THE GARDEN OF EDEN REVISITED

The Aramean

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THE GARDEN OF EDEN REVISITED

Introductory Letter

February 23, 2004

Dear Children,

The enclosed is a gift that I send with all my love. I hope you read it and ponder its meaning. These letters are based upon what I believe to be God’s direct interaction with me, and more than half a century of life experience, observation and growth. While the enclosed disclaims a foundational story of our Judeo-Christian heritage, it has enormously freed me to better understand, appreciate, honor and worship God. It also has allowed me, as a Christian, to better understand Christ and his significance.

I have written this for you five and your mother, with my mother, brothers, and female and male friends also in mind.

What I describe I did not figure out by myself. I can only tell you these insights were given to me in dreams and when I was wide awake. I was simply charged to be the scribe who should write them down. I can also say I have wrestled with these concepts for twelve years and have concluded that they make rational and spiritual sense.

I have come to understand that God wants people to know that the Garden of Eden story in the Bible is a spiritual fallacy and must be dug up and thrown out from our religious, cultural, familial and legal systems.

God is deeply concerned that Jacob and his religious descendants, including me, have twisted and distorted God’s real message. God is in great pain watching while the male half of the human creation, misinterpreting God’s message, justify the oppression of the female half.

The more I have learned, the more convinced I am that the Garden of Eden story is the theological foundation used to legitimize men’s domination of women for thousands of years in the Judeo-Christian world. I have also come to believe that most injustices in the world are connected to this fundamental oppression.

When children learn from birth that it is expected/ordained that men should dominate women, isn’t it a natural extension for many men to believe that they are supposed to dominate other people they think are lesser or weaker? I also wonder if many women, dominated by a system they think God sanctified, believe it is their right to dominate other people.
It is my understanding that what I was given is but a small part of God’s great effort to give a wonderful gift to humanity, the fulfillment of a portion of Christ’s ministry. God wants all men and all women to understand that we are equal, all equally created in God’s image. The evidence of the gift is all around us, even in world soccer cup tournaments.

Jesus ministered to every human with love, compassion, wisdom and faith. The gender of the person did not matter. Jesus described God’s characteristics, including feminine attributes. Yet those who came after him did not follow his lead, either intentionally, to maintain control, or because they were too blinded by traditional teachings to understand what they had seen and heard.

Apparently, God has decided to celebrate the second millennium of Jesus’ birth with the fulfillment of equality for all people.

With all my love,

Your Father,

The Aramean
**Introductory Note**

Most of the following letters are addressed to Jacob, son of Isaac and Rebekah, and grandson of Abraham and Sarah, -- to Jacob who was renamed Israel, father of the twelve tribes. Like millions of other Christian and Jewish people, I am his spiritual grandson of hundreds of generations. While millennia separate us, Jacob’s legacy lives on today, through the Torah and the Bible. His impact on us is as profound as it was upon his immediate children and grandchildren. I write to Jacob as I would to my biological Grandfather, so strong is the bond of our spiritual inheritance.

I have addressed the Introductory Letter, Letter Twelve and Letter Sixteen to my children.

**The Aramean**
Dear Grandfather Jacob,

I saw you in a dream last night, sitting around a camp fire telling us stories in the flickering light. Smiling faces basked in the warm glow of embers, all intently listening. Boys, young men and old, all cousins, brothers and uncles relaxing after a long day of shepherding, as the burning branches quietly snapped, hissed and popped. You enthralled us with your wit, humor and charm.

Then you told us your greatest story, the one you made up about the Garden of Eden, about Adam and Eve, and the Serpent.

But this was not my first dream about the Garden. Only five nights ago, I was awakened, shaking in fear. That night, I had gone to bed, praying fervently for God to help me understand unfathomable things.

I was confused because I had been thinking about my relationships with my sons and daughters; I saw that I treated them differently. I loved all equally, but I did not act the same toward them. With the boys, I taught them to live free and independent lives, by giving them my full love and affection, through words and actions.

Yet, with my daughters, I made them dependent. I talked about their ability to do anything in life that they wanted to do, but unconsciously, I withheld just a small amount of my love and affection, never giving them as much as their brothers. I made my daughters cling to receive their share. I made them earn my love and affection, to make them dependent and subservient. When I finally realized this, I was ashamed. Where had I learned to do this thing of which I had been unaware? And why had I done it?

I looked at my relationship with my wife, who is loving, caring, hard working, wise, and energetic. She is certainly as well organized and capable a manager as I am, yet when we were engaged twenty-eight years ago I declared that we would always discuss issues and decisions before they were made, but I reserved the right to make the ultimate decisions. Of course, my very capable fiancée agreed -- that was the way our society and our religion dictated the distribution of power between men and women. Under the social and religious standards of that era, I was being generous in allowing her to have so much involvement in decisions.

Throughout our marriage I demanded, and she accepted, that I was the “head of the household.” I valued her opinion, but I made the final choices. Why was I unable to trust my wife sufficiently to allow her to share in decision making as an equal? Why couldn’t we be equal partners in our marriage?

Then, I talked to my mother. She is seventy-six years old, and a woman of great spiritual conviction. She has spent her entire life trying to be a good Christian. As we talked, she claimed, nay insisted, that her importance in life has been in assisting her husband, my father, and her sons – outside of her role as a helper of men, she had no value to God. As we talked, I wondered why does she adamantly believe this? Where did she get such and an idea?
I had observed her, through life, expending enormous energy trying to repress her enthusiasm and exceptional management skills because she “knew” that God expected her to be subordinate to her husband. She believes that major portions of her forceful personality were given to her by God to be burdens, burdens she must beat down and suppress within herself. She believes that she must demonstrate faithfulness by repressing and destroying these “sinful” facets of herself, as a sign of obedience and penitence to God.

What a loss. If only my mother had been able to see her personality as God’s gift to her, to be used for the enhancement of God’s world. If she had been able to accept herself as God made her, what could she and my father have accomplished together, as partners, rather than as superior male to subordinate female? How much happier our childhood home would have been, and how much more fulfilled would my parents’ lives have been.

Then there was the day before the dream. I was in conversation with a minister in my church. Bright and energetic, she is an extremely able pastor. She described her difficult experiences in churches across the United States of America. Many men and women refused to accept her as a minister because they believed that only a man can do that job; only a man can serve as God’s representative on earth. Some hate her for it. What troubled her most, though, was that some people thought she is evil.

As she spoke, I thought to myself, “What a burden for her to carry. What on Earth could make anyone think this compassionate, capable, brilliant and dedicated human being is evil? Why does she have to live with the hatred of people for whom she cares so much and to whom she ministers so well?”

So I went to bed praying earnestly, asking for help to answer these perplexing questions. In the middle of the night, I jolted awake, shaking from the intensity of a dream where I had been in the Garden of Eden and had seen Adam and Eve. Upon awakening, I knew instantly where all of this had come from. As a young child, my parents and church leaders had told us the story of the Garden. The most authoritative people in my life had taught me from the most authoritative document, the Bible. I had paid rapt attention.

The Garden of Eden was planted deeply in my soul. By age four or five, I understood – God explains in this story how men and women are supposed to relate, with men always in the superior role. More importantly, I understood the story to define how we are to relate to God; men have a special, direct relationship with God, while women relate to the serpent and lead men into sin. As I awoke, I thought, “Oh my God, no wonder some people view women as inherently evil -- and that they must be repressed!”

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,
The Aramean
Second Letter

March 20, 1992

Dear Grandfather Jacob,

I write again because I was too frightened and confused to tell you everything about my first dream.

In the dream, I understood that God was trying to tell me that the Garden of Eden story is a false story; that it is a story created by men who distorted Yahweh’s word to serve their selfish purposes, and then passed the story to their descendants in order to avoid God’s real intent.

OH MY GOD! How could I think such a thought? Who am I to receive such a message? Who am I to think this? How could I even consider the possibility that the spiritual leaders of my faith created and perpetuated a myth to block God’s real will? How could I question the men whom I revere as the leaders of my faith for thousands of years?

I must be wrong. I must be intellectually arrogant. I must be a fool!

But there it was. I could not deny that part of the dream. Nor could I deny the other part, the part of the dream in which I vaguely recalled a very different creation story: a creation story depicting very different relationships between men, women and God, another Biblical chapter in which men and women are created equal in relationship to each other and equal in relating to God.

As I awoke, I wondered if I had just dreamed this, or had God reminded me of something I had read long ago, but had ignored. So, I climbed out of bed, went downstairs, picked up the Bible and read the first chapter of the book of Genesis:

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image,
after our likeness: and let them have dominion over
the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air,
and over the cattle, and over all the earth,
and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”*

*So God created man in His own image.
In the image of God he created him;
Male and female he created them”*

I sat a long time. I was stunned by the simplicity. I was stunned by the power.

God created men and women as equals.

