

The Story

The commentary which follows is linked to *The Narrated Bible* by F LaGard Smith, the Bible arranged in chronological order, published by Harvest House, Eugene Oregon 1986, based on the New International Version of the Bible. Because it is chronological, it does not always follow the order of the Bible as published in English.

The readings are divided into 365 daily sections, to take a reader through the Scriptures in one year. However, since the days are not dated, the length of time taken may be extended.

As a guideline for the pronunciation of Hebrew and Greek words, the stressed syllable is indicated by an acute accent on the English transliteration throughout.

Day 1 Genesis 1.1 -3.24

Genesis is the book of the origins. In Hebrew, as with all of the books of Moses, or *Torah*, it is called after the first word of the book, *BeReshít* (Heb. בְּרֵאשִׁית meaning *In the Beginning*) The account of creation with which it opens is the most beautiful Hebrew poem, its language full of rhythm and song-like repetition. It is the written form of a much older oral tradition, designed to be remembered and passed on through generations.

Scholars have discerned two complementary accounts of the creation, one which uses employs the divine name of God as ‘*Elohím* (Heb. אֱלֹהִים) in Genesis 1, and one which brings in the divine name as YHWH – spoken and vocalised in written Hebrew as the word *Adonái* (Heb. אֲדֹנָי). This is only as strange as are the four gospels to tell the one story of Jesus ; in the variety different aspects are revealed.

Gen.1.1 -2 God created – why? As a development of His own character and as an exploration of His own nature as love. But love must give choice. The word used for ‘he created’ is *bará’* (Heb. בָּרָא) which is a word used mainly of God, and differs from the normal Hebrew word to make or do, which is ‘*asáh* (Heb. עָשָׂה). The word *bará’* also has connotations of an ongoing creative process, a feeding and nurturing. Thus there is something in the term ‘to create’ which is not just a one-off action, but an entering into a process of nurture and sustaining towards that which is ‘created’, making God both Creator and Sustainer.

The earth begins in chaos (Heb. תֹהוּ וָבוהו *tóhu va-vóhu*) two words which means ‘waste’ and ‘empty’, under cover of darkness (Hebrew חֹשֶׁךְ *chóshekh*) .

The reader is then introduced to the interactive aspect of God’s being in the created world – the Spirit of God (Heb. רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים *rúach-Elohím*) , who is in the feminine gender in the Hebrew language, and is found undertaking a very female task; the Spirit is described in the feminine gender version of the verb to be *brooding* (Heb. מְרַחֵפֶת *merachéphet*) over the chaos, like a mother-bird sitting on her nest, hatching her eggs. The Holy Spirit has been called ‘the executive agent of the Trinity.’

Gen.1.3- 25 The creation follows a repetitive pattern, which develops the sense of order and process in what God is creating. The creation is by God’s word, conveyed by ‘And He said’ (Heb. וַיֹּאמֶר *va-yomér*), followed by ‘Let there be..’ (Heb. יְהִי *yehí*) . Atmosphere, day and night, sea and land and animals are created, the time being divided into ‘evening’ (Heb. עֶרֶב

‘*érev*’) and ‘morning’ (Heb. בֹּקֶר *bóqer*), setting the pattern for the Semitic mind of day beginning at sunset, reckoning the night as the first part of the daily cycle.

Gen.1.26 The name of God (Heb אֱלֹהִים *Elohim*) in this first creation account (known by scholars as the E account, because of using *Elohim*) is a plural form with a singular meaning. That is, like the English words *news*, although a plural form is used, a singular idea is conveyed, and a singular verb used. (ie ‘Here is the news..’)

However, what is surprising is that at this point, God speaks to Himself in the first personal plural, addressing Himself as ‘*we*’, - ‘let us make man.’ If we remember that we have already encountered the Holy Spirit as an aspect of God’s nature, then it is not incongruous for God to speaking at least to Himself and the Spirit in this way. Yet God is still One, though *plural in aspect*.

The name Adam (Heb אָדָם) is a generic and a proper name, being a word for the human being and for the first name. It comes from the root for ground, also meaning red, as he was taken from the earth. Adam is in this sense *everyman*.

Man and woman – both carry the image of God. In union with each other they recall something in the divine nature itself – two persons, one flesh. And they are creative and fruitful – they are sub creators. No other joining in mankind has such a powerful God-reflecting nature both in relationship and in fruitfulness. They also reflect the plurality which is within God’s own name, and the masculine and feminine expressions of His image.

They are called to ‘subdue’ the earth. The Hebrew is *kabhash* כָּבַשׁ to conquer, subjugate, tread down. But the intention of God cannot be to harm and to abuse what He has created – look at His care to conserve in Gen 7 in the flood. Rather, the world is wild, wonderful, and man will need to come to terms with it, to battle with it, to tame it, to domesticate it. This is the reason for man’s adventure, reflecting God’s in creation. God is the adventurer, and man is His counterpart in the earth.

Gen 2.1 -25 2.2 The seventh day, being the day of God’s rest from his work is made separate and is called later *Shabbát* (Heb שַׁבָּת) from the word ‘to rest’, *shabhát* (Heb שָׁבַת). The number seven henceforth in Scripture signifies completion, fulfilment. In Revelation, it will appear in many contexts (seven churches, sevenfold Spirit of God, seven bowls, seven trumpets.) The rhythm of man’s life is to be a working cycle of six days and a seventh of rest and *re-creation*.

