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The final section of Genesis chapter 50 deals with the death of Joseph. We saw last time that after the death of Jacob, he required an oath of his sons. He charged them and said to them, I am to be gathered to my people.

This is 49, 29, Jacob's death. I am to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephraim the Hittite.

He specifies the place and he commands his sons to bury him there. Then he gathered up his feet and was gathered to his people. Then the first part of chapter 50 dealt with this great mourning that took place over the death of Jacob that seems so ironic.

And you can imagine the context into which the book of Genesis first came when it was completed. Here are the Israelites who are being ground under the sandals of the Egyptians in bondage. And they're coming out with a mighty hand but thinking that the Egyptians are this superior race and they are the slaves and all.

And it must have seemed almost unbelievable that there was a time when all of Egypt ground to a halt over the death of Jacob. And that there were these 70 days of mourning that took place. And this great retinue, all the leadership in Egypt goes up and encamps while Joseph and his brothers go up to the cave of Machpelah and inter his father's bones.

And we do get that idea in verse 10, 11, and 12 that all of the company, including the Egyptians, went up to the threshing floor of Atad. Atad, I'm not sure I mentioned it during class last time, but means thorns. And so you have this Goron Ha-Atad and you always wonder in some Hebrew phrases how much of it to translate and how much to leave as a proper name.

Was the name of the place Goron Ha-Atad or was it threshing floor of Atad or was it the threshing floor of thorns? But I think Janelle mentioned this last week that there may be some significance there. You know, threshing floors reoccur in Scripture the future site of the temple in Jerusalem. You remember when the angel is going through wreaking havoc and discipline after the numbering of the people in David's day, he stops and hovers over a threshing floor.

And that is the land that David purchases and that's where the temple is eventually built. But this is a threshing floor. And thorns, of course, also are significant in Scripture.

Briars and thorns and so forth. And this is where they stop and mourn with a very great and solemn lamentation and observe seven days of mourning for the Father there. And then you get the idea that the Egyptian retinue stays there at Goron Ha-Atad while the sons in verse 12 and 13 carry him to Machpelah and bury him in this field where

Abraham had purchased.

And also after he buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and all his brothers and all who went up with him to bury his father. So, and this raises a question and I think I did mention this last time. Why is it that now that the famine is over and the promises of possession of the land still exist, why did Joseph and all of his brothers return to Egypt? Why don't they stay? Famine is over.

They could take up a nomadic existence. Joseph could turn in his robes of state and tell the Egyptians, thanks a lot. You've helped me out.

I've helped you out. Let's part good friends and we'll have an alliance or whatever. I may come down and visit you sometime in the future, but this is the land that was promised to my father and grandfather and great-grandfather and I'm going to come up here with my brothers and return.

They don't do that. All of them return to Egypt. Why is that? Well, there is a thing in God's plan called timing.

And there had been the prediction made all the way back in Genesis 12-13. Do you remember that? You go all the way back to what God told Abraham in chapter 15. Among others, the promises began in 12 and 13, but in chapter 15, if you'll recall, this is the covenant, the walking between the pieces and so forth.

In verse 13, you know that Abraham has split the animals and is keeping the vultures off the carcasses and so forth. But in verse 12 of chapter 15, the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abraham and behold, horror and great darkness fell on him. Then he, God, said to Abraham, Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs and will serve them.

And they will afflict them 400 years. Also, the nation whom they serve, I will judge. Afterward, they shall come out with great possessions.

As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation, they shall return here.

For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. And I think it is that last phrase that dictated the return after the burial of Jacob. Joseph is well aware of these words.

I strongly suspect, in fact, I believe that the accounts of events that we have studied in Genesis had been set down in writing, probably on cuneiform tablets, clay tablets, that were in the possession of this line, the line of Shem coming down from Noah. I think the prehistory before the flood had been set down. Shem had that history.

It came down through the family to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. And that's the

reason we have the level of detail that we have in terms of ages and names and genealogical information on the various lines of the family. These are the generations of.

