

New Beginnings

Understanding

God's Greatness

Part I
Studies from the Book of Genesis
Chapters 1-21

A Creative Living International Publication

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Foreword

Welcome to this life-enriching seminar for men and women who already know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and others who may be seeking Him.

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New Beginnings

Understanding God's Greatness

Part I

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PART 1

THE BEGINNINGS OF HISTORY

Genesis is a book of beginnings: of life, death, marriage, parenting, problems. The characters in Genesis experienced them all. Genesis is also a book of facts. It is not an exhaustive book of scientific or historical fact, but rather a book containing the facts needed to answer certain questions the author meant to address.

Jewish tradition ascribes authorship of Genesis and the first five books of the Bible to Moses. Jesus Christ explicitly ascribed these writings to Moses as well (Luke 24:44). Some theologians contend that unknown authors or editors long after Moses put together these works, but these theories have many variations as well as flaws. There are many evidences, however, that the true author was Moses, although he may have used existing sources for Genesis and some minor editing may have been done after his death.

With Moses as the author, we can assume Genesis was addressed to Israel during their years in the wilderness around 1450 B.C. It was written to explain to these people where they had come from, where they were going, and why. Though miraculously delivered from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses, they understood very little of how and why it happened. Although they were Hebrew and had always been outcasts in the Egyptian culture, they had little knowledge of the God of their forefather Abraham. God set them apart to be a holy nation, but they had a long way to go from the pagan thinking they had developed in Egypt during 400 years of captivity. They needed to know God and His purpose in history, guides to their worship, and standards for moral and ethical decisions.

So the five books of Moses were written to help the Israelites make a clean break with their past in a pagan society and begin to look at life from God's perspective. They were to become a new culture, out of which the world would be blessed. They needed, as we do, answers to the questions: Who is God? What is my relationship to Him? How did it come about? How does this affect the way I live? Why should I live this way? As we follow the history and people of this book, we will receive, as the Israelites did, God's great answers to these questions.

Easy Breakdown of Genesis

I. Beginnings of Mankind (Chapters 1-11)

Creation

Fall

Flood

Babel

II. Founding Fathers of Israel (Chapters 12-50)

Abraham

Isaac

Jacob

Joseph

Lesson 1

CREATION

Genesis 1:1-2:3

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” There is nothing here about the details of creation, just that in the beginning, however distant that may have been, God called into being everything. The Genesis creation account is not a technical review, rather it is written in everyday language, as its events would have appeared to the average person.

First, God prepared the earth to be life sustaining. Then He made plant and animal life and finally man. The process involved six stages described as days.¹ One brought light, another atmosphere, another the establishment of land, sea, and plants, yet another the functioning of the sun, moon, and stars, another fish and birds, and finally animals and other land life. When the earth was ready God created man, the crown of His work, and gave him rule and dominion over all the earth.

All that had been made was declared “very good,” and God ended the six days with a day of rest.

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3.

1. What was the earth like in the beginning (1:1-2)?

2. What did the commands of the first three days produce (1:3-13)?

3. What was the result of God's commands in the next three days (1:14-25)?

4. How were man and woman different from the rest of creation (1:26-27)?

5. What did God commission the man and woman to do, and how did He provide for them (1:28-30)?

6. How was the seventh day of creation unique (2:1-3)?

7. What does the creation account and God's creation around you tell you about the character of God?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Order in Our Lives

Imagine the judge in an unruly courtroom pounding his gavel and shouting, “Order in the court!” Wouldn’t it be nice if we could bring order to the sometimes chaotic arena of our individual lives just by pounding a gavel?

A turmoil-filled world can easily take over our inner world as well. As we look at this first chapter of Genesis, we see God bring order, beauty, and purpose to a lifeless planet in space. He began here to reveal Himself as a God of order with infinite power to bring life where there was none and meaning out of chaos. Let’s look at what this can mean in our lives today.

1. What do these verses say about God’s way of doing things?

1 Corinthians 14:33a

1 Corinthians 14:40

2. What are your observations about God's order in the massive project of Genesis 1?

3. What confusion do you see in the world around you regarding:

Relating to God

Marriage, family, and other relationships

Meaning in life

Work

Sexuality

Mental and emotional stability

4. What do you think causes disorder in our world?

5. What was the *result* of God's ordering of things according to Genesis 1:4,10,12,18,21,25?

6. What do these verses suggest regarding the order God can bring to our lives?

Proverbs 3:5-6

Isaiah 48:17

Psalms 48:14

7. What can stand in the way of God bringing order to our lives?

Proverbs 12:15a

Proverbs 28:26a

8. a. When God created the world, one seventh of His time went to rest. What significance might this have on ordering our lives?

Exodus 23:12

b. How might Exodus 34:21 be rewritten for us today?

SUMMARY

9. When you have sought to order your own life apart from God's wisdom, what have you found?

10. In what areas do you need to trust God to produce order, beauty, and harmony? Perhaps you would like to take a moment now to ask Him to do this.

LESSON 1 NOTES

1 The meaning of *day* has been the subject of endless debate over the centuries. Four interpretations are:

a. Each day is a 24-hour period. This interpretation has the problem of man and woman being created over a longer period of time in Genesis 2. It also conflicts with facts of geology (studies of the history of the earth and its life).

b. The days represent long periods of time that can be correlated with contemporary scientific theories of geological epochs (dates that begin different geological time periods). The problem here is that modern geological studies and time periods are changing all the time.

c. The days are arranged in a literary structure that is not designed to show time frames or duration of creation. It is not necessary to

take the days literally as God's work week any more than we should take God having ears and eyes literally because He hears and sees in biblical accounts. Rather, the account shows a progression and order in creation, and at the same time a 6/1 model for human work and rest.

d. The creation account was revealed to the author in six days, each day giving a vision of another part of God's creative work. Some points to consider are:

- There is nothing in the account to contradict the six days being either periods of twenty-four hours or long periods of time.
- God, being God, could have done the whole work in six days or six seconds if He had so willed.
- Chapter 1 of Genesis is not enough to decide the meaning of *day*. Furthermore, this definition is not necessary in order to understand the focus of the author: God's creative work and the incredible results.

Irving L. Jensen, *Genesis, A Self-Study Guide*, p. 23.

Lesson 2

ADAM AND EVE

Genesis 2:4-25

God prepared a beautiful garden in Eden.¹ Then He fashioned Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the life that would allow him to know God personally and reflect His image.² Adam was placed in the garden to begin his responsibilities of governing nature and beginning the human race. To give Adam the freedom of choice, God placed a simple, but precise test before him. He forbid Adam to eat of one tree in the middle of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.³

Adam's first task was to name all the animals. (This first man could *not* have been without intellect or language.) As God paraded every creature before him, Adam named each one, and “. . . that was its name.”

But not one creature could be a companion to Adam on the same physical, mental, and spiritual level. For the first time, God looked at His creation and said it "was not good." Adam needed a partner. So, the account continues, God put Adam to sleep and fashioned Eve from Adam's rib. She was the perfect complement to Adam, and he was elated.⁴

The chapter ends with the first instituted marriage in the beautiful environment of Eden.⁵ With this, God declared all that He had made was *very good* (1:31).

Read Genesis 2:4-17.

1. What does Genesis 2:7 add to the 1:27 account of the distinctiveness of man above all other creatures?

Reference: Note 2, *the breath of life*, p. 21.

2. Describe the garden God prepared for Adam (2:8-14).

3. What charge, freedoms and boundaries did God give Adam (1:28, 2:15-17)?

Read Genesis 2:18-25.

4. What does Genesis 2:18 tell us about human nature?

5. What does Gen 2:19-20 infer about the mental ability of Adam?

6. How would you describe woman and how she is related to man (1:26-27; 2:20-23)?

Reference: Note 4, suitable helper, p. 21.

7. What was God's intent as He created the institution of marriage (2:24-25)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS **How's Your Self-Image?**

How is your sense of self-worth? Each of us carries a mental picture of ourselves, and often it screams at us to be different. Great emotional and social stress stems from poor self-esteem as well as all kinds of destructive behavior.

The most solid foundation for a healthy self-image is not found in what other people think, but in grasping God's truth about us. In Genesis 1 and 2, we observe God's creation of the universe, the earth, plants and creatures of the earth, and a beautiful garden, all in preparation for humanity. With His own hands, He formed man, and with His breath, God gave him the capacity for a personal relationship with the Creator. With this, the great value of each human being is firmly established.

Beginning with the creation story, and throughout the Bible, God encourages us to believe in ourselves as we trust in Him. Together, the two create a healthy self-image. Let's look at some biblical truths that support self-esteem.

1. What in our society encourages a poor self-image? What false values can determine self-worth?

2. How might a poor self-image affect:
our relationship with God?

our relationships with other people?

our daily tasks?

3. What can be observed about man's worth to God from Gen 1-2?

Reference: Note 5, man, p. 21.

4. What do these verses say about your uniqueness and worth to God?

Psalm 139:13-18

Luke 12:6-7

5. Knowing we are loved by the Creator of the universe can radically change our self-image. What do these verses say about God's love?