At Genesis 2.4 we move into the use of the Divine Name YHWH, whose exact pronunciation is not known, but is thought to be ‘Yáhweh’. In Hebrew He is יהוה, four consonants YHWH (also called the *Tetragrammaton* – the ‘four letters’) with no vocalisation (or vowels), in common with all early Hebrew script. But generations later, when the text needed to be vocalised, when Hebrew was in danger of being forgotten, the vowels ‘pointed’ around the Unspoken Name were taken from the word *Adonái* (Heb אֲדֹנָי) meaning ‘my Lord’ or ‘Sire’. When a Jew comes to this name in the text of the Bible, he therefore substitutes the word *Adonái* for the four letters he sees in the text.

Because of this, the second account of creation here in Genesis 2 is said to be that of the J-source (J being in many languages the equivalent of English Y), using the Unspoken Name to convey the divine character.

Gen.2.4 starts the refrain which comes through in the early books – here are the generations of .. (Heb אֱלֹהֵי הַדּוֹרוֹת *éleh toldót*) in this case, of the heaven and the earth. The next comes in 5.1, the generations of Adam.

In 2.21, God does something in Adam which is key. God has made man in His own image; singular but with plural aspect. Yet in his physical being, man experiences loneliness, needs the community which God experiences within His being. Thus God separates out the plurality which is in original Adam, the masculine and feminine aspects which are united in God and His Spirit, and makes a separate physical being to enable relationship to be experienced bodily by man and woman as the reflection of God's plural yet single being.

Gen.3.1-24 Every tree in the garden is permitted to them except one. Even the tree of life is available to them. The prohibition is on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent questions why they can't eat every tree. They are made to doubt God's integrity. 'God has said you can't eat from all the trees in the garden...'

When they eat, immediately they have the knowledge of good and evil. They already had the knowledge of good, though – everything around them was good. They had each other to enjoy and to love, they had the earth to tame and adventure in. The one thing they didn't have was the awareness of evil. In disobeying, they see the darkness; they see their own capacity to abuse and to harm each other, and they are ashamed of their vulnerability and afraid of sexuality. They also hide, no longer confident, no longer free. Evil will now rule them, since they are not built to be able to manage evil. They need a saviour. The issue is not so much their sin, as their inability to overcome evil.

The serpent is cursed, here understood as the primeval symbol of evil (chaos, the great serpent). A promise is made that although he will strike the heel, his head will be crushed by the seed of woman, specifically – interestingly, not the seed of man but her seed. Woman has some key role in this battle which is now under way.

For woman, childbearing will be hard and dangerous. The very grace which God has given her to replenish the earth and reflect the creator's role is now fraught with difficulty. Does this reflect the travail which now the Creator Himself suffers, the struggle to which He is to be put? There is also a terrible irony that she who has been co-regent with man will now be ruled over by this one who stood at her side and was silent while she said yes to evil. And her desire will be toward him.

For man, the ground is cursed. He will work it with hardship and toil, and will return to it at the end of his life.

But there is a tender ending to this – God does not revoke his call to replenish the earth. And he clothes them with animal skins to keep them alive. God has not finished with them.

Then God causes cherubim to dwell at the entrance to the garden, so that man cannot perpetuate his darkened life for eternity. The next time we meet cherubim are over the mercy

seat. There is to be a way back; the story of God's love is just begun, the adventure, the rescue is in progress.

Note also that God addresses Himself again in the plural in 3.22 – man (and woman) has become like one of us, like Elohim. From a form critical perspective this is of interest, since the first chapter of Genesis is the E source, where God first uses the 'let us', but here we are in the J source, but God is still talking to Himself in the first plural!

Day 2 Genesis 4- 5

Cain and Abel – Cain is the first birth. His name means 'acquired' or 'procured' or 'purchased'. Perhaps Eve is making the point that the birth has cost her dearly, in terms of the pain and labour of childbirth. 'I have purchased a man by the Lord.'

Abel is dealt with almost peremptorily in the text; 'and she again bore his brother Abel'. Abel (Hebrew **הֶבֶל** *Hébhél*) is a word meaning 'breath' in the sense of something transitory – as in Job 7.16, **כִּי הֶבֶל יָמַי** *Ki hébhél yamí - For my days are a breath*. It's the word the Preacher uses in Ecclesiastes which the KJV renders as 'vanity'.

Obviously, given the violent nature of Abel's end, his life is transitory; but his parents give him this name, which perhaps is something to do with their sense of futility of life as it is now lived, and the great loss they have endured from their loss of relationship with God in Eden.

Why does God accept Abel's offering and not Cain's? Perhaps because the ground, from which Cain's offering comes, is cursed, while the animals are not.

