

Genesis A devotional study by Max Frazier, Jr.

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It records for us the beginnings of creation, man, woman, the Sabbath, marriage, the family, work, sin, murder, sacrifice, the races, languages, culture, civilization, and redemption. Its author is Moses and the book is part of what the Hebrews call The Torah. The Torah, or Pentateuch, consists of the first five books of the Old Testament.

The book of Genesis can be divided into two parts. Each part is unique. Chapters 1-11 form the first division, the theme of which is "beginnings" with the key verse being Genesis 1:1 - "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The second division of Genesis consists of chapters 12-50. It concerns a group of people known as the Patriarchs. They include: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. This portion of Genesis is really the initial history of the children of Israel. The theme is "patriarchs" with the key verse being Genesis 15:6 - "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

Let's turn our attention to Genesis 1.

Key Words: "and God said"; "it was so"; "God saw it was good"; "God blessed them"

Key Verse: Genesis 1:1 is the general statement on God's creation. It answers the "who?" - God; the "when?" - in the beginning; the "what?" - the heavens and the earth; and the "how?" - He created.

Purpose Statement: This chapter is a general statement of God's creative act.

Outline: THE CREATION

I. General Statement (vs. 1)

II. Creation primeval (vs. 2)

III. Events of creation (vs. 3-31)

A. Day One: Light from darkness (vs. 3-5)

B. Day Two: Sky from earth (vs. 6-8)

C. Day Three: Dry land from water; plants (vs. 9-13)

D. Day Four: Sun, moon, stars (vs. 14-19)

E. Day Five: Water animals; fishes; birds (vs. 20-23)

F. Day Six: Land animals; man (vs. 24-31)

1. Animals (vs. 24-25)

2. Creation and purpose of man (vs. 26-30)

3. God's conclusion (vs. 31)

Questions to Probe: Why is it only to fish and birds and man that God gives His blessing and instructions to be fruitful and to multiply?

Thoughts to Ponder: Can you discover the one thing mentioned in this chapter that God did not create? It is the one thing most unlike God. And yet its existence is almost from the very beginning and we know that its existence will continue on into eternity future. It is darkness. God is never the creator of darkness. In Him is light.

Two very unique Hebrew words are used in verse 1. The word "God" is "elohim." That is a plural form of the noun "el" or God." God is a triune being (compare verse 26). Also, the word for "created" is from the Hebrew root "bara" which depicts the making of something from that which doesn't exist. Only God could "bara-create." Man only manufactures or makes things from substances that already exist. Verse one seems to be a statement of fact. The purpose of the rest of the chapter is to describe the mechanics of the "bara." Initially, the earth lacked a definable form, yet the presence of God was there even in its formlessness. Creation was the product of God's voice, giving definition to His desires.

But not all things were a product of His voice alone: 1. Verse 3 - Light - "and God said" 2. Verse 6 - Firmament - "so God made" 3. Verse 9 - Seas and dry land - "God said" 4. Verse 11 - Vegetation - "God said", but "the land produced" 5. Verse 14 - Heavenly lights - "God made" 6. Verse 21 - Birds and fish - "God created (bara)" 7. Verse 24 - Animals - "God made" 8. Verse 27 - Man - "God created (bara)"

Also, it wasn't until the third day that God stated what He had created was good (see verses 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Finally, according to verses 29-30, all forms of non-vegetable life were to be vegetarians. This would only change after the flood (see Genesis 9:3). It will also be what happens during the Millennium (see Isaiah 11:7)

We continue our study in the book of Genesis. Let's look at chapter 2.

Key Words: "man," "woman," wife"

Key Verse: Verses 18 and 24 tell of God's original intent for marriage. It was to be one man and one woman.

Purpose Statement: This chapter focuses on the specifics of the creation of man and woman and their relationship to each other.

Outline: THE CREATION: FOCUS ON MAN

- I. The Seventh Day (vs. 1-3)
- II. Man (vs. 4-25)
 - A. His creation (vs. 4-7)

- B. His garden (vs. 8-14)
- C. His restrictions (vs. 15-17)
- D. His responsibilities (vs. 19-20)
- E. His companion (vs. 18, 21-25)

Questions to Ponder: Why was there a time gap between the creation of man and the creation of woman?

Thoughts to Ponder: From the very beginning, God's desire has been for mankind to work. It was never God's intent for man to be idle and lazy. He was to have constructive work to do managing God's creation. In verse 2 we read where God finished His work and then entrusted the remainder of His work to man (vs. 15). Work has sacred implications for us.

God made man from the ground (vs. 7). God made animals from the ground also (vs. 19). The difference is that God breathed His life into man only (vs. 7). God created two special trees; yet only one was off limits to man - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I wonder if these two trees were in close proximity to each other.

It is interesting to note that whenever someone says to us, "Don't peek in that room" or "Don't ask for more" that we sneak a peek and ask for more. The power of the negative is great. Perhaps that is the reason Eve was around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was the power of the "no."

Genesis 3

Key Words: "curse," "pain"

Key Verse: Verse 15 is a statement of penalty and a promise of hope.

Purpose Statement: world. it shows the subtleties of sin and also the grave consequences for sin.

Outline: THE FALL OF MAN

- I. The deception of Eve (vs. 1-7)
- II. God confronts Adam and Eve (vs. 8-19)
 - A. Excuses offered (vs. 8-13)
 - B. Penalties imposed (vs. 14-19)
- III. Eve named (vs. 20)
- IV. God closes Eden to man (vs. 21-24)

Questions to Probe: Why did Eve add the phrase, "do not touch", to the commandment of God? Why was she even anywhere close to the tree? Did she already have an innate urge for it? Why did Adam eat? Did he also have a desire for it?

Thoughts to Ponder: Eve was the very first legalist. She added further restrictions to God's laws. God had said, "You shall not eat." Eve told the serpent God had said, "You shall not touch or eat." Isn't it just like a legalist to add to God's restrictions. But Eve soon broke her own version of God's laws. How we need to be careful not to add to God's laws or to wander in our interpretation of them.

The very first consequence of sin was the shedding of moral innocence - they realized their own nakedness and were ashamed. Whereas a sinful Adam and Eve tried to hide their nakedness, sinful men and women today seek to uncover theirs. Even the shame has been lost.

Because of Adam and Eve's sin, the very first deaths occurred. Innocent animals died so that a covering could be made for Adam and his wife. This thread of the death of the innocent for the atonement (covering) of the guilty runs throughout the pages of Scripture until it climaxes there at Calvary's cross.

Verse 16 presents the first hint at any authority structure. Eve was created as a help suitable for Adam (Genesis 2:18). That phrase meant someone who exactly corresponds to someone else. They were to rule over God's creation together (Genesis 1:26). But, after the fall, the woman was given a place subordinate to man. It was part of the curse.

Notes: Not only the serpent, the wild animal, was made by God, but also the serpent who spoke through the wild animal was made by God (see Ezekiel 28:13).

Adam's first expressed problem was loneliness which God corrected with the creation of Eve. In verse 10, after eating the fruit, he expressed fear - a problem present today and correctable only by God's presence.

We will now focus our study upon Genesis 4 and 5, chapters that I collectively call, "The Story of the Dying." These are not such pleasant chapters to read, but there is profound significance in the developing the story of why God sent Jesus to be our redeemer.

Genesis 4

Key Words: "angry," "vengeance," "sin"

Key Verse: Verse 7 states that we can have power over sin and we do not need to succumb to it.

Purpose Statement: This chapter shows the first act of murder. Also it demonstrates how God intervened to thwart Satan's attempt to prevent the coming of Jesus. God sent Seth when Abel was killed.

Outline: CAIN AND ABEL

- I. Their story (vs. 1-16)
 - A. Birth (vs. 1-2)
 - B. Sacrifices (vs. 3-5)
 - C. Abel slain (vs. 6-8)
 - D. Cain's punishment (vs. 9-16)
- II. Cain's family (vs. 17-24)
- III. Birth of Seth (vs. 25-26)

Questions to Probe: Had God previously shared with Cain and Abel that they needed to bring a "blood sacrifice?" Why was there so much anger between Cain and Abel? What kind of mark did God place upon Cain?

Thoughts to Ponder: Cain's sin was twofold. First, it was open rebellion against the commands of God. He knew the type of offering that God desired but refused to present it to God. Second, his murder of his brother was premeditated. He carefully planned it. Then he compounded the problem by denying his guilt. Cain never pled for forgiveness and God's grace. Even in his guilt he was remorseless.

By the time of Lamech, just a few generations from Adam and Eve (in fact they were still on the scene), we see the corruption of the marital plan of God. God's original intent had been for one man and one woman to become one flesh. Lamech now, with great boasting, becomes one flesh with two women. It doesn't take long for sin to thoroughly corrupt God's plans.

Notes: Cain and Abel had honorable professions (vs. 2). It was not their jobs that created the problems, but the differences in attitude in approaching God. Cain's attitude was one of self-centeredness. He was angry when God rejected his offering (vs. 5). He was inattentive when God encouraged him to do the right (vs. 7). He was unrepentant when confronted by God following the murder of his brother (vs. 9). He was focused upon his own welfare after God had sentenced him (vs. 13-14).

There is a great truth in verse 7. Sin can only control us when we allow it to have that influence over us. To a certain extent I am the captain of my ship (see Romans 6:11-14).

Genesis 5

Key Words: "he died"

Key Verse: Verse 29 is important. With the exception of Enoch, this chapter records the struggles of man against the curses of Genesis 3.

Purpose Statement: This chapter chronologs the "fruitfulness" of man in filling the earth. But it also states the reality of the curse - "he died."

Outline: GENEALOGY FROM ADAM

- I. Creation of Adam (vs. 1-2)
- II. Adam's line (vs. 3-32)
 - A. Adam to Seth (vs. 3-5)
 - B. Seth to Enosh (vs. 6-8)
 - C. Enosh to Kenan (vs. 9-11)
 - D. Kenan to Mahalelel (vs. 12-14)
 - E. Mahalalel to Jared 9vs. 15-17)
 - F. Jared to Enoch (vs. 18-20)
 - G. Enoch to Methuselah (vs. 21-24)
 - H. Methuselah to Lamech (vs. 25-27)
 - I. Lamech to Noah (vs. 28-31)
 - J. Noah (vs. 32)

Questions to Probe: What made Enoch so special? What was so different in his life from that of his fathers?

