

Meditation #1
Genesis 3:1
Rev. Andrew Lanning

Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

The first question in the Bible was posed by the serpent (Gen. 3:1). Under the control of Satan (see Rev. 20:2), the serpent approached Eve and asked, “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”

Now, Satan knew very well what God had said to Adam: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16, 17). Satan wanted Adam and Eve to disobey God’s command, but Satan had a problem: God’s word was so perfectly clear! Satan could not very well begin by directly contradicting God; Adam and Eve would recoil against such a frontal assault on the truth. If he was going to have any success in enticing Adam and Eve to sin, Satan needed a subtle way to introduce some doubt about God’s clear word into their minds.

The devil’s solution to his problem was to use the subtle power of a question: “Yea, hath God said?” Satan’s question was so powerful because it indirectly denied the wisdom of God’s command. Satan’s question was no innocent query for information: “What did God say?” Satan’s question was a veiled accusation that God’s word was foolish: “Did God really say *that*?!” By questioning God’s word, Satan undermined God’s word. Satan helped Eve’s unbelief along by presenting a caricature of God’s actual command, making it appear unreasonable. “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?!” God never said that, but the misrepresentation made the real command seem overbearing. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was a good tree, after all. Would God really command us not to eat of it? Wouldn’t that be just as bad as commanding us not to eat of *any* tree? How could God be so harsh? Yea, hath God said?

By subjecting God’s word to human judgment, Satan set man over God. No longer would God’s clear command be the standard of right and wrong, but man’s will and wisdom. After Satan’s question had weakened Eve’s conviction about God’s word, Satan could still spring his bold lie: “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). The result was that Adam and Eve fell into sin.

Satan is still posing his subtle, devilish question today. Against almost every truth of Scripture, the question is raised, “You really believe *that*?! Would God really say such a thing?! Yea, hath God said?”

Yea, hath God said, He created the world in only six days?

Yea, hath God said, Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation?

Yea, hath God said, Men only may serve as officebearers in his church?

Yea, hath God said, Remarriage is forbidden while a spouse still lives?

To Satan’s devious question, there is an answer. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us how to respond when he answered the devil’s temptations by quoting Scripture. On the unbreakable Word of God, the lying questions of the devil are destroyed. The next time you hear the question, *Yea, hath God said?*, respond by saying, *Yea, God HATH said, for it is written...*

Memory Verse: *Matthew 4:4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

Meditation #2
Genesis 3:9
Rev. Andrew Lanning

Where art thou?

The second question in the Bible was posed by God himself (Gen. 3:9). To Adam, hiding in guilt and shame behind the trees of the Garden of Eden, God called out, "Where art thou?"

Can you imagine the fear that must have shot through Adam's heart to hear such a question from God? Earlier that day, Adam and Eve had disobeyed God's clear command not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In the moment of their sin and guilt, their eyes were opened, and they saw that they were naked, a sign of being exposed in shame. Imagine their bitter tears of regret and remorse, and their growing sense of dread as the hour of God's approach drew near. How could they face Him? Guilty sinners standing before the holy God!

And yet...and yet...there was still some hope that they could hide their sins from the eyes of God! Adam and Eve set to work, fashioning aprons out of fig leaves to cover their nakedness. But as they finished the aprons, they heard it, the dread voice of God as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day. In a panic, Adam and Eve fled into the forest of Eden and flung themselves behind the trees of the garden. Can you see them there, trembling, hardly daring to breathe, willing the trees to conceal them from the searching eyes of God?

With a single question, God flushed them out: Where art thou?

God did not ask out of ignorance. He knew very well where they were hiding, and what they had done. An apron of fig leaves and a forest of trees could not hide sin from God, who is able to see even the deep recesses of man's heart, God did not pose this question in order to learn something for himself, but in order to drive home to Adam his disobedience. God's question was so powerful because it confronted Adam with where he was supposed to be. Adam knew he was supposed to be dressing and keeping the garden. He was supposed to be avoiding that one tree. He was supposed to be communing with his God now that the work of the day was finished. But instead, he was hiding from God! *Where art thou? Not where I am supposed to be!*

God still puts that question to us today. Every time we disregard God's laws, we stray from the path of obedience that we are required to walk. Oftentimes we know we are disobeying, and yet we willingly go astray. We even begin to convince ourselves that God will not find out, or at least will not hold us accountable. With a single question, God exposes us: "Where art thou?" And we must confess, "Not where thou hast called me to be."