God tells Cain that, as with the serpent in the garden, evil is looking for an opportunity to break in and harm. It is crouching at the door, (**רֹבֵהֵץ** *robhétz*) like a beast of prey ready to strike (similar to the coiled serpent?). Cain has a learning opportunity here, he can either do the good, or the evil. Evil/sin desires to strike at him keep him from the good. But his anger, (which is not the sin itself) opens the door for the evil to be released. The deed, not the temptation is the failure. (The Hebrew word **חָטָא** *Chatáh* means to miss the target, as in archery, to fail – Gesenius has German *fehlen*)

Abel's is the first death in Scripture, and is murder, even fratricide. Yet, Cain is not killed as later the law demands. This comes in with Noah in Genesis 9 – a limitation on human evil. So the first murder is not subject to capital punishment. Rather, Cain is driven from the land and from God's presence, to wander as a fugitive in the land of *Nod* (Hebrew **נוֹד** means vagrancy, nomad) with a mark upon him.

Later in the chapter, Enoch takes two wives, Ada and Zillah. This is the first occurrence of polygamy – and then he commits murder also, resulting in his wandering also. (This also establishes the unfolding story in which *cultures* may change, as we see later the patriarch Israel also having two wives, and being blessed by God.)

Cain builds the first human settled community (called *city* in KJV, but this is rather mistranslation. The Hebrew word is **עִיר** *'iyr*) and then we also have music introduced as well as manufacture in chapter 4.

The chapter ends with the birth of Seth, (Hebrew שֵׁט *Shet*, means *substitute*). Finally, the first reference to prayer is found in v.26 – men begin to call on the name of the Lord. I.e. They appeal to Him for assistance and help, they pray. However, this could also mean to proclaim, or to call, and may mean that men begin to call God by His holy name, Yahweh, or to call themselves by the name of Yahweh's people.

Chapter 5 opens with the words again 'these are the generations of Adam', the next comes in Gen 6.9 with Noah's. The chapter is a genealogy, noteworthy for the extremely long lives of these antediluvian patriarchs. Whatever we say of the years they lived, it points to a looking back to the time before the flood as a different age, an age of mythical longevity and awesome people who lived in a way decisively different to the post-deluge age, pointing to the echoes of Eden in the lives of earlier peoples.

5.24 has the mysterious reference to Enoch who walked with God, and was not for God took him. Evidently this is a reference to a close relationship with God, and the possibility of man being transformed by God to the extent of bypassing death (cf Elijah later.)

Day 3 Gen 6 – 9

6.1,2 Whatever the Nephilim are they are divine, and they have intercourse with women, and bear powerful children. Many cultures have myths concerning the intercourse of gods with men, and there is something which in the midst of time occurred to give rise to these ideas. But the context is unclear to us.

6.3 Here is the decision of God to shorten the days of men, since they cause God strife. God is suffering, He is discouraged by men's evil and reduces their post-Eden longevity to a century and a bit. The reason is because God is tired of judging them, of striving with them and of pleading with them. There is a very real sense here that the world is not going as God intended; man's choices are giving Him great grief, and man, after all, is only flesh, mortal (Heb. בָּשָׂר *Basár*)

So He takes another step in the process of relieving His own grief by deciding He will end the project. *But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord.* Noah is a tremendous encouragement. God is not interested in numbers. He is prepared to continue on the basis of one faithful man. All the earth is corrupt, but for the sake of Noah, God forbears. It is not about how many, but how faithful.

6.9 Here are the generations of Noah, next in the unfolding line. (The next is Gen 10.1, Shem Ham and Japheth.)

7.1 In an age when we are hyper-conscious of the natural environment, it is instructive to us to see the care God takes over the natural order in conserving animal as well as human life. After all, according to the early accounts, man has named these creatures, and has stewardship of them. Some of them have been domesticated (e.g. the sheep as soon as Gen 4) God is not about to throw them all on the scrap heap.

God also commands Noah to include male and female, for only together can they continue the life of earth, for together they reflect the image of God, masculine and feminine.

8.17 Noah received the same command from God as Adam; God has not changed His intention toward the earth. To have destroyed the planet's life would have been failure. God takes the risk, His love always risks. He wants the earth to be filled with fruit, with life; Noah is the new Adam, his wife the new Eve, with their sons and daughters-in-law, their family. It says something about man's resilience but also his dependence on God.

8.21 God appears to revoke the curse on the ground – I will no longer curse the earth for man's sake. God now comes to terms with man's nature – that he is evil from his childhood up, and God must work with this. But God will no longer harm the earth because of man's failure. God, it is clear, is developing and learning in this experience of creation as much as man. The earth is the battlefield on which God will overcome evil once and for all.

9.1ff Noah, the new Adam, restarting the earth, has a new mandate from the creator. All animals will be in awe of man, and God now gives Noah permission to eat them as well, all living things – this is interesting given the later kashrut code of clean and unclean. The only prohibition at this stage is against eating blood. Blood was used in many pagan rites as the carrier of the life of an animal, and was thought to transfer the nature and strength of the beast to the eater. This marks Noah and his descendants out from the rest.

9.5 Here comes the ordinance of the sanctity of human life; whoever takes human life will be answerable for that life. And there is the sanction for man to take man's life – whoever takes a man's life, by man will his life be poured out.

9.9 The Covenant is established for the first time with man – it is a *Berit* (בְּרִית) which implies sacrifice and cutting, the verb used with it being *karát* (כָּרַת) Covenant is a self-imposed sacrificial vow, obligating the covenanter in covenanted *chésed* (חֶסֶד) for the term of the vow.

