



DISCOVERING

THE BOOK OF
GENESIS

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Part 1

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Forward

The book of Genesis falls into two sections. The first section begins with the chapters 1 and goes through chapter 11. The second section begins with chapter 12 and goes through chapter 50.

The first section focuses upon the ruin of man, who has fallen from his created perfection and it is coming under the judgment of the creator.

Chapters 12 – 50 describes God's program of man's redemption..

The first division could be summarized in the following way:

1. Chapters 1 - 2 The creation
2. Chapters 3 – 5 The fall of man.
3. Chapter 6 – 9 The events of the flood.
4. Chapters 10 – 11 The confusion of languages

The second division of Genesis can be summarized in the four main characters:

1. Chapters 12 – 25 Abraham
2. Chapters 25 – 26 Isaac
3. Chapters 27 – 36 Jacob
4. Chapters 37 – 50 Joseph

The incidences in this book point our way to understanding how man first learned to deal with God and his environment in which he was placed. Study and relate to these Bible happenings.

Genesis

Chapter 1

God Creates the Heavens and the Earth:

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

The creation story teaches us much about God and ourselves. First, we learn about God: (1) he is creative; (2) as the Creator he is distinct from his creation; (3) He is eternal and in control of the world. We also learn about ourselves: (1) since God chose to create us, we are valuable in his eyes; (2) we are more important than the animals.

God creates the light:

Genesis 1:3

And God said, let there be light: and there was light.

God created the earth in an orderly fashion (he did not make plants before light), and he created men and women as unique beings capable of communication with him. No other part of creation can claim that remarkable privilege. It is not important how long it took God to create the world,, but that he created it just the way he wanted it.

God Creates the Firmament:

Genesis 1:6

And God said, to let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

The “expanse between the waters” was a separation between the sea and the mists of the skies.

God separates the dry land:

Genesis 1:9

And God said to let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

Before the earth was ready to receive life to sustain it, the land had to be separated from the water.

God forms the sun, the moon and stars:

Genesis 1:14

And God said, let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

The purpose for the lights in the heaven was to mark the seasons, the days and the years.

God Makes Fish and Fowl:

Genesis 1:20

And God said; let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

The waters became filled with fish and other life. The skies became filled with birds of every kind.

God Makes Cattle, wild beasts, and Creeping Things.

Genesis 1:24

And God said, let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

The earth brought forth every kind of animal—livestock, small animals, and wildlife."

God Creates Man in His own Image and Blesses Him:

Genesis 1:26

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Knowing that we are made in God's image and share many of his characteristics provides a solid basis for self-worth. Human worth is not based on possessions, achievements, physical attractiveness, or public acclaim. Instead it is based on being made in God's image.

Because we bear God's image, we can feel positive about ourselves. Criticizing or downgrading ourselves is criticizing what God has made and the abilities he has given us.

God Grants the Fruits of the Earth for Food:

Genesis 1:29

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

God provided food for man and all his creation. When God delegated authority to the human race, he expected us to take responsibility for the environment and the other creatures that share our planet.

We must not be careless and wasteful as we fulfill this charge. God was careful how he made this earth. We must be careful how we care for it.

Chapter 2

Adam and the Woman's beginning in the Garden of Eden

The First Sabbath

Genesis 2:1

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

We live in an action-oriented world! There always seems to be something to do and no time to rest. Yet God demonstrated that rest is appropriate and right. If God himself rested from his work, then it should not amaze us that we also need rest. Jesus demonstrated this principle when he and his disciples left in a boat to get away from the crowds (see Mark 6:31-32). Our times of rest refresh us for times of service.

That God *blessed* the seventh day means that he set it apart for holy use. This act is picked up in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) where God commanded the observance of the Sabbath.

Further Details concerning the manner of Creation

Genesis 2:4

These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

Adam and Eve, our first ancestors, were the highlight of God's creation—the very reason God made the world. But they didn't always live the way God intended. Through their mistakes, we can learn important lessons on how to live rightly. Adam and Eve teach us much about the nature of sin and its consequences.

The Planting of the Garden of Eden and its Situation

Genesis 2:8

And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

“From the dust of the ground” implies that there is nothing fancy about the chemical elements making up our bodies. The body is a lifeless shell until God brings it alive with his “breath of life.” When God removes his life-giving breath, our bodies once again return to dust. Therefore our life and worth come from God's Spirit. Many boast of their achievements and abilities as though they were the originator of their own strengths. Others feel worthless because their abilities do not stand out. In reality, our worth comes not from our achievements but from the God of the universe, who chooses to give us the mysterious and miraculous gift of life. Value life, as he does.

Man is placed in the garden, and the tree of knowledge is forbidden

Genesis 2:15

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

God gave Adam responsibility for the garden and told him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Rather than physically preventing him from eating, God gave Adam a choice, and thus the possibility of choosing wrongly. God still gives us choices, and we, too, often choose wrongly. These wrong choices may cause us pain, but they can help us learn and grow and make better choices in the future. Living with the consequences of our choices teaches us to think and choose more carefully.

The Making of Woman and the institution of Marriage:

Genesis 1:21

And God created great whales, and every living creature that moves, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

It was instituted by God and has three basic aspects: (1) the man leaves his parents and, in a public act, promises himself to his wife; (2) the man and woman are joined together by taking responsibility for each other's welfare and by loving the mate above all others; (3) the two become one flesh in the intimacy and commitment of sexual union that is reserved for marriage. Strong marriages include all three of these aspects.

Genesis 3

Adam and Eve sin and Expulsion from the Garden

The Serpent deceives Eve.

Genesis 3:1

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field that the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

Disguised as a crafty serpent, Satan came to tempt Eve. Satan at one time was an angel who rebelled against God and was thrown out of heaven. As a created being, Satan has definite limitations. Although he is trying to tempt everyone away from God, he will not be the final victor. In Genesis 3:14-15, God promises that Satan will be crushed by one of the woman's offspring, the Messiah.

Both Adam and the Woman fall into Sin:

Genesis 3:6

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

The serpent, Satan, tempted Eve by getting her to doubt God's goodness. He implied that God was strict, stingy, and selfish for not wanting Eve to share his knowledge of good and evil. Satan made Eve forget all that God had given her and, instead, focus on the one thing she couldn't have. We fall into trouble, too, when we dwell on the few things we don't have rather than on the countless things God has given us. The next time you are feeling sorry for yourself and what you don't have, consider all you *do* have and thank God. Then your doubts won't lead you into sin.

Genesis 3:8

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

Adam and Eve hid from God when they heard him approaching. God wanted to be with them, but because of their sin they were afraid to show themselves. Sin had broken their close relationship with God, just as it has broken ours. But Jesus Christ, God's Son, opens the way for us to renew our fellowship with him. God longs to be with us. He actively offers us his unconditional love.

The serpent is cursed:

Genesis 3:14

And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

As a holy God, he could respond only in a way consistent with his perfect moral nature. He could not allow sin to go unchecked; he had to punish it. If the

consequences of Adam and Eve's sin seem extreme, remember that their sin set in motion the world's tendency toward disobeying God. That is why we sin today: Every human being ever born, with the exception of Jesus, has inherited the sinful nature of Adam and Eve. Adam's and Eve's punishment reflects how seriously God views sin of any kind.

The Promised Seed:

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Satan is our enemy. He will do anything he can to get us to follow his evil, deadly path.

