

THIS

he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" Esau said (Gen. 27:36).

Struggle defined Jacob and Esau's relationship. It began in the womb (25:21–26), continued when Esau sold his birthright to Jacob (vv. 29–34), and culminated when Jacob stole Esau's blessing (27:1–28:5). Though they were twins, the men were as different as night and day, and they became the fathers of very different nations.

In the womb they struggled so much their mother, Rebekah, asked, "If all is well, why am I like this?" (25:22). Perplexed, Rebekah prayed to God for an answer.

The Lord told her, "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger" (v. 23).

To their credit, Isaac and Rebekah did what faith requires during difficult times: They sought the Lord—Rebekah during her difficult pregnancy and her husband on her behalf when she was barren (v. 21). In faith, they did as the psalmist had: "In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears" (Ps. 18:6).

The Lord heard their cries, and Rebekah gave birth to Jacob and Esau:

So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them (Gen. 25:24–26).

Esau means "hairy one." An ancient Jewish commentary exaggerates Esau's appearance, claiming he was born with hair on his head, a beard, and even hair between his teeth.



TROUBLED TWINS

**FROM BIRTH TO BLESSING,
TROUBLE DEFINED THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
JACOB AND ESAU.**

BY PETER COLÓN

Scripture, however, says Esau came out “red.” *Red* is a Hebrew wordplay for the name Edom, and *hairy* is a Hebrew wordplay for the word *Seir*.

Together, the words refer to the reddish-brown mountainous region stretching between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. Esau settled in Seir; and his descendants, the Edomites, later occupied that area (Dt. 2:4, 22). The book of Obadiah prophesies the nation of Edom’s doom.

The name Jacob comes from a Hebrew root word meaning “to supplant,” similar to a Hebrew word meaning “heel.” By grasping Esau’s heel at birth, Jacob tried to supersede the position of firstborn and thus acquired the nickname “heel-holder.” In this conflict, Esau won because he emerged first. However, God calls Jacob’s descendants the “apple of His eye” (Zech. 2:8) and promises them land, seed, and blessing via the Abrahamic Covenant.

TROUBLE OVER THE BIRTHRIGHT

As the boys grew, Esau became a skillful hunter, “a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob” (Gen. 25:27–28).

Jacob and Esau were complete opposites. Isaac favored Esau because of his hunting skills; and Rebekah favored Jacob, who was the more passive and spiritual of the two. Some people even try to depict him as a “mama’s boy.”

One day, exhausted and starving, Esau returned from the field to find Jacob cooking red stew (lentils). Esau literally demanded, “Let me gulp it down!” Jacob took advantage of his brother’s hunger by demanding Esau sell his birthright for the food (vv. 29–33).

A birthright made one the chief of the tribe and head of the family (27:29). In this family, the birthright determined who would inherit the Abrahamic Covenant. Jacob should not have exploited Esau’s weakness, particularly because he must have known that God had already decreed, “the older shall serve the younger” (25:23).

However, the sale of the birthright was legitimate. Esau freely chose to sell it, showing he “despised” it (v. 34). Scripture makes it clear that Esau sold his birthright because he was immoral and irreligious (Heb. 12:16).

TROUBLE OVER THE BLESSING

When Isaac was old and growing blind, he asked his favorite son, Esau, to hunt wild game and prepare a meal for him. Isaac told Esau he would then give him the blessing due the firstborn (Gen. 27:1–4). Many years later under the Mosaic Law, a father was obliged to acknowledge his firstborn son as his principal heir and grant him a double portion of the estate (Dt. 21:15–17).

Though they were twins, the men were as different as night and day, and they became the fathers of very different nations.

Rebekah overheard Isaac’s conversation with Esau and devised a plot to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob instead. When Esau returned, Isaac realized he had been deceived and trembled uncontrollably. Esau mourned, raged, and swore to kill his brother after their father’s death. So Jacob fled for his life and became an exile in a hostile world.

Many were at fault for this turn of events: Isaac failed to obey God, Rebekah resorted to trickery, Esau was profane, and Jacob distrusted God to work on his behalf. Sin has consequences: Jacob would later be deceived by his father-in-law as he had deceived his father (see Genesis 29–31). Galatians 6:7 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

After nearly 20 years apart, Jacob returned home and had to face his brother. The night before the meeting, he anxiously stood alone by the Jabbok River. An angelic man met him there, and Jacob wrestled with him until daybreak (Gen. 32:22–31). The man put Jacob’s hip out of joint and renamed him Israel.

The name Israel in this context literally means “Prince w God.” The “man” was the preincarnate Messiah Jesus, who referred to in the Old Testament as “the Angel of the LORD” (cf. Ex. 3:1–6). Jacob named the place Peniel, which means “Face of God.” “For I have seen God face to face,” he said, “and my life is preserved” (Gen. 32:30). Jacob had received his father Isaac’s blessing through deceit, but he obtained God the Father’s blessing rightfully (v. 29).

Jacob learned the hard way to trust and depend on God. Some have said that when the Lord touched Jacob’s hip, he became a broken man and a new man at the same moment. Over the course of his life, he developed a strong, worshipful faith in God. Hebrews 11:21 says, “By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.”

The limp Jacob received from wrestling with the Lord probably caused him to lean on a staff to walk for the rest of his life—a great reminder for him (and for us) to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3:5–6).



Peter Colón

is the creative resource coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.

A look at Jacob's time with Laban and God's boundless grace

BY CHRIS KATULKA

FAMILY

FEUD

God uses all types of circumstances to shape people. Sometimes they are favorable; other times they involve trouble, heartache, and grief. In the case of the patriarch Jacob, the Lord used 20 difficult years in Padan Aram, when Jacob worked for Laban, to mold Jacob's character and draw him closer to God.

Jacob was 77 when he left Beersheba and went to his mother's family in Padan Aram. Yet his journey with God had just begun. For the next two decades, Jacob lived in Laban's world. Previously, others served him. Now he served Laban. He learned to navigate life on his own, apart from his mother's favoritism, and he matured into a man of God as he appropriated

the blessings of the rich and unconditional covenant God made with his grandfather Abraham; reiterated to his father, Isaac; and then reiterated to Jacob himself.

MEETING HIS MATCH

When Jacob first arrived in Padan Aram, he immediately fell in love with Laban's younger daughter, Rachel. Jacob offered to serve

istockphoto

Laban seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage, and the years "seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her" (Gen. 29:20).

However, on the evening of the wedding, Laban stealthily switched Rachel for Leah, Rachel's older sister. When Jacob awoke the next morning and saw he had married Leah, he ran out to Laban: "What is this you have done to me?" he asked. "Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?" (v. 25). All of a sudden, Jacob's world came crashing down.

Laban's deception came straight from Jacob's playbook. Seven years earlier, Jacob had deceived his father by pretending to be his brother, Esau, in order to extract the blessing his father had wanted to give to his other son. Jacob essentially condemned his own deception against Esau when he asked Laban, "Why then have you deceived me?" God used Laban to show Jacob how deceptive and dishonest he was. Jacob may have seen himself in his father-in-law's duplicitous actions, and the revelation may have sparked the steady spiritual change he desperately needed.

Jacob married Rachel the next week, but not before he promised to serve Laban another seven years.

CONFLICT IN JACOB'S FAMILY

It seems that conflict for Jacob was never far away. And after marrying sisters, it was even closer. Leah, who felt unloved, was blessed by God and gave Jacob his first four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Rachel, unable to conceive for 13 years, was jealous of her sister and demanded of Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!" (30:1). Jacob demonstrated his faith when he angrily replied, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (v. 2).

The sisters' competition for children escalated quickly when Rachel gave her servant Bilhah to Jacob. Bilhah had two boys with him: Dan and Naphtali. Leah then sent her servant Zilpah to Jacob. Zilpah gave birth to Gad and Asher. Leah herself would bear two more sons and a daughter: Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah. Meanwhile, Rachel remained childless.

The conflict pitted the sisters against each other, and family members began alienating themselves from the Lord, which is evident by the impersonal way they used God's name. Yet God remained gracious. Eventually, He blessed Rachel, and she gave birth to a son she named Joseph, using the personal name of God when she said, "The LORD shall add to me another son" (v. 24).

JACOB RETURNS TO THE LAND

Joseph's birth became a transitional moment in the life of Jacob in exile. He clung to the promise God made to him in Bethel, that He would bring him back to the land of his father. So Jacob turned to Laban, requesting to leave his father-in-law's house in order to start his own household.

Laban stopped short of outright refusing to let Jacob go

and admitted that Jacob's time serving him greatly increased Laban's wealth. Laban knew if Jacob left, his wealth was sure to follow him.

Jacob fashioned a plan that appeared to benefit Laban but ultimately favored Jacob. Jacob promised to work for Laban, he could have all the multi-colored lambs and goats, which were an abnormal breed in a sea of single-colored animals. To Laban, this seemed like a win-win situation because Jacob was willing to remain in Padan Aram and work for practically nothing.

Over time, however, the Lord blessed Jacob and multiplied his flocks while Laban's flocks continued to diminish. Seeing their wealth disappear, Laban and his sons grew hostile toward Jacob, confirming it was time for Jacob to pack up his large family and return to the Promised Land (31:1-21).

