

RUF Bible Study – The Gospel in Genesis

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Genesis 35-36 – Reflections on the City of God and the City of Man²

35:1 God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.” 2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments. 3 Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.” 4 So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.

5 And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. 6 And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, 7 and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. 8 And Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth.

9 God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. 10 And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. 11 And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. 12 The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” 13 Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. 14 And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. 15 So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

16 Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. 17 And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, “Do not fear, for you have another son.” 18 And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), 20 and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel’s tomb, which is there to this day. 21 Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

22 While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine. And Israel heard of it.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. 23 The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob’s firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. 24 The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 25 The sons of Bilhah, Rachel’s servant: Dan and Naphtali. 26 The sons of Zilpah, Leah’s servant: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

27 And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. 28 Now the days of Isaac were 180 years. 29 And Isaac breathed his last, and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

36:1 These are the generations of Esau (that is, Edom). 2 Esau took his wives from the Canaanites: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite, 3 and Basemath, Ishmael’s daughter, the sister of Nebaioth.

As we left chapter 34, we would be justified in being pretty depressed. The last verse in the chapter, “*But they said, ‘Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?’*” sort of sums it up for us. Jacob is a pitiful leader, a poor father, a covenant breaker. His sons proven to be killers and ones that use God’s symbols for their own wicked purposes. The whole chapter smells of defilement, it reeks of sin.

We might be justified in wondering where God is in all of this. He doesn’t appear too concerned with the narrative. He isn’t even mentioned. In researching that chapter, I found a sermon online that posits that this is what happens when God abandons his people. Has God abandoned Jacob? I’m sure it may have felt like it.

But the first verse of chapter 35 says differently. God has been there all along. We may wonder at His ways, but He is there. Perhaps He is testing Jacob. Perhaps disciplining him. But not abandoning Him. We have no indication here that God’s reintroduction was based in any way on Jacob’s repentance or renewal. God sought out Jacob. He spoke to him, telling him to get out of Dodge and back to Bethel.

This section of Genesis caps off Jacob’s main story line, and thus Esau’s as well. We wrap up the two brothers with these two chapters, and then move our focus to Joseph’s narrative. I think the main lessons we see here are about the Kingdom of God. We’ll look at worship in the covenant, conflict in the covenant and the spread of the covenant.

Worship in the Covenant

God commands Jacob to go up to Bethel and build an altar there. Jacob, the passive actor in the previous chapter, actively obeys here, showing that he isn’t dead to life after all. This call and response echoes many others we’ve encountered in Genesis to this point. It fulfills Isaac’s blessing on Jacob in 28:3-4. We recall Jacob’s first theophony in Bethel when Jacob was fleeing Esau. But this time Jacob isn’t filled with fear and the context isn’t one of fleeing (Esau) but of going back to where he knew he should be. Jacob interestingly names this place El-Bethel, which means the God of Bethel, which means the God of the House of God. He is redirecting his worship to the one worthy of such devotion.

There is a place to which Jacob is to go and worship. Apparently he is not in that place. We cannot worship God anywhere we please, contrary to the popular notion. Yes, God is just as present in Shechem as He is in Bethel, for He is everywhere. But He is also present in Bethel in a different way than at Shechem. It is the House of God, after all, is it not. And it is in the Promised Land, which has to mean something. We need to conform our worship to the ways God has prescribed. He has

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² Sources: Waltke, Kidner, Wenham, Alter, Calvin, Gibson and DeGraaf.

commanded us to be with Him in His church on the Lord's Day. "Jacob's tragedy at the wrong sanctuary of Shechem and the expanded covenant at the sanctuary of Bethel underscore the importance of worshiping God only according to His agenda. The church's form of worship is 'God's face' in the world. The church must not deviate from His prescribed form lest they change His face. God will judge, not bless a willful church."³

It's interesting to notice the scurrying activity after God speaks to Jacob. Jacob is suddenly invigorated. He gets his household in order, commanding them to get rid of their household gods and change their clothes. After the defilement themes of the last chapter, we see purification themes in this one. Either Rachel's household gods she'd smuggled away from her father had always remained with them, or new ones had been picked up from the Shechemites, or possibly both. But they are to be done away with. God will not tolerate idols in His midst. What would it look like if we brought our idols to church next week and buried them under the playground outside? What might we bring? Clothes, cars, money, positions, status indicators, gadgets, boyfriends, pictures of our children or parents, grade cards, 401K statements. None of these are our significance and security. All should submit to God and His ways.