The phrase "you will strike his heel" refers to Satan's repeated attempts to defeat Christ during his life on earth. "He will crush your head" foreshadows Satan's defeat when Christ rose from the dead. A strike on the heel is not deadly, but a crushing blow to the head is. Already God was revealing his plan to defeat Satan and offer salvation to the world through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The Punishment of Mankind:

Genesis 3:16

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

Adam and Eve learned by painful experience that because God is holy and hates sin, he must punish sinners. The rest of the book of Genesis recounts painful stories of lives ruined as a result of the fall. Disobedience is sin, and it breaks our fellowship with God. But, fortunately, when we disobey, God is willing to forgive us and to restore our relationship with him.

The First Clothing:

Genesis 3:21

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

Adam and Eve tried to hide their nakedness by making clothes from leaves, But God sacrificed an animal whose blood was shed so they could be clothes with skins. Jesus shed his blood for redemption of our sins.

The Expulsion from Paradise:

Genesis 3:22

And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever:

Life in the Garden of Eden was like living in heaven. Everything was perfect, and if Adam and Eve had obeyed God, they could have lived there forever. But after disobeying, Adam and Eve no longer deserved paradise, and God told them to leave. If they had continued to live in the garden and eat from the tree of life, they would have lived forever. But eternal life in a state of sin would mean forever trying to hide from God. Like Adam and Eve, all of us have sinned and are separated from fellowship with God.

We do not have to stay separated, however. God is preparing a new earth as an eternal paradise for his people (see Rev. 22).

The cherubim were mighty angels of the Lord.

This is how Adam and Eve broke their relationship with God: (1) they became convinced their way was better than God's; (2) they became self-conscious and hid; (3) they tried to excuse and defend themselves. To build a relationship with God we must reverse those steps: (1) we must drop our excuses and self-defenses; (2) we must stop trying to hide from God; (3) we must become convinced that God's way is better than our way.

CHAPTER 4

Cain kills Able: His curse and Descendants

Genesis 4:1

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man **from the Lord**.

The phrase lay with is literally he knew and means he “had sexual intercourse with.” Sexual union means oneness and total knowledge of the other person. Sexual intercourse is the most intimate of acts, sealing a social, physical, and spiritual relationship. That is why God has reserved it for marriage alone.

Cain Murders his Brother Abel:

Genesis 4:8

And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

This is the first murder—taking a life by shedding human blood. Blood represents life (Leviticus 17:10-14). If blood is removed from a living creature, it will die. Because God created life, only God should take life away.

Adam and Eve’s disobedience brought sin into the human race. They may have thought their sin—eating a piece of fruit—wasn’t very bad, but notice how quickly their sinful nature developed in their children. Simple disobedience quickly degenerated into outright murder. Adam and Eve acted only against God, but Cain acted against both God and man. A small sin has a way of growing out of control. Let God help you with your “little” sins before they turn into tragedies.

The Curse of Cain

Cain was severely punished for this murder. God judges all sins and punishes appropriately, but not simply out of anger or vengeance. Rather, God’s punishment is meant to correct us and restore our fellowship with him. When you’re corrected, don’t resent it. Instead, renew your fellowship with God.

Has a son, Builds a City that he called by the son’s name.

Genesis 4:17-19

And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch. [18] And unto Enoch was born Irad: and Irad begat Mehujael: and Mehujael begat Methusael: and Methusael begat Lamech.

Unfortunately, when left to them, people tend to get worse instead of better. This short summary of Lamech's family shows us the variety of talent and ability God gives humans. It also presents the continuous development of sin as time passes. Another killing occurred, presumably in self-defense. Violence is on the rise. Two distinct groups are appearing: (1) those who show indifference to sin and evil, and (2) those who call on the name of the Lord (the descendants of Seth, Genesis 4:26). Seth would take Abel's place as leader of a line of God's faithful people.

The Birth of Saith and of Enos:

Genesis 4:25-26

And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. [26] And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.

Genesis 5:

Descendants from Adam to Noah

Review of the Creation of Man

Genesis 5:1

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him;

The genealogy, age and death of the patriarch from Adam to Noah

Genesis 5:3

And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth:

All human beings are related, going back to Adam and Eve. Mankind is a family that shares one flesh and blood. Remember this when prejudice enters your mind or hatred invades your feelings. Each person is a valuable and unique creation of God.

Enoch's godliness and translation into Heaven.

Genesis 5:22

And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:

. The family line of Methuselah to Noah and his sons

Genesis 5:25

And Methuselah lived an hundred eighty and seven years, and begat Lamech:

How did these people live so long? Some believe that the ages listed here were lengths of family dynasties rather than ages of individual men. Those who think these were actual ages offer three explanations: (1) the human race was more genetically pure in this early time period, so there was less disease to shorten life spans; (2) no rain had yet fallen on the earth, and the expanse of water “above”

Genesis 6:

God's Mercy on Noah in the midst of Man's Wickedness

The wickedness of the world that provoked God's wrath

Genesis 6:1

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them,

Earth was no longer the perfect paradise that God had intended. It is frightening to see how quickly all of humanity forgot about God. Incredibly, in all the world, only one man and his family still worshiped God. That man was Noah. Because of his faithfulness and obedience, God saved him and his family from a vast flood

that destroyed every other human being on earth. This section shows us how God hates sin and judges those who enjoy it.

Noah finds grace.

Genesis 6:8

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

The people's sin grieved God. Our sins break God's heart as much as sin did in Noah's day. Noah, however, pleased God, although he was far from perfect. We can follow Noah's example and find "favor in the eyes of the LORD" in spite of the sin that surrounds us.

His family line

Genesis 6:9

These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.

To say that Noah was righteous and blameless does not mean that he never sinned (the Bible records one of his sins in Genesis 9:20ff). Rather it means that he wholeheartedly loved and obeyed God. For a lifetime he walked step by step in faith as a living example to his generation. Like Noah, we live in a world filled with evil. Are we influencing others or being influenced by them?

The order, form, dimensions, and building of the ark.

Genesis 6:14-16

"Make a boat from resinous wood and seal it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout its interior. [15] Make it 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. [16] Construct an opening all the way around the boat, 18 inches below the roof. Then put three decks inside the boat—bottom, middle, and upper—and put a door in the side.

The boat Noah built was no canoe! Picture yourself building a boat the length of one and a half football fields and as high as a four-story building. The ark was exactly six times longer than it was wide—the same ratio used by modern

shipbuilders. This huge boat was probably built miles from any body of water by only a few faithful men who believed God's promises and obeyed his commands.

Genesis 7:

The Great Flood

Noah, his family and the living creatures enter the ark.

Genesis 7:1

And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.

Pairs of every animal joined Noah in the ark; seven pairs were taken of those animals used for sacrifice—the “clean” animals. Scholars have estimated that almost 45,000 animals could have fit into the ark.

. The flood begins.

Genesis 7:6

And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.

The increase of the flood for forty days.

Genesis 7:17

And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth.

Many have wondered how this animal kingdom roundup happened. Did Noah and his sons spend years collecting all the animals? In reality the creation, along with Noah, was doing just as God had commanded. There seemed to be no problem gathering the animals—God took care of the details of that job while Noah was doing his part by building the ark.

