

THE DOUBLE CAVE AND THE BIBLE'S ART OF DIALOGUE (GENESIS 23)

We are now jumping back in time to patriarchal times to the story in Genesis 23, of how Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah for the burial of Sarah. And the story, if you look at it, mostly consists of a long dialogue between Abraham and the Hethites who own the land that he wants to buy. But before we come to the details of the story itself we need to face a much bigger problem. And that is: Why was the story told in the first place? Now this is a real question. Because first of all the story looks trivial. If you remember the book of Genesis: The book of Genesis is a book that not only tells us patriarchal history. It tells universal history. As we know it starts with the creation of the universe and then goes on, not with the affairs of Israel and all the patriarchs but with universal affairs. Some of them are bad like the flood, some of them are worse, maybe like the tower of Babel. So compared to these large events in the history of mankind and the history of the patriarchs, why tell this story about the cave? And moreover, this is one of the longest stories in Genesis in terms of space. And this space could be used for a lot of other stories that we might have considered more important.

So that is the first question in terms of the relative unimportance of the story. But the problem goes deeper because

the problem is not just a matter of artistic proportion, but it's a matter of ideology. It is a problem of ideology because the Bible has a constant and major fight against the ceremonies having to do with death and funerals and things like that. That is one of the reasons why the Bible so hates Egypt. Not just because Egypt is the land of slaves. And a slave is one who has lost the image of God because he can't choose. So a land of slaves is for the Bible the place of the worst abomination. But apart from that the Bible hates Egypt because ancient Egypt was all about the culture of death. An Egyptian, especially if you were not just the Pharaoh but an aristocrat, spent much of his life preparing his grave. And on the other hand the Bible is a culture of life so much, so that "taking care of oneself" is a commandment in the Bible. Just as keeping observing the Sabbath is a commandment, you should very much guard your souls. In other words: Do not harm yourselves without necessity.

So it's a head-on clash between the culture of death and the culture of life. That is why in Biblical law there are laws against excessive grief, excessive mourning for the dead. For example, there is an explicit law that says that you should not scratch your face when you are mourning for your

beloved ones. And moreover it's not just a matter of the culture of life versus the culture of death. It is a matter of the conception of holiness. **To the Bible nothing is holy except two things: One is God, the other is the image of God in man.** These are the only things that are holy. The temple isn't holy. The sacrifices made to God are not holy. They are only at most vehicles for the holy or expressions of some attitude to the holy. And in this sense the concept of holiness is never a concept that is involved with things. To regard even the Temple, the holy Temple, to regard it as holy in the eyes of the Bible, is simply worship of false Gods. Because the tangible concrete, the thing is never holy. And just as the Temple is not holy, so then you might say, even more so our graves. The Bible doesn't want the people to spend their life or to spend part of their mental energy visiting graves.

And if you find it difficult to believe then just look at the end of Deuteronomy which describes the death of Moses. There you find in the last eight verses that Moses dies alone on the mountain. Alone except for the company of God. And there is the very mysterious verse about his burial. I translate literally: "And he buried him in the land of Moab ...". Who is he? There is nobody there. The only possibility is God, because he is the only one who is there. In other words: God did not want us to know where Moses is buried so that there will be no pilgrimage to the grave of Moses, because a pilgrimage to a grave is idolatry. And this is also why the holy cave of Machpelah which Abraham buys here - I mean „holy“ in terms of today, I mean everyone regards it as a holy place; the Bible doesn't. In Machpelah Sarah is buried

now, Abraham will be buried later, then Isaac will be buried with Rebekkah and Jacob will be buried with Rachel/Leah. So you might think there the patriarchs with their wives are buried, it must be a holy place. But outside this chapter, outside Genesis, the cave of Machpelah is never mentioned in the Bible again. Never! So why?

And the reason is clear: Just because the Bible doesn't want to have much business, you know, with the graves of the dead, holiness must not be materialized, not in a temple, not in a grave. Now the question is: If so, why is the story told? It's not only a relatively unimportant story, a story about an unimportant thing, a grave, but it is a story that goes straight against Biblical ideology. Because it might encourage a worship of the dead. So, I mean, we have this big question. I don't want to answer it now. But we have to understand, there is this big question hanging over the whole story and I hope we will find an answer to it. So we can keep this question in mind and get down to the details of the story. And for the story in Kings I apologize for the length of reading of the whole. This apology holds even more true of the present story where we really have no time to go into any important details. But I do hope that in the little time we have we will again manage to perceive something of the spirit of this tale.

