

Bible 101 Notes for January 13, 2010, Genesis 1-4

Begin with prayer: Proper 28

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Bible 101 system: As described in *The Messenger* article, the bulletin and at the Jan. introduction, we'll go verse by verse through the entire Bible in roughly 6 or 7 years, alternating OT and NT books. So tonight we begin Genesis; when we finish it, we'll go to Matthew (and we should be there about the start of Lent). Lecture style, but you're welcome to ask questions before and after class, and by e-mail. I promise to answer them and if I don't know the answer, to find one for you. And when we finish a book, we'll spend some time on Q&A before moving on to the next study.

What Bible 101 is NOT: I am not a theologian, not ordained, nor do I have a PhD in Bible Studies. I do have a lifelong friendship with the Bible, fostered by my parents. My father was a pastor; I went to church twice on Sunday and on Wednesday nights. We also had family worship after dinner every night. I grew up hearing the Bible and studying it. But I owe a great deal of my enthusiasm for and understanding of the Bible to more recent methodical studies under people like Bill Creasy, J. Vernon McGee, Chuck Smith and Mark Foreman. I've been teaching the Bible since 2003, and this will mark my third trip through Genesis. I'm excited. This is a book that is filled with poetry, prayer, archetypal characters, dramatic events, tragedy and romance, love and family. We'll study it as the inspired word of God, a story that God has given us in order that we might know what he expects of us. And what we can expect of God. We will learn much about God as he shows us his power and his love from the first verses of his self-revelation to mankind.

Why study Genesis: Genesis a book of beginnings and covenants. It roughly divides into two big parts—Part I consists of 4 events (creation, sin, flood and Tower of Babel), and Part II is the story of 4 men (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph). We're going to cover Part I, the first 11 chapters, quickly—this week and next; and we'll take the next six weeks to cover ch. 12-50 and the stories of the four great men through whom God brought a new nation—one whose God he was in a special and direct way.

Gen. 1:1 "In the beginning" shows us the nature of God and creation: he spoke (*God's word* has at least three meanings to a Christian: It's God speaking; God's written word, the Bible, and the Word made flesh, Jesus.) God's voice carries power: notice that he speaks and everything happens. And he does it in an orderly way. Note also the poetic nature of the creation story: repetition and rhythm emphasize God's work and its nature—he spoke and everything began. And each time, God looks at his work and says "it's good."

Genesis 2 is not a second creation story, as some have alleged; it's the story of the most important part of creation to human beings—the creation of man and woman. In Gen. 2:1-4, we hear God saying "I like what I've done and now I'm going to rest." But in the following verses, the writer (Moses) shows us the creation in detail, at ground level. Before we were seeing it from God's point of view.

Note how Gen. 2 ends. Adam is happy and God is happy with his creation. In v. 7, God "formed a man's body from the dust of the ground and breathed into it the breath of life. And the man became a living person." Different. In creating the heavens and the earth, the animals and the plants, God had spoken, and his powerful words resulted in a creation that was complete and orderly. Now, God is working with his hands; he's forming man's body from the dust of the ground—he's not speaking him into existence. This is careful and personal. God then breathes into him LIFE—and that alone makes us different from animals. The spirit of God is given to us at creation—breathed into us so we are mind, body and spirit beings.

Matthew Henry's comments on Gen 2:21-25

The making of the woman, to be a help-meet for Adam. This was done upon the sixth day, as was also the placing of Adam in paradise, though it is here mentioned after an account of the seventh day's rest; but what was said in general (ch. 1:27), that God made man male and female, is more distinctly related here. Observe, 1. That Adam was first formed, then Eve (1 Tim. 2:13), and she was made of the man, and for the man (1 Co. 11:8, 9), all which are urged there as reasons for the humility, modesty, silence, and submissiveness, of that sex in general, and particularly the subjection and reverence which wives owe to their own husbands. Yet man being made last of the creatures, as the best and most excellent of all, Eve's being made after Adam, and out of him, puts an honour upon that sex, as the glory of the man, 1 Co. 11:7. If man is the head, she is the crown, a crown to her husband, the crown of the visible creation. The man was dust refined, but the woman was dust double-refined, one remove further from the earth. 2. That Adam slept while his wife was in making, that no room might be left to imagine that he had herein directed the Spirit of the Lord, or been his counsellor, Isa. 40:13. He had been made sensible of his want of a meet help; but, God having undertaken to provide him one, he does not afflict himself with any care about it, but lies down and sleeps sweetly, as one that had cast all his care on God, with a cheerful resignation of himself and all his affairs to his Maker's will and wisdom. Jehovah-jireh, let the Lord provide when and whom he pleases. If we graciously rest in God, God will graciously work for us and work all for good. 3. That God caused a sleep to fall on Adam, and made it a deep sleep, that so the opening of his side might be no grievance to him; while he knows no sin, God will take care he shall feel no pain. When God, by his providence, does that to his people which is grievous to flesh and blood, he not only consults their happiness in the issue, but by his grace he can so quiet and compose their spirits as to make them easy under the sharpest operations. 4. That the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved. Adam lost a rib, and without any diminution to his strength or comeliness (for, doubtless, the flesh was closed without a scar); but in lieu thereof he had a help meet for him, which abundantly made up his loss: what God takes away from his people he will, one way or other, restore with advantage. In this (as in many other things) Adam was a figure of him that was to come; for out of the side of Christ, the second Adam, his spouse the church was formed, when he slept the sleep, the deep sleep, of death upon the cross, in order to which his side was opened, and there came out blood and water, blood to purchase his church and water to purify it to himself. See Eph. 5:25, 26. (From Blueletterbible.org/commentaries; Matthew Henry an English minister in 17th and early 18th c; died 1714).

Details of the garden and the place where God has placed man. And the Adamic covenant expressed in Gen. 2:15-17

Then we get to Gen. 3: Here's where God's great plan is disrupted by man's free will. Notice what God says to Adam in 2:15: "You can eat of anything EXCEPT the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; if you eat of its fruit, you will surely die." This is a covenant: you do what I ask—take care of the world, and stay away from this ONE tree. You can have all the rest. If you do as I ask, you'll have a wonderful life, a relationship with me, you'll be comfortable. You'll have life if you obey, death if you disobey." God could have made man without free will; he could have created beings who would automatically love and serve him. But God created mankind with a will and the ability to make decision—he'd rather we wanted to love him than that we loved him out of a sense of duty.

Covenant is an important word in Genesis. It means promise or agreement, and a modern equivalent might be contract. There are several very significant covenants in Genesis; the first is with Adam, the second with Noah, the third with Abraham.

Four characteristics of sin (from Bill Creasy's lectures on Genesis)

Sin is subtle (the serpent crafty). He plants doubt. "Did Elohim really say. . .?" He took Eve's words and used them to undermine Eve's relationship with God. Satan isn't smart: he's done this same thing over and over. Matthew 4:1-11 records Jesus' temptation by Satan. Satan's tone is subtle again: "If you are the son of God. . ." Jesus replies with scripture. Satan takes Jesus' scripture and turns it back on Jesus, uses it; Jesus uses scripture reply again. Satan uses Jesus' words against him. He does the same to us. God gave us his word to understand what's at stake so we can win against Satan (he knows scripture and we must know it, too). Keep Psalm 91:9-13 in mind: "If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your dwelling. For he orders his angels to protect you wherever you go. They will hold you with their hands to keep you from striking your foot on a stone. You will trample down lions and poisonous snakes; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet." And the final verses of that psalm only reinforce this promise that God protects his own. When sin entered the Garden of Eden, the relationship between Adam and Eve was fractured, and the relationship between God, Adam and Eve was fractured.

Sin distorts our judgment: Sin is the condition into which we are born in; our behavior results from this condition. We rationalize rather than confronting our behavior. "It's no big thing." "I only told a white lie." Etc.

Sin gets bigger: it doesn't stay still. David and Bathsheba illustrates: David was "in heat" not in love. He sets up a murder and puts Bathsheba's husband on the front line; he and others die.

Sin cascades down through the generations: affects everyone around you. An alcoholic parent creates an abusive home, and often creates kids who are alcoholic and abusive to their own kids. In David's case, his son Absalom tried to take the throne; David grieved for him.

James 1:13-15: James, the brother of Jesus, wrote this very practical epistle. In it, he speaks of faith being obvious in a person's "works" or behavior. And in the first chapter, he speaks of sin in this way: "When tempted, no one should say 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does

he tempt anyone, but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, give birth to death.” James’ sequence: temptation, evil desires, giving in, sinning is clearly demonstrated by Eve’s seeing the tree, hearing the tempter’s words, wanting to be like God and eating the fruit God had said they were not to eat.

At the end of chapter 3, we see the consequences of sin. Sin always has consequences since a holy God cannot permit sin; sin destroys our relationship with God. God curses both the devil/serpent and man and woman. He also states that enmity will always exist between man and devil—the devil is our enemy. And yet he’s subtle, as we saw. From mankind will come a redeemer. Then at the end, God locks and guards the garden and he decides that man cannot live forever—life will have a limit. Death has entered the picture. What a contrast to chapter 2 where everything is perfect and God is happy with his creation. Genesis is a book of creation and recreation.

Chapter 4: We begin to see how sin has consequences in the next generation, and the next. Cain and Abel; offerings and attitudes. Note God's telling Cain "sin is waiting to attack and destroy you; you must subdue it." (4:7; sin metaphor: beast lying in wait). God warns Cain; he loves Cain and Abel; God may be disappointed with his creation but he never stops loving them. We see his love all through Genesis. In ch. 4:18, we're 7 generations from Adam, and finally, we see another distortion of God's plan: first we've had sin destroying the perfect garden and harmony of God and man; then we've had murder; and now, marriage is distorted: Lamech, 7th gen. from Adam, marries two women, and he brags about killing a man who attacked him. At the end of the chapter, we see Adam and Eve having more children—one replaces Abel. Seth and his son "began to worship the Lord." Hopeful. (Wonderful John Steinbeck novel called *East of Eden* is a retelling of Genesis 4).

Next week: we'll begin with chapter 5.

Let's close in prayer.

