

Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

An Introductory Study Guide

If we accept Genesis as scripture:

- We must read it *seriously*, expecting to learn and apply important lessons of life and faith.
- We must read it *spiritually*, looking primarily for the intended theological truths.

Genesis is primarily narrative. How should we read narrative to rightly understand and apply it?

Exposition of Genesis (and the rest of the OT) in this class will be unapologetically Christological. Though we aim to understand the meaning and purpose of the original text, we also believe the ultimate significance of the text is discovered in its expectation of, preparation for, and fulfillment by Jesus Christ.

Genesis unfolds in a cycle of Generation, Degeneration, and Regeneration, which is also the story of the Bible.

Promise is the essence of God's revelation and the theological focus in the book of Genesis.

Parallels to Look for in Genesis and Revelation

The heavens and the earth
Garden – Tree
Marriage
Satan
Death
Babylon
Redeemer

Major Doctrines to Look for in Genesis

- 1) The Doctrine of Creation
- 2) The Doctrine of Sin
- 3) The Doctrine of Judgment
- 4) The Doctrine of Grace
- 5) The Doctrine of Election
- 6) The Doctrine of Promise
- 7) The Doctrine of Faith

Moses and the Pentateuch (Genesis – Deuteronomy)

Pentateuch is the Greek name for the first five books of the Old Testament. The name comes from two words: *pente* (five) and *teuchos* (scroll or vessel, container). The one term was used for all five books due to their inherent unity and common attribution to Moses. The Hebrew name for these books is *Torah*, a word meaning *law* or, more specifically, *teaching* or *instruction*.

The evidence for Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is three-fold. First is the testimony of the Pentateuch itself. Explicit references to Mosaic authorship are made in Exodus 24:4 and 7 as well as repeated references to Moses recording in writing the divine instructions and Israelite experiences (Ex. 17:14; 34:27; Nu. 33:2; De. 31:9, 19, 22, 24). Furthermore, there are multiple speeches attributed to Moses in the Pentateuch (Le. 4:1; De. 1:1), and his ministry pervades the entirety of Exodus-Deuteronomy. The second proof is the attribution of the contents of the Pentateuch to Moses by New Testament writers and spokesmen, including Jesus (Mk. 10:3-4; 12:19, 26; Lk. 16:29-31; 24:27, 44; Jn. 1:45; 5:46; Ac. 3:22; 7:37; 13:15; 13:26; 13:28; 13:29; 13:30; 13:31; 13:32; 13:33; 13:34; 13:35; 13:36; 13:37; 13:38; 13:39; 13:40; 13:41; 13:42; 13:43; 13:44; 13:45; 13:46; 13:47; 13:48; 13:49; 13:50; 13:51; 13:52; 13:53; 13:54; 13:55; 13:56; 13:57; 13:58; 13:59; 13:60; 13:61; 13:62; 13:63; 13:64; 13:65; 13:66; 13:67; 13:68; 13:69; 13:70; 13:71; 13:72; 13:73; 13:74; 13:75; 13:76; 13:77; 13:78; 13:79; 13:80; 13:81; 13:82; 13:83; 13:84; 13:85; 13:86; 13:87; 13:88; 13:89; 13:90; 13:91; 13:92; 13:93; 13:94; 13:95; 13:96; 13:97; 13:98; 13:99; 14:1; 14:2; 14:3; 14:4; 14:5; 14:6; 14:7; 14:8; 14:9; 14:10; 14:11; 14:12; 14:13; 14:14; 14:15; 14:16; 14:17; 14:18; 14:19; 14:20; 14:21; 14:22; 14:23; 14:24; 14:25; 14:26; 14:27; 14:28; 14:29; 14:30; 14:31; 14:32; 14:33; 14:34; 14:35; 14:36; 14:37; 14:38; 14:39; 14:40; 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17:35; 17:36; 17:37; 17:38; 17:39; 17:40; 17:41; 17:42; 17:43; 17:44; 17:45; 17:46; 17:47; 17:48; 17:49; 17:50; 17:51; 17:52; 17:53; 17:54; 17:55; 17:56; 17:57; 17:58; 17:59; 17:60; 17:61; 17:62; 17:63; 17:64; 17:65; 17:66; 17:67; 17:68; 17:69; 17:70; 17:71; 17:72; 17:73; 17:74; 17:75; 17:76; 17:77; 17:78; 17:79; 17:80; 17:81; 17:82; 17:83; 17:84; 17:85; 17:86; 17:87; 17:88; 17:89; 17:90; 17:91; 17:92; 17:93; 17:94; 17:95; 17:96; 17:97; 17:98; 17:99; 18:1; 18:2; 18:3; 18:4; 18:5; 18:6; 18:7; 18:8; 18:9; 18:10; 18:11; 18:12; 18:13; 18:14; 18:15; 18:16; 18:17; 18:18; 18:19; 18:20; 18:21; 18:22; 18:23; 18:24; 18:25; 18:26; 18:27; 18:28; 18:29; 18:30; 18:31; 18:32; 18:33; 18:34; 18:35; 18:36; 18:37; 18:38; 18:39; 18:40; 18:41; 18:42; 18:43; 18:44; 18:45; 18:46; 18:47; 18:48; 18:49; 18:50; 18:51; 18:52; 18:53; 18:54; 18:55; 18:56; 18:57; 18:58; 18:59; 18:60; 18:61; 18:62; 18:63; 18:64; 18:65; 18:66; 18:67; 18:68; 18:69; 18:70; 18:71; 18:72; 18:73; 18:74; 18:75; 18:76; 18:77; 18:78; 18:79; 18:80; 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26:17; 26:18; 26:19; 26:20; 26:21; 26:22; 26:23; 26:24; 26:25; 26:26; 26:27; 26:28; 26:29; 26:30; 26:31; 26:32; 26:33; 26:34; 26:35; 26:36; 26:37; 26:38; 26:39; 26:40; 26:41; 26:42; 26:43; 26:44; 26:45; 26:46; 26:47; 26:48; 26:49; 26:50; 26:51; 26:52; 26:53; 26:54; 26:55; 26:56; 26:57; 26:58; 26:59; 26:60; 26:61; 26:62; 26:63; 26:64; 26:65; 26:66; 26:67; 26:68; 26:69; 26:70; 26:71; 26:72; 26:73; 26:74; 26:75; 26:76; 26:77; 26:78; 26:79; 26:80; 26:81; 26:82; 26:83; 26:84; 26:85; 26:86; 26:87; 26:88; 26:89; 26:90; 26:91; 26:92; 26:93; 26:94; 26:95; 26:96; 26:97; 26:98; 26:99; 27:1; 27:2; 27:3; 27:4; 27:5; 27:6; 27:7; 27:8; 27:9; 27:10; 27:11; 27:12; 27:13; 27:14; 27:15; 27:16; 27:17; 27:18; 27:19; 27:20; 27:21; 27:22; 27:23; 27:24; 27:25; 27:26; 27:27; 27:28; 27:29; 27:30; 27:31; 27:32; 27:33; 27:34; 27:35; 27:36; 27:37; 27:38; 27:39; 27:40; 27:41; 27:42; 27:43; 27:44; 27:45; 27:46; 27:47; 27:48; 27:49; 27:50; 27:51; 27:52; 27:53; 27:54; 27:55; 27:56; 27:57; 27:58; 27:59; 27:60; 27:61; 27:62; 27:63; 27:64; 27:65; 27:66; 27:67; 27:68; 27:69; 27:70; 27:71; 27:72; 27:73; 27:74; 27:75; 27:76; 27:77; 27:78; 27:79; 27:80; 27:81; 27:82; 27:83; 27:84; 27:85; 27:86; 27:87; 27:88; 27:89; 27:90; 27:91; 27:92; 27:93; 27:94; 27:95; 27:96; 27:97; 27:98; 27:99; 28:1; 28:2; 28:3; 28:4; 28:5; 28:6; 28:7; 28:8; 28:9; 28:10; 28:11; 28:12; 28:13; 28:14; 28:15; 28:16; 28:17; 28:18; 28:19; 28:20; 28:21; 28:22; 28:23; 28:24; 28:25; 28:26; 28:27; 28:28; 28:29; 28:30; 28:31; 28:32; 28:33; 28:34; 28:35; 28:36; 28:37; 28:38; 28:39; 28:40; 28:41; 28:42; 28:43; 28:44; 28:45; 28:46; 28:47; 28:48; 28:49; 28:50; 28:51; 28:52; 28:53; 28:54; 28:55; 28:56; 28:57; 28:58; 28:59; 28:60; 28:61; 28:62; 28:63; 28:64; 28:65; 28:66; 28:67; 28:68; 28:69; 28:70; 28:71; 28:72; 28:73; 28:74; 28:75; 28:76; 28:77; 28:78; 28:79; 28:80; 28:81; 28:82; 28:83; 28:84; 28:85; 28:86; 28:87; 28:88; 28:89; 28:90; 28:91; 28:92; 28:93; 28:94; 28:95; 28:96; 28:97; 28:98; 28:99; 29:1; 29:2; 29:3; 29:4; 29:5; 29:6; 29:7; 29:8; 29:9; 29:10; 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GENESIS

The Book of Beginnings

AUTHOR: Scripture attributes the Torah/Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) to Moses (Jos. 1:7; Dan. 9:11-13; Lk. 16:29; Jn. 7:19; Ac. 26:22).

DATE: *Genesis* was likely written during the wilderness wandering (1446-1406 B.C.). The book itself covers about 2,400 years of human history. The first eleven chapters cover approximately two thousand years.

THEME: The Beginning

Genesis records the creation of the universe and of man (1-2). It introduces the design of man (1:26), the problem of sin (3-4), and God's judgment against sin (6-8). The book also shows us the development of the nations (10) and introduces us to the family through whom the Savior would come (11-50). Most important of all, *Genesis* begins to reveal God's plan to save man from his sin (3:15, 21; 12:1-3).

STRUCTURE: The book contains eleven units organized according to genealogies or histories.