Thoughts to Ponder: The text states that Enoch walked with God for 300 years. Just imagine three centuries of close fellowship with God. Three centuries of intimate relations with Him. No wonder Enoch did not die. As one old preacher said, "It got toward evening one day, and because he was closer to God's house than his own, God invited him to come with Him." But we can have that same intimate relationship with God today. We can call Him "Abba! Father!" Have you had an "Enoch-walk" with God?

Notes: Verse 1 reaffirms that God created man in His own image and likeness. Mankind was like his Creator. In vers 3, Adam had a son in his own image and likeness and named him Seth. But because Adam himself was created in God's image, that image also is passed down to our children who are created in our image.

This chapter summarizes human existence with three thoughts: man is born; man reproduces himself; man dies.

I never cease to be amazed at how much God teaches me from this book that we are so familiar with. Just shows the power of His Word. Our study this week will focus on chapters 6 and 7 - part of the story of Noah.

Genesis 6

Key Words: "the Lord was grieved;" "his heart was filled with pain"

Key Verse: Verse 8 is a contrast between Noah and society (do we find favor with God?) and verse 22 describes the total obedience of Noah.

Purpose Statement: This chapter is a portrait of a corrupt society and a faithful man; of a verdict of destruction from God to that society, yet of mercy and deliverance to the man.

Outline: Noah's Call and His Obedience to God

- I. The union of the sons of God with the daughters of men (vs. 1-4)
- II. The response of God (vs. 5-8)
- III. The story of Noah (vs. 9-9:29)
 - A. His family and his reputation (vs. 9-10)
 - B. The instructions concerning the ark (vs. 11-22)

Questions to Ponder: Who were the "sons of God" mentioned in verse 27?

Thoughts to Ponder: Seldom in the Bible do we read of God being in pain. But this text (verse 6) tells us that God's heart was filled with pain over the intense and continuous evil of the man that he had created. It seemed their sole purpose was to do evil. They turned those things that God had created for good (example - sex) into evil. When one reads these early verses one can picture our world today. Is God's heart filled with pain today? I think it must be.

As a child I often pondered how Noah could round up all the animals that were to go into the ark. But verse 20 relates that he did not round up any of them. They came to him. I image that was quite a scene in Noah's hometown when one day, out of nowhere, came two elephants and then two camels and then two giraffes. And two kangaroos just happened to hop by. As did Noah, so did the animal world - they all obeyed God.

Why did Noah find favor (grace) in the eyes of a God whose heart was filled with pain? In verse 9 we read where Noah walked with God. This is the same expression used of Enoch (Genesis 5:24). It is what God wants from each of us (Colossians 2:6). Second, in verse 22, Noah did everything just as God commanded him. When we are walking with the Lord we will then practice obedience. Walking and obeying always curry God's favor.

Genesis 7

Key Words: "obeyed;" "shut"

Key Verse: Verse 5 shares solid testimony of Noah's unquestioned obedience.

Purpose Statement: This chapter is a continuation of the account of Noah's obedience to God in preparation for the flood and of God's sparing Noah as the flood begins.

Outline: The Story of Noah (continued)

- C. Instructions about the animals (7:1-5)
- D. The gathering into the ark (vs. 6-10)

Note: this took a week
E. The floods come (vs. 11-24)

Questions to Probe: I wonder how Noah felt as he heard the door shut and the rains begin and he heard the pitiful pleas of the people from outside? Or perhaps the people responded in hatred to God (compare with Revelation 16).

Thoughts to Ponder: I imagine Noah created quite a spectacle that day as he and his sons began to load the ark with all the strange creatures that had arrived in town. It may have been almost a circus-like atmosphere as "crazy old Noah" loaded his boat, labeled perhaps by most of his neighbors as "Noah's Folly." Perhaps, some might have had a twinge of nervousness as Noah and his family walked up the ramp, but what could they expect from a "crazy man." Then God shut the door with a loud thud.

Two key statements are found in this chapter: verse 5 - another reminder that Noah did all that the Lord commanded him; and verse 6 - the Lord shut him in. I think there is a relationship between these two verses. Because Noah did obey all that God had said, it pleased God to close him safely into the ark. The blessings of safety followed the acts of obedience. When those first rain drops came, some began to wonder if Noah had not been right. But the rains persisted - day after day. Now it was no longer funny - it was deadly serious. They beat upon that ark door but Noah would not open it up. He couldn't because it had been closed from the outside. Finally, the knocking ceased and the only sound now was the beating of the rain on the hull of the ark. Oh, if the people had just heeded God's warning while there was still time! But, have we learned the lessons of the flood? I think not. The day will come when the Lord will come and so many will be left behind to experience the flood of God's judgment that will come upon the world.

Study Note: Verse 2 is the first reference to the differences between clean and unclean animals. We have to assume that God had given instructions to Noah as to how to classify these animals. It must have been quite a sight as they loaded the ark.

Genesis 8

Key Word: "remembered"

Key Verse: Verse 1 relates that "God remembered Noah." I wonder, if at times, Noah thought God had forgotten him in the storm. But it is good to know God does remember us.

Purpose Statement: This chapter shares the closing days of the account of the flood and the deliverance of Noah.

Outline: The Story of Noah (continued)

- F. The waters recede (8:1-5)
- G. The sending of the raven and the dove (vs. 6-14)
- H. Noah leaves the ark and sacrifices to God (vs.15-20)
- I. God's promise (vs. 21-22)

Thoughts to Ponder: While it took only forty days to flood the earth, it would take over eleven months to dry it out. This meant that Noah and his family were in the ark for 370 days. Wow! That is a long time to be confined. But they knew the protecting hand and the providing hand of God during that time. Those opening words of this chapter are powerful: "But God remembered Noah..." God will never forget us. That is His promise.

Genesis 7:1 is God's command to enter the ark. Genesis 8:15 is God's command to exit the ark. Noah's survival depended upon his obedience to the first command; his receiving God's blessings upon obeying the second. God does ordain our going in and our coming out (Psalm 121:8).

Genesis 9

Key Word: "covenant"

Key Verse: Verse 17 summarizes the covenant between God and all flesh on the earth.

Purpose Statement: This chapter has three intents: 1) the command concerning the sanctity of life; 2) the giving of the eternal covenant between God and mankind; and 3) the sin of Noah and the cursing of Canaan and the blessing of Shem and Japheth.

Outline: The Story of Noah (continued)

- J. The command concerning the sanctity of life (9:1-7)
- K. God's covenant (vs. 8-17)
- L. Noah's sin and its consequences (vs. 18-27)
- M. Noah's death (vs. 28-29)

Questions to Probe: Prior to the flood (compare verse 3), was man only a vegetarian?

Thoughts to Ponder: It is fascinating to know that the rainbow was given not only as a sign to Noah and his family but also to every creature upon the earth. Could this mean that creatures of the earth were able to recognize the presence of God and the promise of God as it related to them? Certainly there is much imagery in Psalms that expresses the praise and worship of the creation toward its Creator. And Paul reminds us in Romans 8 that all creation is now groaning awaiting its redemption. God does care for each of His own. Praise the Lord for that great

thought.

The covenant of the rainbow is all of God. He made it with Noah. The conditions of the covenant, the length of the covenant, and its initiation were all from God and not man. Sinful man has nothing with which to bargain with God. We cannot dictate terms. The covenant is all from God.

The act of Ham in exposing his father's nakedness was an act of disrespect. His two brothers handled it properly. But Noah's curse fell upon Ham's son rather than Ham. No one knows the exact reason why, but perhaps Canaan was present when Ham exposed his father and did nothing to prevent it. Whatever the cause, it was a curse that would have lasting consequences in biblical history.

These chapters of Genesis complete those scenes of the very early days of man's travels here upon the earth. We will conclude with an introduction to Abraham, whose story comes next.

Genesis 10

Key Words: "sons of"

Key Verse: Verse 32 is a good summary statement of the chapter.

Purpose Statement: This chapter describes how Noah and his family fulfilled God's command to be fruitful and multiply and to populate the earth following the flood.

Outline: The Table of Nations

- I. Introduction (vs. 1)
- II. Descendants of Japheth (vs. 2-5)
- III. Descendants of Ham (vs. 6-20)
- IV. Descendants of Shem (vs. 21-31)
- V. Conclusion (vs. 32)

Questions to Probe: Do any of the nations mentioned in this chapter have any modern descendants?

Thoughts to Ponder: In the midst of this list of names of the descendants of Noah is that of his great-grandson Nimrod. We know that Nimrod was a mighty warrior, a man skilled with military might. We might say he was the very first "Alexander the Great" or "Napoleon" of the world. We also know that he was a great builder of cities, some of which went on to play major roles in world history. But the phrase that intrigues us is the statement that he was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Did Nimrod have time for God? Did he serve God? It seems the phrase "before the Lord" is somewhat ambiguous, but most scholars feel he worshiped his military might before the Lord. Certainly, Babylon, the city he founded, became the center

for worship of false gods. It is always dangerous to place anything, including our own abilities and desires, before God.

Genesis 11

Key Words: "language", "Babel", "Abram"

Key Verse: No single verse really shares the key ideas of this chapter.

Purpose Statement: This chapter concludes the thoughts in chapter 10 by describing how the various languages were formed. But it also shows the selection by God of one family to become a special people.

Outline: From Babel to Abraham

- I. The tower at Babel and the confusing of languages (vs. 1-9)
- II. The line of Shem to Abraham (vs. 10-26)
- III. The early life of Abraham (vs. 27-32)

Questions to Probe: Was Shem born after Noah began building the ark? (verse 10)

Thoughts to Ponder: One wonders if we are not progressing toward another Babel. The whole world is eager to learn English. Why? I am not sure. It does have positive benefits for the proclamation of the Gospel. But could it also have a very negative effect? Could English be the language that will draw the world together again under the leadership of the Antichrist to challenge God even as the common tongue of those at Babel caused them to challenge God? I am not certain of the answer to that question, but I do know that all languages must be used wisely and with care.