Bible 101 Notes for January 20, 2010, Genesis 5-11

1. **Maps:** The events and people of the Bible relate to real geographic places. When we begin to talk about Abraham, for example, we'll trace his journey. Your Bibles should provide you with some maps, too.
2. **Recap Gen. 1-4:** In the first two chapters of Genesis, we watched God create a perfect world—balanced, harmonious, orderly. And we heard God give Adam a choice: obey me and eat of all the tasty produce of this garden—except for the fruit of this one tree. If you eat of it, God said, you'll die. This is the Edenic covenant, the first of many covenants recorded in Genesis (a second covenant occurs in Gen. 3, after Adam and Eve sins; this is called the Adamic covenant). God is happy with his creation: "God saw that it was good" repeats throughout the creation narrative. On the 7th day, God rested. He set apart (made holy) this one day and did no work on it. **In Gen. 3**, this perfect world changes: Satan enters the picture and tempts Eve. She falls for his line, eats the fruit, gives some to Adam and the two of them are changed: now they know good vs. evil, and they are afraid when God comes to see them. They are ashamed of their nakedness. Sin is subtle, it distorts our judgment, it grows, it cascades down through generations. God exiles man and woman from the Garden and puts a guard around it so they can't re-enter. Sin has consequences. **Sin continues:** In Genesis 4, Cain kills his brother Abel and Cain is cursed.
3. **We see a pattern:** when mankind obeys God, blessings follow; when mankind disobeys God, curses and consequences follow. One of the consequences is separation from God. Paul writes in Romans "where sin did abound, God's grace did much more abound." (KJV) or in a more modern translation: "As people sinned more and more, God's wonderful kindness (grace) became more abundant." (Rom. 5:20) Praise God for his grace in giving Jesus who came to bridge the gap between God and man: he is the perfect sacrifice, and his offering of himself, a perfect man who never sinned, atoned for the sin which began in the Garden of Eden. Jesus institutes the New Covenant.
4. **Now Gen. 5:** Here we have the first of many genealogies we'll encounter in the OT, and most of them act as transitions between events and significant characters. We're leaving Adam and Eve, their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and down through the generations, we see that men lived exceedingly lengthy lives. At the end of this genealogy, we are introduced to Noah who becomes the focus of the next four chapters. It's worth mentioning that this long lifespan was reduced; by the time we get to Abraham, we're down to the 100s. And then in Moses' time, he writes in Ps. 90:10: "The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty, yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away." Moses lived to be 120, but it was because he had work to do for God. Back to Noah.
5. **Genesis 6:** Here are the first five verses of Gen. 6 from The Message: "When the human race began to increase, with more and more daughters being born, the sons of God noticed that the daughters of men were beautiful. They looked them over and picked out wives for themselves. Then GOD said, "I'm not going to breathe life into men and women endlessly. Eventually they're going to die; from now on they can expect a life span of 120 years." This was back in the days (and also later) when there were giants in the land. The giants came from the union of the sons of God and the daughters of men. These were the mighty men of ancient lore, the famous ones."

6. **Various interpretations:** Some think the "sons of God" are descendants of Seth (Gen. 5:26) whose line was godly, whereas the "daughters of men" were descendants of Cain, whose line was not godly. That's one way to read it. Another is to say that the "sons of God" are angels—fallen angels—who corrupt the human race still further. And their offspring were giants—abnormal human beings, but as the Greek and Roman myths have it, able to do extraordinary feats. Incidentally, this is the only place in the Bible where such a liaison is described. One other anomaly: does the 120 years refer to the lifespan of men from then on? Or does it refer to the number of years God will give humanity to straighten out? I think God's disappointment with mankind has urged him to limit the number of years given to each. By Psalm 90, which Moses wrote, the average span is 70.
7. **Violent sin is the focus:** It doesn't matter who the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" are. The point of this passage is that the population had exploded and so had sin. Mankind became more and more evil. And in fact, Jesus refers to this time in Matt. 24:37: "When the son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day." Doesn't it describe our society today?
8. **Gen 6:6 is sad:** "The Lord was sorry he'd ever made mankind." Just think how a parent feels when a child in whom parents have placed tremendous hope and dreams turns to drugs or a life of crime. How disappointed, how betrayed a human parent feels. The writer gives God human attributes, which of course, are applicable only to a point: God is God—he KNOWS the human heart. In fact, the passage makes it clear that God reads our thoughts and he knew that there were NO good thoughts, motives or intentions in the human race. It was therefore time for God to act, and he does.
9. **The contrast between** the first 7 verses and verse 8 is dramatic: "But Noah found favor with the Lord." An old Gospel song says "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," and that sums it up. God's grace existed even in his anger and disappointment with everyone else; God knew Noah was a righteous man and so he gave him some strange instructions. Noah lived miles—500 miles—from the nearest big body of water. He lived in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, an area where pitch or raw petroleum was available. But there's no ocean nearby, and a boat this size won't float on a river. Noah doesn't live in a seaport, or a fishing village—he is not a man of the water. But God tells him to build a boat. A very big boat.
10. **Recall the description of Noah:** He was the "only blameless man on earth, he followed God's will and enjoyed a close relationship with God." He trusted God, and trusted God's promise that he'd keep him and his sons safe when the flood came. Noah believed God.
11. **God gives specific details about construction: Look** at vs. 22: "So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him." The three decked barge was 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high—the size of a Navy cruiser. Noah is about 500 years old when he starts and it takes 100 years to finish building this boat or ark. His neighbors called him crazy, taunted him.
12. **Animals:** The number of animals it could hold would be enormous: two of every family, around 700 animals, but of every species would number 35,000 pairs or 70,000 animals. The ark had room for those 70,000 and more. Someone calculated that if the average land animal is the size of a sheep, the ship which could hold 136,500 sheep and use only half its

capacity. The rest would be taken up with food and water for the human and animal passengers. And they're going to be cooped up there for about 13 months.

13. **God has said he will destroy all living things on the earth.** So he instructs Noah to take animals on board with him. Note that God specifically tells him to take pairs of most animals, and 7 pairs of certain animals approved for offerings. What are those animals? Look at Lev. 1:1-17. God's instructions for sacrifices and offerings are always VERY specific. So we can assume that the animals taken on board were in pairs except for these bulls and goats and sheep, pigeons and doves. Some will become offerings once the flood is over, and the rest will "multiply and fill the earth" once again.
14. **Genesis 7 and 8 are filled with the details of the flood.** God shuts the door of the ark once Noah, his family and all the animals are on board. They're on the boat, getting organized, I'm sure, for 7 days and then the rain starts. Noah's faith is tested once more. God said I'm going to destroy the earth with a flood; they're on the boat, waiting, waiting and finally the rain and the water fountains start to flood the earth. It has not rained before; this is a new phenomenon.
15. **I love Gen. 8:1:** God remembered Noah and all the animals in the boat. God causes the water to dry up. Remember, it's flooded the earth to a depth of 22 feet above the highest peak. That's truly deep water.
16. **It takes 150 days for the water** to go down sufficiently for the ark to rest on Mt. Ararat (16,946 feet high; in Turkey). Then in 40 days Noah opens the window and releases a raven; then in another 40 days, a dove is released. The dove returned to the ark. Another week, and the dove was released and at the end of a day, came back with an olive leaf. Noah waited another 7 days, released the dove and she never returned. Now it was OK to get out. More than a year after they'd entered the ark, Noah and his family stepped onto dry ground again (408 days).
17. **In Gen. 8:20,** Noah builds an altar to the Lord. Noah gives appropriate thanks to God for keeping them safe; God renews the covenant with Noah. In Gen. 9:1, we read that God blessed Noah and his sons, telling them to replenish the earth.
18. **The theme of creation is back with us:** God has destroyed the earth's living breathing population, but he's left a remnant with which to begin again. This speaks of hope. Man creates chaos; God creates order.
19. **Gen. 9:** Here are covenant details and some laws for mankind: no murder, be careful about what you eat, etc. The rainbow is the promised symbol of God's promise never to destroy the earth again by flood.
20. **Gen. 9:20 to the end of the chapter** records a rather sordid event. Noah gets drunk; his son Ham sees him naked and passed out. He apparently laughs at this (the man's 601 years old!! How attractive a body can it be?!), and tells his brothers, Shem and Japheth, who take a blanket and back into the tent, letting it fall over their father. They preserve their father's—and the family's honor.
21. **Noah is angry with Ham and** curses his offspring. The Canaanites are the descendants of Noah and it is this nation which God tells Joshua to utterly destroy when they come into the land of Canaan. Their worship is contemptible to God: they worship Ba'al and his goddess in a perverted way.

