

Ask Jeff 9.12.18
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Alright, as we get started, I do want to call your attention to what is known as the Circle of Concerns. This is the prayer sheet here at First Baptist Opelika. Allow me to clarify a few things. Number one, you do not have to be a member of First Baptist nor does the person on the list have to be a member of First Baptist. We just have to know of them to be willing to pray for them. Second thing allow me to share with you is this, we update it about ninety minutes before we get together on Wednesday night. So, if you have a concern, an issue we need to know about, please let us know, even up to Wednesday afternoon. And last, but not least, do not throw this away. Hopefully, you place this in your Bible, put it on your refrigerator, or take it home, and make it a point to pray through these names and for these folks throughout the week. Many of them are at home with long illnesses. Some of them, as you can see, are in the hospital. And on the back side, some are celebrating the birth of grandbabies. Some are experiencing a loss of life in the family. So, just all kinds of situations and scenarios. But I just want you to know that if you have somebody or something that you want us praying for, they don't have to be a member of First Baptist. They don't even have to live here. I mean, you notice there is a section of missionaries, and half of them don't even live here. So, we just want to be able to pray for those who you want us to be praying for.

As you see, there are those that are right around the corner at EAMC, as well as Arbor Springs at home, as well as those that are out of town. That's all on your front side. On the back side you see the congratulations of a new grandbaby in our church family, as well as the sympathy for the Sanford family and Miss Mary's passing away recently. And as always, the missionaries and those serving in the military, who oftentimes are away from family, uncomfortable in different environments.

I just met with five recent college graduates that the Lord, or they feel that the Lord is calling them to North Africa. And so, they are all gainfully employed. They are all making, they're all doing the American dream, shall we say, and they're about to fold up the American dream and go to a place, to community, if the Lord so leads, there is a hundred and fifty thousand residents, so pretty similar to our community. There is one believer, and he is twelve years old. So, just I'm amazed. So, when we talk about praying for the missionaries, you understand. Sometimes I think sometimes we think, "Well, they have the same life we have, they're just over there telling everybody about Jesus." Can you imagine showing up tonight, and there is one person, and that's the only person in the community. They said they're used to be a second believer, but he just recently died. So,

there is one person. And so, when you see that list of the missionaries, please understand that they don't have tonight what we have tonight. In fact, at the most, they might have a table of people, wherever they are. So, let's pray for not only those, but the rest.

Lord, tonight as we gather as a family of faith, oh we are blessed. Blessed, Lord, that hundreds of years ago the gospel witness came to this land, and over those hundred years there has been times of rebellion, there has been times of disobedience, but there has been times of revival. There has been times of awakening. And every single one of us tonight, Lord, is a testimony to your grace and to your mercy, not only that we heard and responded to the gospel, but there has been a consistent witness for many, many, many generations in our land. And Lord, we pray for those that are serving in capacities where they may be the first voice of Jesus in hundreds of years. They may be the first person to ever share a Bible, to ever show somebody what a Bible looks like in their land. Lord, we pray that you would give them perseverance. And God, we pray that you would just give them the fortitude that when they are lonely and when they feel like there is no fruit of their labor that you would remind them that you have called them to obey and to be faithful and not to be successful according to worldly western standards. God, we pray for those in the military who oftentimes find themselves in harms way just so that they can protect our freedom to do what we are doing tonight. Lord, for all of those that are sick, whether we would diagnose it as something that is just rudimentary or something that is life threatening, Lord, we know to each and every one of them it is the most dire thing on their heart right now. So, we pray that your Holy Spirit would minister to them and bring healing where healing is needed, restoration where restoration is needed, and please, oh God, bring comfort where comfort is needed. On our campus tonight, whether it be the babies in the nursery, the college students who will arrive in a few moments, or everybody in between, Lord, we just pray that your Holy Spirit would speak to and through us. May your Word be the final authority for every conversation tonight. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Alright, welcome to Wednesday nights at First Baptist Opelika. If this is your first time, number one, welcome. Number two, allow me to give you kind of the lay of the land. Our adult Bible study on Wednesday night is typically laid out in two sections. The first section is what we know as the Q&A, just a question-and-answer time. This is the opportunity that you have to guide the conversation. If there is something you have always pondered about, thought about, or possibly you said, "You know, there is something I have always wanted to discuss or hear what the Bible says, but I am just embarrassed, or I am ashamed to say I don't know the answer." Well, we have the perfect venue for you. You can go to our website fbcopelika.com/askjeff. And you can submit your question and remain completely anonymous. Nobody knows who you are. I don't know who you are. When I pull up the question, it doesn't give your name. It doesn't even give your email address. However, as soon as we address the question on Wednesday night, I have the opportunity to push a little button that says "answered." When I push that answered button, thanks to the brilliant geniuses behind the scenes, it will send you, who I don't know who you are, a link to the video. So just in the event that you were not here, you can still get the answer to your question.

Obviously, for those of you that are seasoned veterans, the most exciting part about Wednesday night isn't what comes off the database. It's what happens when you raise your hand, because you have the ability to remain completely unfiltered. That's right. You can ask whatever you want, whenever you want, about whatever you want. And then, we will transition at some point into our Bible study, which now we're currently walking through, working through, what we know as the book of Revelation.

Now, I used the word typically several times, because what we typically do is open up the database, and then we just push the button, and it pulls up a random question. However, as many of you know, we are systematically walking through the Bible over about a three-year time period, and the last couple of weeks we have been in the book of Genesis. And I addressed some specific issues regarding to the book of Genesis this past Sunday morning, and I received two email communications in regard to, from the same person, just very quick questions about the book of Genesis, in particular one subject matter. And I thought it would be apropos tonight to address them, not only because we have been walking through Genesis, but also because they're so pertinent, not only to our culture, but to just the Bible in totality. And so, I just want to read these two questions as they're written. And then we're just going to go for it.