Let us look at the text: Sarah died in Hebron, in the land of Canaan. And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Then Abraham got up before his dead and spoke to the Hethites, saying: „I am an alien and a resident with you. Give me a holding for a burial ground with you and I will

bury my dead out of my sight.“ The Hethites answered Abraham, saying to him: „Hear us, my Lord. Thou art a great prince amidst us.“ In the original it is an „Elohim prince“, a great prince, amidst us. „Bury thy dead in our choicest burial grounds. No man of us will deny thee his burial ground to bury thy dead.“ So on the face of it, what we have here, is a kind of ideal harmony between the two sides. Abraham requests the Hethites for a burial ground, and what they do is that they seem to offer him more than he asked for. But if things are so harmonious why does the dialogue go on? Because if they said: „Yes, of course, you are such a great prince among us“, then he would go home and take the corpse and bury it. Why are there four further rounds of dialogue in the story? So this is again the Bible’s art of indirection which tells us that apparently the harmony is only on the surface.

So let us look again at those verses, again what Abraham requests and what the Hethites offer. So actually what he as usual does is simple and forthright. He describes his political status. He is an alien and a resident, and he asks for a burial ground so that he can bury his dead. Now look what they say: „Hear us, my Lord. Thou art a great prince among us.“ They seem to be offended by his humble self-description. As a sojourner and a resident. „You are a stranger? You are an alien? No, you are a great prince! Don’t call yourself such ugly names! Thou art a great prince among us.“ Now he says, he wants a grave and they say: „Bury thy dead in our choicest burial grounds. Because no man of us will deny these burial grounds to bury thy dead. There is no one here who is saying „no“, if you say you want to bury your dead, your wife, among us.“

But if you look at their words, the words do not amount to „yes“. Because what does it mean: „Bury thy dead in our choicest burial grounds?“ What he needs is not several choicest burial grounds, what he needs is one burial ground. He can’t bury his wife in more than one place. So if you tell him that you can bury your dead in our choicest burial grounds you say nothing. Nothing dramatic. He can’t bury her anywhere. And when they add and say: „No man of us will deny thee his ground“, they don’t even say „every man of us will give you.“ He says: „Give me!“ They say: „No man of us will deny you.“ In other words: „No man of us will not give you.“ So what they say amounts to nothing. And on the face of it, it looks fine. But words cost nothing. On the other hand, what he said, is really significant. He describes himself as an alien and a resident and so a man without political rights. So he has no right to buy land and he wants the land to be his. He has no right for this. And apparently they do not want to give him any land. That’s why they say: „You bury, whatever happens, you don’t bury her in a land of your own. You bury her among us.“ And the key to all this lies in a very humble word. When he says: „Give me a holding for a burial ground!“ Now in Biblical Hebrew a holding is a word for possession. So it’s the keyword because what he wants is possession of the land. They do not want to give an alien and a resident the political right to possessing land. So in fact they haven’t said „yes“ and they haven’t said „no“. They leave it in the air.

Now please don’t be sentimental about it, because sentimentality will lead us nowhere. If they don’t agree to somehow let him bury Sarah, he

can't bury her. Because to them he is an alien from Iraq. Iraq I mean Mesopotamia as it's called in Biblical times. They in effect might say to him: „Take your corpse and go back to where you came from! We are not going to give you land.“ So please no sentimentality duty to the dead, and so forth. To them he is a foreigner and again the big words mean nothing. „You're a great prince“, and so forth. Nonsense! What they say is: „We are not going to sell you any land“. They don't repeat the word „holding“, they don't repeat the word „give“. He says: „Give us!“ They say: „No one of us will deny you.“ So the question is: If so, why didn't they say no? They are very polite. But as you know politeness doesn't prevent one from saying no. In Japanese for example, if you take a modern example, it is considered not done to say no. So what you do is you say: „Yes, but...“. So why don't they say no? You can say: „You are a great prince“, and so forth, „but sorry, there is no land“. So what we can conclude is that perhaps they are ready to negotiate. And we have to remember that Abraham is described throughout Genesis as a very very rich man. So they don't say yes. They don't say no. They leave him to, as we say in English, make the running, to go ahead, to find a way to proceed. So let us see how he proceeds. That comes next.