DIVINE CONSEQUENCES AND GOD'S GRACE

The two decades Jacob spent in exile serving Laban left a lasting impression on Jacob's life. The deceiver was humbled by deception that came from within his own family, and he had to deal with the consequences of his sins. The fact that he was the inheritor of God's promise didn't make him immune to the divine repercussions of his wrongdoing. Jacob did not stand above or apart from God's judgment. His experience with Laban changed his life; and through all of his trials, he knew that God was leading and guiding him.

Jacob's 20 years with Laban reveal that God's grace has no parameters. Nothing can sequester God's lovingkindness and mercy, not even our own sins. Though Jacob's family was in complete disarray, God still used him to push forward His plan of redemption.

God moves even in chaos. His plan does not stop because we are imperfect or because our family situation is dysfunctional. God's plan marches right along, which is an element of His matchless grace.

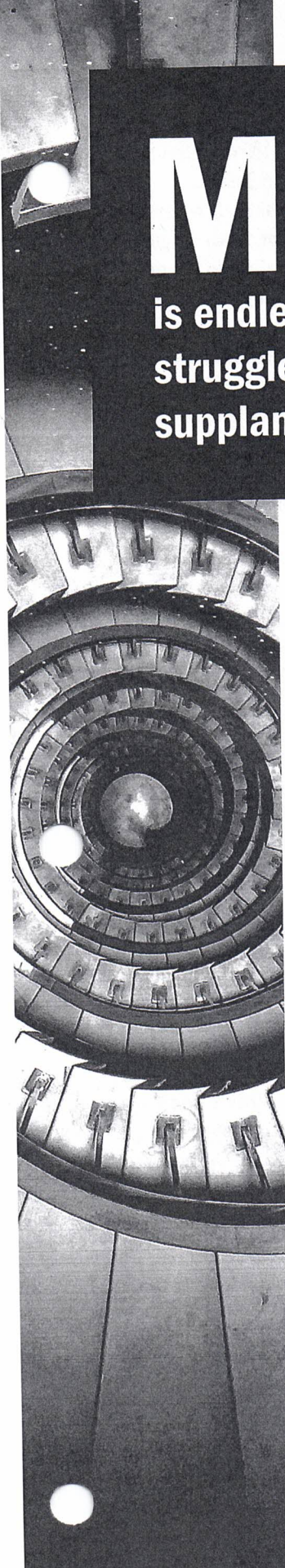
Even Leah, who was unloved by Jacob, eventually stopped trying to please him and found her worth in the Lord. When she gave birth to her fourth son, she named him Judah, meaning, "Now I will praise the LORD" (29:35). This same Judah would become the father of the tribe from which the Ruler of Israel would come, Jesus the Messiah. God took the hurt and pain of Leah's relationship with Jacob and turned it into something beautiful.

Jacob went to Padan Aram with a divine promise. He left 20 years later as a husband, father, and prosperous man ready to appropriate the promise with which God had blessed him.



Chris Katulka

is a Bible teacher and the host of "The Friends of Israel Today" radio program.



Many people struggle through life. Every day brings them something new to worry about. Some have illnesses. Others have grief. The list of troubles that shape a person is endless. The patriarch Jacob knew all about trouble, yet his struggles became God's instruments to transform him from a supplanter to a servant.

After working in Padan Aram for his father-in-law, Laban, for 20 years, Jacob knew it was time to go home: "Then the LORD said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you'" (Gen. 31:3). Returning to Canaan would not be easy because of the circumstances under which he had left. Jacob had stolen the blessing of the firstborn from his brother, Esau; and Esau wanted to kill him. Earlier, Esau had willingly given Jacob the birthright of the firstborn in exchange for a meal, showing how little he valued it. The brothers never communicated the entire time Jacob was gone, and Jacob was terrified of Esau.

Meanwhile, Laban and his sons also were angry with Jacob, believing he had become rich at their expense. As Jacob's flocks increased, Laban's decreased until God had shifted all of Laban's wealth to Jacob. As Jacob prepared to take his two wives (Leah and Rachel), their children, and a multitude of livestock back to the Promised Land, he struggled tremendously. He knew he had cheated Esau and would have to face him. He couldn't remain with Laban, yet he was afraid of

his brother. He couldn't go backward, and he was afraid to go forward. He had nowhere to go but to God.

Twenty years earlier, as he fled Canaan, he had a divine encounter with God. He had a dream, "and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God

were ascending and descending on it" (28:12). As if that weren't enough, "the LORD stood above it [the ladder]" (v. 13). There God bestowed on Jacob the everlasting Abrahamic Covenant—the promise He had made to Abraham and Isaac:

I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed (vv. 13–14).

He also assured Jacob, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you" (v. 15). Jacob "called the name of that place Bethel" (v. 19), meaning "house of God."

Jacob "called the name of that place Bethel" (Gen. 28:19), meaning "house of God."

Now, 20 years later, Jacob was returning with a large family and great wealth—a testimony to God’s faithfulness. He was on the road when he heard Esau was coming with 400 men (32:6). So he lifted his heart to God in earnest supplication.

O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, “Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you”: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, “I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude” (vv. 9–12).

That night Jacob sent his entire family over the ford of Jabbok and remained alone. Then a “Man” wrestled with him until dawn (v. 24). “When He [the Man] saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint” (v. 25). Yet Jacob continued to wrestle. Jacob’s determination was so great he told the Man, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” (v. 26). This is not the action of a weakling but, rather, of a man who recognized his hope lay only with the Lord: “And in his strength he [Jacob] struggled with God. Yes, he [Jacob] struggled with the Angel and prevailed” (Hos. 12:3–4).

“What is your name?” the Man asked (Gen. 32:27). When the patriarch replied, “Jacob,” it was an admission of how his life had been before this defining moment. It had been one of trickery, deceit, and living by his wits. His name meant “heel catcher,” “trickster,” or “supplanter.”¹ It seems that this desperate struggle with the Lord was changing Jacob and altering the direction of his life.

The supplanter was becoming Israel, which means “he fights or persists with God”² or “prince with God.” As the King James Version states, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (v. 28).

Ultimately, Israel understood with whom he had been wrestling because he named the place Peniel: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (v. 30). The Man was the Angel of the Lord—a preincarnate appearance of Jesus.

As Jacob had changed, so had Esau. When Jacob

crossed the Jabbok River, he met his brother, who also had become wealthy and harbored no resentment against him. God not only had protected His servant from his enemy, but He enabled both brothers to dwell in their lands in peace.

Later, God sent Jacob back to Bethel, where He had first appeared to him more than 20 years earlier and had conferred the Abrahamic Covenant on him (35:1). When Jacob arrived, God appeared to him again. He reconfirmed his name was Israel and reconfirmed His covenant: “I am God Almighty.

Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you. . . . The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land” (vv. 11–12). From here the promise would go to the entire house of Israel, and it resides with them to this day.

It seems that this desperate struggle with the Lord was changing Jacob and altering the direction of his life.

Five times in Scripture God refers to Israel as “Jacob my servant.” The final reference is in Ezekiel. It speaks of the days after the terrible “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), when God will regather the remnant that is left and bring them home: “Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever” (Ezek. 37:25).

Neither time nor trouble diminishes God’s faithfulness. He uses them both to shape lives and nations and, ultimately, to bring glory to Himself.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Dr. Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible NKJV* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1985), 46 n Gen. 25:26.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 60 n Gen. 32:25–28.



Tom Simcox
is the Church Ministries training coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.



GOODBYE

BY DAVID M. LEVY

People often approach their so-called golden years with an unrealistic view of the future. They envision themselves healthy and enjoying carefree living and financial security. Often, however, the opposite is true. And they are unprepared for the changes and limitations they soon will face.

Jacob's life was somewhat different. He faced trouble earlier but experienced many blessings with his family in the latter years of his life.

JACOB'S PLIGHT

Jacob's early life was filled with scandal, intrigue, danger, suspense, family division, difficulty, and heartache—including the supposed death of his favorite son, Joseph, at the tender age of 17. But at 130 years old, Jacob was reunited with Joseph, who had become the most powerful man in Egypt next to Pharaoh.

So at Joseph's request and with God's blessing, Jacob gathered all his possessions and family of 70 people and made the final pilgrimage of his life, leaving Canaan to live in Egypt. He took a great step of faith, trusting in God's promise to forge his family into a great nation there (Gen. 46:2–4).

Joseph arranged a historic meeting with Pharaoh, five of

his brothers, and his father. When Pharaoh questioned Jacob about his age and life, the patriarch replied, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life" (47:9). Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and left his presence (v. 10).

Although Jacob and his sons were shepherds (a profession the Egyptians despised), Pharaoh nevertheless gave them the fertile delta region of Goshen. It was excellent land for grazing flocks and growing crops (46:28–34; 47:11), and Jacob (renamed Israel by God, 32:28) and his family went from being strangers in a foreign country to residents in the fertile region of Egypt for 430 years (Ex. 12:40). In Goshen, God blessed Israel abundantly and forged his family into a nation of 2.5 million to 3 million people. Jacob was blessed in Egypt for the next 17 years until his death.