9.12 This is a covenant with all creation, and as covenant has a sign or mark with it, the sign is God's bow (Heb קֶשֶׁת *qéshet*, literally an archer's bow) which He lays down, making peace with the earth and heaven and all in it. God declares a truce, then, with creation.

9.20 Noah is not immune from evil, nor are his sons. He becomes a farmer, plants a vineyard, makes wine, gets drunk and lies in a shameful way in his tent, vulnerable and unprotected. Perhaps this, more than the fact of Noah being unclothed is the real issue. Ham then uncovers his father's shameful vulnerability instead of keeping confidence. His other two sons cover him up, a sign of honour and not of condemnation. For this failure Ham is judged.

9.26 This is part of the justification for the invasion of Canaan (Ham's son) and displacement of the Canaanites.

Day 4 Gen 10,11 (In order Gen 11.1-9, Gen 10, Gen 11.10 – 26)

11.3 Here man the builder is identified, making bricks from clay and mortar from bitumen (Heb חֵמָר *Chémah*) The story of Babel is representative of all the monumental feats of early man, the temples, the structures – man enshrining his self-glorification in stone.

11.6 Man united in one imagination without God is controlled by evil, thus God needs to break up the earth into peoples and languages to stop the terrible outcome. Babel (Heb בְּבֵל *Babhél* = confusion) comes from Hebrew *balál* (Heb לָלַל) meaning to confuse.

11.10 The generations of Shem – the next are the generations of Terah in 11.27

10.1 Generations of Noah's sons (see above for next) Many of these are recognizable as the names Israel later gives to different European and African nations – Yavan is Greece, Magog is perhaps Russia, Tarshish perhaps is Spain (whither Jonah later tried to flee), Kittim is Cyprus, Cush is Ethiopia, Mizraim is Egypt, Put is Persia, and then Canaan.

10.5 *These divided up between themselves the lands (islands) of the nations (KJV has 'Gentiles'.)* Note that this is the first occurrence in the English versions of the Scripture where the word 'Gentiles' is chosen. This word, employed by them to demarcate Jews from non-Jews is an Anglophone creation; the word in the original Hebrew, in the Greek Septuagint and in the Latin Vulgate is the normal word for nations (Heb גּוֹיִם *Goyím*, Greek ἔθνη *éthnai* and Latin *gentes*.) it is simply a matter of interpretation that English translators have chosen to render the original word as 'Gentiles' and in fact seems incongruous here, since the nation of Israel does not exist at this point!

Gen 10.9, Nimrod the Great, who founds the city from which Asshur (Assyria) emerges.

10.13,14 Genesis has the Philistines coming from Egypt (Mizraim)

10.21 Here follow the sons of Shem, the Semitic peoples, including Assyria (Asshur) and Syria/Mesopotamia. (Aram.) Abraham is descended from this branch of the family of Noah. (A wandering Aramean was my father...Deut 26.5)

11.10 Thus we come to the generations of Shem, the Semites, who will lead us to Terah and Abram next in 11.27

Of note in chapter 11, between Shem and Terah is the reduction in longevity – from four hundred to two hundred, then we have Abram's brother Hárán (Heb חָרָן) dying before his father Terah in Ur of the Chaldees. (11.28) Also of note is that Sarai, Abram's wife is unable to have children, a key fact in the unfolding story. (11.30)

11.31 Abram's father Terah sets out to go to Canaan, but stops before he achieves his goal. He settles in Haran.

11.32 Terah dies aged 205.

Day 5 Gen. 12-14

In Hebrew, this section of the reading (the perashat) is called in Hebrew, לֶךְ-לְךָ *Lekh-lekhá*, *Go you, get you*. It emphasizes the move of Abraham from Haran to Canaan.

12.5 Abraham moves with all the *souls he has acquired* (Heb עָשָׂה *asáh* usually meaning he made) He also takes his late brother's son, Lot, presumably whom he has agreed to raise.

12.8 As in Gen 4.26, Abram is one of those who calls on the name of YHWH/Adonai. An early example of prayer.

12.10 is the first appearance of Egypt as a place of refuge. Abram goes there to escape famine in the land of Canaan, as later does Jacob-Israel and eventually Jeremiah with the exiles. Egypt is a place of doubt, often of departure from God's best. Here it is a place of Abram's darkness coming through in the subterfuge he plots with Sarai which is uncovered by God.

12.17 In a prequel to later events, God brings plagues upon the Egyptians because of their desire towards Sarai. Abram leaves Egypt, however, with the stuff which Pharaoh gave him.

13.4 Having made this detour into Egypt, Abram returns and calls on the name of the Lord, back where he started from. Why would he have done what he did if God had promised him the land? But Abram has not yet BELIEVED.

13.7 Not only was there not pasture enough for Abram and Lot's flocks, but also the Canaanites and Perizzites needed to survive there as well.

13.10 The plain of Jordan must have been beautiful, before the Dead Sea came there. Like Jericho and the places further north, a place of pastures.