Often we do just the opposite of Noah. We worry about details over which we have no control, while neglecting specific areas (such as attitudes, relationships, responsibilities) that *are* under our control. Like Noah, concentrate on what God has given you to do, and leave the rest to God.

All flesh is destroyed by it.

Genesis 7:21

And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that crêpes upon the earth, and every man:

Was the flood a local event, or did it cover the entire earth? A universal flood was certainly possible. There is enough water on the earth to cover all dry land (the earth began that way; see Genesis 1:9-10). Afterward, God promised never again to destroy the earth with a flood. Thus this flood must have either covered the

entire earth or destroyed all the inhabitants of the earth. Remember, God's reason for sending the flood was to destroy all the earth's wickedness. It would have taken a major flood to accomplish this.

It's duration of 150 days.

Genesis 7:24

And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.

Genesis 8:

**The Flood Subsides and the
Ark Rests on Mount Ararat**

God remembers Noah and calms the waters.

Genesis 8:1

And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that were with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged.

The ark rests on Ararat.

Genesis 8:4

And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.

6. Noah sends forth a raven and then a dove.

Genesis 8:6

And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made:

Occasionally Noah would send a bird out to test the earth and see if it was dry. But Noah didn't get out of the ark until God told him to. He was waiting for God's timing. God knew that even though the water was gone, the earth was not dry enough for Noah and his family to venture out. What patience Noah showed, especially after spending an entire year inside his boat! We, like Noah, must trust God to give us patience during those difficult times when we must wait.

13. Noah, being commanded, goes forth from the ark.

Genesis 8:13

And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry.

He builds an altar, and offers sacrifices,

Genesis 8:20

And Noah built an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

God accepts and promises to curse the earth no more.

Genesis 8:21

And the Lord smelled a sweet savor; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done.

Countless times throughout the Bible we see God showing his love and patience toward men and women in order to save them. Although he realizes that their hearts are evil, he continues to try to reach them. When we sin or fall away from God, we surely deserve to be destroyed by his judgment. But God has promised never again to destroy everything on earth until the judgment day when Christ returns to destroy evil forever. Now every change of season is a reminder of his promise.

Genesis 9

The Covenant of the Rainbow

God blesses Noah and his sons, and grants them flesh for food.

Genesis 9:1

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.

Blood and murder are forbidden.

Genesis 9:4

But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

To “demand an accounting”, means that God will require each person to account for his or her actions. We cannot harm or kill another human being without answering to God. A penalty must be paid. Justice will be served.

Here God explains why murder is so wrong: To kill a person is to kill one made in God's image. Because all human beings are made in God's image, all people possess the qualities that distinguish them from animals: morality, reason, creativity, and self-worth. When we interact with others, we are interacting with beings made by God, beings to whom God offers eternal life. God wants us to recognize his image in all people.

God's covenant, of which the rainbow was constituted a pledge.

Genesis 9:8

And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying,

18. Noah's family replenishes the world.

Genesis 9:18

And the sons of Noah went forth from the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan.

Noah stepped out of the ark onto an earth devoid of human life. But God gave him a reassuring promise. This covenant had three parts: (1) never again will a flood do such destruction; (2) as long as the earth remains, the seasons will always come as expected; (3) a rainbow will be visible when it rains as a sign to all that God will keep his promises. The earth's order and seasons are still preserved, and rainbows still remind us of God's faithfulness to his Word.

Noah plants a vineyard,

Genesis 9:20

And Noah began to be a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:

Noah, the great hero of faith, got drunk—a poor example of godliness to his sons. Perhaps this story is included to show us that even godly people can sin and that their bad influence affects their families. Although the wicked people had all been killed, the possibility of evil still existed in the hearts of Noah and his family. Ham's mocking attitude revealed a severe lack of respect for his father and for God.

Curses Canaan;

Genesis 9:25

And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

This verse has been wrongfully used to support racial prejudice and even slavery. Noah's curse, however, wasn't directed toward any particular race, but rather at the Canaanite nation—a nation God knew would become wicked. The curse was fulfilled when the Israelites entered the Promised Land and drove the Canaanites out (see the book of Joshua).

Blesses Shem;

Genesis 9:26

And he said, blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

. Prays for Japheth, and dies.

Genesis 9:27 - 29

God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

Noah lived another 350 years after the Flood.

He was 950 years old when he died.

.

Genesis 10

Descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth

The Generations of Noah

Genesis 10:1

Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.

Japheth

Genesis 10:2

The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras.

Ham. Who was Nimrod? Not much is known about him except that he was a mighty hunter. But people with great gifts can become proud, and that is probably

what happened to Nimrod. Some consider him the founder of the great, godless Babylonian empire.

Genesis 10:6

And the sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan

Nimrod becomes the first monarch; the descendants of Canaan.

Genesis 10:8

And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth.

Who was Nimrod? Not much is known about him except that he was a mighty hunter. But people with great gifts can become proud, and that is probably what happened to Nimrod. Some consider him the founder of the great, godless Babylonian empire

The sons of Shem.

Genesis 10:21

Unto Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were children born.

Genesis 11

Tower of Babel; Shem's Descendants to Abraham

One language in the world.

Genesis 11:1

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

The building of Babel.

The brick used to build this tower was man-made and not as hard as stone.

The tower of Babel was most likely a ziggurat, a common structure in Babylonia at this time. Most often built as temples, ziggurats looked like pyramids with steps or ramps leading up the sides. Ziggurats stood as high as 300 feet and were often just as wide; thus they were the focal point of the city. The people in this story built their tower as a monument to their own greatness, something for the whole world to see.

Genesis 11:2

And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

The tower of Babel was most likely a ziggurat, a common structure in Babylonia at this time. Most often built as temples, ziggurats looked like pyramids with steps or ramps leading up the sides. Ziggurats stood as high as 300 feet and were often just as wide; thus they were the focal point of the city. The people in this story built their tower as a monument to their own greatness, something for the whole world to see.

The tower of Babel was a great human achievement, a wonder of the world. But it was a monument to the people themselves rather than to God.

We may build monuments to ourselves (expensive clothes, big house, and fancy car, important job) to call attention to our achievements. These may not be wrong in themselves, but when we use them to give us identity and self-worth, they take God's place in our lives. We are free to develop in many areas, but we are not free to think we have replaced God.

It is interrupted by the confusion of tongues, and the builders dispersed.

Genesis 11:5

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

The generations of Shem.

Genesis 11:10

These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood:

In Genesis 9:24-27 we read Noah's curse on Canaan, Ham's son (Genesis 10:6), ancestor of the evil Canaanites. Here and in Genesis 10:22-31 we have a list of Shem's descendants, who were blessed (Genesis 9:26). From Shem's line came Abram and the entire Jewish nation, which would eventually conquer the land of Canaan in the days of Joshua

The generations of Terah, the father of Abram.

Genesis 11:27

Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot.

In Genesis 9:24-27 we read Noah's curse on Canaan, Ham's son (Genesis 10:6), ancestor of the evil Canaanites. Here and in Genesis 10:22-31 we have a list of Shem's descendants, who were blessed (Genesis 9:26). From Shem's line came Abram and the entire Jewish nation, which would eventually conquer the land of Canaan in the days of Joshua.

Terah, with Abram and Lot, move from Ur to Haran.