JACOB'S PROPHECY

Eventually, Jacob's health began to fail. He became ill, bedridden, and almost blind. Knowing he was dying, Jacob wanted to review his life with his sons and leave them with words of warning and blessing. His final remarks on his deathbed are of great importance, which is why they are recorded in such detail.

Joseph brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to their grandfather's bedside. When Jacob heard of Joseph's arrival, he mustered the strength to sit on the edge of his bed. Immediately, he began to talk about his pilgrimage in Canaan and the blessing he received, and then he wasted no time blessing Joseph's sons.

But he did more than bless them. He adopted them, elevating them to equal status with their uncles. Joseph "brought them from beside his knees" (Gen. 48:12) and placed his elder son, Manasseh, on Jacob's right side and his younger son, Ephraim, on Jacob's left—making it easy for Jacob to lay his hands of blessing on them. But the Lord guided Jacob to cross his hands and lay his right hand on Ephraim, giving the younger son preeminence over the elder. Joseph tried to remove his father's right hand from Ephraim, but Jacob refused to budge, revealing this was the Lord's will (vv. 17–20).

Jacob then gathered his other sons to his bedside for a final word to each. What he said was more a prophetic utterance about their lives and destinies than a blessing and is of great significance concerning Israel's history.

REUBEN (GEN. 49:3–4)

The firstborn son was entitled to the rights of pri-

mogeniture, meaning he stood to inherit more than the other sons. But this was not to be Reuben's lot because of his gross sin. He had slept with Bilhah, his father's concubine (35:22). He was unstable as water and would not excel. Reuben settled east of the Jordan River (modern-day Jordan) and would decline over time, producing no judges, prophets, or rulers.

SIMEON AND LEVI (GEN. 49:5–7)

Jacob cursed them for killing Shechem, who had raped their sister, Dinah, as well as for slaughtering all the men of that city and confiscating its wealth and families (chap. 34). The two brothers would be scattered throughout Israel. Simeon was absorbed into the tribe of Judah, and Levi was scattered throughout 48 cities in Israel, destined never to own any land but later to become priests (Ex. 32:26–29).

JUDAH (GEN. 49:8–12)

Judah was highly esteemed in Jacob's eyes. It was Judah who saved Joseph's life when his brothers tried to kill him (37:26–27). Judah also offered himself as security to Jacob for taking Jacob's youngest son, Benjamin, to Egypt as Joseph had requested before anyone realized who Joseph was (43:8–9). It was Judah whom Jacob sent ahead to prepare for his travel to Egypt (46:28). Judah would emerge as leader of the tribes, from which the royal line of Israel's kings would come. Jacob compared Judah to a lion that is courageous, mighty in conquering its prey, and king of beasts (49:8–9). But above all, Judah is the tribe from which the Messiah would come: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah . . . until Shiloh comes" (v. 10). The word *Shiloh* means "whose it is" or "whose right it is." Both ancient rabbinical and Gentile scholars agreed this is a Messianic prophecy. Thus the ruling staff and scepter (right to rule in Judah) will not depart from Judah until He (Messiah) comes whose right it is to rule; and then He will receive the scepter forever. The idea is that there will be no need for any successor to rule in Judah once the Messiah comes, and the royal power to rule remains forever invested in Him. This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus and will be fully realized after His Second Coming during the Millennium. The prophecies of verses 11–12 look forward to the Messiah's Millennial rule when Israel will experience peace, prosperity, and plenty on Earth.

ZEBULUN (GEN. 49:13)

Zebulun received land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee in the north. The tribe did well

Commercially because of its location on trade routes in the Jezreel Valley.

ISSACHAR (GEN. 49:14–15)

A retiring spirit characterized Issachar. He was not aggressive, like some of Israel's other sons. The people of Issachar were described as a "strong donkey" (v. 14), meaning they were hardworking and content with their station in life, though they lacked notable achievements. The tribe was susceptible to surrounding invaders and subservient to them. It was said of the men of Issachar that they "had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chr. 12:32).

DAN (GEN. 49:16–18)

This tribe is compared to a serpent for craftiness and deception. It was constantly at war with its neighbors. It is pictured as a deceitful, treacherous, subtle, unwary enemy that strikes without notice. Dan conquered Laish (also called Leshem) and acquired more land than originally allotted (Josh. 19:40–48). Dan was the first tribe to bring idolatry into Israel (Jud. 18:30–31), and King Jeroboam introduced calf worship through Dan (1 Ki. 12:2–30). After uttering this prophecy, Jacob suddenly blurted out, "I have waited for your salvation, O LORD!" (Gen. 49:18). The word *wait* means to look eagerly with expectation, steadfast endurance, and faith. Jacob had a confident hope that God would bring about salvation for both him and his son.

GAD (GEN. 49:19)

Gad, like Reuben, chose land east of the Jordan River. The tribe continually faced war with Gentiles and eventually triumphed over them. Elijah the prophet was from Gad.

ASHER (GEN. 49:20)

Asher was told he "shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties." His inheritance was fertile land in the Carmel valley along the Mediterranean coastland. The tribe thrived agriculturally and grew wealthy. Moses called Asher "most blessed" and "favored" and said he would "dip his foot in oil" (Dt. 33:24). Its produce was a favorite of kings.

NAPHTALI (GEN. 49:21)

Naphtali is described as "a deer let loose; he uses beautiful words." The verse describes Naphtali as loving freedom, living without restraints, and not wanting to be governed by regulations. The men of Naphtali

moved quickly and gracefully like deer in the hill country where they resided, and they spoke eloquently.

JOSEPH (GEN. 49:22–26)

Jacob waxed eloquent in his blessing of Joseph as a godly man. He called Joseph a "fruitful bough," speaking of his work in Egypt and of Joseph's two sons, who would become major tribes in Israel. Joseph's foes were like "archers," shooting verbal arrows to destroy him. But Joseph's "bow remained in strength," speaking of his favor with and faith in God through all his trials. Jacob's final words to Joseph overflowed with blessing. In fact, the word *blessing* appears six times; but not once did Jacob use the word *bless* in connection with his other sons.

BENJAMIN (GEN. 49:27)

Benjamin is compared to a "ravenous wolf" devouring his prey. Men such as Saul, Abner, Sheba, and Shimei from the tribe were fierce in battle.

JACOB'S PASSING

After prophesying over his sons, Jacob gave instructions to them concerning his funeral. He made them promise to carry his body back to Canaan and bury him in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were buried. Then he lay back in bed, took his last breath, and passed into the presence of the Lord—a beautiful picture of dying grace (vv. 29–33). He was 147 years old (47:28).

Joseph "fell on his father's face and wept over him, and kissed him" (50:1). He had his own private physicians embalm Israel, which took 40 days. The Egyptians wept over Israel's passing for 70 days. Then Israel was given a royal funeral made up of Pharaoh's servants and elders, along with the households of Joseph and his brothers. The mourners traveled to Machpelah, where they lamented seven days at the threshing floor of Atad, then returned to Egypt (vv. 2–14).

Jacob had a difficult life, but he finished well. His pilgrimage could be characterized by plight, preservation, providence, promises, and personal direction by God. His history will live in perpetuity. And though he was far from perfect, he was a paradigm of faith.



David M. Levy

is the director of Worldwide Ministry Development and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.

T

There is no other biblical personality that has been made more the butt of harsh and unfair criticism than that of the patriarch Jacob, one of the ancestors of the Jewish race. He is depicted as the cunning supplanter and schemer who takes advantage of his guileless and trusting brother, Esau, and robs him twice of his birthright and parental blessing.

Jacob is also accused of having acquired sheep and cattle by dubious means in his dealing with Laban, his father-in-law. Having painted him as a black character, his accusers thereupon proceed to point out that the Jews should have all the deplorable characteristics and moral ineptitudes of their ancestor. For centuries Jacob has been a strong weapon in the hands of the anti-Semites against the Jews.

It is true that Jacob, perhaps more than anybody else, personified his descendants the Jewish people. Yet after a close scrutiny of his biblical record, we reach the conclusion that the Jewish people have cause to look back with a sense of pride rather than shame upon their patriarchal prototype.

It is to the eternal glory of the Bible and a strong proof of its reliability and trustworthiness that the characters described in that Book are true to life. No attempt is made to gloss over their failures or sins or to make them appear as saints without blame and blemish. The ancient pagan classics always made of their heroes supermen and half-gods.

