

**Paradox In Genesis**

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## Introduction

Throughout the centuries, there has proven to be a lack of scholarly interest in the study of strictly literary devices found in the Bible. Generally, analyses of the Bible are centered on source criticism, biblical theology, or historical backgrounds. Literary criticism is an established, respected, and frequently used form of analysis among scholars of literary works. However, though it has been rendered as a valid and acceptable tool of analyzing works by such authors as Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante, it has traditionally been labeled as an unacceptable method of studying a book many hold to be sacred. Thus, scholars have either ignored the literary criticism technique or used the term only after distorting its meaning. Therefore, there has been and still remains a serious absence of knowledge involving the employment of literary devices in the most widely read book throughout the world.

Due to this lack of literary analysis, the field is ripe for a serious examination of how paradox is subtly interwoven in Genesis. I have regarded this book as one unit purposely written in the form we observe today. Because this is a literary analysis, neither the documentary hypothesis nor the historical accuracy of the text are considered in the presented research. Though the documentary hypothesis could sufficiently explain why certain paradoxes exist, it is incompatible to a strictly literal study of the text and so will be disregarded from this study. Instead, Genesis will be analyzed just as any other ordinary piece of literary work would be analyzed. In addition, the focus of the paper is not to deal with biblical theology. However, because biblical theology is a difficult subject matter to escape, there may be some elements of it throughout the paper.

The definition of paradox deals with several elements. To begin with, paradox depicts a statement that seems contradictory, unbelievable, or absurd yet is understood as expressing a truth. For example, though Joseph says that it is God who sent him to Egypt and not his brothers, he contradicts his words by punishing them for the role they played in his enslavement, a role he says was preapproved of by God (chapter 45). Absurdity or unbelief is aroused when one reads how Cain, cursed for his disobedience to God, actually appears to be blessed by God when he becomes the ancestor of the arts and sciences (chapter 4). Paradox also refers to a person, situation, act, etc., that seems to have contradictory or inconsistent

qualities. For example, though God describes Abraham as a man of faith, Abraham often shows a lack of faith through such incidents as laughing in disbelief at God's words and giving Sarah away to men because he fears death (chapter 12, 17, 20). Thus, by employing these factors, paradox can be applied to a wide variety of issues and can deal with subjects ranging from God to man to word and deed.

Because paradox is so prevalent in Genesis, it is not possible for a paper of this small size to cover all instances of the use of this particular literary device. To begin with, this paper does not contain a detailed analysis of the theological implications of paradoxical situations. For example, the God depicted in Genesis is not compared to the God of the New Testament. Though many paradoxes arise when comparing the Old Testament God to the New Testament God, Christian ideology along with its implications has been omitted from the following research due to the limited scope of this research project. Secondly, this paper also lacks a discussion of paradoxes in relation to later texts. For example, unlike in Revelation 12:9, Genesis never refers to the serpent in the Garden of Eden as Satan. The paradoxes involved in considering the serpent to be just an animal are quite different than the paradoxes involved in considering the serpent to be Satan. If the text in Genesis was compared to other books in the bible, different paradoxes and implications would arise. Thirdly, paradoxical names and terminology found in English translations of the text are not included due to the fact that what may be considered a paradox in English may not be a paradox in Hebrew and vice versa. Fourthly, small, individual paradoxes which have no bearing on the larger picture have also been eliminated in order to maintain the flow of the paper.

Thus, the focus of the paper has been narrowed to include two main elements. First of all, in Genesis, the literary device of paradox illuminates words and actions by God that appear to be imperfect or ambiguous. Secondly, paradox elucidates the numerous instances in which God's favored people practice questionable attitudes and behaviors towards both their own people and people outside God's favor.

I have worked from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible as contained in The HarperCollins STUDY BIBLE (New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1993). I have used the footnote apparatus by Joel W. Rosenberg only with regard to his footnote to Genesis 3:1--which points out that the term "more crafty" is a word play on "naked" in the Hebrew text of that verse. I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. E. Cleve Want, for his guidance during this project.

## Paradox In Genesis

### Creatures of the Sea, Birds, and Animals

God's first blessing after creating the earth leads to violence and death. In Genesis 1:22, God blesses the creatures of the sea and the birds in the air telling them to *be fruitful and multiply*. The term *fruitful* refers to the actual act of having offspring while *multiply* connotes that God wants them to produce a large number of offspring. Paradoxically, this blessing is also a curse. In order to multiply, they must stay alive. In order to stay alive, they must eat, and in order to eat, a large number of them must kill each other for food. God's blessing is fulfilled when the creatures of the sea and the birds in the air kill one another in order to stay alive long enough to multiply. Pain and death are the consequences of God's blessing.

In addition, a creature God declares to be good is punished for behaving in the manner God created him to act. *God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good (1:25)*. Since God declares all the animals to be good including everything that *creeps upon the ground*, this implies that the serpent who leads Eve into sin is good also. On the other hand, the serpent is cursed by God for tempting Eve, which implies that the serpent's actions are actually evil. It is interesting that though man has a choice between obedience and disobedience, there is no indication that the animals in *Genesis* do. Thus, since the serpent is deliberately categorized as an animal rather than a man, it would follow that like the other animals, the serpent has no ability to modify his behavior. His actions are based on instinct and the nature God gave him at the point of creation. Therefore, a paradox exists in that God creates an evil creature yet declares him to be good and punishes him later on for the very nature he had once declared to be good.

Despite the fact that God gives mankind dominion *over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth (1:28)*, man's dominion is actually limited. There are instances in which mankind does not seem to have dominion over the animals, but the animals

have dominion over him. For instance, in the situation between the serpent and Eve, the serpent obviously has more knowledge than either Adam or Eve. Without the inclusion of force, whoever has the most knowledge usually has the power or dominion over those without this insight. This is evidenced when the more knowledgeable serpent is easily able to trick the innocent and even ignorant Eve into disobeying God. Paradoxically, despite God's words, Adam and Eve have only a limited dominion over the various creatures God has created.

In summary, paradox shows the imperfection of God's blessings and punishments. For instance, the creatures God blesses to multiply must kill in order to survive. Furthermore, though God blesses mankind to have dominion over the animals, it turns out that mankind is not given complete dominion over all creatures. As a result, the serpent who has greater wisdom than the humans is able to lead Adam and Eve to their downfall.

## **Plants**

Paradox also reveals that God's orders concerning the eating of plants is contradictory. God expands his blessing and tells mankind in 1:29 that *I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food* and in 1:30, *I have given every green plant for food*. According to 1:29, only plants with seed may be eaten. However, 1:30 makes these words ambiguous when God contradicts himself by saying that *every green plant* may be eaten regardless of having seeds or not. In 2:17, God changes his original words of 1:29 and says that Adam and Eve may eat of every tree except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Paradoxically, if the tree of knowledge of good and evil has seed, then God had previously told them that they may eat of it. Likewise, if the tree can be classified as a green plant then God had said that they may eat of it in 1:30. The only justification for the change in words would be if a separation is made between plants and trees or if the tree of the knowledge of good and evil does not have seed. In addition, paradoxically, God has not actually given Adam and Eve every plant on the earth for food. While Adam and Eve are in the garden, they have no access to the plants outside the garden. When they are expelled from the garden, they still do not have dominion over every plant on the earth for now their dominion over the plants in the garden has

been taken away and they will never be allowed to return to the garden again (3:24). Therefore, God's paradoxical instructions regarding the consumption of plants proves to be ambiguous.

Under intense scrutiny, the reasons why God has delayed planting trees prove to be invalid. According to 2:5, there are two reasons why God has not planted trees. The first states that God "*had not caused it to rain upon the earth.*" However, in 2:8-9, God proceeds to plant and grow vegetation even though there is still no rain. There is only a mist to provide the needed water (2:6). Thus, the lack of rain becomes an invalid excuse for delaying the planting of vegetation. The second reason God has not planted vegetation is because "*there was no one to till the ground.*" It is assumed that when God created the garden of Eden, he also created plant life throughout the rest of the earth, because there is no mention of suddenly having to create a world outside of Eden when the humans are thrown out of the garden. Instead, plant life already exists along with the thorns and thistles that man will eventually be cursed to deal with (3:18). Paradoxically, when man is in the garden, there is still no one to till the ground outside the garden. When man is thrown out of Eden, there is no one to till the ground inside the garden. Therefore, though there is no rain and most of the earth remains untilled at this point, God still creates the plant world, thus rendering his words invalid.

In summary, paradox illuminates the ambiguous reasoning for not planting trees as well as God's contradictory instructions concerning which plants may be eaten. Though the two conditions for not planting trees were unmet, God still proceeds to plant trees. In addition, due to God's contradictory words, Adam and Eve had good cause to be confused on whether they could eat all green plants or just green plants with seeds. Paradox shows that God's words and even the narrator's words are quite unclear.

## **Sexuality**

In 1:28, God tells mankind to *be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.* This verse is riddled with several paradoxes. First of all, before the fall, mankind is in a state of innocence as depicted when God tells them they are not allowed to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17). They do not even realize the importance of their being naked nor do they have

knowledge of sex or how exactly to multiply. It is not until they eat of the forbidden tree that they lose their innocence and gain knowledge of sexuality. While they are in a state of innocence, Adam and Eve are unable to fulfill God's blessing of being fruitful and multiplying. In order to know how to fulfill the LORD's blessing, they had to first know the difference between good and evil. However, they could not know the difference between good and evil until after they had sinned. Thus, in order to fulfill God's blessing, Adam and Eve had to first sin and be cursed by God before they had the knowledge of how to carry out God's words.

Secondly, nudity and sex appear to be both a blessing and a sin. Because Adam and Eve have no knowledge of good and evil, they are not aware that God has made the human body something to be ashamed of as implied when Adam hides from God because he is ashamed of his nakedness (3:8). Thus, it is paradoxical that the naked human body is something to be ashamed of rather than proud of or something to rejoice in. It is not good, even though God created it and once declared it to be good. In addition, because God wants man to multiply, sex seems to be a blessing from God. On the other hand, sex is part of the knowledge of evil that they are not supposed to know about. If sex is good then would not Adam and Eve have had sex in the garden and created children by now? After all, it can be assumed that Adam and Eve already have healthy reproductive organs, especially since God told them to multiply before the fall occurred. Apparently, Adam and Eve knew nothing of sex before the fall which means that sex and nudity, something created by God, was part of the knowledge of good and evil that they had gained.

Thirdly, though God tells Adam and Eve to *fill the earth*, they are unable to, for they are enclosed in a small garden with no access to the outside world. In order to fill the earth, they must first sin and be expelled from the garden. Thus, as with nudity and sexuality, it is paradoxical that in order to obtain God's blessing, Adam and Eve must first lose their innocence and be blackened with sin.

Furthermore, chapter 3 reads, *Now the serpent was more crafty than another wild animal that the LORD God had made* (3:1). According to Rosenberg, "*More crafty*, in Hebrew (is) a wordplay on 'naked' in 2:25" (ft nt. 3.1). Literally, *naked* means that there are no hair, fins, feathers, shells, wings, clothes, etc. like other animals/creatures/humans. A paradox exists, for though the serpent obviously already has knowledge of good and evil, he is not ashamed of his nakedness. Adam and Eve, on the other hand, are

ashamed of their nakedness as soon as they gain knowledge of good and evil. Thus, two opposite situations exist here. Man is to be ashamed of his body while animals are not. This is emphasized for the snake, who had no hair, fins, feathers, shells, wings, or clothes, was the most naked yet the least ashamed. Adam and Eve at least had hair, which makes them less naked than serpent. However, Adam and Eve, not the serpent, winds up being the most ashamed of their bodies.

In summary, paradox depicts through the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that God's creation of the human body and human sexuality is something to be ashamed over rather than something to rejoice over. Animals, on the other hand, have no such embarrassment over their bodies and bodily functions. The question remains as to how Adam and Eve would have ever multiplied if they had never gained knowledge of good and evil.

## **Punishment**

As God changed which plants Adam and Eve may eat, so he now changes the sign indicating that disobedience has occurred. God tells man *but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die* (2:17). Thus, death in the same day that they had sinned is to be the sign that they had disobeyed and eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Paradoxically, Adam and Eve do not die in the same day that they eat of it. Instead, in 3:11, God asks, "*Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?*" God has, in effect, changed the sign which indicates sin has occurred. Once, the sign was death. Adam and Eve were to die the same day that they ate of it. However, God does not find two dead bodies lying on the garden floor when he visits Eden. Instead, he knows of their sin because of the new awareness they exhibit concerning their nude bodies. Therefore, the sign that Adam and Eve have sinned is an awareness of their nudity and this awareness, paradoxically brings about life rather than death. With knowledge of nudity comes knowledge of sex, and sexual relations result in the population of the earth. An actual physical death does not occur until many years later.

God paradoxically punishes Adam, who had had no knowledge of good and evil, more severely than he punishes the serpent, who has more knowledge than Adam. After God discovers that sin has



occurred, he issues out punishment. God says to the serpent, “*Cursed are you among all animals.*” In the first two chapters of Genesis, there is a distinction made between humans and animals. Humans are given dominion over *the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth* (1:28). However, though the serpent is cursed above all animals and man has dominion over him from the beginning, the serpent is cursed “less” than mankind is. The serpent is only cursed to eat the dust for as long as he lives (3:14). Man, on the other hand, must not only eat dust, but he also has to spend his life in labor, sweating and toiling on a ground full of thorns and thistles in order to coax it to grow food (3:17-18). When God first created man, vegetation was given as a blessing to man (1:29, 30). Now, God takes something he once called *good* (1:12) and gave as a blessing to mankind and turns it into a curse which he heaps upon man’s head. Thus, man, who had no knowledge of good and evil, is condemned to spend his life in a type of slave labor, while the more knowledgeable and crafty serpent spends his in relative luxury when compared to man’s plight. Furthermore, God *sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man* (3:23-24). Though God drives out man, nowhere is it mentioned that God made the serpent leave the garden. Finally, though the serpent must eat dust, God never says that he will have to return to the dust like man will. While Adam is struggling with thorns and thistles and must eventually die, the serpent could still be living in paradise without ever having to meet death. Thus, it is paradoxical that God chooses to punish the ignorant Adam over the crafty serpent.

Paradoxes also exist when God punishes Eve. First of all, God can not *greatly increase* the pains of childbearing when Eve has never had a child. Secondly, it is paradoxical that though her husband causes her pain, she will still want him. Usually, one stays away from that which gives pain. God, however, condemns her to a life of desiring a person who hurts her. Thirdly, the man who was beguiled by a woman is given authority over her. Though man has proven that he is incapable of resisting sin at the hands of a woman, he is still given the authority. Paradoxically, this decision foreshadows future events in which men are influenced by women as depicted in the proceeding analysis of such characters as Sarah/Abraham and Jacob/Rebekah. Therefore, close study reveals the paradoxes within God’s punishment of Eve.

In summary, paradox reveals that the punishment rendered by God is imperfect. To begin with, God does not stick to his original determinant in detecting sin. Next, the man who can not decipher good from evil is given a harsher punishment than the serpent who was deliberately trying to deceive mankind into sinning. Finally, Eve is not only to desire a man who gives her pain but she is to be his subordinate even though it was this same man who was beguiled by a woman in the garden.

## **Cain**

Paradox reveals that the man God helped produce initiates the violence and corruptness in the world. Eve bears Cain, her first child. According to chapter 4, *Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the LORD." Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground*" (1-2). A distinction is made between the births of the two brothers. According to her words, God helped produce Cain but not Abel. Paradoxically, the man that the LORD helped her produce is not favored by God. Instead, God favors Abel as seen when he accepts his sacrifice over Cain's sacrifice. Furthermore, the man God helped produce becomes the first murderer and spreads violence throughout the world. Ironically, Cain is the beginning of the violence that God eventually destroys the world for in the flood.

Furthermore, God's words to Cain appear meaningless and untrue. Cain and Abel bring God sacrifices. Abel's sacrifice of the firstlings of his flock is accepted by God, but Cain's sacrifice of the fruits of the ground is rejected. In response to Cain's anger, God tells him, *"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door"* (4:7). Paradoxically, Cain has done well. He has mastered the ground that God has cursed. Cain has toiled and succeeded in his labor to grow crops from thistles and thorns out of the sweat of his brow, but God still rejects what he has to offer. According to the story, God has not yet told mankind to sacrifice animals in order to atone for their sins. Therefore, even if God means *well* as in doing the righteous thing, Cain has no way of knowing that fruit is not acceptable to God. Thus, paradox depicts that despite God's words, though Cain did well in his labor and had no way of knowing what God considers to be an acceptable sacrifice, sin, which is *lurking at the door*, still captures him.