Neither was created first. Neither has preference. Neither has dominion over the other.

*More importantly, women and men are created equally in God’s image.* No greater statement of equality could be made. We are equal in our relationships to God. Our souls equally reflect God’s likeness. We both, “them,” men and women, share equal responsibility for all the fish of the sea and the birds of the air.
We are God’s equal creation.

There is no distinction.

How could I have been so wrong for so long? How could I have lived my life in disobedience to God’s will for nearly five decades? How could I have harmed my children for so long? How could I have made my daughters subservient and sons overbearing when God’s truth is so obvious, so clear, and so available?

Sadly, I knew the answer. The Garden of Eden’s sinuous vines had sprouted and grown, intertwining with my young soul. As my spirituality and moral values formed, the grandiosity of the Garden of Eden story totally overshadowed the clear, brief story in the beginning of Genesis.

God’s word had gotten lost.

No one taught me to pick one story over the other. I understood the Garden of Eden better. It was more dramatic. When my parents read it, I could visualize a garden with people, a tree and a serpent, -- things were made from mud and bones – how wonderfully appealing to a child. As a boy, I particularly liked the story because males were obviously superior to females. Perhaps my parents or others had read the brief statement of equality in the beginning of Genesis, but the Garden of Eden was emphasized.

The story was so deeply rooted in my soul, that I had totally believed that dominating my wife and daughters was what God wanted me to do.

This, Grandfather Jacob, is what I was afraid to tell you when I wrote yesterday.

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,

The Aramean
Dear Grandfather Jacob,

You are silent. I wish you could respond.

Now I want to tell you about another dream, the one in which you appeared.

For days I struggled with what I had seen and learned in the first dream. If it could be true, if God’s real intent has been bypassed by the Garden of Eden story, how could that have happened? How did the Garden story get there? Who could have inserted a false story into our spiritual heritage so it is included in both the *Torah* and in the *Bible*? How could our religious forbears, over thousands of years, have perpetuated and carried on something that was not from God – something which is the opposite of God’s will?

And I kept worrying, how can I even think such thoughts? Who am I to question?

As I washed the dishes on the evening of March 18, it occurred to me that the author of the Garden of Eden story may have been a person of deep faith who was trying to understand human kind’s earthly nature as we relate to God. It also crossed my mind that such an author might identify himself in the text of the Garden of Eden story and in the family history.

In the wee hours of the next morning, my second dream startled me awake. I saw you, Grandfather Jacob, tending goats in Haran, after you fled from Canaan and your brother’s wrath. As you stood watch for days and nights, year after year, your anger grew out of the pain of separation from your beloved home. I saw you surrounded by powerless wives and concubines who had to scheme, beg, seduce and pester you to get what they needed.

In the dream, I sat around campfires with your sons and herdsmen laughing as you told us stories, particularly your best story, the Garden of Eden.

And, then I saw you wrestling through the night with an angel the night your hip was thrown out of its socket. In that instant, I realized you had the audacity to alter God’s plan to take care of your own interests. No one else dared to wrestle with God’s representative.

I also dreamt of Abraham and Sarah. I saw him standing outside on a starry night, gazing into the heavens, and heard God’s call for them to become parents to a nation with more descendants than he could count, just like the stars. He would have been so stimulated by that vision he would have probed and searched until he found God’s insight about creation, and he would have faithfully retold it. I saw him following that call to move his household and, later, to prepare to sacrifice his son’s life. It was obvious that Abraham would have understood and faithfully passed on to succeeding generations God’s real intent.

Your Grandfather Abraham, then, would have been the one to whom God entrusted the sacred vision of men and women being born equally in Yahweh’s image.

As his grandson, you could not destroy Abraham’s story, but you had to find a way to overshadow it.
As I was startled awake, I was frightened. How could I think such thoughts? How could I imagine that the root of the Garden of Eden story lay in you, our beloved Grandfather? How could I even think that you and succeeding generations of leaders had perpetuated a false story of God’s intent? But then I remembered that as a child and young man, I was in conflict with my older brother. Like you, I manipulated my parents to get the upper hand in that struggle. I had so badly wanted their affection and attention to be focused on me. And I had sought their authority and power to be used for my benefit, against my brother. I also remembered times of pain and anger at my mother and father for not giving me all the love and attention that I felt I needed. And I remembered blaming my mother for so many problems.

I also thought of my dominance over my wife and daughters -- I realized that I had believed that I had a divinely ordained duty to dominate them, based upon the Garden of Eden. I realized how much I am like you. Perhaps that is why I could comprehend the unfathomable.

Then, my thoughts turned to Abraham, and his message that humans are created equally in God’s image. I remembered that at work and in church, I have witnessed women who are not subservient. They have a sense of self-confidence, born of their knowledge that they are equal to all other human beings. I have seen them effectively lead organizations, resolve disputes and work for justice. Also, I have seen them fail, just as men have failed.

I thought of another woman pastor who had been at our church for several years. I had observed as she tried to minister to our congregation, deal with prejudice against her, shepherd our members, and work for justice in this nation and others. I had also seen her struggle with her own internal anger and problems, working earnestly to be God’s faithful servant, in spite of her own problems. I recognized in her the same earnestness and struggles that I and many men live with. So I knew, from direct observation, that women and men are equal -- neither one greater than the other, and neither one less than the other.

Thinking of this, I realized I must choose. I could either continue following your footsteps, Grandfather Jacob, living in Garden of Eden relationships with my wife, mother, daughters, and other women, or I could follow Great Great Grandfather Abraham.

I chose his path.

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,
The Aramean
Fourth Letter

June 7, 1999

Dear Grandfather Jacob,

Please forgive my long silence. While I wanted to keep in touch, I have had so many other things to deal with that I held off. Perhaps the most daunting task has been to try to change the way I lived. I have had to put into practice my decision to live according to Great Great Grandfather Abraham’s message – God created all men and all women as equals. It has not been easy to change, and yet I have tried.

Since my last letter, I have been praying, reading and thinking. I am still perplexed. I cannot understand why God would grant me the dreams of seven years ago. Is it my imagination gone amok, or my ego over-expanding to believe that I can question you, a patriarch of our faith?

I wish you could write back to me. I wish I knew what you thought of all this.

Though you cannot reply, you have communicated a great deal about yourself in the Book of Genesis. You have given us so much that I begin to see how and why you crafted the Garden of Eden story. It is rooted in your life!

Your tales are embedded deeply within us. I can visualize images of you being born right behind your twin brother, Esau, holding onto his heel – clutching his soul as you entered the world.

At your mother Rebekah’s urging and plotting, you disguised yourself as Esau and served father Isaac. Deceived, Isaac gave you God’s blessing -- the birthright that belonged to your older brother. Then you had to run in fear from the land you loved so dearly, Canaan, the land God had gifted to your family. Esau would have killed you had you stayed. The difficult exile that followed was a huge price to pay for listening to Rebekah and following her advice.

You fled to Haran where life was troubled and you grieved for Canaan. You lived with Uncle Laban (your mother’s brother) and fell in love with his daughter Rachel. After working seven long, hard years to win her hand in marriage, Uncle Laban and older daughter Leah deceived you. Waking on the morning after your wedding, you found Leah in your bed instead of beloved Rachel. After wild dancing and free flowing wine at your wedding party, you had such a good time you got drunk and couldn’t distinguish between Leah and Rachel in the dark.

I can only imagine how angry you must have been. How gullible and powerless you must have felt - and now, for the second time, you had to pay the price for a woman’s deception. Uncle Laban allowed you to marry Rachel a week later, but to have her, you had to promise to work seven more years of hard labor. I am proud of you for staying in a foreign land that you did not like and was not home, in order to marry the one you loved, but you must have been hurting deeply inside.

Then, after fourteen years of labor, you had to work six additional years to get a goat herd of your own.

Watching over the goats and goat herders, day after day for those long, extra years, you had time to think and nurse your pain. You loved Rachel deeply, but she was barren. Leah, whom you ignored,
competed with Rachel for your attention and favor by giving birth to your sons Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. This put her at a disadvantage in her struggle with Leah, so Rachel turned on you in anger, blaming you for her infertility. Not to be outdone, Rachel devised a scheme to regain your favor. She gave you her handmaiden, Bilhah, to be your concubine and Bilhah gave birth to Dan and Naphtali. Leah, who was not able to get pregnant at that time, retaliated by giving you her servant-girl, Zilpah, who bore Gad and Asher.

Rachel and Leah constantly argued about everything, even over the sharing of mandrakes that Reuben picked for Leah. When Rachel asked for some of the mandrakes, Leah just scoffed at her because she intended to use them to help her get pregnant again and, thus, to gain more power in the family. The mandrakes apparently worked and Leah delivered Issachar, and, later, Zebulun. Finally, after years of waiting, Rachel’s prayers for sons were answered and she gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin.