So what hope is there for guilty sinners who stand before the holy God? After God exposed Adam and Eve and taught them that they could not hide their sin, he proceeded to do an amazing thing: God himself hid their sin! Slaying an animal and shedding its blood as a sacrifice, God took the animal's skin and covered his peoples' shame (Gen. 3:21). Man cannot hide his sin, but God can! Through the shed blood of his only-begotten Son.

Can you hear God speaking? He has a question for us: Where art thou?
Thanks be to him that we have a new answer: Under the cross of my Saviour!

Memory Verse: *Galatians 6:14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*

Meditation #3
Genesis 3:13
Prof. Herman Hanko

And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

Our first parents, Adam and Eve, had listened to Satan, appearing in a serpent, and had disobeyed God's command by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had come to them in the cool of the day and had asked Adam about his sin: "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" Adam, in response, blamed his wife for his sin.

It was then that God turned to Eve and asked her basically the same question. She in turn, blamed the serpent. Both were, in blaming someone else, really blaming God: God had given Eve to Adam, which is something that Adam reminds God of. And God had created the serpent, which Eve wants God to know.

God knew, of course and did not ask to learn something he did not know; but God often deals with man in this way that he may bring sharply to man's attention what he had done. Jesus did the same when he was walking with the travelers to Emmaus: he made as if he would go on when they arrived in the village, although he knew that he would not. It was the Lord's action that prompted them to ask him to stay with them (Luke 24:28-29).

The serpent was the highest of all God's creatures. Apparently, he walked in an upright manner (Gen. 3:14) and could communicate with man in some way, for Eve was not surprised when the serpent talked. It was the "link" between Adam and the animal world; the serpent was responsible for cooperating with Satan, and is therefore also punished.

By Adam's sin, sin entered the world and death with sin (Rom. 5:12-14). And sin manifested itself in a way in which it still manifests itself today: Adam and Eve blamed others for their sin, and so do we. It starts already with children who always try to escape the consequences of their sin by blaming others: "He made me do it!" It is our feeble effort at self-justification. We find it difficult to admit our own sin and that is because we are proud and unwilling to confess our sins.

But confession of sin is the only way to forgiveness. Let us then humble ourselves and make confession.

Memory Verse: *1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Meditation #4
Genesis 4:9
Rev. Andrew Lanning

Am I my brother's keeper?

The next question we turn to was posed by Cain (Gen. 4:9). Cain had just killed his brother Abel in a fit of rage when they were alone in the field. God had accepted Abel's bloody sacrifice (a lamb), but not Cain's sacrifice of works-righteousness (the fruit of the field he had tilled in the sweat of his brow). Angry that God had been pleased with his brother's sacrifice, and angry at God's rebuke for his anger, Cain took out his rage on Abel by killing him. God confronted Cain with his sin by asking him, "Cain, Where is Abel thy brother?" Cain responded, "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?"

In asking this question, Cain showed himself to be the seed of the serpent. During man's fall into disobedience, the devil had used the subtlety of a question to entice Eve to sin. Now Cain used the blunt force of a question to excuse his sin. Cain was not merely trying to cover his sin, although he was lying to God when he said he did not know where Abel was. Throughout the passage, Cain shows a calloused contempt for God, and nowhere does he appear afraid of God. Therefore, Cain was probably not so much interested in covering his sin as he was in challenging God's right to judge his sin.

Cain phrased his question in a way that was calculated to free him from responsibility. Cain used the word *keeper*, which means *guardian, protector*. "Am I my brother's guardian?" Cain was saying to God, "You made me Abel's brother, but you never made me Abel's protector." The implication is that Cain could not be held responsible for any harm that came to Abel, even if Cain himself inflicted that harm. The logic of Cain's question ran this way:

Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

God: "No, you are not."

Cain: "Then I am not responsible for his death."

People today still ask the question "Am I ...?" to try to free themselves from responsibility for their sins. The child or youth who is being reprimanded by his parents for neglecting his responsibility lashes out, "Am I perfect?" (or, "Do you expect me to be perfect?") The logic goes, "If you know I am not perfect, how can you judge me for this particular imperfection?" The citizen who breaks a law that he just learned about asks, "Am I supposed to know every law?" The logic goes, "I cannot be aware of every single rule, so you cannot hold me responsible for violating one of them." The member of the church disciplined for a sin asks, "Am I the only sinner?" The logic goes, "If others sin too, you cannot hold me responsible for my sin (unless you discipline everyone)."

God's answer to Cain's question is another question, "What hast thou done?" With one question, God dismisses the excuse. God's question stands man before his responsibility and accuses him of disobedience. Never mind that Cain was not Abel's keeper; what Cain did was sin.