We saw that rubric occurring time and again in the earlier portions of Genesis. And those divided into neat clay tablet-sized chunks of information. And this has been noted by cuneiform scholars and so on, that this notation was often found at the bottom of some of these historic clay tablets, these Eleteledot, an equivalent phrase that's found in a lot of the tablets that they've dug up at Nuzi and Mari and other places.

And that these became source materials. Joseph, I think, had possession of these family records and placed them in the libraries of the palace of Egypt, the pharaoh's palace, the pharaoh's library. And years later, when Moses is raised as a prince in the royal family of Egypt, he has access to that library.

This is where he goes to do research and study and learn the things that a prince of Egypt needs to know. And he comes across these things that were archived by Joseph so many years earlier. And under the inspiration of God, the Holy Spirit, he transfers this information to the book that we have before us, the book of Genesis.

So I say all of that to say, Joseph well knows what God said to Abram so many years before his great-grandfather, that there would be a time when they would sojourn in a land that was not their own. And they needed to sojourn because the land that God had promised them is full of iniquity and it is not fit to take possession of until the iniquity of the Amorites is full and they are expunged. That's going to be the plan.

So Joseph knows, because he knows the Word of God, the words of God spoken to his great-grandfather, that it is not the time to go up and take possession of the land. He knows how to make decisions in time, practical decisions about where to live because he knows the Word of God. He knows the promises of God.

He knows what God has said about that land. He can see that God has spoken to his father Jacob and said, yes, you need to go down to Egypt and dwell there. It's okay to leave the land.

In the same way that God said He would be with Jacob when He crossed the northern border of the land of promise, God appeared to Jacob and told him it's okay to cross the southern border and go down to Egypt. Joseph has possession of these facts and he makes application of them in determining where to live and where to lead the family because even though he's the second to the youngest son, he is effectively the leader of the clan after Jacob's death. All of the brothers come and bow themselves down before him, fall on their faces on the ground before him, and he decides.

If he had said, let's all go up to Canaan land and live, that's where they would have gone. But God has made provision for them. There are promises and principles that have been

expressed to Abram, Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph that dictate that that's where they need to live.

And so they return. Then in verse 15 of chapter 50, you have the beginning of 15 through 21, this renewed expression of fear and trembling that now Joseph is going to wreak some sort of vengeance. He's going to take justice into his own hands upon the death of Jacob and revenge himself on his brothers for their maltreatment, their crime that they have committed against him.

The Hebrew word there, and I mentioned this last week, that's translated crime, is pesha, P-E-S-H-A. And it is the sin of the high hand. It is a rebellious type of sin.

The modern translators like to translate it crime. It's different. They've spoken of this act against Joseph as being an evil.

You meant it for evil, ra-ah. God meant it for good, tov. But now it's talked about in terms of a crime, a rebellious sin of the high hand.

I beg you, please forgive the trespass there in verse 17. So, please forgive the trespass. It's used twice there.

The servants of the God of your father. And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Why does he weep? Pick your reason.

After all this time, do they not know the transforming power of God's Word and the perspective that Joseph has because of his faith in God? Do they not understand his genuine compassion for them? Not just duty to his father Jacob, but genuine forgiveness, genuine concern for them and their families. Their renewed acknowledgement, perhaps for the first time, of the depth of the crime that they committed against him and so forth. And in verse 19, Joseph said to them, Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? An identical phrase was used by his father Jacob when Rachel demanded children from Jacob.

And Jacob said, Am I in the place of God that I can open and close wombs? This is an issue between you and God. And Joseph implies the same thing. This issue, you shouldn't be asking my forgiveness and fearing me.

You need to be going to the Lord. I'm not in the place of God in this sense. As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

We're going to come back to this statement a little bit down the road here. Therefore, do not be afraid. I will provide for you and your little ones.

And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his

father's household. Joseph lived 110 years.

We saw the significance of that number last time. The sum of the squares of 5, 6, and 7 that were the ages of his predecessors. Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third generation.

The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph's knees. He adopted them. Why would he do this? Why would he adopt these sons? Well, his own sons had been adopted by Jacob, right? Ephraim and Manasseh.

And in that sense, they've been lifted up a level and become sons of Jacob. So Joseph looks down to his grandsons and picks one, picks his grandson Machir, and adopts his sons as his own. So they're brought up on Joseph's knees.