In addition, pleasing God or being accepted by him brings little reward. Though Abel and his sacrifice are acceptable to God, God does not protect him from being murdered by Cain (4:8). After Cain murders Abel, he himself is unacceptable to God along with his rejected sacrifice. Paradoxically, though God does not protect the favored Abel from being slain, he protects Cain from being murdered by anyone wishing to seek revenge for Abel's murder or wishing to kill him because he is an alien in their land. Cain cries out, "*Anyone who meets me may kill me.*" The LORD answers, "*Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.*" Then the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him (4:14-15). Though Abel is accepted by God, he too is cursed in the end for Abel must return to the ground in fulfillment of the curse God put upon Adam and Eve and their offspring. In this situation, the LORD paradoxically protects the one who does evil, but turns his back on the one who pleases him.

God then attempts to further punish Cain, but paradoxically, once again, his words appear to be meaningless. As already hinted at, Cain's punishment for committing the first murder is very mild. God says, "*And now you are cursed from the ground*" (4:11). This statement is, of course, a paradox for Cain along with all of mankind is cursed from the moment they are born due to Adam and Eve's fall. The offspring of Adam and Eve will never be allowed into the garden which is now guarded by a cherubim with a *flaming and turning sword* (3:24). Like Adam and Eve, they too will live a life of labor before they finally die. Therefore, *now* is irrelevant for this is not the first time Cain has been cursed. Furthermore, not only is God cursing one who is already cursed but he is also issuing out the same type of curse that has been weighing on Cain's shoulders since birth. In 3:17-18, God had previously said, "*cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.*" When God decides to try and punish Cain, he once again curses the ground that he has just recently cursed for in 4:11-12, he says, "*And now you are cursed from the ground...When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength.*" According to 3:18, the ground has only given Cain thorns and thistles rather than *its strength* anyway. Though Cain was able to conquer the ground as seen in the offering of fruit he previously brought to God (4:3), it is logical to assume that this particular curse on

the ground is not any harsher than the one he has already been dealing with. A cursed ground is a cursed ground. Therefore, the curse given to Cain lacks power as depicted when God curses a cursed ground.

The second part to God's curse also appears to carry little weight. God declares that Cain is to be a *fugitive and a wanderer on the earth* (4:12). By specifying *on the earth*, God desires Cain to be a fugitive and a wanderer in all lands and not just in his own homeland. A wanderer refers to someone who never settles, never has a permanent home. However, the very first thing Cain does after leaving God is to *settle* in the land of Nod (4:16). Cain does not wander the earth but quickly settles in one of the first lands he comes upon, though paradoxically, in Hebrew, Nod means wandering. In addition, in contrast to the curse of being a wanderer, Cain later builds his own city and names it after his son, Enoch. Since he now owns a city, Cain can not even be considered a fugitive. Further support of Cain's "unfugitive-like" state is found in the fact that a fugitive is one who flees from danger. Paradoxically, Cain never really had to flee from danger due to the protective marking placed on him by God. Thus, God's curse of being a *fugitive and a wanderer on the earth* appears to be just another set of powerless words.

To state it further, the curse on Cain paradoxically ends up being more of a blessing than a punishment. Not only is he rid of the brother he was extremely jealous over, but he does so without being executed in return. Ironically, though Cain's punishment is not very severe, he claims that it is greater than he can bear (4:13). Cain does not utter these words because he thinks death would be better than to be alienated from his family for in 4:14, he is clearly worried about dying at the hands of another human being. Furthermore, it is paradoxical that Cain is worried that someone might kill him since he himself has just murdered his own brother. Though Cain has now made the family environment unsafe, it is paradoxical that God takes pains to make this murderer feel safe *outside* the family environment or homeland as seen when he puts a special mark on Cain to protect him from harm (4:15). Therefore, the imperfectness of God's curse can be seen when scrutinizing what Cain has gained and what he has lost as a result of being cursed.

Finally, paradox reveals that the curse is a blessing in additional ways. For instance, Cain's wife finally has a son, a highly valued commodity during this time period (4:17). Before this point, Cain had existed childless. If God had executed him for murdering Abel, his seed would have died with him since he

had no heir, a circumstance considered to be a terrible tragedy for a line of descendants has come to an end. However, God allows Cain's seed to flourish rather than to die. Thus, Cain's seed does not die but flourishes. Furthermore, Cain's offspring are not just ordinary people for they appear to be blessed, also. For instance, Jubal is the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe (4:21). Tubal-cain makes bronze and iron tools (4:22). These talented offspring allow Cain to be the predecessor of the arts and crafts. Thus, paradox shows how God's curse becomes so twisted that it ends up being a blessing in disguise.

In summary, paradox reveals the imperfectness of God's dealings with Cain. Though Abel was the favored brother, God not only allows Cain to murder him but he also protects him from people who wish to execute him in return for Abel's murder or just because he is a stranger in their land. The harshest punishment Cain ends up dealing with is having to leave his homeland. Ironically, God's curse yields up great blessings as seen in the son that is born, the city he builds, and the fact that he becomes the ancestor of the arts and crafts. Therefore, God's words appear to be imperfect.

## **The Flood**

Several paradoxes exist in the story of the mass slaughtering of man. To begin with, it is paradoxical that God who permitted violence in the world to spread, destroys the world for this same violence. God declares, *"I will blot out from the face of the earth the human beings I have created - people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them (6:7).* A paradox exists in God's anger and grief over mankind's actions. After all, by protecting Cain from being murdered and by mainly blessing him rather than cursing him, God has sent the message that violence is acceptable. Because Cain lives, he is allowed to spread his seed. As a result, Cain produces offspring who carry his passion for murder. For instance, five generations later, Lamech, a future offspring of Cain is born. One day he tells his wives, *"I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold (4:23-24).* Two things are evident from his words. First of all, after Cain murders and is set free, violence spreads as seen when the young man attacks Lamech. Secondly, as seen in Lamech's actions, murdering others has become a quick, easy, and guiltless way of eliminating people that have given offense. Therefore, the spreading of sin and

violence can be attributed to Cain who was reprieved by God. Paradoxically, it is this violence and the corruptness that it brings to man's heart that disgusts God. He tells Noah, "*I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them*" (6:13). Thus, a full circle has developed. Because God let Cain go without executing him or even punishing him very severely, violence spreads and it is this same violence that prompts God to destroy the whole world rather than just one man.

Furthermore, paradox reveals that God's rating of humans and animals is ambiguous. *God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good* (1:31). God declares both animals and mankind to be *good* in this verse. The *goodness* of the creation of the animals is further emphasized in 1:25 for once again, in reference to the animals, *God saw that it was good*. In addition, in 1:21, God declares that all the *great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind* to be good. Animals of all kinds are declared to be good at least twice in chapter 1. Mankind is only declared to be good once. Despite this, when Noah slaughters at least one of every clean animal and clean bird, the odor of the dead animals burning on the altar is *pleasing* to God. However, when Abel's blood cried out from the ground after Cain murdered him, this displeases God. God is more concerned with the death of humans than with the death of animals. Though animals are declared to be good twice and man is declared to be good only once, in reality God rates man as being more good than the animals, thus rendering his words to be ambiguous.

It is also paradoxical that the very God who took the time to create both the animals and mankind in minute detail is the same God who eventually destroys mankind with his own hands while finding pleasure in the slaughtering of animals. When the LORD is grieved at the evil on the earth (6:6), he takes that which he had breathed life into (2:7), and crushes that same breath out of them by drowning all living things in a flood. With the exception of those in the ark, all life is destroyed both on the earth and in the waters (7:21). He has killed that which he once took such pride in creating. In addition, before the flood and after the flood, God delights in the sacrificing of animals as seen in his approval of Abel's animal sacrifice before the flood (4:4) and of Noah's animal sacrifice after the flood (8:21). It is not until later books that God makes a distinction between those animals that his people may sacrifice and those that they may not sacrifice. At this point, God is pleased when man kills that which God created. Paradox

illuminates that whereas God once found delight in creating life, now his interests have turned towards bringing death to his once living creatures.

God's words to Noah and his family after the flood are important for they lack the insight to prevent the repetition of past history. *God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything"* (9:1-3). Paradoxically, this blessing to Noah and his sons by God is remarkably similar to the blessing he gave Adam and Eve. As he said to Noah and his sons, God's first words of blessing to Adam and Eve are, *"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth"* (1:28). Furthermore, as God *delivered* all the creatures on the earth and in the water into Noah's hand, so he once gave Adam and Eve dominion over all creatures on the earth and in the water when he finishes 1:28 by saying, *"Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."* In addition, God gave Noah and his sons green plants. Likewise, God told Adam and Eve, *"See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth"* (1:29). Thus, as in the situation with Adam and Eve, the world must be populated. God gives Noah and his sons everything he had given Adam and Eve. It is worthy to note that when God first blessed Adam and Eve, this blessing did not prevent a sinful world from developing. Though God is starting the world over, hoping to have a pure world with no violence or corruptness, he takes the exact same steps he took generations before. Instead of blessing Noah and his sons with practical things, things that will prevent the world from becoming corrupt again, such as a perfect spirit, a steel will against temptation, or a mind full of wisdom, once again, God only blesses them with the necessities, food and the ability to reproduce. It is obvious from the lesson learned from Adam and Eve, that the necessities are not enough to keep man pure. Thus, God's imperfect blessing actually condemns man to repeat the same cycle of becoming corrupt and violent, two attributes that the LORD destroyed mankind for.

It is also paradoxical that the God who hates violence plays a large role in spreading it throughout the world again. First of all, God decided to destroy the world because the earth was filled with violence

(6:13). Now, mankind is starting over again. They are equivalent to Adam and Eve, who, like Noah and his family, had the task of populating the earth. With this new start, God could have provided provisions for peace and nonaggression. However, God reintroduces violence to the earth. For instance, the first thing Noah does when he gets off the ark is to slaughter animals and birds in order to please an apparently blood-thirsty God. Violence between man and animals exists once again. In addition, God's decision on how to deal with murderers is questionable. Before, God had allowed murderers such as Cain and Lamech to escape without punishment. That God himself has the power to deal with people on an individual basis is evident, for God personally punished Adam and Eve for their disobedience. He also personally rebuked Cain though he did not execute him. At this point, instead of continuing to punish people for crimes, God says in 9:6, "*Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.*" God still does not wish to punish murderers by executing them himself. He realizes, though, that they must be put to death, but he assigns this role to mankind rather than taking it upon himself. Though he has placed limits on when they are allowed to kill, God has, in effect, given mankind permission and an excuse to be violent, for the act of killing is a violent act. Because mankind has the same sin nature as before the flood, they are certain to abuse this power and spread wickedness throughout the world again. Therefore, God's imperfect actions allow violence to once again prevail.

Another example of reality belying God's words is when God angrily declares, "*My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years*" (6:3). Though we do not know how many years passed between these words and the passage of the flood, we can assume that if a person was already past the age of 120, God would certainly only allow them to live for a maximum of 120 more years after he first spoke these words. *Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came on the earth* (7:6). Even if God's words were spoken as late as the day of the flood, the maximum amount of years Noah should have lived were 720 in order to give significance and power to God's spoken command. However, paradoxically, Noah lives for 950 years before he dies, which completely contradicts what God has declared (9:29). This discrepancy in life expectancy is seen throughout Genesis. For instance, Shem was 98 years old at the time of the flood. He lived to be around



600 years old (11:10, 11). Arpachshad (11:12, 13), Shelah (11:14, 15), Eber (11:16, 17), Peleg (11:18), Reu (11:20, 21), Serug (11:22, 23), etc., all lived over the 120 year limit. God's word have again failed to hold true.

In summary, the story of the flood reveals several instances in which God's words are powerless or imperfect. A huge paradox exists when God destroys the world for wickedness and violence for as soon as the ark disembarks, he instigates this violence once again through animal sacrifices and ordering mankind to execute one another for murder crimes. Paradox also reveals how God's past dealings with Cain has led to the present evil state of the world. Finally, paradox highlights the ambiguousness of God's words as seen in his rating of man and animals and in his declaration that mankind shall only live to be a total of 120 years.

### **Noah's Sin**

Paradox reveals that Noah, a man favored by God, causes more pain, due to the humiliating state he placed himself in then did any single person who lived before the flood. In 9:20, Noah, a righteous, blameless man (6:9), is *the first to plant a vineyard*. This vineyard leads not only to sin but to a repeating of the Cain cycle in which a line of descendants will be cursed forever. Noah *drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tents. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers"* (9:21-25). Paradoxically, it is not Ham who sinned nor is it Canaan who sinned. Instead, it is Noah, a "righteous, blameless man," who humiliated himself by exposing his body. Obviously, laying around naked, exposed to the eyes of any passer-by was a shameful position to be found in. Otherwise, despite the fact that Ham left him lying there naked, Noah would not have been so overwrought and angry. The severity of Noah's curse depicts the severity of the shame Ham left exposed to the eyes of his family. Thus, this righteous, blameless man deals out pain and misery to an infinite number of people in retaliation

for the shame he placed upon his own shoulders. It is a further paradox that before the flood, no single person was able to cause such a huge mass of people to suffer. Noah, however, has caused more misery to a greater number of people than any single individual previously destroyed in the flood had been able to cause.

Furthermore, Shem and Japheth's act of covering up their father's sin actually exposes it to the public eye. Unlike Ham, Shem and Japheth try to cover up their father's sin without looking upon his naked body. However, by covering up their father's nakedness, it actually leads to the revelation of Noah's sin. By placing a garment on their father, Noah finds out that Ham has looked upon him without bothering to cover him up. When Noah discovers that he has been humiliated by Ham, in a rage, he curses one of Ham's sons, Canaan. As a result of his angry curse, his descendants will never forget Noah's sin for they will always remember why Canaan and his descendants are cursed. Furthermore, the curse leads to the events being recorded for all of mankind throughout the centuries to read. Now everyone will know of his sin, not just his sons or his descendants. Thus, paradoxically, the single act of covering Noah up, exposes his sin to the world at large.

In summary, God's declaration that Noah is righteous and blameless seems to be either invalid or terms which applied to Noah before the flood came. The Noah depicted in chapter nine enjoys getting drunk but becomes excessively defensive and wrathful if someone subordinate to him looks upon his humiliating state but chooses to do nothing to make him more respectable. Furthermore, it is ironic that in trying to cover up their father's sin, Shem and Japheth actually expose it for millions to see.

### **The Tower of Babel**

Paradox also reveals how God deliberately creates chaos and disunity among the people of the earth because he is afraid of their potential should they unite strongly as one force. The people who settled in Shinar desired to be united with one another for they said, "*Come, let us made build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth*" (11:4). A key to peaceful relations among a group of people is to ensure that they are united together in spirit. Previously, it was understood that God wanted

his creation to exist in peace. For instance, God outlawed murder, destroyed the earth because of violence and corruptness, and as the flood waters were receding, he had a dove bring back an olive leaf as a symbol of the future peace to come (8:11). However, his actions after the flood keep pointing towards the fact that God does not really want his creation to have peaceful relations. As mentioned above, God facilitates violence between man and animals and man against man. Here again, is another example of God destroying all chances of a world to exist in peace for the LORD says, *“Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech”* (11:6, 7). As evident in God’s words, pride is not a factor in why God decides to punish them. Instead, he is fearful of the potential of their united ability. God proceeds to create confusion, separation, and chaos in order to destroy the unity of the people. In the years to come, hostility will break out among people of different languages for whereas people once had a chance of resolving differences, now the opportunity is nonexistent. Wars, intense violence, and fear will be a future factor in the relations between the people on earth. All chances for a peaceful existence has been completely annihilated by God, who paradoxically once advocated peace over violence and chaos.

In summary, paradox illuminates how God destroyed all chances for peace on earth by deliberately spreading confusion and chaos throughout the world. The God who was once so angry over the corruptness of the people has now taken deliberate steps to ensure that ill-will and chaos will forever exist in their lives. Because God became afraid of mankind uniting together, peace has become an ideal of the past, destroyed by God’s own two hands.