When God comes to us with a rebuke for our sin, what shall we do? Let us not be as Cain, who tried to escape his responsibility. Let us rather flee to the cross of Jesus Christ and there find forgiveness. Instead of asking, "Am I ...?" let us instead say, "I am sorry. Be merciful, and forgive me, for Jesus' sake. Amen!"

Memory Verse: *Psalm 41:4 I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.*

Meditation #5
Genesis 15:2
Rev. Andrew Lanning

Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me?

The biblical question was asked by Abram as God spoke with him in a vision (Gen. 15:2). The question is striking because it looks selfish, presumptuous, and demanding: “Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me?” What mere man has the right to make such a request of the living God?! God’s answer to Abram, however, shows that it was a holy question, asked in faith. It was a question that honoured God, and it is a question that we do well to ask of God yet today. Let us see this by considering these three points.

First, Abram was simply asking for the fulfilment of God’s own promise. “*What wilt thou give me?*” meant “*What heir will you give me?*” This was a burning question for Abram, because God had promised Abram that his children would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. As Abram looked around, he saw that he had been living in the promised land of Canaan for some time already, but was no closer to seeing this promise realized. He and his wife were getting older, and still they had no children. The only other member of their household was Abram’s servant, Eliezer, and Abram began to wonder if it was through him that God would fulfil His promise. So, when God appeared to him, Abram besought God to give him an heir to fulfil God’s own covenant promise. Rather than doubting God’s word, Abram clung to his covenant God and asked in harmony with God’s own promise, “*Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me?*”

Second, Abram was asking for the glory of God in Christ. Abram did not know Jesus Christ by name in the Old Testament, but Abram did know that God would send the Seed of the Woman, promised in Genesis 3:15. That Seed of the Woman would be God’s Man, who would bring honour to God’s name through His victory over the serpent. Abram’s heir would not be just another child, but another link in the line that would produce the Messiah. With zeal for the glory of God in this Seed, Abram asked, “*Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me?*”

Third, Abram was asking for God to bless his church. When God had promised as many children as the stars in the sky, He was not merely promising a fruitful legacy for Abram, but a church. These children would be a nation: the Hebrews, the Jews, Israel, the church of the Old Testament. This church God would bless by giving them the promised land of Canaan with all of its riches as a picture of the spiritual blessings of salvation. But, there could not be blessings for the church if there were no church, and there could be no church if Abram had no heir. Out of love for God’s church, Abram asked God, “*Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me?*”

All of this applies to us today because God has given us many promises of blessing and salvation in Christ. The fulfilment of these promises honours God, and blesses God’s church. Promises such as the forgiveness of sins, power to fight sin, everlasting life, an inheritance in heaven, the return of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and a new heavens and earth. Our hearts crave these blessings, not out of selfishness, but a holy desire to see God honoured through our salvation in Christ. Therefore, we pray with Abram, “*Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me?*”

Memory Verse: *Genesis 15:2 Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me?*

Meditation #6
Genesis 15:8
Prof. Herman Hanko

And he said, LORD God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?

The context of this verse is very important. Abram had won a mighty victory against invading armies and had rescued Lot from them. God assured Abram that he would protect him if the enemies he had defeated returned to attack him. In that connection, God began to reveal to Abram the blessedness of his covenant. The promise of the covenant was that God swore an oath to give Abram the land of Canaan for his possession. There were two things that Abram knew were important in God's promise: 1) Canaan would be a picture of heaven; and, 2) His inheritance could only come with the coming of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) who was Christ.

But Abram had a problem which seemed to make the promise of God impossible: he was an old man and Sarai was unable to have children. How could God fulfil his promise when it seemed impossible? Abram brought his problem to the Lord.

He brought his problem to the Lord by way of asking for a sign to assure him that God would do what he said even if it seemed impossible. It is not surprising that Abram asked for a sign, for he lived in the old dispensation.

The difficulty was that Abram had no Bible! It would be almost five hundred years before any part of the Bible would be written. All he had were the words of God in a vision. And so God gave him the wonderful vision described in the rest of the chapter as a sign.

We may not ask for a sign today, nor does God reveal himself in visions any longer. But we do have the Bible that was written by divine inspiration. It is the Word of God that we can read every day to hear what God says to us.

I heard of a minister in England who had taken over a church and badly split it by his charismatic teachings. He prayed that God would give the congregation a sign to prove to them that he was right. It was wicked to ask for a sign, for the **Bible** tells us that his teachings were wrong (2 Tim. 3:16).

We have the Bible. It is God's word. When we believe what God says in the Bible, we believe in Christ and it will be said of us also, "And [Abram] believed in the LORD, and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Gen. 15:6).