Legally speaking, they are his heirs and his signs. Joseph said to his brethren, by the way, they are mentioned later on in the Bible when you go over to Kings and so forth. You find the sons of Machir mentioned participating in battle and so forth.

Nothing remarkable about them, but they are mentioned as a group later on. Then Joseph took an oath. And this is where we're concluding, verses 25 and 26.

Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here. These are his instructions for burial. And he requires an oath of the people.

And this follows the pattern established by his forebears. Because in the same way that Abraham gave directions at the close of his life, all of them, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were all concerned about their last words which have to do with the fulfillment of God's promise. Every one of them, the heritage, everybody values last words by some famous individual.

Well, these men used their last words to remind their descendants of the promise of God. That's what they focus on. You can go back to chapter 24 of Genesis, verses 1 through 7. And here we find Abraham being old and advanced in age, gets his oldest servant, and has him swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, not to take a wife for Isaac from the daughters of Canaan.

Go to the country and family and take a wife for my son Isaac. He's thinking about the promise of God. He makes his servant swear and take an oath by the God of heaven that his line is going to be within the people that God has called out.

The line of Shem. In the same way when you go a few pages forward to chapter 28 and verse 1, you have Isaac's last moments on earth. Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, at least for the purposes of Scripture.

We think Isaac actually lived a while, but this is his swan song in the pages of Scripture. Don't take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Go to Paddan Aram, to the house of Bethuel.

Take yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban. Then he gives the blessing. May God Almighty bless you, make you fruitful, multiply you, so that you'll be an assembly of peoples.

Give you the blessing of Abraham to you and your descendants with you that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger which God gave to Abraham. Passing down the blessing. These are Isaac's last moments with his son Jacob.

However long he lives after this, he doesn't see him again after he leaves because Isaac dies while Jacob is up in Paddan Aram. Then you go to chapter 47 where we have recently been and the dying expressions of Jacob. And in verse 29 there, the time drew near that Israel must die.

He called his son Joseph, put your hand under my thigh, deal kindly and truly with me, take an oath. Please do not bury me in Egypt. Let me lie with my fathers.

You shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place. He said, I will do as you have said. Then he said, swear to me.

And this oath is emphatic that he's going to be buried in the land. It is an expression of faith in the promise of God. That's where he wants to be at the moment of resurrection is in the land of promise.

It is a communication not only to his descendants that he believes the promise, but it's an indication that's where he wants to be. He wants to wake up in the land of promise when God raises him. So, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Joseph's final concern is with the promise.

And like them, he requires an oath of those who attend him at his deathbed related to his burial place. He says, God will visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here. He could have asked for another procession like they did for Jacob and gone right on up to the land and been planted there.

But the same rationale that caused Joseph to return to Egypt is what makes him leave his bones there. We know what Joseph is thinking. That's why he came back down from the land into Egypt.

He knows full well that they are going to dwell there for a time. They are going to sojourn in a land that is not their own and they will ultimately return. And he has thought about this.

He's meditated on the Word of God and he's thought about the implications of it and what his role is in it. And he realizes that by not having a big funeral procession like they had for Jacob, by leaving his sarcophagus above ground and unburied, it is a reminder of the promise of God that they will return. And he says, I know you're returning to the land.

You take my bones with you when you go. You just leave me sitting out here until God takes you up there and you take me with you. It's a visible, conscious reminder to all of the nation of Israel of this Word.

The same Word that motivated him to return to the land after the burial of Jacob. There's kind of a bracket there. The burial of Jacob on one side and the burial of Joseph on another.

Within that bracket you're going to have the slavery of Israel and the deliverance of Israel. Within those two parentheses you have that same parabola, so to speak, that we've seen throughout the book of Genesis where you have the descent, the fall from prosperity, the fall from blessing into bondage and you're going to have the deliverance of God and the upswing, the deliverance out of Egypt with a mighty hand conquering all kinds of things including their own failure in order to cross the Jordan and enter the promised land and ultimately the fulfillment of this oath that Joseph requires of the people of Israel. And if you turn over to Exodus chapter 13, verse 19, you can go back to verse 17 to get a little bit of context.