Jeremiah 31:3

Romans 8:38-39

John 3:16

6. Seeing God's perspective on our lives can change the course of our achievement. What do the following verses infer about worthy ambitions?

1 Samuel 16:7

Proverbs 31:30

Note: fear means reverent trust.

Micah 6:8

7. Freedom from guilt can help our self-worth. What does 1 John 1:9 say about God's forgiveness?

8. What we say to ourselves can also affect our self-worth. What does Philippians 4:8 instruct us to concentrate on about ourselves?

9. A sense of inadequacy can prevent us from trying new things and reaching our potential. What does God promise if we put our trust in Him?

Philippians 4:13

SUMMARY

10. The Lord who created Adam and Eve and each individual wants to help us become the fulfilled human beings He created us to be. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, where does our fulfillment begin?

11. In what area(s) have you been struggling to have a healthy self-image?

Take a moment to talk to God about your struggles. Remember that God loves you, knows your weaknesses, and has a special purpose for your life.

LESSON 2 NOTES

1 *The garden* was probably located in the vicinity of ancient Mesopotamia and modern Iraq. A river originated in the garden, then split into four branches. We are able to locate the Tigris and Euphrates rivers today.

2 *the breath of life...and the man became a living being (2:7)*. "Spirit gives man God-consciousness, enabling him to hear God's voice and respond to Him (given in 1:27). Soul (being) implies self-conscious life, including abilities such as reasoning. The animals have body and (in the sense of self-conscious life) soul, but the highest beast has no trace of God-consciousness—religious nature. Between animal life and human life there is a great gulf—a fixed gulf." Irving L. Jensen, *Genesis, A Self-Study Guide*, p. 21.

3 *tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17)*. "Knowledge of good and evil" refers to moral knowledge or ethical discernment. Adam and Eve possessed both life and moral discernment as they came from the hand of God. Their access to the fruit of the tree of life showed that God's will and intention for them was life. Ancient pagans believed that the gods intended for man always to be mortal. In eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve sought a creaturely source of discernment in order to be morally independent of God." *The NIV Study Bible*, page 9.

4 *Suitable helper (2:18)*. "The term *suitable helper* literally means 'a help as opposite him,' in other words, 'corresponding to him.' The connotation is more *cooperation with* than *service to* another." Charles & Anne Hummel, *Genesis God's Creative Call*, p. 98.

5 "*Man* was placed in the world like a king in a palace stored with all to please him, monarch and sovereign of all the lower orders of creation. The sun to labor for him . . . the moon to light his nights, or lead the waters around the earth in tides, cleansing its shores; elements of nature to be his slaves . . . flowers to scent his pathway; fruit to please his taste; birds to sing to him; beasts to toil for him and carry him; and man himself, amid all this luxury, as God's representative, God's vice-agent. This is man as God made him." Irving Jensen, p. 22.

Lesson 3

THE BIG MISTAKE

Genesis 3

The union of Adam and Eve was happy, and the world around them was perfect. Chapter 2 ends with the words “not ashamed.” But Genesis 3 ushers in a new experience for Adam and Eve that changed mankind forever after.

God created man in His image by giving him a spirit that could relate to God and other human beings intimately. He gave him authority to rule over the earth, and gave him freedom of choice. He also gave man and woman the freedom to choose to trust and obey God by means of a simple test. In the center of the garden was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,¹ and God had forbidden Adam and Eve to eat its fruit. He told them that if they did, they would “surely die.” The command was specific as was the consequence; the test was not a harsh one.

In its subtle way, the serpent persuaded Eve that she would be better off to disregard God’s command. He convinced her that God was deceiving her, and she really wouldn’t die if she ate the fruit, but would instead become as wise as God. She would become “like God.” With this, Eve ate the fruit, then offered some to Adam, who also chose to disregard God’s command.

Shame and fear instantly came upon the couple,² and soon the Lord confronted them. He informed them that the death penalty, although not immediate, would come, and they would have to leave the garden where they had freely and intimately walked with Him.

Life became very different for Adam and Eve, reminding them continually of their poor choice in not trusting their Creator. Difficulties the Lord predicted would trouble them are still part of our lives today. For the woman, there would be difficulty in childbirth, parenting, and marriage. The man's greatest struggles would relate to making a living.

But the most important prediction was addressed to Satan, who had used the subtle serpent to draw this couple away from God. The Lord informed Satan that he would one day be "crushed" by the "seed," or offspring, of the woman. Herein lies the first prediction in the Bible about a Savior, later referred to as Messiah, who would redeem, or provide a way to bring people back into, the original intimate relationship with God.

The chapter ends with God clothing the couple with garments of skin, replacing their fragile fig leaves. To keep mankind from living forever in this sad condition, He made the fruit of the "tree of life"³ unavailable to them and banished them from the garden.

Read Genesis 3:1-6.

1. What was the serpent trying to achieve by asking Eve "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'"(3:1)?

2. How was Eve's quotation of God in Genesis 3:3 inaccurate (cf. 2:16-17)? What might this have revealed about her attitude toward God's command?

3. In Genesis 3:4-5, what statements did Satan make about:
the purpose of God's command?

the results of God's command?

4. a. What was Eve's perspective after her conversation with the serpent (3:6)?

b. What did she risk in making this decision?

Read Genesis 3:7-13.

5. How do you think Adam and Eve's decision affected their relationship:
to each other?

to God?

Read Genesis 3:14-19.

6. What was the outcome:

for the serpent (3:14-15)?

for the woman (3:16)?

for the man (3:17-19)?

Read Genesis 3:20-24.

7. How did God end this era in Eden (3:21-24)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Dealing With Bad Habits and Temptation

People often ask why suffering and evil exist if God loves His creation. Although the Bible never answers this question directly, Genesis 3 begins to explain the reason. Most of the hardship around us is the result of an initial decision not to trust God, a

decision that has become the rule rather than the exception in the human race.

Adam and Eve listened to the advice of a creature rather than their Creator, followed their own inclinations rather than God's instructions, doubted God's concern for their best interests, and made self-fulfillment their goal. We all face these temptations. The first couple's story reveals much about how temptation comes to us and about how to deal with it successfully. Let's look at some biblical principles that can help us live with the constant pulls toward unhealthy choices.

1. What does the Bible say about the source of temptations?

James 1:13-14

2. How did Adam and Eve's *view* of God affect their going against His Word?

3. What can we know about God's Word as it advises us against a certain behavior?

Psalm 19:7-11

4. a. What are some unhealthy behaviors listed in Gal 5:19-21a?

b. In contrast, what does God's Word say is emotionally healthy for us? See Galatians 5:22-23.

5. What is God's attitude toward us when we yield to temptation or bad habits?

Psalm 103:8-14

6. The first step in dealing with any bad habit is to confess that we have a problem with it. How does Proverbs 28:13 support this fact?

7. Another step is to seek wise counsel and become accountable to someone. How do these verses support this action?

Proverbs 24:6

James 5:16

8. God's power is readily available to help us overcome the temptations and bad habits we face. *When we give our lives to Him*, what strength and hope does God promise?

1 Corinthians 10:13

Ephesians 3:16, 20

9. Some defeats in the area of temptation are really only symptoms of a deeper problem with which we are either oblivious or unwilling to deal. What principles that we have studied in this lesson apply to relieving this problem?

10. When it takes a longer time to overcome an area of temptation, what should we do?

Philippians 4:6-7

Psalms 27:14

SUMMARY

11. a. What bad habits or nagging temptations are you seeking to overcome?

b. What principles from this lesson are especially helpful for you to consider in the process?

c. Do you think your bad habit has a deeper cause than lack of self-control? How might you discover and deal with this deeper problem?

LESSON 3 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 3, *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, page 21.

2 *realized they were naked (3:7)*. “Adam and Eve’s response to their nakedness has nothing to do with sexual guilt or shame. The Bible has a high view of sex, despite certain church teachings throughout the centuries. Just as their nakedness was a sign of innocence and lack of self-consciousness, it now becomes a symbol of guilt to be covered up so they can still appear

presentable.” Charles & Anne Hummel, *Genesis God's Creative Call*, p. 98.

3 *The tree of life* is a separate tree from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9). Adam and Eve were initially free to eat the fruit of the tree of life (2:16).

Lesson 4

CAIN AND ABEL

Genesis 4 & 5

Eve's first son, Cain, was followed by his brother Abel. In their adult years, these two men brought offerings to the Lord, and Cain's was not acceptable. Though the reason is not given, some assume from 4:6-7 that Cain had not brought his offering with the right attitude or as he had been instructed.¹ Rather than remedy the situation and please God, Cain became very angry. He disregarded the Lord's encouragement to fight against the evil attitudes overpowering him. Instead, Cain lured his brother Abel to a field where he killed him, then denied responsibility for the murder.

The Lord's gracious judgment on this action was to make Cain a protected fugitive criminal. Cain complained that God's punishment was too severe. The account that follows in Genesis 4:17-24 records the lineage of Cain.² His son Lamech, who married two wives and became a killer himself, had no regret for his actions.