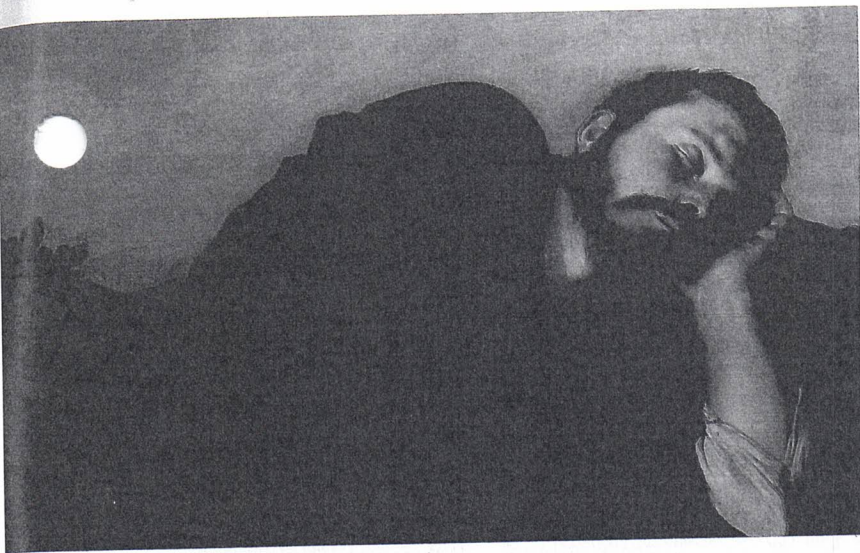
Jacob's character, full of human frailties and failings, is real and near to us. The Word of God does not portray him as a plaster saint, but as a very human kind of being, sinful and

wayward. The story of Jacob is the story of the power of God working upon the human heart, which seeks to break the shackles of self and sin and longs to dwell in the nearness of God. The greatness of Jacob is in his pathetic struggle against the earthly bonds and his striving to attain the things of God. In Jacob we see a sinner with the makings of a saint and of a great man of God.

TWO BROTHERS—TWO WORLDS

Compared with his twin brother, Esau, the character of Jacob stands out in bold relief. The two are as different as are the flesh and the spirit, as differs the mind of this world from the mind of God. Born from one womb, the brothers belong to two different and essentially hostile worlds. Their incompatibility is indicated in the Word of God even before their birth:





**THE STORY OF JACOB
IS THE STORY
OF THE POWER
OF GOD WORKING
UPON THE HUMAN HEART.**

And the children struggled together within her [Rebekah]; . . . And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels (Gen. 25:22–23, KJV).

And they were separated forever.

A further indication as to the difference of the two brothers we have in the following words of the Scriptures: “And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents” (v. 27, KJV).

Esau represents the natural man with earthly needs and cravings. His chief interest is in hunting and in the satisfying of his physical appetites. But concerning Jacob we read that he was “a plain man.” The Hebrew idiom for “plain” (*tam*) conveys more than the English *plain*. It points to a steady, persevering character, one who is likely to press forward through suffering or prosperity, exile or return, bereavement or consolation.

Esau the hunter, the child of nature, is impulsive and prompted by his natural instincts. Jacob the tentmaker is contemplative, spiritually minded, and hungry after the things of God.

When Esau is hungry, food is above everything. The bowl of red pottage is more highly regarded than his

birthright. Jacob, however, desires this one thing above all else, to obtain the birthright and the divine promises and blessings incidental to it, the chief one amongst them being the promise of a Redeemer (12:3). To Esau, these things are of little value and meaning: “Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright” (25:34, KJV).

This is the divine verdict concerning Esau, that he despised the gift of God and held it as of little value.

Perhaps therein lies the explanation of the seemingly arbitrary and harsh words of God: “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom. 9:13, KJV). Their Creator knew better than anybody else what was in each one of them.

Jacob may at times seem crafty and subtle and in comparison with the natural and simple-minded Esau even appear unfavorably. Yet with all this Esau was an earthbound being, where the Spirit of God finds no entrance. Only Jacob could dream of angels and God, for his deepest waking yearnings were spiritual.

Jacob is affectionate, his love for Rachel tender and constant. He is a devoted son. In his love for his children, especially for Joseph and Benjamin, there is pathos and passion, causing him, as he expressed himself, to go down “with sorrow to the grave” (Gen. 42:38). Such a character is not to be scoffed at. Its tragic complexity commands our sincere respect. Like in all profound characters, there seem to be in him irreconcilable contradictions. His twofold name, Jacob-Israel, is in itself indicative of that. Through toil and suffering, Jacob, the supplanter, is gradually transformed into “Israel—the prince with God.” With the passing of the years, the cruder features of youth become softened and purified, and his character crowned with the grace of humility expressed in that lovely passage of Jacob’s confession before God: “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant” (32:10, KJV).

When considering the relationship between Jacob and Laban, we must bear in mind the fact that it was Laban in the first place who took advantage of and exploited his son-in-law. Jacob only matched the unscrupulous cunning of Laban with a little guile of his own. Hard as the bargain was, Jacob adhered strictly to the terms of the contract. It was Laban who proved himself to be the crafty and unscrupulous employer, causing Jacob to complain bitterly: “Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times” (31:41, KJV).

Jacob’s experience with Laban seems to be prophetic of the experiences of his children the Jews. They too

often were given an unfair and raw deal. They were often forced into a position in which their only weapons against injustice and brute force were shrewdness and an ability to outwit those who would rob them, if they were to survive at all in a hostile world. Yet when treated with equity and fairness, they are as honorable and straightforward as any people in the world.

In the seemingly mercenary and self-seeking Jacob there is the dormant Israel, which means "a prince with God." The world does not see it or realize it, yet Christ did. Zacchaeus, in the eyes of his contemporaries, was just a little, mean, sordid publican; but Christ, who could look into the soul of the man, discerned in him a hunger after righteousness, in whom there was the making of a great disciple (Lk. 19:9-10).

The magic of love in conjunction with the magic of faith performed a miracle of grace. These miracles still happen today, and the tribe of the Zacchaeuses is more numerous than ever.

THE WRESTLING JACOB

The early part of Jacob's life was that of a hardheaded, successful businessman. Yet it was hardly a peaceful and happy life. From without, there was conflict and persecution. From within, a constant striving and struggling. Through the years of exile, he gained wealth and increased in numbers, but the returning Jacob meets on the threshold of his homeland his unreconciled brother, Esau, still mindful of the wrong endured. It was fear, grim and paralyzing fear for himself and his loved ones, that caused him to seek divine help in solitude and in prayer.

But at the fords of the swift brook of Jabbok, he suddenly discovered that his contention was not against flesh and blood but against a far more formidable antagonist. He wrestled with a man who later revealed Himself as God. The God who promised him for his inheritance the land to which he was now returning did not wish him to come as the old Jacob, clever and worldly successful, but contrite, conscious of his sins and regenerated: "And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. 32:28, KJV).

The God-Man who wrestled with Jacob was the same God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who wrestles forever with each one of us, seeking to smite in us that which is sinful and selfish so that from dust and darkness may rise at dawn a new man with a new name, not Jacob but Israel—a prince with God and man.

Jacob's defeat is also his victory. Smitten by God, he rose up more than a conqueror. At dusk there was a

fearful, apprehensive man by the name of Jacob, a man haunted by his past—at dawn after a memorable vigil, there arose a new man, knighted by God and given a new name—Israel. Truly we have no reason to be ashamed of the fact that the God of Abraham and Isaac is also the God of Jacob.

THE MAGIC OF LOVE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MAGIC OF FAITH PERFORMED A MIRACLE OF GRACE.

THE PROPHET JACOB

The life of Jacob is so rich in spiritual qualities and so full of wonderful experiences that it is impossible even to outline its contours in a brief article. Yet we must not leave unmentioned this grand feature in his character, namely, "The Blessed Hope" that was in him. Our Lord said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (Jn. 8:56, KJV).

These words of our Savior apply with equal force to Jacob. On his deathbed Jacob blessed Judah, of whom he knew that the Messiah would come, and said, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10, KJV).

And with his dying breath, the weary and worn servant of God whispered, "I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD" (v. 18, KJV). This was the hope which Jacob left as a heritage to his children, and even to the present day it is still in the family. This was the hope that gave wings to the words of David the king and to the prophets. This was the hope which filled the breast of the aged Simeon with heavenly joy when he held the Child Jesus in his arms and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Lk. 2:29-30, KJV).

Even though "blindness in part" has happened to the Jews today (Rom. 11:25), this is still their hope, for are they not the children of Israel?



Victor Buksbazon (1903-1974) was the first executive director of The Friends of Israel and served in that capacity and as editor-in-chief of *Israel My Glory* for 33 years. He was a Polish immigrant to the United States and a Hebrew Christian who was fluent in seven languages, including Hebrew. He held a ThD in theology.

A LITTLE MATH HELPS A LOT

BY LORNA SIMCOX

IT is often interesting to know the age of individuals at significant points in their lives. The Bible is not written in chronological order, and ferreting out that information often requires doing a little math. But the results can be fascinating. Here is an article that does the math for you. All Scripture references are from the book of Genesis, and the math is in parentheses.

ABRAHAM IS 100 WHEN ISAAC IS BORN. (21:5)

ABRAHAM DIES AT 175.

Therefore, Isaac is 75 (175-100) when Abraham dies. (25:7)

ISAAC IS 60 WHEN JACOB AND ESAU ARE BORN.

Therefore, Jacob and Esau are 15 (75-60) when their grandfather Abraham dies. They probably knew him, and he probably told them firsthand what God had done in his life and how God had made an unconditional covenant with him, promising him land, seed, and blessing. If Esau received this information directly from Abraham, his eagerness to sell his birthright for food appears all the more contemptuous and displays a lack of faith in God. (25:26)

ISAAC DIES AT 180.