### **Abram in Egypt**

Abram, a man highly favored by God, ends up both deliberately lying and rashly endangering God’s future covenant with him and his descendants as well as exhibiting the selfish side to his personality. *And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb. Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land* (12:9-10). Abram’s motives for going to Egypt is questionable. First of all, it might have been more convenient for Abram to

travel to a land that was closer. Secondly, there is obviously grave danger involved in going to Egypt as seen when Abram tells Sarai, *“Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account”* (12:13). Abram knew the dangers of going into Egypt. It was not a surprise he discovered after he arrived in the land. He is willfully taking what could be an unnecessary and dangerous risk. Abram is risking not only the life of himself, but he is also endangering his wife, Sarai, who has no choice but to obey him. The man God selects to be the father of his chosen people appears to be a selfish man with little concern for the woman God has also chosen to be the mother of these same chosen people. Abram only thinks of himself when he asks Sarai to pretend that she is his sister. He does not care that she may be violated nor is he concerned with her feelings. He is not even concerned with her sleeping with other men. As long as his life is spared, this is all that matters to him. Furthermore, he is putting God’s promise to him and his descendants (spoken of in chapter 12) at risk since at this point he has no offspring to fulfill God’s promise. Thus, if he dies, God’s promise becomes obsolete. Thirdly, it does not appear that God has led him into Egypt. God only told Abram to go and see the land that he is going to give him (12:1). The land spoken of refers to the land of Canaan. Since Abram completed his mission in 12:7, he could have even gone back to his homeland if he so chose to instead of traveling on to Egypt. However, this man favored by God paradoxically decides to endanger God’s promise by traveling to a place so dangerous that he selfishly has to lie by saying that his wife is his sister.

In addition, though Abram is known as a man of faith, his actions speak otherwise. *When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife;’ then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account”* (12:11-13). It is paradoxical that a man later known for his faith, showed no faith in this situation. Abram knows he is in danger and might die. He wants to prevent this at all costs, especially since God has promised that he will one day be a nation (12:2). However, Abram does not believe that God can keep him alive without his help. Abram’s method of helping God is to lie to

Pharaoh and his people without consulting God first. His lack of faith in God's abilities to keep him alive contrasts sharply with his reputation for being a man of faith.

Paradoxically, even though Abram harms others, God blesses Abram by punishing those Abram has harmed. *When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels (12:14-16).* Pharaoh dealt honestly and well with Abram. After hearing the lying words of Abram, Pharaoh took Sarai but recompensed him with gifts of sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels (12:16). It should be noted that Abram gladly accepts these gifts without any hesitation. During this time, even though a famine has struck the land, Pharaoh's gifts are very generous. Paradoxically, though Pharaoh's actions are just, he is the one who is punished for Abram's sin. *But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife (12:17).* God unjustly punishes the gullible Pharaoh rather than the lying Abram. Though Abram sins and turns his back on God by not trusting in God's powers to deliver him from danger, he ends up being rewarded by both Pharaoh and God for it. Furthermore, not only does Abram get Sarai back, but he gets to keep the sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels that he had received from Pharaoh through falsely deceiving him. Thus, paradoxically, God blesses the deceitful Abram over the Pharaoh.

In summary, paradox reveals the ambiguousness of the situation dealing with Abram visiting Egypt. First of all, the man God has selected to be the ancestor of his chosen people, exhibits a selfish personality as seen when he lies to Pharaoh by claiming Sarai is his sister rather than his wife. Then he uncaringly gives her to the Pharaoh so that he may do with her as he pleases. Abram's lack of faith shines through in this story for he never asks God what he should do in this situation but depends, instead, on his own strength to save himself. As a result, God must intervene in order to protect the woman he has selected to be the mother of his chosen people and so he ends up punishing the just and rewarding the unjust.

## The Separation Of Lot And Abram

The land Abram offers in good faith to Lot will one day be taken away from him by Abram through God's power. Abram says to Lot, *"Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left."* Lot looked about him, and saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere like the land of Egypt . . . So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan . . . Abram settled in the land of Canaan (13:9-12). Paradoxically, Abram, the chosen man of God, settles in the cursed land while Lot, a man not particularly favored by God, settles in the fertile regions. However, as soon as Lot leaves, God contradicts what Abram has told his nephew by telling Abram, *"Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever"* (13:14-15). Though Abram has just freely given Lot whichever land he wants and claimed that Lot has the whole land before him, God makes his words a fallacy by promising Abram a whole bundle of land -- including the one that Lot has just moved to. Just as Lot can see the plain of the Jordan when he looks around, so can Abram. Thus, Abram's descendants will eventually take over the land that Abram has given to his own nephew.

In summary, Abram gives Lot his word that he can have whichever land he chooses. God, however, intervenes after Lot moves away, not before, in order to tell him that one day he will take over even Lot's land. Abram's words become a fallacy.

## God's Promise To Abram

When God comes in a vision, his words to Abram paradoxically casts doubt on his judgment. *After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."* (15:1). The question remains, reward for what? Thus far, Abram has proven that he is just as faithless as he may be faithful. Though Abram showed faith by leaving his father's household and following God (12:1), he has also shown his lack of faith and character when he was in Egypt facing the Pharaoh (chapter 12). When God rescues him from the trouble he has ensnared

himself in, Abram has, in effect, been rewarded for sin. Likewise, if God is rewarding Abram for his part in the war of chapter 14, it must be noted that Abram went to fight in order to rescue his nephew, Lot, rather than to fight for the sake of righteousness. In addition, Abram was offered all the material possessions he wanted in recompense (14:13, 21). Paradoxically, Abram has actually had to do very little to keep God's favor, which brings into question God's judgment in rewarding a man who has thus far done little to honor his God.

It is also paradoxical that a faith-filled and righteous man requires proof of God's power before he will believe in his promises. God brings Abram outside and tells him, "*Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.*" Then he said to him, "*So shall your descendants be.*" And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness (15:5-6). Though it says that Abram believed the LORD's promise and the LORD now sees him as a righteous man, in the next breath, Abram's unbelief takes the stage. Then he said to him, "*I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.*" But he said, "*O LORD God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?*" He said to him, "*Bring me a heifer three years old...*" (15:7-9). Abram, a man renowned for his great faith has trouble believing in God's promises. As a result, he needs to have God give him concrete proof that God is powerful enough to fulfill his promise. God is patient enough to prove to Abram that he is powerful for *When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces* (15:17). Therefore, this revered man who is favored by God, has paradoxically shown a surprising lack of faith in regards to the power of God.

Paradox also shows how God utilizes sleep to bring about certain but dissimilar events. *As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him* (15:12). A deep sleep fell on Abram just as a deep sleep fell on Adam. However, Abram's sleep is characterized by a *deep and terrifying darkness* that descends upon him. Adam's sleep, on the other hand, was not terrifying. Paradoxically, not long after Adam's sleep is over, he ends up being cursed forever. On the other hand, after Abram's sleep ends, he will be blessed forever. Furthermore, Abram's life will be one of peace for God tells him, *As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age* (15:15). God tells Abram, on the other hand, *cursed is the ground because of*

*you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; . . . until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return* (3:17-19). Therefore, while Abram lives peacefully, Adam's life is one of toil. God uses both deep sleeps as a turning point. However, he allows one to end in joy while the other must end in sorrow.

To summarize, the use of paradox casts doubt on God's judgment and on Abram's faith. For instance, God decides to reward Abram for actions that have yet to warrant a reward. Furthermore, God praises a man for being righteous as seen when he believes in God's words. Paradoxically, the next thing one reads is that Abram requires proof before he will believe in God's power. Thus, Abram is portrayed as both a faithful and a faithless man. In addition, God's judgment in regards to Abram, appears to be warranted at times, and completely off base at others.

### **The Birth Of Ishmael**

Once again, Abram, a man of faith, shows his paradoxical lack of trust in God when upon Sarai's suggestion, he decides to sleep with Hagar in order that she might have a son. *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram, "You see that the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai* (16:1-2). Sarai says that although the LORD promised Abram descendants, the LORD has prevented her from having children. It is ironic that Sarai is looking for children--plural --when God only promised a heir--singular (15:3). Like Abram in Egypt, Sarai thinks the only way to fulfill God's promise is to take matters into her own hands and have Abram sleep with an Egyptian slave. Neither Sarai nor Abram believes that God intends for Sarai to be the natural mother of God's chosen people. Otherwise, Sarai would never have made such a suggestion and Abram would never have followed through with it. However, God has shown in previous circumstances that Sarai is indeed important to him and he has a future purpose for her. For example, God was very angry with Pharaoh when he took Sarai into his home and sent plagues upon him as punishment (12:17). God did not send the plagues because Abram was treated wrongly by Egypt, for it was Abram who said that Sarai was his sister and Pharaoh recompensed him richly for possession of her. However,



Abram still did not learn from the Egypt example that he should trust in God and not try to intervene with his own help. *So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife (16:3).* Abram gives Sarai (as a wife) to an Egyptian in Chapter 12. Now, paradoxically, Sarai gives Abram (as a husband) to an Egyptian slave. As a man of faith, Abram should have believed that God would fulfill his promise without their help. He should have also realized that the rightful descendant would have to come from Sarai and not Hagar if for no other reason than the fact that the slave-girl is Egyptian rather than a Hebrew. Thus, paradoxically, the “faithful” Abram shows no faith.

Paradox also reveals how Sarai allows jealousy to interfere in her plans to provide Abram with a descendant. *He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress . . . But Abram said to Sarai, “Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her. The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness (16:4, 6-7).* Sarai gives Hagar to Abram in order to provide him with descendants so that God’s promise will be fulfilled. Now after going to all this trouble, Sarai paradoxically treats Hagar *harshly* for she is filled with jealousy over Hagar’s pregnancy and anger over Hagar’s haughty attitude. Though it is not clear how harsh “harshly” is, it is evidently horrible enough for a pregnant woman to run away by herself into a wilderness instead of staying where she has a roof over her head and food to eat. There was a real danger that Sarai’s treatment of Hagar could not only have led Hagar into having a miscarriage but also that Hagar could have died in the wilderness after her forced flight. By being cruel to Hagar, Sarai paradoxically could have caused the death of the very descendant she had played a role in the creation of.

Finally, paradox reveals how God’s treatment of Ishmael closely parallels his treatment of Satan in the garden of Eden story. To begin with, Ishmael’s fate is a lot like God’s curse on the serpent. God says that Ishmael will have *his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him (16:12)*. This is similar to God’s words to the serpent *he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel* in 3:15. As the serpent will have enmity between man and woman (3:15), Ishmael will have no peace either for *he shall live at odds with all his kin (16:12)*. Furthermore, as the serpent is cursed to crawl on his belly and eat dust

(3:14) so Ishmael will be a *wild ass of a man*. Thus, because Ishmael is half Egyptian, God has ousted him from his covenant with Abram and decided instead of having his personal guidance and peace, he must live in enmity with his fellow man.

In summary, paradox shows how God unjustly favors those who do ill to others. First of all, though Abram and Sarai reveal their lack of faith in the ability of God to provide them with a son, God does not intervene or chastise them for doubting his power and attempting to have a son through their own means. Instead, he allows Sarai to deal so harshly with Hagar that Hagar flees to the wilderness in terror. Thirdly, God disregards Ishmael as a chosen descendant in light of Isaac and declares that his life will be one of turbulence. Thus, once again, despite their actions, God favors his chosen over those he has not chosen.

### **God's Covenant With Abram**

When God restates his covenant with Abram, he paradoxically changes his unconditional promise to a promise based on Abram's behavior. *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous"* (17:1-2). God has now attached a condition to his unconditional promise. To state the matter simplistically, Abram has to be good or *blameless* in order to receive God's promise. When God first made promises to Abram, he told him, *"Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them."* Then he said to him, *"So shall you descendants be"* (15:5). Where once it had basically been a "so shall it be" situation (15:5), now it is not such a "sure" thing. If Abram is blameless, *then* God will make his covenant with him. Abram is not told what will happen, though, if he is not blameless. Likewise, 18:19 reads, *"No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."* This is yet another place which shows that God's promise is now conditional. If Abram does *righteousness and justice* then the LORD will fulfill his promise. God has now placed limitations upon his unconditional covenant.

It is also paradoxical that Abram once again shows disbelief in God's words, especially since God has redefined his covenant with him. God tells Abram, *"I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her."* . . . *Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"* (17:16, 17). Once again, Abraham, a man of faith, shows his lack of faith in his LORD. In 15:6, God relates righteousness to belief in him. When God restates his covenant, righteousness or belief is one of his conditions for fulfillment. However, after God is barely through speaking about his new covenant, paradoxically, Abraham's first inclination is to laugh in disbelief. His laughter is hardly an exhibition of his righteousness or his faith in God. When Sarah hears of the news, *Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?"* (18:12). Ironically, Sarah is admonished by God for her laughter (18:13). Abraham, on the other hand, not only laughed at the same news but he *fell on his face and laughed* (17:17). However, God never rebukes Abram for disbelief or even mentions it. It is only Sarah who is chastised. Thus, God's words, in terms of the new conditions placed on his covenant, seem ambiguous or without meaning for Abram has laughed but God has not retaliated.

Furthermore, though circumcised slaves will be part of the covenant with God, Abraham's own circumcised son, Ishmael, is paradoxically excluded from God's covenant. God then further says, *"Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant"* (17:12-13). It is ironic that slaves and foreigners in Abraham's household can be part of God's covenant but Abraham's own flesh and blood son, Ishmael, is excluded. For example, though Ishmael is circumcised in 17:25, God tells Abraham that, *"Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him"* (17:19-20). Though God has reserved a separate blessing for the circumcised Ishmael, he is not part of God's covenant to Abraham. Paradoxically, though Ishmael is not part of God's chosen people, his

people will fare quite well in comparison to Isaac and his descendants. Whereas Isaac's descendants are going to be in slavery for a number of years (15:13), Ishmael's will be *fruitful* and a *great nation* (17:20). It is ironic that though God will not be "God" to Ishmael's descendants, Ishmael will still be a blessed nation. Ishmael will do good *without* serving God. Isaac's descendants, on the other hand, will be constantly punished and berated for not serving God well enough. Though they make an effort to serve him, they will end up constantly subject to God's wrath. The people who make no effort to serve God, though, will be blessed, not punished. Thus, though God unfairly excludes the circumcised Ishmael from his covenant with Abraham, God's judgment upon Ishmael's descendants ends up being far less harsh than his judgment on Isaac's descendants.

Paradox also questions the meager food supplies Abraham gives Hagar and Ishmael in comparison to the large meal he provides for mere strangers. After Abraham circumcises all the men, three strangers appear to him to tell him that he will have a son. *And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes."* Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them (18:6-8). Abraham provides all this food--cakes, meat, and milk--for mere strangers or for men who he may have figured out are most likely some type of angels and either do not need to eat or can get food easily enough. However, in the future, when Abram expels Hagar and his son, Ishmael, he only gives them bread and a skin of water (21:14). Though throwing out Ishmael *was very distressing to Abraham* (21:11), he gives strangers the best of his food and drink, but he gives his son and second wife the meagerest of sustenance available.

In summary, paradox calls into question some of the new conditions of God's revised covenant. First of all, it is ironic that God has decided to place conditions on his unconditional promise. Secondly, as soon as God finishes speaking, Abraham violates the new conditions of being righteous by laughing at his words. God, however, appears not to even notice Abraham's laughter though he later notices Sarah's. Thirdly, God allows circumcised slaves, but not the circumcised Ishmael, to be part of this covenant with Abraham. God's words and intentions continue to remain unclear and contradictory.

## Sodom and Gomorrah

In this episode, God is depicted not only as a being who has incomplete knowledge but also as one who has to be reminded by Abraham, who, at this point, is concerned for Lot's safety, to be just. To begin with, *Then the LORD said, "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! I must go down there and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know" (18:20-21)*. God, the creator of the universe, is not certain that Sodom is as bad as the rumors he has been hearing. In order to verify the rumors, he has to physically go to Sodom and evaluate their behavior. It is interesting to consider that if the men had not chosen this night to be evil than God may not have destroyed them. If the people had not attacked the strangers, it is reasonable to believe that God would have left them alone, thinking that the *outcry* was exaggerated. Next, though God wants Abraham to be just, he also has problems being just though he is a divine being. God says, *"I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" (18:19)*. Abraham, who sees that destroying the city would be wrong, uses God's requirement of justness to alter his plans of complete destruction. After Abraham is told of God's plans he tells him, *"Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (18:25)*. Abraham, a mere man, has to admonish and remind *the Judge of all the earth* to be just. He rebukes God for intending to carry out unjust acts. Most likely, Abraham takes this risk of casting doubt on God's actions because he is worried about his nephew Lot who is living in Sodom. Therefore, he questions God about the fate of the righteous in the city. *Then he said, "Oh do not let the LORD be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it" (18:32)*. Ironically, if Abraham is thinking about Lot, Lot is only one person and not ten. When Lot and his family are eventually rescued, they number only four which is still not even half of ten. It is surprising that Abraham stopped questioning God at the number ten since Lot and his family are fewer than this number. Thus, God's actions and knowledge are paradoxically imperfect in this scene.