Memory Verse: *2 Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

Meditation #7
Genesis 18:14
Rev. Andrew Lanning

Is anything too hard for the LORD?

God designed language in such a way that questions make an impact. A question engages the listener by compelling him to consider what is being asked and give an answer. An examination of the questions of Scripture not only gives us an opportunity to review some Bible history, but also engages us personally in the conversations.

The question we study today was posed by God to Abraham (Gen. 18:14). God had just announced to Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son within the year. Sarah, listening through the tent, heard this announcement and laughed in unbelief. God responded by asking Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

God's question was striking, because He had just announced the impossible. Abraham and Sarah could not have a child. Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah was 89 and barren. Scripture tells us, "Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women" (Gen/ 18:11). No wonder Sarah laughed! We might have done the same thing in her position.

But what is impossible with men is possible with God. God's question compelled Abraham and Sarah to recognize who they were dealing with: Jehovah God! He who created the entire universe by His Word. He who numbers the starry host and guides them by his hand. He who sends the wind and the rain and the sunshine and the crops. He who is from everlasting to everlasting. He who gives children and withholds children. Jehovah God! The answer to God's question is a resounding, "NO, nothing is too hard for the LORD!" Too hard for men, yes, but not too hard for Jehovah.

The doctrinal truth God taught here is His omnipotence. *Omnipotence* means *all-powerful*. Omnipotence is God's ability and power to accomplish anything that he pleases. It pleased him to create a cosmos, and he was powerful to create a cosmos. It pleased him to give Abraham and Sarah a child, and He was powerful to give a child. Later, God would say the same thing about the birth of Christ by a virgin: "For with God, nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

This truth about God's power is a powerful comfort to us. We face many problems that are impossible for us to solve. There is the problem of our guilt, which we daily increase by our sin. There is the problem of our spiritual enemies, who are stronger and craftier than us. There is the problem of our circumstances, which often are difficult and sorrowful. There is the problem of our future, and how we can live in heaven and be raised from the dead. We cannot remove our guilt, defeat our enemies, endure our circumstances, or raise ourselves. But, is anything too hard for the LORD? He is Jehovah God, and he is able to deliver us!

In all of our trials, let us cling to our omnipotent God. When deliverance seems impossible, remember God's omnipotence, and be comforted by the knowledge that nothing is too hard for the LORD.

Memory Verse: *Luke 1:37 For with God, nothing shall be impossible.*

Meditation #8
Genesis 18:18
Prof. Herman Hanko

[And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;] Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

God appeared to Abraham in the form of three persons, and told Abraham that within a year, Abraham (then 99 years old) and Sarah would have a son who would be the promised seed.

After the meal that Abraham fed them, the three men and Abraham walked together in the direction of Sodom and Gomorrah. When the cities became visible in the valley below, God turned to his companions and asked them whether they thought that Abraham should be told what they planned to do. It was clear what God purposed to do: Sodom and Gomorrah were indescribably wicked and had to be destroyed. God asked his companions whether they should tell this to Abraham.

There are two reasons given in this verse and the following verse, and both reasons have to do with God's covenant.

The first reason is that God knows Abraham will become a great and mighty nation. Abraham understood this, for God had told him earlier that his seed would be as the stars in the heavens (Gen. 15:15).

Abraham also understood that the great and mighty nation was not only made up of Jews, direct descendants of Abraham, but that it included all the nations of the earth. That too had been promised to Abraham, when God changed his name from Abram to Abraham (Gen. 17:5): Abraham means, "Father of Nations." And so God said, "And all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him."

How can these things be the reasons why God wants to tell Abraham what he is going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah?

The answer is this: what God is going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah is something that all Abraham's seed must know. It is a fundamental work of God that is so important that the whole seed of Abraham must be aware of it. The truth that God reveals to Abraham is that the wicked world will someday be destroyed as God is about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah.

And, Abraham has to tell his seed this truth. This is what God says in verse 19: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD..."

In other words, Abraham's seed is the catholic church of all time; and that church is God's covenant people.

Memory Verse: *Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

Meditation #9
Genesis 18:23
Prof. Herman Hanko

And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

After God revealed to Abraham that he would destroy Sodom, Abraham was confronted with a difficult problem occasioned by Lot's presence in Sodom, for Lot was a righteous man (2 Pet. 2:7-8). If the destruction of Sodom was God's way of telling all believers that he will someday destroy the wicked world, that immediately brings to Abraham's mind a great concern for God's people: "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?". The righteous, after all, live in the midst of the wicked. And the righteous are Abraham's seed that God had promised him. It is an important question.