The whole story of the building of the tower at Babel is one of disobedience. How long after the flood this story occurred we are not told, but considerable time must have elapsed as there were sufficient people to build a city. God had commanded Noah to fill the earth (Genesis 9:1), yet here the people deliberately chose not to be scattered over the earth (Genesis 11:4). So with confused communications, God accomplished His will in spite of the people. God's will is always accomplished.

One wonders why Terah and his family left Ur. Perhaps it was the memories there of the loss of his son Haran. But, whatever it was, the move was a family affair. They followed the Euphrates River north to a place where these shepherds might become successful. Terah called that place Haran after his deceased son. It would be from Haran that Abram would receive God's call (Genesis 12:1-5).

I am very excited about that portion of the Word that will be our focus of study for the majority of the time this year. The longer I teach the Patriarchs, the more intimate I become with them and their stories. I find these chapters in Genesis to be among some of my favorites within the Bible. And I hope that through this study you will be

enabled to say that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph have become among your best friends.

We will begin with the story of Abraham. You probably grew up singing that old song, "Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham; I am one of them, and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord...right arm, left arm, etc." It was a silly song that as kids we enjoyed because of all the motions that were put into it. And it is still popular for those very same reasons. But, just who is this Abraham? And why should the Bible tell us so much about his life? And why does he become the personal hero of the Apostle Paul, being mentioned by Paul in nearly every epistle he wrote?

The story of Abraham is a really a journey in faith. You have probably said, as I have said, "If only I had the faith of Abraham!" Certainly that is a lofty goal to which to aspire. But, God has shown me that Abraham's faith story did not begin at Mount Moriah, that great scene that we characterize as being the faith statement of Abraham. In fact, that story did not occur until nearly 40 years had elapsed since we were first introduced to Abraham in chapter 12 of Genesis. God can do a lot of development of our faith, if we allow Him, in 40 years. So, our focus for these first several weeks will be to try to follow this faith-story of Abraham.

So glad you are along for this study. (By the way, if you would like to read an excellent study on the life of Abraham, I would highly recommend Chuck Swindoll's book on Abraham, part of his series on Great Characters from the Bible.)

Genesis 12

Key Words: "I will" (spoken by God - these words are very important)

Key Verse: Verses 2 and 3 declare God's promises to Abram, promises that have an eternal bent to them. These promises are made not only to Abram, but to his seed as well.

Purpose Statement: This chapter documents the call of Abram, his obedience by faith and his disobedience in going to Egypt.

Outline: The Call of Abram

- I. A covenant with Abram (vs. 1-3)
- II. Abram journeys to Canaan (vs. 4-9)
- III. the journey to Egypt and the great lie there (vs. 10-20)

Questions to Probe: Why did Abram bother to take Lot along with him? God had specifically told him to separate from his family. Lot was really never to be an asset to Abram.

Thoughts to Ponder: The burden of responsibility for the fulfillment of the promises

made to Abram rested upon God. Seven times God makes the statement, "I will..." We live in a world of broken promises such that we almost come to expect them and consider them as being part of life, but now so with God. He always keeps His promises. Not one has ever been broken. Now the fulfillment may be delayed, as in the case of Abram; but, in His time, each will come to pass. What a great God to put our trust in!

Verse 10 states that Abram went down to Egypt. Not only was this a going down geographically, but also spiritually. God had not told him to go to Egypt, only to enter into the Promised Land. Yes, a famine did greet him when he arrived, but as he left Haran by faith, really not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8), so he should have remained by faith in the land depending upon God to supply his needs. Egypt is always the place of spiritual destitution. It is much better to trust God in the midst of a famine than to trust Egypt with its plenty.

Genesis 13

Key Words: "I will"

Key Verse: Verse 4 states that Abram got back to firm ground by re-establishing ties with God.

Purpose Statement: This chapter shares with us the importance of including God in all our decision making. Note the contrast between what Lot did and what Abram did.

Outline: The Separation of Lot and Abram

- I. Abram leaves Egypt (vs. 1-4)
- II. The conflict between Abram and Lot (vs. 5-7)
- III. Lot's choice (vs. 8-13)
- IV. God's promise to Abram (vs. 14-17)
- V. Abram's obedience (vs. 18)

Questions to Probe: Why did Abram persist in keeping Lot as part of the team?

Thoughts to Ponder: Whenever we take along baggage that was not a part of God's plans, we can expect problems. It was not God's plan for Lot to accompany Abram. Abram just took him along. And Lot was a constant problem for him. When God says to separate ourselves, then we need to separate. Let's get rid of the "Lots" in our lives. Doing so will save us many problems and difficulties.

Lot saw the plains of the Jordan with his physical eyes. He saw green pastures, clear waters, and people. The cities and lands around Sodom looked so much more exciting and offered more hope for success than did the barren plains of the Negev. What he did not see was the evil of the hearts of the people living there. Lot chose based only on the physical evidence. But the beauty of Sodom would

soon fade into ashes, and its hopes would turn into total despair. The eyes of men do not see as the eyes of God. After Lot had chosen the best what was left for Abram? God now told him to look. What did he see? He saw and heard the promise of God. All the land was to be his and his descendants. I am certain that Abram may not have fully understood it all but he trusted God. I have often wondered how Abram could have had the peace to let Lot choose first. I think I have found the answer in verse 4. Abram returned to the altar and called on the name of the Lord. Prayer, surrender, and obedience - these are the keys to fully trusting the Lord.

One can only imagine what precipitated the quarreling among the servants of Abram and Lot. But I am sure there were selfish motives included. It appears from the text that Lot was motivated by his own self-centeredness. He saw the most favorable land and decided that it would be most suitable for him. As he was to later discover, even as we do also, a decision based upon selfish motivations often leads to disastrous consequences. When we only focus upon our personal needs rather than God's will, we will make wrong choices. Abram had already made one bad choice, so he wisely consulted God in prayer. That is a model we can learn from as well.

Genesis 14

Key Words: "tithe"; "Abram the Hebrew"

Key Verse: Verse 13 includes the first time use of the phrase, "Abram the Hebrew."

Purpose Statement: This chapter demonstrates (1) the consequences of making a decision without God's wisdom; (2) the great sacrifice love will make even when wronged; and (3) a spirit of selflessness and generosity.

Outline: Abram Rescues a Captured Lot

- I. The capture of Lot (vs. 1-12)
 - A. Background of the struggle (vs. 1-7)
 - B. Sodom seized (vs. 8-12)
- II. Abram rescues Lot (vs. 13-16)
- III. Abram is confronted by Melchizedek and the king of Sodom (vs. 17-24)

Questions to Probe: Why was Melchizedek there when Abram returned? How did he happen to be a believer in God? What do we know about him? What made Abram give one tenth of what he had? Is there a significance in the tithe?

Thoughts to Ponder: When you associate with the wrong crowd there is a great possibility that you will be subjected to the same fate as they are. That is what happened to Lot. He never took part in the civil war that was going on in the area. But when Sodom was attacked and defeated, Lot and his family were led captives just like all the other residents of Sodom. There is a profound lesson to be learned.

I might attend a school event where alcohol is being served illegally and I may not even be drinking, but if the school authorities enter the premises, I will be just as guilty as those who were drinking. Oh how careful we must be in the selection of those we call friends. What a lesson to be learned from Lot.

Two kings greeted Abram after his rescue of Lot. To the king of Sodom, Abram bestowed a blessing by returning the booty taken in his victory. Although it rightfully belonged to him, yet he returned it to the previous owners because he did not want to be beholden to the Sodomites. From another king, Melchizedek, king of Salem, Abram received a blessing. This king, about whom we know so very little (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6, 10; Hebrews 6:20-7:28), was a servant of God, and he honored Abram for being a servant of God as well. Because Abram was blessed by God, he could become a blessing to others. That really is what Jesus meant when He stated that we are salt and light; we are to bring God's blessings to others.

Note: The geographical distances mentioned in this chapter stagger the mind. Sodom was located at the southern-most part of the Dead Sea. When Abram and his small force finally overtook the captors of Lot, they had traveled to the far north of Canaan and the continued pursuit took them even north of Damascus. That was a distance of nearly 200 miles. That's a lot of marching. Wow! It was tough being a soldier in those days. How we forget the role of geography in Bible accounts.

Genesis 15

Key Words: "covenant"

Key Verse: Verse 6 states that Abram believed the Lord. I don't think he understood what God had promised him, but he believed it anyway. There is a lesson there for us as well.

Purpose Statement: This chapter demonstrates the faithfulness of God to Abram. What amazing promises were given to him!

Outline: God's Promises to Abram

- I. The promise concerning descendants (vs. 1-6)
- II. God's promise about Israel's history (vs. 7-16) [This was to involve slavery, then deliverance.]
- III. Covenant concerning the land (vs. 17-21)

Thoughts to Ponder: A covenant is a binding agreement between two individuals. When two people speak their wedding vows a covenant is formed between them. Verse 18 states that God made a covenant with Abram. The Hebrew word literally means "to cut a covenant." This act is described in verses 10 and 11 as Abram divides the animals in half and lays their carcasses opposite each other with an aisle between them. Then, in verse 17, the presence of God passes down that aisle in the form of a smoking pot and a blazing torch. This act was God's seal that this covenant was all of God. God initiated a covenant with Abram. In fact, the

responsibility for the fulfillment of the covenant rested with God. He stated, "I will...." And God keeps His covenantal promises. Abram has long since died, but that covenant God made that day with him is still effective for his descendants. What an awesome God who keeps His promises to generation after generation!

Four truths about Abram's offspring are discovered in this chapter. First, the offspring would be the fruit of Abram's own body. They would be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (verse 4). Second, Abram's descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens, in other words, there would be a lot of them (verse 5). Third, difficult times would be the lot for Abram's descendants, in fact, they would face slavery. Yet God would bring them deliverance (verse 13). Fourth, a land, specified by God, would be a gift to Abram's descendants (verses 18-21). This land further clarifies God's promise given in Genesis 13:14-15.