1. The history of creation (1:1-2:3)
2. The generations of the heavens and of the earth (2:4-4:26)
3. The generations of Adam (5:1-6:8)
4. The generations of Noah (6:9-9:29)
5. The generations of the sons of Noah (10:1-11:9)
6. The generations of Shem (11:10-26)
7. The generations of Terah (11:27-25:11)
8. The generations of Ishmael (25:12-18)
9. The generations of Isaac (25:19-35:29)
10. The generations of Esau (36:1-37:1)
11. The generations of Jacob (37:2-50:26)

OUTLINE:

I. The Preliminaries: Four Great Incidents (1:1-11:9)

- A. The Creation (1:1-2:25)
- B. The Corruption (3:1-5:32)
- C. The Correction (6:1-9:29)
- D. The Confusion (10:1-11:9)

II. The Patriarchs: Four Great Individuals (11:10-50:26)

- A. Abraham (11:10-25:18)
- B. Isaac (25:19-26:35)
- C. Jacob (27:1-36:43)
- D. Joseph (37:1-50:26)

Biographical Outline

Creation (1)

Adam (2-5)

Noah (6-11)

Abraham (12-23)

Isaac (24-26)

Jacob (27-36)

Joseph (37-50)

Ch. 1-11	Ch. 12-50
Historical	Biographical
Human Race	Hebrew Race
Four Incidents	Four Individuals

Genesis: Chapter-By-Chapter

1. Creation: Summarized
2. Creation: Amplified
3. First Sin
4. Cain and Abel
5. Genealogy of Adam
6. Flood: Preparation
7. Flood: Culmination
8. Flood: Salvation
9. Covenant w/Noah
10. Genealogy of Nations
11. Tower of Babel
12. Abraham: Called
13. Abraham: Lot
14. Abraham: Rescues
15. Abraham: Covenant
16. Abraham: Ishmael
17. Abraham: Circumcised
18. Abraham: Intercedes
19. Abraham: Sodom & Gomorrah
20. Abraham: Abimelech
21. Abraham: Isaac Born
22. Abraham: Isaac Offered
23. Abraham: Sarah Dies
24. Isaac: Wife
25. Isaac: Sons
26. Isaac: Abimelech
27. Jacob: Blessing
28. Jacob: Bethel
29. Jacob: Wives
30. Jacob: Flocks
31. Jacob: Flees
32. Jacob: Wrestles
33. Jacob: Reunited
34. Jacob: Dinah
35. Jacob: Covenant
36. Jacob: Esau' Genealogy
37. Joseph: Sold
38. Judah and Tamar
39. Joseph: Potiphar
40. Joseph: Prison
41. Joseph: Pharaoh
42. Joseph: Buy Grain
43. Joseph: Benjamin
44. Joseph: Judah's Plea
45. Joseph: Revealed
46. Joseph: Jacob Arrives
47. Joseph: Goshen
48. Joseph: Sons Blessed
49. Joseph: Brothers Blessed
50. Joseph: Dies

Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

Chapter 1:1-2:3

The narrative of Genesis 1-2 proclaims God's dealings with His creation. Words like *cosmos* and *nature* cannot compare to theologically loaded terms like *creation*, *creature*, and *Creator*. This section packages historical and theological truths in a story with a covenantal emphasis.

Creation came into existence and was organized by God's will; it was neither accidental nor purposeless. These chapters show us God has a purpose for this world. It came into existence for that purpose, and He acts within it to further and fulfill His purpose.

Genesis 1-2 is not a scientific description. It is a theological declaration. Its information is historical in nature, but its purpose is spiritual and covenantal. These chapters answer the questions *Who*, *What*, and *Why*, but they do not explain *How*.

Believers can disagree on how to reconcile the narrative in this text with scientific evidence without discarding the biblical testimony of God's creative work or the historicity of the text. We must be careful of requiring a specific interpretation of God's methods in creation when the text might permit another view. Both modernist denials of the creation account and hyper-literalist interpretations of it are fairly recent theories.

Jesus expected Genesis 1-2 to be read as a harmonious account of the beginning. (Mt. 19:4-5)

The days of creation described in Genesis 1 are structured in a pattern of forming and filling.

Day One: Appearance of Light

Day Two: Sky/Firmament

Day Three: Dry Land and Plants

Day Four: Sun, Moon, and Stars

Day Five: Fish and Birds

Day Six: Land Animals and Man

Find the word **good** in Genesis 1. What do you notice about its appearance?

Look for the following actions in Genesis 1-2: **Create**, **Make**, **Speak**.

Find the word **blessed** in Genesis 1:1-2:3. What can we learn from its use here?

Applications

- 1) Worship
- 2) Trust
- 3) Stewardship
- 4) Respect for Mankind

Genesis 2 is not a second or parallel creation story. It is a more intense reflection on the significance of God's creative work.

God's creative work displays both aesthetic and ethical unity. It is beautiful as well as obedient. (cf. Ge. 1-2; Re. 21-22)

God commands His creation, but He speaks personally to human beings and engages them in dialogue. (cf. Ge. 3)

The Image of God

- SPIRITUAL – Man is a spiritual creature, made for the purpose of being with God. (Ge. 1:26; He. 2:10; Ecc. 3:11)
- ETHICAL – Man is a moral creature, made for the purpose of being like God. (Co. 3:10; 2Pe. 1:2-4)
- REPRESENTATIVE – Man is given dominion as God's steward over creation. (Ge. 1:26, 28; 2:15, 19-20)
- EMOTIONAL – Man has the capacity for emotion like his Creator.
- RATIONAL – Man has the capacity for rational thinking like his Creator.
- VOLITIONAL – Man has the capacity for making choices like his Creator.

The image of God is both an **actuality** (OT history) and an **aspiration** (NT exposition) of Man.

Are Adam and Eve historical persons or fictional characters?

- The later Old Testament writings regard Adam as historical. (1Chr. 1:1)
- The New Testament historian, Luke, regarded Adam as historical. (Lk. 3:38)
- Jesus assumed the historicity of Adam and Eve in His teaching. (Mt. 19:4-5; Mk. 10:6-8)
- Paul regarded the pair as historical. (Ro. 5:12-21; 1Co. 15:21-22, 45-49; 1Ti. 2:13-14)

Human gender is an expression of God's will, not His image. Both men and women are made in God's image. Their distinction in gender is part of His particular decree.

Adam is given a **profession** (2:15), **permission** (2:16), and a **prohibition** (2:17). What lessons might we learn from these features of God's earliest dealings with man?

Applications

- 1) The Importance of Work
- 2) The Basis of the Marriage Relationship
- 3) The Sufficiency of God's Creation

Some Conclusions Regarding the Image of God

1. The image of God in the human constitutes personhood. It is what makes us persons.
2. Persons as thinking, feeling, relating, and acting beings are so because of having been created by God in His very own image.
3. As persons we represent, reflect, and relate to God because we have been created in God's image. --James Borland

Outline

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| I. The Sin (1-8) | III. The Curse (14-19) |
| II. The Separation (9-13) | IV. The Consequences (20-24) |

Observations

Some have suggested the serpent may have been a literary symbol, but the Bible seems to indicate an actual serpent through which Satan worked to deceive Eve (3:1, 14; cf. 2Co. 11:3).

Satan attacked Eve's spiritual integrity in three ways: **Doubt** (1), **Denial** (4), **Desire** (5).

Chronologically Eve sinned first; theologically Adam introduced sin into the world (Ro. 5:12-21). He was the representative head of the human race with dominion over the natural world. His transgression had greater significance because of his unique position and responsibility.

God's order of headship was reversed in the events of the fall (Beast-Woman-Man-God).

Woman's subjection to her husband did not begin with human sin, but it was reinforced by the curse associated with it (cf. 1Co. 11:7-9; 1Ti. 2:11-14). Nevertheless, she is not placed in a spiritually inferior position. Her role is used by God to bring salvation to the world.

Questions

How did Satan's approach to Eve assault the three components of godliness: **Love of God** (1), **Fear of God** (4), and **Desire for God** (5)?

What were the immediate signs of Adam and Eve's guilt?

How did Adam and Eve attempt to deal with their guilt? What parallels do you observe in the ways men still deal with the guilt of sin?

Can you find the *three* kinds of death in this chapter?

Can you find the *grace* of God in His *judgment* of man's sin in this chapter?

Applications

- 1) The Seductive Serpent
- 2) The Shame and Sorrow of Sin
- 3) The Shadows of Salvation (3:15, 21)

Outline

- | | |
|---|--|
| I. Abel: Commended and Killed (1-8) | III. Cain: The Depraved Majority (16-24) |
| II. Cain: Confronted and Condemned (9-15) | IV. Seth: The Faithful Minority (25-26) |

Observations

Genesis repeatedly shows the patriarchs offering sacrifice to God. (13:4, 18; 22:13; 26:25; 33:20) The nature and function of these sacrifices is not stated, but they were clearly intended to worship and honor Jehovah, acknowledging His greatness and goodness. (12:7-8; 35:3) Burnt offerings were the most common patriarchal offerings. (cf. 22:6-9) The book of Job establishes a connection between patriarchal sacrifice and atonement. (Job 1:5; cf. Ge. 3:21)

Jehovah's response to Cain indicates several important principles about worship. First, my acceptance is not dependent on my brother's piety or lack thereof. Religious service is not a competition. Second, God is willing to accept everyone who approaches Him by faith. Abel's approval was due to the excellence of his sacrifice, not his personal merits. Third, God enables man to resist and overcome sin, but on our own strength, we will inevitably be defeated by it.

Questions

In what ways were Cain and Abel alike? In what ways were the brothers different?

How did their sacrifices differ in: 1) **Substance**, 2) **Quality**, and 3) **Motivation**? (cf. He. 11:4)

What specific attitudes do you see in Cain that led to his act of violence? (cf. Eph. 4:26-32)

Can you find the concept of "grace in the midst of judgment" in this story?

In what sense can Cain be "a fugitive and a vagabond" if he later had a family and built a city?

Applications

Lessons from Cain

- a. Do Your Own Work **2Co. 10:12-18**
- b. Beware of Sin **1Pe. 5:8-9**
- c. Don't Separate Social Duties & Divine Relationship **1Jn. 4:20-21**

Lessons from Abel

- a. Give God Your Best **Ma. 1:6-14**
- b. Act By Faith **He. 11:6**
- c. Live So Your Life Will Continue to Speak Beyond the Grave **2Ti. 4:6-8**

Outline

- I. The Genealogy of Adam (Through Seth to Noah) (5:1-32)
- II. The Depravity of Man and God's Decision to Bring Judgment (6:1-7)
- III. The Remnant of Grace (6:8)

Observations

1. Biblical genealogies are not intended to provide precise chronology.
(e.g. Shem - Ge. 5:32; 10:21; 11:10)
2. Biblical genealogies are not intended to be complete or exhaustive.
(e.g. Cainan - Ge. 11:12; Lk. 3:36; Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah - Mt. 1:8)
3. The firstborn sons listed in the Bible's genealogies are not necessarily the first children born.
(e.g. Seth - Ge. 4:25; 5:3; Abram - 11:26, 32; 12:4; cf. Ac. 7:4)
4. The Bible's genealogies were regarded as historical by inspired men, but their purpose is theological and national. (e.g. Enoch - Jude 14; Mt. 1:17)

Enoch's life was roughly one-third of his contemporaries named in the genealogy, yet his story stands out not as a tragedy but as a triumph. (5:21-24)

Questions

What is the significance of Adam's son (Seth) bearing his image? (5:3) Does this mean mankind no longer bore the image of God? (cf. 9:6)

What can we learn about Enoch from the New Testament references to him? (He. 11:5; Jude 14)

Assuming no gaps in the genealogies and twenty children borne by each father in the genealogy, how many people might have been on the earth by the time of Noah?

Assuming no gaps in the genealogies and a strictly chronological accounting, when would Methuselah have died?

What lessons can you learn from Noah finding grace in the eyes of Jehovah?

