

PRIMEVAL SAINTS

PRIMEVAL SAINTS
Studies in the Patriarchs of Genesis

by James B. Jordan

James B. Jordan, *Primeval Saints: Studies in the Patriarchs of Genesis*
Copyright © 2001 by James B. Jordan.

Published by Canon Press, P.O. Box 8729, Moscow, ID 83843
800-488-2034 | www.canonpress.com

Cover design by David Dalbey.
Printed in the United States of America.
ISBN-13: 978-1-885767-86-8
ISBN-10: 1-885767-86-2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the author, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jordan, James B., 1949

Primeval Saints: Studies in the Patriarchs of Genesis / by James B.

Jordan

cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-885767-86-2 (pbk.)

1. Patriarchs (Bible) I. Title.

BS573 .J67 2001

222⁴.1106-dc21

07 08 09 10 11 12 10 9 8 7 6 5 4

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
1 FAITH AND THANKFULNESS <i>The Stories of Adam and Cain</i>	13
2 FAITH AND WORSHIP <i>The Stories of Seth and Enoch</i>	29
3 FAITH AND REST <i>The Story of Noah</i>	41
4 FAITH AND REBELLION <i>The Stories of Ham and Nimrod</i>	51
5 FAITH AND PATIENCE <i>The Story of Abraham</i>	61
6 FAITH AND COMMUNITY <i>The Story of Lot</i>	75
7 FAITH AND TYRANNY <i>The Stories of Isaac and Rebekah</i>	85
8 FAITH AND ACCEPTANCE <i>The Story of Esau</i>	101
9 FAITH AND WRESTLING <i>The Story of Jacob</i>	107
10 FAITH AND SERVICE <i>The Story of Joseph</i>	117
11 FAITH AND THE WORLD <i>The Story of Pharaoh</i>	129
12 FAITH AND SLAVERY <i>The Story of the Egyptians</i>	141
SCRIPTURE INDEX	151

For my sons
Dale and Douglas

INTRODUCTION

The book of Genesis contains the Bible in a nutshell. It records the beginnings (geneses) of all things, and everything that happens later in the Bible is an unfolding of what happens for the first time in Genesis. Because of this, the book of Genesis can and should be studied from a variety of angles, with attention paid to a variety of themes.

Yet, above all these themes is the overarching notion of beginnings and what develops out of beginnings. In the very first chapter we see God create the world, and then out of this beginning develops one good thing after another, with each new thing “begetting” in a broad way the next new thing as the Spirit works with the world. Then Genesis records a series of epochs in early history, each of which is “begotten” by the one that precedes it, and each of which transforms the old into something new.

Similarly, fathers and sons (or daughters) are continually in view in Genesis. We see this not only in the genealogies (which some wit has called “the begatitudes”), but also in the attention paid to Adam and his sons, Noah and his sons, Abraham and his sons, Isaac and his sons, and Jacob and his sons. In each case the son is called to carry forward the faithfulness of his father in new ways, becoming a new kind of person, and advancing beyond his father as “new occasions teach new duties.”¹

Fascinating as such themes are, our interest in this book is simpler. We are concerned with the heroes of the city of God. Our focus is limited to individual people, their faith in God, and what that faith meant for them.

¹As human beings are images of God, what Genesis shows about fathers and sons is an implicit revelation of God the Father and God the Son.

Heroism can be a dangerous idea. In the pagan world, heroism means pretty much the opposite of what it means in the Bible, but Christians too often get their ideas of heroism from the pagans. A reading of pagan literature, such as Homer's *Iliad*, reveals to us that for the pagan, the hero is consumed with his own honor and that of his family and society. He acts on that honor by killing other people and by being killed in some honorable fashion. These two notions, honor and death, are inverted in the Bible.²

The Christian is never to be motivated by a sense of his own honor, but rather by the honor of Christ. If pride was Satan's original sin, humility and patient faith are the Christian's primary duty. The Christian casts his own honor in the dust so that God may be honored, knowing that God and God alone can give him true honor. The Christian, thus, lives by obedience and submission, not by pride and honor and nobility. The Christian lives by something outside himself—God's commands, and not by something inside himself—his sense of honor.

Honor is our sense of self-worth, of self-importance. Since we are created as the very images of God Himself, we are indeed worthy and important. But our sense of our worth must never come from ourselves. It must always come from God's calling us to be His.

The pagan hero acts to preserve his honor from shame and disgrace, but the Christian hero, like Jesus, is willing to take up a cross, even though the public exposure of nakedness that the cross entails is monumentally shameful.

The pagan hero acts to preserve his name and reputation; the Christian hero is willing to endure slander and to ask God and God alone for eventual vindication.