Therefore, Jacob and Esau are 120 (180-60) when Isaac dies. (35:28)

JOSEPH IS 17 WHEN HIS BROTHERS SELL HIM INTO SLAVERY. (37:2)

JOSEPH IS 30 WHEN HE IS MADE RULER IN EGYPT.

Therefore, Joseph is in Egypt 13 years (30-17), gaining administrative experience by managing Potiphar's household and then overseeing the prison, before God elevates him to power as the manager of the affairs of a nation. (41:46)

9 MORE YEARS PASS BEFORE JOSEPH REVEALS HIMSELF TO HIS BROTHERS.

Therefore, Joseph is 39 (30+9) when he reveals himself. (45:1)

JACOB IS 130 WHEN HE GOES TO LIVE IN EGYPT. JOSEPH IS 39.

Therefore, Jacob is 91 (130-39) when Joseph is born. Joseph is sold into slavery at age 17, making Jacob 108 (91+17) at the time. This means Isaac is still alive at age 168 (108+60). Isaac dies 12 years later (180-168), one year before Joseph becomes governor of Egypt. Isaac may have died thinking his grandson had been eaten by a wild animal. So in selling Joseph into slavery, Joseph's brothers not only hurt and deceived their father, but they may have done so to their grandfather as well. (47:9)

JACOB SERVES LABAN 20 YEARS.

14 years for Laban's daughters and 6 years for Laban's flocks. Then he returns to the Promised Land. (31:41)

JOSEPH IS BORN AFTER JACOB SERVES LABAN 14 YEARS AND AGREES TO SERVE ANOTHER SIX

Therefore, when Jacob finally leaves Laban, he is 97 (91+6). And since he serves Laban 20 years, Jacob is 77 (97-20) when he deceives his father into believing he is Esau and flees Padan Aram. Also, Isaac is 137 (77+60) when he is deceived. Isaac thinks he is dying, but lives another 43 years (180-137). (30:25)

JOSEPH IS 6 (20-14) WHEN JACOB LEAVES LABAN

Jacob wants to leave Laban after Joseph's birth but agrees to stay six more years. Therefore, Benjamin is at least six years younger than Joseph because he is not yet born when Jacob leaves Laban. Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob's 12 sons, after Jacob leaves Padan Aram. So Benjamin is 33 (39-6) or younger when he goes to Egypt. (35:16-18)

JACOB DIES AT 147.

Therefore, Joseph is 56 (147-91) when his father dies. Since all of Joseph's older brothers are born during the 14 years Jacob served for Laban's daughters, none of his brothers are older than 70 (56+14) when Jacob dies. (47:28)

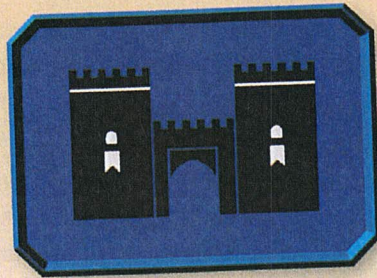


TWELVE TRIBES of Israel



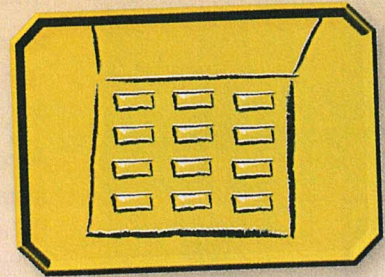
REUBEN

"See, a son!"
Water



SIMEON

"Hearing"
Gate



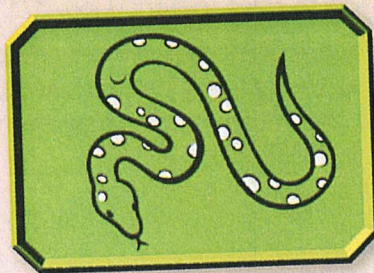
LEVI

"Attached"
Breastplate of the high priest



JUDAH

"Praise"
Lion



DAN

"Judge"
Snake



NAPHTALI

"My struggle"
Deer



GAD

"Good fortune" / "warrior"
Tents



ASHER

"Happy"
Tree



ISSACHAR

"There is a reward"
Donkey



ZEBULUN

"Dwelling"
Ship



JOSEPH

"He will increase"
Sheaf of grain



BENJAMIN

"Son of the right hand"
Wolf



REUBEN

Size: First Census: 46,500. Second Census: 43,730.

Location: The tribe settled outside the Promised Land, east of the Jordan River in rich pasture lands suitable for their large herds and flocks (Num. 32:1). Included Mt. Nebo from which Moses viewed the Promised Land.

Jacob's Blessing: Jacob called his firstborn "my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power." But Reuben had relations with Bilhah, Rachel's handmaiden (Gen. 35:22), so Jacob rebuked him saying that he is "unstable as water" and he will "no longer excel" (Gen. 49:3-4 NKJV).

Moses' Blessing: "Let Reuben live and not die, nor his people be few" (Deut. 33:6).

Notable: Reuben intervened on behalf of Joseph to save him from being killed by his brothers. Nevertheless, when Reuben returned, he discovered that his brothers had sold Joseph to slave traders (Gen. 37).

The tribe of Reuben kept their word by helping the other tribes conquer the Promised Land, though they themselves settled outside the land (Num. 32; Josh. 1:12-18). Yet at other times, they seemed indecisive and failed to assist in battle (Judg. 5:15-17).

SIMEON

Size: First Census: 59,300. Second Census: 22,200. Between the two censuses—a span of 40 years—the size of the tribe significantly decreased. Though it's not clear why, it's possible that they suffered more severely than the other tribes from the plagues recorded in the book of Numbers (See Num. 25).

Location: Enclave of land in Judah, likely with scattered settlements in Judah. Included Beersheba.

Jacob's Blessing: Along with his brother Levi, Simeon attacked the people of the city of Shechem to avenge the assault on his sister Dinah (Gen. 34:24-31). Jacob rebuked Levi and Simeon saying, "their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council ... for they have killed men in their anger... I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel" (Gen. 49:5-7).

Moses' Blessing: Moses does not mention the tribe of Simeon.

Notable: When Jacob's sons went to Egypt to buy food during a famine, Joseph imprisoned Simeon as a guarantee that Benjamin, their youngest brother, would be brought to Joseph (Gen. 42-43).

The tribe was known for being shepherds, often migrating in search of pasturelands for their flocks, possibly a fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy that Simeon will be scattered and dispersed (1 Chron. 4:24-43).

Meaning: "See, a son!"

Symbol: Water (or mandrake plant; Gen. 30:14)

Stone/Color: Turquoise (or emerald) / Greenish-blue

Family: First son of Jacob, born to Leah



Meaning: "Hearing"—God has heard

Symbol: Gate, like the gate of Shechem (or a sword)

Stone/Color: Lapis lazuli (or sapphire) / Blue

Family: Second son of Jacob, born to Leah



Meaning: "Judge"

Symbol: Snake (or scales of justice)

Stone/Color: Topaz (or beryl) / Color unknown, possibly light green

Family: Fifth son of Jacob, born to Rachel's handmaiden Bilhah



Meaning: "My struggle"

Symbol: Deer (doe)

Stone/Color: Jasper / Reddish-brown

Family: Sixth son of Jacob, born to Rachel's handmaiden Bilhah



Meaning: "Good fortune" (or "warrior")

Symbol: Tents, like a battlefield camp

Stone/Color: Emerald (or diamond) / Possibly a stone with little color

Family: Seventh son of Jacob, born to Leah's handmaiden Zilpah

DAN

Size: First Census: 62,700. Second Census: 64,400.

Location: Small portion of land that included Joppa (Tel Aviv today). The tribe, however, failed to conquer the Philistines in the land and migrated to the northernmost part of Canaan (Judg. 18).

Jacob's Blessing: "Dan will govern his people.... Dan will be a snake beside the road" (Gen. 49:17-18).

Moses' Blessing: "Dan is a lion's cub, springing out of Bashan" (Deut. 33:22).

Notable: The tribe of Dan is reprimanded in the Song of Deborah for not joining in battle (Judg. 5:17). Samson was from this tribe (Judg. 13:2, 24). King Jeroboam built a pagan temple in Dan (1 Kings 12:29). Amos includes Dan in his list of idolaters (Amos 8:14).

NAPHTALI

Size: First Census: 53,400. Second Census: 45,400.

Location: Hill country of Galilee.

Jacob's Blessing: "Naphtali is a doe let loose; He bears beautiful fawns" (or "gives beautiful words" Gen. 49:21).

Moses' Blessing: Naphtali is "full of blessing" (Deut. 33:23).

Notable: In the Song of Deborah, the tribe is praised for its courage (Judg. 5:18). Barak was from Naphtali (Judg. 4:6). The tribe assisted Gideon in battle (Judg. 7:23). They volunteered fighting men to support David against King Saul (1 Chron. 12). Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy (Matt. 4:13-22; Isa. 9:1-2).

GAD

Size: First Census: 45,650. Second Census: 40,500.

Location: Fertile land outside the Promised Land, along the Jordan River (Num. 32).

Jacob's Blessing: "Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels" (Gen. 49:19).

