

which is to bring liturgy in by the back door and to make the distinction between ethical and liturgical issues vanish entirely. Was Samuel a kingmaker who demanded absolute loyalty? Was the opposition to kingship he expressed based on the predictable erosion of his power? Why withhold pardon for Saul? Was he to be given no time to learn his new role? Was his sin so heinous that repentance didn't matter? Samuel -- or Yahweh, one or the other, is being less than generous or forgiving. Or was it simply that Samuel saw David as a better bet for the nation, so of course he protected David from Saul with prophetic frequency which overcame Saul himself? Clearly Samuel controlled that band of prophets.

What was God's larger purpose? If God was able to foresee the course of Saul's career, why support his kingship in the first place --except as an expedient? Did Saul ever really have a chance? Was the career of Saul a way of showing the people how bad kings can be, or was it a way of training David not to repeat Saul's mistakes? Perhaps we should doubt our assumption that God foresees the future? It seems that Samuel made the same assumption, when he said that Yahweh is not like mortal man that he should change his mind! Yet over and over again in the sacred text we have reports of God's mercy? Indeed, if God demanded absolute justice, who could stand?

### **The Major Role of Minor Characters Doeg, Abner and Joab**

They have in common a fierce loyalty to their king, and a willingness to do whatever the king can't or won't handle personally, but they are hardly devoid of self-interest. Did Abner engineer the Michal deal with David rather than the other way around? Her return

to David promoted his interest quite as much as David's, for wouldn't his position with David be more secure with her continuing presence? Bible characters are quite capable of lying when it suits their purposes. Maybe they could deceive those writers who report their self-serving publicity as actual fact?

Why was Joab's fast running brother so determined to catch Abner, and so ill-prepared when he caught up with him? Did Joab see Abner as competition for commander-in-chief of the army? Did Abner tell David all Israel was behind him because he wanted to be commander-in-chief? Joab's swift and treacherous assassination of Abner risked undermining the carefully worked out and peaceful transfer of power that Abner and David had agreed upon, and paved the way for the assassin's of Ishbaal, Saul's son, who was powerless without the presence of Abner. Joab was David's nephew. Was it really true that King David had no control over those 'hot heads?' Certainly a warrior as capable as David did not fear for his own safety at Joab's hands? So was David merely pretending he had no control of Joab? Did Joab foster the kind of interest David had, but wouldn't dare say out loud? If not, why did David put up with two major instances of insubordination, which in our time would be court-martial offenses? What did those two men have on each other? How could David get Joab to carry out his orders concerning Uriah? Did this give Joab such a hold over David that he dared to kill David's son Absalom against the king's specific orders?

It may be that Joab and Doeg had more in common with each other than either had with Abner. We could readily stage a Joab and Doeg dialogue, perhaps over wine, where they could brag to one

another about their exploits. The group could speculate how the course of the history of Israel might have been altered if any one or combination of the three hadn't been on the scene when they were.

#### Part IV

##### *Personalities from Genesis*

These are excerpts from a 1995 summer course in Bibliodrama presented at University United Methodist Church of Redlands, California, consisting mostly of study material circulated in advance of each of the ten sessions. Though some of what follows was written almost three years ago, I have kept editing to a minimum, inasmuch as Part IV has been addressed to a specific audience, where all the students come from a Christian point-of-view. The frequent references to the New Testament and the life of Jesus are pertinent to their needs, and differ in this respect from the bulk of this book, where I have maintained an interfaith stance. Not that actual reference to particular views has been totally lacking, but I have identified such as my own individual perspective, or that of Doctor Moreno's regarding the Jesus of history. This specific group was also open to an innovative educational method pioneered at Johnston College, once part of the university. This featured a foundation in laboratory training and encounter group methods.

One essential disclaimer for Part IV: Our group here at university church was more open to self-presentation than is common outside the psychodrama world. This was quite as important as fidelity to the text. Therefore you may expect to find encouragement to move beyond simply representing a Bible character to sharing personal parallels. In actual practice this came out during sharing, but when

it emerged during an action review of the text, we welcomed it and worked psychodramatically to foster personal growth, not in full detail, but enough to achieve sufficient closure to return to the text centered approach. Today, when working in sectarian settings, I help participants distance themselves more, for self-disclosure has not been within their expectations and I function as a Bibliodrama facilitator. Within the psychodrama world and with highly cohesive groups such as the one here at university church, I function more as Bibliodrama director. Therefore, if some of what follows seems to contradict Parts I, II, and III, please see Part IV as my adaptation of Bibliodrama to a particular setting, and illustrative of Bibliodramas done by psychodramatists early on without a consciousness of doing anything very different, as indicated in my historical review above. When I first came into the field over 35 years ago our annual conferences frequently presented offerings of *axiodrama*, where Bibliodrama was welcomed, especially when presented in a sociodramatic vein.