²An excellent discussion of the Homeric (and pagan) ideals of honor and heroism is found in Peter J. Leithart's *Heroes of the City of Man: A Christian Guide to Select Ancient Literature* (Moscow: Canon Press, 1999).

In a duel or war, like that which Homer recounts in the *Iliad*, the pagan hero kills to preserve his name and his honor.

The pagan stands his ground, guarding his own rights, but the Christian guards only the rights of God and, in doing so, he is willing to give up his own things in order to preserve peace. Thus, when the Philistines kept seizing Isaac's wells, Isaac simply moved on to another place and dug another well—not a very honorable response from a pagan point of view.

From the pagan point of view, Abram did not act honorably when he told Sarai to tell Pharaoh that she was his sister and not his wife. Many Christians have faulted him for this, but as we shall see, he was acting in faith to preserve God's kingdom. And God vindicated him.

The pagan seeks to save himself, to save his sense of his own honor. The believer trusts in God for salvation and even for daily bread and is willing to die rather than let God down. Thus, while the pagan seeks an honorable death full of glory, the Christian is ready for an ignominious and shameful death. We can think of Jesus Himself, of course, but in Genesis we think of Joseph. He was ready to die rather than betray God, though he was spared by Potiphar who understood what had really happened (Gen. 40).

Finally, because the pagan does not believe and trust in God's kingdom, he makes his own country and family paramount. In the *Odyssey*, all Odysseus wants to do is get home. In the *Iliad*, the heroic Hector leaves his wife and son to be enslaved rather than abandon his clan and city, despite knowing that the Trojans are in the wrong and are doomed. "My country, right or wrong" was his operating principle. But the Christian hero is willing, like Abram, to leave family and country behind to serve God.³

³An even better example is Jeremiah, who told Jerusalem to submit to Nebuchadnezzar and encouraged the people of the city to defect to Nebuchadnezzar's army. The "honor of Jerusalem" was not Jeremiah's interest, but rather the kingdom of righteousness.

In these studies we look at a number of examples of true heroism—heroism that stems from faith in God and not from any sense of personal honor. We explore different aspects of the faith to which God called various people, and how they responded.

We shall see that true faith is thankful, not proud and grasping.

We shall see that true faith worships God and is not oriented toward self.

We shall see that true faith is restful and patient, not restless and impatient.

We shall see that true faith is submissive, not rebellious.

We shall see that true faith operates in a community of the faithful, and that it trusts God when faced with tyranny and oppression.

We shall see that true faith wrestles with God for blessings, not first and foremost with men.

We shall see that true faith serves others and does not seek to lord it over them.

And we shall see that the fruit of true faith is blessing and salvation to the world.

1 FAITH AND THANKFULNESS

The Stories of Adam and Cain

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that after God made everything else and set up everything the way He wanted it to be, He then made man. He said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen. 1:26).

We Christians are so used to reading this verse that we often miss its full impact. In fact, what is said here almost defies belief. Why? Because we are said to be created in the image of the God who made the world in verses 2–25 of Genesis One. God had made the world, and now He commissions man to take it over. But the man He designs for this task is nothing less than His own very image and likeness. It is only when we see just how wonderful and amazing man is that we can appreciate the magnitude of the Fall and the greatness of redemption.

The Glory of Man

Let us survey the earlier verses of Genesis to get an idea of what this new creature—man—is like. There we find that God caused light to shine upon a dark world, so that He could see all of it down to the last detail; then he began to work with it. That is what man is like. That is the kind of understanding God’s image is created to have.

God laid hold of a formless world and gave it form. That is what man is like. That is the kind of world-shaping thing man will do.

God laid hold of an empty world and filled it. That is what man is like. That is the kind of productivity man will have.

God reorganized whole oceans and planted vegetation; He established whole ecologies. That is the kind of thing man will do.

God flung the sun, moon, and stars into space. “Could it be,” wondered the angels who heard God speak in Genesis 1:26, “that this *man* will even do such things as this?”

Such is the import of the statement that man is made in God’s image. Man is not a worm, but a son of the King (Lk. 3:38), not a bit player on the stage of history, but captain of the whole of God’s earthly creation.

Additional wonders concerning man are seen in Genesis 2, where we read about the Garden of Eden and the first man’s tasks there. “Then Yahweh God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). Two tasks are set out here: to cultivate or beautify the world and to keep or guard it.

First of all, God told Adam to beautify the world, starting with the garden as his first project. He was to “dress” or “cultivate” it. Adam was to take the raw materials he found in the garden and work with them in order to enhance the garden. By reworking the garden he would beautify it further, eventually transforming the whole world into the glorious city of God.