14.13 Here, Abram is called a Hebrew for the first time. (Heb עִבְרִי *Tbhri*) He is also described as being a *Ba'al-berit* (Heb בְּעֵל-בְּרִית), a covenant-master with allies Mamre, Eshcol and Aner the Amorites. They band together to attack Kedorlaomer and to release Lot from the marauder.

14.18 Here we meet Melchizedek, King of Salem, who brings bread and wine to Abram; he is also the priest of El Elyon, most High God. Abram receives his blessing. This is the type of Christ, from whom the priesthood comes. Melchizedek is the first named priest in the Scripture. Abram also tithes to Melchizedek, which indicates a significant recognition and accountability.

Melchizedek blesses Abram in the name of El Elyon, *possessor of heaven and earth* (Heb. כֹּנֵן *konéh*) which is equivalent to the maker of all things Abram recognises. In 14.22, Abram actually reveals he has taken an oath in the name of El-Elyon that he will not take any booty, lest he have a part in the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah described in 13.13. He does accept the provisioning of his men, and allows the Amorites covenanted with him to have their share.

Day 6 Gen 15 -17

15.6 This is the crucial moment in the story; not Abram's actions, not even the covenant, but Abram's faith, his self-resignation to the providence of God, a God who is telling him that the impossible can happen. Out of this moment come all the faithful. Abraham trusted God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now Abram can only await the fulfillment of the promise, and obey the One who gave it in relationship. This is the place where God and man begin the new ascent to the kingdom;

15.14 In a way, Abram has already experienced some of this deliverance himself in the story of his going down into Egypt and returning with goods.

15.18 God *karát berít*, (כָּרַת בְּרִית) cuts covenant (itself a sacrificial word) with Abram. God makes Himself self-sacrificially accountable for His words and His promises through this sacrifice. This is the promise which will one day be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

16.1 Egypt figures again here, this time in the female slave Hagar. Everything is wrong here. Abram has just received promises from the Lord, but he now submits to the pragmatism of his wife who, in her desperation, urges him to fulfil God's word by human means. The result will be a situation of enmity between the child of promise and the child of the Egyptian, whose repercussions are being felt now, and which will likely continue until the end of all things. It is sobering that the Arab people look to Ishmael, not to Isaac as the child of promise, turning the story on its head.

16.6 Sarai is jealous of Hagar's motherhood, and Hagar despises Sarai's barrenness. The outcome is discord and perhaps even violence, enough to make Hagar flee.

16.11,12 Ishmael is born within the covenant; he is seed of Abraham, even though he is not the child of promise. As Abraham's son, he benefits from God's protection. But he will be a thorn in the side of all, though he will dwell among his brothers. This is a touching story, in that God will not reject the widow and orphan, and the God who sees will care for them.

17.1 God reminds Abraham of the covenant – here the word is not *karat* but *natán* (נָתַן) he will give – God is now working out the terms of the covenant of Gen 15. And God now changes Abram's name to Abraham, puts something of the breath of God's name into Him. The name reflects the purpose of God for him, great father.

17.8 Here is the promise of the land with the covenant as well.

17.10 The circumcision of the foreskin of the male penis is to be the sign of the covenant in Abraham's flesh and that of his descendants. It would not be uncommon in many ancient cultures for a wounding and scarring of the flesh to be made as an indelible sign of covenant (e.g. the wrist cutting and sealing of native Americans) and for the sons of Abraham, the sign was to be in the most personal and intimate place of a man's anatomy. There is something also of an echo of the shame of Adam, covering his genitals, which God redeems, since the male member is also the vehicle of the sub-creative seed. Certainly, in Abraham's case, this will be the miraculous carrier of seed which will result in God's covenant being fulfilled. It is a wholly appropriate sign, therefore. There are also health benefits to circumcision. All this is known to God.

17.13 The covenant will be in your flesh, says the Lord. There will be other, eternal marks of covenant in flesh when Jesus ascends to the Father with the scars of the eternal covenant in his hands, feet and side.

17.15 Sarai becomes Sarah, the divine *h* put into her name also.

17.18 Abraham has been assuming all this time that God means Ishmael to be his heir, but God affirms it will be a child of the old woman Sarah.

17.19 Isaac's name is given prophetically by God to Abraham here; his birth will indeed cause mirth and laughter.

17.20 Ishmael is not forgotten, and will be blessed with twelve nations out of him also.

17.23 Abraham does not hesitate not debate with God. The same day he circumcises all the males of his household. He must have been popular with those men!

17.24 Abraham was 99 when he was circumcised, giving a brave example to his household, and Ishmael, who must also have been in the household again, was 13. (So Ishmael would be about 14 years older than Isaac.)

Day 7 Gen 18 - 19

18.1 This is an incarnate appearance of the Lord. I tend to look at this as continuing the covenant theme, since a meal shared is part of the rites of covenant.

18.2 Abraham sees three men, the Lord and two angels- Rublev, the Russian iconographer uses this image as the basis of celebrated icon of the Holy Trinity.

18.8 In Rublev's icon, the head of the calf is seen in the bowl, but symbolizes the sacrifice of the son.

18.12 Sarah laughs at God's plan. God has already declared that this child's name will be 'he will laugh'. (Heb. יִצְחָק *Yitzchaq*) Is anything too hard for God?