It is also a paradox that though God has not given any indication of what is right and what is wrong, he has still decided to destroy a group of people for their evilness. *Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof"* (19:6-8). Paradoxically, Lot does not even know the difference between right and wrong for he sees it as wicked to rape men but not to rape women. During this time period, God has not given explicit rules on good or evil actions which leads to the moral conclusion that a just God would not be able to destroy people for wickedness when he has not yet defined what wickedness entails. Thinking it is acceptable to rape women but not men shows that these people, including Lot, have no concept of the difference between good and evil. After all, Lot did not offer up his daughters because he recognized that the strangers were angels of God. Otherwise he would have known that they could save themselves. Furthermore, though he says that the men *come under the shelter of my roof*, he does not acknowledge that his daughters are also under the shelter of his roof. Mankind can not even rely on a "moral conscience." The God depicted has judged and condemned mankind even though he has given them no rules and little conscience to depend on.

Paradoxically, though God looks after Lot because of Abraham, the verses further imply that both Lot's son-in-laws and his herdsmen are evil. Text in 19:4 reads, *But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surround the house.*" According to these words, all the men in Sodom was part of the mob that came during the night to attack Lot and his guest. Therefore, this would include even the sons-in-laws mentioned in 19:14 for they were most likely in Sodom at the time of the attack for the angels did not give Lot the time to travel to another city in order to warn them of the upcoming danger. Therefore, the angels are giving Lot the opportunity to take wicked men with him to safety. Furthermore, does *the men of Sodom* include Lot's herdsmen spoken of in 13:7? Would Lot's own men behave in this manner towards their boss? The herdsmen would have to be included in this group of wicked men because Lot never asks them to leave with him. The herdsmen are destroyed along with the city. If the herdsmen were not part of the mob of Sodom or if they were not just as evil as the men of Sodom, then God would have destroyed the righteous along

with the unrighteous--the very thing he and Abraham argued over in 18:22-33. Thus, it becomes paradoxical that Lot has such evil men serving under him when he is being looked after by God. God considers Lot to be a good man. Otherwise, he would have destroyed him along with Sodom. Abraham's people, though, do not turn wicked even though there are several episodes in which Abraham's actions are a poor example for his people to follow. Lot, however, has both evil sons-in-laws and evil herdsmen.

The angels' words regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah contradict each other. *When they had brought them outside, they said, "Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed"* (19:17). The angels make it sound as if they do not run as fast as they can then the fire will overtake and kill them for they have precious little time. However, the immediacy of the situation is downplayed in 19:22. *"Hurry, escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there."* Here, the angel says that he can not even begin to destroy Sodom until they reach the safety of Zoar. Thus, according to 19:22, Lot could have taken all day to reach Zoar and he still would not have been harmed since the angel could not start the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah until they were in Zoar.

Though Lot is permitted to escape to Zoar, he paradoxically ends up going to the very place the angels first beckoned him to. When Lot was first leaving Sodom, the angels told him, *"Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed"* (19:17). Lot, however, argues with them and says, *"Oh, no, my lords; . . . I cannot flee to the hill, for fear the disaster will overtake me and I die. Look, that city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there--is it not a little one?--and my life will be saved!"* (19:18-20). The angels allow Lot his request and permit him to flee to Zoar. Paradoxically, Lot later ends up going to the very place the angels told him to go to in the first place. *Now Lot went up out of Zoar and settled in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; so he lived in a cave with his two daughters* (19:30). Thus, wicked people are needlessly spared from destruction and remain unpunished. The people of Zoar were obviously very evil if Lot was afraid to stay there and chose to live in a cave in the hills instead. After all, he lived in Sodom for a long time and was never so afraid of them that he chose the isolation of the hills

rather than their company. However, he does become afraid and flees to the hills; the place the angels first told him to go.

To summarize, paradox uncovers characteristics of both God and mankind in the Sodom and Gomorrah episode. To begin with, God is depicted as having imperfect knowledge when he has to visit Sodom and Gomorrah personally in order to verify the rumors he has heard concerning them. He even allows Lot, whom he protects for Abraham's sake, to be surrounded by evil men, at both work and in the home. He is also described as a God who has problems with being just, as emphasized when Abraham has to rebuke him for his intention of destroying the righteous along with the wicked. Lot, on the other hand, is an example of how God's lack of specific rules has given mankind little moral sense or moral judgment as exhibited when he offers up his virgin daughters to the mob in exchange for the three strangers. The justness of destroying those without status then becomes questionable. In addition, the reader becomes aware that like God, the words of the angels can be contradictory as illustrated when one of the angels gives conflicting accounts of when he can begin demolishing the cities. Finally, the paradox of saving the people of Zoar is revealed when Lot soon leaves Zoar in order to retreat to the hills, thus needlessly saving a wicked people from destruction. Paradox, then, elucidates the ambiguousness of God as well as mankind's words and actions.

### **Abimelech**

It is paradoxical that Abimelech is attracted to a ninety year old woman. *While residing in Gerar as an alien, Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." And King Abimelech of Gerar sent and took Sarah (20:1-2).* King Abimelech's eye is caught by Sarah even though she must be pretty old by now. The use of Sarah rather than Sarai shows that this event occurs when she is at least ninety years old. *God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name . . . Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (17:15, 17).* Unlike 12:11, there is no mention of Sarah still being beautiful all of these years later. Thus, it is rather amazing that Abimelech becomes infatuated with a ninety year old woman.



Again, paradoxically, Abraham exhibits little faith in God's protection which, in turn, endangers Sarah and her future heir. *Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, "LORD, will you destroy an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'?" And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' I did this in the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands"* (20:4-5). Once again, the faithful, blameless Abraham is being unrighteous while a foreigner is being righteous. First of all, Abraham is showing no faith in God's ability to keep him safe in Gerar. Secondly, he either did not learn from the situation in Egypt (chapter 12) that it was wrong for him to give his wife to another man or else he figured that God would get him out of any complications which might arise. Thirdly, Abraham is not even considering that, at this point, Sarah is most likely pregnant and he could be endangering his heir for God promised him in 18:10 that Sarah would have a child. In 21:2, *Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Thus, at the time of which God had spoken to him, God made Sarah pregnant.* Later, Abraham takes Sarah, who should be pregnant at this point, to Gerar and gives her to Abimelech. Not only is Abraham showing his lack of faith in God's power, but he is also endangering his heir.

Abimelech's faith in God is paradoxical in comparison to Abraham's lack of trust. Even though God has not made any covenants with Abimelech, it appears that Abimelech knows a lot about God and has respect for him for not only does he listen to God but he also acknowledges God's power by immediately returning Sarah to Abraham. Though Abraham lacks insight and proclaims that there is *no fear of God at all in this place*, in this situation, Abimelech displays more fear of God than Abraham does. After all, Abraham knew from the example of Egypt that claiming Sarah as his sister was wrong but he did it anyway. In contrast, when Abimelech finds out that God disapproved of his actions, he takes immediate steps to correct it. In addition, this is one of the few times where God is positively concerned with the well-being of people outside of his covenant rather than just being concerned with punishing them. Ironically, God prevents Abimelech, a person who is not a member of his chosen race, from sinning and tells him he knows the situation is not his fault for *God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart"* (20:6). When dealing with his own people, though, (i.e. Adam and Eve, Cain,

etc.) God rarely intervenes in order to keep his race sinless. Paradox clearly shows that Abimelech's fear of the LORD is stronger than Abraham's.

It is a further paradox that though Abraham sins against Abimelech, Abimelech not only pays for Abraham's sin but he must also have Abraham pray that God does not kill him. As already mentioned, Abraham's eyes are closed to recognizing that he has acted unrighteously. Abimelech, on the other hand, confronts Abraham and tells him that *you have done things to me that ought not to be done* (20:9). Paradoxically, Abimelech did not sin against Abraham but Abraham sinned against Abimelech. It is a further paradox that Abraham, the man who caused all the problems to begin with, is put in the role as savior. God tells Abimelech, *"Now then, return the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all that are yours."* Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him. Then Abraham prayed (20:7, 14, 16). Abraham's character is now questioned further. If Abimelech had not given Abraham sheep, oxen, male and female slaves, and a thousand pieces of silver, would Abraham have prayed for Abimelech's healing? After all, Abraham does not pray for Abimelech until he has been given all of these extra gifts. According to God's words, though, Abimelech only needed to return Sarah. However, he had so much fear of either Abraham or God that he greatly over-compensated in gifts of recompense. It must be emphasized that if Abraham had chosen not to pray for King Abimelech, God would have killed Abimelech, thus punishing an innocent man. Even though God admits in 20:6 that Abimelech is innocent, the king and his family are not healed until Abraham prays for him. *Then Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For God had closed fast all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife* (20:17). Abimelech ends up unjustly paying for Abraham's sin. Though Abraham was so concerned with the righteous being punished because of the wicked (18:25), here is a case where a righteous man is punished for the wicked act of another.

In summary, paradox clearly illuminates that, in this situation, Abimelech's faith is far stronger than Abraham's faith. Abraham lets God down once again by claiming Sarah as his sister. Ironically, though God admits that Abimelech is not guilty of intentionally sinning, he is still going to kill him unless

Abraham, the initiator of the sin, prays for his absolution. Therefore, this is a situation in which God blesses the sinful actions of his chosen people over the virtuous actions of those he has, for the most part, abandoned.

### **The Birth of Isaac**

Sarah's attitude change towards Hagar and Ishmael is paradoxical for whereas she once considered Hagar to be Abraham's second wife and Ishmael to be her own son, she now ostracizes them from the family. After Isaac is born, Sarah says to Abraham, "*Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac*" (21:10). Sarah now despises Hagar and strips away her role as second wife to Abraham (16:3). Hagar has once again become a mere Egyptian slave woman. Paradoxically, one day, Sarah's descendants will be slaves to Hagar's people. It is also interesting to note that now that Sarah has had a child of her own, she no longer considers Ishmael to be their child. She does not even consider him to be Abraham's son for she refers to him as *her son* (meaning Hagar's son) and *the son of this slave woman* rather than saying "your son" when speaking to Abraham. (21:10). Before, she had considered Ishmael to be her son as witnessed when she said, "*Go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her*" (16:2). Furthermore, despite what Sarah wishes, Ishmael is an inheritor just for being the offspring of Abraham. God tells Abraham, "*As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring*" (21:13). Though Sarah hates him, God stays with him (21:20). Paradoxically, though Sarah once gave Hagar as a wife to Abraham and accepted Ishmael as her own, she now wants Abraham to have nothing to do with his second wife or with Ishmael.

Furthermore, the actions of Abraham and Hagar in relation to Ishmael's age are paradoxical. To begin with, 21:15 says that Abraham gave Hagar *the child* to hold. Then, in 21:18, the angel of God tells Hagar to *lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand*. Paradoxically, Ishmael is at least fourteen by this time for he was thirteen years old when he was circumcised and since his circumcision, Isaac was both promised and born to Abraham and Sarah (17:25, 18:10, 21:2). It would be hard for her to hold fast a child of fourteen with her hand. After Hagar leaves Abraham's household, Ishmael is then depicted as a

baby or a toddler rather than a fourteen year old. *When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off...for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child" And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy (21:15-17).* Though Ishmael is fourteen, he is paradoxically young enough to carry, be put under the bushes, and to cry because he is thirsty.

Still another point of interest is that despite the fact that this is a patriarchal society, the women are in control in many of the situations. For instance, Sarah exerts her will over Abraham and has Ishmael sent away. God even orders Abraham to do what Sarah tells him for he tells Abraham, *"Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you"* (21:12). Likewise, Hagar is in control of Ishmael's future. God tells her, *Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him"* (21:18). The phrase *hold him fast with your hand* implies power. Without Hagar standing with her son, he will never survive to become a great nation. In these situations, Sarah is controlling Abraham while Hagar is vital to Ishmael's future.

To summarize, paradox depicts the complete attitude change Sarah has undergone in relation to Hagar and Ishmael, the strangeness of how Ishmael is treated in relation to his age, and the influential control women have in a patriarchal society. Whereas Sarah once regarded Hagar as Abraham's second wife and Ishmael as her son, she now ostracizes them from the family. When they leave, Ishmael is referred to as a fourteen year old boy but treated as a child. Finally, Sarah shows her control over Abraham by throwing out Hagar and Ishmael while Hagar is put in control over Ishmael by God. Thus, between Sarah and Hagar, women are in control of this entire episode.

### **Sacrificing Isaac**

Whereas Abraham had to symbolically kill Ishmael, he is now told literally to kill Isaac. *After these things God tested Abraham...He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you"* (22:1-2). When Abraham sent Ishmael away, it was nearly the same as sacrificing him. Sending him and Hagar out with only water and bread would have been a death sentence if God had not intervened.

Though Abraham did not physically run a knife through him, by sending him into the wilderness, he was still giving him up to certain death due to either dehydration, starvation, or attack by wild animals. Though Ishmael did not die a physical death, Abraham has still permanently lost his son Ishmael, for if he ever saw him again it would not have been for many years later. Abraham was forced by Sarah and God to symbolically kill Ishmael. Now, paradoxically, God tells Abraham to offer up Isaac as a burnt sacrifice and to literally kill him. Abraham most likely thought that he would have to actually slaughter Isaac just as he really had to send Ishmael away. In any case, both sons are threatened with death at the hands of Abraham by the command of God early in their lives. However, both survive to become the ancestor of a nation. Thus, paradoxically, Abraham is told to kill Isaac after he has already killed Ishmael symbolically.

Paradox also shows that God has no compunction against tempting men and that Abraham could have refused God's directive and not been punished for it. To begin with, Abraham is tested by God just as God allows Satan to test Job. Usually God is not the one who directly tests man. In other situations, it is either Satan or other humans who tempt man to do wrong (i.e. the serpent tempting Eve, Rebekah encouraging Jacob to usurp his brother's place). God is essentially making Abraham choose between sins. Abraham has to decide whether to murder his son or to disobey God. Either way, Abraham will be committing a sin. In order to remain a man of faith, he has to make up his mind to commit an unrighteous act. The question remains, if Abraham had not offered up Isaac as a sacrifice then would God have broken the covenant he had made with him? Previously, God said the covenant would be broken if males were not circumcised (17:9-14). At this point, all the males are circumcised so God could not have broken the covenant based on this stipulation. Though God also told him to *walk before me and be blameless* (17:1), Abraham showed how "unblameless" he is in episodes such as at Gerar. So far, when Abraham has been unfaithful, he has been rewarded rather than punished for it. Thus, it logically follows that he could have refused to succumb to God's temptation to sacrifice his son and still received God's promised covenant. God's words to Abraham prove to be inaccurate for whether deliberately or unintentionally, he has forgotten about Ishmael. *He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me"* (22:12). Again, *the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn,*

*says the LORD; Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you*" (22:15-17). God has completely left out the existence of Ishmael. After all, Isaac is not Abraham's *only son* nor is he the only son that Abraham did not withhold from God. He also gave Ishmael up when God commanded him to (21:11-14). Thus, God's words to Abraham prove to be a false statement.

In summary, paradox illuminates how completely Ishmael has been ostracized from the family as well as revealing more of God's characteristics. Ishmael's symbolic death is superseded only when God tempts Abraham to kill Isaac. God, however, not only tempts his chosen, but he also seems to remember only what he chooses to. This is illustrated when God refers to Isaac as Abraham's only son rather than his second son.