Applications

- 1) It is possible to walk with God in an ungodly environment. (5:22-24)
- 2) God saw the depravity of mankind, but He saw Noah individually, as a recipient of grace.
(cf. 2Ti. 2:19)

Outline

I. The Flood: Preparation (6) **II.** The Flood: Culmination (7) **III.** The Flood: Salvation (8)

Observations

We learn three things about Noah in 6:9. Noah was a *just* (righteous) man, referring to his standing before God (cf. Ge. 6:8; Ro. 4:1-8). Noah was *blameless*, referring to his standing before other men. And Noah *walked with God*. None of this suggests Noah received grace in consequence of his works or was sinless in his personal life. It does, however, indicate how profoundly the grace (favor) of God had changed his life. Not only was his spiritual standing changed, but his character and daily conduct were also.

Enoch walked with God and was taken (5:24). Noah walked with God and was left on earth and given a daunting task, though a doable one (6:9). Why was Enoch taken early to be with the Lord? Why was Noah not given the same opportunity? Jehovah had special plans and a unique role for each man. Both Enoch and Noah served God in his own generation (cf. Ac. 13:36).

Noah carefully obeyed the instructions God gave him, in spite of the magnitude and difficulty of his task (6:22; cf. He. 11:7).

Doing the numbers:

God apparently passed sentence on mankind 120 years before the Flood (6:3). Noah's first son (Japheth) was born 100 years before the Flood (5:32). When God gave instructions to Noah about the ark, Noah's sons may have already married (6:17). Noah probably had 70-120 years to build the ark and make necessary preparations for the deluge. Noah and his family were in the ark 1 year and 17 days or 377 days. The rains lasted 40 days and 40 nights (7:12), and water continued to rise thereafter, peaking after 150 days (7:24; 8:3).

Questions

Some suggest the Flood was only a local event, though catastrophic for the area. Others believe it covered the entire earth. What reasons can you find in the text for each view?

What did Noah do as soon as the ground was dry and his family left the ark?

How does Peter relate this story to our conversion experience and baptism? (1Pe. 3:21)

Applications

We must trust God and patiently live under the direction of His will, even when the task before us appears impossible or hopeless. God knows how to judge the wicked and deliver the godly!

Outline

- I. The PRECEPTS Given to Mankind After the Flood (1-7)
- II. The PROMISES Made by God After the Flood (8-17)
- III. The PERSISTENCE of Sin After the Flood (18-29)

Observations

The covenant God made with Noah after the flood was made with all mankind and every living creature (8-10). It was not part of the Mosaic dispensation nor was it set aside at the cross. God first announced His will for man (1-7) and then declared His promise and the sign of the covenant (8-17). There may have been rainbows before the flood, but they are infused with a new significance afterwards. God declares *He* would look at the rainbow (16) and *He* would remember His covenant (15). In this way, God relates to man and assures us of His enduring faithfulness to the promises He has made.

The story of Noah's drunkenness climaxes with the cursing of his grandson Canaan and the blessing of Shem and Japheth. The practical and prophetic implications of this climax are clear in the defeat of the Canaanites by the Israelites in Joshua's day. The interpretation of these verses which associate them with racial superiority are foolish and unbiblical. But why did Noah curse Canaan? Patriarchal blessings (and curses) had a prophetic element. Noah is not just stating his displeasure; he is announcing what will be. It is also possible, though not certain, Canaan participated in Noah's sin, perhaps by getting him drunk or ridiculing him.

The episode of Noah's drunkenness also appears to be intended to reinforce the survival of sin even after the flood (cf. 8:21). Even though no command against drunkenness has been recorded and no censure of his behavior is found in the story, Noah's nakedness and the implied associated shame is reminiscent of the fall in chapter three. This conclusion is strengthened by the righteous respect shown by Shem and Japheth for their father and in covering his nakedness, which is praised by Noah and is suggestive of atonement (cf. 3:21; Ha. 1:13).

Questions

- What instructions are given to mankind regarding the habitable earth? (1, 7)
- What information and instructions are given to mankind regarding the animals? (2-4)
- What instructions are given to mankind regarding human life? (5-6)
- Make a list of what God says about the sign of this post-flood covenant He made. (12-17)

Applications

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) The Responsibility of Human
Reproduction | 3) The Sanctity of Human Life |
| 2) The Stewardship of the Natural World | 4) The Respect for Patriarchs and People,
Even in Their Sin |

Outline

- I. The TABLE of NATIONS (10:1-32)
 - a. Japheth's Descendants (2-5) b. Ham's Descendants (6-20) c. Shem's Descendants (*Joktan*) (21-31)
- II. The TOWER of BABEL (11:1-9)
- III. The TRIBES of SHEM and TERAH (11:10-32)
 - a. Shem's Descendants (Peleg) (10-26) b. Terah's Descendants (27-32)

Observations

As you read the genealogy in chapter 10, remember: (1) The list refers not only to individuals but to clans, tribes, and nations; (2) The genealogies are incomplete, not an exhaustive list; (3) Some names do not easily correspond to modern nations since names, locations, and ethnicity change over time; (4) These chapters are arranged for literary value, not chronological order.¹

Theological significance of the Table of Nations suggested by Warren Wiersbe: (1) Jehovah God is the Lord of the nations, (2) All nations belong to the same human family, (3) God has a purpose for the nations to fulfill, and (4) God is concerned for all the nations.

Pay attention to the differences in the genealogies in chapters 5, 10, and 11. The latter two lists do not record deaths as does the former genealogy. The difference in age of paternity is also significant, indicating a sharp reduction in the average human lifespan.

All three sons of Terah, Abram, Nahor, and Haran, will be important in Genesis and will contribute indirectly to later biblical history. Haran's son Lot became a traveling companion of Abram and progenitor of the nations of Moab and Ammon (19:36-38). Haran's daughter Milcah became Nahor's wife and the mother of Bethuel, to whom would be born Rebekah and Laban (22:23; 24:24; 28:5). Abram, Nahor, and Haran, were not triplets. Comparison of the biblical data suggests Abram was probably the youngest but is listed first due to his importance in the scheme of biblical history (cf. 11:26, 32; 12:4; Ac. 7:4).

Questions

What is the historical and theological significance of the story of the Tower of Babel?

Why was God displeased with the Tower project at Babel? (cf. 11:4, 6)

What relationship do you see between God's activity at Babel and on Pentecost? (cf. Acts 2)

Why does the genealogy of Shem in chapter 11 only name the descendants of Peleg?

Draw a family tree of Terah's sons and their immediate descendants.

Review and summarize the characters, stories, and lessons learned in Genesis 1-11.

Applications

1) The Brotherhood of Mankind

2) God Remains in Charge Even When He Chooses Not to Directly Control

¹ Biblical genealogies often have literary or numerical patterns. There are lists of ten generations (e.g. Adam to Noah Ge. 5, Shem to Abraham Ge. 11, and Perez to David Ru. 4) and of fourteen generations (e.g. Mt. 1). The number seventy is also significant (cf. Ge. 46:27; Ex. 1:5; Lk. 10:1) and is the number of nations listed in Genesis 10. This does not discredit the historicity of these lists.

Outline

- I. The Call of Abram (12:1-9)
- II. Abram in Egypt (12:10-20)

Observations

It appears God first called Abram in Ur. After Terah's death in Haran, Abram continued his journey, perhaps after God renewed His call (11:31; 15:7; Jos. 24:2-3; Ne. 9:7; Ac. 7:2).

Abraham is constantly tested by God, challenged to trust Jehovah in the face of circumstances which seem to preclude what God had said would occur. Bruce Waltke notes, "The narrative is a study of Abraham in the school of faith." Abraham's experience reminds us that God is never content to leave us wherever we are. He continually calls us to greater trust in Him.

Though seven promises can be identified in 12:1-3 and an eighth can be found in 12:7, the Abrahamic promises which organize the rest of the Bible story are generally categorized under three headings: *Nation* (12:2; 15:5; 22:17), *Land* (12:7; 15:7), and *Seed/Blessing* (12:3b; 22:18).

Altars are very important in the life of Abram and other patriarchs. These altars demonstrated his faith and devotion to Jehovah, even though his trust was imperfect. Eventually the patriarch would grow to have such faith he would even offer his son as a sacrifice on a similar altar.

Abram and Sarai obviously prefer defilement to death, but this kind of rationalization is both unnecessary and inappropriate in advancing the claims of God's kingdom and purpose. Genesis highlights more than once the foolishness and impotence of human wisdom and work in contrast to the gracious wisdom and power of God (cf. 3:7; 16:2; 20:2; 26:7; 27:10; 30:38).

Abram's identification of Sarai as his sister, a half-truth which omitted mention of their marriage, is rightly to be regarded as a lie. (Some have tried to suggest otherwise, observing Sarai was protected by God and Abram was vindicated and enriched in the two stories and so suggest the patriarch did nothing wrong.) Even though something less than the whole truth can still be truthful and not a lie (e.g. 1Sa. 16:1-3), Abram's conduct was wrong, not least because he exposed Sarai to defilement to save his own life.

Questions

What are the seven elements of God's promise in 12:2-3?

What key words can you identify in the first paragraph? What can we infer from them?

Famines play an important part in lives of the patriarchs (12:10; 26:1; 41:56). How does God use each of the famines in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and his brothers' lifetimes?

Applications

- 1) God's Promise and Power to Bless in Spite of Man's Weakness
- 2) Even Great Men of God Make Mistakes and Fail to Trust Him as They Should

Outline

- I. Abram and Lot Separate (13:1-18)
- II. Abram Rescues Lot (14:1-24)

Observations

Even though Abram was Lot's elder, he gave the younger man first choice of new pastureland. Lot's choice of the best available land is viewed by many as disrespectful of his uncle, indicating a willingness to take advantage of the older man's generosity. The narrative neither praises nor condemns Lot's shrewdness, but the rest of the story will show that while Lot sought a temporal advantage without regard to the spiritual consequences, Abram trusted God and was rewarded in spite of the apparent inferiority of his available resources.

Lot's decision to move toward Sodom, and eventually into the city, does not change the fact God regarded him as righteous (2Pe. 2:6-8). But it does demonstrate that even righteous men sometimes make foolish decisions that harm their integrity, security, and family.

Genesis 14 reinforces the lesson learned in Egypt in chapter twelve. Those who bless Abram would be blessed, and those who cursed him (or his family) would be cursed, just as God promised (12:3).

Abram's ability to muster 318 trained servants who were born in his house testifies to the fantastic wealth this Semitic nomad possessed with the blessing of God.

Little is known of Melchizedek, but his Christological significance will be developed in the New Testament (He. 6:20-7:22). While there seems no reason to believe Melchizedek was a theophany, the independence of his priesthood and lineage is a foreshadowing of Christ. Like Jesus, Melchizedek serves as both priest and king and rules in righteousness and peace. His superiority to Abram is seen in his ability to bless and his willingness to receive tithes from the patriarch. Though Abram is great and instrumental in bringing the Messiah into the world, God's plan anticipates someone much greater (Jn. 8:58).