22. **Chapter 10 is another genealogy**, and shows that the remnant which survived the flood is growing to repopulate the earth.
23. **Genesis 11 has two very important events**: the first is the Tower of Babel with its confusion of language, and the second is the calling of Abram. In the second event, we see God beginning to build a nation that will be different from the rest of the world. Abram, as we will see, is the father of a mighty nation—one worshiping a single God, with laws that set them apart from other peoples.
24. **Gen. 11**: This chapter makes it clear that it doesn't take long after the flood for mankind to return to sinful ways. God's desire to rid the earth of mankind and his evil has been only partly successful; he needs a new plan.
25. We start chapter 11 with the idea that **the whole world is speaking one language**—even though in the preceding genealogy (ch. 10) we've read that certain of the nations had their own languages. I'm guessing that the chronology is that the single language is *prior* to the various languages described in ch. 10. It could even be an "aside" or a "sidebar" by the writer. At one time, everyone spoke the same language—obvious since everyone on earth at that time came from the family of Noah. So the writer is saying, "Are you curious about how and when the tribes began to develop their own languages? Well, here's how." Then he tells us about Babel. Note the personal pronouns in this passage: all I/we/us/our. There's no mention of God. "Let us build a tower. . ." "let us build a monument to ourselves. . ." The building materials—brick (no stones in the area) and asphalt or the same resinous material that Noah used to make the ark waterproof suggest that the people had gone so far from God's promise not to destroy the earth with a flood, that they were building a waterproof tower in which to take shelter if such a flood came again. They didn't believe God.
26. **Tower of Babel under construction**: **God** sees them, but he wants to see it up close, so he comes down to see this construction. Note the plural pronoun God uses: "Let us. . ." trinity again. Let's be clear about what upset God here: it's mankind's pride and self-reliance. God wants human beings to obey him and to trust him. He finds their arrogance a sign of their desire to get along without God. And so, he decides to break up the party: give them all different languages so that the brick makers can't understand the supervisors and the mortar makers can't understand the brick layers. Ingenious. The people scatter, too, to different parts of the world.
27. **In Gen. 11:10, we get the genealogy of Shem, one of Noah's sons**. **Note** that a partial genealogy had been given in ch. 10; in ch. 11, the line is more complete. Why? God wants us to see Abram's lineage. Abram is a giant of the Bible—not just the OT but NT, too, and he is a man whose life and trust in God are to be emulated. God wants us to know and understand Abram.
28. **At the end of chapter 11, the scene shifts to Terah's family**: Abram, Nahor and Haran. All the sons are mentioned, but the focus is on Abram and his family; Abram (whose name means "father") is married to Sarai, who is unable to have children. Both names are changed as God works with them: Abram becomes Abraham (meaning father of a multitude) and Sarai to Sarah (meaning princess). The family moves: Terah takes Abram and his wife, and his grandson Lot, with him from Ur, a great city on the Euphrates River, of the Chaldeans (southern Iraq today) to Haran (just inside modern day Turkey). Their

eventual destination was Canaan—the land to which God would lead Abram. Haran is north and west of Ur, a journey of 700 miles at least. Canaan is still south of them, and west, modern day Israel.

29. **Why all this family history?** Why is it important to know about Abram's father, brothers, nephew, etc.? Family history *WAS* history at that time. Even in Jesus day, people were known by their father's name and grandfather's name, and their tribal affiliation (12 tribes named for 12 sons of Jacob). Remember that Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem to register under Herod's order, and it was because they were of the tribe of Judah. **Jesus is given two genealogies:** the first in Matthew 1 begins with Abraham and follows the family to Mary the mother of Jesus. Luke 3 takes a different approach. Luke begins with Jesus, son of Joseph, son of. . . all the way back to God: "Adam was the son of God." The family history identifies Abram and puts him in a line stretching back to Noah (and by extension to Adam and God).
30. **Genesis 12:** In this chapter, we read another covenant, and we read of the first appearance of God to Abram (there are seven in all). We've seen the general Edenic covenant (Gen. 2:14), we've seen the covenant with Adam after he and Eve have sinned (Gen. 3:14-21), the Noahic covenant (Gen. 9) and now with Abram. This covenant will be restated and reaffirmed throughout Genesis—first to Abraham and then to his son and grandsons. Here we see God choosing another man: first he'd chosen the first man he's created, Adam, for a blessing. Then he chose Noah as a righteous man in a sea of sin; now he chooses Abram, and from Abram will come a distinctly different line. The promise is for land and children, and remember, Sarai is barren so Abram is not yet a father. But God promises him that he will not only be a father but "the father of a great nation."
31. **Next week:** we'll get into Abram/Abraham's story in depth.

Bible 101 Notes for January 27, 2010, Genesis 12-16

1. **Review:** God gave mankind a second chance when he preserved Noah's family as a remnant. They were to replenish the earth, and "out of the virtues and vices of Noah's sons grew the virtues and vices of the families of the world." Worth keeping in mind that as parents we pass on not only our genes, but our attitudes and our beliefs, values and yes, our vices because we teach not so much by our words, but by our example.
2. **The Bible is one story:** But we don't get all the details of any of the individual stories: God concentrates on selected events and characters who illustrate God's interactions with human beings. We focus on several very important people who play major roles. Abraham's story is, in effect, the story of the entire Jewish nation. Gen. 12-24 records God's relationship with Abraham and Abraham's faith in God.
3. **Time line:** Abraham enters history at approximately 2000 BC. The flood is estimated to have occurred 500 years before, and so Adam and Eve were probably alive circa 4000 BC—but of this we cannot be sure. Of Abraham's time, there isn't much doubt because tracing Jesus back to him accounts for 2000 years. The Exodus from Egypt is at about 1440 BC. David takes the throne in 1000 BC. There is an exile which occurs 586 B.C., a return at 516 B.C, and then until the birth of Christ in 4 BC, there is a period of silence. Jerusalem, Israel is conquered over the years by the Assyrians, the Persians, the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans, and at Jesus' birth, has been under foreign rule for 500 years.
4. **Abraham:** What a man of God he becomes as we watch his life from the time he leaves his father's home in Ur and Haran (about 2000 B.C.) and strikes out on his own. But Abram's behavior isn't exemplary all the time; again, God gives us the whole story, not just the times when Abram was above reproach. But on the whole, we watch Abraham develop a faith walk and trust in God. He is a man whom the Bible—old and new testaments—refer to as a foundational figure. It is his faith that becomes the model for those who follow him, and most importantly, the Jewish nation, God's chosen people. And that's why we have a bit of his genealogy (he descends from Shem, not Ham) at the end of ch. 11. God wants us to know who Abram is; we're going to read much more about him.
5. **Overview of Abraham** It's hard to overestimate the importance of this man to Christianity and to Judaism. The Muslims also trace their origins to Abraham. Checking only a few of the New Testament references will give you some idea of his influence: Romans 4: 1-3 Abraham was humanly speaking the founder of our Jewish nation. What were his experiences concerning his question of being saved by faith? Was it because of his good deeds that God accepted him? If so, he would have had something to boast about. But from God's point of view, Abraham had no basis at all for pride. For the scriptures (Gen. 15:6) tell us "Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous." Later in Romans 4:13, Paul says: "It is clear, then, that God's promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was not based on obedience to God's law, but on the new relationship with God that comes by faith." And here is Paul's description of Abraham's faith in Romans 4:16-22: So that's why faith is the key! God's promise is given to us as a free gift. And we are certain to receive it, whether or not we follow Jewish customs, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, "I have made you the

father of many nations." This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who brings into existence what didn't exist before. When God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations, Abraham believed him. God had also said, "Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars," even though such a promise seemed utterly impossible! And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though he knew that he was too old to be a father at the age of one hundred and that Sarah, his wife, had never been able to have children. Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was absolutely convinced that God was able to do anything he promised. And because of Abraham's faith, God declared him to be righteous.

6. **Jesus as Abraham's descendant:** Jesus' lineage is traced to Abraham in Matthew 1:1-2: "This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of King David and of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac," etc. Matthew introduces Jesus' genealogy by naming the two most important ancestors of the Messiah: David and Abraham. Jesus is the fulfillment of the covenant promise which states "through you will all nations be blessed." Jesus is the savior of all mankind—the redeemer, toward which all of the OT points. James and Peter also link Christ to Abraham in their epistles, as does the writer of Hebrews. Paul makes additional references to Abraham in Galatians and Ephesians.
7. **Abraham takes the stage in chapter 12**, and continues to be "present" through the rest of the book in his offspring: Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. The first verse of this chapter sets the tone: Go to a land I will show you. God is asking Abram to take on faith a journey to a destination God isn't naming.
8. **The covenant:** God makes a covenant with Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3, and notice that it has six parts: God will give him land, will cause him to become the father of a great nation, will bless him, will make him a blessing to others (through Abraham will all the nations of the earth be blessed), will bless those who bless Abraham, will curse those who curse Abraham. This is the most far-reaching covenant God has made with any man. And God confirms and re-confirms this covenant four more times. Notice, too, that this is an *unconditional* covenant whereas the covenant with Noah and that with Adam were conditional: obey me (do what I ask you to) and I will bless you. (Or in the negative, disobey and you'll die). God is responsible for fulfilling this covenant he makes with Abraham. The only part Abraham has is to believe God—to put his faith in God's promise. Remember, though, that A and S are childless and he's 75, she's 65.
9. **The journey:** They go trusting in God to lead them. Abram takes Lot with them and their households. They leave Haran for Canaan. In v. 7, God tells Abram (2nd appearance), "I will give this land to your descendants" and Abram builds an altar and offers a sacrifice to God there. This is a pattern Abram repeats: God appears, he makes a promise to A and A worships God by building an altar (v. 8, another altar when they reach Bethel) and here Abram is "calling on God" or praying, worshiping God. They continued their journey.
10. **Egypt:** In v. 10, we read about a famine in the land where A's household is traveling. They decide to go to Egypt. Notice that Abram doesn't ask God about this. His last conversation with God is in v. 8. Sarai is a beautiful woman so A tells her to tell a half truth that she is his sister and not his wife; in fact, she is his half sister, but she is also his wife. A is looking out for himself; he wants the Egyptians to find Sarai attractive but not

kill him as her husband to get her. And Sarai did as she was told. When they got to Egypt, indeed, Pharaoh found S. beautiful and took her into his harem. The Pharaoh treated A well—giving him flocks and servants as a sort of dowry. But the Lord brought plagues on the house of Pharaoh (a preview of the later plagues) and this angers P. He asks A why he'd told him that S was his sister and not his wife? P tells A to take her and leave, and so they do.