### **Abraham's Marriage To Keturah And His Death**

Paradox is further found in Abraham's fertility, the sending away of his sons, and in the gifts he gives to these sons. To begin with, after Sarah's death, Abraham marries Keturah (25:1). Abraham is too old to have children without God's help as evident when God intervened to make both Abraham and Sarah fertile again in order that Isaac could be born (17:17). Paradoxically, though Sarah's womb was closed after the birth of Isaac, Abraham has remained fertile. After Isaac was born, Sarah produced no more children. Abraham, on the other hand, has six more children for he fathers Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah (25:2). This is triple the amount of children he has produced before this time. Thus, though God had closed Sarah's womb, he had caused Abraham's fertility to continue. However, Abraham was not left fertile in order that he can produce more heirs. The six sons he has with Keturah are not allowed to have any part of the inheritance Abraham leaves behind. A second paradox is exhibited when Abraham, sends both Keturah and his six sons *away from his son Isaac* (25:6) just as he once sent away Hagar and Ishmael. Whereas, he sent away Hagar and Ishmael at the orders of Sarah and God and was very distressed over the matter, now he sends away his wife and sons of his own free will and appears to feel no remorse. Furthermore, God takes no personal interest in Keturah's sons as he did with Ishmael or Isaac. In fact, it is as if they do not exist for God does not acknowledge their presence nor does he make

great nations of them as he does with Ishmael and Isaac. Finally, it is paradoxical that Abraham gives gifts to Keturah's children when he sends them away (25:6). He gives gifts to those he expresses no personal feeling for while giving Ishmael only bread and water when he sends him away. Thus, the entire existence of his sons with Keturah is paradoxical from the moment of their conception to the moment when they are sent away.

It is interesting to note that Ishmael's relations with his family contrasts with the words God spoke concerning his future. God decreed that Ishmael would *be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin* (16:12). Paradoxically, when Abraham dies, it is Ishmael and not the six sons of Keturah that help Isaac bury their father. *Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him* (25:8, 9). Though Ishmael was sent away many years prior with no gifts and was as good as dead to Abraham and Sarah, Ishmael still takes the time to honor his father by helping Isaac bury him. Keturah's sons, on the other hand, never come to honor their father one last time before he is buried. Furthermore, up to this point and at this point, there has been no mention of rivalry between Ishmael and his family. Instead of having *his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him* and living at *odds with all his kin*, he is helping Isaac with the intimate task of burying their father. There is no mention of Ishmael and Isaac being at odds with each other. Instead of being a *wild ass of a man*, a picture is drawn of the two brothers working peacefully beside each other. Ishmael's relations with his family along with his behavior is at complete odds with God's earlier predictions of his future.

Furthermore, paradox is discovered in the concept of Esau serving Jacob and in Isaac's love for Esau. To begin with, God tells Rebekah, *"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger"* (25:23). In this society, the older brother is the inheritor of his father's birthright and blessing. As in the situation of Isaac becoming the heir rather than Ishmael, there is a paradox in an older brother serving his younger brother. After the twins are born, *Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob* (25:28). If Rebekah told Isaac God's words then it is paradoxical that Isaac chooses to favor Esau

over Jacob. After all, it would be odd if Rebekah did not tell Isaac what God had told her. God did not talk to them often and when he did, they most likely told each other about it. In any case, his love for Esau over Jacob is paradoxical. For, like Jacob, Isaac is the younger brother and he has prevailed over his older brother, Ishmael. Therefore, Isaac would be able to relate to Jacob more just in terms of the order of their births. In addition, Furthermore, the text reads that Isaac loved Esau because he was a hunter (25:28). However, Isaac appears to more of a farmer than a hunter so even their life's work is dissimilar (26:12) and, finally, Esau and his wife Judith *made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah* (26:35). Despite all of the above though, Isaac paradoxically loves Esau more than Jacob. Thus, paradox highlights the backwardness of the younger ruling over the elder as well as the strangeness of Isaac's love for Esau instead of Jacob.

To summarize, paradox elucidates the uncharacteristic disinterest Abraham exhibits towards over half of his sons, a version of Ishmael's future that should not have happened according to God's words, and the triumph of the younger over the elder. Whereas Abraham was once grieved at the idea of being separated from Ishmael or Isaac, now he turns six of his children away without shedding a tear. In addition, though God has declared that Ishmael is to live in enmity with his family, paradoxically, Ishmael and his brother Isaac work together to bury their father. Finally, though Isaac has more reasons to identify with Jacob, he loves Esau more. Through paradox, the reader is allowed to look further into the souls of each of these characters.

### **Isaac In Gerar**

Through paradox, one sees how God lowers his covenant standards and how he makes an unsupported claim regarding Abraham's faithfulness. God now continues his covenant with Abraham through Isaac. He tells Isaac, "*Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Abraham*" (26:3). Like Abraham, Isaac's covenant is conditional. However, God has paradoxically lowered his standards. Isaac does not have to be righteous and blameless as he required of Abraham. Instead, Isaac merely has to stay in Gerar. If Isaac had decided not to stay in Gerar, then God



might not have fulfilled his promise. Furthermore, God makes an unsubstantiated claim that Abraham has kept his *commandments, statutes, and laws*. In reality, God has not given Abraham any laws or statutes to keep. Obviously, there was no statute against lying as seen when Abraham tells the rulers that Sarah is his sister in both Egypt and Gerar. Abraham probably even broke the no killing rule when he went to rescue Lot from enemy forces in 14:14-16. Thus, paradox brings to light God's lowering of standards in addition to his ambiguous words in regards to Abraham's faithfulness.

Furthermore, by comparing Isaac's actions in Gerar to Abraham's actions in Gerar, one sees that Isaac was just as unwilling as his father to blindly trust God during dangerous situations. *When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister;" for he was afraid to say, "my wife," thinking, "or else the men of the place might kill me for the sake of Rebekah, because she is attractive in appearance"* (26:7). To begin with, Abraham spoke this same lie in the same place with the same king in chapter 20. After discovering that Isaac has lied to him, Abimelech asks of Isaac (26:9, 10) the same questions he asked Abraham (20:9, 10). For instance, as he once asked Abraham, *"What have you done to us?"* (20:9), he now asks Isaac, *"What is this you have done to us?"* (26:10). Likewise, both Abraham and Isaac answer that they initiated the deception because they were afraid that they would be killed if they did not. Paradoxically, despite God's words and protection, Isaac and Abraham have the same tendency to lose their trust in God's power to protect them when confronted with danger.

Paradox also shows the control Abimelech has over Isaac despite the fact that Isaac is a member of God's chosen race, for not only does he make Isaac leave his land but he also extricates an oath from him. Abimelech told Abraham that *my land is before you; settle where it pleases you* (20:15). Paradoxically, he now tells Isaac to *go away from us; you have become too powerful for us* (26:16). When Abimelech was in a similar situation with Abraham, he allowed Abraham to stay in his land even though God had inflicted Abimelech with a sickness and closed the wombs of his wife and female slaves (20:17). Isaac, on the other hand, only threatens him with his immense power (26: 14, 16). With Isaac, Abimelech does not have to be frightened of sickness or death as he was with Abraham. However, Abimelech wants no part of Isaac and makes him leave his land. Before he can get too far away though, Abimelech comes to him and says, *"Let there be an oath between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you so that you will do*

*us no harm*" (26:28, 29). As with his covenant with Abraham (21:22-24), the oath is focused on Isaac making a promise that he will not harm the Philistines. Paradoxically, Abimelech never says that he will not harm Isaac or his people. Thus, despite Isaac's favored status, not only must he leave the land but he also has to swear never to harm Abimelech or his people.

In summary, paradox illuminates the imperfectness of God's words and actions, the lack of trust Isaac has, and Abimelech's upper hand over Isaac. God appears to be imperfect when he once again changes his unconditional covenant by lowering the standards he requires Isaac to fulfill in order to receive the benefits of the covenant. Along the same lines, God appears imperfect when he claims Abraham has kept commandments that he has yet to issue. In addition, Isaac shows the same lack of faith that Abraham did when he attempts to pass off Rebekah as his sister rather than his wife. Finally, though Isaac is one of God's chosen people, Abimelech eventually gains control of the situation when he makes Isaac leave his land while ensuring that Isaac gives him an oath of protection on the way out.

### **Jacob Steals Esau's Blessing**

Rebekah is so determined for Jacob to receive Isaac's blessing that she remains unconcerned that God is witnessing her deception and betrayal and she is also willing to take upon herself any punishment which may result. When Isaac is old and can no longer see well, he tells Esau to *prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die* (27:4). Nowhere in his exchange does he mention God. When Rebekah repeats the exchange to Jacob she tells him that Isaac said, "*Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food to eat, that I may bless you before the LORD before I die*" (27:7). It is paradoxical that Rebekah, who seems to be consciously aware that God is watching them, is the one instigating the deception of Isaac and the betrayal of Esau. Though she feels God is watching them, she still plans to undermine Isaac's authority in order that Jacob, the son whom she loves the most, is blessed instead of Esau. Rebekah either feels that she is committing no sin or else she believes the gains are worth the consequences as witnessed when she is willing to take any curse given to Jacob upon her own two shoulders (27:13). In addition, since God has told her that *the elder shall serve the younger* (25:23), she probably feels that her actions are in line with God's wishes. Thus, it is paradoxical

that Rebekah, who is very aware of God's presence, remains unafraid of God's reaction to her deception and betrayal.

Jacob's concern about being cursed, illustrates how obedience can lead to sin, and emphasizes the futility of Rebekah's attempts to redirect any curse upon herself. Jacob says, *"Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing."* His mother said to him, *"Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me"* (27:12, 13). To begin with, it is paradoxical that by obeying Rebekah, Jacob sins against Isaac and Esau. Thus, here is another instance in which obedience leads to sin. However, it must be noted that no where in the account does it state that Jacob's deception was a sin against God. Secondly, if Jacob had been cursed, Rebekah would most likely have had no power to transfer the curse upon herself, especially if it was a curse dealing with the prosperity of their descendants as was Noah's curse upon Ham. Otherwise, Isaac's curse would have overridden God's covenant and God's power would have been diminished. Paradox is illuminated through Jacob's fear of being cursed.

Furthermore, Isaac's lack of exhibiting deep emotions such as rage or grief at Jacob's deception is paradoxical in terms to the love the text claims Isaac has for Esau. In Genesis 25:28, *Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.* First of all, after Esau comes to him carrying the freshly cooked meal, *Isaac trembled violently* (27:33). After this one reaction, however, throughout the rest of his exchange with Esau, Isaac is not too perturbed over the occurrence or the implications of the deception. He never severely rebukes Jacob nor does he cry out to the LORD in sorrow, anguish, and humiliation. Instead, he paradoxically remains strangely cold to Esau, the son whom he loves. Esau, on the other hand, *cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, me also, father!"* (27:34). With the words, *"Bless me, me also, father!,"* Esau has been reduced to sounding like a child which parallels the new role of younger brother that Esau has been thrust into. Isaac, on the other hand, offers Esau no comfort for he says, *"Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing."* Esau then begs, *"Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"* Isaac answered Esau, *"I have already made him your LORD, and I have given him all his brothers as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?"* (27:36, 37). Paradoxically, Isaac

could have done a number of things for Esau. For instance, he could have blessed him with wealth and told him that he would become a great nation though one that was not as mighty as Jacob's. However, Isaac says none of these words. Instead he dismally tells him, "*See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck*" (27:39, 40). Esau begs Isaac to bless him but when Isaac finally speaks he only reinforces what he has already given to Jacob. No words of blessing are spoken, only a little bit of hope is offered in the words *but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck*. Paradoxically, even Ishmael received a better blessing than Esau did although Isaac supposedly loves Esau. Later on, after Jacob is sent away with a second blessing, Esau continues to try to please his father. *So that when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please his father Isaac, Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael, and sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had* (28:8, 9). However, Esau's actions make no impact on Isaac and he still receives no blessing. Therefore, Isaac's actions are paradoxical in comparison to the love the text claims he has, as seen when he coldly turns his back on his elder son.

In summary, paradox illuminates Rebekah's lack of fear at having God witness the deception as well as providing another example of how obedience can lead to sin as seen when Jacob steals his brother's birthright at the insistence of his mother. Paradox also highlights the unusual aspect of Isaac's lack of emotional reaction to the deception as well as the uncharacteristic refusal to give Esau a decent blessing.

### **God's Covenant With Jacob**

Paradoxically, in the situations with Abraham and Jacob, though God puts a time limit to his covenant, it is Jacob rather than God who makes the covenant conditional. To begin with God puts a time limit to his covenant when he states, "*For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you*" (28:15). These words bring about a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, Jacob wants God to fulfill his promises. On the other hand, if God does fulfill his promises then he will leave Jacob, a situation Jacob most likely does not want. Furthermore, unless God fulfills certain conditions, Jacob will not serve

the LORD as his God. He says, *"If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God"* (28:20, 21). Jacob demands that God give him bread, clothing, and the promise that he will one day return to Isaac's house. Otherwise, he will not serve him. It is paradoxical that Jacob will only worship God if he gives him what he wants rather than because he is the creator of the universe and holds the power of life and death in his hands.

### **The Marriage And Children Of Jacob**

The deception of Jacob is paradoxical to his own deceptive nature and his past deceptive acts. To begin with, after fleeing from his father's household, he comes to Laban's, his uncle's, house and falls in love with Laban's younger daughter Rachel. After a month of staying with Laban, Laban tells him, *"Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me what shall your wages be?"* Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, *"I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel"* (29:15, 18). Here, Laban shows concern in not offending Jacob and in treating him right. He even asks Jacob what wages he should pay him for his work. It should be noted that it is Jacob, not Laban, who makes the terms of serving seven years for Rachel. Laban, in return, responds that it is better to give Rachel to Jacob than to any other man (29:19). However, when the seven years have expired, *he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her* (29:23). Thus, if Jacob had not later volunteered to stay for another seven years for Rachel then Laban would have had to paradoxically give Rachel to another man even though he claimed it was better to give Rachel to Jacob rather than to any other man. When Jacob discovers that he has slept with the wrong woman, he says to Laban, *"What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?"* (29:25). Laban has paradoxically changed his original intentions of dealing with Jacob fairly. He now has no conscience against deceiving him. This is evident for instead of giving Jacob both women he now says, *"Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years"* (29:27). In this situation, the tables have turned and it is Laban rather than Jacob who sets the terms for another seven years in order to finally receive Rachel. Finally, it is paradoxical that Jacob,

the one who has deceived both his father and older brother would, himself, be deceived so easily. Thus, it is paradoxical that the sly Jacob has been so easily deceived.

The names of Leah's first three sons are paradoxical in terms of how they are regarded in Jacob's eyes. To begin with, after Leah's first son, Reuben, is born, she says, "*Because the LORD has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me.*" Thus, Reuben is associated with being loved. However, it is Joseph, Rachel's son, whom Jacob will love the most. Reuben does not make Jacob feel love. Instead, he makes him feel shamed by sleeping with Rachel's maid Bilhah (35:22). As a result, when it comes time to relate the future, Jacob ensures that Reuben shall no longer excel (49:4). Secondly, when Simeon is born Leah says, "*Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also*" and when Levi is born she says, "*Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons* (29:33, 34). Paradoxically, Simeon, who was born out of Jacob's hate, is also filled with hate. Jacob says of Simeon and Levi, in reference to when they slaughtered the men of Shechem (chapter 34), that *weapons of violence are their sword . . . for in their anger they killed men, and at their whim they hamstring oxen* (49:5-6). As a result of Simeon's actions in Shechem, Jacob is not in any hurry to rescue him when he is held captive in Egypt (42:38). Likewise, it is paradoxical that Jacob will have nothing to do with Levi, whose name refers to a uniting or a coming together of hate and love. Instead of Levi joining people together, he causes separation as evident when Jacob says in reference to Simeon and Levi, "*May I never come into their council; may I not be joined to their company*" (49:6). Leah thinks that Levi will join her and Jacob together. However, Jacob will one day hate Levi and divide and scatter his descendants. Therefore, the names of Leah's first three sons are paradoxical to the future Jacob relates to them when he is close to death.

Rachel's words in regards to children are paradoxical to the reality of her situation. Rachel says, "*Give me children, or I shall die*" (30:1). Paradoxically when she does finally have children, she dies giving birth to her second child (35:16-19). Therefore, in both situations death is the outcome. When Rachel, like Sarah, is desperate for a son, she gives her maid Bilhah to Jacob in order that she will obtain a son through her maid. When Bilhah bears a son, Rachel says, "*God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son*" (30:6). Paradoxically, God has not given Rachel a son. He gave Bilhah

one. He has indeed judged her, but, as a result of this judgment, he has kept her barren while opening up Leah's womb (29:31). When Bilhah has a second son, Rachel says, "*With mighty wrestling I have wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed*" (30:8). However, paradoxically, Rachel has not prevailed. Leah already has four sons at this point. Rachel has zero. Even Bilhah's two sons, which she is pretending to be her own, are still less than the four sons of Leah. Thus, when Reuben finds some mandrakes, Rachel allows Leah to sleep with Jacob that night in exchange for possession of the mandrakes. Mandrakes were thought to make a person fertile. Paradoxically, Leah, who gave up the mandrakes, is the one who later ends up having two more sons and a daughter before Rachel ever produces her first son (30:17-22). Therefore, Rachel's words deeply contrasts her reality while her mandrakes still leave her fruitless.