Abraham spoke to the people of the land, the Hethites, saying: „If you wish to bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and intercede for me with Ephron that he will give me the cave of Machpelah which is his, which is at the edge of his field, at the full price. Let him give it to me amidst you as a holding for a burial ground.“ Now again the Biblical narrator tells us nothing as in

the story in Kings. There is nothing, no information given about the characters in a life. Neither about what the Hethites really wanted, nor about how Abraham felt when he found his request in effect half rejected. What we can judge is only from his words. So what can we judge, what can we find out from his words? First of all he now speaks in a completely different way from what he spoke in the first round. Because look again: What he spoke in the first round is composed of three short protective sentences: "I am an alien resident among you", "give me a burial grave, a holding for a burial grave among you" and "I will bury my dead". Three short sentences that follow one another. Very explicit about everything, about his status, about what he wants. And suddenly if you look at his present response, it's completely different. It's composed of one very long sentence, a very complicated sentence with subordinate sentences following one upon another.

What happened? Well, I think that the most probable hypothesis is that he learns from the Hethites that you don't speak straight. That there must be a nice dressing, a nice front to even the darkest things you are planning. For example the way they speak, they call him „a great prince with the choicest of graves“, and it amounts to nothing. So he must learn to speak „Hethite“. So what he does is he starts with indications. So look at how he proceeds now. He starts and says that: „If you wish to bury my dead out of my sight.“ What does it mean? It means that he pretends that they said „yes“. He says: „If you really want to do it as you say, hear me and intercede for me with Ephron". That's how he pretends that they said „yes“. And the problem is to

convince this person Ephron to sell the cave he has. So Abraham now says: „Let us join forces, right? And you, who have influence with him, talk to him that he will sell me the cave.“ And he has in mind a very particular cave, the cave of Machpelah - Machpelah means „double“-, the double cave. Which is his, which is at the edge of his field. Why does he describe that it is at the "edge" of his field? Because he wants to convince them that he will not be a nuisance to them, I mean, to be not in the middle of the field where they have to work and so forth. It is at the edge of the field, I will be in nobody's way. And so, in other words, he tries to make his request as simple as possible. Moreover he goes on "... at the full price that it will be given to me". That is, he in fact interprets what he said before. Before, in the first round, he said: „Give me a holding for a burial ground!“ What does "give me" mean? Give me for nothing?

In Biblical Hebrew „give“ is an ambiguous word. It may mean „give“ as a gift and it may mean „give“ as something sold. And now we understand why the Hethites didn't want to use the word „give“. They said: „No one of us will deny.“ Because if they said „give“, he might understand it as if they agreed to give him a gift. So Abraham apparently understood it, in retrospect, this possible misunderstanding. And now he interprets what he said. He said: „When I said 'give me', what I meant is at the full price let it be given to me!“ The full price. I don't want any reductions. I don't want any favours. Yes, no discount! What I am willing to pay, the full price. So please don't misunderstand. I didn't mean a „gift“! And after all this he said: „It is at the edge of the field, I am willing to pay the full price.“

Finally he has apparently softened them. Finally he repeats his request: As a holding for a burial ground. This is his minimum. On this he is not willing to compromise. In effect he says: „I'm willing to be at the edge of the field. I'm willing to pay the full price. But I'm not willing to give up the possession of the grave". Why? Because in the next chapter, chapter 24, we see he sends his servant back to the old country, to Iraq, to find a wife for his son Isaac. In other words, he doesn't want to marry with the Canaanites. And just as he doesn't want to intermarry with them, he doesn't want to bury his dead among them. That is why he is so firm about this. He is willing to give way in everything but not in the possession. In other words, a grave of his own.

So we go on quickly. Ephron was sitting among the Hethites and Ephron the Hethite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hethites of all who came at the gate of the city, saying: „No my Lord, hear me my Lord.“ You will remember they called him a great prince, and he continues: „My Lord, hear me! The field I've given thee and the cave that is in it, I've given thee. Before the eyes of my people I have given it to thee. Bury thy dead!“ It's a surprise, isn't it? I mean perhaps we have suspected the Hethites for nothing. Because look at what he says! He says: „I have already given it to you!“ Not: „I will give it to you!“ „I have already given it to you!“ And the important thing is for him: „Bury your dead!“ But again the question is: If this is the case, why didn't Abraham say: „Thank you very much“, and go to bury his dead? Why does the dialogue go on? And again, if we take a harder look at what Ephron says, then we see again that there is a large distance between the nice words