18.19 Abraham's seed will do righteousness and justice/judgement (Heb זְדָאָה וּמִשְׁפָּט *tzedaqáh oo-mishpát*) Two concepts which go hand-in-hand in the story.

18.20 It is all too easy to see God's attitude as harsh and judgmental; but God describes the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as 'heavy' (Heb כָּבֵד) something which weighs him down. God is in pain over sin, not just in high dudgeon. Sin turns men into less than who they are, and darkens all the landscape around them. In the same way God refused to allow Adam to perpetuate his darkened life by eating of the tree of life, God will not sanction the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah.

18.23 Abraham appeals to God's justice; will He destroy the innocent with the guilty? The ensuing intercession of Abraham clearly shows God's willingness to respond to prayer and to our hearts. In the end, Abraham yields to God's own perfect justice, 'Will not the judge of all the earth do justice? (Heb. יַעֲשֶׂה יְיָ מִשְׁפָּט *ya'aséh mishpát*)' (18.25)

19.3 In middle eastern culture, the gift of hospitality was a great honour to the host. The guests under his roof were under a kind of temporary covenant, and to be defended at all costs.

19.5 The disgusting behaviour of the men of Sodom is heinous not only because of their intentions to perform unnatural acts on the guests, but also because in ancient cultures, sodomy was a means of bringing intense humiliation and shame on the victims of this kind of rape-crime. They are the very worst epitome of power-driven males, prepared to go to any perverted length to enforce their supposed superiority. Such actions have often been seen in war, for example, as a psychological crushing of enemies. (cf the sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners in the most recent conflict involving British soldiers.)

There is a sordid violence in these Sodomites which God will no longer countenance.

19.16 In the midst of impending judgement on Sodom, there is a moment of intense grace here as the angels take hold of Lot and his wife and daughters by the hand, so that God can show them favour, to lead them away from the conflagration now unfolding. God offers a way of escape, but not all will take it. (Lot's sons-in-law laugh at the idea of leaving.)

19.19 Here is the first occurrence of the word *chesed* (Heb חֶסֶד) in Scripture, the self-sacrificial obligation resulting from a covenant, as Lot appeals to the loving concern of the angel in getting them out of Sodom. Lot understands the concept of *chesed* enough to draw on it.

19.21 The angels warn Lot to escape with his family into the mountains. But Lot negotiates a stay in Zoar, Hebrew for little. However, only a few verse later in 30, he wants to get away into the mountain where he lives in a cave out of fear of what is happening in the valley.

19.29 Abraham sees the smoke going up from Sodom, and has his answer from God. There were not even ten righteous in the city.

19.31ff. Sex, incest, drunkenness and selfishness – all ingredients of the sorry cocktail that blights so many human lives. And here Lot is seduced by his daughters, having been made drunk, so that they can have children. The offspring of Lot by this incest are the fathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites. Darkness is in the heart even of those God favours. The names of the children bear out the shame: Moab (Heb. מוֹאָב *Mo'abh*) means 'from father' and Ben-Ammi (Heb. בֶּן-אֲמִי) means Son of my people. (However, how amazing that from the Moabites comes the faithful great-grandmother of King David, Ruth.)

Day 8 Gen 20-21

20.1 "Scripture impartially relates both the failings and the virtues of its heroes." *Rabbi Hertz, Etz Chayim* as found at <http://www.beki.org/dt/mlcddt05.html>

This site also suggests that Abraham was following a Hurrian cultural custom which was to adopt a wife as a sister to give her more secure legal status, and to confer benefits upon her. So the idea that Abraham had married his sister may not be as straightforward as we think.

Worth also noting that Sarah is now 90, but even then is desirable and attractive. (The previous similar event in Egypt had been when she was 65!) There were stories of men taking other men's wives and killing the husband – compare David and Bathsheba in 2 Sam.11.1ff.

'the power of our texts, including these three stories, lies in the unvarnished realities and contradictions they describe.' Morris Cohen on above site.

20.4 Abimelech converses with the Lord, so he is on speaking terms. He also describes his nation as righteous.

20.7 Abraham is described by God as a prophet (Heb *nábhi'* נָבִיא), the first time the term appears in the Scripture. Abimelech is urged to restore Sarah to Abraham.

20.12 It does appear, whatever the Hurrian custom, that Sarah is Abraham's half-sister, since Abraham says they share a father. However, such relationship must be taken as culturally acceptable for Abraham's time.

20.13 This is the second occurrence of the word *chesed* (Heb חֶסֶד) in Scripture, in quite a strange context- Abraham, it appears, has bound Sarah by covenant obligation to say that she is his sister wherever he goes. This does suggest also the adoption spoken of above, perhaps, making it a legal arrangement that Sarah is in law his sister as well as his wife.

20.16 Abimelech's thousand pieces of silver, it is said here, compensated Sarah for the ordeal Abraham had subjected them to. Whether Sarah saw it that way is unknown!

20.17 The first healing recorded in Scripture, as a result of Abraham the prophet's prayer. The women of Abimelech's household had been made barren as a result of the sin of Abimelech. Here is the model of prayer in action. The word here is *palál* (Heb פָּלַל) meaning to intercede or to supplicate. Gesenius has for this word a sense of *rolling to make even*, a *leveling* of situations. It can mean to judge, and perhaps has a similar connotation as *mishpat*. In the hithpa'el aspect,(reflexive) it means to cause judgement for, to supplicate, hence to pray.