You must have been so frustrated with the constant nagging and bickering between Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah. While you could make jokes to other men about your wives’ and concubines’ behavior, you must have been infuriated by their scheming, conniving and seducing to get your favor. How much you must have wished you were back in Canaan. How angry you must have been at your mother for having persuaded your father that you should flee to Haran to marry Laban’s daughter because Canaanite women were inadequate to be your wife.

Am I right in guessing it was during your second seven long years of labor for Uncle Laban that you decided to do something to make certain that the women in your life never gained power and that you and your sons could maintain control? To do that, you had to overcome the problem your Grandfather Abraham had handed down to you. In his faithfulness, he had accepted and transmitted God’s vision of the equal creation of men and women.

The concept that God made women and men equally in God’s image must have been very difficult to deal with. If it were true, how could you explain the behavior of your wives, concubines and daughters? – They certainly did not act like equals. It probably never occurred to you that the powerless women you knew would have behaved differently if they had been given an opportunity to be your equal.

Wherever you looked, women were basically the property of their fathers and their husbands. And men were physically stronger so they were able to kill wild animals that attacked the goat herds, and to fight and kill men who wanted to take your land, or who occupied land you wanted to take.

The women in your life had such limited value that you didn’t even mention your daughters’ names in the family history, as passed down to us in the book of Genesis (except for Dinah - she is mentioned because she was raped and her brothers decided to protect the family honor by killing the attacker, his father and all other males in the town where they lived). Yet, you used your sons’ names throughout your life history.

More importantly, if men and women are equal, how could you explain the way you treated your wives? How could you “buy,” and “own,” Rachel, Leah and their servants, if they, as women, had equal rights with you? And by what authority could you take away their equal rights, gifted to them by God?
Fortunately for you, your Grandfather Abraham’s vision had not been handed down into Uncle Laban’s family – only you knew about it. You must have wanted to destroy your Grandfather Abraham’s message by not passing it on to your descendants.

But you could not do that. You had a responsibility to carry on the promise and responsibility that God had given to Abraham and Isaac – you inherited that responsibility when Isaac gave you his blessing. On top of that, during your flight from Canaan to Haran, you dreamt of a ladder running from the ground to heaven. God spoke to you from the ladder’s top and told you of your responsibility to parent a great nation that lived in covenant with God.

What a dilemma! On one hand, you had to maintain loyalty to God and to Grandfather Abraham, which meant accurately retelling the story of creation that he passed down to you. Yet, that story, if understood by others, would have made your life unbearably difficult -- you could no longer rule the family like a prince. You would have had to change the way you lived, how you treated your family, and what you taught your daughters and sons. If the women in the family knew and understood the story, they would have demanded equality.

So you had to find a way to pass along your Grandfather’s great vision of creation, while keeping the women and men in your life from paying attention to what he taught.

To solve this dilemma, you had amazing skills and determination.

You were capable of bargaining with God, of demanding something in return if you were to do God’s will. On the morning after the wondrous dream of God speaking to you from the top of a ladder, promising to make your descendants a great people and to protect you until you returned to Canaan, you built a stone altar and gave the place the name of “Bethel.” You vowed to make Jehovah your God, but only if Jehovah stayed with you, gave you food and clothing and brought you back to your father’s home in peace.

You were also capable of deception. Just as you cheated Esau out of his birthright, you used your brilliance to cheat Uncle Laban. Toward the end of your stay in Haran, you convinced him to give you the streaked, spotted and black goats from his herd, in exchange for more of your labor. Once he agreed, you skillfully bred the herd so that the majority of lambs were born streaked and spotted. Then you bred the strongest and healthiest goats with yours and the feeblest ones with Uncle Laban’s so your herd was superior -- never letting him observe what you were doing.

You were very clever. You picked a day Uncle Laban was away sheering sheep to leave Haran and return to Canaan with your family, goats and possessions. You didn’t want him to know you were leaving because you feared he might try to stop you. Ten days later, when he finally caught up with you at Mount Gilead, you played the victim role, giving that great speech about how he worked you so hard with so little return – but you didn’t mention the stealthy way you used his goats to breed your herd.

I still chuckle when I think of this, but I also realize this means you were clever enough to develop the Garden of Eden story.

You were audacious. You wrestled with a man who represented God all of one night during your journey home to Canaan. Impressively, you would not quit, you would not give in. You kept wrestling until the man finally had to throw your thigh out of joint. Even then, you would not let the man go until
he blessed you. He said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

You were also proud of being audacious. The night you wrestled, you and the man were alone in the campsite; only you could have told the story to your family and passed it down to us. As I read this passage in the Bible, I hear you telling us that you would not submit to God’s will when it served your purpose.

Thus, Grandfather Jacob, it is not surprising that you were able to solve your dilemma. You were able to borrow from other tribes’ creation legends and skillfully craft the Garden of Eden story. Perhaps you took portions of the story from divine inspiration, but then twisted and manipulated the inspiration to achieve your purpose.

What a huge accomplishment! You were able to leave God’s story of the equal creation of male and female in the family’s oral history, just as your Grandfather Abraham had communicated it. But in a single stroke, you overshadowed it with a story so powerful that your wives, concubines, and daughters would never dare challenge your control, and your sons would never doubt their authority to dominate women.

I can imagine how entertaining you were as you worked on the story, retelling and refining it over and over again, night after night -- your sons and the goat herders listening around campfires in rapt attention.

Grandfather, forgive me, but I am getting tired. So I’ll stop here and resume another day.

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,

The Aramean
Fifth Letter

June 14, 1999

Dear Grandfather Jacob,

It is time to resume. While I have continued to read and think for years, the core of what follows came to me in my second dream.

In your creation story, God created the first man, Adam, out of the dust from the ground. God gave him responsibility to care for the garden, which had been created out of the same substance. Thus the relationship was direct - the first man directly relating to and serving God. In the story, God then created trees from the ground and set about creating a helper for the man, forming from the ground every type of animal and bird and bringing them to Adam to see what he would name each one. While you don’t say who gave Adam his name, he was named in the story, prior to the creation of Eve, thus establishing that either God named him directly or that God allowed Adam to name himself.

On the other hand, Eve’s creation was very different. God created her, but not to relate to and serve God, but rather to be Adam’s helper, to serve him. She was not made from the ground as were Adam, the trees and all the animals. Rather she is symbolically created from a small part of Adam, from one of his ribs. Thus her value is established: a woman is a subservient part of man, equivalent to only one rib. If Eve’s subordinate relationship isn’t clear enough, Adam then declares, “This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

So not only is Eve made out of man, it is man who has the power to give woman her name. Just as God had given him authority to name the animals and birds - all creatures created for the subordinate role of helping Adam – God granted to Adam the authority to name his servant female.

After developing the concept of Adam and Eve, their relationships to God and one another, you added the most powerful part to your story. In this era, we call it “the temptation and fall.” In your story, God told Adam that he could eat from the fruit of any of the trees in the Garden of Eden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong. Yet a beguiling serpent tempted Eve to eat the fruit from that tree, persuading her to disobey God. Then Eve, in turn, seduced Adam into disobeying God, so he also ate the fruit. As God strode through the garden, Adam and Eve recognized their spiritual nakedness as well as physical nakedness, so they tried to hide in the trees. But Yahweh searched them out, cursed them for their disobedience and cast them out of the Garden of Eden forever, into a life filled with difficulty, pain and suffering.

This part of your story made it clear that females relate to and serve evil, the serpent. The innocent male paid the price for the female’s willingness to obey the serpent and to beguile the man into doing the same. The man hadn’t even listened to the serpent, yet he fell prey to the evil through the female’s conniving.
In case any of your wives, sons and daughters missed the point, Grandfather Jacob, you hammered it home through God’s curse on Eve for her disobedience:

> I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing;  
> in pain you shall bring forth children,  
> yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
> and he shall rule over you.

And to Adam God said:

> Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,  
> and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you,  
> ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you;  
> in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;  
> and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
> In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground,  
> for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Putting the whole story together, Grandfather, you made it clear to me, as a child, that men are created by God from the substance of the earth to relate to and serve God. If men had been left alone, they would have been pure and obedient.

Women, however, were created by God as subordinates, out of a tiny part of males to relate to and serve men. But along the way, women chose also to relate to and serve the evil serpent and then persuaded men to do the same. This led to untold misery for men and for women ever afterward.

Grandfather Jacob, this is how you accomplished your goal. The Garden of Eden’s imagery overwhelms and swallows up God’s simple, direct story of the equal creation of men and women. You were able to leave in the family history the story of equal creation because you had nothing to fear from it. No one would pay attention to it while it was followed by the powerful story from your imagination.

I admire your cleverness and your audacity, Grandfather! Yet, I wish you had used them more for God’s purposes.