We begin with the opening brochure, distributed to interested persons at University Church. This constituted their warm up prior to the first session. We called it *Close Encounters of a Biblical Kind*, to take advantage of the publicity associated with a popular movie then being screened locally.

#### **Close Encounters of a Biblical Kind**

features group-centered participant learning through action, rather than passive observation. Drawing upon methods tested at Redlands High's **School Within a School** and at **Johnston College**, we shall provide options from which those who come may select from narrative Biblical literature persons

and/or situations to be explored in breadth and depth. In this way we invite you to take major responsibility for your own learning. The function of the leader is to guide in dramatizing those themes and issues which become the focus of the group. Think of this more as playing than as performing in a play, for dramatic excellence is not required. Acting talent has as often hindered as helped. Whereas actors pretend to be someone they're not, we want to help you come forth as who you are. The initiative is yours; you retain veto power over matters which would lead to more self-disclosure than you are ready for. In other words, you are under no pressure to say any more than you want to, but we do expect you to be willing to get out of your chair and move about as directed.

Do not expect to have your nose in a book -- not even the Bible itself. We will build entirely upon your memory, which of course may be enhanced through your imaginative application to present situations and issues. The leader's task is to tie together the individual concerns which have surfaced. The group will contribute more and the leader less as we progress.

If, on any given evening, you happen to come unprepared, you will still have an opportunity to warm-up to the task before us. We shall extract the basic story from others who have come, seek out those themes which resonate with our collective experience, and examine them in action, in order to involve feelings. This is more than watching TV or a movie, but falls short of doing psychodrama.

We hope those who come for the first meeting will attend regularly to live out the choices they make, which choices remain negotiable as we move along. The leader has chosen the Garden of Eden story from

the opening chapters of Genesis for our first meeting, but the topics for all subsequent meetings will be the choice of the group which plans to come on any particular occasion. If the leader had made all the subject matter choices in advance, individuals would pick and choose among them, much as one changes TV channels; but here members of the group choose together one evening at a time.

Here are some persons whose lives we might explore: Moses, David, Jacob, Joseph, Ruth, Esther, Abraham, Jonah, Job and Peter. And here are some of the situations we may concentrate upon: Moses' relationship with Jethro and his family, David's relationship with his wives, his father-in-law, and his sons; Joseph and his brothers; the controversy between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark; the controversy between Peter and Paul at Jerusalem over Gentiles in the church; the relationships among Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael; Esther's relationships with her husband the king, Mordecai and Haaman. We cannot cover them all. The choices are yours.

### *Chapter Thirteen*

#### *Adam: Every Man, Every Woman*

(a paper distributed a week before the session)

Given that we cannot cover everything important in a single evening, what can be done? What is worth emphasizing? What will leave participants with more than they brought with them? This is to suggest some questions, and some ways of approaching answers:

1. If we grant that not everyone experiences God in exactly the same way, may we allow that the writer of Genesis 2-3 presents God in a way that is both like and unlike God as we've come to know him? *Who*



*among us is already clear on the similarity to and difference from the Genesis presentation of God and your own experience of God?* We choose from among volunteers one who is willing to portray God as presented in Genesis 2-3. If this is not God as we've come to know him, we should feel free to question, and for the persons playing the role to respond as best they can. Out of a series of interviews of the God of Genesis 2-3 members of the group come to understand just what their experience has been.

2. We understand that every story has been addressed to an audience, and the first hearers may differ significantly from the first readers, and these can differ from later readers and hearers. Certainly we know this has been true of operas and plays, first a flop but later applauded. We may raise the very same question here with regard to humankind that we have raised with regard to God. *Do you see yourself in Adam and/or Eve? Are you more like the one or the other? Or are you sometimes like one and sometimes like the other? When, where and how? As you read Genesis 2-3, how old do you imagine Adam and Eve? Are they children? youth? fully grown? elderly?* Every human being we've ever known has an age and a gender identity. Have Adam or Eve represented the you who used to be? In psychodrama we'd explore this in action, beginning with you as you once were. Then have you choose someone to represent the old you in order that you may address the old you from the standpoint of the newer you. But here it is enough that you just tell us during the sharing, if you'd rather..