Abram grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans, an important city in the ancient world. Archaeologists have discovered evidence of a flourishing civilization there in Abram's day. The city carried on an extensive trade with its neighbors and had a vast library. Growing up in Ur, Abram was probably well educated.

Genesis 12

God Sends Abram to Egypt

God calls Abram, and blesses him with a promise of Christ.

Genesis 12:1

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

When God called him, Abram moved out in faith from Ur to Haran and finally to Canaan. God then established a covenant with Abram, telling him that he would found a great nation. Not only would this nation be blessed, God said, but the other nations of the earth would be blessed through Abram's descendants. Israel, the nation that would come from Abram, was to follow God and influence those with whom it came in contact. Through Abram's family tree, Jesus Christ was born to save humanity. Through Christ, people can have a personal relationship with God and be blessed beyond measure.

God promised to bless Abram and make him great, but there was one condition. Abram had to do what God wanted him to do. This meant leaving his home and

friends and traveling to a new land where God promised to build a great nation from Abram's family. Abram obeyed, walking away from his home for God's promise of even greater blessings in the future. God may be trying to lead you to a place of greater service and usefulness for him. Don't let the comfort and security of your present position make you miss God's plan for you.

He departs with Lot from Haran, and comes to Canaan.

Genesis 12:4

So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

God planned to develop a nation of people he would call his own. He called Abram from the godless, self-centered city of Ur to a fertile region called Canaan, where a God-centered, moral nation could be established.

Though small in dimension, the land of Canaan was the focal point for most of the history of Israel as well as for the rise of Christianity. This small land given to one man, Abram, has had a tremendous impact on world history.

He journeys through Canaan

Genesis 12:6

And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

God planned to develop a nation of people he would call his own. He called Abram from the godless, self-centered city of Ur to a fertile region called Canaan, where a God-centered, moral nation could be established. Though small in dimension, the land of Canaan was the focal point for most of the history of Israel as well as for the rise of Christianity. This small land given to one man, Abram, has had a tremendous impact on world history.

Which is promised to him in a vision.

Genesis 12:7

And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.

Abram built an altar to the Lord. Altars were used in many religions, but for God's people, altars were more than places of sacrifice. For them, altars symbolized communion with God and commemorated notable encounters with him. Built of rough stones and earth, altars often remained in place for years as continual reminders of God's protection and promises.

Abram regularly built altars to God for two reasons: (1) for prayer and worship, and (2) as reminders of God's promise to bless him. Abram couldn't survive spiritually without regularly renewing his love and loyalty to God. Building altars helped Abram remember that God was at the center of his life. Regular worship helps us remember what God desires and motivates us to obey him.

He is driven by famine into Egypt

Genesis 12:10

And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

When famine struck, Abram went to Egypt where there was food. Why would there be a famine in the land where God had just called Abram? This was a test of Abram's faith, and Abram passed. He didn't question God's leading when facing this difficulty. Many believers find that when they determine to follow God, they immediately encounter great obstacles. The next time you face such a test, don't try to second-guess what God is doing. Use the intelligence God gave you, as Abram did when he temporarily moved to Egypt, and wait for new opportunities.

Fear makes him feign his wife to be his sister.

Genesis 12:11

And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt that he said unto Sara his wife, "Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon":

Abram, acting out of fear, asked Sarai to tell a half-truth by saying she was his sister. She *was* his half-sister, but she was also his wife (see Genesis 20:12).

Abram's intent was to deceive the Egyptians. He feared that if they knew the truth, they would kill him to get Sarai. She would have been a desirable addition to Pharaoh's harem because of her wealth, beauty, and potential for political alliance. As Sarai's brother, Abram would have been given a place of honor. As her husband, however, his life would be in danger because Sarai could not enter Pharaoh's harem unless Abram was dead. So Abram lost faith in God's protection, even after all God had promised him, and told a half-truth. This shows how lying compounds the effects of sin. When he lied, Abram's problems multiplied.

Pharaoh, having taken her from him, is compelled to restore her.

Genesis 12:14

And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair.

Genesis 13

Abram and Lot Part Ways; Abram Promised Many Descendants

Abram and Lot return with great riches out of Egypt.

Genesis 13:1

And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.

In Abram's day, sheep and cattle owners could acquire great wealth. Abram's wealth not only included silver and gold, but also livestock. These animals were a valuable commodity used for food, clothing, tent material, and sacrifices. They were often traded for other goods and services. Abram was able to watch his wealth grow and multiply daily.

Strife arises between Abram's herdsmen and those of Lot.

Genesis 13:6

And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.

Facing a potential conflict with his nephew Lot, Abram took the initiative in settling the dispute. He gave Lot first choice, even though Abram, being older, had the right to choose first. Abram also showed a willingness to risk being cheated. Abram's example shows us how to respond to difficult family situations: (1) take the initiative in resolving conflicts; (2) let others have first choice, even if that means not getting what we want; (3) put family peace above personal desires.

Abram allows Lot to choose his part of the country

Genesis 13:8

And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we be brethren.

Surrounded by hostile neighbors, the herdsmen of Abram and Lot should have pulled together. Instead, they let petty jealousy tear them apart. Similar situations exist today. Christians often bicker while Satan is at work all around them.

Rivalries, arguments, and disagreements among believers can be destructive in three ways. (1) They damage goodwill, trust, and peace—the foundations of good human relations. (2) They hamper progress toward important goals. (3) They make us self-centered rather than love-centered. Jesus understood how destructive arguments among brothers could be. In his final prayer before being betrayed and arrested, Jesus asked God that his followers be “one” (John 17:21).

Lot goes toward Sodom.

Genesis 13:10

And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou come unto Zoar.

Lot's character is revealed by his choices. He took the best share of the land even though it meant living near Sodom, a city known for its sin. He was greedy, wanting the best for himself, without thinking about his uncle Abram's needs or what was fair.

Life is a series of choices. We too can choose the best while ignoring the needs and feelings of others. But this kind of choice, as Lot's life shows, leads to problems. When we stop making choices in God's direction, all that is left is to make choices in the wrong direction.

. **God renews his promise to Abram.**

Genesis 13:14

And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

Good pasture and available water seemed like a wise choice to Lot at first. But he failed to recognize that wicked Sodom could provide temptations strong enough to destroy his family. Have you chosen to live or work in a "Sodom"? Even though you may be strong enough to resist the temptations, other members of your family may not. While God commands us to reach people in the "Sodom" near us, we must be careful not to become like the very people we are trying to reach.

He moves to Hebron, and there builds an altar.

Genesis 13:18

Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.

Genesis 14

Abram Rescues Lot and Receives a Blessing from Melchizedek

The battle of four kings against the king of Sodom and his allies.

Genesis 14:1

And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations;

Lot is taken prisoner

Genesis 14:12

And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

Who was Kedorlaomer, and why was he important? In Abram's time, most cities had their own kings. Wars and rivalries among kings were common. A conquered city paid tribute to the victorious king. Nothing is known about Kedorlaomer

except what we read in the Bible, but apparently he was quite powerful. Five cities including Sodom had paid tribute to him for 12 years. The five cities formed an alliance and rebelled by withholding tribute. Kedorlaomer reacted swiftly and reconquered them all. When he defeated Sodom, he captured Lot, his family, and his possessions. Abram, with only 318 men, chased Kedorlaomer's army and attacked him near Damascus. With God's help, he defeated them and recovered Lot, his family, and their possessions.