11. **Genesis 13:** Abram takes his household back to Bethel, the place where he'd built his first altar. He goes back home richer than when he'd left Bethel for Egypt. Now Abram calls on God (v. 4). The household of A included Lot; the servants or herdsmen of the two households began to fight over grazing land. So A called Lot to him and said "let's not fight; we need to separate to find adequate land for our flocks." A gave Lot a choice; Lot looked to the green Jordan valley and decided to go there. Lot followed his eyes and not God's plan. Lot settles near Sodom—the city lights are attractive to him. Abram remains a shepherd and a nomad. But God comes to A and tells him "Lift up your eyes; all this will be yours forever—for you and your descendants" (remember, A has no children). God tells A that he will have descendants too numerous to count. This is God's 3rd appearance to Abram. This chapter is significant for two reasons: one Lot leaves and goes to the vicinity of Sodom, which we'll discover is a wicked place. And A's peace-making move is rewarded: God comes to him once again and tells him "all of this will be yours." Once again, we see A building an altar and worshipping God.
12. **Genesis 14:** Now we read about the first war the Bible records. Five kings from the north invade the land of four kings in the south. The reason is trade routes; the northern king, led by Kedorlamer want more control and more land, more power. The four in the south rebel and unite to fight them. They are defeated anyway, and the alliance of the north carries off the possessions and people of Sodom—including Lot. Someone comes to A and tells him; A gets his own army together and they chase after the fleeing northern army. They defeat them and get Lot and his family back. A is a good commander; he divides his troops and attacks at night, surprising the much larger force. The kings of the south come to thank A when he returns to his tent at Mamre. And he refuses money from them; he doesn't want to be obliged to them. He says it's OK to reward his allies (v. 13). Then a wondrous character enters the picture. Notice Melchizedek has no genealogy and this is his only appearance in all of the Bible, but he is mentioned several times in the NT as a type of Christ. Mel, the king of Salem (later called Jerusalem) is also a priest; he comes to bless A and tell him that God has given A this victory. A gave Melchizedek his tithe in response. Melchizedek is called the King of Peace, the King of Righteousness; he's the archetype of Christ who becomes our great high priest. The writer of Hebrews (some think it's Paul), is carefully arguing through the entire book that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law; Jesus is the high priest who is eternal. He died once for all, making a sacrifice for sin. Heb. 6:26 says "Jesus has already gone in there [God's inner sanctuary] for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the line of Melchizedek." And Heb. 7 gives a lot more detail comparing Jesus to Melchizedek.
13. **Genesis 15:** God comes to Abram again in a vision (4th appearance) and tells him that he, God, is Abram's "shield and compensation." (This is a wide awake vision; later in the chapter, God puts A to sleep and in a dream tells him about the future.) Since A has just turned down a reward from the king of Sodom, God is telling A, "I am your provider; I am

the God who gives you strength to defeat your enemies and I will give you all that you need." Abram asks God a question: who will be my heir? You've promised me a son; where is he? It's OK for us to ask God questions. After all, God's promises do not always come to pass instantly; our faith is being tested as we wait, but like A, we can ask God for clarification. God assures him that his servant will not inherit; A will have a son who will inherit—a son from your own body. Then A is told to look at the stars—your descendants will be that numberless. Before God had told him they'd be as countless as the sand; now as countless as the stars. And Abram believed God and it was counted as righteousness. A very important verse. Abram's faith gained righteous standing with God just as our faith gains us righteousness. A still has questions and asks for a sign that this promise will be fulfilled—that he'll have a son.

14. **Strange scene in Gen. 15:9-21** (end of chapter). God tells Abram to get him a 3 year-old heifer, a she-goat and a ram of the same age, a dove and a pigeon. A is to cut them in halves and lay them out on the ground; vultures come and A drives them off. He waits for God. God puts A to sleep just as he put Adam to sleep in ch. 2, a "deep sleep." The sun has gone down and A is possessed of fear; the dream God gives him is one of captivity and pain; A's descendants will live as foreigners and slaves.. God tells A he will bring them out and back to this land of promise. But God also tells A that it will not be he who suffers this pain of slavery; he will die of old age. Then smoke and fire consume the sacrifices laid on the ground. Some say this prefigures the cloud that led the Israelites out of Egypt during the wilderness—a cloud by day and fire by night. And God tells A just what the borders of the land will be that he and his descendants will inherit forever.
15. **Chapter 16 begins with the verse:** "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children." The promise continues but the heir has not yet arrived. Abram's faith continues to be tested.

Next week: We'll get into ch. 16 and go on as far as we can.

Bible 101 Notes for February 3, 2010 — Genesis 17-22

Review: As we were introduced to Abraham and God's covenant with him in Genesis 12, we saw that Abraham was a man of faith. But he didn't become a giant of faith overnight; it took years of "walking before and with God." As we continue to observe Abraham's journey, we know he's finally become a father but not to the child of the covenant and not with Sarah his wife; the mother of Ishmael is Hagar, Sarah's maid servant who came back from Egypt with them (ch. 12).

God confirms and reconfirms the covenant: On several occasions after Gen. 12:2-3, God re-confirms and expands or explains the covenant to Abraham: Gen. 12, God appears twice; Gen. 13, God's 3rd appearance; Gen. 15, God's 4th appearance; Gen. 17, God's 5th appearance; Gen. 18, is God's 6th appearance to Abraham, and the last appearance is in Gen. 22. On each of these occasions, God speaks with Abraham to tell him "from your descendants will come a mighty, numberless nation." But Abraham has not yet seen the son of this covenant. In Gen. 17, we see Abraham at age 99, and God appears in v. 1 to tell him that yes, the covenant stands and that Abraham's descendants will become many nations, and God changes his name from Abram to Abraham, and Sarai's name is changed to Sarah.

Circumcision as a sign: In Gen. 17:9, God tells Abraham that he must circumcise every male in his household as a sign of this covenant and that circumcision on the 8th day after birth will be a permanent responsibility; it must be done to show that you are God's people. And so on the same day, Abraham at age 99 and his son Ishmael at age 13 are circumcised. Circumcision is a physical sign of the covenant for Jews to this day, but to Christians, it is a part of the law. Paul says in Col. 2:11 "When you came to Christ you were 'circumcised' but not by a physical procedure. It was a spiritual procedure—the cutting away of your sinful nature." And in Deut. 10:16, Moses told the children of Israel to "circumcise your hearts," a statement that suggests that the rite had spiritual as well as physical meaning even then.

(This rite of circumcision became a major issue for the NT church, and Paul confronts Peter over it. The Judaizers were saying that Gentile Christians had to follow Jewish law and all its rituals; Paul said the law was a burden to the Jews and under grace, it was irrelevant. That's why a number of his epistles speak of circumcision vs. uncircumcision).

Time of promise revealed: Finally in Gen. 17:16, God tells Abraham that Sarah will have a son and that kings will be among her descendants. Abraham laughs to himself wondering how at his age and Sarah's age they will be parents. God says that Isaac will be the son's name and that he will be born about this time next year. So . . . the promise is about to be fulfilled after 25 years. And God changes their names—another sign of the covenant.

This conversation about the child is repeated and reiterated just a month or so later in **Genesis 18**. Sarah is in the tent when three men come to visit: two angels and God with them. Abraham offers them hospitality—typical of Bedouins today. Not to offer food and water in the desert would be tantamount to killing those who came by your tent. One tells Abraham "About this time next year, I will return and your wife Sarah will have a son." Sarah overhears this and she laughs wondering how a woman past menopause can have a baby. But God says "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (v. 14) a question all of us must answer with "no." Nothing is too hard for the Lord, and this is an important concept--worth remembering when we get to Gen. 22.

Abraham intercedes for Lot: God tells Abraham (Gen. 18:20-21) that because of the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, he will destroy the cities. Because Lot lives in Sodom, Abraham bargains with God asking for how few righteous people God will spare the city; they finally get to 10 and Abraham leaves it there. Could he have gone lower? Probably; but Abraham would have found it hard to believe that there weren't 10 righteous people there. This conversation reveals much about God's choice of Abraham as the man of the covenant and the relationship between God and Abraham.

Sodom: In Gen. 19, the two angels go to Sodom and Lot welcomes them. We see that Lot has become an important man in Sodom—he's at the city gate (a sign of his importance). He takes the men home with him and while they're eating, the men of Sodom come and want Lot to give them these men. He refuses but offers his two daughters; they don't want them. The angels see Lot is in trouble and pull him back inside, bolt the door and cause the mob outside to become blind. (They are made physically blind; they're already spiritually blind.) The angels tell Lot to get his family ready to leave; they urge them to run from Sodom and go to the mountains. Lot doesn't want to go that far; he asks if he can go to a nearby town and he gets permission. They run (Lot and his daughters and wife) but Lot's wife turns back; she doesn't really want to go and she becomes salt.

The Dead Sea is 1300 feet below sea level, 35% salt (vs. 3% salt in the Pacific); there's no outlet. It's got high content of sulfur, magnesium and bitumin, and it's on an active fault. God rains down fire and sulfur from a volcanic eruption which causes an earthquake; the city goes up as though an atom bomb had hit it. Abraham sees this destruction from a distance.

Lot and his daughters: In Gen. 19:30 and to the end of the chapter, we witness depravity of the type that caused God to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. It's clear that the two daughters brought S and G with them. They end up in a mountain cave and they must believe that the world has been destroyed and they're the only ones left; they scheme to get pregnant. They carry out their plan and their sons, by their father, are Moab and Ben-ammi, father of two groups of people who become enemies of the Israelites.

Peter speaks of Lot as a righteous man in II Peter 2:7, saying God rescued him because "he was a good man who was sick of the immorality and wickedness around him." It's interesting that we remember Lot's wife and Sodom and Gomorrah have become symbols of depravity and wickedness.

Genesis 20: another sojourn: For some unstated reason, Abraham goes into the Negev, into a region under the control of a king named Abimelech. Again Abraham tells Sarah to tell everyone that he, Abraham is her brother; she does and Abimelech does just as Pharaoh did—he takes her into his harem. God intervenes; he appears to Abimelech and tells him he's in trouble. Abimelech is terrified and calls Abraham in to confront him. Abraham says "yes, she is my sister, but she's also my wife." The term prophet is first used here (v. 7), meaning holy man or man of God who speaks for God. Irony in this exchange: Abraham a man of God is told by a godless man that what he, Ab has done, is dishonest—a sin. Abimelech as Pharaoh earlier gives Ab gifts to get rid of him. God restores Abimelech's wives to fruitfulness. Abraham and Sarah leave.

Genesis 21: the promise fulfilled: Now Isaac is born "in the fullness of time." This is a phrase that fills the Bible. "In the fullness of time, the Messiah came." It means that it's in God's time. God gave Abraham and Sarah a son even when Sarah was past menopause. He made Isaac a miracle baby just as Jesus was a miracle baby to Mary. Isaac is a predicted son, as Jesus was; he came by God's workings, just as Jesus did. Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac just as God sacrificed his son Jesus. Many parallels. The inevitable friction between Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac occurs about the time Isaac is weaned—age 2 or 3. By now, Ishmael has been the son of Abraham for 16 or 17 years. But Sarah wants Hagar and Ishmael gone; she demands that Abraham send them away. This hurts Abraham—after all, Ishmael was his first and only son for a long time. He loves him. But God had said he would bless Ishmael and told Abraham to do as Sarah asked. Hagar and her son are sent away.