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,

The Aramean
Sixth Letter

June 18, 1999

Dear Grandfather Jacob,

In looking back, it is easy to see how your life provided all the raw material you needed to devise your story. Canaan was like the Garden of Eden for you, as you looked back at it in memory while standing guard over goats in Haran. Your childhood home had been a happy place with all the food and joy you could ask for.

You also knew that God could be in direct communication with humans. God had spoken to you from the top of a ladder leading to heaven in your dream, as you fled from Canaan to Haran.

You knew what it was like to steal and eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge, because you stole the blessing from Esau. You devoured God’s special covenant with your family and with the nation your family would become. When you cheated, and stole that blessing, you received all the knowledge and authority that flowed from God’s covenant.

Your mother, Rebekah, made a perfect model for Eve. She conceived the idea of deceiving Isaac so you could steal the blessing from Esau, and she persuaded you to carry out the deception.

And you modeled Adam on yourself, a man who stole the tree’s fruit and ate it at the urging of a woman. You were driven from your beloved Canaan, and you suffered all the indignities in Haran because you listened to a woman. These were the perfect models for God’s curse upon Adam.

Also, God had told you in the dream of the ladder that you would have as many descendants as dust and they will cover all the land, and all nations will be blessed because of you. You gave that role to Adam in the Garden of Eden story.

But who was the serpent? From what model did you craft this beguiling creature? In our time, some interpret the serpent in the Garden of Evil to be Satan, an evil being or force that is attempting to undo God’s work, to destroy God’s love for humans and the universe. I have seen references that call the serpent the Devil, Lucifer, Old Scratch, Mephistopheles, an evil spirit, and a fallen angel.

I am pausing, to take a deep breath. I am reluctant to continue. Perhaps the hardest part of my dreams and all this correspondence is what I am about to say, Grandfather. Until this part of my second dream, I never understood who the serpent was. When I finally did, it was immensely painful, and it has taken me a long time to be willing to talk about it to anyone.

The image of the serpent coiled in a tree appeared toward the end of the second dream. As I watched, it slithered down, round and round the tree trunk and moved off into the dense forest. I didn’t want to follow. I dreaded to go where the serpent was leading. I wanted to wake up so I could stop the dream. “Do I really want to know?” I thought, but I continued in the dream.

Stumbling through thickets of lush undergrowth and twisted branches, I tried to find the serpent’s lair, twisting and turning my way around gnarled tree trunks, under a canopy of overhead leaves. It was dank. Heat swirled, mist oozed from every plant. Stumbling down a bank into a swampy bottom, bordered by limestone outcroppings and encroaching vines, I saw the coiled serpent resting
in an alcove of rock. Staggering forward, around intertwined branches and twigs that clutched my legs, I made so much noise that the serpent awoke. He raised his head and looked at me. OH MY GOD, the head looked like no snake I had ever seen.

The face of the serpent was your face, Grandfather Jacob!

How can this be? It is terrifying to see your visage on this frightening creature. What had I misunderstood before? What are you doing here, embodied in the likeness of the clever, deceptive, beguiling, seductive serpent? The pencil thin shafts of light struck your face, and it was unmistakably you.

“I don’t like this. I don’t want to be here,” I thought. My discomfort sweated out of every pore.

But, after a few moments, the face changed to look like another man, perhaps one of your sons. And so the face continued to change, each face representing a male leader of our faith; each face representing a man who lived during the eons of time between your life and mine. Finally, the face became my face and stopped changing. It was like looking into a mirror.

“I want to get out of here,” I thought in my dream. “This is far too frightening and far too painful to view.”

But that is what I dreamt.

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,

The Aramean
Dear Grandfather Jacob,

Here I am, writing to you again. The images of the second dream still come back as I think about them. I understand now, just as I did in the instant of the dream. The serpent is not some vile creature from a subterranean world. The serpent is you, it is me, and it is every man who tries to dominate and control other human beings, particularly women.

As I woke from the second dream, I realized that the model for the serpent in the Garden of Eden was a part of your personality, the part you didn’t want to acknowledge. From what you have told us, I think we can assume you courted your mother from early childhood, always gaining her favor at Esau’s expense. As a child, you were brighter, more charming and more fun to be with than Esau, and you knew how to use those skills to become Rebekah’s favorite (just as I did with my mother). You would have persuaded her that you would make the better leader of the family than Esau. You may have also told her how much better you would look after her in her old age than rugged, insensitive Esau. Thus, you would have sown the ideas that led her to plan the great deception of your father, so Isaac would give you the birthright that belonged to Esau.

As you later retold your life story around campfires, I would guess you described Rebekah’s plan as hers alone – because you did not want others to find out how clever and manipulative you were (any more than I wanted others to know about me). You would have talked as if you had simply followed her directions.

But you have told us too much about yourself to accept that. Isn’t it time for truth telling? You were clever enough and determined enough to have beguiled Rebekah into her plan, and then to have left that out of the story when retelling it. You didn’t like being exiled and living through very painful experiences in Haran, but that is not reason enough to continue the deception. Please come out from hiding so all of us can see all of you, particularly the part you hid in the guise of a serpent.

In crafting the serpent, you were aided by what you saw in Uncle Laban. You had witnessed the serpent part of him that talked Leah into climbing into your bed and having intercourse with you on the night of your wedding to Rachel, because Uncle Laban wanted to keep you in Haran. He wanted to get seven more years of labor from you. He had prospered while you worked for him and he wasn’t about to give that up.

So you clearly knew about men’s capacity to use their position of authority, persuasiveness and beguilement to get women to do what men wanted.

In the Garden of Eden story, did you leave clues to the serpent’s identity? No other animals in the story, except the “serpent,” have the capability to speak. Only God and humans possess that skill. Since the serpent is not God, the only other creature that it could be is human.

You also used the pronoun “he” in the story to describe the serpent (that is the word used in the English translations of the Bible I have). Since you did not use “she,” the serpent’s male identity appears firmly established. In my limited knowledge of the Bible, the pronoun “he” is also used to
describe God and male human beings, not animals. Thus, it seems you established the serpent’s identity as human.

It has been difficult for many of us in our era to understand your clever disguise because we no longer think as you did in your time. We are so caught up in the logic of computers and scientific methods that we don’t focus on the souls of people. You were unencumbered by our type of linear thinking, so you were aware of people at many levels. You could distinguish between a person’s physical being and his or her inner being, all the multiple facets of each person’s personality. You could think and talk about a person’s soul without reference to the external, physical form.

Thus you could talk about “Adam” and the “serpent” and mean the same person.

You left us another example of this when you passed down the story of your father’s first cousin, Lot, and his wife. In the Book of Genesis, we learn that God sent angels to warn them to flee from Sodom and Gomorrah and not look back, because God was going to destroy those wicked cities. In their hasty departure, Lot’s wife disobeyed. When she turned to see what was happening to her beloved home, she became a pillar of salt, permanently affixed to that spot.

Isn’t it fair to assume, Grandfather, that what you meant was when she turned to look, she was so distressed by the sight of destruction, that she went into a severe depression and never recovered. While her body walked on from that point, with the rest of the family, her joy in life, i.e. her spirit, was never seen again. It was as if her soul had been turned into a pillar of salt and was left standing there in the desert, looking back mournfully at her city.

So, just as you used the term “Lot’s wife” to mean a major portion of her personality, not her physical being, you would have used the “serpent” to mean your and other men’s characteristics most closely resembling the behavior of a reptile. At the same time, you would have used “Adam” to describe the innocent characteristics of yourself and other men that are dedicated to serving God.

It is fascinating how insightful you were. Our modern, scientific culture has confirmed your observation about people. Science has discovered, deep within each human’s brain, a section that closely resembles and functions like a reptile’s brain.

The hardest part of all this was recognizing so many other male faces, particularly my own, on the serpent. It is very hard to acknowledge how much I am like that part of you.

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,

The Aramean
Dear Grandfather Jacob,

I have continued to read the Bible and think about what I have learned. More importantly, I have continued to think about my second dream. As I awakened from it, I felt that God was imparting knowledge to me through the dream.

In the later parts of the Garden of Eden story, you tell about what happened to Adam and Eve after God expelled them from the Garden of Eden. Isn’t it fair to guess that many years after you left Haran and returned to Canaan, you developed these parts of the story?

The portion describing Cain and Abel must have been devised after Joseph disappeared, and before he was found again in Egypt. When the older brothers brought you Joseph’s blood stained cloak and told you that he had been killed by a wild animal, you must have guessed that they, not a lion, had killed him.

You knew from your experience with Esau that rivalry between brothers could result in a brother becoming so angry that he would kill another if given the opportunity. You had to know the deep animosity between your sons, particularly because Rachel had been your favorite wife and Joseph, her oldest son, was your favorite boy. Leah’s sons were jealous and angry, and you must have been aware of it.