Genesis 16

Key Words: "Hagar", "angel of the Lord"

Key Verse: According to verse 13, God sees us and cares about us.

Purpose Statement: This chapter chronicles man's attempts in the flesh to fulfill the promises of God. The result - failure.

Outline: Abram and Hagar: A Story of Disobedience

- I. Sarai's plan and Abram's response (vs. 1-4)
- II. Sarai's treatment of Hagar (vs. 5-6) [Note: Hagar went from the loving arms of Abram to the vengeful hands of Sarai]
- III. God's promise to Hagar (vs. 7-12)
- IV. Hagar's response (vs. 13-14)
- V. Birth of Ishmael (vs. 15-16)

Thoughts to Ponder: Oh the troubles we fall into when we try to help God do His work. Yes, Abram believed God, but I am not certain Sarai did. She grew impatient and she began to understand that the sands of her biological clock had run out. She was never going to bear children. So she persuaded Abram to initiate plan B. This was not God's way and the world has paid the price for this wrongful act ever since. God does perform His word in our lives. He makes all things beautiful in His time. Lord, give us patience to wait for You and to wait for You to act. Help us to learn the lessons from the story of Hagar. Forgive us for the many "Ishmaels" we create in our attempt to hasten Your will.

Study Notes: According to verse 3, it had been ten years since God had made His promise to Abram concerning his descendants. Abram was now 85 and Sarai was 75. I certainly can understand Sarai's rationale behind her plans. She did believe God's promise concerning children, she was just impatient.

I wonder what went through Hagar's mind when she was told that her son would be

a wild one, antagonistic toward everyone. I am sure that there were times when her heart often was broken as she, too, paid for Abram's lapse of faith.

Abraham...this Old Testament Patriarch became a hero to the Apostle Paul and is mentioned in nearly every epistle that bears Paul's name. His story is the story of a developing faith, as we have seen these past several weeks. Now, this week we enter into the significant account of the giving of the sign of God's covenant with Abraham.

Genesis 17

Key Words: "covenant;" "I will"

Key Verse: Verse 7 relates the covenant between God and Abraham which is an everlasting one. It cannot be changed.

Purpose Statement: This chapter establishes the eternal agreement God struck with Abraham. It was sealed by the rite of circumcision and honored through the promised birth of Isaac.

Outline: God's Covenant with Abraham

- I. The covenant defined (vs. 1-8)
- II. The covenant exacted (vs. 9-14)
- III. The covenant expanded through Isaac (vs. 15-20)
- IV. The covenant enacted (vs. 24-27)

Thoughts to Ponder: Abraham had been in Canaan for 24-years. Ishmael was now 14-years old. Isaac, the son of the promise, could not be born until the covenant had been established. I have often wondered why God used the act of circumcision as the means of establishing His covenant with Abraham. Why not pierce Abraham's ears or cause some other kind of physical abnormality to appear, to be inherited by each succeeding generation? I think I am just now beginning to understand. First of all, it could not just be something a person inherited, for the covenant was passed on only by an act of obedience, not something very involuntary like a genetic inheritance. Secondly, circumcision affected the male organ used in reproduction. It would cause a man to remember that life came from God and that his offspring would also receive the promises God had given to Abraham. God's ways are so much higher than our ways, even in the giving of the rite of circumcision. Praise God for His circumcision today of our hearts. It is a sign that His promises are for us as well.

One cannot escape the fact that the covenant God made with Abraham was to be an everlasting one. Associated with the covenant were God's blessings in the form of many nations and kings, and even a changed name, and God's provisions as it related to the land. The only condition placed by God upon Abraham was obedience in being circumcised. But, then again, there is that biblical truth that obedience produces God's blessings.

Abraham. What a man of God! In chapter 18 we clearly see the unique relationship between Abraham and God, and we come to understand why the Bible describes Abraham as being the friend of God. We have that same status today because Jesus says that He calls us His friends.

Genesis 18

Key Words: "righteous"; "spare" "I will not destroy"

Key Verse: Verse 14 states that God delights in doing the impossible. Verse 19 states that it is a parent's responsibility to direct his family into the ways of the Lord.

Purpose Statement: Two great thoughts are shared in this chapter: (1) the announcement of the upcoming birth of Isaac; (2) Abraham's intercession for the righteous (Lot and his family) living in Sodom.

Outline: A Birth Announcement and an Intercessory Prayer

- I. Abraham and his three guests (vs. 1-15)
 - A. Abraham's hospitality (vs. 1-8)
 - B. The promise of Isaac's birth (vs. 9-15)
- II. Abraham and the Lord (vs. 16-33)
 - A. God shares His thoughts on Sodom (vs. 16-21)
 - B. Abraham intercedes for Sodom (vs. 22-33)

Thoughts to Ponder: What did Sarah do after she had been confronted with her laughter before God over the news of her impending pregnancy? She lied to God. Now I am not certain that she knew this was God, but at least it was a very important stranger who had made this incredible birth announcement. In Sarah's shoes, I would have laughed also. Biologically, it was an impossibility. Who had ever heard of a 90-year old woman giving birth? Laughing in disbelief is wrong, lying about it is more wrong. When confronted we need to model truthfulness even when caught in an error.

This chapter is a stirring reason why Abraham is described as the friend of God. God did not have to share with Abraham what He was about to do to Sodom, but He did. Oh the joys of friendship with God. And Jesus said that is just what we are - His friends (John 15:15). I recall the words of the hymn-writer: "And He walks with me and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own. And the joys we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known."

According to verse 3, it appears that Abraham recognized one of the three men who appeared to him as the Lord. One can only wonder initially how Abraham knew this. In verse 9, we read where this stranger knew the name of Abraham's wife; and in verse 10, the promise God had given to Abraham earlier concerning a son was repeated for the sake of Sarah. And this stranger knew that Sarah had

laughed. What intimacy Abraham had with God that he recognized the visible presence of God in his tent. Oh that my walk with the Lord would be such that I, too, would recognize Him should He knock on the door of my home.

Verses 20 and 21 seem to imply that God was uncertain as to the extent of the sinful conditions at Sodom and Gomorrah. Does this passage teach us that God is less than omniscient, at least in this instance? If not, what is the meaning behind His statement? Many Bible commentaries state that, although God knew what He was about to do, His visitation was to give Sodom one final opportunity to repent. It is also to be noted, that the destruction of these cities because of their gross wickedness, was to be the historical reminder to the people of Israel of how seriously God looked upon sin. Jesus even makes reference to this judgment in His teachings (Matthew 11:23-24).

We now come to two very difficult chapters in the book of Genesis. We might say that each chapter focuses upon the failures of its main characters - Lot, in chapter 19, and Abraham, in chapter 20. Perhaps the saddest of all is that of Lot and how his life failed to impact the people of Sodom. I think there are some encouraging lessons that we can learn from these very negative experiences of Lot and Abraham.

Genesis 19

Key Words: "angels"; "the Lord rained down burning sulfur"

Key Verse: God answered the prayer of Abraham's heart. Lot was his concern in chapter 18 and God knew that. The key verse is verse 29.

Purpose Statement: This chapter depicts the total collapse of life and morals because of sin. Lot was even willing to sacrifice the morality of his daughters in a compromise with the citizens of Sodom.

Outline: The Fall of Sodom and the Rescue of Lot

- I. Lot and his angelic vision (vs. 1-22)
 - A. His hospitality (vs. 1-3)
 - B. His interceding for their safety (vs. 4-11)
 - C. He is warned by them (vs. 12-15)
 - D. He is delivered by them (vs. 16-22)
- II. The destruction of Sodom (vs. 23-29)
- III. Lot's sins with his daughters (vs. 30-38)

Questions to Probe: What would make a father willing to sacrifice his daughters' morally? Why, when warned, did Lot hesitate to leave Sodom? What kind of hold did the city have on him?

Thoughts to Ponder: What a dark story! One wonders how Lot could have lived in a community so given to sexual perversity. It would appear from his offer of his

virgin daughters for the sexual gratification of the crowd that he had at least tolerated their perversion in the past. Oh, the tragic consequences of sin. Lot lost his home, his wife, his possessions, and the respect of his daughters. The last portrait we see of Lot in scripture is a homeless drunken father committing incest with his daughters in a cold dark cave. Oh, the grievous wages of sin.

The Bible does not tell us how long Lot had been living in Sodom. But, in verse 1, we find him sitting in the gate of the city. That place was reserved for those men who were leaders of the community. Now Lot may have become a leader rather early because of his wealth (even in Bible times wealth bought influence), or it might have happened because it had been his uncle who had rescued the city. However it happened, Lot was a part of this wicked community.

God was merciful to Lot (verse 16). This mercy was extended, not because of Lot, but because of Abraham's intercession. It was a mercy that Lot initially refused but God's will was not to be thwarted by the actions of one hesitant man. Perhaps it was because of this story that John Calvin developed his concept of the irresistible grace of God.

Genesis 20

Key Words: "I said to myself"

Key Verse: Verse 11 describes the ugly scene that occurred because Abraham had a lapse of trust in God's keeping power. He devised his own plan for safety rather than waiting upon the Lord.

Purpose Statement: Beware, lest we set up men as heroes. Abraham did have feet of clay. Yet, notice how God spared Abimelech from further harm, thus showing God's mercy.

Outline: Abraham and Abimelech

- I. Abraham's journey to Gerar and Sarah lies (vs. 1-2)
- II. God confronts Abimelech (vs. 3-7)
- III. Abimelech confronts Abraham (vs. 8-13)
- IV. Abraham and Sarah compensated: Abimelech's family is healed (vs. 14-18)

Questions to Probe: Why did Abraham leave his home? Why did he have Sarah lie again? Was there fear in his heart because he knew he was acting out of disobedience?

Thoughts to Ponder: How strange that God would punish Abimelech for an offense he did not know he was doing. One would have thought that God would have punished Abraham and Sarah for being deceitful. I am sure that Abraham's testimony before this man was severely affected. It certainly wasn't Abraham's testimony about God that moved Abimelech to respond. It was the appearance of

God Himself to him. How we need to guard our testimony before others.