First question says, it begins with a statement, it says, "God told Abraham that he would bless all of his descendants. Mohammed conceived the Islamic faith centuries after Jesus's ministry, and Mohammed was a descendant of Ishmael. Did God bless Ishmael's family until the radical violent Islamic began killing the people one thousand plus years ago?" Followed up by question two. It says, "You stated Sunday that the consequences resulted from Abram and Sarah's sin, but to the 'good Islamist' who does not know that the only way to heaven is through Jesus, it appears that their fate is sealed. So, is it possible that any of Ishmael's family was blessed?"

So, the questions that are being asked are in regards to God saying that he would bless all of Abraham's descendants. How do we take this statement "all" when you have Ishmael, who, as a whole, typically today is represented by what we know as the Islamic faith, and Isaac, which is largely represented by the Jewish faith? How do you reconcile that God would bless "all" and yet you have such diametrically opposed faith systems? And then, on the back side, what do you do with the question about those who grow up in what we know as an Islamic community who have no access to or have never heard the name of Jesus, never seen the scriptures, much less John 3? As the question stated, is there "fate" just sealed?

So, that being said, I think this is an important question for us to address and answer, particularly in our context and culture today. And I want to begin with kind of looking at, shall we say, the lineage of what we are dealing with. And so, we know that we have Father Abraham up here. And Father Abraham will have two primary descendants of which the history of the world has been changed through. We have the son known as Ishmael. This was the one from Hagar. This is in chapter 16 of the book of Genesis. This was not the child of promise. This was the child of, shall we say, let's find a better solution than God has for us. And so, we know that it didn't work out real well in that

scenario. And then we have the son known as Isaac. Isaac was the child of promise. This was the one that the Lord said, “By natural means, you, at our age, almost one hundred years of age, are going to have a child of promise.” Okay? Child of promise, a child supernaturally.

When you begin to look at the descendants, Isaac begat whom we know as Esau and Jacob. Now, who out there who knows your Bible well, why did I put Esau first?

[unintelligible]

Because he was the firstborn. He was the firstborn, and you know that his brother Jacob came and grabbed ahold of his ankle on the way out. I would have loved to have been there to see that. I just want you to know, that would have been entertaining to me. But nonetheless, grabs his ankle. We know that later on Esau would sell his birthright to Jacob. And so, Jacob would receive the birthright, and he would become the father of what we know of the twelve tribes, and his name would be changed to Israel.

So, that’s kind of the lineage on that side. Ishmael’s side, if you want to do the lineage there, all you have to do is read Genesis 21. You say, “Well, why do I have to read Genesis 21?” Because I can’t pronounce any of the names. That’s why. But you begin to read Genesis 21, and you will see his descendants that are listed. Now, there are two passages that I want to draw your attention to in the book of Genesis, if I can find them here, that I think are interesting to the story. Then we’re going to go back to the idea of a blessing.

In Genesis 28, I know I say this all the time, but sometimes you teach and you preach so that you can teach and preach to yourself. There are a lot of verses in the Bible that appear to be linking verses, or connecting verses, or just chronological verses, that have so much theological truth in them we tend to just gloss over them thinking, “Well, okay, this is just setting the scene.” Chapter 28 verse 1. “And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan.” Now, the daughters of Canaan, I bet you can guess who they are, right? The descendants of Ishmael. He made it very clear. “Jacob, do not marry these folks. You need to stay pure, because there is two different lineages that are happening here.” Alright?

Turn a few pages over to the book of Genesis 36. Genesis 36. We again have one of these just kind of connecting passages. But it says, “Now these,” this is verse 1, “Now these are the generations of Esau,” so we got Esau over here, Jacob’s brother. “These are the generations of Esau, who is Edom. Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan.” Aha! Do you see what’s happening here? You see that Esau is going to join his lineage over here with Ishmael. Okay? And then go to verse 3. “And Bashemath Ishmael’s daughter, sister of.”

So, you see that early in the game that Esau not only sells his birthright, but you see him begin to come back over to this side of the equation. And so, therefore, you have the

Ishmaelites here. You have the descendants of Isaac here. But you do have Esau and his family, for lack of better terms, change teams, so to speak. Alright? So, but the importance there, is that when it comes to faith and systems of belief, that thousands of years later this lineage is going to produce what we know as Islam, and this lineage is going to produce what we know as Judaism, okay?

Now, I'm just going to be fair. There are people from all sides who go back and forth. So, don't think that anybody is "in a pure lineage" here. Nobody is pure. But as a whole, we have two lineages, okay? That being said, go back to Genesis 16. This is why it is important, because God told Abraham that he would bless all of his descendants. And what I want us to see tonight is that there are two blessings that are given. There is the blessing that is given to Ishmael, and there is the blessing that has been given to Isaac. They are two distinct, different blessings.

So, that being said, and we'll talk about the faith system of Islam versus Judaism in a minute. When it just comes to the family lineages here, God's word is true. They're both blessed. But they're blessed differently. Chapter 16 is the blessing of Ishmael. Interesting that the first one blessed is actually the one that we would probably like to see least blessed, but nonetheless, in verse 12 of Genesis 16, this is speaking of Ishmael, "He will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." It says, "He will be a wild man." He will be everywhere. He will be a man of violence. He will be a man of warfare. He will be antagonistic to all. And notice it says at the very end, "He will dwell among his brethren." In other words, he's always going to be kind of that thorn in the side to the descendants over here.