The Angel of the Lord: God intervenes in a life and death situation in the desert (Gen. 21:17). The angel appears to Hagar and opens her eyes so she can see a well; they are saved and the angel tells Hagar that God will make a great nation from Ishmael's descendants. In other words, he will live. And he does. Gen. 25:12-18 records the sons of Ishmael. He comes back into the life of Isaac at the burial of their father Abraham; he leaves Isaac when he's about 16 or 17, and returns about 72 or 73 years later at Abraham's death. Recall that the Angel of the Lord had appeared once before to Hagar, ch. 16:9 when she'd run away from Sarai. We'll see the Angel of the Lord again in the next chapter.

Abimelech again: At the end of ch. 21, Abimelech comes to Abraham to make a treaty; they do. A well that Abraham had dug becomes a sign of their agreement to live in peace.

Chapter 22: Here's the ultimate test of faith for Abraham. God tells him to sacrifice his son—his only son Isaac, whom you love—as a burnt offering. This is a total sacrifice. Abraham is confused by this request. But he obeys. In this narrative, as in others, the reader needs to pay attention to what is NOT said as much as what IS said. For example, between v. 2 and 3, what happens? Abraham has to try to get some sleep after he's been told to sacrifice his son. Did he sleep? Unlikely. But the next day, he chops wood, saddles the donkeys, takes fire and his son and servants and sets off. For three days they walk; on the 3rd, they come to Mt. Moriah and Abraham tells the servants: "Stay here; the boy and I will go worship and we will return." So the two go off on foot, Isaac carrying the wood. How old is Isaac? He's at least 25, and may be as old as 33 or 34; he's an adult. So the sacrifice involves his obedience to his father as Abraham obeys his Father God. They go up the mountain and while walking, Isaac asks his father about the animal for the sacrifice. Abraham replies with a stunning statement of faith: "God himself will provide a lamb my son." Grammar and syntax are inspired along with words. In Hebrew, "my son" is ambiguous. A comma makes a difference in the message: "God himself will provide a lamb, my son." Or is it "God himself will provide a lamb—my Son." Does "my son" refer to Isaac or Jesus? Or both?

Isaac climbs on the wood placed on the altar, the knife is raised, the flint ready to strike a fire when a voice from heaven calls "Abraham! Abraham!" (v. 11) Again The Angel of the Lord. Abraham is told not to slay his son; "Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." (v. 12) A ram caught in a thicket becomes the sacrifice.

The Angel of the Lord again speaks and says Abraham's obedience is complete; God will surely bless him as promised. Abraham and Isaac return to the servants and the whole group goes home.

End of ch. 22: Rebekah is mentioned for the first time in Abraham's brother's genealogy. This is a transition to Isaac's adult story.

What does Abraham learn from this experience? He learns to trust God. On that 3-day walk, he understands that even if God asks him to do something so tragic as killing his own son—the son from whom the promised descendants will come—God will bring that son back to life. God can be trusted to keep his word.

Who is the Angel of the Lord? Jesus who was with the Father from the beginning, as a pre-incarnate Lord, appears throughout the Old Testament.

Who is The Angel of the Lord? (Bill Creasy's notes)

In Gen. 22:15, the angel calls to Abraham staying his hand; in Gen. 16 (first occurrence), the angel appears to Hagar and tells her she will have a son and what to name him; in Gen. 21:17, the angel saves Hagar and Ishmael; in Gen. 22:11 the angel of the Lord shouts to Abraham saying "lay down the knife." And in Gen. 22:15, the angel called again to Abraham saying "This is what the Lord says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your beloved son, I swear by my own self that I will bless you richly. I will multiply your descendants into countless millions, like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. They will conquer their enemies, and through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you obeyed me."

In Ex. 3:1, the angel of the Lord appears to Moses (at age 80) from the burning bush. The angel of the Lord is all through the OT. Judges 6, the story of Gideon, it is the angel of the Lord who calls Gideon a mighty warrior. In Judges 13, the angel of the Lord appears to the mother of Samson saying he will deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. In several instances, those who saw the angel said "we have seen God."

In Numbers 22, the angel of the Lord appears to Balaam and his donkey sees the Angel but the man does not. Then the Lord causes the donkey to speak to Balaam, finally getting his attention.

The Messiah is prophesied in Isa. 9, and in v. 6 "he will be called wonderful. . ." and several other names are given to Jesus. John 1, "The word was with God the word was God, the word became flesh and lived among us." In Rev. 21, God will be with them; the old order has passed away and all things are new. It is accomplished. In Matt. 1, Jesus is born. Where was Jesus from the beginning? We meet Jesus in the OT as "the angel of the Lord." He is the pre-incarnate Christ. He's active in the plan of salvation. We no longer see "the angel of the Lord" when we get to Matthew. Now we see God in a body.

Next week: We'll begin with ch. 23 and the focus will shift to Isaac, his marriage and the birth of his sons, Jacob and Esau.

Bible 101 Notes — Genesis 23-31

Review: Last time, we examined Abraham from the time when Isaac's birth was given a date; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the rescue of Lot (because God remembered Abraham); the birth of Isaac, the departure of Hagar and Ishmael; and ultimately, the greatest test of Abraham's life—taking his son up Mt. Moriah to sacrifice him to God. We learned that Abraham's obedience was what God wanted, and it was what God got. Abraham had grown in faith; he is now able to believe that God can bring Isaac back to life since it is through Isaac that God's promise will be fulfilled that Abraham will become the father of a multitude. Has God made a good choice in selecting Abraham to be the father of a nation dedicated to him and his ways? As the NT often refers to OT figures, it's worth mentioning that in Hebrews 11, the "hall of faith" chapter, a longer passage is devoted to Abraham than any other of the men and women of faith mentioned in it. Paul, too, makes mention of Abraham's faith (e.g., Romans 4, Gal. 3, 4).

Abraham and Isaac: If I were to ask you to sum up who Abraham is, what would you say? What words do you associate with him? Now what do you know about Isaac? What words do you associate with him? Recall that Isaac is in his 30s when he walks up Mt. Moriah with his father. By then, Abraham is at least 130 or 135 years old. When was the covenant first given? When Abraham was 75; when was Isaac born? When Abraham was 100. Now he's had 30+ years of life with Isaac. What has he taught him? How has he taught him? Tonight we'll see Isaac as a husband and father.

Genesis 23 records Sarah's death: Sarah is 127 when she dies; for no other woman in the Bible is her age at death recorded. Her faith is lauded in the New Testament (Heb. 11:11).

Abraham's purchase of a tomb: This is the only land that Abraham ever buys; God tells him that he and his offspring will possess all the land "from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates River" (Gen 15:18), but in his lifetime, Abraham is a sojourner in his land, and he buys the property for the tomb and only that. The bargaining process Abraham and the elders engage in shows a great picture of life in that time.

Genesis 24 is a quest: Abraham wants a wife from his father's family for Isaac, but the focus of our attention is not on Isaac but on Abraham and his servant—especially on the latter. The servant's behavior demonstrates at least 11 things about his character (and by extension, Abraham himself): **First**, the servant swears an oath, serious and intimate; it shows how much Abraham trusts him, and just how much he expects of the servant. **Second**, the servant listens carefully to Abraham's instructions and asks for clarification. **Third**, the servant prepares for a long journey, and sets off without delay, taking many gifts (proof that he believed he would have success; he's taking a dowry). **Fourth**, the servant goes where he's been sent. **Fifth**, the servant prays, asking God's help in finding the right woman for Isaac. His prayer is reverent and specific. **Sixth**, he continues to pray and asks for a sign to recognize the young woman of God's choice. **Seventh**, the servant knows for whom he is working: he is not taking credit for any of this. He's Abraham's servant, and he knows where Abraham has found guidance and strength: in God. **Eighth**, the servant talks to the young woman and gets right to the point—who are you? **Ninth**, the servant thanks God for giving

him success. **Tenth**, the servant is efficient and cannot be distracted. **Last**, he continues to give God the credit for his having found Abraham's family.

Who has taught this servant such trust in God? Who has taught him to obey and follow instructions? Who has taught him to be focused on a job? I believe it was God and Abraham's obedience to God which the servant observed. From this we can infer what about Abraham? That he has been a good example to his household. His servant appears to be proof that he has done this. Notice too the values he seeks in Rebekah: a willing heart and hands.

Genesis 24 the trip home: The servant and Rebekah return to Beersheba. Rebekah leaves with a blessing from her family. On the way home, she probably asks the servant for information about Isaac. What does he look like? What does he do? What are his favorite foods? Isaac is out meditating in a field and spots the caravan coming; Rebekah asks about the man and is told it's Isaac, so she covers herself. Isaac falls in love with Rebekah and marries her.

Genesis 25 Abraham's death: Abraham's death brings Ishmael back to the funeral; no doubt he's heard news of his father over the years. He left when he was 16 or 17, and when Abraham was about 103. Abraham dies at age 175 which means Ishmael returns when Isaac is 75 and Ishmael is 88 or 89. They grieve together, but they do not stay together. Ishmael returns to his country and his descendants are listed (vv. 12-18). Chronologically, the birth of Jacob and Esau comes before Abraham's death; they are about 15 when he dies (Isaac is 60 when the twins are born; he's 75 when Abraham dies).

Genesis 25:11, 19ff the spotlight shifts to Isaac: Isaac and Rebekah are married for 20 years before she gives birth. This reminds us of Sarah. Twins are born to them and because of their struggle in her womb, she asks God about it, and he tells her "The sons in your womb will become two rival nations. One nation will be stronger than the other; the descendants of your elder son will serve the descendants of your younger son." (v. 23) We learn a bit about their personalities: they are not identical in any way. In Romans 9:10-13, Paul says of this: "When he (Isaac) grew up, he married Rebekah, who gave birth to twins. But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message proves that God chooses according to his own plan, not according to our good or bad works). She was told, 'the descendants of your older son will serve the descendants of your younger son.' In the words of the Scriptures, 'I loved Jacob but I rejected Esau.'"