3. Knowing what you know now, do you see any parallel with your own experience of temptation? Take the role of Adam, who was apparently present when Eve picked and ate the forbidden fruit. *What do*

*you say to her? Would you have encouraged this behavior or treated it as if it were not your business? Would you have done the same thing as Adam, out of solidarity with her? What would have happened to your relationship if you hadn't? Let Eve reverse roles with Adam to see whether she'd handle these questions differently if she had been Adam. What does she expect of Adam?*

By the way, does Adam see or hear the serpent? The story doesn't say. May we believe that her temptation was an internal experience like ours? What about the experience of Jesus with Satan in the wilderness? **If in every respect tempted like us**, does this mean that an unseen observer would have seen or heard nothing? Which scenario would provide the more compelling temptation?

4. Compare your experiences of yielding to temptation with examples of successfully resisting temptation. Are there things you shouldn't have known? Do you still think so? What do you tell your kids? Have guilt and shame meant exactly the same to you? If you may have one without the other, explain. What are some good ways to cope with these? Think about it.

#### GARDENING IN EDEN.

(a paper distributed at the beginning of the meeting)

1) Genesis 1:26-31. ON THE SIXTH DAY GOD (Elohim) CREATED HUMANKIND IN THE IMAGE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST .

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion....over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created

them. God blessed them, and God said to them. 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth'... God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed, and you shall have them for food.... and everything that has the breath of life (beasts, birds, and creeping things), I have given every green plant for food. And God saw everything he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Group Action: Persons present take the role of the heavenly host round the throne: angels, seraphim, cherubim. See Isaiah 6, 1Kings 22, Job 1. As artist with easel, God portrays an image of the divine image modeled before him, simultaneously producing male and female. Next God created plants for both animals and humankind. God saw everything so made **very good**.

II) Genesis 2:4b-9; 15-17. IN THE DAY THE LORD GOD (Yahweh-Elohim) MADE EARTH AND HEAVENS GOD CREATED MAN, AND TOLD HIM WHAT HE MAY OR MAY NOT DO--TO PROTECT HIM IN HIS INNOCENCE.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet upon the earth....there was no one to till the ground, but a stream would arise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground--then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being....The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man. *You may eat freely of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for the day you eat...., you shall die.*

Group Action: As potter with clay or sculptor with stone, God molds man. Correlative scene: mother or father assign chores and tells naive off-spring of the dangers out there. The child does the chores, but supposes the dangers are for others.

III) Genesis 2:18-20. GOD SOUGHT AN EQUAL PARTNER FOR THE MAN FROM AMONG HIS CREATURES. THE MAN NAMES ALL THE CREATURES GOD HAS MADE, BUT NO SUCH HELPER IS TO BE FOUND THERE.

Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make...a helper as his partner. So out of the ground God formed every animal...and every bird, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them....but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

2. Group Action: Persons present represent themselves as various birds and animals. God sought for a partner from among them, but not one qualified as a candidate for equal partnership with man. Correlative scenes: vain searches for the right relationship both in the business and social life.

IV) Genesis 2:21-25. GOD CREATES THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A MUTALLY SATISFYING RELATIONSHIP THROUGH DISCLOSURE OF HUMAN DEPTH.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man...; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib...he made into a woman and brought her to the man....

Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Group Action: Persons present represent surgical team, as the Lord God performs the first operation. Exit team. Then as a artist God creates Eve and presents her to Adam, who gratefully welcomes her and clings to her.

Correlative scenes:

1. doctor delivers baby and everyone hearing about it is delighted.

2. woman consents to marriage proposal. Peers pleased too.

3: youth leaves nest to form own home. Mixed feelings of all.

4: newly weds getting used to being together, as in sit-coms.

5: Plato's **Symposium**, where search for the lost part of self.

**V) Genesis 3:1-5. HUMAN VULNERABILITY TO DECEPTION, DESPITE THE EFFORT GOD HAS MADE TO PROTECT OUR INNOCENCE.**

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. (editorial note: to know good and evil is how ancients spoke of coming to experience everything).

Group Action: Reproduce the dialogue between Eve and the serpent with Adam looking on. Should they believe God or the serpent? Correlative scene: from the group bring out first remembered brushes with temptation, or those adults have found themselves unable to resist. Also how temptation is successfully resisted, and the implication this has for relationships. Consider the likelihood that our action or inaction may involve others.