One can only speculate about the relationship Abimelech had with God. Could he have heard about God from contacts he had had with Melchizedek, king of Salem? We do know that when God spoke, Abimelech knew it was God's voice. Abraham was wrong when he concluded that there was no fear of God in the land. Many times first impressions can be deceiving. Abimelech's sin was done out of ignorance, yet he and his family suffered the consequences (vs 18). Yet, unlike Cain, when warned by God of what he had done, Abimelech made the right choice. He did not let sin become his master. In this way his life becomes a model for us.

Genesis 21

Key Words: "Hagar"; "Ishmael"; "well"; "Beersheba"

Key Verse: Verse 22 is a strong testimony concerning Abraham. I wonder if the world sees us in that way?

Purpose Statement: This chapter introduces us to Isaac, the child of promise. It also shares with us the heartache Abraham experienced due to the tension between Isaac and Ishmael. The chapter closes with an experience of Abraham with his neighbors.

Outline: The Birth of Isaac and the Sending Away of Ishmael

- I. Birth of Isaac (vs. 1-7)
- II. Hagar and Ishmael driven out (vs. 8-21)
 - A. Ishmael mocks Isaac (vs. 8-10)
 - B. Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away (vs. 11-14)
 - C. God's promise to Hagar concerning Ishmael (vs. 15-19)
 - D. Ishmael grows up (vs. 20-21)
- III. Treaty between Abraham and Abimelech (vs. 22-34)

Questions to Probe: Was Sarah's attitude toward Hagar and Ishmael justified?

Thoughts to Ponder: This chapter shares two powerful stories about God and His faithfulness to His promises. First, there is the account of the birth of Isaac. What a miracle! Sarah was ninety. That is too old to have children. But God had promised them a child and God was faithful to that promise. A little matter of old age did not really matter to Him; after all He designed our reproductive system. What a miracle of God's faithfulness!

The second account concerns the sad story of Hagar and Ishmael. Although treated unfairly by Sarah and cast out of the family camp by Abraham, God had made a promise concerning the boy Ishmael, the son of Abraham's impatience with God. When it appeared that all was lost and the promise would die there in the wilderness, God appears. And the first of two great miracles of provision for the sparing of Abraham's sons occur - this time a well of water. how thankful we should

be that God always keeps His word.

Study Notes: Ishmael was 14 when Isaac was born (Genesis 16:16). By the time Isaac was weaned, Ishmael could have been as old as 17. It was at this age that Abraham sent him and his mother out into the desert. But God was watching over Ishmael as well.

In verses 10 and 11 there is an interesting use of pronouns that tell of the tension between Sarah and Abraham. In verse 10 Sarah orders Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael from the camp for the sake of "my son" Isaac. Notice she did not say "our son." Then, in verse 11, Abraham, reflecting upon what Sarah had said, was greatly distressed because of "his son." For those many years the sin of not waiting for God's timing had brought tension into Abraham's family.

I found it interesting that even the Philistines were aware of the presence of God as they observed the life of Abraham. Because of this fact there were certain expectations that followed. This scene reminded me of those words of Jesus that I am to be a light in the world (Matthew 5:14-16).

This chapter is, I think, in many ways the clearest picture we have in the Old Testament of Calvary and of the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us. This story is found in Genesis 22, so please turn with me now to this passage and let us discover anew the act of faith and its rewards.

Genesis 22

Key Words: "God tested Abraham"; "we"; "God will provide"

Key Verse: Verses 5 and 6 demonstrate Abraham's confidence in what God was going to do, although he did not know what that was.

Purpose Statement: This chapter, besides sharing the great testing of Abraham's faith, presents a picture of Calvary.

Outline: The Testing of Abraham's Faith

- I. God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (vs. 1-2)
- II. Abraham's obedience (vs. 3-10)
- III. God's intervention to spare Isaac (vs. 11-14)
- IV. God reaffirms His covenant with Abraham (vs. 15-19)
- V. Abraham's nephews (vs. 20-24)

Questions to Probe: Why did God feel that Abraham needed to be tested in this way? Could Abraham have been possessive of Isaac?

Thoughts to Ponder: This chapter contains one of the poignant stories in all the Old Testament. I have often wondered what went through Abraham's mind those three days as they walked to Moriah. Perhaps the young Isaac was filled with

excitement. Perhaps this was the first time he and his father had made a trip like this. In his heart I believe Abraham was crying out to God, "why?" Abraham had believed the promises of God and now God was asking him to slay the one through whom the promises would be fulfilled. "God, this just doesn't make any sense!" Yet, the author of the text informs us that Abraham was very confident God would do something, even if God had to raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). Each one of us has our own "Isaac", that which we love so dearly; that which we would struggle so intensely with giving up. God does call upon us to go to Moriah and there offer that as a sacrifice to Him. God cannot fully bless us until we have yielded ourselves fully to Him and that means surrendering our "Isaacs." Now God will not necessarily remove them from us; His desire is to know that we would surrender them to Him. I think Abraham had a greater love for Isaac after Moriah because he had been willing to surrender him to God.

We are not told the age of Isaac, but the term used of him here is similar to that used of Ishmael in the previous chapter and we know that Ishmael was at least fourteen. Isaac was big enough to be able to carry the wood for the offering, so might have been as old as his teens. If so, then he also had to make a decision to allow his father to bind him as a sacrifice. Abraham's faith was being transmitted to his son. I pray that my children and grandchildren will see and want to model my faith.

Jehovah-jireh (verse 14) is a wonderful name for God. Yes, He is our great provider so we should not worry or fret. He is aware of what our needs are - in Abraham's case it was a lamb for the sacrifice - and He will provide it for us. I like the way Peter expressed it: Cast all your cares upon Him because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7)

We are drawing near the end of our study in those chapters in Genesis that focus upon the life of Abraham. In our last study, we traveled to Mount Moriah with Isaac and Abraham and there witnessed one of the truly remarkable stories in the Old Testament. We observed there a portrait of Calvary. Now we tackle Genesis 23 which records the death of Sarah.

Genesis 23

Key Words: "burial"; "death of Sarah"; "Ephron the Hittite"; "cave of Machpelah"

Key Verse: Verse 4 states that Abraham owned nothing, yet had been promised everything. Verse 20 tells us that what he finally possessed was a cemetery.

Purpose Statement: This chapter shares Sarah's death and Abraham's plans for her burial.

Outline: The Death and Burial of Sarah

I. Death of Sarah (vs. 1-2)

II. Abraham negotiates for a burial place for Sarah (vs. 3-20)

Questions to Probe: I wonder how many years Abraham and Sarah had been married?

Thoughts to Ponder: Abraham, the one to whom God had promised all this land, really owned none of it. Although it was all his by promise, he was currently a stranger there. So, when Sarah died, Abraham had no tomb in which to bury her. He, who was the lord of the land by promise, was forced to go to his neighbors and request the purchase of a burial site. In fact the only ground Abraham really owned in all of the land promised to him was a cemetery. But perhaps that too was fitting as the writer to the Hebrews shared centuries later that Abraham was really searching for a better country. The entrance to that better country comes through a cemetery, not only for Abraham but for each of us. Are our eyes focused on that better country? Or do we seek to change our status from stranger to resident here? I think Abraham was focused properly.

Study Notes:

1. Isaac was 37 when his mother died. Sarah had lived long enough to see her son grow into a fine young man. God had been good to her.
2. It is amazing to read in the Bible of all that transpired at the gates of a city. Verse 10 states that it was there Abraham negotiated with Ephron the Hittite the purchase price of the cave of Machpelah. The concept of the town square in many towns in America might be representative of the gates of the city today with the courthouse in the center of the square and the businesses clustered around the square.

Genesis 24

Key Words: "God of my master Abraham"

Key Verse: Success in our finding God's will depends upon our walking with the Lord according to verse 40.

Purpose Statement: God was keeping the line of His people pure by not having Isaac marry one of the girls from the neighboring tribes.

Outline: A Bride for Isaac

- I. Abraham's desires are expressed concerning getting a wife for Isaac (vs. 1-9)
- II. The prayer for guidance by Abraham's servant (vs. 10-14)
- III. Rebekah is God's answer to that prayer (vs. 15-21)
- IV. A request and an invitation to stay (vs. 22-25)
- V. The prayer of praise (vs. 26-27)
- VI. Hospitality is shown (vs. 28-33)
- VII. The servant relates his story (vs. 34-49)
- VIII. The family and Rebekah respond (vs. 50-58)
- IX. Meeting of Isaac and Rebekah (vs. 59-67)

Thoughts to Ponder: What an amazing story of God's guidance. After a journey of

several hundred miles, Abraham's servant stops at a well as a stranger in a foreign land. He is certain that he is near the location of Abraham's immediate family. He offers a simple yet specific prayer to God for guidance: "God, I am here. Now bless my journey by causing this to happen." There is a lesson to be learned in listening to this man's prayer. He did not ask for some vague directions or for some mysterious answer. He needed to know God's will for that moment so he was very specific in how he desired an answer. Abraham's servant had observed the great faith of his master. As he left on his important journey, he tested that faith and God rewarded him by answering in such a powerful way. This story reminds us that others do watch our lives and are led to model what they observe. So, may all who come behind us find us faithful. If we can learn to pray specifically, then I believe God will answer specifically and our response will be like Abraham's servant - praise to the Lord!

This chapter introduces us to Rebekah and her family. One wonders about the state of her father, Bethuel, as he is only mentioned in verse 50 and then listed second to his son Laban. It appears that Laban was the decision-maker in the family. Perhaps Bethuel was an invalid of some kind. We just don't know.

Genesis 25

Key Words: "Abraham died"; "God blessed Isaac"; "Esau despised his birthright"

Key Verse: Verse 23 helps us to anticipate the struggles that will come between Jacob and Esau. They started even before the boys were born.

Purpose Statement: This chapter lays the background for some of the significant conflicts to occur in the Old Testament - Midian, Ishmaelites, Esau and Jacob.