Now, turn a few pages to the right to Genesis 21. I want to continue the blessing of Ishmael. And for the sake of time, just so you will know, it begins in verse 9. Verse 9 is when Hagar takes Ishmael out. She is fearful that he is going to die. She doesn't want to see him die. The angel of the Lord comes down and says, "Don't worry. He's not going to die. I'm going to bless him," because the Lord had promised that he would. But if you will, go to verse 14. It says, "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness." What did chapter 16 say that Ishmael would be? He would be a person of the wild, okay?

In my Bible I have to turn the page, but look at verse 17. "And God heard the voice of the lad." That's of Ishmael crying out under the bush. It says, "And the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad." Now, listen to this. "He grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt." Alright?

So, what we have here is not only does the Lord say in chapter 16, “He’ll be a man of the wild.” He’ll be antagonist toward all. But Hagar, his mom, goes into the wilderness. The angel of the Lord comes and blesses him in the wilderness, and he goes out into the wilderness. Now, you and I have got to get our North American western minds out of this for a moment. Because if you told me, “Oh, he’s a man of the wild,” what do we think of? We think of going into the woods, right? The Israelites wished there had been woods in the wilderness for forty years. Where were they for forty years? A desert. Okay? So, we need to kind of get our western minds out. When the Bible speaks of a wilderness, it speaks of the desert, alright? I want you to hold onto that for a moment.

Now, let’s go back to Genesis 17, and let’s look at the blessing that he gives Isaac. This is beginning in verse 6. And we’re only going to read three verses, because almost all of the rest of your Old Testament is about Isaac’s blessing. It says, “And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant.” How long is everlasting? Everlasting. There we go. “To be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” Here is what’s important. “I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

I want you to notice that both of these blessings involve land. Land! Now, what we typically think of, “Well, Islamic faith. You know, Jewish faith.” Don’t think about faith for a moment. Because the blessing that God gave them had everything to do with the dirt under their feet, not the state of their soul. Okay? That’s important to note. What did he tell Ishmael? You will be a person of the wild. You will live in the wilderness. You will survive. You will thrive, and you will be antagonistic to everybody else. What did he tell Isaac? That land that you and I today call the Promise Land, the land of Canaan, that is yours.

Now, I want you to think about this. Let’s go with Isaac first. What we know as the modern Israeli state, they, after what we know as the holocaust at the end of World War II, six and one half million of them dead, they go into what we now know as the Promised Land without any other help, and, somehow, they win their independence. And today, some seventy years later, what we know as Israel, a land that was a desert, hold onto that thought, was barren, is now the number one exporter of fruit to Europe. One of the amazing things about this blessing is that when Israel, the people, are in Israel, the land, it flows with milk and honey. It flows with fruit. It flows with food. They want for nothing when they’re there. Now, when they’re not there, it doesn’t work, does it? God may bless them as a people, but not bless the land. That land for almost two thousand years was barren over there, because the right people weren’t in it.

Now, let’s go over to Ishmael. Let’s think about the descendants of Ishmael, what we would call modern day now, those that are Arabic in background and are in Islam by faith, typically, okay? Where is the number one place of their dwelling in the world? In the wilderness. One of the things that is most fascinating is do a study of the land. Any time the Jewish people are in Israel, it thrives. Any time they’re not, it doesn’t.

Everywhere the descendants of Ishmael go, it turns to a desert. It turns to a desert. Don't believe me? Go do the research. They can take the most beautiful, thriving land in all the world. If they invade it, it turns into a desert overnight. They can survive. Nobody else can. Why is that? That's their protection. That's what God gave them. They're able, somehow, to go to where there is nothing but dirt and caves, and they thrive. You and I go to dirt and caves, and we can't survive. We can't do it. And the reason that that is important is because God blessed them from the very beginning with the protection. He told the descendants of Isaac, "If you're where you're supposed to be, in your land, you'll be safe. If you're not, you won't." To those of Ishmael, "If you are out in the wilderness, or it becomes a wilderness, you're going to be safe. If you're not, it will not." Who were the residents of what we call modern Israel before 1948? The descendants of Ishmael. What did it look like? A desert. What does it look like now? Thriving agriculture. And so, what I want you to see per the question is, the blessing of God that was given to all of Abraham's descendants, the blessing was a blessing of the land under their feet. Their faith and response to God is completely different than the ground under their feet.

And so, the next question involved, "Well, what about those from an Islamic background who have never heard, never seen, never witnessed. Are they, just, as it's said, are they just, their fate is sealed; they're out of luck?" A couple of things I want to address there. First one is this. Everywhere that you see the primary residents of the Islamic people in the world today, is actually where what we know as the church of Jesus Christ first started. You ever thought about that? If you read the book of Acts, you read all those places that Paul's missionary journeys went to, those are now Muslim countries. Those were originally places of thriving Christianity. And so, the gospel witness was there first. And it was there for an extended period of time.

Now, we could walk through two thousand years of history tonight, and we're not going to, but we see a lot of things happening, occurred that cause it to dissipate or go away. But understand that every place, you think, "Well, what about Africa?" I mean, particularly Northern Africa. I mean, it's just saturated with Islam. You do remember in Acts 8 the first convert to Christianity with one-on-one evangelism was a eunuch from Ethiopia. The gospel was in Africa just a couple of years after Jesus rose from the dead. You see the apostle Paul, you see the disciples go into what we would call the Arabian Peninsula. They went into the eastern world, where you see, if you draw a map right now of the major concentration of Islamic people, you see places where the gospel first went. And so, we have to look back and say that there has been at some point a gospel witness. It may not be there today. Does it need to be there? Absolutely. That's why I shared with you there is a young people that are about to go on our behalf to one of those areas.