In your immense grief over losing Joseph, you must have wanted to find a way to prevent your sons from killing one another again, and brother from killing brother in future generations. So it was logical to develop the part of the story in which Adam and Eve have sons, first Cain, a farmer of the ground, and then Abel, a shepherd. When the brothers bring offerings to God from their labors, Cain brings produce from the land and Abel brings the fatty cuts from his best lambs. In your story, God accepts Abel’s offering, but not Cain’s. In a jealous rage, Cain leads Abel out into a field and kills him.

God has observed this heinous deed and asks Cain, “Where is your brother?” Cain answers, “I don’t know, am I my brother’s keeper?” Then God curses Cain and sends him away from God’s presence to lead a long and painful life as a fugitive and wanderer.

Thus you made clear that no matter how angry or jealous a brother may be toward another, the angry brother must never kill his kin. You also made it clear that God expects brothers to be responsible for one another.

For this part of the story you would have modeled Cain upon your eldest sons and Abel upon Joseph.

You also added to the story the birth of Seth, the young son who consoled Adam and Eve after Abel was killed. I would guess that you added Seth because you had experienced a similar grace from God after Joseph disappeared and you thought he had been killed. You found enormous solace in Benjamin, Rachel’s youngest son. You had overlooked Benjamin while Joseph was with you, but after Joseph disappeared you found solace and renewal by caring for Benjamin.
Were there other reasons you added Seth to the story? Did you do so for the same reason a painter puts a unique mark on art work? Did you add Seth to leave a clue to your authorship? You must have been very proud of your story and probably wanted future generations to know that you were the author. Seth’s role in the story is so similar to Benjamin’s real life role that it is hard to miss this clue.

I am very impressed with your creativity and skill. You used all the ingredients of your remarkable life to model the story of the Garden of Eden and its immediate aftermath.

Well, enough for today. I have to get on to chores for my family. I will write again.

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,
The Aramean
Ninth Letter

July 1, 1999

Dear Grandfather Jacob,

I find it intriguing that in the final part of the story about Adam and Eve, the place where you name their descendants, you repeat the great Creation vision from your Grandfather Abraham, (Genesis 5:1-2):

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.
Male and female he created them, and blessed them
and named them Man when they were created.

Did you add this because, very late in life, you finally understood the priority and the reality of the message that men and women were created equally in God’s image? Or was it added simply in an effort to be loyal to your Grandfather, or to appease God for your having planted the Garden of Eden story into the midst of the family’s history?

Or was it added later by your son, Joseph, or another descendant, because he understood the importance of this message and didn’t want it lost?

Whatever the reason, people have heard, read and understood the Garden of Eden story to be the primary perspective. The equal creation of men and women has been missed by generation after generation, including me and my generation.

I wonder if you know the impact your Garden of Eden story has had?

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,
The Aramean
Dear Grandfather Jacob,

I have been wondering if you intended to have your perspective persist for thousands of years and more than ten thousand generations. Would you be surprised to learn that many men and women still believe God made women to serve men and that women are temptresses who lead men into disobedience for selfish reasons? Would it surprise you that this story has been at the very foundation of the relationship between men and women throughout the Judeo-Christian cultures?

I have also wondered why your spiritual sons, the religious leaders in succeeding generations, carried the Garden of Eden story forward, unchanged, imbedding your concept of the relationships between men, women, God and the serpent into the very souls of millions of people.

We have Saint Paul’s first letter to his friend Timothy, in the Bible. Almost 2000 years ago, Paul said:

\[
I \text{ never let women teach men or lord it over them. Why? Because God made Adam first, and afterwards he made Eve. And it was not Adam who was fooled by Satan, but Eve, and sin was the result. So God sent pain and suffering to women when their children are born, but he will save their souls if they trust Him, living quiet, good and loving lives. (I Timothy, 2:verses 12-15)}
\]

Four hundred years later came Saint Augustine, beloved Bishop of Hippo in North Africa and great author of substantial Christian doctrine. Saint Augustine believed and taught that death was the punishment all humans must face and death began with Adam’s sin. In his treatise, The City of God, he said:

\[
\text{For God, the author of natures, not of vices, created man upright; but man, being of his own will corrupted and justly condemned, begot corrupted and condemned children. For we all were in that one man, since we all were that one man, who fell into sin by woman who was made from him before the sin. [emphasis added] (The City of God, Book XIII, Chapter 14)\textsuperscript{1}}
\]

Saint Augustine went on to discuss the nature of sin. He described how the “proud and envious” angel fell from spiritual Paradise and “chose the serpent as his mouthpiece.” Through the serpent, the fallen angel:

\[
\text{first tried his deceit upon the woman, making his assault upon the weaker part of that human alliance [Adam and Eve], that he might gradually gain the whole, and not supposing that the man would give ear to him, or be deceived, but that he might yield to the error of the woman. (The City of God, Book XIV, Chapter 11)\textsuperscript{2}}
\]

Nine hundred years after Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, the great intellectual Christian leader, wrote extensively. His work is still published and highly regarded. In Summa Theologica, he discussed “The Production of the Woman,” describing her creation in Garden of Eden terms.
According to him, women were created only to help men by producing his children; in everything else, men are superior. He said:

I answer that, It was necessary for woman to be made, as the Scripture says, as a helper to man; not indeed as a helpmate in other works, as some say, since man can be more efficiently helped by another man in other works, but as a helper in the work of generation [producing children].

In the same section, Saint Thomas Aquinas concludes that women must be subject to men’s authority:

For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates. (Summa Theologica, First Part, Question XCII, Article 1)³

In the next article, he discusses “Whether Woman should have been made from Man?” He stated:

I answer that, When all things were first formed, it was more suitable for the woman to be made from the man than (for the female to be from the male) in other animals. First, in order thus to give the first man a certain dignity, so that just as God is the principle of the whole universe, so the first man, in likeness to God, was the principle of the whole human race. [emphasis added] (Summa Theologica, First Part, Question XCII, Article 2)⁴

If that were not sufficient to establish women’s subservient role, Saint Thomas Aquinas goes further to use the Garden of Eden story to conclude that women were not equally created in God’s image. He said:

The image of God, in its principal signification, namely the intellectual nature, is found both in man and in women. Hence, after the words, To the image of God He created him, it is added, Male and female He created them (Gen. 1. 27)….But in a secondary sense the image of God is found in man, and not in woman, for man is the beginning and end of women, just as God is the beginning and end of every creature. So when the Apostle had said that man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man, he added his reason for saying this: For man is not of woman, but woman of man; and man was not created for woman, but woman for man. [emphasis added] (Summa Theologica, First Part, Question XCIII, Article 5)⁵

Later, he reiterates his view of women’s role, citing the Garden of Eden story as the basis:

Moreover, we are told that woman was made to be a help to man (Gen. 2. 18, 20). But she was not fitted to help man except in generation [begetting children] because another man would have proved a more effective help in anything else. (Summa Theologica, First Part, Q. XCVIII, Article 2)⁶

Grandfather Jacob, my best guess is that many male religious leaders have continued your Garden of Eden story because they have understood the benefit to their self-interest.
But, ironically, I believe that the people most responsible for the story’s pervasiveness are the most faithful men and women who try to live their lives according to the words written in and sanctified by the *Torah* and the *Bible*.

Because your Garden of Eden story is at the very beginning, it holds special significance. It forms the foundation for our understanding of ourselves in relationship to God and to each other. Even as very young boys and girls, our souls understand the powerful imagery. Repeated at firesides and at bed times for generations, it has been written into the hearts and souls of children for six thousand years. I believed you, and so have countless others.

The only problem is that the imagery is yours, Grandfather Jacob, not God’s.

Most of us have assumed that the stories handed down to us from you and from many others in the *Torah* and the *Bible* are the faithful recounting of your encounters with God. We have trusted you, believing that the Garden of Eden story was divinely revealed. Thus, we have thought that the Garden of Eden story is the “Word of God” and we have tried to live accordingly.

Yet, I also confess that I never questioned the origins of this story, because it served me so well. I liked the story. It allowed me to reign over my household with great authority.

This is why my dreams came as such a shock. They tore away at the very foundation of my belief system. They made me realize that I had been wrong, that I had unjustly dominated my wife’s and daughters’ lives. I felt extreme guilt and shame for what I had done.

I also felt great regret for never having been able to treat women as my equals. I realized that I had never been able to trust any woman because she might lead me into conflict with God and my destiny.

I recognized just how much of life I had missed trying to control women, rather than working with them as friends.

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,

The Aramean
Eleventh Letter

November 22, 1999

Dear Grandfather Jacob,

Perhaps this is a day of reckoning for us. We must look at the cost of the Garden of Eden story. I must look at the price my sons and daughters, wife, mother, brothers and sisters have paid because I believed the story.

How many young children have been put to bed by loving parents reading the story? How many children have gone to sleep, dreaming your powerful images of inequality into their souls? How many have founded their lives and their relationships with God and other people on this story? How long has God watched in anguish at the damage done by this story?