Outline: Abraham's Death, Births of Jacob and Esau

- I. Abraham's last days and his death (vs. 1-11)
 - A. His children by Keturah (vs. 1-4)
 - B. His legacy to his children (vs. 5-6)
 - C. His death and burial (vs. 7-11)
- II. Ishmael's family (vs. 12-18)
- III. Isaac, Jacob, and Esau (vs. 19-34)
 - A. Births of Jacob and Esau (vs. 19-26)
 - B. The character of the two boys (vs. 27-28)
 - C. Esau sells his birthright (vs. 29-34)

Questions to Probe: One wonders why Abraham took another wife after Sarah died. He was 137 years old then.

Thoughts to Ponder: Two boys could not be much different than Jacob and Esau. They were total opposites. Esau lived for the moment - he needed food, now. Jacob lived for the future - he wanted the birthright and all the privileges that went

with it. Esau gave up that which was priceless for a bowl of stew because he had stomach pangs. We say, "how foolish of him." Yet, how many times do we do the same? We sacrifice a moment with our children to take another business call. We surrender a night with our spouse for overtime at the office. We give up our time of silence before God to attend another meeting. I am afraid that too many times we make the same bad choice that Esau made. Those are moments and opportunities that we can never revisit. So, let's learn to make our choices more carefully with eternity's values in view.

Note: The last time the Bible records Isaac and Ishmael being together was at the funeral of their father Abraham. Having grown apart, the only person that bound them together was now gone. Each went his separate way only to live in hostility against the other. This was a sad part of the legacy that Abraham left behind.

We begin our abbreviated study in the life of Isaac. In my classes I sometimes call him, "God's Interlude." Aside from his miraculous birth (you remember that his father was 100 and his mother 90 when he was born), and his extraordinary marriage (how many young men would marry a woman selected for him by his father's slave?), and the problems he had with his two sons, we know very little about this second of the Patriarchs. Really, Genesis 26 is about the only chapter where Isaac gets his own top billing - otherwise he shares it with either his father or his sons. Yet there is much that can be learned from his life, so let's begin.

Genesis 26

Key Words: "I will"

Key Verse: Verse 5 relates that blessings still come from obeying God and obedience entails keeping all God requires.

Purpose Statement: This is the only chapter that gives us a clear picture of Isaac as a man. Before this chapter he is linked with his father and in the following chapters he is linked with his sons.

Outline: Isaac and Abimelech - A Repeat of an Earlier Time

- I. God reaffirms His covenant with Isaac (vs. 1-6)
- II. Isaac's lie about Rebekah (vs. 7)
- III. Confrontation between Isaac and Abimelech (vs. 8-33)
 - A. Concerning Rebekah (vs. 8-11)
 - B. Concerning properties (vs. 12-18)
 - C. Concerning wells (vs. 19-22)
 - D. Peace at Beersheba (vs. 23-33)
- IV. Esau's marriage: grief to Isaac and Rebekah (vs. 34)

Questions to Probe: I wonder if Abraham had ever shared with Isaac about the times and consequences when he lied about Sarah? Why did God bless Isaac even when he lied?

Thoughts to Ponder: Time has past and Isaac enters the lands of another Abimelech. But something interesting happens. As one reads this story it is almost as if he has read it before. And one has. Abraham's son, Isaac, tells the same lie about his wife as did Abraham; and Abimelech's son almost committed the same offense as did his father. It would appear from both stories that God's judgment was not upon either Isaac or Abraham but upon Abimelech. In fact, both Isaac and Abraham prospered while in Abimelech's land. Both Isaac and Abraham had acted out of fear. We often do foolish things when we fail to trust the Lord.

We are told that Isaac dug at least four wells and reopened many others. Now the digging of a well was no small task as they were often up to a hundred feet deep and drilled through solid rock. How discouraging it must have been for Isaac to make the effort to drill a well only to abandon it to others for the cause of peace. Yet, all along God is reassuring Isaac of His promises concerning the land and descendants. It is probably what kept Isaac going.

There is a very sad comment made about Esau at the close of this chapter. His wives were a source of grief to his mother and father. Oh the joys of having the blessings of our parents as we enter into marriage.

Let's turn the focus of our attention this week to the life of Jacob. Of all the men and women in the Bible that God chose to use, I believe Jacob probably was among the most questionable. In fact, Jacob does not even begin with a relationship with God. He pretty much lives for himself. Yet, the more I read and teach the life of Jacob, the more I see within his life, the story of a journey toward God. So, let's spend the next few weeks looking at how God changed Jacob - the deceiver - into Israel - the one who strives with God.

Genesis 27

Key Words: "blessings"; "blessed"; "bless"

Key Verse: Verse 35 accurately describes Jacob's actions as being deceitful; and yet we know God was in it.

Purpose Statement: This chapter completes the shift of God's hand from that of the firstborn (Esau), the normal recipient, to Jacob. Both the birthright and the blessing were obtained deceitfully.

Outline: Jacob Steals the Blessing

- I. Jacob steals the blessing belonging to Esau (vs. 1-29)
 - A. Isaac's request of Esau (vs. 1-4)
 - B. Rebekah's plan for Jacob (vs. 5-13)
 - C. Rebekah carries out her plan (vs. 14-17)
 - D. Jacob before Isaac (vs. 18-29)
- II. Esau's response (vs. 30-41)

- A. Esau appears before Isaac (vs. 30-32)
 - B. Esau becomes aware of what happened (vs 33-38)
 - C. Isaac's blessing on Esau (vs. 39-40)
 - D. Esau's plot against Jacob (vs. 41)
- III. Jacob's plans to flee (vs. 42-46)
- A. Rebekah's plan (vs. 42-45)
 - B. Rebekah's reasoning (vs. 46)

Questions to Probe: Why did God bless Jacob for this act of deceit?

Thoughts to Ponder: None of us know the day of our death (verse 2). Indeed Rebekah did place a curse upon herself as she further alienated herself from her oldest son and she would eventually lose her youngest son. Again, we see the awful wages of sin.

With a brother like Jacob one certainly would need no other enemies. I would imagine that he and his brother Esau were always at odds with each other. And in the heat of the argument Jacob would always remind Esau that the rights of the firstborn belonged now to him. The only thing Esau had left was the blessing of his father, a blessing that passed from father to the oldest son. Esau did not willingly give this away as he had his birthright. He lost it by trickery and deceit. I do believe it was God's plan for Jacob to receive his father's blessing. But it was not God's plan for it to be obtained by deceit. Jacob had much to learn before God could change his name to Israel. Oh the penalty of a shattered relationship with his brother. Oh the consequences of sin. They are great indeed.

As an earthly father, Isaac had only one blessing to give (verse 38). His resources were limited. But our heavenly Father has blessed us with infinite blessings, yes, with all the spiritual blessings found in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). All Esau received were the leftovers from Isaac. Praise God there are no leftovers with Him. His blessings are new each and every day. Great is God's faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Study Notes: Had Rebekah never communicated to Isaac the words the angels had told her about her two sons even before they were born? It certainly appears evident that Isaac had no knowledge of it. I think communication certainly was a problem in this family.

Let's continue our travels with Jacob - the Deceiver. And what a journey it will be in the following weeks. Jacob - the Deceiver - becomes deceived himself, and I can tell you he did not like it one bit. But, as you read these chapters in Genesis, please note how God is at work in his life. God had a tough nut to crack in Jacob, but with God nothing is impossible...just ask Jacob.

Genesis 28

Key Words: "I will" (speaking of God first, then of Jacob); "Bethel"

Key Verse: Verse 15 relates the tremendous promise that God made to Jacob. It repeated what God had promised to both Isaac and to Abraham.

Purpose Statement: This chapter relates the Abrahamic covenant being shared with Jacob. It is now God's promise to him.

Outline: Jacob's Dream at Bethel

- I. Isaac sends Jacob away (vs. 1-5)
- II. Esau still struggles with his parents (vs. 6-9)
- III. Jacob's experience at Bethel (vs. 10-22)
 - A. His dream (vs. 10-12)
 - B. God's promise (vs. 13-15)
 - C. Jacob's response (vs. 16-22)

Thoughts to Ponder: Oh how the rebellion of young people grieves the heart of parents. Esau, in his bitterness over his own misfortunes, never could forgive his parents for their blessings upon Jacob. Instead of seeking reconciliation, he sought revenge upon his brother and upon his parents. How much better would world history have been if Esau had sought forgiveness.

I am not certain how much contact Jacob had with God previous to this experience at Bethel. We don't even know if Isaac had shared with his two boys the promises that God had given both to him and to their grandfather. But what is amazing, to me at least, is that God would restate the same promises now to Jacob, to a man whose whole life had been one of cheating and deceiving. But God saw something in Jacob that He could use. Praise God for that great fact. God sees us not for who we are but for what we can become in Him. It would take God awhile to chip away the rough edges of Jacob's life. But doesn't God do the same with us today? Praise the Lord for the Bethels in our lives, those places where God's promises become real to us. We may never see ladders and angels but we can hear the voice of God.

Study Notes: The one thing I find significant is the repetition to Jacob of God's promises first given to Abraham and then to Isaac. The promise had nothing to do with Jacob the person but had everything to do with God. We see that repetition of the phrase "I will" by God. The promises of God are indeed grounded in Him.

#2 - God's promise to Jacob in verse 15 is similar to the one Paul shared in Philippians 1:6 - God will accomplish the purposes He has initiated through us.

Genesis 29

Key Words: "love"; "loved"

Key Verse: The whole process of conception was controlled by God according to the comment in verse 21.

Purpose Statement: A beginning of the account of the rise of the seed promised to Abraham. Abraham was one. Isaac was one. Jacob was one. Now many are born to him.

Outline: Jacob and His Family

- I. Jacob meets Rachel and Laban (vs. 1-14)
- II. Jacob and his marriages (vs. 15-30)
 - A. His love for Rachel (vs. 15-21)
 - B. His tricked marriage to Leah (vs. 22-27)
 - C. His marriage to Rachel (vs. 28-30)
- III. Children by Leah (vs. 31-35)
 - A. Reuben (vs. 31-32)
 - B. Simeon (vs. 33)
 - C. Levi (vs. 34)
 - D. Judah (vs. 35)

Questions to Probe: What was significant about serving seven years in order to obtain a wife? Was there really a custom that stated that the older must be married before the younger?