I'm always fascinated by the interplay between outward and inward devotion. Jacob tells them to purify themselves, to get rid of their idols and even change their clothes as a picture of repentance and change. But did they repent and change? It doesn't say that they did, just that they obeyed him and followed through with the outward signs.

I feel like in our culture today, and as a reaction to the dead orthodoxy in the past, we are taught to believe that things are only right and true if they are from the heart. That mere actions are bare and hollow. Of course, what we most desire is that actions and motives go together. But the Bible seems to have a more balanced view on the interplay between the two. Sometimes we do things over and over and over and then learn what that means. Our actions lead our minds and hearts. We say a creed before we believe it. We commit to love before we feel loving. We confess our sins with our lips and midway through begin to confess with our hearts. We submit to the liturgy and allow it to train our hearts, even unwittingly. We obey the laws of the state even if we personally haven't thought them through.

And other times we wait until we believe or feel or desire before we take action. But we must be careful that we don't think that that is more spiritual than the other. God commands His people to make sacrifices over and over – and is telling them that their actions should instruct their hearts. But they are to obey regardless of how they feel about it that day.

I think we're losing this in our culture today. We should make commitments and then stick to them, even if it gets difficult at times. We should teach our kids to obey and repeat the words of our faith so that those can get into their bloodstreams. We should make sure they know and do, and trust that that will affect their hearts.⁴ "The way chosen to do this without either destructiveness or accommodation is by way of *radical symbolization*. Israel engages in dramatic ritual activity as a mode of faithfulness (cf. Josh. 24:23). Philip Carrington has suggested that in the Christian tradition, this same disengagement is enacted in the sacrament of baptism (cf. Eph. 4:22-25, Col. 3:7-8, James 1:21, 1 Peter 2:1). To retain purity from the sensuality at Corinth, Paul took a Nazirite vow. To retain purity on an aircraft carrier, my brother prayed beside his bunk every night. The new community is formed by renunciation, renaming, reclothing, and finally, receiving a promise."⁵

As Jacob fulfilled his vows, God proved faithful and blessed him again, reiterating His covenantal promises. *10 And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel. 11 And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. 12 The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you."*

We are in a Kingdom marked by worship. I know it doesn't always seem like the best thing to do with your time. There is a test to study for, sleep to catch up on, a meal to prepare, shopping to be done. But God calls us to worship Him. Jesus says in John 4:23 *"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."*

Death/Life Conflict in the Covenant

We might be tempted to think that all is now rosy. Jacob is first en route and then established in the Promised Land. He is worshipping in The House of God. He is hearing the covenantal promises again, music to his ears after the disasters in Shechem.

But we live in a fallen world, stained with sin and death, obtained for us by our representative head, Adam. The Bible doesn't shy away from the fact, despite the claims to the contrary from our health and wealth friends.

In this chapter we see it all over the place. First, we have a sentence that says, *"And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth."* This is odd. We read about an insignificant

³ Waltke, p. 475 – a thought: I've heard several anecdotes of "God and Country" services that seem to me to be more about Country than God. I can't figure out how the Pledge of Allegiance can rightfully have a place in a Christian worship service. Or the lights going out and playing "Taps" to commemorate fallen soldiers. Or the worship band playing Stars and Stripes forever. I love our country, and think it is the greatest one in the world. I will stand and say the Pledge of Allegiance, but never will I do so in church.