Moses' Blessing: Gad is commended for carrying "out the LORD's righteous will, and his judgments concerning Israel" (Deut. 33:21).

Notable: Gadites who supported David in his conquest of Jerusalem were described as "brave warriors, ready for battle and able to handle the shield and spear" (1 Chron. 12:8).

**Meaning:** "Attached"

Leah believed that having given birth to another son, Jacob would become attached to her.

Symbol: Breastplate of the high priest

Stone/Color: Not represented on the breastplate / Often associated with the tabernacle colors: gold, purple, blue, and red.

Family: Third son of Jacob, born to Leah

**Meaning:** "Praise"

Symbol: Lion

Stone/Color: Carnelian (or ruby) / Red

Family: Fourth son of Jacob, born to Leah

The genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew shows how Jesus was a descendant of Judah through the royal lineage of King David (Matt 1; Ps. 89:3-4; Isa 9:6; Heb. 7:14; Rev. 5:5). Christ was born in Bethlehem as Micah prophesied (Mic. 5:2).

LEVI

Size: First Census: Not counted with the other tribes because they were caretakers of the tabernacle, not fighting men. They were counted separately and numbered 22,000. Second Census: 23,000.

Location: Joshua gave them 48 towns throughout the Promised Land in which to live and serve as ministers of the law among the tribes.

Jacob's Blessing: Along with his brother Simeon, Levi attacked the people of the city of Shechem to avenge the assault on his sister Dinah (Gen. 34:24-31). Jacob rebuked them for the attack (Gen. 49:5-7).

Moses' Blessing: "Bless all his skills, Lord, and be pleased with the work of his hands" (Deut. 33:11).

Notable: The priests were chosen from the tribe of Levi. Levites who were not chosen to be priests, however, still participated in caretaking of the tabernacle (Num. 3:5-10). Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest wore the breastplate with the precious stones and entered the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle. He sprinkled a sacrificed animal's blood on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant to atone for the people's sins (Lev. 16). The Levites sided with the Southern Kingdom of Judah and migrated to Jerusalem after the Northern Kingdom engaged in idol worship and rejected the Levites as priests (2 Chron. 11:13-17). When the Jews returned to the land after exile, Ezra had to send a special delegation to persuade some of the Levites to return (Ezra 8:15-36). Moses, Aaron (the first high priest), Miriam, Ezra, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, and Barnabas were from the tribe of Levi.

JUDAH

Size: First Census: 74,600. Second Census: 76,500. Largest of the tribes.

Location: Very large allotment of land. Included Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Gaza.

Jacob's Blessing: "You are a lion's cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his" (Gen. 49:9-10).

Moses' Blessing: "Hear, LORD, the cry of Judah; bring him to his people. With his own hands he defends his cause. Oh, be his help against his foes!" (Deut. 33:7).

Notable: Judah convinced his brothers to spare Joseph's life and sell him to slave traders for a profit instead of kill him (Gen. 37). Later, Judah unknowingly had relations with his daughter-in-law Tamar. When it was revealed, he confessed his wrongdoing (Gen. 38). The tribe of Judah led the other tribes on their march toward the Promised Land. The tribe camped on the east side of the tabernacle—the only side with an entrance (Num. 2). Leaders like Caleb, David, and Zerubbabel were from the tribe of Judah, as were prophets like Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and Zephaniah.



Meaning: "Happy"

Symbol: Tree (or food)

Stone/Color: Onyx / Black

Family: Eighth son of Jacob, born to Leah's handmaiden Zilpah



Meaning: "There is a reward"

Symbol: Donkey (or sun and moon)

Stone/Color: Chrysolite (or topaz) / Yellowish-green

Family: Ninth son of Jacob, born to Leah



Meaning: "Dwelling"

Symbol: Ship

Stone/Color: Beryl (emerald) / Possibly green

Family: Tenth son of Jacob, born to Leah

ASHER

Size: First Census: 41,500. Second Census: 53,400. The tribe significantly increased.

Location: Northern coastal region along the Mediterranean Sea.

Jacob's Blessing: "Asher's food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king" (Gen. 49:20).

Moses' Blessing: "Let [Asher] be favored by his brothers, and let him bathe his feet in oil" (Deut. 33:24).

Notable: Asher is not included in King David's list of chief rulers, possibly indicating that by the time of David the tribe had lost its significance (1 Chron. 27:16-22). The prophetess Anna, who recognized the infant Jesus as the Messiah, was from the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36-38).

ISSACHAR

Size: First Census: 54,400. Second Census: 64,300.

Location: Fertile Jezreel Valley. Included Nazareth.

Jacob's Blessing: "Issachar is a sturdy donkey.... When he sees how good the countryside is and how pleasant the land, he will bend his shoulder to the load and submit himself to hard labor" (Gen. 49:14-15 NLT).

Moses' Blessing: Mentioned along with Zebulun as tribes who will "feast on the abundance of the seas, and on the treasures hidden in the sand" (Deut. 33:18-19).

Notable: Deborah commended the tribe of Issachar for standing with the Israelites in battle (Judg. 5:15). During the time of David, the tribe was known for its wisdom: "men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chron. 12:32).

ZEBULUN

Size: First Census: 57,400. Second Census: 60,500.

Location: Small portion of southern Galilee.

Jacob's Blessing: "Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships" (Gen. 49:13).

Moses' Blessing: Zebulun and Issachar will "feast on the abundance of the seas, and on the treasures hidden in the sand" (Deut. 33:18-19).

Notable: Deborah commended this tribe for risking their lives (Judg. 5:18). They supported David with "undivided loyalty" (1 Chron. 12:33). When Hezekiah called for spiritual renewal, people from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and traveled to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 30:10). Jesus began his ministry in Galilee—the land of Zebulun and Naphtali—fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy (Matt. 4:13-22; Isa. 9:1-2).



Meaning: "Judge"

Symbol: Snake (or scales of justice)

Stone/Color: Topaz (or beryl) / Color unknown, possibly light green

Family: Fifth son of Jacob, born to Rachel's handmaiden Bilhah



Meaning: "My struggle"

Symbol: Deer (doe)

Stone/Color: Jasper / Reddish-brown

Family: Sixth son of Jacob, born to Rachel's handmaiden Bilhah



Meaning: "Good fortune" (or "warrior")

Symbol: Tents, like a battlefield camp

Stone/Color: Emerald (or diamond) / Possibly a stone with little color

Family: Seventh son of Jacob, born to Leah's handmaiden Zilpah

DAN

Size: First Census: 62,700. Second Census: 64,400.

Location: Small portion of land that included Joppa (Tel Aviv today). The tribe, however, failed to conquer the Philistines in the land and migrated to the northernmost part of Canaan (Judg. 18).

Jacob's Blessing: "Dan will govern his people.... Dan will be a snake beside the road" (Gen. 49:17-18).

Moses' Blessing: "Dan is a lion's cub, springing out of Bashan" (Deut. 33:22).

Notable: The tribe of Dan is reprimanded in the Song of Deborah for not joining in battle (Judg. 5:17). Samson was from this tribe (Judg. 13:2, 24). King Jeroboam built a pagan temple in Dan (1 Kings 12:29). Amos includes Dan in his list of idolaters (Amos 8:14).

NAPHTALI

Size: First Census: 53,400. Second Census: 45,400.

Location: Hill country of Galilee.

Jacob's Blessing: "Naphtali is a doe let loose; He bears beautiful fawns" (or "gives beautiful words" Gen. 49:21).

Moses' Blessing: Naphtali is "full of blessing" (Deut. 33:23).

Notable: In the Song of Deborah, the tribe is praised for its courage (Judg. 5:18). Barak was from Naphtali (Judg. 4:6). The tribe assisted Gideon in battle (Judg. 7:23). They volunteered fighting men to support David against King Saul (1 Chron. 12). Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy (Matt. 4:13-22; Isa. 9:1-2).

GAD

Size: First Census: 45,650. Second Census: 40,500.

Location: Fertile land outside the Promised Land, along the Jordan River (Num. 32).

Jacob's Blessing: "Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels" (Gen. 49:19).

Moses' Blessing: Gad is commended for carrying "out the LORD's righteous will, and his judgments concerning Israel" (Deut. 33:21).

Notable: Gadites who supported David in his conquest of Jerusalem were described as "brave warriors, ready for battle and able to handle the shield and spear" (1 Chron. 12:8).



Meaning: Joseph: "He will increase."

Manasseh: "One who forgets." God made Joseph forget all his hardships (Gen. 41:51).

Ephraim: "Double fruitfulness." God made Joseph fruitful in the land of his suffering (Gen. 41:52).

Symbol: Sheaf of grain (or grapevine)

Stone/Color:

Manasseh: Agate / Yellowish-brown

Ephraim: Jacinth / Orangish-red

Family: Eleventh son of Jacob, born to Rachel. Joseph's sons are Manasseh and Ephraim.



Meaning: "Son of the right hand"

Symbol: Wolf

Stone/Color: Amethyst / Purple

Family: Twelfth son of Jacob, born to Rachel. Rachel named him Ben-Oni, "son of my sorrows," as she was dying in childbirth, but Jacob renamed him Benjamin, "son of the right hand" which indicates a favored son (Gen. 35:18).