**VI) Genesis 3:6,7. HOW IMAGINATION TRIUMPHS OVER WILL.**

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eye, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took one of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made loinclothes for themselves.

3. Group Action: Eve looks at the tree and in soliloquy marshalls all the arguments for doing what she wants to do: a. the food is edible, b. it looks great! c. how much better to know than to continue in ignorance. d. we can risk it together. Whoops, there are some things we haven't let ourselves think about. Sink or swim, we must join in the cover-up!

Correlative scenes both ironic and sad:

1. dieter's dilemma.

2. addict's feeling of helplessness, the morning after.

3. how we enable others to continue in their addictions through denying our stake in the human situation.

4. how our disobedient initiatives lead others astray.

**VII) Genesis 3:8-19. CONFRONTATION AND CONSEQUENCES.**

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden. But the Lord called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman



whom you gave to be with me. she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate. Then the Lord said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." The Lord God said to the serpent: enmity between you and the woman...to the woman: pain in childbirth and consuming desire for man to the man: you have work without respite, and shall die.

Group Action: Take the three roles and reproduce the dialogue, slowly enough that the flimsy excuses show through, together with the attempt to push the blame away from oneself onto others. The guilt of others doesn't take me off the hook. I take responsibility for what I do, and they do too. Our common guilt separates us rather than brings us together.

Correlative scenes:

1. reactions to having been caught with a hand in the cookie jar -- or, if we've seen it close at hand and are free to speak of it, caught red-handed, as with a smoking gun. What has it meant to be caught in a lie?

2. painful episodes of having been shamed as a child.

Editorial aside: Guilt and shame are not the same, though they are presented together in this story. Shame is more primitive and more devastating. I want the ground to swallow me up, for I cannot bear being seen. Whereas guilt means I have willfully disregarded my own high standards, and must face the fact that I may not be who I thought I was. Nevertheless, guilt is easier to deal with than shame. Whereas shame is global, leading me to conclude I am totally bad, guilt reflects that one who knows what is right has done something specific which I am wrong. Therefore I may face the wrong squarely,

taking responsibility, and throw myself on the mercy of the offended party. Where mercy is a possibility, relationships may be restored and guilt erased. The Lord offers forgiveness for the repentent. So, to some extent, does society.

VIII) Genesis 3:20-24. JUSTICE TEMPERED WITH MERCY. FOR GOD HAD NOT ABANDONED MAN. GOD DEALS WITH TIME'S IRREVERSIBILITY.

And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them. Then the Lord God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now he might reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and live forever--- therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims and a flashing sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Group Action: The man tells the woman all the words which seem to describe her, and vice versa. Which is most descriptive? Adam and Eve pairs discuss choices.

The Lord God shows how and why his tailoring for them works better than that which they made for themselves. Wearing the garments God has made means they need not be ashamed. A scene in the presence of the heavenly host: Adam and Eve retain the maturity gained, but it has a limit, this lifetime. What have you done that can never be undone? How did you lose your innocence? What advice would today's you give to yesterday's you? Let's see how you deal with your children. Let's have you return to Eden, and let time flow on; satisfied?

Dialogue with God. Did God know that sooner or later man would yield to temptation? Was the serpent

doing God's will? Why did God change his mind about man--if God did? Does God need to keep man in his place? Does **hubris** threaten God? Show how **hubris** affects interpersonal relationships.

(Editor:Hubris=prideful, longing for unrestricted autonomy, and acting as if one had attained it by virtue of one's own excellence, vain and narcissistic; whereas **pride**=satisfaction in competent achievement, no self-esteem implication beyond specific deeds)

Additional scene possibilities:

1. Jesus discussing his experience of temptation with Adam and Eve. Were Jesus' 3 temptations the same or different? What can Adam and Eve learn from Jesus?

Correlative scene:

Show how you've seen others deal with the serpent, and/or how you've done so. With what result?

EXEGETICAL COMMENTS ON PART OF GENESIS 1, 2 AND 3 (Distributed about a week after the previous session)

Let us review the process of story development itself. Many Sunday AM worship services include a **time for children**. Or maybe you've taken the role of story teller with your own children. Where do we get our material? Does it come from God? Let's hope that at least some of it does. How may God do this? We hear, we read, we remember and we invent, don't we! We take into account who we're talking to, and who may be listening, such as **older children and interested adults of the church**. Who else? God listens. Do we not believe that God influences both

the way we speak and also how others listen? Not totally, of course. Read the **acknowledgements** of several books. Authors typically credit the good stuff to distinguished mentors and the the blame to themselves.