Before Adam could begin to rework the garden, he would have to study and understand it. His *scientific investigations* would be the foundation for his *artistic endeavors*, just as God’s light preceded His actions. The more he learned about the acidity of soil, the better gardener man would become. The more he knew about the chemical composition of oils, the better painter he would become. The more he studied geometry, the better builder he would become. The more he understood himself, the better man he would become.

Adam would need help to do his task, and the animals would be his helpers. They would pull his plows, contribute wool to his garments, and give eggs for his table. Beyond providing these services, however, they would behave in ways that would teach Adam about himself. For example, by observing the habits of the ants, he would learn to be provident (Prov. 6:6–8). So the animals would help Adam understand himself and the world and assist him in glorifying it.

The first wisdom Adam acquired stemmed from observing that the animals came in pairs. Each animal had a mate uniquely fitted for it. For Adam, however, there was no helper specially fitted for him. From these observations Adam learned that his world-changing tasks were not to be performed by himself alone, without help. Rather, the human enterprise was to have a social dimension: Men would need women to help them, and beyond that, men would have to form larger social organisms in order to accomplish larger projects. It is not good for men to be alone (Gen. 2:18).

What a privilege! Man was to be lord of the universe under God's guidance, second only to God Himself in governing all things within the earthly creation. As great as this privilege was, however, it was not Adam's highest and most amazing glory.

Second, God entrusted Adam with the protection of His Garden. The word "keep" actually means "guard" or "protect," and it was Adam's duty to guard the garden against intruders. Protecting the garden from other would-be rulers meant offering it to God, affirming that it was God's Garden. To grasp the full weight of this we need to consider that the Garden of Eden was not simply a patch of ground. It was also God's holy sanctuary, the place of His earthly throne. Like the Tabernacle and the Temple later on, the garden was the place where God would meet with men and hold court. It was nothing less than the throne of God that Adam was called upon to guard. When Adam failed to do so, the cherubim were brought in to carry out the task (Gen. 3:24).

Consider the greatness of the task entrusted to Adam. After all, a king does not entrust the protection of His palace to just anyone. Only his most trusted and competent servants are given this task. The cherubim who took Adam's place were certainly glorious and terrifying creatures, yet it was man to whom the task was originally given. The cherubim were God's second choice. "In man We trust," said the Lord as He gave the keys of the kingdom to Adam. "Guard this Garden and everything in it. Guard your wife, and guard your own heart. Keep My palace holy."

To show him what it means to guard the garden, God arranged for another animal to approach Adam and Eve. There was nothing subtle or complicated about the serpent's assault on the garden. "God is a liar," he said, contradicting the word of God pointblank. The serpent did not directly attack Adam, but Eve. Adam, as guard, had the responsibility to protect the garden and his wife, and thus to rebuke Satan. He was to stand as warrior and priest to defend the very sanctuary of God. There is no higher calling.

Eden with its Garden was situated on a mountain or plateau. We know this because four rivers flowed out of it, and rivers only flow downstream (see also Ezek. 28:13–14). In the Bible, God frequently meets with men on mountaintops. We can think of Mount Moriah, where Abraham offered Isaac; Mount Sinai, where God met with Moses and the elders of Israel; Mount Zion, where God built His City; Mount Carmel, where God defeated the prophets of Baal; the Mount on which Jesus preached His great Sermon; and Calvary Hill, where Jesus was elevated as dying King.

Who gets to stand on this Holy Mountain? Who stands at the top of the world, right under heaven itself? Who takes the highest station, and is able to survey the whole world from the heights? Is it the lion or the ox? Is it the cherub or the seraph? No, it is man; it is Adam.

With Adam God speaks as Father to son. It is Adam to whom the world is given; he is commissioned to transform it from glory to glory. It is Adam who has the privilege of guarding the earthly throne of God from His satanic adversaries.

God created the raw material of the world and then brought it out of formlessness and emptiness over the course of six days. God initiated the project, and then He turned it over to Adam. Adam's task was nothing less than the transfiguration of the world, repeatedly, from glory to glory. He would begin with the scientific, the task of cataloguing and naming the animals, thereby coming to grips with the world. Adam would then start to work with the created order, learning progressively more difficult tasks, engaging in progressively more magnificent undertakings. There was flax to be spun into thread and made into clothing. There were dyes to be discovered to add color and glory to the clothing. There was gold to be mined and made into jewelry and other beautiful objects. There were four rivers to be followed to the four corners of the world, with ever new prospects for dominion and glory. And who knows, perhaps there were even the rocky shores of the planets and the fiery hearts of the stars to be subdued for man's use to the glory of God.

The task was limitless—with ever more complex projects, ever more magnificent undertakings. And as Adam and his posterity undertook to change the earth to God's glory, they themselves would also change, growing and maturing from glory to glory.