JOSEPH

Size: Manasseh: First Census: 32,300. Second Census: 52,700. Population greatly increased.

Ephraim: First Census: 40,500. Second Census: 32,500. Population decreased.

Location: The descendants of Joseph's two sons became recognized as two tribes and were given territory when they entered the Promised Land.

Manasseh: Two large portions of land east and west of the Jordan River. The eastern section (Golan Heights and part of Syria today) was outside the Promised Land. Those in the eastern section are referred to in the Bible as the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Ephraim: Small portion of land (part of the West Bank today). Included Bethel where Abraham built an altar (Gen. 12:8) and where God confirmed the Abrahamic covenant with Jacob (Gen. 28).

Jacob's Blessing: Joseph is "a fruitful vine" (Gen. 49:22). Jacob blessed Joseph's sons saying that Ephraim would be greater than Manasseh the firstborn (Gen. 48).

Moses' Blessing: "May the LORD bless [Joseph's] land ... with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness" (Deut. 33:13-17).

Notable: Though Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, God raised Joseph to a place of prominence in Egypt. Joseph stored up grain for a coming famine. When his brothers traveled to Egypt to purchase grain during the famine, Joseph was reconciled to them. He said, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20). Jeroboam (who led the secession of northern tribes), Joshua, Deborah, and Samuel were from the tribe of Ephraim (Judg. 4; 1 Sam. 1; 1 Kings 12; 1 Chron. 7).

BENJAMIN

Size: First Census: 35,400. Second Census: 45,600.

Location: Small portion of land just north of Jerusalem, a strategic position in ancient Israel.

Jacob's Blessing: "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder" (Gen. 49:27).

Moses' Blessing: "Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long" (Deut. 33:12).

Notable: In Egypt, Joseph tested his brothers by saying that he would keep Benjamin as his slave. When Judah pleaded with Joseph not to deprive his father of Benjamin, Joseph was moved to reveal his true identity and be reconciled with his brothers (Gen. 44-45). In the era of the judges, a civil war nearly obliterated the tribe of Benjamin (Judg. 20). King Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam. 9:1-2). After Saul's death, the tribe fought against David for control of the kingdom, but eventually sided with David (2 Sam. 2). Jeremiah, Mordecai, and the apostle Paul were from the tribe of Benjamin (Jer. 1:1; Est. 2:5-6; Phil. 3:5).

THEODICY A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE OF EVIL

Where did evil come from?

Evil originated when Lucifer misused his freedom and exalted himself over God. Evil entered the physical world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden.

If God created all things, does that mean God created evil?

No. Even though evil is real, evil, in itself, is not a material *thing*. Rather, it is a lack or absence of what should be present in good things (such as a hole in a shirt). God made evil *possible* by giving us free will, but man makes evil *actual* by choices.

Is God the author of evil (Isaiah 45:7)?

God does not author evil in the sense of sin and moral perversity, but is the author of calamity, plagues, and chastisement, which are viewed as “evils” to the one experiencing them (such as the plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the book of Exodus).

Does God will evil?

God doesn’t will or not will evil. He doesn’t *promote* it, but simply *permits* evil to occur.

Is God to blame for evil?

No. God gave mankind the *potential* to do evil through free choice; therefore, people are responsible for their own decisions. To blame God would be like blaming Henry Ford, instead of individual drivers, for all auto accidents because Ford helped to make automobiles possible.

Why doesn’t God destroy evil now?

God destroyed evil *positionally* by dying on the cross and will destroy evil *practically* at his second coming. If God were to remove all evil immediately, He would also have to remove human free will, which is the means by which we receive salvation. So we must be patient for the time when God brings all evil to an end.

Are there benefits we can derive from the effects of evil?

Yes. Ministry and servanthood are possible only when there is a lack (evil). There is no courage without danger, no perseverance without obstacles, and no gain without pain. In addition, many of the most valuable lessons in life are learned through times of adversity.

Are there purposes in pain and suffering?

Yes, pain can often preserve us from greater problems (such as the dentist’s drill); we show compassion and comfort to others because we are aware of the need for these through our own experiences. God can use evil to fulfill his purposes and plans. For example, Joseph said to his brothers that the cruelty they showed toward him was meant for evil, but God meant it for good to help keep many people alive during a severe famine (Genesis 50:20).

If God is perfect, why does this world have evil in it?

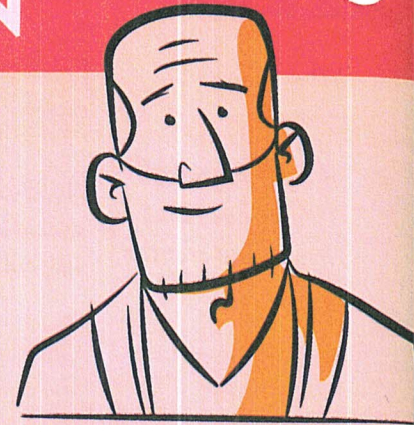
God permits evil temporarily to bring about a greater good for mankind. That is to say, if Adam and Eve hadn’t sinned, they would have lived under the constant threat of potentially falling into sin and potentially dying as a result. Even before they sinned, God had designed a plan to remove the threat of evil permanently so that we will be better off in the end (in heaven) without the potential to ever sin or die. While we are not in the best of all possible worlds right now, what we are experiencing is the best way to get to the best of all possible worlds as long as humans still have free will.

Could God have avoided evil?

Yes, he could have created us with no free will, but that would make us nothing more than robots who must do what God programs us to do. This would make love, praise, and obedience totally meaningless. People would have no moral responsibility; hence, no reward or punishment. Perhaps God could have not created anything at all, but to go down that path is to say that nothing is better than something. Common sense agrees that a half of a loaf of bread is better than no loaf at all. To have something is better than to have nothing, even if there is risk involved.

JOB: SUFFERING, FAITHFULNESS, AND RESTORATION

Job was a righteous man who lived in the land of Uz (the region of Mesopotamia). He feared God and despised evil (Job 1:1). The devil wanted to show God that Job was only a “fair-weather friend” because of the abundant wealth God had given to Job. God knew Job’s faithfulness was not anchored in his wealth; even so, God permitted the devil to test Job. The book describes Job’s attempts to understand his suffering in light of God’s existence, a topic that theologians call “theodicy.” After Job had suffered greatly and lost his family, health, and wealth, God restored double of everything to Job.



JOB’S SEARCH FOR ANSWERS ABOUT HIS SUFFERING

KEY QUESTION: *Is God just in light of my suffering?*

Person	Scripture	The Argument	Focus	Conclusion
Job	Job 2–31; 27:2; 29:31; 31:35	“I have done nothing wrong.”	“My suffering is unfair and not divine justice.”	Job demands an explanation from God.
Job’s Wife	Job 2:9	“Curse God and die.”	Morality is foolish and God is unjust in light of Job’s suffering.	God doesn’t care and is unworthy of devotion.
Job’s Three Friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar	Job 3–28	God must be just.	Job must be a moral failure.	Because God is just, Job is surely being punished for some sin he has committed.
Elihu	Job 32–37	God is just.	God governs the world according to justice.	Suffering is God’s wake-up call to Job and builds character.
God’s Response to Job	Job 38–41	God has an infinite perspective of the world, while Job’s understanding is limited.	The distinction between God’s and man’s vantage points makes Job unqualified to judge God.	The world is good, but not perfect. Suffering is unavoidable. God has good purposes for suffering even if Job is not aware of them.
God’s Response to Job’s Friends	Job 42:7–9	“After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: ‘My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.’ So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job’s prayer.”		

CONCLUSION: Because God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving, we should have faith in God’s wisdom, purposes, and plans even if we don’t understand them.

The Story of Job

The book of Job tells the story of an upright man whose life is overthrown. Job is a good man with a good life, and yet God permits Satan to take it all away. Job loses everything: his riches, his children, and his health—everything but his loyalty to God.

Clues from the book suggest that Job lived sometime during the era of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) possibly in Edom, east of the Dead Sea. But no matter when or where Job lived, his story invites all readers to ponder the universal human experience of suffering.

In the story, we see Job's friends trying to empathize with him, but their speeches always end in accusations. Various passages in the Old Testament correctly teach that if you sin, then you will suffer (see for example, Deut. 30:16–18; Prov. 11:21). Job's friends, however, turn this teaching on its head. They argue that if you are suffering, then you must have sinned. Job's ordeal shows how their assumption is wrong.

Job

Time/Place

Job's story may have occurred during the era of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in an unknown location simply called "the land of Uz" (Job 1:1), possibly Edom.

The Book

Job is written in a style of ancient Hebrew known as wisdom literature. Rather than dealing directly with Israel's history, wisdom literature—like Job, Psalms, Proverbs—reflects on universal themes and overarching questions that are relevant for all people in all places. The beginning and end of Job are written in prose (Job 1:1–2:13; 42:7–17), with everything in between written in poetry.