It is amazing how much may be called forth from individuals, information which they don't know they know. For example, Socrates (in Plato's dialogue **Meno**) showed a slave boy who had never studied mathematics already knew the Pythagorean theorem. Of course the boy was innocent of technical terminology but a series of questions from Socrates demonstrated how the boy grasped the basic concept. We may imagine Jesus making the point: if the great teacher could call forth so much from so little, **how much more** has each group member available than we expect to see. Little wonder that well functioning groups show more maturity than any member alone.

What do we already know about telling stories? Think back to your experience as a child. Did you run into the same story more than once? Take the first time: did you **hear** it, **read** it, or (in this technological age) **see** it? Maybe you **did** it, for the story may have originated with you. My mother told me that during worship service I ran to the front of the church and hid behind the organ, and my father had to go up there in front of everybody to bring me back to where I belonged. Truthfully, I don't remember ever having done such a thing, but I believed her, and I could easily imagine how it happened, for I've seen the same sort of thing happen to others. When in relaxed social conversation, or when speaking to children, I've retold the story **as if** I did remember the flight to the organ loft, for I visualize it clearly. Of course here I



have bared my soul in freely admitting I don't actually remember the incident, so I haven't **lied** to you, but when I've told the story elsewhere without telling the whole truth, was I lying? One might say I was if I allowed others to get the impression I did in fact remember. But do my hearers care if I did or didn't? Not in the slightest. You don't even care if the incident happened at all. I like to think you liked hearing it anyway.

People everywhere readily **suspend disbelief** in order to enjoy a good story. Probably you've seen the movies **Ghosts** and **Ghostbusters**. The premises of these stories are unrealistic, yet you were ready to suspend disbelief, and having done so you found much that was real and familiar in them. Who would accuse the authors, the producers, and the cast of lying? We are accustomed to finding more fact in fiction than truth in history.

History must be re-written in every generation. Fiction skips generations without appreciable loss. Sometimes we use the word **history** to mean what has actually happened, but its stricter sense is **public events as observed and confirmed by contemporary witnesses**. Obviously, there is considerable room for alternate versions of the same incident.

For example, our four gospels all speak of the sign above the cross, but no two gospels agree precisely on the specific wording. This troubles us not at all, for if all gospel writer said exactly the same thing, we'd only need one, not four. But I'm not giving away a big secret when I tell you that a generation ago that sort of thing worried a lot of Christians, because they were burdened with a theory about how the Bible **ought to have been written** (but obviously was not).

Moreover, the gospels never pretended to be history in the technical sense, nor even biography. Rather they expressed through eyes of faith what God had done through Jesus of Nazareth. The first, we assume Mark, was written after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD and was addressed to Jewish-Christians, whereas the last, John, was addressed to gentiles. To discover this, one reads, knowing the social, political and religious situation of the time, and thereby understands more what is written in the books themselves. We may approach Genesis in the same way.

Not that we have to, for the stories as they have come down to us have been so worked over that we may take them at face value, as children do, and thereby share in the human experiences of which they speak so eloquently. But it's an enormous meal for a single sitting. Little children don't like to let their vegetables mix in with each other, so even TV trays for adults have separate compartments. Therefore, the scenes in which we may engage will be reduced to bite-size proportions.

A whole course could be devoted to creation, but we're going to treat it simply as **prologue**. Modern translations, such as the New Revised Standard Version call attention to what some Bible scholars throughout history have always known, that we have two stories of creation. The second one begins in the middle of the fourth verse of the second chapter. One may make an effort to compress them into a single story, but I can't think of a good reason to try. Let's acknowledge some of the differences, and then we can focus on what they have in common. Differences have a lot to teach us. They provide clues to the **when** and **where** of sources.

The oldest stories surely were told and retold from one generation to another prior to anyone's writing them

down. In the process of varied presentations we'd expect them to develop at last a standard form, limiting further alteration.

Over the past 25 years I've told and retold stories about the origin of group therapy and psychodrama, which I first heard from doctor J.L. Moreno himself and from those about him. When Moreno's widow Zerka retold those same stories to an audience I was part of Washington DC two years ago, I was startled to discover they were not exactly the same stories I'd been telling!