But the other thing I like to bring up, and sometimes this causes people to get really upset with me, and please forgive me in advance. In Acts 10 there is a man by the name of Cornelius. It says that he believed in God. Do Muslims believe in God? Yeah, they do, don't they? It says, "He believed in God, and he gave alms." That means he gave of his financial resources. Do Muslims do that? They do. In fact, they give two percent of their family's wealth every year. That's their prescription for giving. So, the Islamic people of contemporary culture, they match up pretty well with Cornelius. Cornelius one day calls

out to God and says, “God, I’m tired of doing it this way. I want to know you.” You know how the rest of the story goes? Peter is across town. God gives him a vision and tells him to meet Cornelius at Simon the tanner’s house. And so, I’m of the belief, and some people get upset with me when I say this, I’m of the belief that if you cry out, and call out, and say, “God, I want to know you,” God shows up at your front door. Why is it that I just met with five young people who feel called to a specific place that is over ninety-nine percent non-Christian? Because I believe there is somebody out there saying, “God, I want to know you.” And God is supernaturally, just like Cornelius and Peter, he’s connecting these young individuals with whomever it is that’s crying out over there.

And so, the question about is their fate just doomed? No, it’s not. The Christian witness was in their land long before they ever were born. And number two, the Lord makes it very clear in his Word, when you cry out, he’ll show up somehow, someday. And, let me add a third part to this, many of you who talk to or keep up with missionaries today, there are many people in what we know as the Islamic world that when they are crying out to know the one true God, they’re seeing him, and it’s not in a missionary knocking on their door. It’s in dreams and visions. And it’s happening. Now, that doesn’t happen a whole lot in Alabama, but it’s happening in Afghanistan. Because there are no Christian witnesses. There are no scriptures. And so, guess what? When we cry out to know God, he shows up every single time. And so, to answer your question, whoever it was, their fate is not sealed, for a lack of better terms, because as long as they are breathing, there is still an opportunity to cry out to the one true God, and most of them live in a place that at one point had a gospel witness, though it may not today.

Here is the thing I would add to the question. As a whole, the descendants of Ishmael, as a whole, because not all of them are practicing Islam, but as a whole, the majority of them are lost without Jesus. So are the descendants of Isaac. So are the descendants of Isaac. The difference is how they are expressing themselves in the culture we live in today. Where one may be fulfilling the blessing of violence and being a wild man, the other one is experiencing great prosperity. Whether you’re in the wilderness, or whether you’re in prosperity, lost is lost. And so, unfortunately, both expressions of what we see of this lineage today are in lostness, because from this one here came whom we know as Jesus Christ. And what did this group as a whole do? They said, “Let his blood be on us and our children.” And they rejected. They said, “We don’t want to have a thing to do with it.”

In fact, just today, this has been one of those crazy days in my life, I met with a group of people who are desiring to bring to our community a Jewish rabbi, he is not a believer in Jesus Christ, but he is very passionate about the temple mount. He is very passionate about those things. And they asked me, they said, “Would you share the stage with him? Would you entertain a dialogue with him for people to learn?” I said, “Absolutely.” But I said, “Let me share with you how I am going to begin the night. I am going to,” I said, “I am going to begin the night by saying this, that this individual and I have complete differing views on who the Messiah laid out in scripture is, but we both agree about a small piece of dirt on the other side of the world.” Do you see the difference? The dirt is the blessing. Jesus is the answer to the sin problem. They’re not the same thing.

And so, when we look at God blessing Abraham and his descendants, don't think of blessing as salvation. Think of blessing as dirt. Blessings are always physical. They're always tangible. Salvation only comes through Jesus Christ, and both lineages are struggling with that.

Okay, I've kind of monopolized the time. Any questions, thoughts, concerns, issues? Yes ma'am.

[unintelligible]

Genesis 22:1-2. I am getting there as quick as I can.

[unintelligible]

It says, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest." Only son. Yes sir.

[unintelligible]

The only son of promise.

[unintelligible]

It was the only son of promise. It's kind of like, you know, Abraham had his fair share of issues. Don't get me wrong. And we discussed this last week. Remember the fact that he goes in and says that his wife is his sister? And he says, "Oh, we got the same dad, but we got different moms." Same story. It's the same scenario. So, the only son of promise. You're right. Because Isaac is the one whom the Lord said, "This is who the promise is going to go through." Hagar has his DNA, for a lack of better terms, but does not have the promise. You're absolutely right.

And again, when it comes to the faith and belief systems here, and I'm sure many of you know and this, the Islamic faith believes that Genesis 22 was Ishmael. Whereas, the Jewish faith and the Christian faith believes it was Isaac as scripture lays out. And so, again that is where, you know, these two diametrically opposed systems, they kind of cross hairs here, because they're both claiming the same event with a different child, which changes everything.

Yes, sir?

[unintelligible]

Go to chapter 25. Okay, I can do this.

[unintelligible]

Oh, we're going to muddy the water? Thanks.

[unintelligible]

Oh, are you talking about where Isaac and Ishmael bury their father?

[unintelligible]

Yes, he took another wife, yes.

[unintelligible]

And he had children. He sure did.

[unintelligible]

I'm not getting involved in that conversation.