Thoughts to Probe: Wells must have been popular places to court a wife in those days. Isaac, Jacob, and Moses all found their brides there. Also, this chapter, we see the classic problem of polygamy - unequal love. You cannot love two wives the same. One is always going to be treated better than the other. What self-control Jacob must have had sexually as he waited those seven years for Rachel.

This is one of the most incredible love stories ever recorded. Jacob fell in love with Rachel almost from the very first moment he laid eyes on her. And the Bible says that his seven years of labor for her hand in marriage seemed to him just a few days. (I wonder how many men today would serve their future father-in-law even one year for his daughter's hand in marriage?) Then comes the truly incredible event. Jacob is married...to the wrong girl...and he does not even know it until after his wedding night. Verse 25 stated is so well: When morning came, there was Leah. How could this have happened? Was Jacob so blinded by love that he could not tell the difference between Rachel and her sister? Just as he had tricked Esau out of the blessing, someone had now tricked him out of the rightful bride. I wonder if Jacob thought about that. We have no profound answers but I find the story incredible to believe. I am certain of this, the next seven years did not fly by as quickly as did the previous ones.

Study Notes: A minimum of 14 years takes place during this chapter. The sequence goes something like this:

- Jacob stays initially for one month with Laban as a guest (vs. 14)
- Jacob works seven years in order to purchase Rachel as his wife (vs.20)
- Jacob marries the wrong woman (vs. 23)

- Jacob then marries Rachel a week later (vs. 28)
- Jacob works seven years for Laban (vs. 30)

Genesis 30

Key Words: "jealous"; "God remembered Rachel"

Key Verse: Verse 27 proclaims that God can bless others through one of His own.

Purpose Statement: This chapter continues the chronicle of the increase of Jacob - of his family (grew from four children to twelve); of his possessions (from a few sheep to many).

Outline: Jacob and His Family (continued)

- III. Children by Leah (continued)
 - E. Issachar (vs. 14-18)
 - F. Zebulun (vs. 19-20)
 - G. Dinah (vs. 21)
- IV. Children by Bilhah
 - A. Dan (vs. 1-6)
 - B. Naphtali (vs. 7-8)
- V. Children by Zilpah
 - A. Gad (vs. 9-11)
 - B. Asher (vs. 12-13)
- VI. Children by Rachel: Joseph (vs. 22-24)
- VII. Jacob increases his possessions (vs. 25-43)

Questions to Probe: It would be interesting to discover how Jacob got his reproductive method with the sheep to work. Was it the method or was it God? Also, what was so special about the mandrakes?

Thoughts to Ponder: Oh the intense jealousy between Jacob's wives. Lack of fidelity did not seem to be a problem for them - in fact they encouraged it. God's way is still best - one woman for one man.

Both Leah and Rachel viewed having a family as a contest. After the birth of Naphtali to Bilhah, Rachel declares victory. Later Leah, after the birth of Zebulun, states that she has won. All of this occurred because of the jealousy that existed between the two women.

When Sarah tried to help God out by giving Hagar to her husband, the son born to the union was cast out and not included in God's blessings. However, now the children born to both Bilhah and Zilpah are included. God does work in strange ways.

Genesis 31

Key Words: "deceive". This whole chapter is full of deception: Jacob deceiving

Laban; Laban deceiving Jacob; Rachel deceiving her father. No wonder there were problems.

Key Verse: Verse 13 shows God in control.

Purpose Statement: Twenty years of frustration on the part of Jacob and his family is played out here. Deception and selfishness seem to rule this family. And yet, God is over-seeing it all.

Outline: Jacob Begins His Travels Home

- I. Jacob decides to leave Laban (vs. 1-21)
 - A. His treatment by Laban and his dream (vs. 1-13)
 - B. Laban's treatment of his daughters (vs. 14-16)
 - C. Jacob leaves (vs. 17-21)
- II. Laban pursues Jacob (vs. 22-25)
 - A. God speaks to Laban (vs. 22-24)
 - B. Laban's dialogue with Jacob (vs. 25-30)
 - C. Jacob's reply (vs. 31-32)
 - D. Laban searches for his idols (vs. 33-35)
 - E. Jacob is angry with Laban (vs. 36-42)
 - F. Laban suggests a covenant (vs. 43-55)

Thoughts to Ponder: The tension between Jacob and Laban kept escalating. There was mistrust on the part of both. There was jealousy over each other's possessions. Both men feared each other. Jacob knew he had to leave and head back home. But, perhaps motivated by fear, he leaves in a less than honest way. The Scriptures state that he deceived Laban. Will Jacob ever learn that the practice of deceit only compounds problems; it never resolves them? Deceit is one of the strong tools of the enemy. Oh the damage to family and church relationships caused by it. The sad note in this story is that Jacob had so modeled deceit before his wives and children that they had adopted it as a legitimate way to handle problems. What a negative role model Jacob was at this time.

Verse 5 would lead us to believe that Abraham's brother, Nahor, was also a believer in God. An evidence of this fact can be seen in the reception Abraham's servant had in the home of Bethuel, Nahor's son (see Genesis 24), and by the dream of warning God gave to Laban, Nahor's grandson. But it was not a perfect walk with God as evidenced by the presence of some household idols in Laban's tent.

Genesis 34

Key Words: "deceitfully" (verse 13), but also implied in the answer to Hamor to his fellow citizens in verse 23.

Key Verse: Verse 30 records the reaction of Jacob after the slaughter of Hamor and his family - certainly not one of regret for them but of fear for his own safety.

Purpose Statement: This chapter begins to share with us the constant problem the people of Israel were to face as they lived among an alien people. There were always the opportunities for defilement and compromise. This problem is perpetuated throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

Outline: The Problem with Dinah

- I. Dinah is raped by Shechem (vs. 1-4)
- II. Jacob and his sons' reactions (vs. 5-7)
- III. Hamor and Shechem's request (vs. 8-12)
- IV. The proposal offered by Jacob's sons (vs. 13-17)
- V. The men of Hamor accept the offer (vs. 18-24)
- VI. Simeon and Levi avenge their sister (vs. 25-31)

Thoughts to Ponder: Shechem's response to Dinah after he had raped her was entirely different from that of most rapists toward their victim (eg. Amnon and Tamar). This chapter describes a series of wrongs:

1. Shechem was wrong to rape Dinah.
2. Jacob and his sons were wrong to agree to allowing Dinah to marry Shechem. Didn't Jacob remember the words of Isaac when he left home twenty years before? He was not to marry a foreign girl.
3. But they were also wrong in breaking that covenant that they had promised. Wrongs prevail when people fail to take into account the guidance of God.

Rape, deceit, murder - those words describe the events of this chapter. Although Jacob was still alive it appeared that the authority for making family decisions fell upon his sons. Of course they had watched their father on many occasions make the best of a bad situation by using deceit. So, like father like sons. But they were not alone in the practice of deceit. Shechem and his father were less than honest when talking with Jacob's sons. Their true feelings were expressed before the elders of their community. The web of deception becomes greatly entangled and the results are usually very tragic. It is no wonder that the Bible admonishes us to always practice truthfulness. It still is the best way.

The events in this chapter occurred because Jacob had purchased a piece of ground near the city of Shechem (Genesis 33:19). Now it is interesting that the only piece of property Abraham owned was a cemetery plot. Isaac is never mentioned as owning any property. But Jacob buys a plot of ground and plans to settle down. But, as succeeding chapter will show, this was the wrong place for Jacob. Whenever we make our camp too near the enemy's, then we can expect trouble. It is always wiser to follow our Lord's leading.

At this time we want to return to the continuing saga of the patriarch Jacob and follow him as he completes his journey home after living in Haran for twenty years. During that time he has married two sisters, gained two concubines, and had 11 sons and 1 daughter. He has had an encounter with God that dramatically

changed his life, and even his name. He has met his estranged brother Esau and what had been feared for over 20 years never came to pass. God was at work.

Now, as we conclude the journey in Genesis 35, we see Jacob returning to Bethel, the place where God had promised him the blessings 20 years previous, and then struggle as he witnesses the birth of his last son and the death of his beloved wife Rachel.

Genesis 35

Key Words: "God blessed him"; "Bethel"

Key Verse: In verse 3 we again see Jacob acknowledging the presence of God in his life.

Purpose Statement: This chapter reaffirms the covenant with Jacob. It includes the promise of people and the land. The cycle of Jacob is now complete as he returns to Bethel.

Outline: Jacob's Return Home

- I. Jacob at Bethel (vs. 1-15)
 - A. God's command to return to Bethel (vs. 1)
 - B. Renewal in Jacob's camp - getting rid of the idols (vs. 2-5)
 - C. Journey to Bethel (vs. 6-8)
 - D. Jacob's name changed to Israel (vs. 9-10)
 - E. God's promises to Jacob (vs. 11-13)
 - F. Jacob builds an altar (vs. 14-15)
- II. Death of Rachel (vs. 16-20)
- III. Sin of Reuben (vs. 21-22)
- IV. Jacob's family (vs. 23-26)
- V. Death of Isaac (vs. 27-29)

Thoughts to Ponder: How wonderful to return to Bethel, the place of God's promises. Throughout Scripture we read of men and women of God returning to those places where God had intervened in their lives in a very special way. The return to Bethel was a source of encouragement to Jacob as God reaffirmed to him the precious promises. Praise God for the "Bethels" in my life.

Only God can change a man from being a deceiver into a prince of God. Had Jacob done anything to earn this change in name? No! It was all of God's grace. But is that not true for us as well. God may not literally change our names, as he did Jacob's, but He changes our lives. And it is based on nothing that we deserve. It is all of God's grace. Praise God for this priceless gift.