If she was right, then I was wrong? Not quite. For one thing, part of what I told originally came from her. Was it right as she originally told me, or as she told the Washington audience 22 years later? Do I remember correctly what she said the first time around, or did she remember accurately what she said then? Wait a minute. She was not herself present when the events took place. She learned of them from her late husband, who also talked to me. May we assume he told us both exactly the same thing? We may not. Moreno has said he was born on a boat in the Bosphorus, but no one believes him. We know he was born in Rumania. There was a point he made through the fictional account of his birth which we don't need to go into here. So who knows the literal truth of what happened **in the day when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens?** Only God knows! Do literal facts matter to God? Apparently not as much as they do for us, for He works through the Holy Spirit's use of stories which may or may not be factual.

In **I Kings 22: 13-24** we read (in part):

**Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, with the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him. And the Lord said, 'Who will**

**entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?' Then one said one thing, and another said another until a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will entice him.' 'How?' the Lord asked him. He replied, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then the Lord said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it.' So you see, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets; the Lord has decreed disaster for you.**

I do not propose to unravel all the layers of questions such a story is sure to call forth in you, beyond illustrating that the Lord can work through (a story of) an actual lie, and introducing background for your understanding the stories before us.

Nothing within the Biblical text itself would lead anyone to believe that Moses wrote the Genesis stories beyond the tradition he had. How many people were involved in giving creation stories their present form no one knows, but there had to be at least three: the source of the first creation story of Genesis 1, the source of the second creation story of Genesis 2, and the author of Genesis who included them both, without bothering to edit out all the apparent inconsistencies. The author of Genesis didn't anticipate what we'd be like. If he had, and set out to accommodate us, his stories wouldn't have lasted long enough for us to get to read them. It amazes me that the thought hasn't occurred to so many who assure us they are students of the Bible.

Every word counts in Genesis 1. It lends itself to reading aloud, and is regularly included in ritual. It is thoroughly Hebraic, probably dating from the period of the exile in Babylon, when the Sabbath assumed such great importance in maintaining the identity of a minority in danger of assimilation into an alien majority. The story is organized into days, even before, according to the story itself, there were actual earth days. Not

American days, which begin in the morning and end in the evening, but Hebrew days, which begin in the evening and end in the morning! To this very day the Jewish Sabbath begins Friday night and ends Saturday evening. Notice that God's creative work was done in six days, and on the seventh God himself rested. Talk about a precedent!

In contrast, in the alternate account of the Creation the Lord made the earth and the heavens **in a day**. Whereas in Genesis 1:2 we heard that **a wind from God swept over the face of the waters**, in Genesis 2:5 we read **no plant of the field had yet sprung up--for the Lord had not caused it to rain upon the earth...but a stream would arise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground -- then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being**. In this story rivers are identified, including the Tigris and Euphrates, the site of modern Iraq and ancient Babylon. God makes a **garden of Eden** and places the man in it. In the first story it seems as if the man and his wife were created at the same time, but in the second story the Lord is looking around for a helper and a partner (apparently an equal!) for Adam, coming forth with birds and beasts, whom Adam has the task of naming, **and only after that** creates Eve from Adam's rib. Genesis 2 cites this as explaining the common observation that **a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh**. He under- scores their innocence: **And the man and his wife were both naked, and they were not ashamed**.

To return to Genesis 1: 26-31 we read (in part):

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion

over...every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...

Note the **let us**, the **our image**, the **our likeness**. Were not the Hebrews monotheists? The Hebrew word is **Elohim**, which is always plural, no doubt about it! In contrast, typical of another Genesis source is **YHVH** as God's name. We supply vowels (which come from the Hebrew word for **Lord**) for those consonants, and thereby we may speak God's name as **Yahweh**. The author of Genesis combines the two into **Yahweh-Elohim**, an awkward joining of singular and plural nouns we translate as **Lord God**. We find it nowhere else in Genesis..We hear the phrase **Lord of Hosts**, but fail to ask who the **hosts** are.

#### *Chapter Fourteen*

#### *Abraham: I'm on My Way*

**HOW DO WE DECIDE WHICH SCENES OF ABRAHAM'S STORY TO ENACT?** Did you see **Fiddler on the Roof?** Genesis 24 provides another romantic and humorous matchmaking as the faithful **Eliezer** seeks a bride for Isaac. Despite the difference in culture, we may easily identify with all the players. We visualize four scenes: Vs 1- 9: Abraham and Eliezer  
Vs 11-27: Eliezer and Rebekah at the well  
Vs 32-60: Eliezer with Rebekah's brother and father  
Vs 62-67: Isaac sees the camels coming and rushes out to meet Rebekah

We may readily elaborate on these: how pleased Abraham and Sarah are with Rebekah, and the wedding which follows. After a suitable interval, Rebekah knows she is pregnant and tells Isaac. Abraham and Sarah join



in the rejoicing, and share with Rebekah the long and difficult experience they had on the way to bringing her Isaac. This allows us to develop flashbacks, enacting God's promise of a son, and the visit of the three strangers at the door of the tent.