and the hard meaning behind. What gives away his show, Ephron's show, is of course that he says again, if you look at the words: „The field I've given thee and the cave that is in it, I've given thee!“ That is for a citizen and he is a Hethite citizen. To give an alien a cave is really an extraordinary act of generosity. And also it is a very significant political act. Because in giving him that land, he gives him citizen rights. So that will be incredible. But he doesn't give the grave alone, the burial ground alone. He says: „I give you the field, the whole field! Abraham said: „I want the grave at the edge of the field.“ He says: „No, I give you the field and I give you the cave in it.“ This we can't take seriously. And in fact Abraham can't take such a gift, you know, because he would humiliate himself in front of the whole community. In other words, he understands that he can't say: „Thank you“. And he doesn't want to say: „Thank you“. He doesn't want to receive any gift, he offered to pay the full price. He knows that what in fact Ephron has done, Ephron has set the terms of the deal. So behind those fine words, what Ephron is saying is: „Look Mister, you want me to break the status quo in your favour. If so I'm not going to do it for a cave at the edge of the field. If you want, then buy the whole field and then we will talk business.“

I don't know if you know there is a famous Jewish story which is made into a play. And it says: there is a character who says, that if I, a religious Jew, am going to eat pork, let the fat spill over into my beard. In other words, what he says is: „If you want me to do this thing which is so in your favour, so against our will, then at least make it worth my while.“ Now this is of course my interpretation of what he says. Maybe I'm

wrong. But let us look at the immediate continuation.

How does Abraham understand it? And Abraham in verse 12, Abraham bowed before the people of the land and he spoke to Ephron, all the people hearing, then saying: „If thou would only hear me. I have given the price of the field. Take it from me and I will bury my dead there.“ So what Abraham says confirms my reading. Abraham understood that now the talk is not about the cave. The talk is about the field and the cave in it. I mean either you buy the field with the cave in it or nothing. So he does not talk about the cave any longer. He talks about the field. He got the point. And so first of all he says: „Okay, you want me to buy the field. I want to buy the field.“ But he has to play the game, you know? And to sound as polite as the Hethite. So look at the tenses he uses. Just as Ephron has said: „The field I have given thee already and the cave that is in it I've given thee“, so Abraham now says: „I have given the price of the field. If you have already given, I have already given the money.“ So if you say: „I've given the money“, that means that I agree to it and at the same time I sound polite and in effect he says: „If you don't take the money, I don't bury my dead. I mean you have to take the money from me because you have already given me the field.“

Now just imagine the situation. There is this old man whose wife just died. I mean the wife with whom he's lived almost a hundred years. And those Hethites not only manipulate him into a deal that he is not interested in, but they force him into playing their game. Because they don't speak explicitly. What they speak is indirectly

and they force him to speak the same way. And of course our heart goes out to Abraham. You know he is alone, faced by all these Hethites and having to know to play the game while his heart is probably broken, but he has to play the game. And the game goes on. I mean, Ephron doesn't give up so easily. So Ephron answered Abraham saying to him: „Hear me my Lord! Hear me my Lord! A piece of land worth four hundred silver Shekels. What is that between me and thee? Bury thy dead!“ Again very kind, very generous, right? You say: „What is four hundred Shekels of money between people like ourselves? He says: „A field worth four hundred Shekels is nothing between us. The important thing is that you bury your dead.“ But again, what does he actually say? Actually, of course, he says: „This is the price of the field.“ In other words, when Abraham said he is ready to pay the full price, that was not enough for Ephron. And the key again lies in the hard facts: How much is four hundred Shekels? Is it much or is it little? If you look at other figures in the Bible you find that it is a lot of money.

Let me give you one example. At the end of the book of Samuel, David buys from another Canaanite - the Hethites are Canaanites -, the plot of land where the Temple is to be built. So there is a plot of land in the capital. Not, you know, somewhere remote like the hole near Hebron. And he pays the full money. He says: „I don't want any gifts“, like Abraham. He says: „I want to pay the full money“. And the full money is fifty Shekel, hundreds of years later! Then there is probably a devaluation in between. So he asks him eight times as much as David paid for a plot of land in the capital. Or take another example,

in Jeremiah where there is described a sale of a field and the field is sold at Anatot. It's the home town, the home village of Jeremiah. And the field, is said, is sold for seventeen Shekel. So this more or less will be the worth of the land at the full price.