⁴ I had an interesting conversation with a Baptist friend of mine who balked at the Apostles Creed being recited every Sunday at church. It would become too boring, meaningless in its repetition, he cried. But how would he know? He couldn't remember ever saying the Creed in church. His protests were based on a modern view of personal knowledge. I said that I wanted my kids to know the Creed backward and forward even if they didn't believe in it. I want my kids to know their multiplication tables whether they like doing them or not. This is how we have always learned and accepted the basic laws of life (until the last fifty years, much to the disaster of education).

⁵ Waltke, p. 475

character in the drama while Isaac's wife Rebekah is left out? It seems we are to infer that Rebekah has died too⁶, and that she is relegated to an outcast roll because of her shenanigans with Isaac and Jacob back in chapter 27. Attention is drawn to her being ignored.⁷

After the happiness of Jacob's blessing, we're told that Rachel went into labor. Rachel, though the most loved wife of Jacob, hadn't had the progeny she had dreamed of. Back in 30:1, Rachel had exclaimed, "Give me children or I'll die!" Then in 30:24, after giving birth to Joseph, she had cried, "May the Lord add to me another son!" And now, years later, she receives her wish, both of them. But as life comes, so also death comes. Tragically, she dies in childbirth, a phenomenon extremely common in that day (and until only the last century in our country and still now in less developed places of the world). As she died, she called her son, Ben-oni, meaning Son of My Sorrow. Imagine Jacob's grief as his favorite wife passes away, the one for whom he had worked fourteen years to obtain. But Jacob somehow sees hope in the midst of sorrow and refused to call his son Ben-oni, renaming him instead Ben-yamin, which means Son of My Right Hand.⁸

With the birth of Benjamin, we now have the twelve sons of Jacob, the future twelve tribes of Israel. A dysfunctional family, to be sure, but extent nonetheless. These twelve are thus named for us all together for the first time. But they are listed in a way that makes us see them as rivals, like a television graphic listing the lineups of the Oklahoma offense verses the Texas defense. The lines of conflict appear to be drawn. The Leahs verses the Rachels. And for now, it appears that the Leahs will win, for they have both numbers and status (of the firstborns) on their side.

Here at the end of chapter 35, we find out that Isaac has died, thereby passing all of the covenantal blessings to Jacob. We see Esau and Jacob together, burying their father in what must have been a touching and difficult moment. With all that had happened, this is filled with import. In the midst of death, we have some measure of reconciliation.

"Isaac, in spite of all his shortcomings, dies at a good old age and is gathered to Abraham's bosom, and Jacob completes his pilgrimage. Some saints soar with wings of eagles, others run, and some only walk; nevertheless, all complete the journey."⁹

The Bible is filled with these sorts of death to life connections. The seed of the woman shall crush the head of the servant comes to mind. Jesus says that unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it will not live. He says that if you truly want to gain your life, you have to lose it. And, of course, he provided just that for us. In his death is our life. In our life is his death. In his demise is our blessing. In his sorrow is our position. Because he was unjustly killed though he ran the race well, we are mercifully spared though we have run the race poorly. We are born again, not by flesh but by the Spirit.

The Spread of the Covenant

We've now covered almost every verse of chapter 35, but haven't touched chapter 36. A whole chapter on Esau's genealogy. Can't we skip this one? How could it possibly instruct us? Three subpoints here: Forsaking the Covenant – Esau, Embracing the Covenant – Jacob, Fulfilling the Covenant – Jesus.

Forsaking the Covenant – Esau

As you look over this concluding chapter that closes the book on Esau, you can't fail to be impressed. He really did become a great nation and did so far sooner than Jacob did.¹⁰ But at what cost? Esau gave up the Promised Land and married Canaanite women, two of the most basic things the covenant had instructed him not to do. Esau's life proved that he would follow through with his "despising the covenant" shown when he sold his birthright. Yet, God continued to care about him. He was and is a part of the visible church, though his heart was not regenerate. Thus, God fulfills his promises – He makes Esau a great nation and then subjugates it to Israel.