My daughters, when they visit Europe and Central America, in countries that claim to be Christian nations, are accosted by men who behave as if they own my daughters. Over the years, my wife and women I know have been humiliated by men who fondled them – these men who think they have dominion over them, here in North America.

I sat in a court room recently, among a large panel of prospective jurors to hear a case where a man was accused of beating his wife. When the attorneys questioned the women and men in our panel, I was appalled to hear from fully one-third of the jurors that they themselves had been physically beaten by men or had female relatives who had been beaten.

Grandfather Jacob, while you and I may be appalled by men beating their wives, girl friends, daughters and other women, what right do we have to stand in judgment against them? Your Garden of Eden story paves the way for it. My willingness to believe it and to live by its precepts helped perpetuate the story and its impact.

We men have assumed from your story that we not only have the right, but also the duty, to dominate the women in our lives -- when a woman doesn’t behave the way we think she should, we must find a way to persuade her or force her to comply.

Grandfather, we cannot declare a whole group of people as unequal and subordinate, and then draw a line limiting the amount of inequality and subordination they must suffer. We saw this in slavery and we see it in the relationship between men and women. No matter how well some slave owners may have limited the beating of their own slaves and how hard they attempted to restrict the beatings meted out by others, they could not stop the cruelty because they were hypocrites. They had robbed human beings of their God given right to equality and had no way to prevent the damnable practices that flowed from it.

So it is in gender relationships.

Likewise, I have come to realize that kindness is no substitute for equality. A slave owner’s kind treatment of slaves could not redeem his sin of holding other children of God in bondage.
Likewise, my kindness as a dominating husband and father did not redeem the subjugation of God’s female children. *The system of inequality that you sanctified and I followed degrades and denigrates the men who dominate -- as well as the women who are subjugated!*

Grandfather, we must find a way to stop all of this.  
Sincerely,  

*Your Grandson,*  
*The Aramean*
Twelfth Letter

Dear Children,

I write to send you the collection of letters I have written to Grandfather Jacob that I call “The Garden of Eden Revisited.” I have also sent them to a number of friends asking them for their thoughts and comments. It is my intent to seek publication of this collection.

To help you understand why I have written, you need more information than provided within the letters to Grandfather Jacob. Nothing could be more opposite to my upbringing, early experiences, church teachings and moral training than what I have written in “The Garden of Eden Revisited.” And yet, after seven years of struggle, I am now convinced of its merit.

The dreams described in the text were powerful and well beyond anything I had previously thought. Without question, they felt like direct communication from the Almighty — that God was putting ideas in my head and wanted me to share them. I had read in the Bible about God reaching out to people in dreams — but it is one thing to read about it as happening to someone thousands of years ago, and quite another to wake up in the middle of the night and have it happening to you. It is one thing to believe that God can communicate with us humans through ideas, concepts, other people, and prayers while we are alert and asking for guidance, and quite another to have God grab hold in the middle of the night and shake you to the very foundation of your being.

I was surprised by the ideas, yet wanted to accept them because they made sense. But I was perplexed because they were opposed to what I had believed before. Also, if these ideas were true, I had to alter the way I lived and how I treated my wife and all of you — I would have to surrender some of the power and authority I held in the family, share leadership equally with your mother and change what I taught you.

Then I wondered if the dreams were just my subconscious at work, that God had nothing to do with it? Perhaps, but they seemed so real. It seemed God was reaching out to give me a gift of insight to share — it was frightening and important. Nonetheless, I was very reluctant: “Why me, God? Please find someone else.”

What convinced me, though, were two events. A short time after the two dreams I described to Grandfather Jacob, I was awakened in the middle of a third night and led to get up and go to the basement by an internal nudge (it felt like someone was nudging me along strongly — but from the inside). I was wide awake but had no idea where I was being led, nor why. The nudging took me directly to the bookshelves, to a group of books on Scottish heraldry, and then to just one little heraldry book. (I had already been given to understand in the previous dreams that “Adam” was really Jacob; that he, as Abraham’s grandson, was the one who had distorted God’s word, and that he had done so intentionally to overcome his Grandfather’s retelling of God’s vision of equal creation.) The nudging led me to open up the Gordon clan booklet, to the back pages’ alphabetical list of family surnames, and the derivation of each name. There listed were:

“Adam, Adams,” the name of the first Gordon, founder of the Clan Gordon.
“Adamson,” the son of Adam.
“Addie, Eadie, Eddie, Edie” the diminutive forms of Adam.
Can you imagine my surprise? I was bowled over. There is our family name – it is the diminutive form of Adam – thus my family name means, figuratively, I am a grandson of Adam. I understood the symbolism instantly. Just as Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, had distorted Yahweh’s word, I was being asked by God, as one of Adam’s (i.e. Jacob’s) grandsons, to correct what he had done, to undo the damage that his story has wrought.

God has moved and spoken symbolically so often; the Old and New Testaments are full of God reaching out that way. Thus, I could not avoid the implications of where God was leading.

But later, I thought perhaps I had read this little book before and that my subconscious memory had recalled it and made the connection. Perhaps I was just following an intellectual fluke to this book, and God was not involved. While I could not recall ever reading that name list previously, it was easier to assume that I had – thus I could ignore any responsibility to write and publish. I thought to myself, “Unless God can give me another sign, I don’t have to do anything. God can’t possibly want me to state these ideas to the world. I am no biblical scholar and have no authority to say these things. Besides, I don’t want to stick my neck out.”

Yet such comfortable thinking lasted only a short time. In the middle of a day, while wide awake, I felt another strong nudge to go to the basement again. So I followed, having no idea where I was headed, nor why. Down I went to the room under the porch where I had stacked the three unopened boxes of Great Books of the Western World published by the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. I felt a nudge to tear open the top of one specific box, which I did. I felt a nudge to pull out the top book, -- but, no, the nudge was don’t look at it, just put it down, and go to the next book. With the second book in hand – I felt a strong nudge that this was it, tear off the sealed wrapper, open it up, leaf through the pages without reading -- now stop and look at the middle of the column on one side of the page. There, to my amazement, I was looking directly at a dissertation on the relationship between men and women, based upon the Garden of Eden story in the book of Genesis in the Bible.

I was astonished. How in the world had I blindly gone into such a text? So I looked at the author’s name -- it was St. Thomas Aquinas. Then I understood. I certainly knew who this man was, and I knew of his extraordinary influence on Christian doctrine. I suddenly realized that God was showing me that what I had dreamed was not a figment of imagination -- that the Garden of Eden story had persisted and had misled even the most faithful followers of Christ for eons.

What I was being asked to do was important to God. This awful injustice must be halted. God needs someone foolish enough to stand up to all Christendom and say STOP!

There was no longer an excuse nor alternative explanation to discredit the call. There was no way I could have found such a passage and gone directly to it, other than God’s leading. (In fact, when I wrote the letters to Grandfather Jacob this year, I had to spend hours searching St. Thomas Aquinas’ books looking for the passages quoted in “The Garden of Eden Revisited,” even though I knew to look there.)

On a fourth night, I was startled awake by a dream in which I was led to understand that I should write the letters to Grandfather Jacob and should sign them as “The Aramean,” rather than with my own name. The reason is simple. What I say only has value to the extent other people
understand it in their own hearts and souls. How these letters are interpreted is a matter between each person and God. Each human must wrestle with this and seek God’s wisdom within the innermost being. My identity is unimportant.

From the day I was led to open that sealed box, pull out a sealed book, and leaf through to a specific page, it has taken seven years to grow enough to write what I have known must be written — it is a daunting task. I have never discussed it with you because I was afraid you would think I was just loony. Also, since I lacked the skills to write it earlier, I saw no point in describing something that might not come into existence. But I am confident now. Christ’s healing has worked its miracles and God’s leading has brought me here.

It may well be that the recent string of disappointments at work have been a necessary prerequisite (something like Jonah getting swallowed by the whale). Had my creative plans succeeded, my energy and time would have been so dissipated that I might never have gotten around to writing the enclosed -- in fact, I was rather hoping that would happen. In any event, the gift is drafted and in your hands. Where it goes from here is Yahweh’s to decide.

With all my love,

Your Father,

The Aramean
Dear Grandfather Jacob,

I have not written for several years because I have needed to think and pray, and to learn new things. I have still had to work out some difficult things within myself. I will write and explain this later on, when I have worked it out.

But an event occurred today that leads me to send this letter. This morning, during our worship service, the Scripture lesson was from the Bible’s New Testament, from the Book of John, Chapter 4, verses 1-42. This passage talks about Jesus walking through Samaria on his way to his home province, Galilee, a short time after being baptized by John the Baptist. As Jesus approached the village of Sychar, he stopped beside a well. When a Samaritan woman came for water, Jesus asked her for a drink. She was so surprised that he would talk to her, a “despised Samaritan,” that she asked him about it. This began a lively conversation in which Jesus talked with her and began to teach her, just as he talked to and taught men.