So Ephron in effect says to him: „Look, what is a million dollars between you and me?“ And in fact he now sets again the terms of the deal. Earlier he said: „No, no cave. The full field or nothing!“ And now in fact he says: „No full money, no full price. Four hundred Shekel or nothing.“ And then we find that Abraham again understands the hint. Because this time Abraham says nothing. It's written: "Abraham listened". There, I mean, the time for talk has passed. Abraham listened to Ephron, he listened well, you know, to what Ephron meant. Not to what he said. "And Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named to the weight current, in the hearing of the Hethites four hundred Shekels of silver according to the weight current among the merchants". Look how heavy the verse is, how all the details. What I mean is, Abraham doesn't sign a check. And he doesn't pull out of his pocket the money. Note what the verse says: Abraham weighed out the money. That is Abraham came with sacks of money and weighed them, because the four hundred Shekels is a matter of weight. Weighing done in front of the whole community. So now look again at the verse: "And Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hethites". In other words, the price that he had said in the hearing of the Hethites, four hundred Shekels of silver. And not only that! But he adds according to the weight current among the

merchants. This is the Biblical phrase meaning the best money possible. In other words: It's accepted everywhere. So Abraham in effect pays not just the four hundred. But he pays with the best silver that is available. And then finally we see the silent narrator suddenly become talkative. The narrator who was so sparing of speech, who told us nothing in effect during the tale, now suddenly becomes talkative. He starts to talk. So the field of Ephron is in Machpelah, east of Mamre. The field and the cave which is in it and the trees in all the field and all the borders round about was made over to Abraham as his possession before the eyes of the Hethites, all who came in at the gate of the city. Then Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, east of Mamre, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan. The field and the cave which is in it were made over to Abraham as a holding for a burial ground by the Hethite.

The question is: Why all these details? Because the narrator could have simply said: And then after he weighed out the money he got the cave. And all the field and the cave in it. Instead what we have is a specification. The field and the cave in it. And the trees in the field. And exactly the contours of the field. Why all these details? It sounds as if it is quoted from a bill of sale. And in archeological findings over the last decades bills of sale were found in the ancient Orient which were exactly like this. I suppose many of you have bought apartments. And then you find it, if you look at the text of it, is reminiscent of this because it contains a lot of details that should have been understood by themselves. When you sign a contract, it says not just „you buy the apartment“ but there

is a closet in here, there is this kind of gadget and so forth. And the lawyers, you know, make a point of specifying it. So what I want to say is that as the story moves forward, the mask over the faces of the Hethites is slowly dropping. The mask is already slipped from Ephron's face when he said: „What is a million dollars between us?“ But when the time for talk has ended and the hard reality is coming there is no longer any doubt. All the time it was about sacks of money and for this return, for this specified possession. So this is the story between Abraham and the Hethites.

But now let's return to the bigger question: Why does the Bible tell the story? What is so significant about the story that it should be told when the most important events in the life of the patriarchs and in the life of humanity are omitted. And more important: Why is it told against the Bible's ideological fight against the worship of the dead?

So let me give the answer very briefly. The story is told because it shows how God's promises do not come easily. What I mean is this, that from the beginning God has promised to Abraham and then of course to Isaac and to Jacob and to the people as a whole. He has made in effect a double promise, two promises that are in fact one. If you look from the first words spoken by God to David and then repeat it through all the intervening chapters between Genesis 12 and this chapter of Genesis 23, you find this promise of God repeated again and again. On the one hand God promises Abraham a seed of his own and on the other hand he promises him a land of his own. And these two promises are one because on the one hand the promise of seed,