[unintelligible]

She said, "Well, he's several, you know, he's over one hundred years old!" I am not going there.

[unintelligible]

It does kind of muddy the water. Yeah, now Sarah was one hundred twenty-seven when she died.

[unintelligible]

Yes, that's right. She was ninety was Isaac was born. What does that sound like ladies? Can you imagine that?

[unintelligible]

You know what would be funny is if one of you ladies out here that's somewhere around that age called me tomorrow and said, "Yeah, I'm at the hospital, and they just gave me a test, and I am going to have a baby." I want you to know that First Baptist would throw the biggest baby shower you've ever seen. That would be fun. That would be fun.

So, any other Isaac, Ishmael, Islam, Judaism? Oh, there! I am sorry!

[unintelligible]

Okay. The question is, is living as a wild man in the desert a blessing? Sure beats dying under the tree, which was the other option. But, allow me to defer to the wisdom of my children. And I mean seriously when I say this. I am not being sarcastic. One of my three children, I am not going to tell you who he is, but he has an older and a younger brother. I'm not going to give you his name though. As they were growing up, he was my child that was fascinated with animals more than the other two. And he used to always ask us this question. We would be at a zoo, or we would be watching a show, and he always wanted to know, "What's their protection?" For, you know, some animals they shoot a scent out. Some animals have spikes, you know. He always wanted to know what's their protection. That's just something he was fascinated with, okay? And the Lord has given all his creation a means to protect themselves, so to speak. And the blessing, the protection, of Ishmael, as I read Genesis 16 and 21, is, "Ishmael and your descendants, you can live places nobody else can live. You can thrive in places where nobody else can thrive. You have a protection that would cause destruction for anybody else."

And so, I know what you're saying. From our perspective that's not a blessing. But it sure beats death and dying. And if you've ever been to the Middle East, there is an amazing observation that if you've been there, you've seen it. If you don't believe me, just go look up google maps, and you can see it. If you are in a Jewish community, and when I say community, I'm not talking one house. I'm talking an area. There will be trees, flowers. It will be thriving with agriculture. You can go one half of a mile down the road to what we would call an Ishmaelite or a Muslim community, and it will be nothing but sand.

[unintelligible]

And oil. Yes. She's right! But for, and I'm serious. You go look up google maps. Look down on what we know as the Jordan River. If you're looking at the Jordan River, and you look west, which is Israel, it's just green. You look East, which is Jordan, it's brown. Well, who are the residents? If you take that same picture eighty years ago, both sides are brown. And it goes back to the blessing.

And I know for you and I the thought of living in the desert is so unappealing to me. I mean, so unappealing. But that was the blessing God gave Ishmael, and it has, they've thrived for thousands of years, you know. I know it doesn't seem like it to us, but it's his protection, and it's how they thrive. I don't understand it. It has to be of God. Because you see entire communities and countries. No water supply. No food source. Nothing but desert. And they multiply. It just. You know. How? What did God say? "You're going to be a man of the wild. I'll bless you." That's the only way I can explain it is God's blessing upon them physically, not spiritually. There is a big, big, big, big, big difference.

Anything else on this one? Yup! Yes, sir?

[unintelligible]

To unmuddy the water.

[unintelligible]

Yes.

[unintelligible]

You're going to go there tonight?

[unintelligible]

Right. He said.

[unintelligible]

I am not going home with you tonight.

[unintelligible]

He said, "This was a promise of God. This was the promise of his wife."

[unintelligible]

That's kind of like when Adam said, "God, the woman you gave me." To quote the great philosopher Lewis Grizzard, "Durn brother, I don't think you'd have shared that." But he's absolutely right. The lineage that we see the blessing through Isaac was God's promise, which was supernatural and divinely orchestrated. The unfortunate issue with Ishmael was it was man's plans, man's ways, carnal, fleshly, and it's exactly what it has produced in the outlay of that.

Anybody else on this one? We're good? Sorry to monopolize the time on that, but getting those two emails so quickly together, and on the subject matter, and every night we turn on the tv this issue is happening somewhere around us. But I want to be clear. God has blessed Abraham's lineage in both directions very differently. Their blessing physically does not equate to a blessing spiritually. It only comes through Jesus Christ. Both lines need Jesus. End of story. And so, let's be able to have the wisdom to separate the differences, but yet realize the similarities in those.

Alright, so, let's go from Genesis to Revelation. That sound good?

Revelation 12. Tonight is one of those Bible studies that I hope will make you depart a few minutes and go, "Hmmm." I am going to preface tonight by saying that we are going to look at a passage of scripture, possibly, possibly, from a different perspective than you have in times past. It is Genesis 12. I mean, I am sorry. Revelation 12. We've been so much in Genesis tonight. And Revelation 12. Allow me to kind of remind you where we are, and then I am going to ask, I hate to use the word, but I am going to ask for your

patience, because I want to walk through Genesis, or Revelation. Good night! We either spend most of our time in Genesis or Revelation, so I just keep calling out Genesis. By the way, those of you that are on the Bible reading plan, what did you think of this morning's reading? What about that battle strategy? Those of you who haven't read it yet, the Israelites talk the Ishmaelites or the Philistines into getting circumcised, and then three days later they attack and kill them all. I am just saying. For anybody who says the Bible is boring, read today's reading.