21.1 God fulfils His word at the *moed*, the appointed time.

21.6 God made me laugh, says Sarah. How wonderful that one of the patriarchs has such a name!

21.12 The promise is through Isaac, not Ishmael. But God still shows *chesed* to the son of human effort.

21.21 Ishmael's wife comes from Egypt.

21.27 Abraham cuts a covenant with Abimelech, at Beer-Sheba, the well of the oath

Day 9 Gen 22 -23

22.1 God comes to examine, to test Abraham in his faith. (Heb נָסָה *nasáh*) This concept of God testing the commitment of men is found again in the people of Israel (Ex.16.4, 20.20) It's also used when Gideon tests the call of God in Judges 6.39, and of the people of Israel when they test God at Meribah (Ex 17.2,7.)

The concept is of an assay, to look at the quality of something. The word actually has to do with the sense of smell, (similar to an Arabic word-root) , to sniff something out, rather than the sense of touch, which is the word *bachán* (Heb בָּחַן)

Something powerful is going on here; God is taking Abraham on a journey with Him. God Himself is going to sacrifice the Son, and He allows Abraham to experience that deep trial of character and commitment which God Himself will experience, but also Abraham will be given the awesome relief of the substitution of another in place of his beloved son. The whole scheme of sacrifice in the Old Testament then foreshadows that one ultimate *pascha* when the

Lamb of God, the Son becomes the sacrifice. As we contemplate the agony of soul of Abraham in obeying the call of God, we can better understand the agony of God the Father in giving up His own Son for us in death on the cross.

22.2 Abraham is to take his son to Mount Moriah – (Heb הַמֶּרֶיךָ = *seen by YHWH*)

Traditionally, this has been associated with the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, but only by legend.

22.3 There is no discussion, no questioning from Abraham. He does as God tells him. It bears mention that for Abraham the concept of human sacrifice would probably not have been alien. Cultures in the ancient world (cf Moloch worship) offered human lives in sacrifice to their idols.

22.5 Abraham tells his servants that they are going to worship (Heb. שָׁחָה *shachah* – to bow, here in the reflexive, to bow oneself down) This is the first occurrence of this word in the Scriptures, one which appears often. When the task in Abraham's hand is contemplated, this is sacrificial worship indeed. Worship is costly.

Gen 22.6 How poignant that Abraham, the father, lays the wood for the burnt offering on the back of his own son, just as the Father laid on the back of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the wood upon which He would be stretched in offering for the sins of the world. (In Hebrew, the word for wood and tree are the same = *eyts* Heb עֵץ)

22.7 Isaac asked where is the lamb for sacrifice. The sheep and its offspring had been sacrificed to the Lord since Abel's offering from his flocks in Gen. 4.4. Our thoughts look down the centuries from here to the coming of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

22.8 God Himself will provide (Heb יִרְאֶה literally *will see (to)*) a lamb for the offering. (King James has *burnt offering*. The word in Heb is *olah* עֹלָה which comes from a root meaning to ascend, which means a raising up, a giving up, and by inference, a holocaust, a total burning. (LXX has here $\text{\delta\omicron\lambda\omicron\kappa\acute{\alpha}\rho\pi\omicron\varsigma}$, *holokárpōs*, meaning whole yield, whole profit or fruit.)

22.9 The father places the son upon the altar, on the wood (Heb also tree.) It is a terrible moment.

22.11 There is something particular about the double call of a person's name which God does to get their undivided attention. Here God calls Abraham's name twice. (cf Jesus' saying Simon Peter's name to him twice in Luke 22.31.)

22.12 The Angel of the Lord stops Abraham from killing Isaac. Abraham has shown his devotion and yieldedness (cf German *Gelassenheit*) and has passed the test. The supreme sacrifice is not asked of Abraham. Note here also that the angel of the Lord speaks as God – 'you have not withheld your son from me.' There is something of the divine about the angel

of the Lord, (literally *the messenger of YHWH*) which leads many commentators to posit Him as a pre-incarnation theophany of the Word of God.

There is an important lesson here for Abraham; unlike the tribes and peoples around him, YHWH the Lord does not accept human sacrifices. There will be only one human who dies for all, but He will be God incarnate, the self-giving of the Creator, the only one who can do this. However, man will be ever aware of the terrible costs of redemption to come through the shedding of animal blood, and through the loss of their earning capacity to man. Thus,

22.13 The male sheep, the ram, the sign of strength, caught by his horns in a thicket, in a tangle of bushes (perhaps of thorns?) This is the substitutional provision of God for the altar Abraham has built. As they slay and sacrifice this beautiful creature, they are aware of what might have been had the Lord not intervened, as Abraham offers the ram ‘instead of his son’ in thankful worship.

22.14 Abraham names the place *Adonái-Yir'éh* (Heb אֲדֹנָי־יִרְעֵה) literally, the Lord will see (to it), hence the proverb, in the mountain of the Lord, it shall be seen (to). God’s seeing is not a stand-offish thing, but results in action.