It came to pass when Pharaoh had let the people go that God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, lest perhaps the people change their mind when they see war and return to Egypt. So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea.

And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt. And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him. For he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here with you.

And that's exactly what they do. And when you go on over to the book of Joshua, you find the final burial of Joseph's bones after they crossed the Jordan. And with the Ark of the Covenant and the memorial stones and all of those things, you find them taking the bones of Joseph with them.

I don't have that passage, but you can find it. It's in the early chapters of Joshua. So in the earlier chapters of Genesis with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, after they required this oath, after they made their affirmation of the promise, then the account went on to show us how that was fulfilled.

The servant did go and find a wife for Isaac. Jacob did go and get a wife from the sons of Laban. In fact, he got two.

And Joseph did bury Jacob in the land, in the cave of Machpelah, as he had promised. But at the end of Genesis, when you get this promise that is required by Joseph, you shall take my bones up from here and bury them in the land, we don't have the fulfillment of that in Genesis. It leaves us hanging.

Is that going to take place or not? And so we have this unresolved request, this unresolved oath that he makes them take. Joseph died being 110 years old and they embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. This word for coffin is interesting because it's a rare word.

It is the same word that is used for the Ark of the Covenant. And it's not really the word coffin per se. It's really, a better translation would be ark.

And there's a lot that you can say about that when you go forward into the times of the wilderness wanderings and the entrance into the land because here you have the Israelites carrying two arks. They have the ark with the dead bones of Joseph and they have the ark with Aaron's rod that budded and the tablets of the law and the pot of manna, things that speak of life. And you have the ark of death and you have the ark of life.

And even the ark of death has the hope of life being carried with it. But they carry two arks everywhere they go. And the word is identical.

The word is the same. And those are the only two things that that word is used of in the Old Testament. It has been pointed out.

I am by no means the first to point out that in the beginning verses of Genesis you have God creating. God bringing things into being. God creating life.

God breathing into man's nostrils the breath of life. And by the end of Genesis the last words are a coffin in Egypt. And this indeed is a pattern in the Old Testament.

What are the last words of the Old Testament? Otherwise I will smite the land with a curse. So Genesis ends with a coffin in Egypt. Malachi ends with a curse.

That is the summation of what we see illustrated in the Old Testament and in the Old Testament age is the need for salvation. And as we conclude and summarize our study in Genesis we see that we are left with Joseph's bones and the fulfillment. We have seen that Joseph was a pledge and a foretaste of the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

Because what were the promises? It was promised a land. It was promised descendants.

It was promised to be a blessing to other nations.

And there is a foretaste of that with Joseph because they are given a land. It is the land of Goshen. But they have that land.

And they do have two parcels up in Canaan. They have the land that Jacob took from the Amorites with his sword which of course is a reference to Shechem that was not his desire to take but his sons took it against his will and it is his by right of conquest and the land that he purchased at the field of Machpelah. But that is just a foreshadowing of the future possession of land.

But they have a place where they live and dwell in peace and safety down in Egypt. In Joseph the descendants are fruitful and multiply. They prosper in the land of Canaan and have many sons.

Joseph sees sons and grandsons all the way down to the fourth generation. Jacob as a prophet in giving his blessing on his twelve sons and on the two sons of Joseph leaves them with hope that there is a future, that the tribes are going to prosper and become large and dwell by the sea and dwell between mountains and do all the different things that he spoke of. Whatever else you want to say about the tone of those prophetic utterances it implies the survival and the growth numerically of his offspring.

And the blessing on Joseph that takes place in the land of Egypt is a foretaste. It is not the fulfillment of those patriarchal promises but it does show the mechanism. How is it that all of this blessing comes not only on Joseph but on all those associated with Joseph? It's through faith and obedience.

Joseph of all the sons of Jacob is faithful and obedient. And that is the key because he is the illustration and is the great landmark in the history of the people of God and the nation of Israel in particular that when you are faithful, when you are obedient, look at how the promises of God find fulfillment even before their time. It's not the time for the literal fulfillment of the land promises and the kingdom promises and the nation promises and the descendants promises and the blessing to the nation promises but Joseph is a foretaste.