Questions

Why might Abram again "call on the name of the LORD" after returning from Egypt? (4)

How is Abram's faith and devotion to God demonstrated in these chapters?

Applications

- 1) God Rewards Righteous, Trusting Generosity
- 2) God's Men Are Courageous Against the Odds and Fight for Righteousness, not Rewards

Outline *(This structural outline is suggested by Bruce Waltke in Genesis, pp. 238-239.)*

- A1 God makes a promise to Abram using the formula “I am” (1)
 - B1 Abram apprehensively questions God using the rare title “Sovereign YHWH” (2-3)
 - C1 God reassures Abram by symbolic acts: the stars [Seed promise] (4-6)
- A2 God makes a promise to Abram using the formula “I am” (7)
 - B2 Abram apprehensively questions God using the rare title “Sovereign YHWH” (8)
 - C2 God reassures Abram by symbolic acts: torch & oven [Land promise] (9-21)

Observations

Genesis 15:6 is a theological observation by the narrator which joins the two encounters in the chapter and connects the themes of **seed** (15:1-5) and **land** (15:7-21) with the corresponding context (ch. 12-14 – Land; ch. 16-22 – Seed).

Just as God pronounced a time of 120 years prior to the flood (6:3), so He tells Abram his descendants will be afflicted for 400 years before the land promise is fulfilled (15:13). Bruce Waltke notes, “God’s people must learn to live with delay (2 Peter 3:8-10).”

God considered Abram’s belief as equivalent to meeting the requirements of the law. He did so on the basis of the patriarch’s faithful heart (Ne. 9:7-8), not on the basis of his works (Ro. 4:1-8). Genesis 15:6 becomes the decisive model for justification by faith in the NT writings (Ro. 4:20-25; Ga. 3:1-14). Though Abram’s obedience to God testifies to the presence of a living faith within him, thus justifying God’s reckoning him as righteous (Ja. 2:20-24), Abram was righteous on the basis of his trust in God, not on the basis of his deeds or rituals.

Questions

- What might be the significance of God’s promise in 15:1 in view of the events in chapter 14?
- What do you notice about the time element involved in the two halves of this chapter? (5, 12)
- What might you infer about Abram’s questions and complaint in vv. 2-3, 8 in light of v. 6?
- What does real, saving faith involve? What can we learn from v. 6 and its biblical exposition?
- What is significant about God’s presence symbolically passing between the animals alone?

Applications

- 1) Man is Justified by Grace thru Faith, not by Perfect Trust, Understanding, or Action
- 2) Complaints and Questions Can Exist in the Context of Faith

Outline

- I. Hagar and Ishmael (16)
- II. The Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision (17)

Observations

Genesis 16 demonstrates both Abram and Sarai's faith and their failure to properly discern God's will. Since the Lord had not yet named Sarai as the mother of Abram's future offspring, her suggestion to take Hagar as a concubine shows faith that God's promise to her husband could be fulfilled. Ultimately, however, the decision creates strife and trouble for everyone involved. Though well-intentioned, the episode with Hagar was an unfortunate attempt to help God fulfill His promise. It is a warning not to act presumptively but to wait patiently for God to act. It simultaneously encourages us to recognize God can bring forth good even from man's misguided attempts to contribute to His work in this world.

Circumcision confirmed the covenant God previously made (17:2), demonstrated the covenant loyalty of those who practiced it (17:9-10), was a sign of the covenant relationship (17:11), was a requirement for every male covenant member (17:12-14), and was a seal of the righteousness Abraham had by faith (15:6; Ro. 4:11; Ja. 2:20-24). Circumcision was not a condition for entering covenant (Ro. 4:11), a work of merit (Ro. 2:25-29), an empty symbol, an optional ritual, or a sacrament which made one righteous (Ga. 5:6).

Names are important to God and often signify character or promises in the Bible. Adam's name for his wife is significant (3:20) as is God's decree of a name for Hagar's son (16:11). Jesus gives names to some of His apostles (Mk. 3:16-17), and they continue this tradition (Ac. 4:36).

Questions

How do we balance the responsibility to act in faith with the need for patience in awaiting the fulfillment of God's purpose?

How might the unilateral (rather than conditional) nature of God's promise to Abram have led the patriarch and his wife to a different decision in chapter 16?

What do we learn about God's character and power from His attitude and promises to Hagar?

What do we learn about Abraham and faith from his obedience to God in chapter 17?

What are the similarities between circumcision and baptism? What are the differences?

Applications

- 1) We Must Act by Faith in Obeying God But Patiently Await Fulfillment of His Promises
- 2) The Importance of Signs and Symbols in God's Covenant

Outline

- I. Three Visitors Arrive (1-8)
- II. The Promise of a Son (9-15)
- III. Sodom's Judgment Revealed (16-21)
- IV. Abraham's Intercession for Sodom (22-33)

Observations

The three visitors to Abraham's tent include the LORD and two angels, though they all appeared to be men (2, 16). This appearance of Jehovah in physical form is called a *theophany*. It is generally believed such theophanies, which occur many times in the Old Testament, are appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ.

The Lord's disclosure that Isaac would be born and Sarah's reaction strongly suggests Abraham had said nothing about God's earlier revelation to him (cf. 17:15-19). The laughter she immediately regretted also implies she did not realize who they were entertaining.

God demonstrates His justice in judging Sodom by investigating their crimes (21), sending two witnesses (22), and responding compassionately to Abraham's intercession (23-32).

Bible examples of effective intercession share several common traits. The intercessor must be holy and blameless in light of the judgment being discussed. The effective intercessor appeals to God's name and character, not to the merits of the ones for whom he intercedes. Successful intercession is persistent. It is bold but humble.

Questions

What do you notice about Abraham's hospitality? How does he respond to his guests?

What did God know about Abraham (19)? What can we learn from this?

Why would God "go down" to investigate the situation in Sodom? Didn't He already know?

What other examples of intercession for those destined to destruction appear in the Bible?

Was Abraham successful in interceding for Sodom? Why or why not?

Applications

- 1) We Serve Christ by Serving Others (cf. Mt. 25:31-46; Eph. 6:4-8)
- 2) Our Perspective on God's Power Affects Our Ability to Embrace His Promises
- 3) Effective Intercession Appeals to the Name and Nature of God, Not the Merits of the One for Whom Intercession is Being Made

Outline

- I. Sodom's Depravity (1-11)
- II. Sodom's Destruction (12-29)
- III. Sodom's Durability (30-38)

Observations

As the chapter opens the identity of the two angels who approach Sodom is no longer concealed from the reader. However, Lot, like Abraham, appears not to recognize who his visitors are until their power is displayed in protecting the household.

Judgments of Lot's character and actions in this chapter must take into account Peter's three-fold affirmation of his righteousness (2Pe. 2:6-8). While the decision to move to Sodom proved disastrous for Lot and his family, he remained righteous by the grace of God. Lot's story is a testament both to the power of God's grace and to the destructive effects of carnal choices and a corrupt environment.

Lot's offer of his virgin daughters to a vicious mob of sodomites is reprehensible, but it highlights his perception of the event as a moral dilemma. The obligation to protect his guests was so great Lot was even willing to sacrifice his family to do so. This does not justify his behavior, but it does contextualize it. Hospitality was a serious responsibility, but nothing can change the fact that Lot's proposed alternative was evil.

Questions

What is the author emphasizing by the way he describes what happened in verse 4?

What evidence of Sodom's influence on Lot and his family do you see in this chapter?

How is God's mercy and goodness to Abraham and Lot manifested in this chapter?

What is significant about the birth of Lot's grandsons both in this chapter and in later history?

Applications

1) Lessons About Righteous Men

- a. A Righteous Man Can Make Bad Decisions
- b. A Righteous Man Can Be Influenced by a Bad Environment
- c. A Righteous Man Can Lose His Family

2) God's Mercy in Man's Moment of Weakness (cf. 19:16)

3) God's Faithfulness in Responding to Prayer (cf. 19:29)

Outline

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| I. Abraham and Abimelech (20:1-18) | II. Isaac is Born (21:1-7) |
| A. Transgression (1-2) | |
| B. Intervention (3-7) | III. Ishmael is Separated (21:8-21) |
| C. Confrontation (8-13) | |
| D. Restoration (14-18) | IV. Treaty with Abimelech (21:22-34) |

Observations

“In this history, the Holy Spirit presents to us a remarkable instance, both of the infirmity of man, and of the grace of God. It is a common proverb, that even fools become wise by suffering evil. But Abraham, forgetful of the great danger which had befallen him in Egypt, once more strikes his foot against the same stone; although the Lord had purposely chastised him, in order that the warning might be useful to him, throughout his whole life. Therefore we perceive, in the example of the holy patriarch, how easily the oblivion, both of the chastisements and the favors of God, steals over us. For it is impossible to excuse his gross negligence, in not calling to mind, that he had once tempted God; and that he would have had himself alone to blame, if his wife had become the property of another man. But if we thoroughly examine ourselves scarcely any one will be found who will not acknowledge, that he has often offended in the same way.” –John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis* Volume I, *s.v.* 20:2

Why does Abraham intercede for Abimelech? Abraham is functioning as a prophet. Though Abimelech behaves justly and Abraham does wrong, the latter is God’s chosen bearer of the covenant and of salvation promises. Like the Church, which often sins and falls short, Abraham must intercede on behalf of those outside the Covenant of Grace.

After great anticipation of the promised child’s birth, the event passes quickly in just a few verses. The real climax of Abraham’s life and faith comes when he is called to sacrifice his son.

Near eastern women typically nursed children until age 3, so Ishmael would have been about seventeen years old in Genesis 21.

Abraham and Sarah not only wait for God’s promises in faith, they respond to God’s choices by faith. By contrast, Hagar and Ishmael resist and reject God’s choices. Faith must embrace God’s promises *and* His choices respecting the covenant.

Though he is not the son of promise and mocks God’s covenant-bearer, Ishmael still enjoys God’s promises, protection, and provision (21:18-21). Even though he is not appointed to share in the redemptive benefits of the covenant, Ishmael is still blessed as Abraham’s offspring.

Questions

What does Abraham’s faithless, dishonest behavior indicate about God’s choosing him?

What does Abimelech’s rebuke of Abraham suggest about God’s moral law?

Application

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) God’s disciplining & restraining grace (ch.20) | 2) Exclusivity of the covenant (ch.21; cf. Gal. 4) |
|---|--|

Outline

- I. The Climatic Trial (1-10)
 - a. God's Sovereign Demand (1-2)
 - b. Abraham's Submissive Obedience (3-10)
- II. The Covenantal Triumph (11-19)
 - a. Isaac's Divine Deliverance (11-14)
 - b. God's Solemn Decree (15-19)
- III. Historical Note on Abraham's Extended Family (20-24)

Observations

The scene of Isaac's sacrifice, Mount Moriah, is a place of tremendous importance in redemptive history. It will be where propitiation is made after David's sinful census (1Chr. 21), where the Temple is ultimately built by Solomon (2Chr. 3:1), and so is also associated with Jesus' crucifixion.