Abram rescues him.

Genesis 14:14

And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.

These incidents portray two of Abram's characteristics: (1) He had courage that came from God. Facing a powerful foe, he attacked. (2) He was prepared. He had taken time to train his men for a potential conflict. We never know when we will be called upon to complete difficult tasks. Like Abram, we should prepare for those times and take courage from God when they come.

When Abram learned that Lot was a prisoner, he immediately tried to rescue his nephew. It is easier and safer not to become involved. But with Lot in serious trouble, Abram acted at once. Sometimes we must get involved in a messy or painful situation in order to help other

Melchizedek blesses Abram, who gives him tithes.

Genesis 14:17

And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

Abram restores the rest of the spoil to the king of Sodom.

Genesis 14:21

And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to you.

Who was Melchizedek? He was obviously a God-fearing man, for his name means “king of righteousness,” and king of Salem means “king of peace.” He was a “priest of God Most High” (Hebrews 7:1-2). He recognized God as Creator of heaven and earth. What else is known about him? Four main theories have been suggested. (1) Melchizedek was a respected king of that region. Abram was simply showing him the respect he deserved. (2) The name Melchizedek may have been a standing title for all the kings of Salem. (3) Melchizedek was a type of Christ (Hebrews 7:3). A type is an Old Testament event or teaching that is so closely related to what Christ did that it illustrates a lesson about Christ. (4) Melchizedek was the appearance on earth of the preincarnate Christ in a temporary bodily form.

Genesis 15:

God's Covenant with Abram

God encourages Abram, who asks for an heir.

Genesis 15:1

Afterward the Lord spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great."

Why would Abram be afraid? Perhaps he feared revenge from the kings he had just defeated (Genesis 14:15). God gave him two good reasons for courage: (1) he promised to defend Abram (“I am your shield”), and (2) he promised to be Abram’s “very great reward.” When you fear what lies ahead, remember that God will stay with you through difficult times and that he has promised you great blessings.

God promises him a son, and a multiplying of his seed.

Genesis 15:4

Then the Lord said to him, "No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own to inherit everything I am giving you."

Eliezer was Abram's most trusted servant, acting as household administrator ("chief servant," see Genesis 24). According to custom, if Abram were to die without a son, his eldest servant would become his heir. Although Abram loved his servant, he wanted a son to carry on the family line.

Abram is justified by faith.

Genesis 15:6

And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord declared him righteous because of his faith.

Although Abram had been demonstrating his faith through his actions, it was his belief in the Lord, not his actions that made Abram right with God (Romans 4:1-5). We too can have a right relationship with God by trusting him. Our outward actions—church attendance, prayer, good deeds—will not by themselves make us right with God. A right relationship is based on faith—the heartfelt inner confidence that God is who he says he is and does what he says he will do.

Canaan is promised again,

Genesis 15:7-8

Then the Lord told him, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land." But Abram replied, "O Sovereign Lord, how can I be sure that you will give it to me?"

Abram was looking for confirmation and assurance that he was doing God's will. We also want assurance when we ask for guidance. But we can know for sure that what we are doing is right if we do what the Bible says. Abram didn't have the Bible—we do.

And confirmed by a sign, and a vision,

Genesis 15:9

Then the Lord told him, "Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

Prophecy of the condition of his posterity till brought out of Egypt.

Genesis 15:18

So the Lord made a covenant with Abram that day and said, "I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River—

Genesis 16

Sarai, Hagar, and Ishmael

Sarai, being barren, gives Hagar to Abram.

Genesis 16:1

But Sarai, Abram's wife, had no children. So Sarai took her servant, an Egyptian woman named Hagar,

Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as a substitute wife, a common practice of that time. A married woman who could not have children was shamed by her peers and was often required to give a female servant to her husband in order to produce heirs. The children born to the servant woman were considered the children of the wife. Abram was acting in line with the custom of the day, but his action showed a lack of faith that God would fulfill his promise.

Sarai took matters into her own hands by giving Hagar to Abram. Like Abram she had trouble believing God's promise that was apparently directed specifically

toward Abram and Sarai. Out of this lack of faith came a series of problems. This invariably happens when we take over for God, trying to make his promise come true through efforts that are not in line with his specific directions. In this case, time was the greatest test of Abram and Sarai's willingness to let God work in their lives. Sometimes we too must simply wait. When we ask God for something and have to wait, it is a temptation to take matters into our own hands and interfere with God's plans.

Hagar, being afflicted for despising her mistress, runs away.

Genesis 16:4

So Abram slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress Sarai with contempt.

Although Sarai arranged for Hagar to have a child by Abram, she later blamed Abram for the results. It is often easier to strike out in frustration and accuse someone else than to admit an error and ask forgiveness. (Adam and Eve did the same thing in Genesis 3:12-13.)

An angel commands her to return and submit herself,

Genesis 16:7

The angel of the Lord found Hagar beside a desert spring along the road to Shur.

Sarai took out her anger against Abram and herself on Hagar, and her treatment was harsh enough to cause Hagar to run away. Anger, especially when it arises from our own shortcomings, can be dangerous.

Promises her a numerous posterity

Genesis 16:10

The angel added, "I will give you more descendants than you can count."

Hagar was running away from her mistress and her problem. The angel of the Lord gave her this advice: (1) to return and face Sarai, the cause of her problem, and (2) to submit to her. Hagar needed to work on her attitude toward Sarai, no matter how justified it may have been. Running away from our problems rarely solves them. It is wise to return to our problems, face them squarely, accept God's promise of help, correct our attitudes, and act as we should.

Shows their character and condition

Genesis 16:12

This son of yours will be a wild one—free and untamed as a wild donkey! He will be against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live at odds with the rest of his brothers."

Hagar names the place, and returns to Sarai.

Genesis 16:13

Thereafter, Hagar referred to the Lord, who had spoken to her, as "the God who sees me," for she said, "I have seen the One who sees me!"

We have watched three people make serious mistakes: (1) Sarai, who took matters into her own hands and gave her maidservant to Abram; (2) Abram, who went along with the plan but, when circumstances began to go wrong, refused to help solve the problem; and (3) Hagar, who ran away from the problem. In spite of this messy situation, God demonstrated his ability to work in all things for good (Romans 8:28). Sarai and Abram still received the son they so desperately wanted, and God solved Hagar's problem despite Abram's refusal to get involved. No problem is too complicated for God if you are willing to let him help you.

Ishmael is born.

Genesis 16:15

So Hagar gave Abram a son, and Abram named him Ishmael.

The age of Abram.

Genesis 16:16

Abram was eighty-six years old at that time.

Genesis 17

The Covenant of Circumcision

1. God renews the covenant with Abram,

Genesis 17:1

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; serve me faithfully and live a blameless life.

The Lord told Abram, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless." God has the same message for us today. We are to obey the Lord in every respect because he is God—that is reason enough. If you don't think the benefits of obedience are worth it, consider who God is—the only one with the power and ability to meet your every need.

5. Changes his name to Abraham, in token of a greater blessing

Genesis 17:5

What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram; now you will be known as Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations.

God changed Abram's name to Abraham ("father of many") shortly before the promised son was conceived. From this point on, the Bible calls him Abraham.