Okay! So, Revelation 12 is parenthetical, meaning it's outside the chronology per say. We have been walking through what we know as the famous seven seals. The seven trumpets. We are about, as soon as we get through the famous beast in chapter 13, we're going to meet what we know as the seven vials, these other seven judgments of the Lord. And so, parenthetical does not mean without chronology. It just means outside of the direct chronology of where we are within the confines of the book of Revelation. And so, I'm just going to begin. I am just going to walk through tonight. Tonight may be a tad bit more monotone than usual, because here is what I want to do at the end. And I know we ask questions on Wednesday night. I think more can be discovered from asking questions than just accepting preconceived answers. And so, I want us to ask some very strategic questions tonight about this passage, okay?

So, first let's begin with the summary of this parenthetical chapter. We know that in verse 1 and 2 there is the appearance of a woman. It's what it says. We discussed this last week that there are three main beliefs of who this woman is. This woman is either whom we know as Mary, whom we know as the church, or whom we know as Israel. Allow me to recap just kind of the pros and cons there. Those who subscribe that this is Mary believe that because there is this man child that comes from her who is chased by the dragon and caught up to heaven. The problem with that, or the negative, is that if you follow all of Revelation 12, the events that take place cover such a large span of time toward the end it would be far in excess of her natural life that she lived into the early second century. So, the pro is, if it's the man child. The con is the chronology there. The second option is the church, because the whole idea again of this man child who is caught up to heaven. The negative there is that Jesus birthed the church. The church didn't birth Jesus. And then there is what we know as Israel, based on the symbolism from the dream of Genesis 37 in verses 1 and 2 with the stars, the sun, and the moon. And we know, as we discussed earlier, that it was Israel in his seed and lineage who eventually produced who we know as the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

And so, that being said, that's who this woman is. The appearance of the dragon, Satan, or the devil, we know he is the antithesis. Later on he is called, you know, "that old red dragon." So, no problems in discovering who he is.

The birth of the man child. Now, I put asterisk by answer here, because this is the context of tonight's interesting discussion. Most of the time, if not all of the time, it is just presumed and assumed that this is Jesus Christ, okay? And I'm not contrary to that. But I just want to bring up some things in Revelation 12 that may make you go, "Hmmm. That

doesn't quite fit the chronology," so to speak. But we'll just go with Jesus Christ or another. Put asterisks there.

There is a war in heaven, verses 7 through 10, that has either taken place at some time in the past or is yet to take place sometime in the future. Again, that just determines on how you view Revelation 12. And then, there are the testimonies of the saints. It says that by the blood of the lamb and the word of the testimony, they loved not their lives. So, even in the context of this, what we might say, warfare, and this chase, and this desire to consume, there are still those that are being saved, okay?

And then, and there is the flight of the woman. Verses 13 through 17 says, "She goes into the wilderness." Interesting, it actually says she goes into her wilderness, a specific place set aside for her, whoever this woman is, where she is protected by the Lord for three-and one-half years supernaturally fed and given water. Does that sound like another event in the Old Testament? While whom we know as the dragon is chasing her. And so, that is just a brief summary.

Now's where it could get entertaining. I want to talk about the chronology. Now, I have always said parenthetical is out of the chronology of the scope, but there is a chronology within this chapter, okay? This section of scripture, it has a beginning. It begins with the appearance of the woman. She appears, okay? That is the beginning. Now, again I know some people believe that's Mary. Some people the church. I believe the evidence is that this is Israel, okay? So, it's a description of the woman, whom we know as Israel, alright?

So, that's the beginning. The end is this three and one half year time period that you get verses 13 through 17. In Revelation 12:14, the famous time period, and then Jesus, in Matthew 24, Jesus called it the Great Tribulation, and he said, in verse 15, "When you see the abomination of desolations, run for the hills. Woe unto them that are experiencing childbirth and all these experiences there. Woe unto them here. Woe unto them." And he basically describes in Matthew 24:15-21 what we see in Revelation 12:13-17, alright? It's almost an identical description.

And so, what we see in Revelation 12 is that it is beginning with Israel, and it is ending with this great run for their life. Now, the question that we have to ask ourselves, and, hopefully, this will be somewhat encouraging or informative for you is, what happens in the middle? I am going to ask three very important or make three very important but boring statements to you, okay? You all ready for this?

First one is this. The importance of language. Notice it says, "The woman appeared." Okay? I have given for you the dictionary definition of what it means to appear. To come into sight or to become visible. To come or to be placed before the public. What this does is it opens up the possibility, notice I said possibility not probability, that the events of Revelation 12 when the woman appears, who I believe based on the language that is used is describing Israel, is not going all the way back to what we know as the Genesis account, but it could be the fact that whom we know as Israel did go away for a while, did it not? And does it not reappear? Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 24, "When

you begin to see the fig tree blossom again.” Romans 11 says, “Blindness in part now to Israel until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” And so, when you see that the woman appears, it could be that it’s describing the initial incarnation of Israel all the way back in Genesis, or it could be describing the appearance of Israel now back on the scene since it’s not been on the scene for a long time, okay? The language allows that to occur. So, that’s the first one.

The second one is this. The importance of punctuation. Now, your Bibles, based on the version in English that you utilize, it may not have this aspect in there, and we’ll kind of describe that in a moment. But in verse 4, in some versions, there is a colon used. In other versions it is a period. But all throughout Revelation 12 it is just statement after statement after statement after statement after statement. And this happened, and this happened, and this happened, and this happened, and this happened. But in some of your versions in verse 4 there is a colon. Now, I want to read verse 4 for you. It says, allow me to go back to verse 3 just for context, and it says, “And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon,” obviously that’s Satan, “having seven heads and ten horns,” we talked about that last week, “and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth.” Some of your Bibles will have a colon. Some of them will have a period. The next statement, “and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.”