Note the parallels between chapters 22 and 21: the surrender of a son, provisions for the journey, the threat of imminent death, intervention by the Angel of the LORD, fear, sight, promise, naming of the place of God's revelation and blessing.

The firstborn belonged to the LORD, as would later be codified in the Law of Moses (Exod. 13:1-2). Isaac is the firstborn, not in terms of birth-order (though he is Sarah's only child) but by inheritance.

The Jewish historian Josephus says Isaac was twenty-five at this time (*Antiquities* 1.13.2). We cannot know for sure, but he was old enough to carry a considerable amount of wood up a hill.

Radical obedience is both the cost and consequence of saving faith in God. Those who regard the Lord's demand in Genesis 22 as extraordinary or inconsistent with NT requirements should re-consider this episode in light of Jesus' instructions in Luke 14:25-35.

This chapter is full of types and shadows pointing ahead to Christ. Explore these parallels in your own study of the text: only son (22:2; John 3:16), innocent dying at the hands of the guilty, 3 days, God will provide a lamb (22:8; John 1:29), willing obedience (22:6-7; John 10:17-18), a father's love, anticipation of resurrection (22:5; Mark 8:31), return to life after death (Heb. 11:19; Acts 2:24), the promise to bless all nations (22:18; Gal. 3:28-29)

Questions

What does it say about our view of God that we would be offended if He demanded our child's life?

What does it say about God that He would fulfill that which He did not require Abraham to complete?

Application

(1) The Relationship of Faith and Works, (2) The Reality of Faith that Works, (3) The Requirement for Faith to Work, and (4) The Radicality of Faith at Work

The Satisfaction of God's Complete, Radical, and Righteous Requirement in the Sacrifice of Christ

Outline

- I. Sarah's Death and Burial (23)
- II. Isaac and Rebekah (24)

Observations

Abraham is living in Beersheba as chapter 22 closes, but Sarah dies in Hebron to the north at the beginning of chapter 23. It may be the patriarch's holdings are distributed, some in the south and some in central Canaan, and that Abraham and Sarah are not staying in the same place at this time. But it is also possible Abraham moved back to Hebron during the years between chapters 22 and 23. Regardless notice the emphasis that Sarah died "in the land of Canaan." This is a key concept in chapter 23.

The negotiations between Ephron and Abraham involve background matters relating to Hittite culture. Abraham would be responsible for taxes on the property if he owned the entire field and not just the cave. The word translated *give* was used as a commercial term for selling. Ephron may have expected negotiation from Abraham, but the patriarch immediately paid the full price. The conversation likely meant something a little different than the way westerners assume as they read it.

Notice Abraham's concerns and confidence: he wanted Isaac to have the right mate (2-4), he wanted Isaac to stay focused on God's promises and plan (5-8), and he trusted God would bless the efforts to obtain a bride for Isaac (7).

Rebekah is portrayed as a kind, hard-working, and God-fearing young woman. Watering ten camels that just completed a long, desert journey is no small task! She is both willing and ready to accept and to do God's will, even if means leaving her home and family forever (cf. Gen. 2:24).

Abraham's extended family did not worship God in a pure manner (cf. 31:19), but the text clearly indicates their faith in Yahweh (31), their recognition of His divine will (50), and their willingness to sacrificially submit to it (51, 54-60).

Questions

In what way might the cave of Machpelah be a type of first-fruits of God's promise to Abraham? In what way does its use as a burial site anticipate the fulfillment of God's promises (cf. Heb. 11:13-16)?

Why would Abraham be adamant that Isaac not take a Canaanite wife? What might be learned from it?

In what ways is the sovereignty of God demonstrated in the choice of Rebekah to be Isaac's wife? How do the participants acknowledge His sovereignty and submit to His revealed providence?

Application

We Must Trust God to Faithfully Provide for His People, Both Materially (23) and Relationally (24)

Essential Spiritual Preparation for Finding a Spouse: (1) Prayer, (2) Trust, (3) Uncompromising Commitment to a Spiritual Ideal

It is More Important to Love the Person You Marry than to Marry the Person You Love

Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

Chapters 25-26

Outline

- | | |
|--|---|
| I. Abraham's Offspring by Keturah (25:1-6) | V. Esau Sells His Birthright (25:29-34) |
| II. Abraham's Death (25:7-11) | VI. Promises Given to Isaac (26:1-5) |
| III. The Genealogy of Ishmael (25:12-18) | VII. Isaac and Abimelech (26:6-33) |
| IV. Isaac & Rebekah Have Twins (25:19-28) | VIII. Esau's Wives (26:34-35) |

Observations

Sarah died when Abraham was 137, and the patriarch lived another 38 years (17:17; 23:1; 25:7). It is uncertain whether Abraham married Keturah before or after Sarah died. Some object that Abraham could not have fathered children once he was so old, but we do not know how God enabled the birth of Isaac, and some regenerative effects enabling procreation may have remained with Abraham.

It is important to note what is and is not significant about Abraham's other offspring through Hagar and Keturah. These sons are a fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham (12:2; 15:5), and nations will descend from them, which also fulfills the original promises (17:6). But these sons are *not* the promise-bearers. The covenant would ultimately be preserved and fulfilled through Isaac's line. Thus, not all who are descended from Abraham belong to Abraham (Rom. 9:6-13). The same was true of national Israel and is true of the visible covenant community today (Rom. 2:28-29; 11:5-6, 16-24). Union with Christ is through faith, not merely by genealogy (Gal. 3:6-7, 26-29).

Notice the contrast between the amount of space in the narrative given to Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph in contrast to the very brief episodes in which Isaac is a central character. This disparity does not indicate Isaac was unimportant, but it does highlight the greater significance of the lives of the three others in terms of redemptive history and the outworking of God's covenant promises.

It is almost certain that *Abimelech* is a royal or dynastic name for the king of Gerar and that the Abimelech in chapter 26 is not the same individual as in chapters 20-21 since between 57 and 97 years have passed (21:8, 22; 25:26; 26:34).

Esau's hairiness at birth may be due to *hypertrichosis*, a condition which apparently affected his physical appearance throughout his life and which plays a major role in chapter 27.

Questions

What does the Bible indicate about Esau's spiritual character and values (25:29-34; 26:34-35; 27:41; 28:6-9; Heb. 12:16-17)? Was his character the basis for God not choosing him (Rom. 9:10-18)?

What does the Bible indicate about Jacob's spiritual character and values during the first half of his life (25:26, 29-34; 27:1-29; 30:37-43)? Was his character the basis for God choosing him (Rom. 9:10-18)?

Application

The Distinction Between God's General Goodness and His Covenantal Grace

The Dangers and Duties of Generational Heritage (Repeating Lies and Re-Digging Wells)

Outline

I. Isaac's Plan (1-4)

a. Rebekah's Plot (5-13)

i. Jacob's Perjury (14-29)

ii. Esau's Passion (30-40)

b. Esau's Plot (41)

II. Rebekah's Plan (42-46)

Alternate Outline

I. Isaac Declines (1-4)

II. Rebekah Devises (5-13)

III. Jacob Deceives (14-25)

IV. Esau Despairs (30-40)

Observations

Though the text does not say explicitly, it appears Jacob and Esau are 77 years old and Isaac 137 when this story occurs (25:26; 47:9; 41:46, 29-30; 45:11; 29:20, 30; 30:25; 31:41). Whether due to failing eyesight, his nearness to the age of Ishmael's death (25:17), or perhaps an unspecified illness, Isaac believes he will die soon. But he lived many more years, finally dying when he was 180 years old (35:28).

Isaac's clear preference for Esau is in spite of the older son's carnality (25:29-34) and distressing marriages (26:34-35) and suggests a troubling lack of discernment in assessing his son. On the other hand, Rebekah's preference for Jacob is in spite of his equally troubling character and selfish nature. She may have felt justified in her attitude in light of God's pre-birth prophecy, but the favoritism of both Isaac and Rebekah bears bitter fruit in Jacob and Esau's lives and in the lives of their grandchildren.

Rebekah attempts to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise by her own means, much as Abram and Sarai did in chapter 16. As a result Jacob is forced to leave home penniless, an heir of his father's great wealth but wandering into the wilderness with only the staff in his hand (32:10). Though God fulfills His promise to set Jacob over his brother, the Lord does not honor Rebekah and Jacob's dishonesty and chastens them by means of this separation. Rebekah almost certainly dies while Jacob is in Padan-Aram (cf. 49:31).

Jacob's deceiving his father by using the name of Yahweh (27:20) is one of the most offensive examples of taking God's name in vain in the entire Bible. Jacob lied, exploited, and blasphemed, yet God remained faithful to His promises and graciously cared for Jacob and worked to eventually convert and further sanctify him. The mercy and goodness of God in Jacob's life should greatly encourage the saints and caution us against ever thinking God's faithfulness is the result of man's goodness.

This is one of many dramatic examples in Scripture of God working not only in spite of and around but even *through* humanity's wickedness to bring about His sovereignly decreed purpose (cf. Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:28).

Questions

What might Isaac and Rebekah's behavior suggest about their awareness of and attitude toward God's promise and prophecy regarding Jacob and Esau's futures (cf. 25:23)?

What objection does Jacob initially have to his mother's plan to deceive Isaac? What does this indicate about his character at this point in his life?

Application

The Danger of the Self-Righteous Justification of Unrighteous Methods

The Sovereignty of God over Human Weakness, Willfulness, and Wickedness

Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

Chapters 28:1-29:30

Outline

- | | |
|---|---|
| I. Jacob is Sent to Laban (28:1-5) | IV. Jacob Visits Laban (29:1-14) |
| II. Esau Weds Ishmael's Daughter (28:6-9) | V. Jacob Works for and Marries Leah and Rachel (29:15-30) |
| III. Jacob's Dream at Bethel (28:10-22) | |

Observations

Jacob's dream at Bethel is the first of seven divine revelations to the patriarch (cf. 31:3; 32:1, 22-32; 35:1, 9-15; 46:1-4). The central promises of the Abrahamic covenant are now given directly to Jacob (28:13-14) along with God's assurance He will personally be with Jacob and fulfill what He has promised (28:15). The episode fills Jacob with reverence and fear, and though he does not yet clearly manifest the character of a believer, this marks the beginning of his external relationship with and conformity to God's revealed purpose (28:16-22).

Jacob's vow at Bethel has been understood by commentators in different ways. Some see the vow as a sign of Jacob's continuing carnality and an attempt to bargain with God for blessing. But it is likely Jacob is expressing commitment to God and trust in His promises. Jacob may be acknowledging the word of Yahweh and affirming his willingness to serve the Lord if, indeed, God's word proves true.

Jacob's twenty year sojourn in Paddan-aram under Laban's authority is a time of discipline. He is chastised for his sins in exploiting his brother and father and finds himself exploited by Laban in much the same way. These years are part of the wilderness motif which appears regularly in redemptive history. The wilderness is where God's people are disciplined and tested, where covenant relationships are made or develop, and where the people of God are drawn closer to and learn to trust Him.