Birthright sold (Gen. 25:29-34): Jacob's name means deceiver, and we learn why in this incident. God has confirmed the covenant made with Abraham with Isaac; Jacob is to be the one through whom the covenant line descends. But Jacob is anxious about this and he connives a way to take the birthright. Esau is a person who wants instant gratification and whose appetites are purely material and physical. Jacob knows the value of the birthright and Esau ignores it. He loses big time.

Genesis 26—covenant given, mistake made: A famine drives Isaac and his family to Gerar in Abimelech's city-state. Notice that God appears to Isaac and says "don't go to Egypt; stay here and I will bless you." And God repeats the covenant he's made with Abraham to Isaac (vv. 3-5) He tells the men of Gerar that Rebekah is his sister. (Recall Abraham did this to Abimelech in

ch. 20, and Abimelech had a dream that scared him to death). Isaac uses this ruse out of fear; the king notices her, but he also sees the way Isaac treats her as a wife. As he confronted his father, he confronts Isaac with the truth. Isaac grows wealthy (God fulfills the promise made in v. 3) and the Philistines are jealous. There's a fight over wells which forces Abimelech to invite Isaac to leave. Isaac finds water wherever he goes. God is with him. Finally Isaac moves to Beersheba and God appears to him there: "I am the God of your father, Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you." (vv. 24-25)

The scene in ch. 21:22ff) is repeated; Abimelech and his army commander Phicol come to make a treaty with Isaac as they had with his father.

Esau's marriages: Esau's rebellion and careless regard for his heritage become apparent again: in Gen. 26:34, we're told he marries local women—that is, not women of his family line as his father had. "Esau's wives made life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah." And that provokes Rebekah to tell Jacob at the end of Gen. 27 that they must find a wife for Jacob elsewhere.

Genesis 27 Jacob deceives his father to get the blessing: Jacob the deceiver conspires with Rebekah to trick Isaac, who's nearly blind, into thinking that Jacob is Esau. He feels his hairy skin (the skin of a goat) and smells Esau's clothes (which Jacob is wearing) and gives him the blessing—a blessing of a man who thinks he's dying, but who lives another 40 years!! This is a very sad scene, but it fulfills God's plan that the covenant would continue through Jacob—not Esau. Remember v. 23 of ch. 25? God tells Rebekah that the younger will rule over the older son. Trickery costs Isaac the company of both his sons: Jacob has to leave the country because Esau has murder in his heart over the loss of his blessing. (Jacob himself is tricked by HIS sons who say they've murdered Joseph, but have sold him instead).

Genesis 28 Jacob's quest: Jacob is now setting off for Paddan-Aran just as Abraham's servant had done years before to find Isaac a wife from his Uncle Laban's household. This is not just a quest for a wife although that is the initial motivation for the trip: it's also Jacob's quest for identity. He must discover who he is and who God is. Isaac blesses him and sends him off. A parenthetical passage is inserted in vv. 6-9; a contrasting incident to show how rebellious Esau is and how resentful is recorded. Esau marries one of Ishmael's daughters.

Jacob's dream: On the first night, Jacob has a dream (vv. 10-15). We've read about two dreams recently: Abraham dreams of a torch and a smoking oven which burn up the animals of the covenant (Gen. 15) and in this dream God also tells him that his descendants will live as slaves for a period and be delivered; and Abimelech has a dream in ch. 20:4-6 in which God tells him that Abraham is married to Sarah and that he, Abimelech is a "dead man" if he doesn't return Sarah to him. Now Jacob has a dream and it's a wonderful vision of God and his provision. God confirms the covenant he's made with Abraham and Isaac to Jacob, letting him know that He, God, is all Jacob needs. God promises to be with him, and that he won't leave him outside the Promised Land—the covenant land.

Jacob's offering to God: Jacob in anticipation of offerings yet to be defined in Leviticus and Numbers, pours oil over a stone as a memorial. Oil is also a sign of consecration: when OT priests were anointed, when individuals are confirmed today, they're signed with oil. When a

king was chosen, he was anointed with oil (David is anointed by Samuel in I. Samuel 16:1-13 tells of this anointing). Oil is symbolic of God's grace. Notice, though that Jacob's vow to God is conditional: IF you do such and such, THEN I will worship you." He does pledge tithe to God, reminiscent of Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek in ch. 14. Jacob is learning who he is: He's the son of the covenant, and God is with him.

Genesis 29 Jacob falls in love: Jacob finds his way to Paddan-aran, and meets Rachel at a well. She takes him home to meet her father Laban. Laban is also a deceiver, a manipulator, and Jacob has met his match. He could outwit his own father and brother, but not Uncle Laban. Jacob agrees to work for Laban for 7 years to pay the dowry for Rachel. Jacob is rich, but he's come away with nothing except his intelligence and strength—and God's promises (and that is a lot). But he has no gold as Abraham's servant presented Laban for Rebekah: he only has time. And Laban likes this deal. At the end of 7 years, Laban Ok's a wedding and at night, Jacob goes to his wife and sleeps with her and in the morning, finds out he's been tricked: he's married Leah. Uncle Laban gives him a song and dance about custom; Jacob is so in love with Rachel he agrees to another 7 years; after a week, Laban gives him Rachel, so now he has two wives—but he loves only one of them. Nevertheless, Leah gives birth to 4 sons; Rachel is not yet pregnant. Each time, Leah gives her son a name that is symbolic: she hopes by giving Jacob sons that she will win his love; she does not.

Genesis 30: More sons and labor: By now, Rachel is feeling inferior and complains to Jacob about her not having children. She gives him Bilhah and she bears a son for Rachel. This happens twice; now Leah, not having more of her own sons, gives Jacob HER maid, and more sons are born. Leah eventually has six sons of her own and a daughter named Dinah. Finally, God hears Rachel and she bears Joseph. In all, Jacob now has 11 sons. After 14 years of hard work, Jacob wants to go home. But Laban knows that God has blessed him because of Jacob, and he says "don't go." So Jacob makes another deal with him for the spotted and striped animals, giving Laban the pure white ones. In this way, Jacob builds his own herds, and there's no mix-up: his are different colors than Laban's.

Genesis 31: Flight: Eventually, Jacob's had it and determines to leave; Rachel and Leah agree since they can see that Laban's taking advantage of him. So they go secretly after God tells him to return to the land of his father and grandfather. (Laban and his sons are off in another part of their land shearing sheep). One negative: Rachel takes her father's "household gods" or idols. This nearly costs her her life. They get three days' journey before Laban hears and follows. A confrontation occurs; Laban accuses them of stealing; Jacob denies it. Laban searches when Jacob says "we're innocent and if anyone has stolen anything, he/she will die." Jacob is angry; Laban finds nothing. They eventually make a peace treaty, offering sacrifices and piling up a stone as a witness. And Jacob takes his family on their way back home.

Next week: The end of the journey, reuniting with Essau and Joseph's story begins.

Bible 101 Notes - Genesis 32-40

Introduction: When both Sarah and Abraham die after long lives, the focus shifts to Isaac and his family. Isaac and Rebekah wait 20 years before their two sons are born (and while waiting, they ask God for help rather than taking matters into their own hands): Jacob and Esau are twins, very different in temperament, personality, looks and goals. Jacob is the covenant son; it is he who will fulfill God's plan of making Abraham a father of multitudes; through their line all the world will be blessed because in God's plan of salvation, the Messiah's genealogy will trace back to them. And while Esau has married local women, his parents have different plans for Jacob. We know that Jacob is a manipulator, that he bought his brother's birthright with stew, and that his name means "deceiver."

Jacob's quest: Jacob goes to Paddan-Aram just as Abraham's servant had done years before to find Isaac a wife from his Uncle Laban's household. And he spends 20 years there working first for Rachel, then Leah, and then because Laban takes all the herds Jacob's built up, Jacob spends another six years building his own flocks so he can return to his father's country. He is fearful of meeting his brother, Esau having promised to kill Jacob for stealing his birthright, and whom Jacob hasn't seen for all those years. But God assures him he is with him as he promised he would be.

Genesis 32: Jacob prepares to meet Esau: Jacob's household slowly moves on after the peace treaty with Laban. And they meet angels of God Jacob recognizing that God is in that place as he had in ch. 28 when he saw God in his dream. The name Mahanaim or two camps means "double camps;" by that, Jacob is saying that he and his family are camped there and God is camped with them. God's angels have been with him all the time, but he hasn't been aware of it. Remember, angels are God's messengers and they were apparent now to Jacob to encourage him to remember that God is with him and protecting him.

Jacob sends a message to Esau telling him that he's coming home and asks humbly for Esau's welcome. Notice that he doesn't ask Esau's forgiveness, though. The messengers return saying Esau is on his way with 400 men, and now Jacob prays—finally!! He asks God for God's help. He reminds God of who he is and that God has sent him on this journey home. He wants to be sure that God remembers all his promises and messages to Jacob. Jacob is still not a man of settled, solid faith. He expresses fear of Esau to God; this is honest. We can do the same. And Jacob also takes measures of his own: he divides his household in half, sending half one way and half the other thinking Esau will meet one and the other can escape. Jacob also sorts out a present for Esau. And during the night, he sends his wives and sons across the river, and while he's alone in the camp, a man comes with whom Jacob wrestles. At dawn, the man strikes his hip, putting it out of joint. Jacob asks for a blessing and he's told his name is now Israel "because you have struggled with both God and man and have won." Then Jacob asks for the man's name, but he isn't told; rather, he's blessed and the man leaves. Then Jacob names the place Peniel, face of God. Jacob knows he's wrestled with God both spiritually and physically; it's a turning point for Jacob, an experience he never forgets. Much like Saul's being struck blind on the road to Damascus, Jacob is dramatically made aware of God and his power.