She was so convinced by what he told her, she went back and told other people in her village what Jesus had said. She then brought them to meet him, and many others listened, learned and believed. Even though Jesus’ disciples were surprised that he would talk to a woman, Jesus saw her and treated her as an equal, just as he treated men. In response, she spread word of his teachings and brought others to him, just as male disciples did.

Grandfather, I heard this story years ago, and perhaps that was part of why I had begun to question my old beliefs about male superiority. I now believe that this and other passages, where Jesus treats women as his equals, should be understood as Jesus teaching us how we are meant to treat women -- Jesus taught by example, throughout his ministry.

But, as I sat and listened to the reader, I heard something in the opening sentences that seemed to have deeper meaning. Jesus didn’t sit down and have this conversation with the Samaritan woman beside just any well. It was a very particular well. This whole thing happened beside “Jacob’s Well, located on the parcel of ground Jacob gave to his son Joseph.” Apparently the people who remembered this event and repeated it knew that there was something very important about this location because they made certain it was reported and recorded.

As I listened to the scripture, I thought, “How ironic, Jesus demonstrated God’s equality for all people, without regard to gender or class, at Grandfather Jacob’s well.”

Was this just a coincidence, or was God leaving another symbol for us to find again, now, in the 21st Century? Did Jesus know that you were the well from which the unholy beliefs about male superiority have sprung, as author of the Garden of Eden story? Was he intentionally talking to this woman at your well, to demonstrate that God repudiates your beliefs (and my previous beliefs)? Was God seeking, through Jesus, to establish equality among men and women in this particular place to make the point that your old ways must cease?
I don’t have answers to these questions, but it would not surprise me if Jesus was deliberately demonstrating how all men and women should relate, at your well.

I’ll send you the next letter as soon as I am able.

Sincerely,

Your Grandson,

The Aramean
Fourteenth Letter

January 16, 2004

Dear Grandfather Jacob,

I have waited to write because a wise friend, four years ago, read my earlier letters to you. He told me that I was too angry, the anger showed up in the letters, and I should get over the anger before I sent them out.

I recognized he was right. I was still very angry at you for creating the Garden of Eden story. I had suffered from it, first in the unhappiness of my childhood home, and later by becoming a dominating, controlling husband and father in my own home. I did not like the person whom I had become, for the emotional suppression I had inflicted on my wife and daughters, and for extending that control to my sons and to influencing them to control the women in their lives.

So I have waited. I have continued to pray and to seek God's healing until I can write again. This delay has yielded insight. I realize I was shifting my guilt and shame onto you, Grandfather. I had blamed you for all my failings and for so eagerly accepting your Garden of Eden story as "God's true message." I understand now, my anger at you was really anger at myself; anger at being so willing to accept the story's message without question; anger at allowing myself to use the story to justify doing things in life that I knew in my heart and soul were wrong -- that were opposite to what I instinctively knew God wanted me to be and do.

What I believed and had become was opposite to what I had learned about God's overarching love through the Bible and through my lifetime of experiencing God's presence. I so badly wanted to blame someone besides myself. I so badly wanted to blame you, or to blame God, for not correcting this sooner.

But I no longer feel that way. How can I remain angry at you when I am just as culpable? I can and do accept responsibility for my failures, which are so similar to yours. I have gone back and revised my earlier letters to acknowledge my involvement.

Perhaps the most important (and the most difficult) revision was to add to the sixth letter how I came to understand that the model for the serpent in the Garden was your alter ego. The first draft described you as the role model for the serpent, but left out the part of the dream where I followed the serpent until it came to rest upon the rock. Most importantly, the draft did not include the part about seeing the serpent's face turn into your face, many other men's faces, and finally, my face.

I didn't want to acknowledge that part of the dream. I didn't even want to write it down because it exposed me.

But, I have gone back and put that part into the letter. By so doing, I claim my responsibility for being a beguiling, manipulating person who has tried to dominate women.

These four years of rest between letters has also given me time to realize I have been angry because I am frightened. I am afraid to challenge you, Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and thousands of other religious leaders who have carried your message through the eons.
I am also afraid of people who live today. There are many men, like me, who have built their lives around the power the Garden of Eden story grants and sanctifies. They will not want to let go of that power any more than I wanted to; they may try to silence God’s message.

Also, there are women who believe the Garden of Eden story and have subjugated themselves to their fathers, husbands, and sons. While some may find what is written here a release and joy, others will reject it because the words threaten the way of life they have accepted.

I still do not know why God has given me this responsibility to write and publish this. I do not know why God chose to reach out to me and to give me these insights. I do not know why or how God was able to take me into my basement where hundreds of books are stored and lead me directly and unerringly to the little book of Scottish Heraldry, and to my family name as the diminutive form of Adam. I still have no idea how God was able to lead me precisely into one specific sealed box, into one specific sealed book and to one specific side of one specific page in that book, without my looking at any other side of any other page of any other book in any other box or shelf. I didn’t even know the name of the book or the author until after I read the passage to which I was led.

I have always known God was real and had power in the world of the soul and spirit, but I had no idea that God could read the words in sealed books in my basement. I had no idea that God, who is not of the flesh, can so fully interact with our physical world!

No matter how well I am trained in and how much I believe in the scientific method and rational thinking, I cannot explain what happened. I am still in total awe of it.

But I do know that I cannot deny the reality of what God did. I cannot deny God’s challenge to try to rectify the damage that you and I, along with hundreds of millions of other men, have wrought.

So now I write again, with gratitude for all the positive gifts you have passed along to us, for being part of the chain of humans who, with all our failings and flaws, tried to be faithful in some ways. You did pass on many other wonderful stories in our spiritual family tree. Most importantly, you did leave Grandfather Abraham’s message so we can find it again now, and you left clues to your identity and deception within the Garden of Eden story so we can discard it now.

For these things, I thank you.

With love,

Your Grandson,

The Aramean
Dear Grandfather Jacob,

Before closing our correspondence, I would like to tell you about what has happened since the dreams of a decade ago.

As the new ideas began to stream in, I decided to try to follow Great Great Grandfather Abraham’s understanding of God’s creation and intent for the relationship between men and women.

With my wife:

I began by talking with my wife and apologizing for having treated her the way I had, and asking to start over again, as equal partners. Sometimes we don’t succeed because our patterns were set deeply for so long. But we keep working at it, and we enjoy each other much more – the conflict and strain between us is gone, as I no longer believe I am supposed to control her and our family life together.

I also took an important step to correct an injustice I had inflicted on her. When we first met, I thought her name sounded silly because she had a “double name” she used her first and middle name together, as if it were just one name. I had been raised in a culture where we looked down on people who did that – just using a single name seemed more dignified. So I insisted, before we married, that she give up use of her middle name. So, for almost thirty years, others and I called her by her first name alone.

But, as I tried to undo my dominance, I recalled my arrogant act. I realized that forcing her to change her name had been a “power move” by me, an act of utter control by forcing her to change her self-identity. From that day on, I have called her by her double name, the name by which she wants to be called, and I have asked others to do the same.

After that, I thought my wife should have a job with equal responsibility and equal pay with mine. Instead, she chose to stay home, raise our children and care for her ailing mother who is now in her 90s and lives with us. Over time I realized that true equality means my wife has the right to decide what she will do, what her career is and what work she will do. Her choices are as valid as mine, and her work is as hard as mine. The fact that she doesn’t receive pay for it is irrelevant.

I have come also to see that our equality is as much in the small things of life as in the big. So I am now doing dishes, sweeping floors and ironing my own shirts. I have even started to do some cooking.

With my mother:

I have also spoken with my mother. She isn’t quite sure what to think of all this, but we have developed a relationship of trust and support. She is eighty-seven years old now, but by God’s grace, she has changed. She is more confident and more content with herself as God made her. While my father died many years ago, she carries on and gathers emotional and spiritual strength each year.
With our eldest daughter:

It was harder, though, to correct things with my daughters. The day came when I sat down with my eldest daughter, who was then in her late teens. I apologized for having treated her differently than her brothers, for having denied her a small amount of my love in order to make her subservient, to make her work and beg for my love. To my surprise, she replied that she didn’t know what I was talking about. She said that I had not treated her differently than her brothers.

I felt relief; thinking I must have failed to make her feel subservient, even though I had tried.

About a week later, my wife said that I had better go back and talk to our eldest daughter again. So I did. To my regret, she told me that she had known all her life that I had preferred her older brother over her and that I had never loved her as much as him. So I reached out for my daughter, and pulled her close. We sat together for a long time, with tears streaming down our faces until they soaked through my shirt and undershirt.

By God’s grace, things have changed since. She has been a successful high school athlete, a confident traveler who spent a full year on her own in Europe while in college, an excellent scholar who has gone through medical school and is now in her medical residency, pursuing her dream of becoming a physician.