Embracing the Covenant – Jacob

We might look at Jacob in a similar way. At first glance he looks to fall short of even Esau's stature. He was certainly a flawed man, and he has a measly twelve sons compared to Esau's impressive brood. He's gained a little property, and has a decidedly messed up family. But Jacob proves that he wants the covenant, he stays in the Promised Land, he marries his wives not from Canaan but from Terah. He rededicates himself to the Lord. He repents. He is loved, the Bible says. He is the heir of the covenant. He's a sinner, but we should expect to see redemption come through Jacob's family.

Fulfilling the Covenant – Jesus

And we've read the Bible before, so we know it will happen. Jesus is the Lion of Reuben, right? No? Why not? Reuben is the first born son, the one who should inherit all the promises of God. But we serve and worship the Lion of Judah – why? We find out in the cryptic 35:22: "While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine. And Israel heard of it." Another ew! moment in the Bible that is shown but left pretty much unsaid in lurid detail. Why is it here? Reuben is making a power play here, an attempt to gain control of the family while Jacob is still alive, much like Absalom does by sleeping with David's wives and concubines. Not only does he want control, but he wants to shame and discredit Bilhah for he fears that Jacob will now like her most instead of Leah. We don't get a strong reaction from Jacob. Just, "And Israel heard." It's enough though,

⁶ And, as many have noted, it seems impossible to believe that Rebekah's death is omitted by accident. In a narrative of such detail, where everything mentioned is filled with importance, we have to read into what is *not* there in this instance.

⁷ Paraphrase from Dr. Rayburn's sermon on this passage.

⁸ It's hard to ignore thoughts of Jesus being at God's right hand.

⁹ Waltke, p. 479

¹⁰ We can see the work of a secondary source here, which doesn't cause us any problem. It seems that the text after verse nine is a later addition, one that takes Esau's lineage out further into history than the original author would have been able to write. Remember that Moses didn't write that he died. Someone else had to do that later.

for *Israel* heard. Not Jacob. And we read in Genesis 49:3-4 that Jacob never forgot and that this incident was the reason Reuben forfeited his firstborn status.

Who now has the firstborn status? Simeon and Levi, the second and third born have taken themselves out of the running by the events of the last chapter. So “firstborn” status goes to Judah, as Jacob says in 49:8-12. “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the people.”

We’ve seen the mechanisms in play that lead to Judah becoming the de facto leader of the family. The surprising heir of promise. Just as Isaac and then Jacob received the blessing through unconventional means, so too now Judah steps up, even though he is the fourth in line. And if you turn to Matthew 1, you’ll see that it’s through Judah we get to... Jesus.

Now let’s back up for a few minutes in closing.¹¹

Clearly, there is a greater theological purpose in this genealogy than simply to demonstrate that God’s promises had come true or to explain how the bitter relations between Israel and Edom had come about. For Edom and Israel do not simply represent two families, or even two nations. They represent, as Cain and Seth and Ishmael and Isaac before them, the only two peoples that exist in the world, the only two nations that have ever existed in this world: the kingdom of this world, of the devil, and of unbelief on the one hand, and the kingdom of our God and of his Christ on the other.

The story of Genesis, and so the story of the world and all of its history as it unfolds, is, primarily, the story of God calling a people out of rebellious and fallen humanity to be his very own, bearing with that people through all of their ingratitude and disobedience, and using them to bring light and life to the rising generations until finally God’s people as a whole will be reconstituted in the new city.

But alongside of that story is its mirror-opposite, the story of the kingdom of man -- born in rebellion against God, marked by violence, pride, and, at last, futility. They trouble the saints, they carry out their rebellion against God by seeking the harm of his kingdom and people and city. But God is seen, through it all, protecting his people and securing them in his salvation.

Consequently, all through the book, the challenge of this divinely inspired author to his readers is this question, over and over again: ***to which line, to which nation, to which kingdom, to which people, do you belong?*** And though it puts it in the terms appropriate to its time -- Esau and Jacob; Edom and Israel -- the question is exactly the same today.