Genesis 33: Jacob and Esau meet: Now the climax of Jacob's journey home—will Esau come in peace? Notice how Jacob arranges the family: Joseph is last; Joseph is his favorite son because he's Rachel's son. Esau does not come to make war but peace. Jacob's relief must have been enormous. They reconcile, but they do not return together to Isaac. Esau goes to his country and Jacob goes on home. But before he does, he buys land in Shechem and builds an altar. Finally, Jacob is becoming a man of faith; he worships God and gives God credit.

Genesis 34: a tale of rape and pillage: Jacob buys land here (ch. 33:19), near a city (note: this is only the second purchase of land by a covenant man; Abraham bought only the land for Sarah's tomb; Isaac bought no land. God had promised land to both of them, and to Jacob; now he, Jacob is buying some, not waiting for God to give it to him). This alone is problematic: it appears he's planning to stay here for more than an overnight or a week's rest, and he's a shepherd, a farmer—why would he buy land so close to a city? The city represents temptation (think Sodom and Gomorrah). As a wanderer who's had nothing of his own his whole life, and who's recently escaped the con artist Laban, he's anxious to establish himself some place, to make a name for himself. He builds an altar here in Shechem (end of ch. 33) and calls the place "El Elhohe Israel" meaning "The God, the God of Israel" confirming the new name God gave him in ch. 32.

Even with an altar, this first attempt to be independent is a failure for Jacob. The scene described for us is horrifying in every way. Dinah is raped, and Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi trick the men of Shechem into believing that circumcision will make them acceptable to the family, and marriage can occur—not just Shechem to Dinah, but more intermarriage between the two groups. Jacob doesn't speak up to protest this; he surely remembers his parents' demand that he not marry a woman from Canaan—no local woman (Gen. 28:1). Why would he want his daughter or sons to marry locally? Even circumcision does not make these men acceptable; Simeon and Levi kill all the men in the town when they're weak and recovering. Jacob tells his sons "you've made my name stink." He's afraid that they'll be defeated by the people surrounding them—who are, after all, not Hebrews, and they, Jacob's family, are the aliens. Again, he's afraid, and notice that his focus is on himself, not on his daughter, his sons or God. Where is his faith? What has he learned? Does he not believe in God's promises to be with him? For that matter, what has the altar he erected meant?

Genesis 35: God tells Jacob to leave and go to Bethel, the place where God first revealed himself to Jacob (Gen. 28:10ff). And so he packs up the family and goes with "the terror of God falling on towns all around them so that no one pursued them" (Gen. 35:5). This "terror of God" coincides with Jacob's name of God, "The Fear of Isaac" in Gen. 31:42 and 53.

Notice that before they leave, Jacob asks that the family "purify" themselves, implying that they were unclean. The terms unclean and purify are used over and over in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Under the law, individuals could become unclean in any number of ways: touching a dead person, getting a skin rash, and a woman was unclean after childbirth. All these conditions necessitated cleansing of body before cleansing spiritually could occur at the Tabernacle (see Num. 19:10-12). Jacob anticipates this in his instructions: first, put on clean clothes (physical cleanliness) and second, get rid of idols and charms like earrings and bracelets (spiritual cleanliness). Jacob wants nothing to interfere with his family's repentance and humility before God. And they worship God at the altar that Jacob builds at

Bethel, and calls it El Bethel. God reminds Jacob that his name is now Israel, and that he is the son of the covenant, when he appears to him there.

Next several deaths are recorded: Rebekah's nurse Deborah dies; and as they travel on to Isaac's home in Hebron, Rachel, who is pregnant, gives birth and dies. The child is named Benjamin (though Rachel calls him Ben-oni meaning "son of my sorrow"; the name Jacob gives him means "son of my right hand" (the right hand was considered the strongest; Ex. 15:6, 12 say God's right hand defeated the Egyptians). Jacob favors the sons of Rachel over the other 10. Jacob and his family got back to Haran; Isaac dies, and his sons bury him, very likely the last time Jacob and Esau are together.

Before they get home, Reuben dishonors his father (Lev. 18:6-7) by sleeping with Bilhah, one of Jacob's concubines (v. 22) and we're told that Jacob heard about it; he says nothing until the end of his life when giving out his blessings, curses and prophecies in Gen. 49, but he remembers. (Bilhah is the mother of two of Reuben's brothers: Dan and Naphtali.)

Transitions in Gen. 35:23-26,: Jacob's 12 sons are named along with their mothers, and **Genesis 36 lists Esau's genealogy:** Esau's sons and their sons are listed. They are the nation Edom who become a thorn on the side of the Israelites for many years. These two genealogies are transitions to the next generation.

Genesis 38: Before we get to Joseph's story, I want us to consider Judah, another of Jacob's sons. We've seen the sins of Reuben (ch. 35), Simeon and Levi (ch. 34), and now we'll see Judah's behavior is less than exemplary.

Judah marries a local woman (against Isaac's advice and presumably against Jacob's wishes, too). He has three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. The first marries a woman named Tamar, and before they can have children, he is killed by God because he is evil. So, following Leviratic marriage custom, Onan marries Tamar; he too, dies before they have children, and he commits evil in God's sight by not honoring his brother's name by giving Tamar a son. Shelah is too young to marry, and Tamar is sent back to her parents. She's a widow twice, has no children, is promised Shelah, but has to wait for him. She's in limbo and can't be married to anyone else until Judah's family releases her. She gets tired of waiting and dresses as a prostitute, seduces Judah (after the death of his wife), gets his "seal" and staff and a promise of a goat in payment. She gives birth to twins as a result, Judah's sons, one of whom is listed in the genealogy of the Messiah: Matthew 1:3-4 lists Judah, Tamar, Perez and Zerah, but Perez (of the twins) is the Messiah's ancestor. When Judah discovers that the "prostitute" is Tamar, he says "she is more righteous than I since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." He recognizes that he has been in the wrong. (Gen. 38:26). We see a couple of things here: one is that intermarriage leads to all kinds of problems, and second, that even a Canaanite woman can behave in a way that teaches Israel's son about honor. This story interrupts the Joseph narrative, and so we can now return to ch. 37 and proceed with Joseph's story.

Genesis 37: Now the camera shifts to the fourth generation. Abraham and Isaac are dead; Jacob is an old man, and the next covenant son begins to emerge. What sort of a man will he become? Will he be a man of faith? Joseph is Jacob's favorite son because he's the first son Rachel bore. Joseph at age 17 is pictured as precocious: he's a computer whiz, the kid whose hand is always up and waving when the teacher asks a question, who scores high on the SATs

and lets everyone know. He's a braggart, too, and that makes his brothers furious. His 10 older brothers are shepherds, but it's clear that Joseph does not see himself in that role; in fact, his dreams picture him as a ruler with his brothers (and parents) in subjection to him. What sibling rivalry is this? It's destined for a clash that will change all their lives.

The older brothers take the flocks to a distant pasture (near Shechem of all places); Jacob sends Joseph with food for them, and to get news to bring back. Joseph tracks them to Dothan, and when they see the "dreamer" coming, recognizing him by his many colored coat, they plot to kill him. They're jealous of him and resent him. Reuben counsels them not to kill Joseph, so they take off his distinctive robe and put him in a cistern instead (Reuben plans to rescue him later). As they're eating, a caravan comes by and they decide to sell Joseph to the traders. They do; they also kill an animal, dip Joseph's coat in the blood and take to it their father. Their father concludes Joseph is dead and mourns deeply. Their cruelty is double: both to Joseph and to Jacob.

Gen. 37:36 tells us where Joseph ends up: in the household of Potiphar, a high-ranking official to Pharaoh.

Genesis 39 Joseph does well: Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar, but his intelligence makes him a trusted servant who takes charge of Potiphar's household. He'd had to learn Egyptian, dress as an Egyptian, take on their customs—a radical change for a young man from a nomadic shepherd's family. Notice why this happens: "The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered." (v. 2). This good fortune doesn't occur merely because Joseph is so good looking and smart: it's in God's plan that he end up where he does. Unfortunately, there's a complication: Potiphar's wife. She wants Joseph as a lover; he is a faithful Jew who can't be tempted (unlike his brothers!). He refuses her, and finally she grabs him; he leaves his robe and runs. She yells "rape" and Joseph is thrown in prison. We don't read anything about Joseph defending himself, but when he's in prison, we DO read that "The Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden" (v. 21). God is with Joseph, protecting him and giving him encouragement.

Who else do we know who went to prison? In the NT, Paul and his compatriots are regularly imprisoned, and on one occasion in Philippi (recorded in Acts 16:23-40)), Paul and Silas sing all night. They've been flogged, they're in shackles in a dirty prison, and they pray and sing. God rescues them.

God is likewise with Joseph in prison and even though it's not the place Joseph chose to be, nor does it fit his vision of a ruler, he's made a leader in the prison, getting special treatment. How will God get him out? Just wait; God's plan is at work.

Genesis 40 cupbearer and baker: While in prison, "some time later," two of Pharaoh's officials are jailed. They have dreams and Joseph interprets them with God's help. He asks the cupbearer to remember him when he's released; the baker will be hanged. The cupbearer forgets and Joseph remains in prison for another two years. Notice how definite and emphatic Joseph is when he states the dreams' interpretations; his lack of hesitation causes people to believe him.

Next time: We'll continue with Joseph's remarkable story.

Bible 101 Notes - Genesis 41-50

Introduction: In Gen. 34 and 38, we encountered not only gross sin and negligence on the part of three of Jacob's sons, but in Gen. 37, the wonderful faith of a fourth, Joseph. God works through events that we may think are tragic; God brings good out of bad, and Joseph tells his brothers, once they're reunited, that what they meant for evil, God meant for good. He is a strong man of God and is able to hold fast to his faith even in a foreign land, among different customs and a pantheon of 80 strange gods. Joseph is the faithful, forgiving man whom God hoped would succeed Abraham. I think Joseph's great grandfather Abraham would be very pleased with him.