Now, the reason that it’s important is if you put a colon there, then that next statement supports the sentence, but it does not necessarily fall in the lines of the chronology of the sentence because verse 5 says, “And she brought forth a man child.” And so, this whole issue of the man child and the chronology from verse 3 to really verse 10 is really up in the air because what we’ve got to address here is, are we dealing with a story that goes back thousands of years that’s finishing at the end, or, as I put on your title, is this a story for which age? Is it possible that this is a story within the confines of what we know as the scope of the book of Revelation?

In the book of Daniel 9:27 with the famous Daniel's seventy weeks. For those of you that are not familiar with that, those weeks are descriptive of years. That there will be four hundred and ninety years of God’s judgment on his people. And it says that after sixty-two weeks that the Messiah will be cut off. And then there is a colon, and then it says about the final week. Well, that cut off was what we know as the resurrection. That final week is this time period that’s being described in the book of Revelation. So, that colon allows for at least two thousand years of time to pass for the sentence to be complete.

The reason I am bringing that up is in verse 4, depending on the version that you utilize, there is this possibility that we’re not reading a direct sequence of events here, but the second half of verse 4 is a color commentary on the first part in verse 5, okay? I know, to quote what we’ve already said tonight, I’ve made it just a little bit muddy, okay? But let me make it a little bit simple. Revelation 12 is the story of the people of God known as the Israelites being chased or having a warfare with whom we know as the devil, specifically the antichrist. The question we’ve got to ask is, is this the story of all ages

that's been happening for thousands of years, or is this the story during the age of what we know as the Great Tribulation. Is the woman that appears when it was initiated whom we know as Israel back in Genesis, or is it this "reappearing" that even Jesus referred to in Matthew 24. If it is the reappearing, then who is this man child? And what is his purpose? We'll talk about that in a minute.

And the third is the importance of conjunctions. In Revelation 12 there are sixteen "ands" and one "therefore." You say, "Well, why is that important?" Well, again, I don't want to lean on my pseudo expertise here, but the word "and" is utilized to grammatically coordinate words, phrases, ideas, or introduce a consequent or conditional result. When Revelation 12 says, "and, and, and, and, and," it is giving us a series of consecutive events. In other words, it's just giving us a play by play. The only thing that would interject into that sequence of events is, like I mentioned in verse 4, if you have a colon that is utilized. That phrase can be pulled out of that sequence as a color commentary. So, Revelation 12 from beginning to end says, "and, and, and, and." And my Bible, every verse with the word "and." It's just a play by play, and it happened, and it happened, and it happened, and it's going through, okay?

So, the reason that is important, are the questions at the bottom that are important. First question, does the "and" in chapter 12 verse 1, does that take place in the 18th century B.C., or does it take place during the tribulation? We have to answer that question tonight, I mean, or it's a question that is worth us addressing. If it is the 18th century B.C., you say, "Well, why did you pick the 18th century B.C.?" Because that's when all of this stuff took place over here. If it is then, then the story takes place over thousands of years, and whom we know as the man child here has got to be Jesus. There is no other question. However, because of the word "appeared" that's used, because of the all the "ands" that is used, because the place of where the scripture is, if it's at some point during this time period that Jesus called the Great Tribulation, then the identity of the man child completely changes.

I do want you to notice that what we have listed here about this famous man child in verse 5. He was to rule the nations with a rod of iron, and her child was caught up to God and to his throne. Nowhere there does it say that he sacrificed himself for the sins of the world. It just said that he ruled, and he was caught up. There are other people in scripture that could qualify under those descriptions. People who had authority and who were caught up. Elijah. Did he not rule? Did he not get caught up? I am not saying this is Elijah here, but I am just saying that there are other cases in the Bible where that qualified, okay?

So, the second question is this, and this is important to the chronology. When does the casting down of the stars take place? Now, we've had some fun discussing this even here on Wednesday night, okay? But when you get to verse 7, it says, well, actually, let me back up. In verse 4 it says that he the dragon drew a third part of the stars out of the heaven, okay? By the way, those stars, if you go back to Revelation 1:20, it describes the seven stars as the seven angels, okay? This is the verse that has been seen by most as the description of when Satan fell. He threw, or a third of the angels fell with him, okay?

Then you get into verse 7. It says, “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

So, three choices here. When did this event take place? Now, remember we are right in the middle of Revelation 12, which is parenthetical. The question is, is it parenthetical to all of history, or is it parenthetical just to a small piece of history, okay? Now, there are those who believe that this event with the stars cast out of heaven and war in heaven took place before the garden of Eden. Now, we do know that Satan fell before the garden of Eden, correct? I mean, he had to have. By the time he shows up to Genesis 3, he is a serpent. So, he is “on the wrong side.” We get that. But did this event where a third of the stars, or a third of the angels, and a war in heaven, did that take place before the garden of Eden? A very famous literary person by the name of John Milton wrote a very famous book called “Paradise Lost” that was all based on that idea. He did the whole concept, and, by the way, it’s a beautiful, not, when I say beautiful, it’s a beautiful literary piece of describing what humanity lost when we exited the garden of Eden. But in that book, he describes this war and a third of the angels falling before Genesis 3, okay? So, there is that view.

The second view is that it took place immediately after the birth of Jesus. You say, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa! Time out. That doesn’t make sense.” Well, as I put on your outline, if you read this chapter without attention to punctuation, that’s the way it reads. The woman gives birth to the child. The dragon fights him. A third of the stars fall out of the sky. The child is caught up to heaven. The dragon is cast out of heaven. Do you see chronological issue that you’ve got here?