Greater projects would require greater time and planning. As he matured, Adam's vision would stretch beyond projects of a mere day or week, and he would begin to plan long-term endeavors. His heroic task of world-transformation would take on an "epic" quality, extending over years and even centuries. He and his descendants would come to see themselves as part of God's great design for history, with each contributing his or her part to the tapestry of universal glorification.

Such was the glory and destiny of man when he was created. Reflecting on this, David wrote, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained: What is man, that You take thought of him? And the son of man, that You care for him?” (Ps. 8:3–4). The moon and the stars are great and wondrous things and man is but a worm by comparison, so why does God bother to think on us? Rather David thinks the reverse: The moon and the stars are great and wonderful, yet God reserves His special care for man. How great must man be, since this is so!

David goes on to sing, “Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (Ps. 8:5–6). Man is created as God’s very image, just a little lower than God Himself, yet man’s glory does not stop there. God will crown him with more. Man would start with children’s tasks, but then God would add to him nothing less than dominion over all His creation!

Having looked at man’s privilege and greatness, let us now look more closely at man’s world-transforming task.

The Pattern of World-Transformation

God could have made the world instantaneously, or He could have done it over the course of six billion years. He could have taken six seconds, or six millennia. The fact that He chose to take six days is significant, for His sole declared purpose in doing so was to set a pattern for man, His image.⁴ The world was designed for man, and God’s actions in building up the world are prototypes of human actions in continuing to build up and glorify the world, transforming the raw materials of

⁴This is stated in Exodus 20:10–11, where man is told to work six days and rest on the seventh because that is what God did. See James B. Jordan, *Creation in Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One* (Moscow: Canon Press, 1999).

the garden and the rest of the world into the perfected beauty of the New Jerusalem, from glory to glory.

God's original creation of the heavens and the earth out of nothing is unique, and man cannot copy it. (We say "out of nothing" because God did not make the world out of His own being or out of any already-existing stuff.) From that point on, however, God acts in ways that man can copy. He brings light to darkness, gives form to the shapeless, names the unnamed, and apportions the restructured world to various kingdoms. Man as God's image copies these acts of illuminating, restructuring, naming, and distributing. We can summarize God's activity in Genesis 1:2–2:4 as a five-fold sequence of actions.

First, God takes hold of the creation. This is expressed by the phrase "And God said." God does not need hands to work, and He lays hold on things solely by the power of His Word and of His Spirit, who is the breath or out-speaking of His inner Word. Man images this aspect of the Divine work when he lays hold on any created thing in order to begin to work with it. Like God, man cannot work with anything until he has names, words, to put on what he is doing. God thinks and then puts forth His Breath to perform His actions. Similarly, the image of God thinks and then acts.

Second, God restructures the creation. This is particularly in focus in the first three days of the creation, wherein God *separates* light from darkness, waters above from waters below, land from sea. The world, already glorious in that it reflects God's glorious Person, is rendered even more glorious in the course of time by being broken down and restructured, so that at the end of each stage the world is "good," with still greater goodness to come.

Men continually and inescapably image this restructuring action of God. If I remove a book from my shelf, I have broken down the original form of my room and restructured it. If I dig up ore from the ground and heat it so as to separate gold from

dross, I am restructuring. This act of restructuring is what we generally think of as work in the strict or narrow sense.

Third, God distributes His work. This is particularly apparent in the last three days, during which God gives the firmament to the sun, moon, and stars, the sea to fishes, the land to birds and animals, and all things to men. This act of distribution follows naturally after the work of transforming. After I have made something I can do one of three things with it. I can keep it for myself, I can give it away, or I can trade it for the work of someone else.

Fourth, God evaluates His work. This is noted repeatedly by the phrase “God saw what He had made and it was good,” climaxing at the end: “God saw all that He had made and it was very good.” Evaluation always comes before consumption or full enjoyment. Before eating there is tasting. When a mother makes a soup and distributes a bowl to each member of the family, the first taste elicits an evaluation. “Well, how do you like it?” she asks. That question comes not at the end of the meal but after the first sampling of it.

Fifth, God enjoys His work. God’s sabbath rest on the seventh day was not apart from the creation; it was in it. God’s temple is always set up in the midst of the world—think of the Tabernacle in the center of the Israelite camp and the Temple in the center of the land of promise. Having tasted His work and finding it good, God relaxed and enjoyed it. Similarly, if the soup tastes good, we enjoy a whole bowl of it, and maybe a second helping.

These five simple actions are as ordinary as they are inescapable. It is, or should be, encouraging and invigorating to realize that imaging God does not necessarily involve performing great, earth-shattering acts. It can be accomplished simply through carrying out very ordinary activities. For instance, when I give you a glass of water: