Laban. “It’s a deal.”

³⁵⁻³⁶ But that very day Laban removed all the mottled and spotted billy goats and all the speckled and spotted nanny goats, every animal that had even a touch of white on it plus all the black sheep and placed them under the care of his sons. Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob. Meanwhile Jacob went on tending what was left of Laban’s flock.

³⁷⁻⁴² But Jacob got fresh branches from poplar, almond, and plane trees and peeled the bark, leaving white stripes on them. He stuck the peeled branches in front of the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink. When the flocks were in heat, they came to drink and mated in front of the streaked branches. Then they gave birth to young that were streaked or spotted or speckled. Jacob placed the ewes before the dark-colored animals of Laban. That way he got distinctive flocks for himself which he didn’t mix with Laban’s flocks. And when the sturdier animals were mating, Jacob placed branches at the troughs in view of the animals so that they mated in front of the branches. But he wouldn’t set up the branches before the feebler animals. That way the feeble animals went to Laban and the sturdy ones to Jacob.

⁴³ The man got richer and richer, acquiring huge flocks, lots and lots of servants, not to mention camels and donkeys.

31 ¹⁻² Jacob learned that Laban’s sons were talking behind his back: “Jacob has used our father’s wealth to make himself rich at our father’s expense.” At the same time, Jacob noticed that Laban had changed toward him. He wasn’t treating him the same.

³ That’s where God said to Jacob, “Go back home where you were born. I’ll go with you.”

⁴⁻⁹ So Jacob sent word for Rachel and Leah to meet him out in the field where his flocks were. He said, “I notice that your father has changed toward me; he doesn’t treat me the same as before. But the God of my father hasn’t changed; he’s still with me. You know how hard I’ve worked for your father. Still, your father has cheated me over and over, changing my wages time and again. But God never let

▣ RACHEL ▣

The first time we hear Rachel use her voice, it's to register a complaint (Genesis 30:1). We know Jacob loved her, and she is identified as beautiful. However, thanks to the trickery of her father, Laban, Rachel found herself in an impossible marriage arrangement alongside her older sister, Leah, and as the only member of Jacob's household who was experiencing infertility. Love and beauty were not enough in a culture that honored fertility above any other attribute a woman possessed—even above the woman herself.

Rachel unwillingly took her place among the biblical women who struggled to bear children, women trying to survive in a system that viewed them primarily as heir makers. Like Sarah with Hagar, and Hannah with Peninnah, Rachel envied Leah. Over the years, as Rachel's beauty faded, Jacob's family prospered, but she did not contribute. How often did she wonder if God had forgotten her?

Eventually, as the author of Genesis reveals, “God remembered Rachel. God listened to her and opened her womb” (Genesis 30:22). *God remembered Rachel*. Her firstborn, Joseph, would go on to save his people from a great famine in the land. Her son Benjamin's tribal land would include Jerusalem, the home to God's Temple, and be located right next to Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus.

For all those tears she cried during all those years of sorrow, God's people, too, would offer tribute to Rachel's suffering. During Israel's dark days of exile, the prophet Jeremiah would remember Rachel as the weeping mother of Israel (Jeremiah 31:15). Later, in response to Herod's horrific command to murder every little boy two years old and under who was anywhere near Bethlehem, Rachel's tears would again be brought to mind (Matthew 2:16-18).

Rachel suffered in a society that equated her value with her fertility. But inside and outside that social system, Rachel—her life, her suffering, and her tears—was precious to God.