On the brighter side, Adam and Eve had another son named Seth, who produced godly offspring. Also at this time "men began to call on [or proclaim] the name of the Lord." In the line of Seth are two outstanding characters: one is Enoch, who walked with God and never experienced death,³ the other is Methuselah, the oldest man recorded in the Bible, who died the year of the Noahic Flood (Genesis 5:25,28;7:6).⁴ The lineage of Seth can be traced through the flood and down through the ages to the birth of Christ (Luke 3:23,37).

Read Genesis 4:1-16.

1. a. What new beginning does Genesis 4:1-2 describe?

b. What are we told about Cain and Abel?

2. What transpired between the Lord, Cain and Abel (4:3-5)?

Reference: Note 1, Cain's offering, p. 37.

3. What was the Lord's explanation and counsel to Cain (4:6-7)?

4. What was Cain's attitude toward God (4:5,9,13-14)?

5. What was Cain's attitude toward his brother (4:8)?

6. How did Cain's attitude affect his behavior?

Read Genesis 4:17-24.

7. How did Cain's attitudes affect the behavior of his offspring (4:19,23-24)?

Read Genesis 4:25-5:32.

8. What are the positive events recorded here (4:25,26b;5:21-24)?

b. What can be observed in Genesis 4 and 5 about the power of attitudes?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Dealing With Anger

Cain's anger brought heartache to his family and had a rippling effect for generations. We all struggle with anger, some of us more than others. As we saw in Genesis 4:7, God's desire is that we successfully deal with anger. Let's observe some biblical principles that can help us.

1. What is God's disposition when it comes to anger? How does God deal with anger?

Psalms 103:8-10

Psalms 30:5

2. a. What similar responses to anger do these verses suggest we have?

James 1:19-20

Proverbs 15:1

Proverbs 19:11

Ephesians 4:31-32

b. What does Ephesians 4:26 imply about nursing grudges as Cain did?

3. What results from giving way to an angry disposition?
Ecclesiastes 7:9

Proverbs 15:18

4. What warnings do these verses give regarding being with an anger-oriented person?
Proverbs 22:24-25

Proverbs 21:19

5. a. What effect does an angry parent or spouse have on the family? What effect does an anger-oriented person have in an office?

b. What do these verses suggest?

Proverbs 27:4a

Colossians 3:21

Proverbs 27:15-16

Proverbs 14:1

6. What does Romans 12:19-21 say about our grievances toward others?

7. What aspects of anger are listed in Colossians 3:8, and what are we to do with them?

SUMMARY

Anger is not always a negative emotion. It can signal to us that something in our lives needs to be changed. However, anger can often be the result of selfishness, perfectionism, or unfounded suspicions about others.

8. What have you observed in this lesson about the person who gives way to anger?

9. Is there a person you have had trouble forgiving? It is important to make a willful decision to forgive and to ask God to give you compassion for that person. This can start a healing process in your own life that you might want to begin today.

10. Have you had a problem with an angry disposition? What is your prayer regarding anger in your life?

LESSON 4 NOTES

1 *Cain's offering. Cain brought some of the fruits. . . But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock (4:3-4).*

"The contrast is not between an offering of plant life and an offering of animal life, but between a careless, thoughtless offering and a choice, generous offering (cf. Leviticus 3:16).

Motivation and heart attitude are all-important, and God looked with favor on Abel and his offering because of Abel's faith (Heb. 11:4)." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 11. "Abel went out of his way to please God (which meant he had faith in God, Heb. 11:6), whereas Cain was simply discharging a duty." John Walvoord & Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 34.

2 *genealogies*. It is important to realize that biblical genealogies are given to us in order to trace the descendants of a family, not to calculate the span of time. Sometimes whole generations are omitted. Three successive kings are left out in Matthew 1:1-17 account. Also, Genesis narratives often name a father as head of a whole tribe of people, not just as head of his immediate family. Therefore a name sometimes refers to a clan rather than an individual; for example, "The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish (individuals), the Kittim and the Rodanim (groups)" (Genesis 10:44). These were not dishonest, but rather standard recording practices of the day. The lists in Genesis serve their purpose of tracing family connections whether they are complete or not, although they do not make it possible for us to date accurately the creation of the world or the Noahic Flood.

3 *Enoch*. Jude 14-15 shows that Enoch, even at this early date, preached about the Second Coming of Christ.

4 *Methuselah...969 years*. The incredible life spans of these people is attributed by some to the ideal environment for preservation of life and the virtual absence of disease until after the Flood (Gen. 6-9), at which time ages decreased steadily to an average 70-year life span at Moses' time (1400 BC). Others believe the numbers may have had a conventional literary function, symbolic significance, gaps summarized in large numbers, etc., as exhibited in other ancient extra biblical writings.

Lesson 5

THE FLOOD

Genesis 6 & 7

In the first chapters of Genesis, the author has shown how rebellion toward God became part of the human race. The result was fractured relationships between man and God, damaged family and social relationships and violence throughout the habitat God had created for man's enjoyment. Moral corruption continued to spread like cancer on the earth until God saw "that every inclination of the thoughts of his [man's] heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man...His heart was filled with pain" (6:5-6). He determined to bring a flood to end the progression of evil.

There was a special man named Noah, a man who "walked with God." Seeing that Noah was the only man on earth who feared Him, God decided to spare his life and that of his family. They followed God's orders in building a huge seaworthy vessel called an ark.¹⁻² On this vessel there was room for Noah's family, a male/female pair of every species of the earth, and food to sustain them all.

Seven days after all had entered the ark and the doors were shut, heavy rain fell for 40 days and 40 nights along with the bursting forth of subterranean waters.³ The water rose until it cleared the highest mountains by 20 feet.

The flood continued for 150 days, and nothing that breathed remained alive outside the ark.

Read Genesis 6.

1. a. What was the extent of the wickedness on the earth (6:5 and 11-12)?

Reference: Note 4, sons of God, p. 48.

b. What was God's response (6:6-7,17)?

2. How was Noah described (6:9,22)?

3. How did God plan to preserve life (6:18-21)?

Read Genesis 7.

4. What miraculous happening did Noah and his family witness as they entered the ark (7:7-9,13-16)?

5. a. Describe how the flood came (7:10-12).

Reference: Note 3, springs...rain, p. 48.

b. What was the result of the flood (7:17-24)?

6. What do you observe about the character of God from these chapters?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Taking God Seriously

A. W. Tozer wrote that God "will always deal in justice when His mercy is despised."⁵ While the people of the earth had become morally degenerate, God still offered them the chance to repent. As Noah built the ark and preached about the coming judgment, however, the people jeered and went on with their corrupt lifestyle. Then the day came when God's incredible promises to Noah were fulfilled. Miraculously, thousands of pairs of species came forth to enter the ark with Noah and his family. The enormous door was shut, and the flood began. God's mercy had been rejected. His judgment came.

We might be tempted to ask ourselves, "Why struggle to please God with my life when the world is going a different, perhaps even more attractive, direction?" The Bible promises constructive living and fulfillment when we choose to take God and His direction seriously. The events of Noah's day remind us of the righteous character of God. His justice will ultimately prevail in human affairs.

There are many reasons to take God seriously. Let's take a closer look at this important topic.

1. What results from disregard for God and His principles in the world around us:
in marriage and family?

in society?

2. How does Romans 1:28-32 describe the society that ignores God and godly principles?

3. What can keep us from "walking with God" like Noah did?

4. Foolishness (scoffing at God and His Word) and pride (self-exaltation) are root causes of not taking God seriously. What does the Bible warn about foolishness and pride?

Ecclesiastes 10:3

Proverbs 16:18

5. a. How did Noah choose differently from the people in the world around him?

b. What difference did these choices make on his family and future?

c. What rewards does the Bible promise to those who follow God and His principles for life?

Psalm 1:2-3

Proverbs 2:7-8

Proverbs 2:9-11

6. a. On what did Noah base his decisions?

b. How do these verses support his course of action?

Romans 12:2

Psalm 119:105

7. Of what can we be sure regarding God's character as we seek to follow His guidelines for our lives?

Psalm 111:7

Numbers 23:19

Psalm 84:11

Note: *blameless* does not mean sinless perfection, but obedience that comes from faith.

8. What should we do when we are ridiculed and rejected, as Noah was, for trusting and obeying God? 1 Peter 4:19

9. The first chapters of Genesis demonstrate man's natural inclination to choose independence from God. When we invite Jesus Christ into our lives, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us (John 14:16-17). If we allow Him, how does the Holy Spirit help us overcome the natural tendency to go our own way?
Philippians 2:13

Ezekiel 36:26-27

Reference: Note 6, Holy Spirit, p. 48.

10. a. When we make wrong choices, the consequences may not go away, but how can we know peace with God and His redemption of the situation?

Isaiah 55:7

1 John 1:7,9

b. Though our weaknesses may be deeply rooted, what does God promise as we seek His will for our lives?

Romans 8:31b,34

SUMMARY

11. What do you see in the story of the flood about the struggle to live God's way when the world seems to be going a different direction?