of sons, means a promise of eternity. In other words: Sons will have sons and so forth. And so the line will go throughout history in time. And on the other hand there is a promise of land because if you grow as God tells him from the first promise: "You will grow into a great people". A great people needs a place for living. So what you find is two promises repeated again and again. In the case of the son, God keeps repeating to him: „You'll have sons and your descendants will be as many as the stars in the sky.“ But nothing happens. So much so that there is a story that the angels come and promise him, for the who knows what time, that he will have sons. And Sarah hears it from the tent and she laughs. What she says is: „I no longer have periods and my husband is old. He is a hundred years old. So what do you come and promise me a son?“ Okay, so Sarah, you can say, is perhaps a little hasty. Even though after the twenty five years the time has come from God to fulfill his promise. Twenty five years! But what is much more astonishing is that Abraham laughs as well. Because when God comes, God himself comes and promises him, for I don't know what time, that he will have a son, Abraham falls on his face and laughs. I mean he is polite. He doesn't want to show God that he laughs. So he falls on his face and laughs. And he says very politely: „May Ismael live before you. That is not the son from Sarah but the son from Hagar. I mean, if you keep him, that's okay.“ And it is only after all these repeated promises and frustrations that Isaac is finally born. Against the laws of nature because Sarah has no longer her period, as she said, and Abraham is so old. I mean, in Kings they said that David was old. How old was he? He was probably in

his sixties. Abraham is a hundred years old. And then what you find is that God drives this long suffering to a limit. In the chapter before this, in Genesis 22, he says: „Take the son of yours and sacrifice him in the place where I will show to you.“ And Abraham obeys and only when he puts his knife over the throat of the son as he was going to cut it, then the angel says: „No, don't do anything because now I know that you are a God-fearing man.“ So the whole business with the son is very dramatic and occupies the attention of almost every reader. But if you read those intervening chapters carefully, the chapters between 12 and 23, you will see that the drama of the land promised is running parallel, because God keeps repeating himself to Abraham. He says: „The land first“ – you look at the phrase for yourself. First he says: „Your sons will inherit this land.“ Then he says: „You will inherit this land.“ And you will again see that the word is used in chapter 23: „You will inherit it as a holding" and "you will get it from the tribes of Canaan". And he names the Hethites among them.

So what must Abraham have felt when he now stands before the company of the whole city, of the men, of the Hethites and he has to plead for a hole in the ground? God has told him: „The land is yours! Not theirs.“ But he doesn't even have a hole of a ground of his own to bury Sarah. What must he have felt? What is God's promise worth that I'm reduced to this situation? Here I stand old, alone and being blackmailed by those Hethites. And I, who according to God, have inherited the land, am forced to obey every demand of theirs. Not a cave but a field. Not the full price but four hundred Shekels of silver. What must he have felt? The

narrator never tells us. Because there is no inside view of Abraham. And, significantly, in the chapter before it, in chapter 22, when he is told to sacrifice his son, there is no inside view either. What must Abraham have felt after twenty five years of repeated promises and repeated frustrations? A son was born to him. Now God tells him: „Go and slaughter the son for me!“ But the narrator doesn't tell us what he felt then and he doesn't tell us what he felt now. What we have is Abraham acting for the best as far as he can. He is going to do the deal that is dictated by the Hethites.

So in this sense we have in those two chapters, chapter 22 and chapter 23, the two supreme trials in Abraham's life. One is the trial for the promise of the son, of the seed. And here we have the supreme trial for the promise of the land. And if the promise of the son seems more important to you than the promise of the land, remember that the second trial, the trial of the land is in a sense even worse than the first. Because in the trial of the son, God told him to go to the mountain of Moriah and sacrifice Isaac there. Happily, Isaac survives. But Abraham dies without knowing if the promise of the land will ever be realized. All he knows is that when he needed a hole in the ground, he had to pay four hundred Shekels for it. So, as we see, these make a pair, these two stories at the end of Abraham's life make a complementary pair. Which brings to a climax the trials of Abraham's whole life.

The trial of the son and the trial of the land, now just as they were run together throughout the intervening chapters 12 to this one, so are the two climaxes brought together. So in

effect the story is worth telling for the Bible, despite the ideological problem. Because it dramatizes a problem that is central to the Bible. And that is the distance and sometimes a tension between what God promises and what happens. God's promises are finally realized, always! But sometimes the suffering that the beneficiary of the promise suffers on the way is really heart-rending. So the Bible in effect tells us, if what you expect is a promise by God and you expect a swift delivery, forget it! God acts in his own ways and he tries you all the time.

Thank you very much.

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MEIR STERNBERG (Ph.D.), Tel Aviv, is Professor of Poetics and Comparative Literature at Tel Aviv University. International lecturing in America and Europe on literature of the Hebrew Bible. Editor of the leading journal on literary science, „Poetics Today“. Author of numerous books and articles on literature of the Hebrew Bible. Israel Prize Laureate.