Abraham's concern for the righteous is so great and his awareness of God's fury so frightening, that he wants to know whether the sparing of the righteous is just a general work, or whether every single righteous man will be saved. Consequently, Abraham gradually reduces the number of righteous from 50 to 10 – 10 being in Abraham's mind the possible number of the righteous in Lot's family. However, God's thoughts are of the whole church of Christ.

God assured Abraham that he would never, no matter how difficult it may seem, and no matter how few righteous are left on the earth, destroy the righteous with the wicked.

It is an assurance that we all rejoice to hear.

God delivered Lot and his two daughters, all that were left of Lot's family – and there is some doubt even about the two daughters who were subsequently guilty of incest.

The righteous are not those who have never sinned, or who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour. They are not those who have let Christ into their hearts. They are those who are eternally elected, those whose righteousness is imputed to them because Christ died for them, and who are the objects of God's love even though they are sinners.

Enoch was taken to heaven without dying. Israel did not experience the last seven plagues, and was led out of the land to escape Egypt's destruction. Similarly, at the end of the world the righteous will be delivered before the end comes (Rev. 11:11-13).

Be assured, you who are righteous in Christ, that the destruction of a city that practices the terrible vices of the heathen as in Abraham's day surely warns us that the same is true of today's world. The wickedness of nations that despise God's law will bring them fire and brimstone from heaven, but the righteous will be saved.

Memory Verse: *Proverbs 10:3 The LORD will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked.*

Meditation #10
Genesis 22:7
Prof. Herman Hanko

And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

Everyone knows the story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son, Isaac. I can hear someone say, Yes, but Abraham never actually sacrificed Isaac, for the angel stopped him before he could plunge the knife into Isaac's heart. However, Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham did actually kill his son. If he did not in fact do this, he experienced the anguish and awful pain of actually doing it.

Isaac must have been puzzled by Abraham's actions. Usually Abraham offered his burnt offerings near his home; but this time he went to a mountain in distant Moriah – where the temple was later built. Usually Abraham made his sacrifices in the presence of his family and servants, this time he took Isaac, his only son. Usually Abraham had a calf or a lamb with him to sacrifice, this time he took only wood and a pot of fire.

It is heart-breaking to read the brief conversation that Isaac and Abraham engaged in – especially Abraham's answer to Isaac's question, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

We must understand that although Abraham fully expected to sacrifice his son, he knew that not even the death of Isaac could take away the sins of God's people. Abraham was a man of towering faith. He was looking beyond the mountain and the dead body of his son slowly burning on the rocks he had piled up. He was looking beyond the horizon to the true Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, whom God would provide (Gen. 22:13, John 1:29).

Abraham's anguish as he in faith sacrificed Isaac is intended to remind us of what it cost God to give his beloved Son as a sacrifice for us. How easy it is to think of Christ's cross as something that did not involve any suffering on God's part. How wrong we can be!

Christ was God's Son in whom God was well pleased, he said so at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. He loved his Son. But God loved the world too, and his love for the world was so great he **gave** his own Son for us (John 3:16). I speak as a man, but it **hurt** God to give his Son to hell where God forsook his Son! Who can know the depths of that anguish?

For what? Just to save wicked and worthless sinners like you and me. God loved us! Believe it and worship!

Memory Verse: *John 1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

Meditation #11
Genesis 25:22
Prof. Herman Hanko

And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD.

Isaac was the seed promised to Abraham. He had married a woman that was his relative, but who had stayed behind in Haran when Abraham moved to Canaan. For a long time, she did not become pregnant. Isaac, conscious of his calling to bring forth the promised seed, prayed God to make his wife pregnant. The Lord answered that prayer and Rebekah was pregnant with twins.

Prior to the birth of her twins, she felt the two struggling together within her. She did not know she was pregnant with twins, and the activity in her womb was unusually great. She knew that something unusual was happening, and she went to ask the LORD about it.

The LORD explained to her that there were twins in her womb and that the younger of the two (the one born last) would be the heir of the birthright. This was contrary to custom. The rule of God himself was that the oldest would be the heir of the birthright. God sometimes ordered changes in that rule, as he did here.

Very near childbirth, the struggling in Rebekah's womb increased to what must have been nearly intolerable. The reason, as Rebekah learned after the twins were born, was that the last to be born (Jacob) was struggling to get past his brother and be the first born. Although Jacob could not have been conscious of this himself, God made him struggle to pass his brother.

That struggle was characteristic of the nation of Israel throughout history. Hosea makes that plain: "He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us [the LORD God of hosts]" (Hos. 12:3-4). Jacob's name became Israel and is used in Scripture to denote the nation. Israel is charged with committing the same sin as Jacob, i.e. trying to gain the birthright by their own power, adding to God's work by their own devices. For example, Elijah charged Israel at Mount Carmel with halting between two opinions, Jehovah and Baal.

The Word of the gospel found here is this. Though Jacob struggled for many years to gain the birthright from Esau, he only received it by humble prayer to God. Hosea tells Israel that, though the reprobate seem in power in Israel, the elect by fervent prayer to God will prevail and receive the true birthright. So also is it true for us. Not by works do we win the birthright in Christ, but in humble reliance on God's promise.

Memory Verse: *Romans 9:10-12 And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.*

Meditation #12
Genesis 25:32
Prof. Herman Hanko

And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

Throughout all their years together, the issue of the birthright was something that drove the two brothers apart. God had told Rebekah that she would have twins and that not the older, but the younger would be the heir to the birthright. Rebekah believed it; apparently Isaac did not, because he planned to give the birthright to Esau.

The tension between the two brothers was due to the problem of who had claim to the birthright. Jacob and his mother knew that the birthright belonged to Jacob; Isaac and Esau claimed it for Esau, for he was the first born.

Jacob liked it best at home with his mother; Esau was the strong and wild one who liked to hunt. The text tells about a day when Esau was out all day hunting and Jacob was home making soup. Esau came home famished, for he had not eaten all day. He asked Jacob for some of his soup. Now it is obvious to anyone that Jacob should have given him the soup, for he owed his brother his love.

I doubt whether Esau was actually near death, but we all have experienced times of total exhaustion and hunger, where we really believe we will die if we do not get some nourishment. Jacob saw his chance to get the birthright from Esau and demanded the birthright in exchange for food – Esau agreed.

Sin was present on both sides. Jacob had sinned because it was the pattern of his life from before he was born when he grabbed the heel of Esau, to gain the birthright. His sin was finally corrected by God at the brook Jabbok when he wrestled with God. God gives the birthright to whom he pleases; and he gives it by grace, that is, unmerited love and favour.

Esau's sin is explained in Hebrews 12:15-16, where we are admonished to look "diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you; and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

Memory Verse: Hebrews 12:16 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

Meditation #13
Genesis 27:24, 33
Prof. Herman Hanko

And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am.

And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.

Genesis 27 tells the sad story of Jacob's deception of his father, Isaac, to gain the birthright.

Isaac, thinking he was old and near death, decided to settle the matter of the birthright by giving it to Esau. This was very wrong of Isaac because he knew that God had told Rebekah that the birthright belonged to Jacob. The birthright comprised 3 blessings. First, the covenant blessing of being in the line that brought forth Christ. Second, lordship over brethren, pointing to Christ, who as our Brother has lordship over us. Third, material prosperity as a type of spiritual prosperity.

However, Rebekah heard Isaac tell Esau to go out and shoot a deer and make a pot of savoury meat, and he would bless Esau. And so Jacob and Rebekah plotted to get Isaac to bless Jacob by deceiving Isaac into thinking he was blessing Esau. Esau's clothes were put on Jacob and the bare parts of Jacob's body were layered with lamb's skin; so that his clothes smelled like Esau's clothes that he wore when hunting, and his skin felt like Esau's hairy skin..

Isaac's determination to bless Esau seemed to Rebekah and Jacob to be contrary to God's will, and that the birthright was about to slip away from Jacob – even though he had once purchased it from Esau with a bowl of soup. Their faith was weak, they did not believe that when God determined to bless Jacob, he would do that. They thought that God needed a little help and if they did not help him, the birthright would go to Esau after all.

Isaac seemed to fall for the lie, although he was somewhat doubtful because the voice sounded like Jacob's voice. That doubt remained.

Scriptures tell us two things that make us wonder whether Isaac completely believed Jacob's lie. First of all, Isaac gave Jacob (whom he thought was Esau) the blessings of a double portion of his possessions and the lordship over his brother; nor, more importantly, did he give Jacob (whom he thought was Esau) the covenant blessing (Gen. 27:28-29). Second, when Esau came, Isaac "trembled." He now knew with certainty that Jacob had deceived him and that he had not blessed Esau. But he knew at the same time that the right person had been blessed, as he said to Esau, "Yea, and he shall be blessed." Isaac finally gave Jacob the covenant blessing before his flight to Padanaram (Gen. 28:1-4).

Memory Verse: *John 6:27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

Meditation #14
Genesis 27:45
Prof. Herman Hanko

Until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?

Jacob had succeeded in gaining the birthright from his brother Esau – at least, in part. In a murderous rage, Esau plotted to kill his brother, and Rebekah, the mother of them both, learned of it. Apparently, without the knowledge of Isaac, she decided to send Jacob away to Padanaram (Haran), the place where Rebekah herself had been born and raised, and the home of her family.