12. What important choices are you currently facing? Have you committed yourself to seek the Lord's guidance through His Word in these choices?

13. How will you benefit from trusting God in these choices?

LESSON 5 NOTES

1 *ark.* "God describes the ark as a box 450 x75 x45 feet, the size of some modern ocean liners and with proportions suitable for excellent floating and maximum storage, not for sailing speed. G.F. Wright calculates that after storing enough food to support several thousand pairs of animals on a voyage of a year, there would remain more than fifty cubic feet for each pair. Noah built this huge ark in a dry, land-locked region where it was inconceivable that there would ever be enough water to float the vessel. Noah's family stayed in the ark a total of 370 days." NavPress Life Change Series, *Genesis*, p. 66.

2 The eleventh book of the famous Assyrian-Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, unearthed at Kuyunjik (Nineveh) in 1853 gives an account of a man (Utnapishtim) who was divinely instructed to build a huge boat five times the size of the ark, using pitch, as Noah did, to close its seams. Of all extrabiblical parallels that have come down from the vast cuneiform literature of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley of ancient history, the most striking is the

Babylonian account of the flood. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 49.

3 *springs of the great deep burst forth... (7:11).* "...there were corresponding gigantic upheavals and shiftings of the earth's crust which caused the oceans' floors to rise and break up their reservoirs of subterranean waters (7:11)." Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, p. 61.

rain (7:12). Some maintain that rain was an unknown sight to anyone until this time (cf. Genesis 2:5).

4 *sons of God (6:2).* Some commentators believe the "sons of God" might have been fallen angels, sent by Satan to corrupt the human race and prevent the birth of the Savior. Others say they might be sons of Seth as opposed to Cain. The Nephilim may have been "giants" as KJV translates, or fallen angels, or offspring of the sons of God and the daughters of men. The Scripture is not clear on these points, but it is clear on the point being made in 6:1-8: God was completely distraught over the corruption of man on the earth. NavPress Life Change Series, *Genesis*, p. 66.

5 *"...mercy despised."* A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, page 97.

6 *Holy Spirit.* God has made Himself known in the Bible as a Trinity, three divine persons with the same essence as God. The Holy Spirit, known as the third person of the Trinity, indwells every person who personally receives Christ (John 1:12, John 14:16,17). When we ask God (Luke 11:13) to "fill" us with His Spirit (Ephesians 5:18b), He responds by supernaturally instructing and empowering us to live the Christian life (Ephesians 3:16-20; Ezekiel 36:26,27). Sometimes the Bible refers to this as "Christ in you," as in Colossians 1:27b.

Lesson 6

THE RAINBOW PROMISE

Genesis 8:1-9:17

After five months, the ark rested upon a peak in the high ranges of Armenia on a mountain now called Ararat. Today it towers to the height of 16,946 feet. All waited as the waters continued to recede.

When they finally left the ark, Noah, his family, and the animals had not set foot on dry ground for more than a year (cf. 7:11; 8:13-14). Now they owned the world. It was a new beginning.¹ God blessed them and commissioned them to repopulate the earth.

At this time, creatures, in addition to vegetation, became food for man. God made clear, however, that the blood of the creature (representing its life) and *especially* the blood of man, belongs to God alone.² In light of this fact, God instituted human government with instructions to punish murder of another human being (9:6).

Upon disembarking the ark, the first thing Noah did was build an altar and offer sacrifices to the Lord. The aroma of his sacrifices went upward to God bearing Noah's gratitude and worship.³ God was pleased with the heart of this man, and made a sacred promise to never again bring judgment on the earth with a natural catastrophe. The rainbow became the token of this promise to Noah and mankind.

Read Genesis 8:1-14.

1. How did the flood end (8:1-5)?

Note: In the Old Testament, God's *remembering* (as in 8:1) does not just involve mental recall, but emphasizes His *faithful love* and *timely intervention* toward what He remembers.

2. What did Noah do during this time (8:6-14)?

Read Genesis 8:15-22.

3. What finally brought Noah and his family out of the ark (8:15-19)?

4. a. What was Noah's first priority amid the activities of leaving the ark (8:20)?

b. What was God's response (8:21-22)?

Read Genesis 9:1-17.

5. What did God charge Noah and his family to do (9:1-3,7)?

6. What restriction and explanation of restriction did God include (9:4-6)?

Reference: Note 2, lifeblood, p. 57.

7. The Noahic covenant was God's first covenant with man. In spite of man's inclination toward sin, what did God promise (9:8-17)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Hope in a Crisis

The definition of the word *crisis* is “the turning point for better or worse,” or “an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs whose outcome will make a decisive difference for better or worse.”

Noah and his family lived during a crisis like none other in all of history. The downward spiral of sin reached the limits (6:5,11-12), and God responded with judgment for the many and redemption for the righteous few. Israel’s history would repeat this pattern often (cf. Isaiah 10:20-23; Romans 11:1-6).

Our world is full of injustices brought on not by God’s design, but by man’s attempt to rule life apart from God. The issue lies in the heart of each person, the inherited inability to totally live up to righteous standards.

But the hope in the crisis becomes the hope in any crisis. The Lord of Noah's time who is the Christ of today offers this hope. Let's make some observations.

1. What kinds of crises do we face?

2. What can happen when we walk through crisis times *without* God's help?

3. a. The Bible speaks of a universal crisis in the spiritual arena of each person's life. What crisis does Romans 3:23 and 6:23a speak of that was evident in Noah's day?

b. What is God's provision for this universal human problem?
Romans 6:23

Romans 5:8

4. a. How do we receive God's provision according to Romans 3:22-24?

b. Of what are we assured when we personally put our faith in the salvation of God through His Son Jesus Christ?

1 John 5:11-13

c. *Optional question:* The story of the ark, with the salvation it provided for the faithful, can be viewed as an allegorical picture of the salvation from sin and death Jesus Christ would one day provide for all who put faith in Him. What similarities do you see?

5. When we have received Christ as the provision for our greatest need of eternal pardon, what hope does He offer us in times of crisis?

Psalm 37:39

John 16:33

Psalm 91:14-16

Isaiah 42:16

6. What do these verses suggest we do in times of crisis?
Psalm 46:10a

Isaiah 26:3-4

James 1:5

Proverbs 3:5-6

SUMMARY

7. a. Are you facing a turning point, unstable situation, or crucial time in your life today?

b. What biblical truths in this lesson give you direction and hope for your situation?

c. As you trust God and wait on Him during the crisis time, of what does the story of the ark remind you?

8. a. If you have never made a decision to trust Jesus Christ to make you right with God and give you eternal life, perhaps you would like to do that now. The following is a suggested prayer:

Lord Jesus, I open the door of my life to you and receive you as Savior and Lord. Thank you for taking the death penalty for my sin as you died on the cross. Come into my life and make me the person you want me to be. Amen.

b. What is God's promise to you in Revelation 3:20?

LESSON 6 NOTES

1 *New beginning (ancient stories about the ark).* The Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh records the gods causing a worldwide flood because of man's wickedness. A single family and some animals on a large seaworthy vessel were saved. After landing, the family offered a sacrifice of thanks to the gods, who accepted it and covenanted never to destroy the earth again in this way. Scholars agree that the differences of detail and outlook show that both biblical and Babylonian flood stories are independent accounts of the same incident.

Tim LaHaye and John Morris, in their book *The Ark on Ararat*, collected several hundred stories of an ancient worldwide flood. The book contains 14 flood stories from Africa and the Middle East, 38 from the Pacific Islands, 21 from the Far East, 13 from Europe and Asia, 21 from Greece, 58 from North America, 21 from Central America, and 24 from South America. Among these accounts, 88% record a favored family saved for its righteousness, while many others name unrelated survivors. Animals are saved in 67%. Seventy percent say that the survivors spend the flood in a boat, and 57% say that the survivors end up on a mountain. Human wickedness leads to the flood in 66%. Smaller percentages mention birds sent out, a rainbow, and exactly eight people saved.

The accounts in the Middle East are most like the biblical one, while the stories vary more and more the further they are from the

Middle East. This fact leads LaHaye and Morris to conclude, “The universal Flood traditions can only have come from a common source, embellished with local color and culture, but retaining enough pertinent data to convey both historical and moral concepts.” James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis, An Expository Commentary*, volume 1, pp. 282-288.

2 *lifeblood* (9:4), in ancient times, was the embodiment of life. In the Old Testament, God affirms that “the life of every creature is its blood” (Leviticus 17:14).

3 *Noah's sacrifice* (8:20) was made with the ceremonially clean animals that were taken on the ark in groups of seven (7:2).

Lesson 7

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Genesis 9:18-11:32

Noah and his three sons had disembarked from the ark in the mountains of Ararat near the headwaters of the Euphrates. God blessed them and told them to scatter and repopulate the earth. The first thing they did, it seems, was to migrate back about 500 miles to Babylon, possibly their pre-flood home.

Noah planted a vineyard and lay drunk and naked in his tent from the wine. His son, Ham, discovered his father this way and made fun of him.¹ To the ancients, such mockery destroyed the sanctity of the family and the strength of the father. When he discovered what Ham had done, Noah prophesied that Ham's attitude would bear fruit in the immorality of his offspring, the Canaanites. He also predicted that the lifestyle of the Canaanites would cause them to serve the descendants of Shem and Japheth.

Chapter 10, called the Table of Nations, specifically follows each of Noah's sons, Japheth (10:2-5), Ham (10:6-20), and Shem (10:21-31), as they began to repopulate the earth. This account gives details of descendants, geographical areas in which they settled, and languages. While the Table of Nations particularly focuses on those descendants who would later affect the nation of Israel, the author's concluding statement reminds the reader that *all* nations of the earth descended from Noah (10:32).

Shem was placed last in the account since it was through his lineage that the nation of Israel would come, the origins of which are the focus of Genesis. Japheth's descendants moved north and

west to become the progenitors of the Caucasian races of Europe and Asia. The Shemites (Semitic peoples) moved south and east and would be the spiritual leaders of men who would teach the religion of Jehovah to the world. The Hamites moved south and west and would settle Canaan (now Israel) on the Mediterranean, Arabia, Egypt, and the east coast of Africa.

Nimrod, a grandson of Ham, became the first great leader on the earth (10:8-12). He is believed to have built the great cities of Babylon and Nineveh and probably was responsible for the Tower of Babel enterprise (10:10; 11:9).²

The Tower of Babel event of Chapter 11, which occurred *before* Chapter 10, explains why the nations scattered with different languages (cf. 10:5). The story is more than a fanciful tale, since it reflects practices known from archaeology. The people were united to build a tower of acclaim to themselves, to refuse God's command for them to populate the earth (9:1), and, some theologians believe, to manipulate astral gods to gain their own control of the earth.³ God confused their rebellion by giving them different languages, making it impossible for them to continue to cooperate with each other in the project. It was God's method of dispersing the race to its task of subduing the earth. This scattering allowed God to continue to move toward the building of a nation (Israel) out of which would come the Redeemer of the world.

Chapter 11 continues with the genealogy of Shem's descendants⁴ and at last the beginnings of the family of Abraham, which we will be following for the rest of Genesis.

Read Genesis 9:18-29.

1. How did Ham's response to his father's condition differ from those of his brothers (9:22-23)?

Reference: Commentary paragraph 2 and Note 1, Ham, p. 67.

2. What did Noah prophesy would be the result of his three sons' respective attitudes (9:24-27)?

Read Genesis 10:1-11:9.

3. How do we know that the tower of Babel event occurred before the tribal establishments of Genesis 10 (10:5, 11:8-9)?

4. What does Genesis 11:4 reveal about the people's attitude toward God's desires for them (9:1)?

5. *Optional question:* The Bible says that the Lord had to *come down* (11:5) to see a tower that was to have reached the heavens. What truth is evident here?

6. How did God deal with the people's rebellion (11:5-9)?

Note: Linguistic studies have shown that all languages fall into six main families, distinct from each other.

Read Genesis 11:10-32.

7. a. The author now traces the line of Shem to Abraham. With this, he shifts from the study of all families of the earth to one family. Up to this point in our study of Genesis, what have you observed about the human race?

b. What have you observed about new beginnings?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Help for the Tongue

All of us know the power of the tongue. Speech has brought both wonderful blessing to mankind and the greatest destruction man has ever known.

In Genesis, collective communication led to total rebellion and independence from God. The miracle of different languages kept man from quickly destroying himself again and sent him back to

the task of populating the earth. The difficulty in communication actually allowed the people of the world to exist longer without God's judgment in order to allow time for God's plan of redemption to come.

God is able to assist us if we want to control our tongue. While for some the task may involve a process and continual work, God's Word is full of motivation and guidance for the one who needs help for the tongue. Let's look at some of these practical principles.

1. a. What was the negative result of collective interaction in the Tower of Babel account?

b. Where do you see this happening today?

2. Communication that leads to rebellion toward God is the most dangerous result of the wrong use of the tongue. What would be the corresponding positive use of communication?

3. Using a modern version of the Bible, describe the power of the tongue described in these verses.

Proverbs 12:18

Proverbs 15:1

Proverbs 15:4

Proverbs 15:7

4. What negative uses of the tongue do you see around you today? What results when a person does not control his/her words in the home? In the workplace?

5. What warnings do these verses give regarding wrong use of the tongue?

James 3:3-8

6. To what problem does James 3:9-12 refer?

7. What do these verses suggest about controlling the tongue?
Luke 6:45

Philippians 4:8

8. What principles regarding the use of the tongue do you see in
the following?
James 1:19-20

Ephesians 4:29

Ephesians 5:4,19-20

Psalms 34:13

Colossians 4:6

9. How does God strengthen us to tame the tongue?
Ephesians 5:18b

Galatians 5:22-23

Galatians 5:25

Reference: Note 6, Holy Spirit, p. 48.

SUMMARY

10. a. When do you need the most help with your use of words?

b. What thoughts from this lesson have been most helpful to you?

11. Jealousy, envy, pride, or bitterness can cause a critical spirit that leads to the wrong words. Are any of these involved in your struggles? If so, what can be done? 1 John 1:9

12. Have you made a decision to begin trusting the Holy Spirit to strengthen you to live the Christian life? The following, a continuing prayer for the Christian who desires to truly reflect Christ through his life, is a suggested prayer:

Dear Father, I need your help and enablement to live the Christian life. I invite you to fill me with your Holy Spirit as you command me to be filled in Ephesians 5:18. I pray that you would so live your life through me, as I choose to let your Spirit reign in me, that people would see Christ in me. As an expression of my faith, I now thank You for taking control of my life and filling me with the Holy Spirit. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

LESSON 7 NOTES

1 *Ham...saw his father's nakedness (9:22).* "He was not involved with Noah sexually, for in that case the Hebrew would be translated 'he uncovered (causative form of *galah*) his father's nakedness.' Instead Noah had already uncovered himself (*way-yitgal*, reflexive form, v. 21), and Ham saw him that way." John Walvoord & Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 41.

2 *Ninevah (10:11).* Cuneiform inscriptions state that Nineveh was colonized from Babylon, which is an archaeological confirmation of Genesis 10:11.

3 *astral gods.* Many temple towers were built in Mesopotamia between 2800 and 2200 B.C. The names of these massive "ziggurats" show that they were meant to serve as staircases from earth to heaven. The temple tower called Birs Nimroud at Babylon, which still exists in ruins, was a structure 153 feet high that covered nearly four acres. Babylonian priests climbed the zodiac tower, developed to learn and control human destiny by reading the stars, to attempt to reach the heavens with magical rites. NavPress Life Change Series, *Genesis*, p. 82. Today's equivalent to this type of action would be astrology, fortune telling, or New Age channeling.

4 *Shem's descendants.* Ten generations are noted, perhaps to match the ten named from Adam to Noah in Chapter 5. The growth of nations in Chapter 10 makes it clear that great intervals lie between names (see Note 2, *genealogies*, p. 38). The life span steadily declines toward the 175 years of Abraham.

5 Reference: Note 6, *Holy Spirit*, p. 48.

PART 2

ISRAEL'S BEGINNINGS — ABRAHAM & ISAAC

Part 1 ended with the human race scattered over all the earth and speaking different languages. Genealogies traced the line of Adam to Noah (Genesis 5) and Noah to Abram (Genesis 10, 11). Noah prophesied (9:26) that the descendants of Shem (Semites) would have the Lord as their God and would become missionaries to the other peoples of the earth. So it came to pass that out of this line of Shem came Abram, God's man for the hour in early Old Testament revelation.

As this section begins, Abram's father, Terah, has moved his family from Ur in the Euphrates valley, about 550 miles north to Haran. After Terah's death, Abram moved to Canaan with the promise of God that he would father a great nation that would bring blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Part 2 of our study will follow the emergence of that nation through the lives of Abraham, his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob.

Lesson 8

THE CALL OF ABRAM

Genesis 12-13

“The Lord had said to Abram . . .” leave all that is familiar—your country, your people, your home and your relatives, and go to another part of the world yet to be announced. “So Abram left, as the Lord had told him.”

We have seen the result of man's decisions not to follow God's leadership. Now God called a faithful man whose obedience would bring blessing to the entire world. In spite of the discomforts, Abram chose to follow and worship the one true God. With Genesis 12, we begin the study of one of the Bible's greatest men of faith, Abram.

Perhaps because of danger, perhaps because of his son Abram's calling from God, Abram's father, Terah, moved his family from Ur toward Canaan a thousand miles away. For some reason, Terah stopped short of Canaan, settling in Haran (11:31).¹ After Terah's death, 75 year-old Abram took his wife, Sarai, who was 65, and his nephew, Lot, and continued on to Canaan. There the Lord appeared to Abram again, promising to give him the land of Canaan and a nation through his offspring which would bring blessing to the whole world (12:2-3,7).

Abram continually worshiped the Lord, building altars at Shechem and Bethel. Finally he "pitched his tent" at Bethel in the hilly area overlooking Palestine on the edge of the Negeb desert area.