Jacob is unable to pay the bride price for Laban's daughter Rachel, so he gladly volunteers for seven years of indentured servitude as compensation for his bride. That this seems extreme to us says more about the depravity and deficiencies of our own cultural views of marriage than about the historical situation. In the end Jacob serves fourteen years as Laban's slave, receiving no other compensation than his room, board, and two brides.

Jacob honors his commitment to Leah, but the circumstances leading to their marriage create significant tension in their home and rivalry between the two sisters. Like Jacob at one time, Laban is concerned only for his material welfare—in this case, providing for his daughter's future—not for the spiritual well-being, emotional health, or happiness of his daughters.

Questions

What parallels do you see between Jacob's exploitation of his brother and father and Laban's exploitation of Jacob? How does God use Laban's sin as an act of divine punishment and justice?

How does the Lord use "wilderness experiences" in Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Israel, David, and Elijah's lives? How does Jesus' temptation in the wilderness fit the same pattern? Can you see similar experiences in your own life God has used to further sanctify you?

Application

Reaping What We Have Sown (i.e. Divine Justice and Chastening for Sin cf. Heb. 12:5-11)

Submitting to God's Discipline and to the Demands of Hardship (cf. 1Pet. 2:18-25)

Outline

- I. Jacob's Children Multiply (29:31-30:22)
- II. Jacob's Flocks and Herds Multiply (30:23-43)

Observations

Jacob spends a total of 20 years serving Laban in Padan Aram. The first seven years he works as a single man. Then he marries both Leah and Rachel and serves another seven years to complete the payment of the bride price. The last six years Jacob works as a partner in Laban's business, being paid with livestock for his service. Eleven of Jacob's sons are borne in the second period of seven years. This is certainly possible since four women are giving birth during this time and their pregnancies certainly overlap. Leah gives birth to six boys and a girl. (The time of Dinah's birth is uncertain, probably at the end of the seven years but perhaps at the beginning of the final six years.) But it should also be remembered these time periods are approximate, not exact, and the focus of the text is on God's redemptive purpose, not narrating a precise chronology. We can be confident the history recorded is accurate without forcing it to be more precise than it intends to be.

The names of the children borne to Leah, Rachel, and their handmaids have special significance. The meanings associated with the various names are based more on the similarity of sounds than strict definitions or etymology. Notice how the names reflect the larger struggle and personal perspectives of the sisters.

There is some uncertainty whether Laban removed the speckled, spotted, and dark animals from his herds in order to give them to Jacob or to prevent Jacob from claiming them as his wages. In either case, it is later apparent Laban changed the terms of Jacob's compensation many times (31:38-41). Commentators also disagree over Jacob's attempt to manipulate the breeding of the flocks by the use of striped sticks. It seems most likely this is merely a superstitious attempt by the schemer to weight the odds in his favor. Once again God blesses Jacob not *because* of his greed and manipulation but *in spite* of it.

The absence of any reference to prayer, sacrifice, or worship in this period of Jacob's life is stunning. He is physically, sexually, and financially potent, but he is spiritually impotent and appears to take for granted the Lord's goodness in his life. Both Abraham and Isaac intercede for their barren wives, but there is no indication of intercession or spiritual leadership by Jacob for his family at this time. Nevertheless, the Lord continues to sanctify Jacob and work for the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and for Jacob's ultimate salvation.

Questions

Learn the names of each of Jacob's wives and concubines and the children associated with each mother.

What difference do you notice between the names of Leah's first three sons and the fourth (Judah)? What do the names indicate about her faith in God and changes in her attitude throughout the rivalry with her sister?

How might the fertility of the unloved and the barrenness of the loved be part of Jacob's sanctification?

How do different parties superstitiously attempt to manipulate elements in these chapters? What do you notice about God's response to it? What can we learn from the contrast between superstition and God's sovereignty?

Application

The Danger and Disaster of Making Family, Performance, or Status an Idol

The Contrast between Sovereign Providence and Superstitious Practices

Outline

- I. The PLAN to Leave Laban (31:1-21)
- II. The PURSUIT of Jacob & Co. (31:22-42)
- III. The PEACE Between Laban and Jacob (31:43-55)

Observations

The text notes three factors in Jacob's decision to leave Padam-Aram and return to Canaan. First was the negative attitude and criticism of Laban's sons (1). Second was the deterioration of Laban's own attitude toward Jacob (2). Third was the direct revelation and instruction of the Lord (3). God directly intervenes and asserts His authority in Jacob's life in this chapter as never before. The increase of Jacob's wealth in the last six years was not a result of his cunning or skill but of the Lord's sovereign blessing (10-12). God reminded Jacob of the vow he made at Bethel and claimed the right to its fulfillment (13). The Lord is no longer merely making promises to Jacob; He is giving commands.

Though we cannot know for certain, many scholars believe Laban had adopted Jacob as his son. This raises the question whether Jacob's position and prosperity threatened the inheritance of Laban's sons and may explain why they and their father developed a negative attitude toward Jacob. Leah and Rachel clearly indicate their conviction the inheritance rightly belonged to them (14-16), perhaps because they were older than their brothers or because their husband had been adopted as Laban's heir. In any case, rightful ownership is clearly an issue for all of the major characters in this chapter.

Laban's intention in pursuing Jacob was clearly hostile as indicated both by God's admonition to him (29) and by his aggressive indictment of his son-in-law (26-30). Laban's selfish and violent nature is on full display in his confrontation with Jacob. Whether Laban had a legal claim to Jacob's family belongings is uncertain (though some extra-biblical evidence may indicate it), but the Lord clearly intervenes in order to protect Jacob from Laban's wrath.

There may have been multiple reasons for Rachel's decision to steal Laban's *teraphim* (household gods). First, the household gods discovered in archaeological digs are most often nude females with accentuated sexual features and were associated with fertility. Rachel clearly desired more children (30:24) and may have believed the gods could assure or assist it. Second, archaeological evidence indicates possession of the household gods was related to inheritance. As noted above, ownership and division of Laban's possessions is a major issue in the chapter, and Rachel may have hoped to secure Jacob's legal rights by taking the idols. Third, the simplest and most obvious reason for Rachel's theft may have been religious attachment. The household gods were a pagan attempt to secure blessing for one's household. Jacob's family knows Yahweh but is corrupted by syncretistic idolatry. Their idolatry will eventually be repented of at their return to Bethel (35:2-4).

Questions

How does the Lord's interaction with Jacob change in this chapter? What does God's instruction to leave Padan-Aram after 20 years of hardship indicate about the Lord's purpose for Jacob?

Can you think of another Bible character God sent into the wilderness to work as a shepherd and then called out of the wilderness for a new role in His plan?

Application

The Sovereignty of God's Timing and the Importance of Waiting on the Lord

The Sufficient Security of God's Providence

Outline

- I. God's PRESENCE on Jacob's Journey (32:1-2)
- II. Jacob's PUBLICATION to Esau of His Return to Canaan (32:3-8)
- III. Jacob's PRAYER for Protection and Mercy (32:9-12)
- IV. Jacob's PRESENT TO ESAU to Win Favor (32:13-21)
- V. Jacob's PROSTRATION Before God By Physical Submission (32:22-32)

Observations

This chapter vividly demonstrates that the key to true strength and blessing is submission to God. Throughout his life Jacob sought to advance himself by his own strength and cunning. He pursued every advantage for himself without truly or completely trusting God. Now Jacob finds himself in a battle he cannot win, facing an adversary he cannot overcome. First he learns that Esau is approaching with 400 men. This is not a welcoming party. It appears certain Esau is coming to kill him. Jacob makes what preparations he can then turns to the Lord in prayer. That night, a second opponent confronts Jacob, this one a stealthy attacker who wrestles with Jacob all night. All of his life Jacob has wrestled with God, fighting against the covenant plan and sovereign authority of God. Now he finds himself vanquished, disabled and unable to stand on his own, much less fight. The experience is a symbol of Jacob's entire life, and he is reduced to tears and repentance by it (Hos. 12:3-4).

Jacob's prayer in this chapter clearly acknowledges (1) Jacob's covenantal heritage, (2) Yahweh's authoritative command to him, (3) Yahweh's promise of personal blessing, (4) Jacob's own unworthiness, (5) God's kindness and faithfulness, (6) God's sovereign power to protect and deliver, (7) Jacob's concern for his family more than for himself, and finally (8) God's covenantal purpose and promise. This is a prayer very unlike the vow Jacob first made in chapter 28 at Bethel, but it is closely related to it. God has kept His word to Jacob, and the patriarch recognizes more than ever before God's sovereignty, mercy, faithfulness, and goodness in his life.

The Lord sent Jacob to Padan-Aram to discipline and humble him. Now God brings him to the Jabbok to break and re-make him. When Jacob is disabled on the bank of the river, he confesses his name and what it says about his character (27-28). The now penitent Jacob is then given a new name, one signifying his lifelong struggle with God and the lesson he has finally learned. The only hope of success lies in utter dependence on God.

Questions

Compare Jacob's prayer in verses 9-12 to his experience at Bethel in chapter 28 and also to God's revelation in chapter 31. What do you notice about Jacob's attitude and affirmations that indicates a shift in his thinking?

How is Jacob's fight with the "man" in verses 24-31 a historical metaphor for Jacob's life to this point?

What evidence do you see in the text that Jacob's opponent was more than just a man?

Where else in Genesis and the rest of the Bible do you see people having their names changed as part of their experience with God and as a symbol of some aspect of their walk with the Lord?

Application

The Sanctifying Experience of Pain and Fear: Clinging to God When We Are Unable to Do Anything Else

Outline

I. The Reunion with Esau (33)

II. The Rape of Dinah (34)

Observations

Though the text does not describe what Esau has been doing during Jacob's twenty year sojourn in Padan Aram, it is evident he has relocated to Mt. Seir and is the leader of an impressive clan (32:3-6; 33:1, 9; 36). Neither does Genesis explain the dramatic change in Esau's attitude toward his brother. Did the passage of time soften Esau's heart, as Rebekah hoped it would (27:42-45)? Did the Lord miraculously intervene as He did with Laban (cf. 31:24)? (This seems unlikely.) Did Jacob's extravagant gifts change his brother's murderous intent (32:13-20)? We cannot be certain. In any event, it seems unlikely Esau brought 400 men only to welcome Jacob home.

There is no indication Jacob ever visited Esau in Seir, though it is certainly possible he did so. Regardless, if Jacob never visited Seir, his statement to Esau (33:14) was not, apparently, deceptive or intentionally dishonest. The Book of Genesis has freely acknowledged Jacob's prior deceptions, so there would be no reason to obscure it in this case. Jacob may have had a change of mind, for any number of reasons one could propose, or his original statement may not have been intended to indicate a plan to go to Seir. Either way, Jacob does not go directly to Seir and never settles there, if he ever visited the territory at all.