Couples with fertility problems can appreciate Abram and Sarai. Loss is a recurrent theme in the Abraham story.

1. The fatherless Lot chose to accompany his uncle Abram on the journey without a definite destination. Then came a parting of the ways, Lot's emancipation leading into danger. When he is kidnapped, Abram heads a rescue party. When he dwells in Sodom, Abram prays for the doomed city. The citizens of Sodom treat Lot as alien, and threaten his guests. He is unable to convince his daughters' suitors that they must flee for their lives. On the way, he loses his wife.

2. At Sarai's request Abram seeks to father a child through her slave Hagar, but when Hagar becomes pregnant, Sarai treats her harshly and sends her away. After Hagar returns and gives birth to Ishmael, Sarah cannot accept the prospect of Ishmael as heir. Abraham sends them out into the desert, and Hagar fears for her son's life, but the Lord opens her eyes to the well that has been there all along.

3. At last Sarah herself dies, and Abraham must obtain a burial place. He is wealthy, but he has never owned any land here (even though God promised it to his descendants) and now he must buy a place. He negotiates in public, oriental style, which has a light touch of humor to mitigate the gravity of the occasion.

Abraham's relationship with God is the dominant theme of the story. He receives a call and a promise, and embarks on a journey to wherever God may send him.

He digs wells and builds altars, and entertains angels unawares. He encounters God in dreams and in prayer, faces temptation and stumbles before the power figures of the land. He faces the supreme test in the near sacrifice of Isaac. Israel has read this story as an anticipation of her history, but what do we make of it? Was God testing Abraham here? If so, did Abraham pass or fail? James says that God doesn't tempt man, but Jesus taught us to pray, **Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.** Risk yourself in Abraham's place, or Isaac's, or the servants, or Sarah's, or God's?

### **SOCIODRAMATIC OPTIONS FROM THE ABRAHAM STORY**

**Chapter 12: LEAVING THE NEST** is not the exclusive experience of youth in the process of emancipation. In my mature years (1985) leaving Redlands for Philadelphia, and leaving Philadelphia for Redlands (1994) involved leaving part of the family behind, even though, in some instances they followed a little later. I can identify with Abram, who was 75 at the time! Also with half the family gone, leaving, returning, staying behind, what next? The economic implications: going without money, and returning lacking the prospect of earning enough for our needs. The place of faith: **We go anyway.** When we go in faith, look! Accent on the unfolding future rather than the past, **where you will be a blessing to others under God's protection!** Abram, all families of earth. Takes his faith with him--at least the outward form, **an altar.**

**The incident in Egypt:** the famine in the land to which he'd come led him there. **Risk of going to a strange place with a woman** where they would be vulnerable to exploitation. **THE SISTER PLOY.**

Where beauty is a handicap (even though Sarai was 65). Pharaoh takes her to his house, but sends her away, and kicks Abram out of the country, though he gave him livestock along with a tongue lashing. Verse 20. Abram fared much better than he'd expected.

**13. THE RISK OF LETTING-GO.** This is the same conflict as the above, but this time with a youth, not quite so favored: He'd already lost his father and chose to go with his uncle Abram. So Lot, though a nephew, was like a son to Abram. And for Lot, Abram was like a father to him. **At a time when there are so many broken families, we try to fill in the gaps.** I know what it is to lose 2 parents at 12 and live with an uncle; and I have a grandson, age 11 who lost his father two years ago (our son). He has a struggle.

Note that Abram, Sarai and Lot had returned to Bethel, but **can one really go home again?** Note Abram's generosity.

This was Lot's opportunity to respond in kind, but he looked out for himself first, choosing what looked like a much easier life. **Abram gave Lot what he wanted, but God gave Abram everything.** Lot moved toward Sodom (the bright lights of the big city) while Abram accepted what was left, **built an altar, thanking God.**

No matter how much you'd like to, you can't make decisions for your kids. They have to learn in their own way in their own time.

**14. ABRAM TO THE RESCUE, A MILITARY ENCOUNTER.** Abram didn't seem to be a warrior, but the life of his wayward foster son was at stake. No matter that he'd gotten himself into this mess. Abram didn't hesitate to risk everything to get him out of it.