God was making a covenant, or contract, between himself and Abraham. The terms were simple: Abraham would obey God and circumcise all the males in his household; God's part was to give Abraham heirs, property, power, and wealth. Most contracts are even trades: We give something and in turn receive something of equal value. But when we become part of God's covenant family, the blessings we receive far outweigh what we must give up.

9. Circumcision is instituted.

Genesis 17:9

"Your part of the agreement," God told Abraham, "is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility.

Why did God require circumcision? (1) As a sign of obedience to him in all matters. (2) As a sign of belonging to his covenant people. Once circumcised, there was no turning back. The man would be identified as a Jew forever. (3) As a symbol of "cutting off" the old life of sin, purifying one's heart, and dedicating oneself to God. (4) possibly as a health measure.

15. Sarai's name is changed to Sarah, and she is blessed.

Genesis 17:15

And God said unto Abraham, as for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.

How could Abraham doubt God? It seemed incredible that he and Sarah in their advanced years could have a child. Abraham, the man God considered righteous

because of his faith, had trouble believing God's promise to him. Despite his doubts, however, he followed God's commands (Genesis 17:22-27). Even people of great faith may have doubts. When God seems to want the impossible and you begin to doubt his leading, be like Abraham. Focus on God's commitment to fulfill his promises to you, and then continue to obey.

God did not forget Ishmael. Although he was not to be Abraham's heir, he would also be the father of a great nation. Regardless of your circumstances, God has not forgotten you. Obey him and trust in his plan

17. Isaac is promised, and the time of his birth fixed.

Genesis 17:17

Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?

23. Abraham and Ishmael are circumcised.

Genesis 17:23

And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.

Genesis 18

God Promises the birth of Isaac; Abram Pleads for Sodom

The Lord appears to Abraham, who entertains angels.

Genesis 18:1

And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;

Abraham was eager to show hospitality to these three visitors, as was Lot (Genesis 19:2). In Abraham's day, a person's reputation was largely connected to his hospitality—the sharing of home and food. Even strangers were to be treated as highly honored guests. Meeting another's need for food or shelter was and still is one of the most immediate and practical ways to obey God. It is also a time-honored relationship builder. Hebrews 13:2 suggests that we, like Abraham, might actually entertain angels. This thought should be on our minds the next time we have the opportunity to meet a stranger's needs.

Sarah is reproved for laughing at the promise of a son.

Genesis 18:9

And they said unto him, where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.

“Is anything too hard for the LORD?” The obvious answer is, “Of course not!” This question reveals much about God. Make it a habit to insert your specific needs into the question. “Is this day in my life too hard for the Lord?” “Is this habit I’m trying to break too hard for him?” “Is the communication problem I’m having too hard for him?” Asking the question this way reminds you that God is personally involved in your life and nudges you to ask for his power to help you.

The destruction of Sodom is revealed to Abraham.

Genesis 18:16

And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.

God gave the men of Sodom a fair test. He was not ignorant of the city’s wicked practices, but in his fairness and patience he gave the people of Sodom one last chance to repent. God is still waiting, giving people the opportunity to turn to him (2 Peter 3:9). Those who are wise will turn to him before his patience wears out.

Abraham makes intercession for its inhabitants.

Genesis 18:23

And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

Was God being unfair to the people of Sodom? Did he really plan to destroy the righteous with the wicked? On the contrary, God’s fairness stood out. (1) He agreed to spare the entire city if only ten righteous people lived there. (2) He showed great mercy toward Lot, apparently the only man in the city who had any kind of relationship with him (and even that was questionable). (3) He showed great patience toward Lot, almost forcing him to leave Sodom before it was

destroyed. Remember God's patience when you are tempted to think he is unfair. Even the most godly people deserve his justice. We should be glad God doesn't direct his justice toward us as he did toward Sodom.

Genesis 19

The Destruction of Sodom; Lot's daughters give birth

Lot entertains two angels.

Genesis 19:1

And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;

The gateway of the city was the meeting place for city officials and other men to discuss current events and transact business. It was a place of authority and status where a person could see and be seen. Evidently Lot held an important position in the government or associated with those who did because the angels found him at the city gate. Perhaps Lot's status in Sodom was one reason he was so reluctant to leave (Genesis 19:16, 18-22).

The vicious Sodomites are smitten with blindness.

Genesis 19:4

But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter:

How could any father give his daughters to be ravished by a mob of perverts, just to protect two strangers? Possibly Lot was scheming to save both the girls and the visitors, hoping the girls' fiancés would rescue them or that the homosexual men would be disinterested in the girls and simply go away. Although it was the custom of the day to protect guests at any cost, this terrible suggestion reveals how deeply sin had been absorbed into Lot's life. He had become hardened to evil acts in an evil city. Whatever Lot's motives were, we see here an illustration of Sodom's terrible wickedness—a wickedness so great that God had to destroy the entire city.

Lot is warned, and in vain warns his sons-in-law.

Genesis 19:12

And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? Son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place:

God promised to spare Sodom if only ten righteous people lived there (Genesis 18:32). Obviously not even ten could be found, because the angels arrived to destroy the city. Archaeological evidence points to an advanced civilization in this area during Abraham's day. Most researchers also confirm some kind of sudden and devastating destruction. It is now widely thought that the buried city lies beneath the waters of the southern end of the Dead Sea. The story of Sodom reveals that the people of Lot's day had to deal with the same kinds of repulsive sins the world faces today. We should follow Abraham's example of trusting God. His selfless faith contrasts with the self-gratifying people of Sodom.

He is directed to flee to the mountains, but obtains leave to go into Zoar.

Genesis 19:15

And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.

Lot had lived so long and so contented among ungodly people that he was no longer a believable witness for God. He had allowed his environment to shape him, rather than he shaping his environment. Do those who know you see you as a witness for God, or are you just one of the crowd, blending in unnoticed? Lot had compromised to the point that he was almost useless to God. When he finally made a stand, nobody listened. Have you too become useless to God because you are too much like your environment? To make a difference, you must first decide to be different in your faith and your conduct.

Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed.

Genesis 19:24

Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven;

In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, we see two facets of God's character: his great patience (agreeing to spare a wicked city for ten good people) and his fierce anger (destroying both cities). As we grow spiritually, we should find ourselves developing a deeper respect for God because of his anger toward sin, and also a deeper love for God because of his patience when we sin.

Lot's wife looks back and becomes a pillar of salt.

Genesis 19:26

But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

Lot's wife turned back to look at the smoldering city of Sodom. Clinging to the past, she was unwilling to turn completely away. Are you looking back longingly at sin while trying to move forward with God? You can't make progress with God as long as you are holding on to pieces of your old life. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters."

Lot dwells in a cave.

Genesis 19:29

And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt.

The incestuous origin of Moab and Ammon.

Genesis 19:31

And the firstborn said unto the younger, our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth:

In this pitiful sequel to the story of the destruction of Sodom, we see two women compelled to preserve their family line. They were driven not by lust, but by desperation—they feared they would never marry. Lot's tendency to compromise and refusal to act reached its peak. He should have found right partners for his daughters long before this; Abraham's family wasn't far away. Now the two daughters stooped to incest, showing their acceptance of the morals of Sodom. We are most likely to sin when we are desperate for what we feel we must have.

Genesis 20

Abraham, Sarah and Abimelech

1. Abraham sojourns at Gerar.

Genesis 20:1

And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.