Dinah would have been between 14-16 years old when the events in chapter 34 took place (30:21; 31:41; 37:2). Her decision to visit the city, evidently unchaperoned, at this age and unmarried was a poor decision that may indicate a lack of spiritual leadership in Jacob and Leah's home. Likewise, her interest in the Canaanite women stands in marked contrast to the negative assessment of them earlier in the narrative (e.g. 24:1-4; 26:34-35; 28:1). It may also be appropriate to see a thematic parallel between this episode and the much earlier event described in 6:1-2. While Dinah's behavior in no way justifies or mitigates Shechem's crime, it stands as a reminder of the danger in being too close to the world (cf. Exod. 23:23-33; Psa. 106:34-39; 2Cor. 6:14-18).

While we ought to be cautious in assigning blame to Jacob in chapter 34, his response to the entire episode moves from (perhaps inappropriate) passivity (34:5) to openly expressed fear (as opposed to faith; 34:30). This is not to justify the wicked and violent response of Jacob's sons, but this will not be the last time a father's passivity in response to the sexual assault of his daughter provokes violence by a son (cf. 2Sam. 13). When tragedy and sin strike a family, what children need are loving, firm leadership, not fear and indecision.

Jacob remembered the violence of Simeon and Levi, and it brought a patriarchal curse upon both men and their descendants (49:5-7). Their subsequent history fulfills Jacob prophetic curse as both tribes are scattered among the rest of the nation. God turns Levi's curse and dispersion into a blessing, however, assigning to him the priesthood and a visible presence within the nation (cf. Exod. 32:25-29). This grace further demonstrates God's sovereignty over sin and judgment and of His ability to bring good from evil (cf. Rom. 8:28).

Questions

How is Jacob's physical position in the caravan as they meet Esau in contrast to his general position throughout life prior to that time? What might this suggest about a change in his heart? (cf. 32:16, 18, 20, 21)

What is the most likely explanation for Esau's wealth and the territory he now controls? (cf. 27:39-40)

Not the different motives behind the main characters' actions in chapter 34: Dinah (34:1)? Shechem (34:2-4, 11-12, 19)? The men of the city (34:20-24)? Israel's sons (34:13-17, 25-31)?

Application

The Beauty of Reconciliation and Peace – Are we seeking to be peacemakers among our brethren?

The Danger of Flirtation with the World and the Evil that Follows From It

Outline

I. The Renewal of Covenant at Bethel (35)

II. The Genealogy of Esau (36)

Observations

These chapters conclude the section of Genesis focused on Jacob's life. Though he continues to live for many years (and appears periodically to the end of the book), the narrative shifts focus to Joseph in chapter 37. The years of Jacob's life can be determined from the information given in the text: Birth to 77 yrs. at home in Beersheba with his parents; 77-97 in Padan Aram with Laban and his growing family; 97-130 yrs. in Canaan with his sons and wives; 130-147 yrs. in Goshen (Egypt) with his family (cf. 25:26; 29:20, 30; 30:25; 31:41; 41:46, 29-30; 45:11; 47:9, 28).

Renewal is the central theme of chapter 35, though the chapter includes Deborah and Rachel's deaths and Benjamin's birth. God initiates the covenant renewal (35:1). Repentance is necessary preparation for the renewal (35:2-4). The process is guided and protected by the sovereign God (35:5-7). The renewal includes divine revelation reaffirming (publicly) Jacob's covenant name and the Abrahamic promises (35:9-13). The renewal is marked by worship (3), memorial (14), and prayer (15).

*(It is probably necessary at this point to note I am **not** advocating "Covenant Renewal Worship" as formally advocated by that name in some Reformed circles; I am merely suggesting the rhythm of Divine Initiation—Repentance—Divine Word—Prayer & Memorial is a pattern that can help us in thinking through the experience of corporate worship.)*

Reuben's adultery with his father's concubine Bilhah serves two primary purposes. First, it fits within the larger pattern of the Canaanization of Israel's family, justifying God's later act to relocate the family to Egypt. Second, it provides historical context for Jacob's decision not to assign the position of firstborn to his first son born (49:3-4; 1Chr. 5:1-2). As it turns out, the eleventh son received the firstborn blessing (49:22-26).

Chapter 36 is important for a reason not immediately obvious to some readers. It demonstrates a larger truth about the entire Genesis narrative, namely, that the central character in Genesis (as in all Scripture) is God and the central theme is His glory and faithfulness. How does chapter 36 prove this? It is a chapter that has no obvious, practical significance. It is completely superfluous if Genesis is about man or how man ought to live. It is also largely irrelevant in an Israelite context. If Genesis is merely intended as a history of the Hebrews, why record Esau's genealogy, especially since it establishes the superiority of the Edomites from the standpoint of monarchy and nationalism (cf. 36:31)? Genesis 36 helps us understand this book, like every other book of Scripture, is about God, first and foremost. It magnifies His covenant faithfulness. Yahweh is a God who keeps His promises (17:6; 27:40). He is a God who does good to all mankind, even those who are not elect unto salvation, even those who do not yield in obedience to Him (cf. 25:23; Rom. 9:10-13). If you read Genesis or any part of the Bible assuming it is about you and me, you are missing the main point of the story.

Questions

How might the central features of 35:1-15 shape our approach to God in corporate worship?

Which three characters die in chapter 35? Reflect briefly on the implications of each character's death.

Application

The Central Features of Covenant Renewal/Re-affirmation and their Import for God's People

The Faithful God Who Keeps His Promises

Outline

I. Joseph's Exaltation: By Jacob's Favor & By Dreams (1-11)

II. Joseph's Degradation (12-36)

Observations

It appears Joseph was born when Jacob was 91 years old (30:22-25). Since Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery, Jacob would have been 108 at the time (37:2). Isaac died and was buried when Jacob was 120 years old (25:26; 35:28). Therefore, the account of Isaac's death is presented out of chronological order in order to advance the narrative to Joseph. Joseph was already in Egypt when his grandfather died.

Joseph's dreams may have been the product of an arrogant, teenage mind, or they may have been revelations from heaven. What they predict is certainly fulfilled twenty years later in Egypt, though the text never attributes them directly to the Lord. Joseph was almost certainly unwise, and may have been less than humble, in the way he disclosed these dreams to his family, but the historical circumstances should be kept in mind. How hard would it be for a favored, teenage son to be discerning and humble under such conditions? Jacob's faults as a father are certainly blamable for much of the ensuing strife, though in no way justifying his sons' sins.

The strife, hatred, and violence in this chapter are even more abhorrent in view of the family relationship and covenantal context in which it takes place. The Hebrew word for *brother(s)* appears twenty-one times in the chapter. The values and behavior of Abraham's offspring highlight the graciousness of God's election and covenant faithfulness. The family has not been chosen for their faithfulness, nor are their promised privileges a right won by moral virtue. Jacob's children are violent and hateful, just like their Canaanite neighbors. As in the story of Abraham (12:10-20; 20:1-18) and Isaac (26:6-11), one might even suppose their conduct would be reprehensible to the pagans living around them (cf. 1Cor. 5:1). But rather than pointing a self-righteous finger at Jacob's offspring, we should remember our own state when God graciously chose us and saved us (Titus 3:3-7).

Whether Joseph's dreams are of divine origin (as they seem to be), his brothers certainly understood them to have predictive value. But like other unrighteous characters in the Bible story (e.g. Saul, 1Sam. 20:30-31; Jonah, 1:1-3; Jewish and Roman rulers in Jesus' day, Psa. 2:1-3), they resist what God has revealed. They are determined to prevent fulfillment of those dreams by acting violently against Joseph (37:18-20). Scripture both indicates and illustrates the resistance of unbelievers to *known truth* (cf. Rom. 1:18-21). Unbelief and evil is not the result of ignorance; it is the suppression of truth which God has clearly revealed to all.

Ishmaelites and *Midianites* are used interchangeably in verse 28, as in Judges 8:22-24. This can be explained on, at least, two grounds: first, the likely intermarriage of the two nomadic people groups, and second, the likelihood that *Ishmaelite* had become more a description of nomadic tribes than of a particular ethnic group.

Pay attention to the development of Judah as this final section of Genesis unfolds (chapters 37-50). Also note the contrasts between Judah and Joseph as well as Judah and Reuben as the narrative continues.

Questions

What three factors can you find in verses 1-11 that stir the jealousy and hatred of Joseph's brothers against him?

What similarity is there between Jacob's deception of Isaac (27:16) and Jacob's deception by his sons (37:31)?

Application

The Danger of Parental Favoritism

The Providence of God Amid Human Sinfulness

Outline

I. Judah's Impurity in the Land of Promise (38)

II. Joseph's Purity in the Land of Bondage (39)

Observations

Judah's two oldest sons are outstandingly wicked. Though Er's specific crimes are unknown, Onan's corrupt character is demonstrated in his willingness to have sex with Tamar but not to fulfill his duty to his brother and family. Sadly the daughter-in-law who dresses as a prostitute and deceives his father-in-law into committing incest is the most "righteous" character in the entire story. Nevertheless, Tamar is mentioned (along with four other women associated with scandal or impurity) in Matthew's genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:1-18) as a reminder of God's redemptive grace and of His sovereignly working all things together for good (Rom. 8:28).

It was dangerous to refuse Mrs. Potiphar's proposition, and Joseph subsequently paid dearly for his commitment to purity. But in the long run, the Lord honors Joseph's obedience and works for His servant's greater advantage and blessedness. Resisting sin and refusing to compromise with the world may be costly in the short-term, but obedience to God is always more valuable and rewarding in the long-term.

Joseph's faith can only be understood in light of the Bible's consistent teaching that faith is a gift of God (Deut. 30:6; 1Sam. 10:9; Ezek. 36:26-27 Eph. 2:8-9; Php. 1:29; 2Tim. 2:25). This does not remove each person's responsibility to believe in (trust) and obey God (Deut. 10:16; 1Sam. 15:22; John 8:24; Acts 17:30-31), but it does eliminate any ground for boasting in those who do (Rom. 3:27; 1Cor. 1:28-31; 4:7). Parents and grandparents should be comforted and encouraged by Joseph's story. Despite Jacob's shortcomings as a father, the hatred of Joseph's brothers, and the estrangement he suffers, Joseph is a righteous and holy man of God. He excels his father and brothers by trusting God from his youth. May God grant such faith to our children also.

Judah indulges his sexual appetite after the death of his wife, and like his son Onan (cf. 38:9), he seeks sexual gratification without the corresponding covenant responsibilities. By contrast, Joseph denies himself sexual gratification, even though his circumstances would certainly have made the temptation to find comfort from a woman even stronger. Even though refusing his seductress's advances means facing false accusation and imprisonment, Joseph is committed to acting with integrity and abstaining from what he recognizes is "great wickedness and sin against God" (39:9).

It may seem as though the whole world is against Joseph. He is innocent of wrongdoing, yet he continues to be hated, persecuted, and exiled. But God is using all of the hardships in Joseph's life to position and prepare him for the redemptive work the Lord has ordained for him. God sanctifies His saints by ordaining their suffering.