Acted swiftly, decisively, and successfully. **How many persons have acted heroically without ever having anticipated they were capable of such a thing! A rising to the occasion.** And God did afford him protection. Vs 16: "brought back all the goods, and the women, and the people?" Are not the women included among the people? What is the comparison between his culture and ours on the role of women?

**The Melchizdek incident.** This is important for the New Testament. See Hebrews 11. **The conquering hero gets decorated!** or blessed--which is far better. **How to handle the aftermath of war.** How many wars are lost in the peace which followed! Vs 20: Gives a tenth of his possessions! Vs 24: Wants nothing for himself but willing that those who fought alongside him get a share of the spoils of the war. Melchizdek a priest-king, but not a Hebrew!

**15. GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM:** Concern that legalities of the time and place would mean that a slave born in his house would be his heir. Where are the descendants God promised him? How often we put our heads in sand and tell neither God nor man our wishes.

Vs 5: **He brought him outside, to see the stars!** Vs 6: **Abram believed God, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.**

Vs 7: In response to **How am I to know?** The strange ritual.

**God encounters Abram in his deep sleep.** The nation shall have 400 years of slavery, but afterwards great possessions. **You Abram, shall peacefully join your ancestors.** Smoking pot and flaming torch passing between the halves. **From the Nile to Euphrates yours!**

**16. BIRTH OF ISHMAEL, SARAI'S HEARTLESS CHANGE OF HEART.** Hagar's abandonment by Abram for Sarai's sake, but they were not abandoned by God! **THE ANGEL OF THE LORD TELLS HER TO RETURN**, and she is received. See Psalm 139:1-12. Note that Hagar had almost given up, but after reassurance, she saw the well which had been there all along! Abram was 86 when Ishmael was born. Lot was grown and I feel sure Ishmael had a place in his heart. What a conflict he faced, but it all worked out with divine intervention.

**17. SIGN OF THE COVENANT, when Abram is 99.** Vs 5: **Your name shall be Abraham.** Vs 7: **An everlasting covenant, a multitude of nations.** Vs 8: **All the land of Canaan for a perpetual holding.**

Vs 10. Every male to be circumcised, even slaves, and children of foreigners bought. Vs 15. **Sarai is to be called Sarah.** Reaffirmation of the promise of a son. Vs 17 **Abraham fell on his face and laughed.** Vs 20. God blesses Ishmael and makes him fruitful.

**18. PROMISE OF A SON TO ABRAHAM AND SARAH.** Oaks of Mamre.

**Three men appear and Abraham offers hospitality.** Affirmation that they will indeed have a son. **Overhearing, Sarah laughs within herself.** Vs 13: **Shall I have pleasure when it has ceased to be after the manner of women?** Vs 14: **Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?**

She denied she'd laughed, but they knew better. Said they'd return.

**Abraham's intercessory prayer for Sodom.** The men (2 angels and the Lord himself) had come to investigate the outcry of Sodom. Their wickedness manifest in their exploitation of others to maintain their **pride, plenty and**

**careless ease.** Is there a message for us here? God always sides with the outcast and enslaved? Why was Abraham concerned? Did he like them that much? But of course, his nephew Lot was there, because he'd let him make his choice. Should he have done that? When the negotiating with God gets down from 50 to 10, they leave off. Vs 23: **Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?** or KJV "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? **Though Abraham doesn't ask specifically in Lot's behalf, what he doesn't ask for he nevertheless gets!**

**19. THE DEPRAVITY OF SODOM.** Now we have **two angels.** Was the third God who was back there communicating with Abraham? **Lot was sitting in the gateway and eagerly offered hospitality, just like his uncle had.** Vs 4: All the men of Sodom, both young and old, wanted to use the guests sexually, surround the house. Vs 8: Lot dares go outside to plead with them, **even offers them his daughters.** Their intended grooms must have been in the crowd. The angels intervene, pull Lot back in, and smite the Sodomites with blindness. They tell Lot they will destroy the place.

Lot tries to save the would-be sons-in-law, but they think he is jesting. The angels take him forcibly when he hesitates. Lot asks for concession and gets it. They'll spare little Zoar, but Lot loses his wife in the process, because she looks back. Jesus mentions this: **Remember Lot's wife. Urgency!** Vs 29. God spared Lot for Abraham's sake.

The shameful origins of Moab and Ammon. Lot and daughters have left Zoar, retreated to a cave. They thought everyone was dead, and rather than be left childless, they got their father drunk and committed incest. Didn't the same thing happen to Noah? All behavior has consequences, especially when they