She informed Isaac of her desire, justifying it by telling Isaac that she did not want Jacob to marry a Canaanite woman as Esau had done. Jacob could do better, as Isaac himself did, get a wife from his relation. Although the covenant lines were to be found in Abraham's descendants, the worship of God was, more or less, maintained in Abraham's relatives in Haran. Isaac agreed and before Jacob left, Isaac gave to Jacob the covenant blessing (Gen. 28:1-4).

Rebekah was mistaken on two counts. She told Jacob that it would be only "a few days" (v. 44) that he would have to be gone; in fact, it was over twenty years later that Jacob returned; he was home when Isaac died (Gen. 35:29). She was also wrong that Esau would forget what Jacob had done to him. Esau did not forget and went to meet Jacob on his return from Padanaram with 400 men – quite obviously, to kill Jacob (Gen. 32:6).

Once again, the whole narrative is clear on the point that God was directly involved in affairs, according to his own plan and will. Just as Abraham fetched a wife for Isaac from Padanaram, so did Jacob find a wife among those who were still worshippers of God, although not in the line of the covenant.

Although in his foolishness Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, through the trickery of Laban he married Leah, who was God-fearing and a true covenant mother, and God's choice for Jacob. God had also ordained that Jacob would, at the river Jabbok, learn that his efforts to gain the birthright were in vain: only God could give the birthright (Gen. 32:24-32).

Memory Verse: *Proverbs 16:9 A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.*

Meditation #15
Genesis 32:29
Prof. Herman Hanko

And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

The verse is at the very end of an event that was the watershed of Jacob's life. From before he was born, till this moment when he met God at the river Jabbok, Jacob had tried to win the birthright from Esau his brother. All his efforts had ended not only in failure, but in disaster.

The event at Jabbok was very strange. If it were not in the Bible, it would be impossible to believe: A mere man wrestling with God, the Creator of heaven and earth! And if that were not strange enough, the man won: "as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. 32:28). Jacob's name was changed from Jacob (probably meaning, Heel-holder) to Israel (meaning Prince of God).

From Genesis 32:26, we see that Jacob had learned that he could receive the birthright only as a gift of God, without his feeble works, and that his calling was to trust in God, wait upon him, and believe that God always works his purpose in our lives.

The Bible does not tell us why Jacob asked for the angel's name. It may have been that he was not sure that he had and would receive the birthright: the angel had only changed Jacob's name. He may have thought he would have to ask again. We read that the angel blessed him after Jacob asked the angel's name. The angel had changed Jacob's name; this may have prompted Jacob to ask for the angel's name.

He may have wondered whether the angel was indeed God, for after it all was over, he named the place, Peniel, which means "Face of God." As a matter of fact, the angel was God, and Jacob finally realized it. He was the Angel of the Covenant; the Angel of Jehovah: and therefore the old dispensation's revelation of Christ.

But the point is that we cannot acquire God's blessing by our work or by anything we do. Only God can bless. It is our calling to seek all things at God's hand and trust in his faithfulness.

Memory Verse: *Hosea 12:3-5 He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us; Even the LORD God of hosts; the LORD is his memorial.*

Meditation #16
Genesis 38:16
Prof. Herman Hanko

And he turned in unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she was his daughter in law.) And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me?

The background of this text is Judah's marriage to a Canaanite woman. In that marriage, he had two sons. Both, when they grew up, were themselves married to the same woman: The elder one while he lived, then the younger. The woman's name was Tamar. The elder was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the younger refused to have children with her. Both were killed by God for their evil. Judah promised Tamar another of his sons, Shelah, when he was grown. Judah failed to keep his promise; and so Tamar was without a husband and without children.

The whole affair was an extremely sordid and ungodly business: Judah for marrying a Canaanite woman; his two sons for marrying Tamar, a Canaanite woman and then refusing to have children with her.

To compound this wicked mess, Tamar dressed as a prostitute in order to trap Judah into having sex with her. It was a blatant act of incest on Tamar's part and it was Judah's sin of lust that led him to agree to Tamar's enticement – although he did not know the woman was Tamar.

There is only one redeeming feature in the whole mess: Tamar's motive was good in playing the prostitute. To understand the whole incident one must realise that in Israel, godly women had one fundamental desire that explained their conduct – they wanted to have children; and they wanted to have children because they wanted a part in bringing forth the seed of the woman, who was Christ. The list of these godly women is long: Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Tamar, Leah, Hannah...This does not excuse her sin, but it does explain why the whole affair is included in Scripture.