I recently spent a wonderful four days with her and her new husband in their home. What I observed took my breath away. She is extraordinarily well organized, and a capable manager. He is a warm, very capable man who enjoys his job in business and finds great satisfaction being home and doing domestic things like cooking. They have worked out their relationship beautifully. Each contributes his and her strengths, without regard to whether she is following the “female role” or he is following the “male role.” They do this without bickering, without fighting, without conflict because they each honor and respect the strengths of the other.

What a joy to know that our future grandchildren will grow up in the home my daughter and son-in-law are creating!

With our second daughter:

After my eldest daughter and I reconciled, I went to our second daughter who was in her early teens. We talked about the same issues, and I apologized to her as well. But it took a number of years for her to build trust and confidence in me, to trust that I truly love her. Only in the last three years have we been able to be close again. She has gone through her own form of rebellion, testing out different attitudes, clothing, and mannerisms in an effort to “find herself” while completing an excellent collegiate education. Now she is one of the most confident, happy, energetic and capable young persons I have met. In her business work, she is receiving praise and promotions for her commitment, quality work, effervescence and, most of all, assertiveness.

It is time for a break for a fresh cup of coffee.
**With our youngest daughter:**

Later the same day.

Now I must tell you, Grandfather Jacob, about our youngest child, a daughter who was only five when I went through the dreams and the ensuing life changes. I wasn’t sure how to communicate with her, because a five year old could not discuss the issues we needed to address. But I did find a way by attending a stage play.

The local high school was putting on the musical drama, *The Sound of Music*, about the Von Trapp family singers. Our eldest daughter was in the play and the director needed a young child to play the role of Gretel, the youngest Von Trapp family member. So our youngest daughter was cast in that role. She was so determined and diligent that she studied her part every day, not just in rehearsal, but at home as well. She became a part of the cast so completely that she had no idea that she was twelve years younger than the other cast members. They were her friends with whom she was putting on a play for the community.

I began to recognize that this tiny five year old had as much sense of her own dignity, of her own role in life, and of her own personhood as any adult. She was just as committed, just as hard working and just as much a child of God as I was. So, when the final performance came to an end, the time when parents go up to the stage to hand their children flowers, I went up onto the stage with two bunches. Our eldest daughter came over, we hugged, I gave her a bouquet, and she returned to the line of actors to receive the audience’s accolades. Then I turned to our youngest who was standing in the middle of the line. I wanted to swoop down, pick her up, and give her the flowers – showing her and the audience what a great father I was.

But I didn’t.

That would have breached her dignity and sense of herself. So, instead, as a terribly proud man, I swallowed hard and knelt down on the stage in front of my five year old – on my knees before that whole audience – it was hard to do. By kneeling, I moved my eyes and my head down to her height, to her level, to the place where she was, and I held out the flowers. She came over, walking with great dignity and “stage presence,” took the flowers, hugged me, and calmly walked back to her place in line with her peers to face the cheering audience.

I went back to my seat a different person. I thought of my grandmother. On her ninetieth birthday, my wife had asked her how it felt to be 90. She smiled broadly, and without hesitation declared, “I feel exactly the way I did on my twenty-first birthday.” Suddenly, I understood why we believe in the possibility of eternal life. Our souls are ageless. Every baby, male and female, is born with an intact soul that understands intuitively that we have a relationship with our creator, we possess dignity, and each of us is equal. Our soul, the place where God interacts with us, is innately aware of our inalienable rights, as a child of God.

It is only through extraordinary work that the sense of God’s unique love for each of us can be broken. It is only through the extraordinary work of someone like you and me, Grandfather Jacob, that we can break it down in people.
But on that night, in my own way, in front of an audience full of people I knew, I knelt down to confirm for my five year old daughter that she has her own dignity as a child of God, and that I love her unconditionally.

That little five year old is now seventeen. She has more self-confidence, more self-assuredness and sense of independence than any of her older brothers and sisters had at that age, and more than either her mother or I had as teenagers. She has gone through a teenage rebellion stage that is more like what her eldest brother went through than her sisters’ rebellion. And yet, she has already finished that period of her life and “pulled herself together.” She has matured and behaves like a young adult, in many ways. She studies hard, has a wide range of male and female friends, and is totally confident with all of them. Like her siblings, she is a joy to behold.

**With our eldest son:**

I would also like to tell you about our two sons. They are the equals of their sisters. Our eldest son is also a physician and is completing his residency. He has initiated medical education programs for physicians in two nations in South America. As I write, he is hiking across the glaciers of Patagonia, at the southern tip of Chile, pursuing his love of adventure and personal challenge.

With him, I did not formally sit down and talk about his upbringing nor take a specific action to help him comprehend my new understanding of what God intends for our relationships with women. Rather, we have done it in small ways. I have attempted to let him see me living differently in relationship with his mother and his sisters. We have talked about what I have learned in a more “off-the-cuff” way when appropriate occasions have come up. For example, when he has telephoned for advice about difficult situations at school and work, we have talked about the men and women that he has to relate to in equal terms.

He appears to have taken this to heart. He is dating a very capable and independent young woman who is also a physician. While I have no idea if they will remain together, I am grateful to see that he has chosen a young woman who is his equal – they complement and strengthen each other beautifully.

**With our second son:**

Our second son is twenty-two and attending a university where he is exploring multiple academic and career possibilities.

He was much younger when I went through the experiences described above. As with his elder brother, I have attempted to lead by example more than through overt “teaching” or discussion. I chose this course by intuition, perhaps because I had learned that teenage boys frequently reject what their fathers tell them.

In recent months, I have briefly described my experience and what I learned. At his request, I sent him a draft of these letters, but he has not read them yet – perhaps my journey seems as unusual to him as it does to me.

In any event, apparently he has learned by observing because he now relates easily and well to many young women and treats them as his equals.
In university, he has had the courage to completely switch from engineering as his major to history, out of his decision that he wants to work with people instead of machines. He has wrestled deep and long with his spiritual beliefs and his faith and has become a student leader in a church at his university, continuing work he began in high school. For a career, he is considering a range of possibilities including Christian ministry, assisting AIDS victims in Africa, or doing youth work with the World Council of Churches.

You can be proud of your great grandchildren.

With love,

Your Grandson.

The Aramean
A New Garden

Sixteenth Letter

January 20, 2004

Dear Children,

Where do we go from here? It is time for the world to let go of the past. It is time to say good-bye to Grandfather Jacob’s Garden of Eden story and its hold on the minds, hearts and souls of people.

Should the story be excised from the Bible and Torah? I do not know. Apparently, that is for other people to consider.

What I do understand is that God seeks to expose the root of the story as Grandfather Jacob’s deception and for me to share my story of change – the Garden of Eden was a story created in sin and has no place in forming our relationships to God and to each other.

It is time that we release ourselves from the yoke of manipulative deception. My Grandfather and I, and men like us, have been responsible for the injury of far too many of the Creator’s daughters and granddaughters. Too many of our sons and grandsons have despoiled themselves by subjugating women.

I have come to understand that Yahweh is sick and tired of watching while we male children dominate and subjugate Yahweh’s female children, and use Yahweh’s name to justify it. The Garden of Eden story is the fountainhead from which oppression of half the human race flows.

The time has come for us, and all future generations, to understand the Garden of Eden story for what it is and to determinedly ignore and disregard it. It is time to stop using it to drive our faith, form our beliefs, or establish our moral compasses. The time has come for the Garden of Eden to wither and die.

We must search for a new garden where we can meet God – the garden that God has sown in our innermost beings – the peaceful place that grows in the soul of every person – the place where God dwells within us – the portion where we are equally made in God’s image. This garden within our souls is serene, as if ringed by tall cypress and verdant cedars, bedecked with ferns and hibiscus, and fragranced by sweet jasmine.

Soft breezes waft through leaves, whispering as they pass. Dragonflies and butterflies drift among the flowers, while birds glide on the ebbs and flows of breeze. Animals walk freely among the trees, nibbling leaves. Healing waters gurgle across a pebble strewn stream bed, and birds sing melodiously, like low toned flutes.
Henceforth, let every person, every man, woman and child return from exile -- and enter the
garden within our souls. Let all males and all females claim our birth right to stand as equals in front
of God -- our equal right by creation -- our equal right by creation in God’s image -- as Great Great
Grandfather Abraham foretold it!

So God created man in His own image.
In the image of God he created him;
Male and female he created them.

With all my love,

Your Father,
The Aramean

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2 Augustine, as before, page 444.
4 Aquinas I, as before, page 490.
5 Aquinas I, as before, page 495.
66 Aquinas I, as before, page 518.
7 Gordon, Your Clan Heritage, Clan Gordon. McNie, Alan. Cascade Publishing Co.; Rowandene. Belses, Jedburgh,