So, some people believe it happened before the garden of Eden. Some people believe it happened right after the birth and, obviously, the resurrection of Jesus. And then there are those who believe that this is sometime in the future. That this event has not yet occurred. And that the war in heaven has not taken place yet, and that that has just not happened, okay?

So, now, again, I apologize for the muddying of the water, to quote my brother earlier. But what we have here is what we call a biblical chronological crisis. Now, it’s not really a crisis, okay? But it is an issue, because as you read through this passage the things that we just assume to be chronological don’t line up real clear with the chronology of the passage, which leads to my last statement. If the two statements above are both in the future, then who was the man child? Who was the person that rules the nations and is caught up to heaven and to his God? Because if you read Revelation 12 beginning in verse 3 as being in the future, then the man child, as it is written, cannot be of the past.

Now, I want to encourage you to go to the book of Isaiah 66 real quick. And hopefully, I am going to un muddy our waters. My goal on Wednesday night is just to make you read more, and think hard, and ask more questions. Isaiah 66. I am actually going to begin in

Isaiah 65. How many of you all have ever said, “Oh yeah, one day the lion’s going to lay down with the lamb.” You’ve ever heard that statement? That’s not in the Bible. The wolf lies down with the lamb. Just interesting. Jesus is the lion and the lamb. But we typically say that.

Alright, verse 25 of Isaiah 65. Let me remind you that when you get to this section of the book of Isaiah it is talking about a future kingdom, okay? Typically, most people equate these chapters with Revelation 20 in the millennial reign of Jesus, but we’ll get to that part of Revelation in a couple years. Okay, so, chapter 65 verse 25 it says, “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.” So, this is describing a time period that is going to be as Revelation 20 describes. This is that kingdom of the Lord reigning on the earth. Just as an aside, isn’t this what really everybody is trying to do right now? I mean, every time you see any type of dialogue, discussion, “pageant,” what do you want world peace? This is what they want, okay? Where the animals all get along, the people all get along, everybody gets along. I got news for you. That doesn’t happen until Jesus comes back, okay?

But it says, but I want you to look in verse 1. “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?” And it begins to describe his authority in this place. Look in verse 7. “Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.” Isn’t that interesting? When you get to Revelation 12 there is this description of this famous man child, and Isaiah 66 where it is talking about this kingdom on the earth, there is a reference to this famous man child, but it comes after the Lord says he has descended, and he has begun to reign.

So, in very quick, hopefully non-muddled waters, allow me to go back to Revelation 12 and to hopefully simplistically lay out for you two distinct competing options for this passage. Option A) is that Revelation 12 is a parenthetical chapter that is describing the conflict between the people of God known as Israel and whom we know as Satan over thousands of years. The woman we know as Israel gives birth to the Messiah, whom we know as Jesus Christ. That individual, whom we know as Jesus, lives, dies, raises from the dead, ascends up into heaven, and at some point in the future, at whatever time it may be, whom we know as the character of Satan, there is a great war that takes place with him and Michael. They’re finally cast out, no longer allowed to have any conversation, any dominion. And then he chases this woman into the wilderness for three-and one-half years. Quick bullet points there.

Option B) is that when it says that the woman appeared, that Revelation 12 is not describing thousands of years of conflict, but it is describing a conflict within the context of the book of Revelation where whom we know as Israel reappears, and when she reappears, there is a man child that is born to rule, and is ruled, and is caught up into the heavens, and then there is a war with the dragon and the rest falls out as suit.

For those of you saying, “I get option A. I don’t get option B.” We just studied last chapter, chapter 11, you remember two witnesses that were caught up to the heavens? You remember that there’s going to be in chapter 14 a group of one hundred forty-four thousand witnesses that will speak the name of Jesus, even in the midst of the tribulation. And so, option A, it’s just a historical reference to Jesus and a great cosmic picture. Option B is that it’s within a limited scope, and that there is coming a time, even in Israel’s future, much like in it’s past, whether it was Elijah or others, where one is sent, not as a redeemer and savior, but one who is come to rule. One’s life is lost because of the ruling and is caught up to heaven, very similarly to the two witnesses in Revelation 11.

Here is the beauty of tonight. At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter which side you take to go to heaven. It doesn’t matter. I promise when you get to heaven one day, the Lord’s not going to say, “Okay, which one is it? Revelation 12. Long time period or short. You go. Now.” Aren’t you grateful that your eternity doesn’t depend on that? But, 1 Peter 3:15 says that we, the believers in Jesus Christ, ought to always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is within us. And if you know anybody as they read through scripture, and hopefully you’ll have people that read through scripture, if they get to this passage of scripture, and they just read it with a very strict chronology, you could go both ways. And I just wanted you to have the answers so that as we go through.

Here is the interesting thing. Next week, we are going to talk about this famous flight of the woman. And then chapter 13. That’s right. A whole chapter about the antichrist. If that doesn’t draw a crowd, I don’t know what will. Please note my sarcasm. Alright, let’s pray. We’ll get out of here.

Lord, as we depart from this place, again, thank you, thank you, thank you for the, not just the unsearchableness of the riches of your words, but the simplicity that is found in Jesus Christ. And Lord, I pray that we, that all of us, would be able to separate the two. That our faith is the simple as a child as described by Jesus, but yes, Lord, you would drive us, you would cause us to dig deeper in your Word to see what you called the mysteries of the faith, not only so that we would have hope, but that we could convey that hope to others that come across our path. Lord, may you bless each and every one of us as we depart from this place until the time in which we return. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Go get your kids unless you didn’t bring kids. Then don’t go get any kids.