In summary, paradoxical situations exist in Jacob's deception, the names of Leah's first three sons, and Rachel's words concerning children. Jacob is the depiction of a man who can either be as easily fooled as his brother Esau or who purposely allowed himself to be deceived as Isaac may have done. Furthermore, paradox underlines the fact that the character of God's chosen people are just like the characters of the rest of the people on earth for his chosen can not always live up to the prestige of their birth names nor can they always separate the imaginings in their minds from the reality of the situation at hand.

### **Jacob Leaves Laban**

Paradox shows how Jacob's metaphysical blindness is emphasized when contrasted with his good hearing, and God's words to Jacob prove to be ambiguous. *Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's; he has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father."* And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him as favorably as he did before (31:1, 2). It is hearing that finally makes Jacob realize that Laban is not too fond of him. As Isaac heard Jacob's voice but pretended it was really Esau's and as Rebekah heard Isaac's instructions to Esau, so Jacob hears of the discontentment of Laban's sons. Paradoxically, though Jacob is good with hearing, symbolically, his eyesight is poor for not only was he too blind to know that he was sleeping with Leah rather than Rachel but he has been too blind to notice that Laban has not regarded him favorably for at least thirteen of the

twenty years he has been there. As a result of what he has heard, God tells him, *“Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you”* (31:3). However, paradoxically, God’s words are confusing, for Jacob is already in the land of his ancestors and kindred for Laban is his uncle. God should have said as he does in 31:13 to *return to the land of your birth* rather than the land of his ancestors for these are two different destinations, one of which he is already at and the other is where he wants to go. Therefore, the ambiguity in God’s words and Jacob’s blindness in relation to his hearing are paradoxical elements in the text.

Paradox also illustrates the incongruity in the indignant feelings of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah as well as the blind eye of God. For instance, it is paradoxical that Jacob, the deceiver, talks to Laban, another deceiver, about how honest he is as seen when he says, *“So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you”* (30:33). In addition, Jacob tells Rachel and Leah, *“your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me”* (31:7). These words are paradoxical for as Jacob once cheated Esau, now he, himself, is being cheated by someone else. However, Jacob did not cheat Esau out of mere wages. Instead, he stole his whole entire inheritance. As mentioned above, Jacob is blind, blind to his own sin. Jacob then says that God told him, *“I have seen all that Laban is doing to you”* (31:12). God’s concern for Jacob in this matter emphasizes how God notices all slights or wrongdoing to his chosen people while turning a blind eye when his people harm others. After all, God never told Esau *I have seen all that Jacob is doing to you.* Finally, Rachel and Leah become indignant and say, *Are we not regarded by him [Laban] as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us”* (31:15). It should be noted that it was Jacob who instigated the *selling* by offering to work for Laban for seven years in exchange for Rachel (29:18). Jacob devised the terms, Laban only complied with them. When the seven years are over, Laban uses Jacob’s prior standard of being given a wife in exchange for seven years of work in order to have Jacob work a second seven year period for him. Thus, paradox exposes the reality behind the words of both mankind and God.

Paradox also illustrates another instance in which God’s words lack power and emphasizes the irony of Jacob’s marriage to Laban’s daughters. God tells Laban, *“take heed that you say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad”* (31:24). However, the first thing Laban does when he reaches Jacob is to ask,



*“What have you done? You have deceived me”* (31:26). Therefore, not only is Laban talking to Jacob but he is talking negatively to him. However, God does nothing to punish him. Though Laban has some fear of God’s retaliation if he should physically harm Jacob (31:29), he believes that in a verbal exchange, either his gods will protect him or else there is no threat behind God’s words. Even though Jacob says to Laban that the LORD *rebuked you last night* (31:42), this rebuke caused no fear for Laban still chased Jacob down, spoke negatively to him, searched his party, and would have been willing to put to death the thief of the statues. This then leads to the point that if Laban’s gods are different than Jacob’s God, then why did it matter if Jacob married a foreign girl (28:1)? If Rachel and Leah were raised up worshipping other gods then, paradoxically, they are no better than Esau’s Hittite girl (26:34). Therefore, God’s powerless words are paradoxical for they are imperfect and Jacob’s marriage is paradoxical for they are the daughters of a man who worships other gods.

In addition, it is paradoxical that Jacob inadvertently shows care for Leah while nearly sentencing Rachel to death. When Laban asks Jacob why he ran away, Jacob responds, *“Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force”* (31:31). Jacob does not say that he was afraid Laban would take Rachel by force. Thus, by including Leah in his fears, he reveals his care for her. Jacob later says in regards to the missing gods, *“But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live”* (31:32). Because Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods, he could have been unintentionally responsible for her execution if the gods had been found in her possession. Through these two situations, Jacob shows his concern for Leah while nearly causing Rachel’s execution.

To summarize, once again, paradox reveals how God’s words can be imperfect while giving further insight into the personalities of his chosen people. For instance, God’s command that Jacob return to the land of his ancestors and his kindred is imperfect for he is already dwelling in such a place. Furthermore, God’s failure to punish Laban for disobeying his words illustrates the imperfect relationship he has between word and action. Through paradox, one also sees that God’s chosen people are only above others because they have God’s favor and not because they have extraordinary personalities. This point is illustrated when Jacob elucidates the fact that God’s special people can be as spiritually blind as those

whom he has abandoned. For instance, Jacob slept with the wrong woman, is blind to his sins, and nearly sentences Rachel to death.

### **The Meeting Between Jacob And Esau**

Before Jacob meets Esau, he has an encounter with either a man or with a divine being. *Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak (32:24)*. First of all, it is paradoxical that Jacob was both alone and wrestling with a man. Secondly, the man Jacob is wrestling with is actually either God or another divine being. *Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed" (32:28)*. Likewise, Jacob says, *"For I have seen God face to face and yet my life is preserved" (32:30)*. Thirdly, it is paradoxical that Jacob would be stronger than a divine being and win a wrestling match, especially when he is fighting with a hip that is out of socket. Fourthly, it is paradoxical that a divine being would practice unsportsmanlike conduct because he is losing the match. *"When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him (32:25)*. Thus, this being has no ethics. Instead, he attempts to cheat in order to escape from Jacob. Fifthly, it is paradoxical that since Jacob prevailed, God lost. An all powerful God loses to the mortal man that he created? Thus, paradox further reveals the weakness and the unjust characteristics of God or his divine beings.

Paradox also resides in Jacob's terminology and in Jacob's loss of control. *Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob..." (32:3, 4)*. Because Jacob is afraid that Esau will kill him, he calls Esau lord in order to stay humble. Paradoxically, Isaac made Jacob lord of Esau twenty years prior to this date. This then brings about a second paradox. Though Jacob is lord of Esau, and has the birthright, the blessing, and riches, he is still afraid of Esau and believes he is at the mercy of his older brother. Likewise, when Esau had the birthright and blessing, he was never in control of situations and was at the mercy of Jacob. Now, however, when Esau no longer possesses the birthright or blessing, he is finally given control of Jacob's future. Paradoxically, as Esau had no control over situations when he had possession of his inheritance, now Jacob, who stole Esau's inheritance, no longer has control.

When Esau and Jacob finally meet, Jacob even acts out the role of servant for he bows down to his brother seven times and has his children, maids, and wives bow down before him (33:3, 6, 7). Furthermore, he makes meek comments to Esau such as *to find favor with my lord* (33:8), *if I find favor with you* (33:10), and *for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God* (33:10). It is paradoxical that, like God, Esau has the power to take Jacob's life. Though Jacob has the upper hand, he has taken on the role of a servant. Thus, Jacob's terminology and subservient position is paradoxical to the role he actually holds.

Paradox also uncovers Jacob's lack of trust in God's protection. God reminds Jacob that he is there with him in verses such as 28:15, 31:13, and 32:1. For instance 32:1 relates how *the angels of God met him* when he was on his way to meet Esau. Jacob, however, is not confident in God's power to protect him from danger. He has none of the courageous warrior characteristics that his grandfather Abraham had (14:14-16). Instead he becomes a coward and forgets God's presence for the text says *then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies, thinking, "If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company that is left will escape"* (32:7). Jacob does not proudly lead his party to meet Esau. Instead, he sends one group of his people ahead to see if Esau will destroy them or not. He would rather that they be destroyed than that he should die. He also sends him a huge number of animals in an attempt to gain his favor saying, *"I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me"* (32:20). Paradoxically, Jacob was never worried about Esau's acceptance before. Now that he faces the possibility of paying the consequences for his sin, though, he is very concerned about what Esau thinks. Furthermore, Jacob's distrust in God's power is evident for Jacob is so afraid of Esau that he ignores God's command to return to the land of his birth (31:13) and lies to Esau, telling him that he will go with him to Seir (33:14). Instead, he travels to Succoth and Shechem instead of to his father's home or to Seir (33:17, 18). Through all of these paradoxes, Jacob has clearly revealed the lack of faith he has in God. However, one factor should also be mentioned in defense of Jacob's lack of faith in God's power. Jacob has just finished winning a wrestling match against a divine being at Peniel. He has proven that he is superior to the divine in physical strength. Therefore, perhaps he had reason to doubt God's power.

Though Esau is tormented by Jacob, his father has practically abandoned him, and God does not care about him, Esau's kindness is paradoxical in terms to the justice that is due him. To begin with, when Esau sees Jacob he *ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept* (33:4). Once again, Esau is weeping, but, paradoxically, this time, his tears are not ones of bitterness but tears of happiness. Jacob, on the other hand, who has never wept for Esau, is crying now. However, his tears are probably ones of relief that Esau is not going to kill him. It is paradoxical that though Jacob has only done ill to Esau, Esau does no ill to Jacob in return. In fact, he is very generous and gracious to Jacob. He never mentions Jacob's past treachery, he does not harm any part of Jacob's household, and he even offers to leave some people with Jacob to help him on his journey. Later, Esau will stand side by side with Jacob in order to bury their father, Isaac (35:29). Esau's kindness uncovers a third paradox: God favors the deceitful Jacob over the generous, forgiving Esau. The God depicted in this account has turned a blind eye to Esau's righteous actions and Jacob's sins. Once again, God favors the sinful over the just. Fourthly, it is paradoxical that despite the loss of his blessing and birthright and despite the fact that Isaac refused to give him a decent blessing, Esau has still prospered. Not only does Esau have four hundred men in his party, but he even turns down Jacob's gifts saying, "*I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself*" (33:9). Eventually, Esau, like Jacob, will become the ancestor of a nation (25:23). Therefore, paradox reveals Esau's generosity and Jacob's unworthiness, and questions God's judgment on whom he decides to favor.

### **The Rape Of Dinah**

Paradox also resides in Shechem's claims of love, Jacob's uncharacteristic silence, and the inherited tendency for Jacob's sons to deceive others. First of all, when Dinah goes to visit the women of Shechem, Prince Shechem rapes her. *And his soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get this girl to be my wife"* (34:3, 4). Shechem's words of love to Dinah are paradoxical to the violence he carried out against her when he raped her. Secondly, it is paradoxical that the *most honored of all his family* not only commits rape but his actions lead to the destruction of his city (34:19, 25-29). Thirdly, paradox is found in

Jacob's near silence concerning the rape of his daughter. After hearing of the matter, Jacob does not have the courage to take action by himself. Instead, he *held his peace* until his sons come home (34:5). Once his sons do come home, Jacob is completely left out of the decision making. As he has lost control over Esau, he has now lost control over his sons. The sons take over all negotiations with Hamor and Shechem and are the ones who decide their punishment. Though the father of the household remains silent, the sons seem to have inherited Jacob's tendency to be deceitful for as Jacob once preyed upon Esau; now Simeon and Levi kill all the males in Shechem and *all their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they* [all the sons living with Jacob] *captured and made their prey* (34:29). It must be noted, that God never personally punishes them nor chastises them for their deceit and treachery. Though some of the sons are given less than a sterling future by Jacob in chapter 49, others profit quite well. Thus, paradox makes Shechem's claims of love absurd as well as pointing out that Jacob has lost control not only of Esau but also of his sons while his sons have inherited his deceptive personality.

When the sons use the word Israel, it is paradoxical, for Israel, the nation, does not yet exist nor are they residing in Israel at this point. After the sons hear of the rape they become angry because Shechem *had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing out not to be done* (34:7). Israel was the name given to Jacob when he wrestled with the divine being at Peniel (32:28). It does not yet refer to a group of people or a nation. However, the sons use it in this context anyway. In addition, paradoxically, Jacob's family is not in Israel, which does not yet exist, but in Shechem (33:18). It is also paradoxical that as the being at Peniel had already told him, "*You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel*"(32:28), God repeats to Jacob a good time later, "*No longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name*" (35:10). According to the divine being, he was no longer called Jacob after their wrestling match. God, however, personally makes the name change after Jacob travels to Bethel. Finally, it is paradoxical that though both the divine being of chapter 32 and the God of chapter 35 make a point that he shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel, throughout the rest of Genesis, he is referred to as both Jacob and Israel. This deeply contrasts with Abram and Sarai. When God changed their names, throughout the rest of the text they are only referred to as Abraham and Sarah. They never revert back to their former names as Jacob does. In fact, God, himself, calls him Jacob rather than

solely Israel as seen when *God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob"* (46:2). Therefore, it is paradoxical that not only do the sons use the word Israel to refer to a nation, but unlike Abraham and Sarah, Jacob's name is not permanently changed.

To summarize, paradox is a tool which illuminates how God favors a people who are in no way morally superior to their counterparts. Though only two of the sons perform the actual slaughtering of the males of the city, all the sons deceive Shechem into circumcising themselves. Furthermore, all the sons take part in looting the city and enslaving the women and children. Furthermore, paradox reveals that God's name changes are ambiguous, for in Jacob's case he ends up reverting back to his former name.

### **Joseph Is Sold Into Slavery**

Joseph's introduction to slavery is riddled with several small paradoxes. First of all, the verse which states *now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves* (37:3) is paradoxical because Benjamin is actually the son of Jacob's old age not Joseph (35:18). Instead, Jacob loves Joseph more because he is the first born son of Rachel, the woman whom he loved more than Leah. Secondly, it is paradoxical that the fruits of Jacob's love is hate. *But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him* (37:4). The brothers hated Joseph not because he *brought a bad report of them to their father* (37:2) but because Jacob blatantly exhibited his love for Joseph over his other sons. When Joseph later gives them details of his dreams in which they are bowing down to him, this only fuels their already smoldering fury, for Joseph makes no attempts to be subtle as Jacob did when he was usurping Esau's position. Thus, it is paradoxical that Benjamin is actually the son of Jacob's old age rather than Joseph and that Jacob's love for one son, produces hate in the others.

This hate then prompts the sons to sell Joseph to some traders and then set things up so that it appears that Joseph is dead. Jacob sends Joseph off to see that things are going *well* (37:14). Paradoxically, his presence makes things not *well*. The brothers are just as jealous of Joseph as Cain was jealous of Abel. They nearly murder Joseph just as Cain once murdered Abel. Instead, at the advice of Reuben, they choose to throw him into a pit in the wilderness after stripping off his robe (37:22-24).

Paradoxically, as Ishmael had been previously driven into the wilderness by Sarah, now his descendants end up buying Sarah's descendant Joseph from a pit in the wilderness (37:25, 28). It should be noted that paradoxically, the sons never actually verbally lie to Jacob. After dipping the robe in goat's blood, *They had the long robe with sleeves taken to their father, and they said, "This we have found; see now whether it is your son's robe or not." He recognized it, and said, "It is my son's robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces"* (37:32, 33). Of course, there is doubt that Joseph is dead. However, Jacob chooses not to investigate the matter further but immediately accepts what his sons tell him. Finally, it is paradoxical that *all his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him* since Jacob has only one daughter, Dinah (37:35). Therefore, paradox depicts how God's chosen people betray their brother Joseph and how Jacob immediately believes him to be dead without any further questions.

To summarize, paradox elucidates that the attitudes and behaviors of God's chosen people are just as poor or sinful as those whom he has turned his back on. Furthermore, Jacob stokes the fire of his sons' anger by loving Joseph more than them. Joseph, on the other hand, deliberately attempts to make them jealous by telling them of his dreams. The combination of these two factors, then leads to the brothers selling Joseph into slavery. Paradox clearly uncovers the lack of spiritual superiority that God's chosen people display.