After this, famine caused Abram to go to the well-watered Nile area of Egypt to live for a while. During this time, Sarai, because of her beauty, was taken into the Pharaoh's harem. This couple had decided beforehand that if Pharaoh should want Sarai, they would tell him that they were brother and sister, not man and wife, in order to protect Abram's life.² (Sarai *was* actually Abram's half-sister.) During Sarai's stay in the palace, the Lord inflicted Pharaoh and his household with serious diseases, causing him to discover Abram's lie. He returned Sarai to him and sent Abram and company back to the Negeb.

Abram and Lot had become so wealthy that the land could not support the two of them with all their flocks, herds, possessions and servants if they stayed together. Abram graciously gave Lot the choice of land, and Lot chose the well-watered Jordan River area toward the east. Abram then took the hill country of Canaan.

While Lot adjusted to the wickedness of the men of Sodom, Abram continued to worship the Lord and receive His promise to give him the Canaanite land and a nation of descendants that would bless the world.

Read Genesis 12:1-8.

1. What was the command and promise which God gave to Abram (12:1-3, 6-9)?

2. What do you think it would have been like to have this move before you (12:4-5)?

Read Genesis 12:10-20.

3. a. How did Abram and Sarai scheme to find security in Egypt (12:10-16)?

b. How did God protect them (12:17-20)?

Reference: Note 2, protect Abram's life in Egypt, p. 76.

Read Genesis 13:1-18.

4. What problem arose between Abram and Lot (13:1-7)?

5. Because he was older, Abram had the right to choose the best land. What did his action reveal about Abram's faith and character (13:8-13)?

6. a. Describe the renewed and expanded promises the Lord gave Abram (13:14-17).

b. What was Abram's response (13:18)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Perspective on Possessions

Material possessions are too often exalted by the world around us. As we naturally want to be accepted, we subtly fall into the world's unhealthy values. The Bible has some principles to help us make wise choices regarding possessions. Abraham found freedom to follow and trust God as he lived by these principles. Let's look at the wisdom God's Word offers in this area of our lives.

1. According to the Bible, what are true riches and poverty?
Proverbs 15:16-17

Amos 8:11

Ephesians 2:12

Matthew 16:26

2. What do you observe about Abram's attitude regarding possessions?

3. What does God see when He looks at our possessions?
1 Samuel 16:7

Psalm 50:10-12

4. a. When a person pursues materialistic things as a way of life, what are the effects on family, friends, and the workplace?

b. What do the following suggest?
Proverbs 15:27a

Proverbs 28:25

5. What do these verses say about generosity and greed?
Proverbs 23:4-5

Luke 12:15

Matthew 6:19-21

6. What guidelines for generosity are given in these verses?
Proverbs 22:9

Luke 6:38

2 Corinthians 9:7

7. a. What guidelines has God given those who are materially rich? 1 Timothy 6:17-19

b. What guidelines related to possessions are found in 1 Timothy 6:6-10?

8. Our attitude toward our possessions ultimately depends on whom we serve. What do the following verses state? Luke 16:13-15

9. Read Micah 6:8. How do these practices work in opposition to a materialistic mindset?

10. God delights to prosper us. What do these verses say about God's provision for all our needs?
Philippians 4:19

Joshua 1:8

SUMMARY

11. In what ways are you pulled toward an unhealthy perspective on possessions? Is there a particular struggle in your life right now in this area?

12. What biblical principles help you find healthy perspectives regarding your situation?

LESSON 8 NOTES

1 *Terah...settling in Haran (11:31)*. Abram's father, Terah, raised his family in the city of Ur on the Euphrates River. The Guti, warlike “barbarians” from the eastern mountains near Ur, had attacked and conquered the region around Ur around 2180 B.C. This may have been part of the reason for Terah’s leaving the area. It was a wise move, as the Elamites destroyed Ur around 1950 B.C. Joshua 24:2 records that Terah was an idolater, worshiping other gods. He may have halted the move to Canaan at Haran because it, like Ur, was a center of moon worship.

2 *protect Abram's life in Egypt*. Abram told Sarai to tell Pharaoh she was his sister rather than wife because to take a woman into his harem who was married, Pharaoh would first have to kill the

husband. According to Genesis 20:12, Sarai *was* Abraham's half-sister, the daughter of his father, but not of his mother. Marriage with half-sisters was not uncommon in ancient times. Even so, half-truth was still a lie in the Egyptian culture where absolute truthfulness was an emphasized ethic. Abram was no doubt very uncomfortable when exposed before these people as a liar.

Lesson 9

CRISIS AND COVENANT

Genesis 14-15

One day, Abram, now called Hebrew¹ by his neighbors, received news that four powerful eastern kings had swept through the Jordan Valley, attacking and defeating five Canaanite kings. The four kings plundered Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot was among those taken captive by the fleeing invaders.

Without hesitation, Abram assembled 318 trained servants and allies and pursued the enemy. After overtaking the invaders in a night attack at Dan (140 miles from Abram's home in Hebron), Abram's men continued to pursue the enemy through the night, finally defeating them at Hobah (100 miles north of Dan). This was an extraordinary victory over four leading kings who had just seized such a large Transjordanian area. Abram recovered Lot, other prisoners and goods, and turned homeward. Near Jerusalem, the kings of Sodom and of Salem (Jerusalem) met Abram.

Melchizedek, king of Salem² and priest of his people, recognized Abram to be “of the most high God,” and praised God for giving Abram the incredible victory over such a powerful enemy. Simultaneously, Abram recognized that this priest and king believed in the one true God and gave him a tenth of the spoils.

Then the king of Sodom offered Abram the spoils of the battle that had initially been taken from the invaded people, but Abram politely refused, not wanting it said that anyone other than God was the source of his prosperity.

In the events of this chapter, Abram demonstrated once again that there was nothing selfish in his character. He acted out of devotion to his family and to God, and God began to honor Abram as He had promised.³

However, Abram and Sarai's concern began to grow over Sarai's barren state. The promises of God involved the multiplying of Abram's descendants, and he had none. The Lord appeared to Abram to reassure and guarantee that he *would* father a son and give birth to a great nation. In a dramatic encounter with Abram, the Lord made a binding covenant to fulfill all his promises.

At the same time, the Lord gave Abram an amazing prediction of the future, revealing the 400-year captivity and slavery that Abram's descendants would experience in Egypt some 200 years later. Their deliverance by God, and return to Canaan⁴ to possess the land was verified by the solemn and binding covenant which the Lord then made with Abram.⁵

Read Genesis 14:1-16.

1. Briefly describe the events of Genesis 14:1-12.

2. What did Abram do to rescue Lot and his family (14:13-16)?

Read Genesis 14:17-24.

3. Who was Melchizedek and what did he do (14:18-20)? To whom did he give the credit for the victory?

Reference: Note 2, Melchizedek, p. 85.

4. What was Abram's response to the king of Sodom's offer (14:21-24)?

Read Genesis 15:1-21.

5. What was Abram's problem and how did he think he must solve it (15:2-3)?

6. Of what did the Lord assure Abram (15:1,4-5)?

7. What definition of faith and reward of faith is given in Abram's response to the Lord's promise (15:6; see also Hebrews 11:1,6)?

8. a. What did the Lord promise in his covenant with Abram (15:7,18-21)?

b. What else did the Lord reveal to Abram (15:13-16)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS **Conquering Impulsiveness**

God blessed Abram by setting him apart to become the founding father of the nation of Israel and by giving him a personal relationship with Himself like no other man alive. But Abram and Sarai were childless, and time seemed to be running out as the promises of God hadn't even begun to be fulfilled.

Perseverance is not a natural human virtue. In our instant society, we are even less prone than Abram to wait on anything. But *waiting on God*, or *putting our trust or hope* in Him, is a way God reveals Himself to us, calls us to pray, and allows us to grow closer to Him. In Chapter 15 and the chapters to come, we see how Abram and Sarai learn the importance of faithful perseverance.

As we continue our study of *New Beginnings*, let's look at some truths about *waiting on God* that can help us trust godly principles and conquer impulsiveness.

1. How does Psalm 130:5 apply to Abram?

2. a. What had Abram and Sarai done so far in following and trusting God?

b. What was at stake if God did not fulfill His promises?

3. a. In what do people put hope or trust apart from God?

b. What is the result of such hope and trust?

4. The Bible promises we will not be disappointed when we wait on God. What is involved in *waiting on God* (*trusting* or *hoping* in God) according to these verses?

Psalm 37:7a

Psalm 37:34a

Psalm 62:5-6

Micah 7:7

5. According to the following, why is it best to wait on God's plans?

Jeremiah 29:11

2 Samuel 22:31a

Isaiah 55:8-9

Ecclesiastes 3:1

6. a. What does God promise if we persevere in waiting on Him?

Isaiah 40:31

1 Peter 5:6

b. What does 1 Peter 5:7 encourage us to do as we wait?