Look again at chapter 36. You’ve surely skipped over it many times. These families listed here no doubt had their stories to tell, their triumphs and their tragedies. There were young princes who turned out well and others who turned out badly. Some who lived to old age, others who died young. We know there were assassinations and intrigue. These families too had their followings and, like all great families before and after them, their sun rose and then set and, though they were the greatest conceivable news at the time in their land, they are remembered by almost no one.

But not so Jacob and his family. His name will be hallowed forever; the names of his sons will be storied names until the end of time. This family history has been read with eager interest and attention by generations of human beings who have read it, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether Eastern or Western, whether primitive or modern, have read it as their own family saga, their own personal story. No one thinks of Hadad or Jobab as his ancestor, his forebear. But multitudes upon multitudes of Christians think of Jacob and Joseph and Judah as the patriarchs of their own family tree.

And this division is made still clearer by the antagonism that existed between Edom and Israel when this part of Genesis was written, and so by the antagonism that has always existed between these two lines and these two peoples. It existed in the days before and after there were kings in Israel and it has existed ever since. The subsequent history of the two nations is dotted with fierce wars between Edom and Israel culminating in some of the bitterest denunciations in all of the prophets and some of the severest prayers for judgment upon the enemies of God to be found in the Bible.¹²

But all the while the author of Genesis, brilliant theologian as he is, forces upon us over and over again the recognition, however unwelcome, that everyone in the world belongs to one line or another, to one people or another, to one master or another, and, so, to one future or another -- to live in Eden remade and renewed, or forever to live outside of Eden, to be child of the serpent or of the seed of the woman, a descendant of Cain or of Seth, of Hagar or Sarah, of Ishmael or Isaac, of Jacob or Esau, to live in the Promised Land or to live in the desert wastes of Edom among the Edomites. The world desires to unite all people in one kingdom, one family. It refuses to acknowledge the antithesis between the two very distinct and different peoples who inhabit the world. The Bible, on the contrary, is forever reminding us of it!

Let me remind you that the Kingdom of God is greater than the kingdom of man. We forget that, we sometimes long to be listed in chapter 36 because it looks so much better on the surface than the measly mention of the twelve sons at the end of chapter 35. We look at the spread of decay in our world, the increase of wickedness, the unrelenting attack against the things of God, the persecution of the church -- and we can easily, far too easily give up hope.

But let me remind you of something. God is at work, my friends. Slowly, like a mustard seed, but He is at work nonetheless. O. Palmer Robertson, in his message at the PCA General Assembly in Pittsburgh in 2004, mentioned that in the past

¹¹ The following comes from thoughts by Dr. Rob Rayburn.

¹² “Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. ‘Tear it down,’ they cried, ‘tear it down to its foundations!’” [Psalm 137:7]

“‘The house of Jacob will be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau.’ The Lord has spoken.” [Obadiah 18]

“‘I have loved Jacob,’ says the Lord, ‘but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.’” [Malachi 1:2-3]

100 years Kenya went from .2% professing Christians to 79% professing Christians. Congo went from 2.5% to 95%. And in the little African country of Malawi, there are more than 800,000 Presbyterians!¹³

Should we be surprised at this? No.

Isaiah 19:19 In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border. 20 It will be a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt. When they cry to the Lord because of oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and deliver them. 21 And the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them. 22 And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the Lord, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them.

23 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

24 In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, 25 whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance."

Chapter 36 of Genesis is a powerful reminder to us of what we are always tempted to forget or, at least, to neglect bearing much in mind. There are two peoples occupying this world, two and only two: the people of Edom and the people of the Promised Land, the people who live their lives in rebellion against God and the people who walk with God.

And you and I are to spend our lives faithful to this fact, careful to live as becomes the children of God, eager to draw those who are still in the world into the family of God before it is too late for them to get their names out of the list of Esau's descendants, and, above all else, grateful, always grateful beyond words, and demonstrating that gratitude in life and worship and service, that of all the people of the world, of all those people so many more clever, more gifted, more interesting, even outwardly more virtuous than I, God, my heavenly father, numbered me, me of all people, among the descendants of Jacob instead of the descendants of Esau. That God, the God of all grace, put into my heart, a desire to live with Christ in the Promised Land. There are a great many people, multitudes without number, who, like Esau, had an opportunity to live in that land and chose to go elsewhere. And I would have, and you would have as well, were it not for the grace and mercy of God.