Denies his wife, who is taken by Abimelech.

Genesis 20:2

And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, she is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.

Abraham had used this same trick before to protect himself (Genesis 12:11-13). Although Abraham is one of our heroes of faith, he did not learn his lesson well enough the first time. In fact, by giving in to the temptation again, he risked turning a sinful act into a sinful pattern of lying whenever he suspected his life was in danger.

No matter how much we love God, certain temptations are especially difficult to resist. These are the vulnerable spots in our spiritual armor. As we struggle with these weaknesses, we can be encouraged to know that God is watching out for us just as he did for Abraham.

3. Abimelech is reproved for her in a dream.

Genesis 20:3

But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.

Abimelech had unknowingly taken a married woman to be his wife and was about to commit adultery. But God somehow prevented him from touching Sarah and held him back from sinning. What mercy on God's part! How many times has God done the same for us, holding us back from sin in ways we can't even detect? We have no way of knowing—we just know from this story that he can. God works just as often in ways we can't see as in ways we can.

9. He rebukes Abraham.

Genesis 20:9

Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, what hast thou done unto us? And what have I offended thee that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.

Because Abraham mistakenly assumed that Abimelech was a wicked man, he made a quick decision to tell a half-truth. Abraham thought it would be more effective to deceive Abimelech than to trust God to work in the king's life. Don't assume that God will not work in a situation that has potential problems. You may not completely understand the situation, and God may intervene when you least expect it.

14. Restores Sarah;

Genesis 20:14

And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and women servants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife.

16. And reproves her.

Genesis 20:16

And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved.

17. Abimelech and his family are healed at Abraham's prayer.

Genesis 20:17

So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.

Why did God punish Abimelech when he had no idea Sarah was married? (1) Even though Abimelech's intentions were good, as long as Sarah was living in his harem he was in danger of sinning. A person who eats a poisonous toadstool, thinking it's a harmless mushroom, no doubt has perfectly good intentions—but will still suffer. Sin is a poison that damages us and those around us, whatever our intentions. (2) The punishment, closing up "every womb in Abimelech's household," lasted only as long as Abimelech was in danger of sleeping with Sarah. It was meant to change the situation, not to harm Abimelech. (3) The punishment clearly showed that Abraham was in league with almighty God. This incident may have made Abimelech respect and fear Abraham's God.

Genesis 21

Isaac Born; Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away; Treaty at Beersheba

1. Isaac is born, and circumcised.

Genesis 21:1

And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

6. Sarah's joy.

Genesis 21:6

And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

Who could believe that Abraham would have a son at 100 years of age—and live to raise him to adulthood? But doing the impossible is everyday business for God. Our big problems won't seem so impossible if we let God handle them.

After repeated promises, a visit by two angels, and the appearance of the Lord himself, Sarah finally cried out with surprise and joy at the birth of her son. Because of her doubt, worry, and fear, she had forfeited the peace she could have felt in God's wonderful promise to her. The way to bring peace to a troubled heart is to focus on God's promises. Trust him to do what he says.

8. Isaac is weaned.

Genesis 21:8

And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.

9. Hagar and Ishmael sent away.

Genesis 21:9

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

15. Hagar in distress.

Genesis 21:15

And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

17. The angel relieves and comforts her.

Genesis 21:17

And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, what ailed thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

What happened to Ishmael, and who are his descendants? Ishmael became ruler of a large tribe or nation. The Ishmaelites were nomads living in the Desert of Sinai and Paran, south of Israel. One of Ishmael's daughters married Esau, Ishmael's nephew (Genesis 28:9). The Bible pictures the Ishmaelites as hostile to Israel and to God (Psalm 83:6).

23. Abimelech's covenant with Abraham at Beersheba.

Matthew 21:23

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?

God tested Abraham, not to trip him and watch him fall, but to deepen his capacity to obey God and thus to develop his character. Just as fire refines ore to extract precious metals, God refines us through difficult circumstances. When we are tested we can complain, or we can try to see how God is stretching us to develop our character.

Beersheba, the southernmost city of Israel, lay on the edge of a vast desert that stretched as far as Egypt to the southwest and Mount Sinai to the south. The phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" was often used to describe the traditional boundaries of the Promised Land (2 Samuel 17:11). Beersheba's southern location and the presence of several wells in the area may explain why Abraham settled there. Beersheba was also the home of Isaac, Abraham's son.

Genesis 22

The Offering of Isaac; Nahor's sons

1. Abraham is tested with the command to offer Isaac.

Genesis 22:1

And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

God tested Abraham, not to trip him and watch him fall, but to deepen his capacity to obey God and thus to develop his character. Just as fire refines ore to extract precious metals, God refines us through difficult circumstances. When we are tested we can complain, or we can try to see how God is stretching us to develop our character

That morning Abraham began one of the greatest acts of obedience in recorded history. He traveled 50 miles to Mount Moriah near the site of Jerusalem. Over the years he had learned many tough lessons about the importance of obeying God. This time his obedience was prompt and complete. Obeying God is often a struggle because it may mean giving up something we truly want. We should not expect our obedience to God to be easy or to come naturally.

3. He gives proof of his faith and obedience.

Genesis 22:3

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

That morning Abraham began one of the greatest acts of obedience in recorded history. He traveled 50 miles to Mount Moriah near the site of Jerusalem. Over the years he had learned many tough lessons about the importance of obeying God. This time his obedience was prompt and complete. Obeying God is often a struggle because it may mean giving up something we truly want. We should not expect our obedience to God to be easy or to come naturally.

11. The angel prevents him.

Genesis 22:11

And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, here am I.

It is difficult to let go of what we deeply love. What could be more proper than to love your only child? Yet when we do give to God what he asks, he returns to us far more than we could dream. The spiritual benefits of his blessings far outweigh our sacrifices. Have you withheld your love, your children, or your time from him? Trust him to provide (Genesis 22:8).

13. Isaac is exchanged for a ram.

Genesis 22:13

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

Notice the parallel between the ram offered on the altar as a substitute for Isaac and Christ offered on the cross as a substitute for us. Whereas God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, God did not spare his own Son, Jesus, from dying on the cross. If Jesus had lived, the rest of humankind would have died. God sent his only Son to die for us so that we can be spared from the eternal death we deserve and instead receive eternal life (John 3:16).

14. The place is called Jehovah-jireh.

Genesis 22:14

And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.

15. Abraham is again blessed.

Genesis 22:15

And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, Abraham received abundant blessings because he did not hold back, but obeyed God. First, God gave Abraham's descendants the ability to conquer their enemies. Second, God promised Abraham children and grandchildren who would in turn bless the whole earth. People's lives would be changed as a result of knowing of the faith of Abraham and his descendants. Most often we think of blessings as gifts to be enjoyed. But when God blesses us, his blessings are intended to overflow to others.

20. The generations of Nahor unto Rebekah.

Genesis 32:20

And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me.

Genesis 23

Death and Burial of Sarah

1. The age and death of Sarah.

Genesis 23:1

And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah.

3. The purchase of the field and cave of Machpelah;

Genesis 23:2

And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

The polite interchange between Abraham and Ephron was typical of bargaining at that time. Ephron graciously offered to give his land to Abraham at no charge; Abraham insisted on paying for it; Ephron politely mentioned the price but said, in effect, that it wasn't important; Abraham paid the 400 shekels of silver. Both men

knew what was going on as they went through the bargaining process. If Abraham had accepted the land as a gift when it was offered, he would have insulted Ephron, who then would have rescinded his offer. Many Middle Eastern shopkeepers still follow this ritual with their customers.