He is a blessing to the nations during the famine. All of the people in that area come to him for grain and have their lives sustained. Everyone is blessed by his good administrative policies.

Every household that he is in prospers and is full of abundance. And you might turn over to Hebrews chapter 11 to see this mentioned in the roster of faith heroes. Hebrews chapter 11 verse 21.

You are familiar with this chapter. We know all of the different ones that are mentioned. After mentioning Abraham and Isaac verse 20.

Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. This is what we are talking about. All of these men are looking forward.

All of these men are waiting for that city whose founder and builder is God. 21 of Hebrews 11. By faith Jacob when he was dying blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshipped leaning on the top of his staff.

By faith Joseph when he was dying made mention of the departure of the children of Israel and gave instructions concerning his bones. It's faith. And faith is undergirded by what motivation? What is the motivation for our lives as believers? It's hope.

It's treating the fulfillment of God's promises in the future as reality. As something that conditions what we do today. So, we see the faith of Jacob, the faith of Joseph in the instructions concerning their bones.

On the one hand you have Jacob buried in the land as a reminder that this is the ultimate destination of Israel. You have Joseph sitting above ground outside the land as a reminder that that land is the ultimate destination of the nation of Israel, the people of God. And those two men by faith leave a heritage behind for their descendants and illustrate and give an example of the Word of God and the promise.

And it's something that all they have to do, no matter how much drudgery and slavery they experience, every time they trudge their weary way home after making bricks all day, they see the sarcophagus, the Ark of Joseph sitting there awaiting the day when they will return to the land. The question is, is that going to be a hope that will sustain them? Is that going to be a hope that will undergird faith and obedience? Or is it going to be, ah, where is the promise of His coming? All things go on as they have from the beginning. My grandfather was a slave.

My father was a slave. I'm a slave. I see my sons growing up to be slaves.

The promise of God is never going to have fulfillment. What is the fruit of a life that lacks faith, that doesn't treat the promises of God as reality, that has no spiritual hope? It's a waste of time. Generations came and went in Israel that produced no eternal fruit, because even with this concrete demonstration of faith and the reality of the promise of God, the fact that Joseph is sitting there as an embalmed body in a sarcophagus reminds them that there was a time when God fulfilled these promises in a huge way, in an almost unbelievable way.

Here is a Hebrew in one of the most ornate sarcophagi ever created, the pinnacle of the nation of Egypt, and here they are at the very opposite end of the spectrum. We know that Joseph is a picture, a prototype if you will, of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we sometimes, although we remember that Jesus Christ is our example, it doesn't always serve as a reality for us. We find ourselves at the opposite end of the spectrum.

He who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despised the shame, he's seated at the right hand of God, he's a picture of faith and obedience, and we think we're so far removed from that, and it doesn't fuel our faith, it doesn't light a fire in our soul to pursue. But it's easy to look at the Israelites and say, why didn't they think back? Why didn't they remember that there was a set limit of time when they would be in slavery? That there was a short period when they would endure these sufferings, and then they would be delivered with a mighty hand. Why couldn't they treat the promise of God as reality with this concrete example before them? Well, we're in the very same boat, aren't we? We have an author and finisher of our faith who is before our eyes, looking unto Jesus, he says, the author and finisher of our faith.

We have the very same opportunity to be inspired, to have our faith undergirded by hope that God will fulfill all of his promises in our lives. So as the book draws to a close with the death of Joseph, with his embalming process being put in the ark in Egypt, we're left with one shoe on the floor and the other shoe still in the air. What's going to take place? And of course, what a great way to spark interest in the sequel.

And Moses was evidently an author that was sensitive to that technique, so he leaves him a little bit of a cliffhanger there. Here's Joseph without the fulfillment of that oath of promise that was made. What's going to happen next? But in looking at the book of Genesis as we stop now at the end, standing next to the sarcophagus of Joseph and survey everything that we've seen since Genesis 1-1, what are we left with? We remember at the very beginning that we looked at this book in the introductory phases of our study and realized that this came into a culture and came into a time and came into the hands of people who were living in a culture just like we do.