SUMMARY

7. In what areas of your life are you needing a “future and a hope” right now?

8. What encouragement and promises do you find in Abram’s story and from this lesson?

LESSON 9 NOTES

1 *Abram the Hebrew* (14:13). Abram is now recognized as a clan leader. This is the first use of the word *Hebrew* in the Bible. It was used by non-Israelites to designate descendants of Abraham. The term was not a flattering one as it referred to a social class that wandered or passed from place to place.

2 *Melchizedek*, whose name means "king of righteousness," is believed by some to be a theophany, an appearance of the preincarnate Christ. As Melchizedek praised *El Elyon*, "the most high God," Abram recognized Melchizedek's God to be Jehovah, the Lord he served. Melchizedek offered refreshments of bread and wine, the New Testament symbols of Christ's death and resurrection. In Hebrews 7:11 Melchizedek is referred to as a type of prefiguration of Christ because of his status as both king and priest, and because of having an office of priesthood not officially established by a specific ceremony (as after the order of Aaron in Leviticus 8 and Exodus 28 and 29). The Tell el Amarna tablets found in Egypt identify Salem and Jerusalem as the same city as early as 1400 B.C.

3 *God began to honor Abram* as promised. The battle references in Genesis 14 are the first biblical events that explicitly correlate with external history. The invasion route is traced along the ancient international caravan road running north and south. This secular military account takes on religious importance when Abram becomes involved. Here God began to fulfill his promise that Abram's name would be great (12:6).

4 *Canaan*, the land the Israelites would one day conquer, was completely destroyed by Israel (Joshua 16:10; 1 Kings 9:20-22), Assyria, and Babylon. Canaanite worship, as documented in archaeological discoveries, included infant sacrifice, idolatry, religious prostitution, and divination.

5 *Abrahamic Covenant* (15:9-21). This covenant resembles an ancient royal grant and is an unconditional grant of land to Abram's descendants. The parties in such a covenant would take an oath by cutting animals in half, walking between the pieces (15:17) and invoking a curse: "May I be cut in half if I don't keep

my oath.” In Genesis 15:9-21, only God passed between the pieces showing that the land grant did not depend upon Abram keeping any promises. In ancient times, this rite was equivalent to signing a contract and filing it with the local authorities today.

The sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure (15:16). God's judgment toward the Canaanites was patient. Archaeological artifacts and the epic literature discovered in 1929 at Ras Shamra on the north Syrian coast bears witness to the evils of their polytheistic worship which included child sacrifice, idolatry, religious prostitution, and divination (cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-12).

Lesson 10

ISHMAEL IS BORN

Genesis 16-17

The Lord had been specific in His promise to give Abram and Sarai a son (15:4), but as the years passed the distance between the promise and reality became more and more baffling. Impatience and frustration broke down Sarai's faith, and she persuaded Abram to try to have a son through her maid, Hagar. Since the practice of ensuring a male heir in such a way was common legal custom in that day, Sarai and Abram decided to take the matter into their own hands.

But the results were disastrous. Hagar became pregnant and began to despise Sarai, who blamed Abram. Abram withdrew from the situation, Sarai mistreated Hagar, and Hagar ran away. Alone by a spring in the desert, the angel of the Lord¹ appeared to Hagar and consoled her, telling her to go back to Sarai, submit to her and look forward to God's blessing on her son. The Lord gave her the name for the child: Ishmael, meaning "God hears." He also told Hagar that Ishmael (as would be the nation that would come from him; cf. 25:12-18) would be a wild, hostile person with enemies on every side. Regardless, Hagar was awed and uplifted by her meeting with the Lord. She named the place Beer Lahai Roi meaning "well of the Living One who sees (or *looks after*) me." God's revelation to Hagar, as well as to Sarai and Abram, was that He does *hear* and *see* distress and affliction and will surely fulfill His promises. Hagar obeyed the Lord as she returned to give birth to Abram's son, Ishmael, when Abram was 86 years old.

Thirteen years later, the Lord appeared to Abram introducing Himself as *El Shaddai*, or *God Almighty*, referring to the all-powerful and all-sufficient character of God. With the encouragement that nothing is impossible to God, He proceeded to reconfirm His promises to Abram. The Lord first renamed him Abraham, meaning *father of many*, indi-

cating that he would indeed have many descendants as promised. Likewise, he changed Sarai's name to Sarah, meaning *princess*, referring to her role as the mother of nations. Then the Lord restated that nations would come through Abraham's descendants, and that the entire land of Canaan, where Abraham was presently an alien, would be theirs.

After this, the Lord instituted circumcision² as the sign of Abraham's covenant with God to submit to His rule. It was also a sign of *God's* covenant to Abraham and his offspring, the circumcised. In prompt obedience, Abraham took every male in his household and had them circumcised that day, including himself at 99 years of age.

God also promised Abraham that Sarah would have a son. Abraham *laughed* in amazement. He was 99, Sarah 90! They had come to accept that Ishmael would be Abram's heir. But while God promised to bless Ishmael, His covenant would be established with the son born to Sarah whom God named Isaac, meaning *he laughs*.

Read Genesis 16.

1. Ten years had passed in Canaan. What was Sarai's problem, and how did she seek to solve it (16:1-2)?

2. Even though having an heir by a maid was an acceptable practice in the ancient Near East, what did Sarai's and Abram's action say about their faith? What do you think caused this?

3. Describe the relationship between Sarai, Abram, and Hagar (16:4-6)?

4. a. What promises and encouragement did the angel give Hagar (16:7-12)?

b. What did Hagar learn about God's character through her trauma (16:13-14)?

Read Genesis 17:1-14, 23-27.

5. a. How much later is this occurrence than the events of Genesis 16 (16:16; 17:1)?

b. How did the Lord introduce Himself as He reiterated His covenant promises to Abram (17:1-8)?

6. What command did God give Abraham as an outward sign of Abraham's inward commitment to God's kingship in his life (17:9-14)?

Reference: Note 2, Circumcision, p. 95.

Read Genesis 17:15-27.

7. a. What promise did God make about Sarah (17:15-16)?

b. What was Abraham's understandable response (17:15-18)?

8. What was Abraham's instant response to this encounter with God (17:23-27)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

What Price Impatience?

The events of this lesson span 14 years and exhibit clearly the importance of trusting God's Word and waiting for its fulfillment. Anyone who walks by faith for any length of time will face situations similar to Abraham's and Sarah's. Waiting and trusting

are hard for us. Impatience is much more natural and often leads, as it did for them, to taking matters into our own hands. The mess they made is the typical result. The grace of God and His redemption of the situation in spite of our human failures always emerges as we again turn to Him in faith. What does impatience cost? Having an answer etched in our minds can help us avoid impatient choices. Let's make some observations about the biblical principles related to this important subject.

1. What did impatience cost Abraham and Sarah?

2. What causes impatience in our society today? What issues do we typically become impatient about in life?

3. What are some of the results of impatience and haste:
in relationships?

in decisions?

4. What warnings do these verses give regarding haste?
Proverbs 19:2

Proverbs 29:20

5. Often impatience leads to action apart from God's will. What principles in the following verses relate to the experience of Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar?

Proverbs 19:21

Hosea 14:9

6. a. Why is it important that children not always get what they want, when they want it?

b. Why would a loving heavenly Father not always give us what we want, when we want it?

c. What rewards of patient faith can be found in the following?
Luke 21:19

Romans 5:3-5

7. What do these verses instruct us to do as we wait?

Romans 12:12

James 1:2-4

Galatians 6:9

8. If our overriding heart's desire is to honor God, what does He do when we fail?

Psalms 103:13-14

Psalms 37:23-24

9. a. As we patiently wait for God's provision, what are we to do?

Psalms 55:22

Psalm 34:4-5

Hebrews 12:2-3

b. What is the promise of Romans 9:33b?

SUMMARY

10. a. What are you experiencing in your life right now that demands patience?

b. What fears regarding the future are wearing on your patience?

11. a. What did you learn from the story of Abraham and Sarah about the cost of impatience?

b. What does God promise if you trust Him with the experiences or situations that try your patience?

LESSON 10 NOTES

1 *the angel of the Lord* (16:7). "Since the angel of the Lord speaks for God in the first person (16:10) and Hagar is said to name 'the Lord who spoke to her: *You are the God who sees me*' (16:13), the angel appears to be both distinguished from the Lord (in that he is called *messenger*--Hebrew for *angel* means *messenger*) and identified with him. Similar distinction and identification can be found in 19:1,21; 31:11,13; Exodus 3:2,4 [and other Scriptures]. Traditional Christian interpretation has held that this *angel* was a preincarnate manifestation of Christ as God's Messenger-Servant. It may be, however, that, as the Lord's personal messenger who represented him and bore his credentials, the angel could speak on behalf of (and so be identified with) the One who sent him (see especially 19:21; cf. 18:2,22; 19:2). Whether this *angel* was the second person of the Trinity remains therefore uncertain." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 29.