The City Of God we speak of is the same to which testimony is borne by that Scripture, which excels all the writings of all nations by its divine authority, and has brought under its influence all kinds of minds, and this not by a casual intellectual movement, but obviously by an express providential arrangement.

For there it is written, "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." And in another psalm we read, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness, increasing the joy of the whole earth." And, a little after, in the same psalm, "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God. God has established it for ever." And in another, "There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of our God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved."

From these and similar testimonies, all of which it were tedious to cite, we have learned that there is a city of God, and its Founder has inspired us with a love which makes us covet its citizenship.

¹³ In 1430 one in 99 of the world's population were Christians. - In 1790 one in 49 - In 1940 one in 32 - In 1970 one in 19 - In 1980 one in 16 - In 1983 one in 13 - In 1986 one in 11 - In 1994 one in 10

In the period 1934-1994, the number of Christians in the world increased by 1300 percent (from 40 million to 540 million in the last 60 years), while the world's population grew only 400 percent.

In our century, Communism pronounced the death sentence upon Christianity. In so many parts of eastern Europe where the atheistic experiment was relentlessly and violently enforced, Communism is in deep trouble and Christianity is thriving.

In Communist China, in the face of sometimes terrifying Government opposition, people are committing themselves to a spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ at a rate averaging about 28,000 new converts a day.

In Africa, the number who follow Christ has risen from 3% in 1900 to a present figure of 45%.

Over the last few decades, South Koreans have been flocking to Jesus by the millions. In response, the UN has officially reclassified as a Christian nation this one-time Buddhist stronghold.

According to missiologist Ralph Winter, only 1% of the world's population had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in 1430. Today, there are some 680 million evangelical Christians (11.1% of the world's population) who started following Christ after a personal conversion. The rate of increase is around 7% per year, compared with around 2.6% for Islam.

After surveying the entire world, Ralph Winter in 1988 identified 18,000 people groups that did not have sufficient numbers of committed Christians to remain strong and convert other members of their people group without foreign assistance. In 1998 this figure has shrunk to a mere 10% (1,736) of what it had been just ten years earlier! These astounding figures were not wild guesses to impress skeptics, but were meticulously collected to guide thousands of Christian missionaries as to where they should target their efforts.

from The Lausanne Statistics Task Force, cited in Grant R. Jeffrey Final Warning, Harvest House publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1996, pages. 251-254. I have also heard of another edition of this book (probably the British edition) in which the relevant section is on pages 168-170.

Jeffrey also cites some of the statistics mentioned below this link.

From another source: International Daily News Bulletin No.245 [Original Source: Friday Fax]

To this Founder of the holy city the citizens of the earthly city prefer their own gods, not knowing that He is the God of gods, not of false, i.e., of impious and proud gods, who, being deprived of His unchangeable and freely communicated light, and so reduced to a kind of poverty-stricken power, eagerly grasp at their own private privileges, and seek divine honors from their deluded subjects; but of the pious and holy gods, who are better pleased to submit themselves to one, than to subject many to themselves, and who would rather worship God than be worshipped as God.

But to the enemies of this city we have replied in the ten preceding books, according to our ability and the help afforded by our Lord and King. Now, recognizing what is expected of me, and not unmindful of my promise, and relying, too, on the same succor, I will endeavor to treat of the origin, and progress, and deserved destinies of the two cities (the earthly and the heavenly, to wit), which, as we said, are in this present world commingled, and as it were entangled together. And, first, I will explain how the foundations of these two cities were originally laid, in the difference that arose among the angels. *Augustine of Hippo, City of God, Book XI, chapter 1 [italics and bold mine]*