Questions

What similarity do you see between the birth Perez and Zerah and a larger recurring theme in the patriarchal narrative? How does the event of their birth compare to events in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's offspring?

What parallels can you find between chapters 38-39? What similarities and dissimilarities highlight important aspects of the two stories?

What lessons might the post-exodus, pre-invasion Israelites learn from these two stories? What should they take from the past experience in Egypt? What danger lies ahead as they occupy the promised land of Canaan?

Application

The Sanctifying Potential of Suffering

The Greater Blessing of Self-Denial and Holiness

Outline

- I. Joseph Interprets the Prisoners' Dreams (40) II. Joseph Interprets the Pharaoh's Dreams (41:1-36)
III. Joseph is Exalted to Prepare for the Famine (41:37-57)

Observations

The cupbearer and baker's roles in Pharaoh's administration should not be underestimated. (There is no mention of a candlestick maker.) Both men would have been entrusted with far more responsibility than simply an ordinary butler or cook. The cupbearer would have likely been a close advisor and, possibly, a last line of defense for the Egyptian ruler. Both are referred to as "chief" in relation to their positions. The fact of their arrest and imprisonment upon incurring the displeasure of Pharaoh suggests the nearness and significance of their role in his administration.

Hated by his brothers, physically assaulted and nearly murdered by them, sold into slavery, removed far from his home and family, falsely accused of sexual assault, imprisoned, then forgotten, it must have seemed to Joseph as though nothing good would ever happen in his life. But the Lord never forsook Joseph, no matter how it may have seemed. The Lord promises to be with His people, but He does not promise that His presence will always be clearly evident or emotionally and spiritually perceptible. We must trust God when He seems far away, knowing by faith He will never abandon us (Rom. 8:18, 28, 31-39; 1Cor. 10:13; Heb. 13:5-6).

The duration of Joseph's imprisonment is unclear as is the time of his service in Potiphar's house. But it seems likely he spent several years with Potiphar before being falsely accused and imprisoned. Regardless, it is certain Joseph spent a number of years in prison, perhaps as long as a decade (41:46; cf. 37:2).

Pharaoh's advisors and wise men were unable to provide an interpretation of his dreams (41:8). This may not mean they did not try to interpret them or even bluff their way through an attempt to do so (cf. Dan. 2:1-9). Whether any attempt was made by the Egyptian magicians or not, Pharaoh recognized they could not authoritatively tell him what the dreams meant. God providentially worked to bring Joseph before the ruler and to place him in a position of authority so that Yahweh's greater purposes would be fulfilled (45:4-13).

It is important to bear in mind the experience and interpretation of divinely inspired dreams was a characteristic of revelation in the Old Testament and not a continuing promise or expectation in the New Covenant (Heb. 1:1-2). While the apostles experienced visions in the first century (e.g. Acts 10:9-17; 18:9-10; Rev. 1:10-20), these were not evidently characteristic of God's typical revelation to His people (cf. 1Cor. 13:8-13; Col. 2:18-19; 2Tim. 3:16-4:2; Heb. 4:12; 2Pet. 1:16-21). Such should not be expected after the completion of the Scriptures.

Questions

Egypt's salvation in the famine under Joseph's leadership is a further demonstration of the Abrahamic promises: "I will bless those who bless you" (12:3). Take some time to reflect on or list other examples of this promise in action in the Book of Genesis.

What similarities can you find between Genesis 41 and Daniel 2? How did God convince pagan rulers in both chapters of His word and guide their decisions according to His ultimate, unrevealed purpose?

Application

Trusting the Providence of God When Everyone and Everything is Against Us

Waiting Patiently on the Lord to Do His Perfect Work at the Perfect Time

Outline

The First Visit to Egypt

- I. Jacob's Command (42:1-5)
- II. Joseph's Charge (42:6-17)
- III. Joseph's Concession (42:18-28)
- IV. Jacob's Concern (42:29-38)

The Second Visit to Egypt

- I. Jacob's Dilemma (43:1-15)
- II. Joseph Dines with His Brothers (43:16-34)
- III. Joseph Determines Their Integrity (44:1-34)
- IV. Joseph Discloses His Identity (45:1-15)
- V. Jacob Discovers Joseph is Alive (45:16-28)

Observations

These four chapters provide further, remarkable insights into Joseph's wisdom, faith, and character. His elaborate testing of his brothers and his ultimate faith in God's sovereignty in all his experiences is all the more impressive knowing the carnality of his brothers and the failures in his family home and upbringing. Far from being embittered, resentful, or vengeful, Joseph acts with grace, discernment, and patience to discover the true character of his brothers and the current circumstances of his father and younger brother.

It is uncertain how long the famine went on before the brothers' first visit to Egypt and how long they stayed in Canaan before their second journey, but we know the famine had lasted two years when they came to Egypt a second time (45:6). Joseph was sold as a slave at 17 (37:2), served thirteen years as a slave and then as a prisoner, then was elevated to Pharaoh's administration at age 30 (41:46). Seven years of abundance preceded the famine, making Joseph 39 when he disclosed his true identity to his brothers.

This section continues to develop Joseph, Judah, and Reuben as characters. Judah appears to be a changed man, penitent, self-sacrificing, and wise. Reuben, on the other hand, shows himself to still be rash and foolish. While his heart may be in the right place, as was the case after Joseph's original abduction, his plan and methods are presumptuous and unwise.

The events in these chapters stand in parallel to chapter 37. Before the brothers gathered against Rachel's son Joseph; now they gather to protect Rachel's son Benjamin. Before they were proud; now they are humbled. Before they were deceptive; now they are honest. Before they were impenitent; now they are repentant. They find salvation in Egypt, but only by contrite, penitent reconciliation to the savior whom they once hated and who suffered because of their crimes.

Questions

Why do you suppose Joseph treats his brothers in the different ways he does during their two visits to Egypt? Is he seeking retribution for their sins against him, or is there a larger, strategic concern he is pursuing?

What does the text indicate about Joseph's emotions during his brothers' two visits to Egypt? How might this influence your answer to the question above about his treatment of them?

How do Reuben and Judah's offers to Jacob differ (42:37; 43:8-9)? What is indicated about their judgment?

How does Joseph interpret his experiences over the previous twenty-two years (45:4-13)?

Application

The Sovereignty of God in Persecution and Suffering

The Power of God's Grace to Liberate Believers from Bitterness and Empower Forgiveness

Outline

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|---|--|
| I. Jacob Journeys to Egypt (46:1-34) | IV. Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons (48:1-22) |
| II. Jacob Settles in Goshen (47:1-12) | V. Jacob's Blesses His Own Sons (49:1-27) |
| III. Joseph Buys Egypt for Pharaoh (47:13-31) | VI. Jacob Dies and is Buried (49:28-50:14) |
| | VII. Joseph Dies and Waits (50:15-26) |

Observations

Jacob is apparently still living at Hebron when his sons bring news of Joseph (35:27; 37:14). On the way to Egypt, Jacob stops at Beersheba to offer sacrifices to God (46:1). This is consistent with Abraham's pattern of building altars as he traveled through the land (12:7, 8; 13:18), and it demonstrates Jacob's desire for God's blessing as he departs the Promised Land for a time. We cannot know for certain, but it would not be surprising if Jacob repaired and reused the same altar Isaac built at Beersheba many years before (26:23-25; cf. 21:33).

Seventy members of Jacob's family go down to Egypt (46:26-27). The four additional members added to the sixty-six which make the journey apparently are Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, and perhaps Joseph's wife, Asenath. The same number appears in Deuteronomy 10:22 and in the Hebrew version of Exodus 1:5, but the Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) give the number as 75, and Stephen quotes this figure in Acts 7:14. The genealogical list almost certainly includes some who were born after the journey to Egypt (e.g. some of Reuben and Benjamin's sons), but these descendants are also counted as making the trip. It is likely the discrepancy between the two numbers is due to different tallying systems which counted additional later descendants.

The blessings of the patriarchs upon their offspring, usually prior to their death, contain both legal and prophetic elements. Jacob's final words to his sons both defend his decision to pass over Reuben, Simeon, and Levi for the rights of the firstborn and announce the future of the tribes descending from each son. The binding nature of these pronouncements can be seen both in the curses uttered (49:4, 6-7; cf. 9:25) and in their unchangeable nature even when received based on false pretenses (cf. 27:33).

The blessing pronounced on Judah suggests he will inherit as the firstborn, though the double blessing given to Joseph (through Ephraim and Manasseh) suggests he actually receives that position. Joseph appears to be the functional firstborn. He saves the family and takes control of their relocation to and sojourn in Egypt. On the other hand, Judah appears to be the eschatological firstborn. He will exercise royal leadership over his brothers climaxing ultimately in the appearance of Shiloh comes whom all peoples will obey, an allusion to the Messiah.

In 50:20 Joseph uses the same Hebrew word to describe the brothers' evil intentions in selling him as a slave and God's good intentions in the same act. *Châshab* (חָשַׁב) means "to think, plan, esteem, calculate, invent, make a judgment, imagine, count" (Brown-Driver-Briggs). Thus God did not merely fulfill his plan *despite* the brothers' sin. He fulfilled his plan *through* their sin! Though in no way responsible for their evil acts or for their temptation and hatred (Jas. 1:13-15), the Lord worked powerfully so that even the evil intentions and actions of Joseph's brothers worked to accomplish his benevolent purpose (cf. Acts 2:23; 2Cor. 12:7).

Questions

What evidence do you see in these chapters both of the Canaanite influence on Jacob's family and on God's providential protection of the family from being similarly corrupted by Egyptian culture?

What is the covenantal and redemptive significance of how Jacob describes his life (47:9; cf. Heb. 11:13-16)?

What indication might there be of a changing status and attitude toward the Israelites when Joseph died?

Application

The Sovereignty of God Over Human Evil

The Providence of God in Human History

GENESIS CLASS: MIDTERM REVIEW

1. Complete the outline of the book of Genesis.

Gen. 1-11 Four Great

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Gen. 12-50 Four Great

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2. Match the passage with the story from the chapter.

Genesis 1	1) The Flood
Genesis 3	2) Abraham: Battle with Northern Kings
Genesis 4	3) Abraham: Separation from Lot
Genesis 5, 10	4) The Fall/First Sin
Genesis 6-9	5) Abraham: Circumcision (Covenant Signified)
Genesis 11	6) Cain and Abel
Genesis 12	7) Creation: Amplified
Genesis 14	8) Abraham: Sodom and Gomorrah
Genesis 15	9) The Tower of Babel
Genesis 16	10) Abraham: Called
Genesis 17	11) Creation: Summarized
Genesis 19	12) Abraham: Intercedes for Sodom
Genesis 13	13) Genealogies (Adam, Nations)
Genesis 2	14) Abraham: Covenant (Enacted)
Genesis 18	15) Abraham: Hagar and Birth of Ishmael