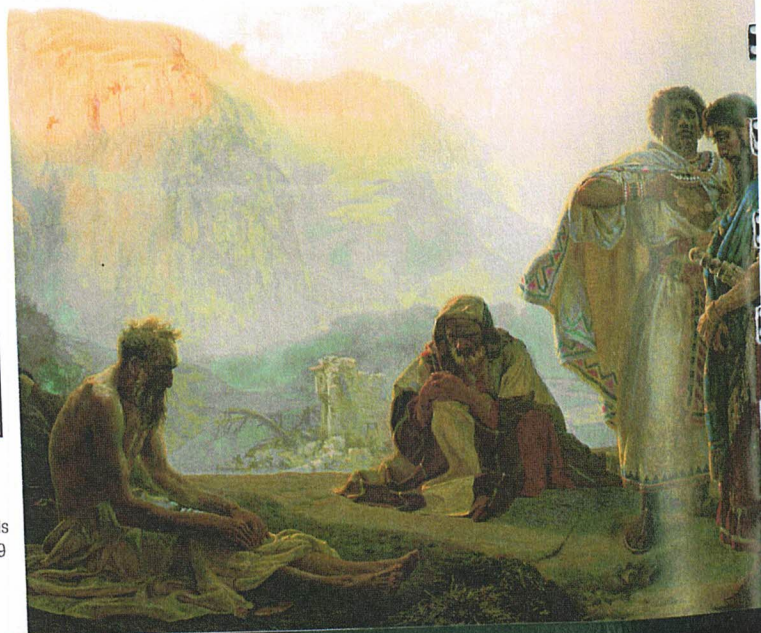
Key Verse

"The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21).

Job's story also illustrates the limits of human understanding. In chapter one, Job is unaware of the conversations happening in the celestial court between God and Satan that will upend his life. When God finally speaks to Job near the end of the book, God doesn't answer Job's questions about why he is suffering. We, like Job, often don't fully know what God is doing behind the scenes of our lives, or why.

In the end, Job comes to trust that God still loves him and cares for him despite his suffering. Trusting in God's love turns out to be a better comfort than getting all the answers we think we need.

The book closes with God restoring Job's health and riches and blessing him with more children. This serves as a reminder that suffering is temporary (though it might seem endless at the time) and that the God who permitted calamity can and will bring healing and blessing. As James says in the New Testament, "You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (James 5:11).



Job and His Friends
by Ilya Repin, 1869

Were Dinosaurs Dragons?

Some dragons flew and other dragons lived in the water, so not all dragons could be called dinosaurs. But all dinosaurs could have been dragons.



Some reptiles are mistakenly called dinosaurs.



Dinosaur

Legs directly under the body
Land-dwelling animal



Not a Dinosaur

Dimetrodon (legs out to the side)
Plesiosaurs (marine reptiles)
Pterosaurs (flying reptiles)



Dragon Legends: Fact or Fiction?

Legends of an ancient flood exist in hundreds of cultures around the world. A large number of these traditions share common elements with the biblical Flood described in Genesis. For example, many of these stories assert that man's wickedness brought divine judgment upon the whole world and that eight people and some animals survived aboard a large boat.

The Bible provides the historical account of the worldwide Flood. By carefully comparing these legends with God's Word, we see that many of these traditions have distorted, embellished, or lost information about the actual events.

Similarly, cultures from all over the globe also have dragon legends. Epic battles between gallant knights and fierce dragons are rather common, and the descriptions of these beasts are often very similar to those of dinosaurs.

Of course, ancient people would not have called them "dinosaurs," since that word was coined in 1841. Carvings and cave paintings of these monsters have been discovered. Some of these dragon legends contain mythical elements, while others likely lost all the true details and retain nothing more than tall tales. But in many cases, the dragons were viewed as real animals. Do some of these dragon legends actually speak of dinosaurs?

In the Bible, God told Job about two creatures that could be considered dragons: the Behemoth and the Leviathan. Some Christians suggest that these are mythical monsters, but the mention of Behemoth and Leviathan in the book of Job follows the descriptions of about a dozen real animals. Furthermore, why would God tell Job to consider two beasts that did not even exist?

DRAGON LEGENDS AROUND THE WORLD



Eighth-century scholar John of Damascus wrote *On Dragons and Ghosts*, in which he differentiated between real creatures and fictional creatures. After describing some dragons as extremely large serpents, he stated:

There is one more kind of [dragon]; those [that] have wide head, goldish eyes and horny protuberances on the back of the head. They also have a beard [protruding] out of the throat ... This dragon is a sort of [beast], like the rest of the animals, for it has a beard, like a goat, and horn at the back of its head. Its eyes are big and goldish. These dragons can be both big and small. All serpent kinds are poisonous, except dragons, for they do not emit poison.

Famed thirteenth-century explorer Marco Polo described dragons in the Far East:

In this province [Carajan] are found snakes and great serpents of such vast size as to strike fear into those who see them ... Some of them are ten paces in length ... The bigger ones are about ten palms in girth. They have two forelegs near the head, but for foot nothing but a claw.... The head is very big, and the eyes are bigger than a great loaf of bread. The mouth is large enough to swallow a man whole, and is garnished with great [pointed] teeth.

The animals described here are believable, and these men intended to relay information about what they had discovered. Did these men actually see or hear about real dragons—creatures that are today called dinosaurs?

ST. GEORGE and the Dragon

St. George (c. AD 275–303) was a devout Christian and Roman military officer. The famous legend of his battle with the dragon is said to have occurred during his journey to join his men in Diocletian's army.

As he neared the city of Selene in Libya, he saw a young princess outside the city wall. She pleaded with him to leave so that he would not be killed by the dragon to which she was being offered as a sacrifice. George refused to leave and vowed to protect her.

Suddenly, the dragon appeared and attacked the soldier. During his fierce battle against the fire-breathing foe, George found a weak spot under the beast's left wing and delivered a crippling blow. The legend explains that the princess then led the maimed creature back into the city, where George killed it in the presence of the people.

The king asked George what he wanted as a reward. The dragonslayer replied, "I desire only that ye believe in the God who strengthened my hand to gain this victory." After baptizing the city into the Christian faith, George resumed his trek to join his troops.

BEOWULF and the Dragon

Originally written in Old English, the epic poem *Beowulf* is named for its hero and tells of his mighty deeds in sixth-century Scandinavia, a time known as the Vendel Era.

The most famous creature in the tale is Grendel, a fierce monster that devoured scores of Danish nobles. Beowulf defeated this creature by ripping its arm from the socket, causing the beast to bleed to death. The hero also defeated Grendel's mother, as well as numerous sea dragons.

Beowulf died from wounds sustained from a vicious fire dragon that terrorized the land after a thief had stolen a golden cup from the beast's hoard. Aided by a brave warrior, Beowulf vanquished the flying dragon and saved the land.

The epic contains accurate historical information as well as fiction. The stories of battling dragons may be legendary, but do they have any basis in reality? Did these men or their ancestors actually fight dinosaurs and pterosaurs? This idea would be consistent with the Bible. But those who believe dinosaurs lived millions of years before man cannot adequately explain why cultures around the world have dragon legends whose creatures often match descriptions of dinosaurs.

DRAGON LEGENDS AROUND THE WORLD

Red Dragon of Wales

Many tales describe how Y Ddraig Goch ("the red dragon") came to be closely associated with Wales. One popular story tells of an epic battle between a red dragon and a white dragon in which the red dragon saved the people of the land by defeating the white dragon.

the Lernaean Hydra

According to Greek mythology, Hercules performed twelve labors, including a battle with a great creature known as the Hydra. This serpentine dragon had nine heads and poisonous breath. When one head was cut off, two more would grow in its place. Hercules battled fiercely and ultimately defeated the serpent.

Quetzalcoatl

The Mesoamerican Aztecs and Toltecs worshipped the feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl (called Kukulcan by the Maya people). According to their mythology, he was the god of the wind and the morning and evening stars.

Daniel and the Dragon

Not accepted as part of the Old Testament canon by Jews or Protestants, the Apocrypha include extra chapters in the book of Daniel. Here we are told about Daniel's encounter with a great dragon.

The king of Babylon commanded Daniel to worship his dragon as a god. The prophet refused and told the king that he could prove the creature was not a god by killing it without sword or club. Daniel made cakes of pitch, fat, and hair and fed them to the dragon, causing it to burst open.

Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680) has been called a polymath (a person with encyclopedic learning). In his exhaustive study of everything underground, *Mundus Subterraneus*, Kircher included a chapter on dragons, describing multiple dragon artifacts and legendary encounters with the beasts. He covered the dragon like any other animal in his book, citing their dwellings (often caves) and habits:

Of winged dragons, dispute has only arisen between authors, most of whom declare them to be fanciful, but these authors are contradicted by the histories and eyewitnesses. Winged dragons—small, great, and greatest—have been produced in all times in every land.

Known as the "father of history," Herodotus (fifth century BC) was a Greek historian who traveled extensively and reported what he heard and saw. He described a boneyard in Arabia filled with skeletons of winged serpents and explained where they came from:

Winged serpents are said to fly from Arabia at the beginning of spring, making for Egypt; but the ibis birds encounter the invaders in this pass and kill them ... The serpents are like water snakes. Their wings are not feathered but very like the wings of a bat.

Both of these men wrote more about dragons and flying serpents. Could they possibly have been writing about creatures we call pterosaurs?