They were in the ancient Near East. Mesopotamian traditions permeated the land and permeated their thinking. And what did that tradition consist of? Well, there were pantheons of gods.

There were many gods. Gods that were localized to different cultures and different city states and different areas of the region. And they were all vying for attention.

The loyalty was based on where you were born and what gods your fathers served and so forth. There were explanations for how things had come into being. We have some surviving traditions that I mentioned back at that time.

The tradition of Atrahasis, which was circa 2000 B.C. This had a story of creation. There were various divine judgments that took place after this creation. It culminated in a flood that destroyed all except Atrahasis and his family who escaped in a boat.

And Atrahasis, after the flood was over and the boat landed, offered a sacrifice. And this parallels in many ways the bare bones, skeletal facts of the Noah account. And you had the Sumerian flood story where you also have a story of creation of man and animals.

And man winds up in a sad plight. There's no irrigation canals. There's no clothes.

No fear of wild animals. A distant memory of actual conditions before the fall and so on. In the Sumerian tradition, Nintur, the Mother Goddess, sees man wandering around in this nomadic life.

It's ideal in some ways but kind of sad in other ways. And so she develops a plan to deliver him out of this nomadic existence and kind of raise him up out of the gutter and make him more godlike. But the plan fails.

kings are established and cities are built and worship is instituted. And there's a list of kings that existed before the flood. Of course, we have this in the early pages of Genesis.

Lists of people that lived before the flood and so on. You have the Gilgamesh epic. A lot of people have heard of that.

Gilgamesh is not the hero of the story. The hero is actually Utnapushtim. He's the Noah of that story.

But there's an account of creation there where the gods are too busy to serve themselves and so they create a lower order of being to serve them. But then they become too numerous and too noisy and they're irritating. So the gods decide that they'll wipe them out and they'll do it with a flood.

But the flood gets out of control. The gods are afraid of the flood that they've created. They cower in fear like dogs.

But one of the gods kind of likes Utnapushtim. His name is Enlil or Enki. And he tips off Utnapushtim and so he gets in a boat and manages to save himself by his foresight and his wisdom.

And this tip, this lucky tip that he got. And he also offers a sacrifice after they get out. But when you think about this there was a prevailing worldview, a prevailing mindset.

There were explanations that people had for who we are and why we're here. And why things happen the way they do. And in the minds of people at large it was these capricious gods, of whom there were many, who were not all-knowing, who were not all-powerful.

They can create a flood and lose control of it. They were petty. They battled one another.

It's the very same pattern that you see in later mythology. I've been reading some of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey to the girls at night. And it's kind of disturbing because here you have Agamemnon and his son going off to war and a goddess will appear and put on the form of an old man and give him advice and then disappear.

And the gods favor certain individuals for some inexplicable reason and then they'll go and fight a battle but then they're cursed because they forgot to offer a sacrifice afterward and this petty god got all jealous and said, you're never going to return home until you go back and offer sacrifice. And so they do that and then they're able to go home. The gods appear and disappear in a very inscrutable and capricious way.

And this is what determines the individual's path through life. And this was kind of the worldview. It's just unknowable and unpredictable what may happen and when the gods are going to be displeased or pleased.

It has nothing to do with a moral view, with a spiritual view, with faith or obedience. None of those are in view. And this is the culture.

Everybody believes this. This is how the world is understood by anybody that you talk to. Any passing caravan.

You sit down over the fire and ask them, well, what do you think about the larger questions of life? Looking up at the stars and oh, the gods and here's my experience with this god and that god. And into this milieu comes the book of Genesis where in contrast to this random scattering of whimsical gods, there is one god who is all-knowing, who is all-powerful, who organizes human events according to a plan, who has a predictable set of standards and behaviors that he expects of mankind. And when you observe those through faith and obedience, you are blessed.

And when you disregard and transgress them, the divine justice follows. There is a rationale. There is an intelligence and a power that must be reckoned with.

It organizes and makes sense of this randomness that everyone has been living in. And so when you think about the contrast, instead of many gods who are capricious, petty, with limited power, limited knowledge, partial to certain humans for no apparent reason, come and go. When you need them, they're not there.