19. Where Sarah is buried.

Genesis 23:19

And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan.

In Abraham's day, death and burial were steeped in ritual and traditions. Failing to honor a dead person demonstrated the greatest possible lack of respect. An improper burial was the equivalent of a curse. Mourning was an essential part of the death ritual. Friends and relatives let out loud cries for the whole neighborhood to hear. Because there were no funeral homes or undertakers, these same friends and relatives helped prepare the body for burial, which usually took place on the same day because of the warm climate.

Abraham was in a foreign land looking for a place to bury his wife. Strangers offered to help him because he was "a mighty prince," and they respected him. Although Abraham had not established roots in the area, his reputation was above reproach. Those who invest their time and money in serving God often earn a pleasant return on their investment—a good reputation and the respect of others.

Genesis 24

Isaac and Rebekah

1. Abraham swears his servant.

Genesis 24:1

And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.

In Abraham's culture, putting a hand under the thigh was how an agreement was sealed or a covenant ratified. To accomplish the same purpose, we shake hands, swear oaths, or sign documents in the presence of a notary public.

In Abraham's culture, putting a hand under the thigh was how an agreement was sealed or a covenant ratified. To accomplish the same purpose, we shake hands, swear oaths, or sign documents in the presence of a notary public.

10. The servant's journey.

Genesis 24:10

And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor.

The well, the chief source of water for an entire village, was usually located outside town along the main road. Many people had to walk a mile or more for their water. They could use only what they could carry home. Farmers and shepherds would come from nearby fields to draw water for their animals. The well was a good place to meet new friends or to chat with old ones. Rebekah would have visited the well twice daily to draw water for her family.

12. His prayer.

Genesis 24:12

And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham.

Abraham's servant asked God for guidance in this very important task. Obviously Eliezer had learned much about faith and about God from his master. What are your family members, friends, and associates learning about God from watching you? Be like Abraham, setting an example of dependent faith. And be like Eliezer, asking God for guidance before any venture.

14. His sign.

Genesis 24:14

And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master.

15. Rebekah meets him;

Genesis 24:15

And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder.

Rebekah had physical beauty, but the servant was looking for a sign of inner beauty. Appearance is important to us, and we spend time and money improving it. But how much effort do we put into developing our inner beauty? Patience, kindness, and joy are the beauty treatments that help us become truly lovely—on the inside.

18. Fulfills his sign.

Genesis 24:18

And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink.

Rebekah's servant spirit was clearly demonstrated as she willingly and quickly drew water for Eliezer and his camels. The pots used for carrying water were large and heavy. It took a lot of water to satisfy a thirsty camel—up to 25 gallons per camel after a week's travel. Seeing Rebekah go to work, Eliezer knew this was a woman with a heart for doing far more than the bare minimum. Do you have a servant spirit? When asked to help or when you see a need, go beyond the minimum.

22. Receives jewels;

Genesis 24:22

And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold;

23. Shows her kindred;

Genesis 24:23

And said, whose daughter art thou? Tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?

25. And invites him home.

Genesis 24:25

She said moreover unto him, we have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in.

26. The servant blesses God.

Genesis 24:26

And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord.

As soon as Abraham's servant knew that God had answered his prayer, he prayed and thanked God for his goodness and guidance. God will also use and lead us if we are available like Eliezer. And our first response should be praise and thanksgiving that God would choose to work in and through us. When Eliezer told his story to Laban, he spoke openly of God and his goodness. Often we do the opposite, afraid that we will be misunderstood or rejected or seen as too religious. Instead, we should share openly what God is doing for us.

29. Laban entertains him.

Genesis 24:29

And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well.

34. The servant shows his message.

Genesis 24:34

And he said, I am Abraham's servant.

When Eliezer told his story to Laban, he spoke openly of God and his goodness. Often we do the opposite, afraid that we will be misunderstood or rejected or seen as too religious. Instead, we should share openly what God is doing for us.

50. Laban and Bethuel approve it.

Genesis 24:50

Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, the thing proceeded from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.

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58. Rebekah consents to go, and departs.

Genesis 24:58

And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.

May your offspring possess the gates of their enemies” means “May you overcome all your enemies.”

Genesis 25

Abraham's Death; Ishmael, Jacob and Esau

1. The sons of Abraham by Keturah.

Genesis 25:1

Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah.

5. The division of his goods.

Genesis 25:5

And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac.

Abraham took another wife, Keturah, after Sarah died. Although the sons and grandson of Abraham and Keturah received many gifts from Abraham, all his property and authority went to Isaac, his principle heir.

7. His age, death, and burial.

Genesis 25:7

And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years.

11. God blesses Isaac.

Genesis 25:11

And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.

12. The generations of Ishmael.

Genesis 25:12

Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bare unto Abraham:

17. His age and death.

Genesis 25:17

And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people.

19. Isaac prays for Rebekah, being barren.

Genesis 25:19

And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac:

Isaac inherited everything from his father, including God's promise to make his descendants into a great nation. As a boy, Isaac did not resist as his father prepared to sacrifice him, and as a man, he gladly accepted the wife that others chose for him. Through Isaac, we learn how to let God guide our life and place his will ahead of our own.

22. The children strive in her womb.

Genesis 25:22

And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the Lord.

As Isaac pleaded with God for children, so the Bible encourages us to ask and even plead for our most personal and important requests. God wants to grant our requests, but he wants us to ask him. Even then, as Isaac learned, God may decide to withhold his answer for a while in order to (1) deepen our insight into what we really need, (2) broaden our appreciation for his answers, or (3) allow us to mature so we can use his gifts more wisely.

24. The birth of Esau and Jacob.

Genesis 25:24

And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

27. Their different characters and pursuits.

Genesis 25:27

And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

29. Esau sells his birthright.

Genesis 25:29

And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint:

A birthright was a special honor given to the firstborn son. It included a double portion of the family inheritance along with the honor of one day becoming the family's leader. The oldest son could sell his birthright or give it away if he chose, but in so doing, he would lose both material goods and his leadership position. By trading his birthright, Esau showed complete disregard for the spiritual blessings

that would have come his way if he had kept it. In effect, Esau “despised” his birthright (Genesis 25:34).

Esau traded the lasting benefits of his birthright for the immediate pleasure of food. He acted on impulse, satisfying his immediate desires without pausing to consider the long-range consequences of what he was about to do. We can fall into the same trap. When we see something we want, our first impulse is to get it. At first we feel intensely satisfied and sometimes even powerful because we have obtained what we set out to get. But immediate pleasure often loses sight of the future. We can avoid making Esau’s mistake by comparing the short-term satisfaction with its long-range consequences before we act.

Esau exaggerated his hunger. “I am about to die,” he said. This thought made his choice much easier because if he was starving, what good was an inheritance anyway? The pressure of the moment distorted his perspective and made his decision seem urgent. We often experience similar pressures. For example, when we feel sexual pressure, a marriage vow may seem unimportant. We might feel such great pressure in one area that nothing else seems to matter and we lose our perspective. Getting through that short, pressure-filled moment is often the most difficult part of overcoming a temptation