### **Tamar's Deception**

Er demonstrates that God has a hierarchy of sin for *Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death* (38:7). Though Cain murdered his own brother, God only banishes him from his father's home. He does not execute him and so violence spreads throughout the world. However, *Er was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death* (38:7). God did not put Cain to death, though, because, unlike Er, he was not *wicked in the sight of the LORD*. *Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her; raise up offspring for your brother."* *But since Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, he spilled the semen on the ground whenever he went in to his brother's wife, so that he would not give offspring to his brother* (38:8, 9). As a result of Onan's actions, God kills him for it was *displeasing in the sight of the*

*LORD* (38:10). On one hand, as Cain killed Abel, thus ending his brother's line, so Onan spills his semen in an attempt to end his brother's line. However, God's hierarchy of sin has determined that Onan's actions were wicked enough to execute him. Cain's sin, however, was not wicked enough to kill him for. It is paradoxical that God would be so angry over Onan's actions since he disliked Er. After all, Er was *wicked in the sight of the LORD* but Onan was not; he was just displeasing. Since Er was so wicked, it would be logical to conclude that God would not want his line to continue. Paradoxically, though, God did want his line to continue as seen when he executes Onan for spilling his seed. Furthermore, like Onan, Judah is deliberately ending both Er and Onan's line by refusing to give Tamar to his younger son Shelah (38:11). Paradoxically, though, God does not put him to death because he is displeased with Judah's actions. Thus, paradox clearly shows that God has established an hierarchy of sin which he uses to punish people with but not in a completely fair manner.

It is paradoxical that within the family, it is acceptable for Tamar to be treated like a prostitute as seen when she is sent from man to man according to the levirate law (which is not officially enacted until later written texts). Inside the family it is acceptable to be treated like an unpaid prostitute as evident when Tamar is sent from son to son in order to produce offspring. Outside the family, however, it is wicked enough to be considered punishable by death (38:24). In an attempt to have a child, Tamar dresses up as a prostitute and asks Judah, "*What will you give me, that you may come in to me?*" He answered, "*I will send you a kid from the flock.*" And she said, "*Only if you give me a pledge, until you send it*" (38:16, 17). Judah promises her a kid from the flock. Paradoxically, what she really wants is Judah's "kid," Shelah, from among the remains of his flock of children. Furthermore, the last time he had promised her a kid from his flock (Shelah), he had given her no pledge and thus never kept his promise. This time, however, she demands a pledge. He said, "*What pledge shall I give you?*" She replied, "*Your signet and your cord, and the staff that is in your hand.*" So he gave them to her" (38:18). Paradoxically, it is Tamar and not Judah who is in control of the entire situation. Judah not only comes to Tamar but he also asks *her* what he should give for a pledge rather than making the decision himself. It is Tamar who makes the very steep terms for the pledge and it is Judah who has no choice but to give her what she demands in order that he can have sexual relations with her. Judah, the leader, the one with the staff in his hand,



relinquishes control and power to Tamar. Even when he sent his friend to deliver a kid to her, his lack of control is evident for she has disappeared with his signet, cord and staff. In response to the loss of these vital items, Judah says, *“Let her keep the things as her own, otherwise we will be laughed at”* (38:23). As a result of their sleeping together, she becomes pregnant. However, though Tamar sleeps with Judah and has a child, this can never be considered Er’s offspring for the child is his father’s son and thus Er’s brother, not his own son and heir. Thus, it is paradoxical that even with the birth of Tamar’s twins, Er and Onan are still never given any descendants. When Judah hears that Tamar is pregnant, he wants to instantly burn her. After all, it would let him out of his obligation to give Shelah to her. Judah then says, *“She is more in the right than I”* (38:26). His words are paradoxical because not only was he wrong in not giving her Shelah but he was also wrong in coming to her for sex in the first place. Thus, because he sleeps with prostitutes, he never had the right to burn her and, as one last point, it is also paradoxical that it is acceptable for men to sleep with prostitutes but the prostitute herself must be burned.

In summary, paradox depicts the hierarchy of sin God has established and the way in which God’s chosen men treat his chosen women as prostitutes. God’s hierarchy of sin is revealed when he executes Onan for spilling his seed while protecting Cain after he murders his brother Abel. Furthermore, though women are part of God’s chosen people, the men pass them down as unpaid prostitutes within the family. Paradoxically, though this type of prostitution is accepted within the family, women are executed for fornication outside the family. Of course, as seen with Judah, it appears to be acceptable for men to fornicate for they are rarely, if at all, punished.

### **Joseph Serves Potiphar**

When Joseph is serving Potiphar, Potiphar’s belief in God as well as Joseph’s claim that he would be sinning against God proves to be paradoxical. It is generally said that nations outside the Jewish people were heathen or that they did not believe in the one LORD God. However, there are several indications that this was not so. For instance, Potiphar, an Egyptian, fears God as Abimelech feared God, for Potiphar *saw that the LORD was with him [Joseph], and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands*. Thus, Potiphar obviously had some knowledge and belief in God even though God has abandoned

his people. After Potiphar sees how God has blessed Joseph, he *made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had* (39:4). However, this obviously did not include his wife. After Potiphar's wife tries to get Joseph to sleep with her, Joseph tells her, "*He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" (39:9). Though Joseph says that Potiphar is *not greater in this house than I am*, paradoxically, Potiphar *is* greater in that house for Joseph is a slave and Potiphar is his master. Furthermore, it is paradoxical that Joseph claims he cannot sleep with Potiphar's wife because it would be sinning against God. After listing all that Potiphar has done for him in verses 8 and 9, he concludes by saying that if he were to sleep with Potiphar's wife, it would be sinning against God rather than that it would be sinning against Potiphar. Joseph's words then leads to the question of how exactly is it sin against God? After all, God still has not yet given his people any statutes or laws regarding morals or sexuality. Furthermore, though she is a married woman, she is the wife of a "merc" Egyptian. Therefore, Potiphar's belief in God and Joseph's fear of sinning against God are both paradoxical situations.

Furthermore, paradox elucidates how bad things can happen to one who is attempting to do only good. One day, Potiphar's wife grabs hold of Joseph's garment *but he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside* (39:12). Paradoxically, by fleeing from trouble, Joseph ends up in even more trouble for the wife becomes so angry that she tells everyone that Joseph tried to rape her. Furthermore, as his brother once ripped off his coat before throwing him in the pit, so his garment is ripped off before being thrown in prison. It is also paradoxical that the first time the wife cries out, she says that Joseph came to *insult us* (39:14). The *us* might have been used in order to turn the household members against Joseph. The second time when she is telling the story to her husband, she says Joseph came to *insult me* (39:17). The *me* would turn Potiphar against Joseph. Thus, paradox shows how Joseph ends up in grave trouble after choosing to honor God even though God later uses it to help his future.

It is also interesting to note that paradox points out that the captain of the guard is synonymous with the chief jailer. According to the text, the captain of the guard is Potiphar (39:1) and the head of the prison is the chief jailer (39:21). In chapter 39, a clear distinction is made between the house of Potiphar and the prison for in 39:1, *Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the*

*captain of the guard, an Egyptian bought him”* When Potiphar becomes angry with Joseph, he *took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph’s care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it (39:20-22).* Thus, in chapter 39, a distinction is made between Potiphar’s house and the jail run by the captain of the guard. Paradoxically, chapter 40 makes no such distinction. *Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them (40:2-4).* According to this passage, the house of Potiphar is the same as the prison. The chief cupbearer further supports the nations that the two are the same for one day he tells Pharaoh, *“Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard . . . A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard” (41:10, 12).* Therefore, the chief jailer has become synonymous with the captain of the guard.

To summarize, paradox once again supports the idea that the God of *Genesis* is imperfect. To begin with, though people such as Abimelech and Potiphar have some belief or respect for God, God would never consider including them as part of his chosen, even if they became circumcised. Instead, he wants little to do with them unless he feels like punishing them. Likewise, because Joseph wants to honor God, he does not sleep with Potiphar’s wife. As a result, he ends up in prison for a number of years. Though God uses this event to help Joseph eventually rise in power, bad still happens to a man who was attempting to do only good. Finally, an interesting incident to note is the correlation between captain of the guard and chief jailer.

### **Pharaoh’s Dream**

Through paradox, one sees how Joseph takes advantage of the lack of wisdom of Pharaoh’s wise men and magicians in order to rise in power. *In the morning his [Pharaoh’s] spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but*

*there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh (41:8)*. Paradoxically, the wise men are not really wise. It is surprising that the magicians and wise men do not come up with some sort of answer. Most men cast in this highly important role would make up something in order to keep the Pharaoh happy and to retain their position as magician or wise man. Of course, if they had done this, then Joseph would still be in prison. Instead, they tell Pharaoh that they do not know what his dreams mean and have Joseph brought out to interpret the dream for him. In response to Pharaoh's request to interpret the dream, Joseph says, "*It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer*" (41:16). Paradoxically, the news Joseph eventually relates to him concerns a severe famine which will strike the land. Though Pharaoh is given a way to survive the famine, the knowledge of a coming famine is not exactly favorable news. Thus, because the wise men were not wise, Joseph began to rise in power.

Joseph sets himself up to become Pharaoh's right-hand man through his well played out humbleness after the wise men and magicians fail to provide their ruler with an answer. Joseph advises Pharaoh, "*Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt*" (41:33). Verses 33-36, tells Pharaoh what exactly this man should oversee. Joseph never appears haughty nor does he tell Pharaoh that the role should belong to him. Instead, by using clever words, he lets Pharaoh decide on his own to give him this position. Since Joseph has shown that he is the only one who is *discerning and wise*, it is a given that as long as Pharaoh believes Joseph's words to be true, Joseph will be given this leadership role. Thus, through his craftily used words, he subconsciously prompts Pharaoh to make him his right-hand man.

The conversation between Joseph and Pharaoh reveals that God has paradoxically decided to strike the land with famine even though the people have done nothing specifically wrong. To begin with, Joseph tells Pharaoh, "*That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine*" (41:36). The first paradox is that it is not the land that would perish in a famine. Instead, it is people who would perish of starvation (41:36). Secondly, it should be pointed out that Joseph gives no indication why God has decided to curse the people with a famine. Unlike in the previous situations with the Pharaoh and with Abimelech, there is no mention of the people sinning or bringing punishment upon themselves. Instead, God has arbitrarily

decided to be cruel just on whim. Furthermore, God did not starve people in order to bring about Joseph's rise in power. Instead, Joseph was brought to power because the famine was already planned as evidenced when Joseph tells his brother, "*So it was not you who sent me here, but God*" (45:8). The people of Egypt are not the only ones who suffer as evidenced when people from other lands come to Egypt for food. Thus, paradox depicts the cruel side of God.

In summary, paradox reveals how Joseph is able to rise in power and wealth through his craftiness while highlighting the cruel aspect of God's personality. Rather than utilizing blatant deception as his father and brothers did, Joseph rises in power by being clever. Because the wise men are not wise, a Hebrew slave is able to gain significant power in Egypt. Paradox also illuminates the cruelty of God as depicted when he decides to strike the world with famine without any provocation.

### **Jacob's Sons Go To Egypt**

Paradox illuminates how Joseph uses his brothers' claim that they are honest men to punish them for what they have done to him years prior. When the famine comes, Jacob sends all of his sons except for Benjamin to Egypt to buy grain. Although Benjamin was not excluded when the text talks about how Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, he is kept at home for he is the only son Jacob has left from Rachel. When the ten men arrive in Egypt, they do not recognize Joseph, but Joseph recognizes them. The sons then identify themselves, referring to themselves as *honest men* (42:11). Paradoxically, they have proven that they are not honest men. For instance, they sold Joseph into slavery and led their father to believe that he was dead, they deceived Shechem and his father in order to destroy their city, and Judah broke his promise to Tamar when he refused to give her his youngest son. It is also ironic that the sons refer to themselves as servants of Joseph for they do not realize that they are unknowingly fulfilling Joseph's dreams of long ago by bowing down to him and calling themselves his servant (42:6, 13). Joseph, however, pays no attention to their words and accuses them of being spies who have come *to see the nakedness of the land* (42:9, 12). Paradoxically, Joseph sees the nakedness of his brothers' hearts for he knows that they are not honest men. Though he accuses them of wanting to see the barrenness of the land, he is actually gazing upon the barrenness of their souls. As a result of his anger and grief, Joseph, puts a

major emphasis on their claim of being honest men. He tells them, *“Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies”* (42:17). As there were three stages in Joseph’s life after he was sold into slavery--the household of Potiphar, the prison, and right-hand man of Pharaoh--so the brothers are in prison for three days (42:17). After the three days of imprisonment are over, Joseph once again brings up the issue of honesty when he says, *“If you are honest men, let one of our brothers stay here where you are imprisoned. The rest of you shall go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus your words will be verified, and you shall not die* (42:19, 20). Joseph’s words that they *shall not die* are paradoxical for once the brothers leave Egypt, they will be safe from danger. Only the brother who stayed could have been killed. They would not even have died of starvation for Joseph filled up their bags with grain before they left (42:25). Thus, the brothers who together harmed Joseph will now share in the punishment together when Joseph mocks the honesty they claim to have by first imprisoning and then testing them.

Paradox also depicts that crimes against the family were considered to be more severe than crimes against God’s unchosen and relates how the brothers lose their individual identity for their collective sin. When the brothers hear of Joseph’s ultimatum, they say, *“Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this anguish has come upon us”* (42:21). Paradoxically, the brothers instantly think that they are being punished for selling Joseph into slavery, an event that happened many years prior and had nothing to do with Egypt or famine. The atrocities they committed by murdering, looting, and enslaving the people of Shechem never comes into their minds. Instead, they instantly feel guilty over Joseph. Their crimes against this city were far more heinous than their crime against Joseph, but according to their thought processes, crimes against the family was far worse than crimes against those who are not part of God’s chosen people. After leaving them to be eaten up with guilt, Joseph then *picked out Simeon and had him bound before their eyes* (42:24). Paradoxically, Joseph’s actions are a reenacting of the scene when he, himself, was bound before their eyes and sold into slavery. Finally, after nine of the ten sons leave to go back to their father, *one of them* is horrified to find money at the top of his sack for it looks as if he stole money from

Joseph (42:27). Paradoxically, their identities are merged together throughout the majority of the episode. It does not matter who found the money for they are all guilty of crime against Joseph. When *one* discovers the money in his sack, *they turned trembling*, as one collective group, *to one another, saying*, “*What is this that God has done to us?*” (42:28). Paradoxically, they should have been asking themselves, “*What have we done to ourselves?*” Thus, paradox depicts the high status of the family as well as the merging of the brothers’ identities.

Then, paradox elucidates how the sons unintentionally reveal to Jacob the source for their anguish. When the brothers reach their father’s home, they relate to Jacob how they had told Joseph, “*We are honest men, we are not spies*” (42:31). Paradoxically, the sons unknowingly bring up the crux of why Joseph is punishing them for they are not honest men and Joseph knows this. They then tell him that Joseph said, “*Bring your youngest brother to me, and I shall know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will release your brother to you, and you may trade in the land*” (42:34). Once again, honesty is brought up but neither the sons nor Jacob can make the connection that Joseph is mocking their character rather than testing it. Though they keep mentioning honesty, they are unable to fully apply it to their own character.

Next, paradox reveals the love Jacob has for Benjamin and the lack of love he has for Simeon. First of all, Jacob already counts Simeon as dead for he says to his sons, “*I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!*” (42:36). It is paradoxical that Jacob would be so grieved over the loss of Simeon for later he wants nothing to do with him as exhibited when he says in reference to Simeon and Levi, “*May I never come into their council; may I not be joined in their company*” (49:6). Secondly, Jacob tells Reuben, “*My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left*” (42:38). By refusing to rescue Simeon, he is sacrificing Simeon’s life in order to ensure that Benjamin remains absolutely safe from harm. Once again, the youngest is placed ahead of the elder. Thirdly, it is paradoxical that though the sons are good at deception, they never think about bringing along a slave and pretending that the slave is Benjamin. This family, who is known for their many lies, are at a strange loss in figuring out how to get out of this situation. Fourthly, 43:1-2 shows that Jacob fully planned on leaving

Simcon in Egypt. After all, upon learning of his capture, he took no immediate action as he would have done with Benjamin. Instead, it is not until all of his food supply is depleted that Jacob allows Benjamin to go to Egypt. The only time Jacob mentions Simcon is as an afterthought when he has resigned himself to the fact that they are returning to Egypt with Benjamin and their *other brother* (43:14). Though he uses Benjamin's name, he does not even bother to use Simcon's personal name. Thus, Jacob's grief is due more to his fear of losing Benjamin, the only child that he believes he has left from Rachel's line.