22.15ff. The angel of the Lord, speaking again in the 1st person, says that because Abraham has offered everything, God will bless all through him. They return from Moriah to live in the southern desert at Beer-Sheba.

22.16 Abraham has not withheld his *one and only* son from God (Heb יֶחֱדִיד *yechíd* – the one) just as God will not withhold His one and only Son from the cross.

22.20 News comes from Haran that Abraham’s brother, Nahor now has family. Key in this listing is Rebekah (22.23), son of Abraham’s nephew Bethuel, and therefore his great-niece, and cousin once removed to Isaac.

Although there is no mention in Gen 11.31 that Abraham’s brother Nahor was among those that moved with his father to Haran, we are told in 25.20 that Rebekah came from Padan-Aram, where her father Bethuel lived, which is the region in which Haran was situated. Therefore we can assume that Nahor was also in Haran.

23.1ff. Sarah dies at the age of 127, seemingly old for us, but not in terms of her ancestors. She dies at Hebron, and is the first to be buried in the Cave of Macpelah. The chapter here is really a wonderful account of an ancient business transaction, first gaining the permission of the Hittites among whom he is dwelling, then with Ephron the Hittite. Abraham is a nomad, but wants a permanent burial place for his family. Ephron is gracious, and offers it for nothing to Abraham, but Abraham negotiates a price. This would be an example of ancient bargaining and conveyancing of property, happening at the city gate, in public at the place of local government, in the sight of the local elders. It becomes his *miqneh*, his purchased acquisition in 23.18, so there is no dispute over possession.

23.2 In the Bible, men weep, and there is no shame in it. They also mourn, which entails tearing hair, garments, and beating the breast in frustration. Death is not borne with stiff upper lips in Bible culture, but is treated as a robber.

Today, Macpelah at Hebron is the second holiest site to Jews after the western wall at Jerusalem. It is the burial place of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob-Israel as well.

Day 10 Gen 24

24.2 It seems a strange custom to us for Abraham's servant to put his hand between his master's legs to swear an oath, but in age not so prudish as ours, the man's testicles were seen to represent his seed, his lineage, his offspring, and thus an oath sworn on the testicles would mean that if the oath were not kept, then the offspring would rise up to avenge the unfaithfulness. This is linked to the fact that Abraham's servant subsequently appeals to the Lord to *do chesed* (24.12, kindness is *chesed* here), that is to allow him to fulfil his covenanted vow to Abraham. The language of vow and promise is seen again, as he swears by the God of heaven and earth to Abraham.

24.3 Isaac is not to have a Canaanite wife; the servant is to find a wife from among Abraham's Semitic relatives in Haran. (A journey north and east of about 550 miles.)

24.12 With the rich trappings of ten camels, a sign of his master's wealth, Abraham's steward (Eliezer of Damascus? See Gen 15.2) arrives in Haran and asks for specific favour according to the oath he has made, from the God of his master.

24.16 In one of those glorious moments, we encounter Rebekah, beautiful, a maiden, who unawares, offers to water the camels of Abraham her great-uncle.

24.21 A gem of a verse, describing the servant's amazement at what was happening. Literally, in the Hebrew, he is stunned into silence by these events, and can't wait to see whether the thing is real or not, whether it really is God at work here.

24.24 Then having produced the gold earrings and bracelets which his master has sent as a gift, he asks who she is – and is overwhelmed to find that she is kin to Abraham, his brother's granddaughter.

24.26,27 The servant worships, bowed down to the ground in awe at God's intervention. Blessing the God of Abraham, who has not left off showing his *chesed*, His covenant obligation and *emet* (Heb אֱמֶת *émet*), his reliability, his integrity and truth to them.

24.29 As Rebekah runs home to share the news, we meet a character who will figure in the next phase of the story, Rebekah's brother, Abraham's great-nephew Laban. He invites the steward to stay, and the steward recounts the whole story to them.

24.50 Because the Lord has so clearly been at work, they will not offer a critique of the matter, but accept it as from His hand. When they agree to release Rebekah to be Isaac's wife, the servant again bows himself down in worship. The picture is one of great grace from God upon this venture.

24.54 The steward is anxious to get on the road, but Laban and Rebekah's mother (it seems that Bethuel was no longer around, and Laban had taken on the headship of the family) appeal to him to wait ten days. We will see Laban doing something similar later to delay Jacob and Laban's daughters.

24.55 But the steward wants to get away, and calling Rebekah, she is willing to go, with her nurse accompanying them.

24.60 They bless Rebekah with a wonderful blessing, to be the mother of thousands of millions (a number not often used in the Bible) and that she may possess the gates of her enemies.

24.63 This moment is so graphically portrayed; Isaac, out in the fields, musing in the evening, looks up and sees a distant caravan of camels. You can just feel the tension, as it comes nearer. And in the next verse, Rebekah sees Isaac and gets off her camel, and veils herself to him for their first meeting, having seen him coming towards them, and having asked who this man was coming toward them.

24.67 There is this poignant ending to this wonderful chapter as Isaac takes his new bride into his late mother's tent and she becomes his wife, and he loves her. A story worthy of the big screen, perhaps ! And Rebekah, the picture of the bride, foretelling the son's quest for a bride in the age to come, of which we are a part now.