Tamar, a Canaanite woman, was more righteous than anyone born in the line of the covenant. She was willing to be a prostitute for the sake of having a part in the line of Christ. Judah also at last acknowledged her right motive and his sin (Gen. 38:26).

Behind it all, God was preserving the promised line so that Christ could be born: he even uses dreadful sinners. And Christ, when he was born, did not have a glittering ancestry, but one that would shame any decent person: foreigners, prostitutes, adulterous women and men. He was truly like us in all things except our sin (Heb. 4:15-16, Rom. 8:3).

Memory Verse: *Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

Meditation #17
Genesis 41:38
Prof. Herman Hanko

And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?

Pharaoh was the king of Egypt when Joseph was sold as a slave into Egypt by his brothers. Joseph was a steward in the house of Potiphar, but had been imprisoned because of false charges made against him by Potiphar's wife.

Furthermore, Pharaoh's butler and his baker had offended Pharaoh, and were in prison, where they met Joseph. During the time of the imprisonment, both the chief butler and baker had a dream, which Joseph interpreted for them (Gen. 40). The dreams had been given by God. The interpretation was that the baker would be hanged, and the butler would be restored to his position in the palace. And so it happened as interpreted.

Joseph had asked the butler to plead for him with Pharaoh when he returned to the palace. But when he was back at his work in the palace, he forgot (perhaps conveniently) all about his promise to Joseph. So Joseph remained in prison.

But God also gave Pharaoh two dreams, one of fat and lean cattle, and one of healthy and warped corn. No one could interpret the dreams for Pharaoh, until the butler remembered how Joseph had interpreted the dreams he and the baker had. The dreams had indeed prophesied what would happen. So Joseph was summoned out of prison to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh.

God rewarded Joseph with escape from prison. Joseph in all the years of his unjust imprisonment must often have wondered whether God had forsaken him. It was even two years before the butler remembered his promise to Joseph, and then it took Pharaoh's dream to deliver him. Through this most difficult time, Joseph never forgot his God nor departed from obedience to him.

At this point, the KJV makes a mistake in capitalising "Spirit of God." It should be merely "spirit of god," or "spirit of the gods." Pharaoh was not saying that Joseph possessed the Spirit of the only true God, but rather than he possessed the spirit of the gods of the Egyptians.

Pharaoh said this because Joseph was the only one in all Egypt who could interpret dreams. None of the soothsayers, wise men, magicians and astrologers in Pharaoh's service could interpret dreams, only Joseph could. Joseph could do it only because the Spirit of the true God interpreted the dreams that God himself had sent the butler, baker and Pharaoh. However, Pharaoh did not believe that and spoke of his gods whom he worshipped.

Memory Verse: *Genesis 50:19-21 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.*

Meditation #18
Genesis 50:19
Prof. Herman Hanko

And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

Joseph who had been sold as a slave into Egypt had been raised to a position of the second ruler in the kingdom, because he had, by God's work, been able to interpret Pharaoh's dream. He became responsible for doing all that was necessary to save Egypt during the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine.

The famine that came extended all the way to Canaan, which land was just to the north of Egypt. When Jacob, Joseph's father and his eleven sons and their family had no more food, the sons went to Egypt to buy food where plenty had been stored during the years of plenty. They did not recognize Joseph, although Joseph recognized them. Joseph did not know whether they had repented of their sin against him and whether they hated Benjamin, his full brother, as they had hated him.

And so he tested them. You can read of how he tested them in Genesis 42-44. When Joseph learned that they had repented, he told them who he was. Of course, these brothers were frightened to learn it was Joseph, because they thought that Joseph would surely get back at them for what they had done to him. Most of us would want to do the same.

Joseph tried to assure them that he would not get back at them, for Joseph saw that God in his providence had brought him to Egypt to save much people alive (Gen. 50:20).

It seems as if they did not quite believe him, but thought that Joseph would only wait until their father died, for, so they thought, as Joseph would not want to sadden his father. So they sent a messenger to Joseph to ask for forgiveness. In fact, they also went themselves to assure Joseph that they were sorry for the horrible sin they had committed. However, Joseph had truly forgiven them. It even seems as if he is just a bit angry that they did not believe him. "Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" was his response.

He did truly forgive them, but he asks this question because he knew that only God could judge how sincere they actually were. He could not and would not judge their hearts.

So we also ought to forgive our brethren when they confess their sin against us and ask for forgiveness. If we distrust the sincerity of our brother and refuse to forgive him, we put ourselves in the place of God (Matt. 18:21-35).

Memory Verse: *Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*