To recap: we have Joseph sold by his brothers to traders who take him to Egypt where he's sold as a slave to Potiphar, an official in Pharaoh's court. There he becomes a trusted servant in Potiphar's household, his chief household manager. He's there for perhaps 8-10 years when Potiphar's wife propositions him, and Joseph refuses; this gets him thrown in prison. There he's once again favored by the warden who elevates him to a responsible position. He meets two of Pharaoh's officials who have dreams; Joseph tells them what they mean. And now we'll learn that the cup-bearer, two years after his release, remembers Joseph's ability to interpret dreams when Pharaoh has two dreams that are significant.

Genesis 41 Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream: Finally, God rescues Joseph. We have to ask why he left him there for two or three years? Probably for the same reason Jacob worked for Laban for 20 years, and why Moses spent 80 years (40 in Egypt and 40 in Midian) before God called him to return to Egypt to lead the people out. God had to work on Joseph's character: he wanted Joseph to learn to trust him and him alone—not human beings, not his own strength, but God's strength. And he does.

Pharaoh's dreams baffle his magicians, and the cupbearer remembers Joseph; Joseph is sent for. Of interest: he cleans up and then appears before the Pharaoh—he's respectful, not resentful. He doesn't go in and yell at the cupbearer or shout about his undeserved imprisonment. He simply goes in, all cleaned up, and does his job. The Pharaoh tells him he has two dreams which he cannot figure out; Joseph says "I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." (v. 16) Joseph gives all the credit to God, rather than misrepresenting himself. He is NOT the one who interprets; God is. And so he tells Pharaoh what his dreams mean: there will be seven years of bountiful crops and then seven years of famine. And Joseph adds: "The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been fully decided by God, and God will do it soon." (v. 32). So Pharaoh knows it's not a matter of conjecture; this is going to happen. Joseph adds good counsel: get a wise man to administer the storing of bumper crops for 7 years, and then, when the land bears no crops, the food in storage can be distributed to keep the people from starving. The plan pleased Pharaoh, and he asks, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" (v. 38) Pharaoh recognizes that Joseph is a man of God and he respects this; Joseph is then put in charge of managing the harvest for the next seven years, and a food distribution program to follow. He becomes second to Pharaoh. What a change! One minute he's in a dark prison in rags, the next he's in Pharaoh's beautiful throne room, dressed and clean, made an official of the court, and has power to burn. Will he use it wisely?

The next section tells us that Pharaoh trusts Joseph because Joseph trusts God, and we also learn that Joseph is now 30 years old. It's been 13 years since he left Dothan with the Midianite traders.

Joseph carries out the plan he described to Pharaoh; food is stored in many cities, ready for the famine to come. Joseph gets married and has two sons, the first called Manasseh, because "God made me forget all my troubles and my father's household," and the other Ephraim, "because God made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." Joseph forgets with God's help what is in the past.

Joseph distributes food during the famine, selling the stored food not only to Egyptians but to individuals from surrounding areas where the famine was also severe. And that leads us back to Jacob. We'll pick it up next week in Gen. 42.

Genesis 42 Jacob's household hungry: Jacob learns that there's food in Egypt and sends his sons (except Benjamin whom he kept at home for fear of losing him, too) to get some. This would be a trip of about 200 miles one way. I wonder how the word "Egypt" sounded to these 10 brothers of Joseph?

Once they arrive in Egypt, they are taken to Joseph—and they bow to him, fulfilling the dream he had in ch. 37. He recognized his brothers, but of course, he looked nothing like the Joseph they'd sold years before (Joseph is at least 37 or 38 now; he was 17 when they sold him), so they do not see "Joseph" in this man. They are treated roughly; Joseph accuses them of coming as spies. But they spill their whole family history to him to justify their errand. That sets up Joseph's request: bring your younger brother. They are terrified; Jacob will never let Benjamin go. He puts them "in custody" for 3 days (meaning prison), and then bargains with them: leave one brother here, return with the food, and when you come back for more, bring Benjamin to exchange for the brother who stays. Simeon volunteers to remain behind and he goes to prison. The others take their food sacks and go, but unknown to them, their money is put in the sacks, too. They find it on the way home. The report to their father; he is beside himself with fear and worry that he'll lose another son. He forbids them to take Benjamin back. Jacob is already grieving.

Genesis 43: Another trip to Egypt: Finally Jacob's family is desperate; they have to return to Egypt. Jacob is told they MUST take Benjamin; the brothers are convinced that Joseph means what he says. And they want to redeem Simeon. Judah guarantees Benjamin's safety with his own life. This reassures Jacob and he sends them off with gifts—and a prayer that God will go with them and bring them back again with Benjamin. They also take the original money and an equal amount for more food.

When they arrive, Joseph invites them to lunch. While the food is being prepared, the brothers tell Joseph's steward about the money that had gone back with them. And the steward says "It's all right; don't be afraid. The God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." The steward is doing as Joseph instructs; and notice that the steward is a man whose faith appears to be in God, too. They're reunited with Simeon—what joy that must have been. They go in, wash and prepare for the meal. Joseph is given gifts, and he asks about their father. Now Joseph sees Benjamin and he is so moved he has to leave the room. They eat—but not at the same table. Joseph is an Egyptian; he cannot eat with Hebrews. But Joseph had seated the brothers in chronological order to their astonishment, and Benjamin is given heaps of food, much more than all the others.

Genesis 44: food prepared to leave: The brothers' food sacks are filled, their money is again returned, and in one, the one of Benjamin, a silver cup is hidden. What is Joseph's plan? Why is he playing this game with them? Does he want to punish them? Or is he just enjoying the sport? All this

time Joseph is observing them: he wants to be sure that the men who sold him have changed. Are they the same rough and ready men? No; they've become more responsible as they've matured. He notices this, but Joseph takes his time, and sets up tests to see how honest they are. They've passed so far.

The next day, the brothers go, and they're overtaken by a servant who wants his master's cup back; they're accused of stealing. They protest that they are not thieves or spies. They have no motive for stealing, but they say if the cup is found, the thief can be put to death and the rest of them will be slaves to Joseph. This is strong stuff, but it reveals their innocence. The cup is found in Benjamin's sack and Judah, with the others, tear their clothes; they can't lose Benjamin, and yet it appears he'll die.

Back they go to Joseph, bowing and hoping to negotiate. Judah speaks for them: "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt." This is not an admission that they stole the cup; they're admitting to their having sold their brother into slavery years before. But Joseph says, just the man whose sack was the offending one containing the cup will stay; the rest can go home. But Judah says, "we have to take the young man home or we'll kill our father." He makes the full case before Joseph who must be dying inside; he wants to tell them who he is, but he also must make sure that they are changed men. Judah offers to take Benjamin's place; to save his life, he'll become Joseph's slave.

Genesis 45: reunion: Finally, Joseph tells them who he is and they all shed tears. The brothers can't believe it: but notice Joseph's words: "Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. . . God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance." (vv. 5, 7) Joseph forgives them; Joseph tells them it was God's hand that brought him to Egypt.

Joseph tells them to return to Jacob, pack everyone up and move to Egypt. There will be five more years of famine. And so Joseph gives them carts and donkeys, many provisions for the journey, and sends them off with this demand: "Do not quarrel on the way." So they returned to Jacob, telling him "Joseph is still alive," and they prepare to take him back to Egypt.

Genesis 46: the move to Egypt: Before setting out, Jacob offers a sacrifice at Beer-sheba, and that night, God spoke to Jacob again, telling him "Don't be afraid to go to Egypt; I'll bring you back from there, and you'll become a great nation." It's more than 400 years before this promise is fulfilled, but it is when Moses leads the descendants of Jacob out of Egypt.

Jacob's family is listed: sons, sons' sons, and the total of Jacob/Israel's family, counting Joseph and his two sons in Egypt is 70; they will grow to become a nation of about 2 million in Egypt.

Judah goes ahead to tell Joseph they're on the way; where should they settle? Joseph says he'll speak to Pharaoh and tell him his family, shepherds are coming. Shepherds—especially Hebrew shepherds—are not welcome in Egypt. But Joseph's status will pave the way, and they'll be allowed to settle in Goshen.

Genesis 47: Joseph reunited with his father: Finally, they get to Goshen and Joseph takes his father and five brothers to Pharaoh. He's told them what to say. But watch Jacob: he blesses Pharaoh! He,

a smelly old shepherd, road weary, ready to go back to his tent, comes into a palace and is not cowed by the experience. He knows who he is—at last—he's a son of God, whom God has honored and preserved. He is the son of the covenant and through his offspring all the world will be blessed. Jacob has learned a lot over his lifetime; he's 130 when he arrives in Egypt. The family settles down in Goshen with their flocks, herds and continue to multiply.

Meanwhile, Joseph has to get through the last years of the famine and he does. He establishes a tax system, whereby a percentage of future crops will be pledged to Pharaoh for the privilege of buying grain now.

Gen. 47:28-31 shows us Joseph and his father discussing Jacob's death; he's 147 and knows he's about to leave this life. He asks Joseph to take his bones back to Canaan for burial and Joseph agrees.

Genesis 48-50: The end of Jacob's life and Joseph's: In these chapters, we read of Jacob's death and his blessings/predictions about all his sons (ch. 49). Jacob blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, giving God thanks that he not only saw Joseph again, the son he thought had died, but also his sons. He blesses Joseph, too, in Gen. 48:15-16, and it's tender, loving, and honors God.

In Genesis 49, we read that Jacob knows his sons well. The Messiah is prophesied as coming from Judah (v. 8-12); Reuben's sin with Bilhah is revealed, and Simeon and Levi's cruelty is not forgotten. Joseph's faithfulness is recounted. Jacob gives instructions for his burial and dies.

Joseph mourns his father 40 days, as does the whole land of Egypt for 70 days (the latter showing Joseph's status in the country). Jacob is embalmed and taken back in a great entourage to Canaan where he's buried in Machpelah just as Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah were.

Coda: After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers were concerned that without Jacob, Joseph would punish them. But he reassures them that he will not. He tells them: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." And he tells them he'll continue to provide for them. Joseph is a man of great faith and generous spirit; he forgives and forgets.

Before Joseph dies, he asks that his bones be taken back to Canaan. He dies at 110 and is embalmed.

Next time: We'll begin our study of the Gospel of Matthew.