Paradox in this episode also shows how Simcon's importance to the story has been eliminated. The reason for returning to Egypt is no longer to rescue his son Simcon. Instead, Judah adds extra words to what Joseph told them and says, "*The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you'*" (43:3). Instead of telling Jacob that he will never see Simcon's face, as Joseph had actually meant, he seems to pick up on the fact that Jacob does not really care about Simcon in comparison to Benjamin. Thus, he changes the focus to we will all starve to death if we can not bring Benjamin to Egypt. His impatience with Jacob is obvious for he even tells Jacob, "*If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice*" (43:10). Likewise, when Judah is pleading to Joseph to release Benjamin, Simcon is completely omitted from Judah's recount of the events. For instance, Judah tells Joseph, "*Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more' . . . And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother goes with us, will we go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us'*" (44:23, 25, 26). Food has become the central issue rather than the release of Simcon. However, the actual terms were that they would not get Simcon back unless they proved their trustworthiness by bringing Benjamin to Egypt. Thus, paradoxically, Simcon has been practically omitted from the focus of the story.

Furthermore, paradox depicts that when Jacob was young, he was strong and even cold. Now that his name has been changed to Israel, the one who strives with God and with humans, he has turned into a whiny, helpless man. His personality change began with his silence on Dinah's rape and his mild rebuke to his sons for their murdering rampage for he was afraid that he would be attacked by his neighbors. The Jacob spoken of in the text is never able to live up to his name for he can not even strive against man much



less God now. It is worth noting, 45:27, 28: *The spirit of their father Jacob revived. Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die."* During the many years that Jacob has been grieving over Joseph's death, he has been called Jacob. However, as soon as he is told that Joseph is alive, his name is immediately changed to Israel in the very next line. Paradoxically, God could not make Jacob happy. Only Joseph could make Jacob truly happy. Even Benjamin was merely a consolation for Joseph's absence. Thus, paradox shows that Jacob is not worthy of the name Israel.

To summarize, paradox is a tool which illustrates how God's chosen people are involved in situations which do not shine favorably on them or which do not depict them as particularly spiritual giants. The dishonesty of the brothers is paralleled by Joseph's own dishonesty, for he hides his identity from them, accuses them of being spies, plants things in their bags of grain, and has them thrown into jail under false pretenses. Minor crimes against their own people are considered more hideous than major crimes against others. For instance, the brothers are eaten up with guilt over selling Joseph while never blinking an eye over the atrocities they committed against Shechem. Jacob plays favorites to such an extreme that he is willing to have one son die rather than to endanger his favorite son. As a result of Jacob's favoritism, Simeon is effectively omitted from the focus of the story.

### **Joseph Reveal His Identity**

Paradoxically, the men who are so fond of deceiving others, are themselves deceived. When the brothers leave Egypt for the second time with Benjamin, Simeon, and more grain, Joseph tells his steward to plant a silver cup in Benjamin's sack and then chase after them and tell them, *"Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup? Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination?"* (44:4, 5). Paradoxically, there is no record of Joseph using divination, much less using a silver cup for divination. Instead, as mentioned before, he either knows what the dreams mean or else he asks for God's help in interpretation. Furthermore, despite Joseph's words, the brothers have actually done no wrong to Joseph. Though Joseph may think they were wrong in selling him they did not return evil for good even in that situation for Joseph never did any good for them. Instead, he only made them angry by taunting them with his dreams. An additional point is that after having found some

mysteriously placed money in a sack the first time they were leaving Egypt (42:27) and after Joseph's insistence on seeing Benjamin before he would release Simeon, this band of deceptions should have been instantly suspicious of the steward's words and sensed a trap coming. Instead, they paradoxically say, "*Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover the rest of us will become my lord's slaves*" (44:9). The brothers who have deceived others in the past are now deceiving themselves and allowing themselves to appear as gullible fools. After all, if money can suddenly appear then a cup can too. Furthermore, Reuben has pledged the sacrifice of his two sons and Judah has pledged personal accountability if Benjamin is not safely returned. Thus, these two brothers, especially, should have been more cautious and less ignorant. Instead, they are all deceived.

When the cup is found in Benjamin's sack, paradoxical actions take place. First of all, *they tore their clothes* which parallels the time when they tore Joseph's coat to make Jacob believe that he was dead and the time when Jacob tore his garments in grief over Joseph's death (44:13). Secondly, paradox reveals that unlike the past when their words brought about the events that they wished (i.e. Shechem was slaughtered as a result of listening to their words and they made Jacob believe Joseph was dead) the words of the brothers are now powerless. For instance, the brothers declared that if the cup is found on someone then that person shall die. However, Benjamin is taken as a slave rather than executed (44:17). They also said that they will become slaves if the cup is found, but, instead, they are released. Thus, the brothers' words are frequently ineffective and useless; just wind. Thirdly, it is paradoxical that Benjamin is now "sold" into slavery and the brothers are free just as Joseph had been sold into slavery while the brothers remained free. Benjamin is, in effect, reenacting Joseph's past.

After Joseph reveals his identity, his words prove to be paradoxical to his actions. To begin with, he cries out, "*I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?*" (45:3). Paradoxically, Joseph knows his father is still alive and his questions are pointless. Judah has just been engaged in trying to tell him a long, sad tale of how his father would die of sorrow if they did not bring Benjamin back to him. In fact, his last words were, "*For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father*" (44:34). These words are a definite indication that his father is alive. Next, Joseph actually tells his brothers, "*And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you*

*sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life* (45:5). Paradoxically, ever since the brothers arrived in Egypt he been playing games with them and punishing them for selling him into slavery. He has purposely aroused everything from intense fear to anger in them in order to somewhat avenge the part they played when they sold him into slavery. Suddenly, however, he tells them that they should not be distressed or angry with themselves because God had approved of their actions from the very beginning. This is a complete change from his actions and words every since their arrival. If God approved of their actions then why was Joseph trying to punish them all of this time? Finally, when Joseph sends his brothers to bring his father and his household to Egypt, his parting words are, *“Do not quarrel along the way* (45:24). Joseph’s words prove paradoxical for he had been the one starting the quarrels in the first place by boasting of his dreams.

Paradox also indicates that God encourages sin in order that he can bring his plans into action. As mentioned above, Joseph tells his brothers, *“Do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life . . . So it was not you who sent me here, but God”* (45:5, 7-8). Here Joseph tells them that it is not their fault but God’s fault for the sin that they committed. In effect, God encouraged or instigated their crime in order to prevent mass deaths during the famine. Paradoxically, an all powerful God could have found a less dramatic way to preserve their lives. For instance, he allowed Isaac to reap a hundredfold of seed in the year of a terrible famine (26:12). Likewise, he could have helped Jacob and his family reap seed. If God wished to protect those besides his chosen he could have either prevented the famine in the first place or he could have helped any one of Pharaoh’s wise men or magicians interpret his dream. Joseph further says, *“God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors”* (45:7). Paradoxically, God was not keeping survivors alive for the brothers. He was doing it out of promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To illustrate this point, God could have allowed all of the brothers to die except for Benjamin and descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky would have still resulted. As Abraham only had one “real” descendant (Isaac) and Isaac only had one “real” descendant (Jacob) so Jacob could have had only one descendant (Benjamin). After all, at this point in the text, Benjamin already has 10 children (46:21).

To summarize, paradox once again brings out how God's chosen, who are so adept at deceiving others, can themselves be deceived, and that God may encourage sin in order to fulfill his plans. Joseph has shown that he is just as capable of deceiving others as his brothers and father are. Even though he claims God is the one who sent him to Egypt, he still punishes his brothers for the part they played in his journey. This then, leads to the paradox of God subconsciously encouraging Joseph's brothers to wrong him in order that his plans may be fulfilled.

### **Life In Egypt**

It is paradoxical that in Genesis God's chosen people are always an alien in a foreign land, for though God is the creator of the universe and they are his chosen people, he has not yet given them a land of their own. Instead, they must live off of the kindness of others as seen when Joseph's brothers have to go to Pharaoh and ask permission to settle in Goshen because of the famine (47:4). Furthermore, the land God promised to Abraham and his descendants has proven thus far not to be good, fertile land. For instance, Abraham leaves Canaan in order to find food in Chapter 12. Isaac had to leave Canaan in order to grow crops among the Philistines in Gerar (26:1). Now, Jacob has to leave Canaan in order to find good pastures in Goshen. God's promised land is not too promising at this point.

Through paradox, the dark side of Joseph's character is illuminated. When the people in Egypt have no more food they come to Joseph for relief. Though God freely gave Joseph the insight to prepare for the famine, Joseph does not use this knowledge to help the Egyptians. Instead, he uses the knowledge in order to profit the Pharaoh for he cruelly *made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other* (47:21). Though they have already made profit off of foreigners buying food from them, Joseph still shows no mercy to the Egyptian people. Thus, once again, God is favoring a man who is practicing wickedness, for Joseph is taking advantage of the weak and dying. Furthermore, Joseph's actions are reminiscent of the time when Esau was starving and Jacob refused to give him food until Esau had sold him his birthright. Joseph has inherited some of this same harshness, for he will not give the people food until they sell him their livestock and later land and then their own bodies. Verse 19 raises some interesting questions. First of all, they ask Joseph, "*Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land?*" This implies that if they

sell their land to Pharaoh and/or become his slaves, then their land will not die. Somehow Joseph has the key during this time of famine to not only keep the people alive but to also make the land fertile again. Then, the starving Egyptians say, *“Just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate.”* This is further indication that Joseph has the ability to make the land grow crops again. Therefore, the famine is not what is killing them now. Instead it is Joseph who is causing their suffering for he will not give them any seed in order to grow crops. According to their words, the land would be able to grow crops if they just had seed to plant. Further proof that Joseph is starving the people is that when the people have become Pharaoh’s slaves and sell him their land, Joseph gives them seed and they are able to grow harvests that year. It is also paradoxical that the famine lasts for only four years instead of seven for there were two years of famine from 45:6 through 47:12, one year of famine in 47:17, and one year of famine in 47:18. Unless three years suddenly passed between 47:12 and 47:13-14, the famine did not last for seven years. More than one year at a time could not have passed after 47:17 because the people, who had no food, would have starved to death. Thus, this only adds up to four years of famine rather than seven and they are able to sow crops again in 47:23. Thus, paradox depicts the cruel side of God’s chosen man, Joseph.

To summarize, it is paradoxical that God’s chosen people still have no land to call their own and that God favors a man who exhibits a harsh spirit. Though God is the creator of the universe, God’s people are still found asking others for a place to stay. In addition, though Joseph has mercy on his own family, he is cruel to most others as revealed when he enslaves the Egyptians before giving them seed.

### **The Last Days Of Jacob**

A striking paradox is that when Jacob is old, he asks Joseph (a younger son) to deal loyally and truly with him. *When the time of Israel’s death drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, “If I have found favor with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt”* (47:29). First of all it is paradoxical that Jacob makes Joseph’s obligation to him conditional. He lowers himself before his son by saying, *“If I have found favor with you.”* The father is, in effect, bowing down before his son just as Joseph’s dream once indicated. Secondly, his

request is paradoxical for Jacob, himself, deliberately robbed his own father, Isaac, of loyalty and truth during Isaac's old age. Jacob deliberately lied and deceived his father and now he is afraid that Joseph will do the same. This is why he wants him to put his hand under his thigh for this is a binding sign among their people.

Paradoxical elements are also exhibited when Jacob takes Joseph's children as his own. When Jacob is old and ill, he tells Joseph, *"Therefore your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are now mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are. As for the offspring born to you after them, they shall be yours. They shall be recorded under the names of their brothers with regard to their inheritance"* (48:6). Paradoxically, a strictly literal interpretation leads to the point that if Jacob takes away Ephraim and Manasseh then Joseph is childless for he has no more recorded sons. Thus, Joseph has no offspring and his line ends. However, Jacob's words may only be symbolical for Jacob seems to recant what he said when he once again refers to Ephraim and Manasseh as Joseph's children rather than his own. For instance, he tells Joseph, *I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also"* (48:11). Likewise, Joseph still refers to them as his children when he later tells Jacob these *"are my sons, whom God has given me here"* (48:9). It is a further paradox that *Joseph removed them [Ephraim and Manasseh] from his father's knee* (48:12).

Throughout the entire chapter the implication is that Ephraim and Manasseh are young children. Paradoxically, they have to be at least 20. Joseph had two sons before the famine came (41:50) and Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years (47:28). Thus, though the sons are over twenty years of age, they are sitting on Jacob's knee. Furthermore, as mentioned many times prior, it is paradoxical when the younger son is placed above the elder. Once again, this situation arises when Jacob puts his right hand on Ephraim, the youngest, and says in regards to the elder son Manasseh that, *"He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations"* (48:19). Thus, through paradox, what is depicted is contrasted to what their reality actually is.

To summarize, paradoxical elements are found during Jacob's last days. Though he was not loyal to his own father, he begs Joseph to be loyal to him. Furthermore, a literal reading of the text points out

that by taking Joseph's children, Joseph now has no descendants which raises the question of whether Jacob dealt loyally with Joseph. Finally, when Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manassch, they are described as young children even though they are over twenty years old.

## Conclusion

To summarize the entire paper simply, Genesis contains paradox. The object of this paper is neither to support nor to tear down the validity of a literal translation of the Bible. It is also unconcerned with historical accuracy, the documentary hypothesis, or the theological implications of paradox when applied to the Christian God. It is a paper that treats Genesis as any other literary work might be treated, as a narrative. Thus, as a narrative, it has been thoroughly analyzed in order to discover the paradoxes hidden between the lines. Once the analysis was complete, the paper was broken down into focusing on two main points.

First of all, throughout Genesis, paradox illuminates how God's words and actions are imperfect and ambiguous. This is not to say that all of his words and actions are imperfect and ambiguous. However, this paper reveals that a significant number of them are indeed inadequate. From the moment of creation, God is depicted as an unjust God as seen when he curses the world and all of mankind for one mistake that Adam and Eve made. Paradox emphasizes that it was not Adam and Eve's fault for making the mistake for God created them with an inability to discern good from evil. His imperfectness and ambiguity continues throughout the chapters until the end of the book is reached. At the end, paradox uncovers the imperfectness of God's love as evident when he favors Joseph, a man who enslaves the people of Egypt, while turning a blind eye to the starving masses. By studying paradox, the text has been chiseled down until a clearer, picture of God's character has surfaced.

Secondly, paradox emphasizes that the characters of God's chosen people are not superior to the characters of those God has turned his back on. Paradox clearly reveals that God's people are no better than the people he has abandoned. For instance, Jacob's sons are depicted as heinous men when they slaughter and loot Shechem, a city that has dealt loyally with Jacob and his sons every since Prince Shechem's offense. God's people, on the other hand, make little pretense of attempting to deal loyally with others, even with their own kin at times as depicted in examples such as Cain's murder of Abel and Jacob's treatment of Esau. Instead, they continue to lend support to the notion that they are just as unrighteous as those outside God's covenant. As a result of their unrighteous and, at times, appalling actions, God's



justness and judgment in abandoning the rest of the world is brought into question. Thus, paradox makes a strong case that the attitudes and behaviors of God's chosen people are often sinful enough to call into question God's justness in favoring one particular group of people over the rest of his creation that he made and then deserted.

As in all works, this paper has both disadvantages and advantages. One disadvantage is the lack of possible explanations for the existence of the paradoxes. For example, some paradoxes might be explained through theology while others could be explained through an investigation into the authorship of the text. In addition, certain paradoxes could be narratively explained as existing in order to instigate the occurrence of specific future events in later texts. A second disadvantage is that this paper is based on an English translation of the text, rather than on the original Hebrew language.

However, there are advantages also. One such advantage is that it does accomplish its goal of containing a thorough literary analysis of paradoxical situations in the book of Genesis. A second less obvious advantage is that this paper gives the reader, whether a strict fundamentalist or an atheist, permission to suspend his or her own rigid beliefs and delve into the text from a different angle. Instead of looking upon it with either scorn or with reverence, it can be impartially looked upon as a work of literature, something to glean for personal and literary meaning. Though no two readers will read a piece of work in exactly the same way nor can they completely understand the author's underlying intentions, I hope that this paper will be a tool to help either reinforce or break down a reader's views and opinions. In short, the goal of this paper is to make people think as it made me think during its creation.