2 *Circumcision* was practiced by other nations, but signified Abraham's covenanted commitment to the Lord, to trust and serve Him alone as King of his life. For him, and everyone after him who would be circumcised as a sign of their heritage of the covenant promises of God, this rite was to symbolize total commitment to God. The action symbolized the inward promise, "If I am disloyal in faith or obedience to the Lord, may I be cut off from the promises of God's covenant as I have cut off my foreskin." The action also marked the circumcised as a recipient of God's covenant commitment.

Lesson 11

ISAAC IS BORN

Genesis 20-21

In our last study, we saw Abraham as an example of a man whose faith in God gave him the integrity necessary to stand apart. In this lesson, we will observe the results of times when he did not trust God. As we learn from his successes, we can also learn from his failures.

Abraham moved southwest to Gerar where he lied, as he did before (cf. Genesis 12:10-20), about Sarah's real identity. In order to protect himself from the local king, Abraham said Sarah was his sister.¹ Consequently, King Abimelech took her into his harem. To save Sarah, the soon-to-be mother of the promised heir of Abraham, the Lord came to Abimelech in a dream to warn him to give Sarah back to Abraham.

The king immediately called Abraham to discuss the matter, at which time Abraham gave the king his excuse for doing what he did. Abimelech, in the fear of Abraham's God, returned Sarah with gifts to make amends and an invitation to Abraham to live in the land wherever he wanted. Abraham prayed for Abimelech, and God restored his household.

Chapter 21 is the happy story of the birth of the long-awaited heir of Abraham and Sarah. As the Lord had instructed, they named him Isaac, meaning "he laughs." Sarah said, "Everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." She was 90 years old, Abraham 100 years old.

At a feast held on the day of Isaac's weaning,² Sarah saw Ishmael, the son of Abraham and her maid Hagar, mocking Isaac. Sarah demanded and God concurred that Abraham should send Ishmael and Hagar away. By faith, Abraham sent them off with only food and water. As God had promised, He followed them, staying with Ismael as he grew and blessing him as a son of Abraham.

Our text for this lesson ends with Abimelech and Abraham making a treaty at Beersheba in the land of the Philistines.

Read Genesis 20.

1. What situation did Abraham get into, and how did God deal with it (20:1-7)?

Reference: Note 1, king wanted her, p. 102.

2. What was Abimelech's attitude toward Abraham (20:8-10)?

3. What potential outcome might Abraham's lie have had for Sarah, their promised heir, and Abimelech's household (20:11-13)?

4. How did God turn this incident around for Abraham's good (20:14-18)?

Read Genesis 21:1-20.

5. What was Sarah's response to this long-awaited event (21:1-7)?

6. What problem arose and how did Abraham settle it (21:8-14)?

Reference: Note 2, Isaac's weaning, p. 102.

7. How did God encourage Hagar in the crisis (21:15-21)?

Read Genesis 21:22-34.

8. What was Abimelech's attitude toward Abraham (21:22-34)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

The Gift of Joy

Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." Although she made some big mistakes in her impatience with divine delays, Sarah followed her husband in God's callings on his life. Her experience became a

picture of the promise, “Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5b). God desires joy to be a part of our lives. The Bible has a lot to say about how and why God brings joy and what its benefits are for us.

1. What brought Sarah joy and why?

2. a. How would you define joy?

b. Why is joy a healthy emotion? What does it produce physically and spiritually?

3. What robbed Sarah of her joy? What effect did that have on those around her?

4. What effect does a person without joy have on others? What does a lack of joy do to relationships?

5. Why do you think God gave man the ability to laugh?

6. What do these verses suggest joy gives us?

Proverbs 15:13

Proverbs 17:22

Nehemiah 8:10c

7. What do these verses suggest bring joy?

Psalms 33:21

Psalms 89:15-16

Psalms 16:11

Psalms 37:4

8. According to these verses, what can God's joy overrule and why? Habakkuk 3:17-19

9. Joy has been described as an inner well of strength in our lives. Why is the joy God gives available in spite of circumstances? Galatians 5:22,25

Reference: Note 6, Holy Spirit, p. 48.

Ephesians 3:16-17a

Romans 8:38-39

10. What does Christ promise about the joy of knowing Him? John 16:22

SUMMARY

11. In what area of your life do you need joy right now?

12. What truths from Sarah's life or the verses of this lesson encourage you to find joy in God's promises?

13. How can you give joy to those around you?

LESSON 11 NOTES

1 *king wanted her.* At 90, it was probably no longer Sarah's beauty but rather the possible alliance with her wealthy and powerful "brother" that motivated Abimelech's action of taking her into his palace. NavPress Life Change Series, *Genesis*, p. 133. See also Note 2, *protect Abram*, p. 76.

2 *Isaac's weaning.* Ishmael would have been 16 or 17 by the time of Isaac's weaning, which usually occurred when the baby was two or three.

Afterword

Moses wrote Genesis to explain to the Israelites their roots as they journeyed back to the promised land of Canaan from Egypt after 400 years of bondage. Genesis helped them understand, as we can today, how man fell, but how God immediately began to work out a plan to bring people back to Himself. God called one man, Abraham, to begin a nation that would bring knowledge of Him and blessing to the world.

As Genesis closes, the curtain is drawn on the drama of Abraham's *family*, with twelve small tribes founded and settled temporarily in Egypt. Exodus begins 400 years later, with the stage set and the curtain opening on the drama of a *nation* as God continues to move in history to provide new beginnings for us all.

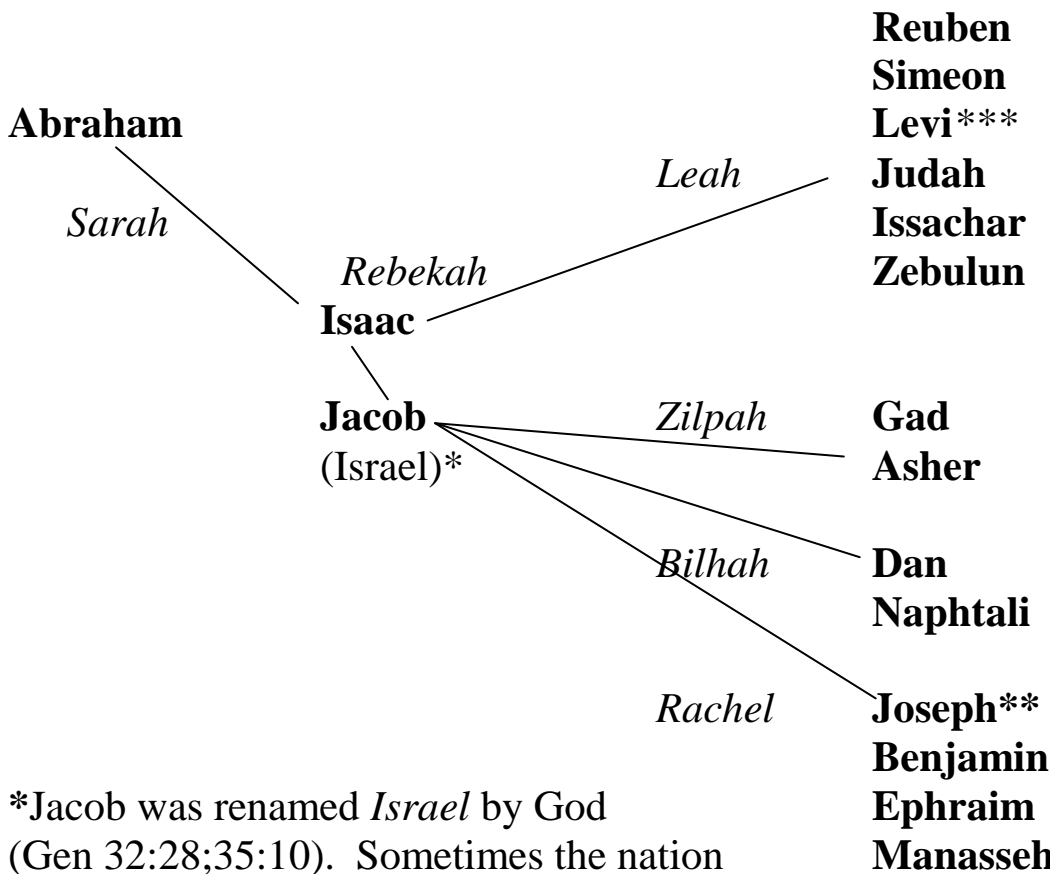
Easy Breakdown of Genesis

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| I. Beginnings of Mankind | Genesis 1-11 |
| Creation, Fall, Flood, Babel | |
| II. History of the Founding Fathers of Israel | Genesis 12-50 |
| Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph | |

The Tribes of Israel

Fathers of the tribes of Israel

Wives in italic



*Jacob was renamed *Israel* by God (Gen 32:28;35:10). Sometimes the nation of Israel is referred to as Jacob by Old Testament writers.

**When Jacob adopted Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph became the father of two tribes of Israel.

***The Levites became the priests of Israel, did not own property in Canaan, therefore were not among the traditional 12 landowning tribes of Israel. They were in 48 towns scattered throughout the Promised Land (Joshua 21).

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**NEW BEGINNINGS
STUDIES FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS**

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