When you don't need them, they're there interfering. In Genesis, you have one god who is all-powerful, all-knowing. He is not fearful.

He is not greedy. He is not ignorant or jealous. He intervenes in human history, not because man is noisy and irritating, but because man is depraved and needs deliverance from sin, needs deliverance from himself.

In the Mesopotamian traditions, man needs deliverance from these capricious gods. In Genesis, man needs deliverance from himself and his own sinfulness and depravity. The salvation of Noah in the flood story is a function of the justice of God.

Noah is upright. Noah trusts. There's nothing about Noah in some of the parallel flood stories.

There's long chapters about how they built the boat and how they got the animals and how they preached to the people. You even see Christianity today trying to add these details into the Noah story. The Bible does not.

All it says is, Noah obeyed. Noah believed God. Noah obeyed.

It says nothing about his inner thoughts or his tribulations in trying to preach to the people or how hard was it to get all of that gopher wood. The emphasis in the Mesopotamian stories, the Sumerian stories, the Babylonian stories, is all on the merit of the hero. He delivers himself by his efforts, by his ability to surf the tide or the waves of these gods and their whims.

In the Genesis story, it is the grace of God. It is the justice of God. It is getting on the right side of God's righteousness and justice through faith and through obedience that puts one in the position of salvation.

And it is very interesting because we have these same things going on today. We think, well, that was then. This is now.

But do we not today... What were the gods in the ancient world? They were an explanation of the forces that determined what happens in circumstances. What do we have today? We have science that tells us why people get sick, why certain things happen, why there is a hole in the ozone and the climate is changing and the polar ice caps are melting. We have the forces of nature and the things that science identifies.

We have cultural things. People try to explain why are so many high school kids shooting one another with guns and things. People are doing the very same thing.

They just do not name them as divinities. But people try to determine what the trends are going to be in the stock market or in the business world or in the world of employment. How can I keep myself in the center of the desirability in the job market? How can I prosper myself? How can I multiply my money? How can I stay healthy and not get a disease or get sick? We have a pantheon of gods whose whims determine our fate.

Just like the ancient Mesopotamians. They just go by different names. They go by chemicals and they go by scientific descriptions.

But people try to manipulate and try to surf the wave of these forces in order to get ahead and to prosper. It's the very same thing. What is the message that we need today? Our lives are not determined by what we eat or what we breathe or what the market does or what the political parties do or what all of these other ozone and everything else does.

Our lives and our future are determined by an all-knowing, sovereign, gracious, and compassionate God. And it is Him with whom we have to do. That is what determines our

fate.

Not the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. But we live in a Mesopotamian world with a pantheon of gods whose whims dictate. That's the human view.

It's very interesting also because there are other parallels to our modern society, to ancient Mesopotamian culture into which Genesis was inserted by God. For example, after the flood, the gods in the flood stories and all of these accounts instituted birth control. They said, you know, we don't want man to get too numerous anymore.

So they decreed that certain women would be infertile. That certain children would die in infancy. That certain women would have to be celibate and become non-producing members of society so that they would never again become so numerous.

And this was going to fix the problem that engendered the flood in the first place. And what do we have today? We have people trying to render women infertile and trying to kill children at an early age in the name of population control, in the name of not inconveniencing someone who had bad judgment and engaged in a relationship and now, oh well, this could inconvenience me. This could mess up my life.

It's justified today by the fact what is the major argument in favor of abortion today? Most people who engage in illicit relationships and end up pregnant are poor. And if they have a child, it's going to put them into the welfare system and cost everybody a lot of money. And by giving them the ability to have an abortion, we won't have such a big load for welfare.

That's the primary. They always talk about the woman's right to choose and all that, but they can't really get very far with that. So they say, well, it's the load on society.

If you have all these children be born and you can't adopt them all, they're going to be a big load on the economy. And it's the same thing. What does the Bible say about birth control? Be fruitful and multiply, God says.

Because if you follow God's dictates, if you live a life of faith and obedience, there is always provision. You don't have to say, well, I can't have a child because this will inconvenience me. This will complicate my circumstances.

This will be an economic hardship. Since when do we kill people because they are an economic hardship? Well, every day in this country.