Study Notes: Jacob and Esau were 120 when their father died (Genesis 25:26). Isaac lived five years longer than did his father Abraham (Genesis 25:7)

What a difference a name makes. Rachel, in her dying moments, named her newborn son, Ben-Oni, meaning "son of my trouble." However, his father renamed him Benjamin, "son of my right hand." This chapter also tells of God changing Jacob's name to Israel. Praise God that He has given us a new name as we have come to know Him.

Genesis 36

Key Words: "the account of Esau"

Key Verse: Verses 1 and 9 state the theme of the chapter: the record of the family of Esau.

Purpose Statement: This chapter shares the history of Esau's family. We especially note that Amalek was one of his descendants.

Outline: Esau's Family

- I. Introduction to Esau's family (vs. 1-8)
- II. Esau's children and grandchildren (vs. 9-14)
- III. Chiefs of the clan of Esau (vs. 15-19)
- IV. Leaders of the Horite family (vs. 20-29)
- V. Rulers of Edom (vs. 31-39)
- VI. Settlement of Esau (vs. 40-43)

Thoughts to Ponder: God did indeed keep His promise to Esau and did cause him to become prosperous and blessed with many descendants. How unfortunate that the Scripture records for us that Esau's family always was antagonistic toward the family of Israel. Oh the pain caused by sibling rivalries.

I find it interesting that Esau moved after Jacob returned. One wonders if this was because of the blessings and birthright that now belonged to Jacob. But I think this shows a positive trait of Esau. He could have been very resentful of Jacob after his return, but he wasn't. His error was in living for the moment rather than the future.

Genesis 37

Key Words: "loved more than"; "hated"; "jealous"

Key Verse: Verse 20 shares that the dreams kept bother Joseph's brothers. They felt they understood the message but did not like it and sought ways to prevent it from happening.

Purpose Statement: This chapter shares the first step in the process of God's turning Israel from a little tribe of family members into one of the great nations on the earth.

Outline: Joseph's Dream and His Relations with His Brothers

- I. Joseph's dreams and his brothers' reactions (vs. 1-11)

- II. Joseph sold into slavery (vs. 12-36)
 - A. His trip to see his brothers (vs. 12-18)
 - B. Their plotting (vs. 19-20)
 - C. Reuben's request (vs. 21-22)
 - D. Joseph sold to the Ishmaelites (vs. 23-28)
 - E. The cover up (vs. 29-36)

Thoughts to Ponder: Joseph's brothers were consumed by hatred for him. It did not help that he was their father's favorite. Every time they saw the multi-colored robe they were reminded of it. When they had to sweat in the sun with the smelly sheep, Joseph remained at home with "dear old dad." Then there was this thing about the dreams. The implications of these dreams was about the last straw for them. The very audacity of Joseph to presume that they, his own brothers, would ever bow down to him. The end result of hatred was the selling of Joseph into slavery. (At least they could make some money that way - two shekels apiece). And they devised a plan to deceive their father into thinking that Joseph was dead. They had watched their father play the game of deceit well, and now it worked for them. I wonder if any of them had a touch of guilt as they watched their father mourn the supposed death of his son? Probably not! Hatred is such a cruel thing! Oh to guard our lives from it.

When Joseph told his father and brothers about his second dream, Jacob rebuked him for his teen-aged arrogance. Yet, verse 11 closes with these words, "His father kept the matter in mind." Perhaps Jacob had already realized that it was possible God's hand was upon his son in a very unusual way. So, as preposterous as Joseph's dream seemed, Jacob did not rule out the possibility of its coming to pass. Perhaps Jacob reflected back to his own dream and understood how God had brought that to pass.

Reuben's story is much like ours, filled with highs and lows. In Genesis 35:22 we read where he had sex with Bilhah, one of his father's wives. Now, in this chapter, we read that, although he participated in the plot against Joseph, he secretly desired to rescue him. Perhaps he thought such an act might get him back into his father's good graces, although the text does not declare his motives. And then, in Genesis 42:37, Reuben pledges his own sons to Jacob if Benjamin is not returned safely. His is an interesting story.

Of all the stories recorded for us in Genesis, the one recorded in Genesis 38 I find the most difficult to understand. The web of sin goes deep into the heart of this chapter. Lying, deception, prostitution, and adultery raise ugly heads. Judah, the one through whom the Promised One is to come, certainly does not come off too messianic in this chapter. In fact, we could say that he was a "chip off the old block." As we shall see in the continuing saga of Joseph next week, Jacob had taught his children the concept of deception and lying very well. But, out of this story come two participants in the genealogy of Jesus: Tamar - we would hardly hold her up as a model for our children, Perez - the son, should have been the grandchild, of the

union between Tamar and Judah. Both names are featured in Matthew 1, the genealogy of Jesus. So, what can we possibly learn from this story?

Genesis 38

Key Words: "Jacob"; "Tamar"

Key Verse: Verse 26 includes the words "more righteous" and yet, both Tamar and Judah were wrong. Tamar had deceived Judah and Judah had failed to keep his promise to her.

Purpose Statement: This chapter presents the story of another pair of people who are in the genealogy of Christ - Tamar and Perez.

Outline: Judah and Tamar

- I. Judah's three sons (vs. 1-5)
- II. Death of his two sons because of wickedness (vs. 6-10)
- III. Tamar's widowhood (vs. 11-12)
- IV. Tamar's relations with Judah (vs. 13-26)
 - A. Her plan (vs. 13-14)
 - B. Judah uses her as a prostitute (vs. 15-19)
 - C. She disappears (vs. 20-23)
 - D. Her pregnancy (vs. 24)
 - E. Judah is guilty (vs. 25-26)
- V. Tamar's two sons (vs. 27-30)

Thoughts to Ponder: Deception works its incredible web once again. Judah deceives his daughter-in-law Tamar into thinking that if she would just wait she would be given Judah's youngest son in marriage. But he knew that would not happen. After years of waiting, Tamar turned the tables on her father-in-law. She deceived him by playing the role of a prostitute and having sex with him. Lies and deceit weave deadly webs that destroy character quickly. How we need to model truth.

Study Notes :

1. The events in this chapter cover many years. Judah has three sons born to him. Now let's say that the oldest does not get married until he is twenty. The youngest, at least the text implies, was considerably younger than his older brothers. I suppose it would be possible for the events in this chapter to have taken thirty or more years to have been fulfilled.

2. The beginning of Judah's problem is recorded in verse 2. He married the daughter of a Canaanite man. It would have been wiser for him to have returned to his uncle's home to see a wife just as his own father had done decades earlier.

Genesis 39

Key Words: "the Lord was with Joseph"; "the Lord gave him success"; "the Lord

blessed"; "the blessing of the Lord"

Key Verse: Joseph was successful not because of his own initiative but because the Lord was with him (verse 3).

Purpose Statement: The continued humbling of Joseph so he could be exalted is the theme of this chapter. Sometimes the prison must precede the throne.

Outline: Joseph and Potiphar

- I. Joseph and his relations with Potiphar (verses 1-6)
- II. Joseph and his relations with Potiphar's wife (verses 7-18)
- III. Joseph cast into prison (verses 19-23)

Questions to Probe: I wonder how Potiphar and his wife later felt as they had to beg food from Joseph? I wonder if they ever made things right with Joseph and God? I feel confident that Joseph had probably forgiven them as he had done his brothers.

Thoughts to Ponder: The Lord was with Joseph and gave him success both in Potiphar's home and in Pharaoh's prison. Joseph was indeed a very capable person. He worked diligently. He was trustworthy. He also knew to whom he belonged - God. When given the choice between protecting his career by having sex with his master's wife or protecting his relationship with God, he chose the latter. And, although he lost not only his job but also his personal freedom, God still honored him. Now we may not be rewarded as quickly as was Joseph, but we do know that we can never go wrong when we seek to honor the Lord at all times.

Although he was in his late teens, Joseph commanded positions of trust and respect both in Potiphar's house and in Pharaoh's prison because the Lord was with him. Like Daniel, Joseph had purposed in his heart that he would serve God and those around him were indeed blessed by that dedication.

When God is at work, so also is the enemy. Potiphar's lustful wife was Satan's tool to cause Joseph much pain. She probably had been indulged all her life and to have someone refuse her request was unthinkable. Joseph's refusal became a reason for her revenge and the sad thing is Potiphar believed her story. (Perhaps Joseph never had the opportunity of telling his). As Paul would later tell the Romans, a person must choose to serve God or himself (Romans 6:12-13). God honored Joseph's choice.

Genesis 40

Key Words: "interpretation of dreams"; "dreams"

Key Verse: Verse 8 shares Joseph's display of humility as he recognizes that only God is capable of sharing the interpretation of dreams.

Purpose Statement: This chapter records another step toward the throne for Joseph (we can realize that because we have seen the complete picture), but for Joseph it is another disappointment.

Outline: Joseph in Prison and Interpreting Dreams

- I. The cupbearer and baker are imprisoned (vs. 1-4)
- II. Their dreams (vs. 5-19)
- III. Their fulfillment (vs. 20-23)

Thoughts to Ponder: "He forgot him." What sad words! What convicting words! How soon we forget. Our hearts are touched by a missionary speaker and we promise to pray for them. Yet, days after the missionary leaves, we forget to pray. We make promises in moments of crisis, and once the crisis has passed life resumes and we forget. There is just too much of the cupbearer in us. Lord, help me to not only remember my promises, but with Your help, allow me to fulfill what I have promised.

Is there a meaning to everyone's dreams? The baker and the cupbearer thought that there was. Yet Joseph recognized that any probable interpretation belonged solely to God. I think Joseph understood that God often communicated His will through dreams. He had probably heard his father's story of the dream he had at Bethel as well as his own dreams that had led to his imprisonment now in Egypt. Praise God for the power of His Word so that we do not need to rely upon dreams.

Genesis 41

Key Words: "God will give"; "God has revealed"; "God has shown"; "God will do"; "God has made"

Key Verse: Verse 16 relates that Joseph did not take any credit for himself.

Purpose Statement: This chapter chronicles the final step in Joseph's reaching the throne. Now we know why Joseph was forgotten in prison. It was not time (God's time) for his release. Now the time is ripe for Joseph to minister to Israel.

Outline: Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams

- I. Pharaoh's dreams (vs. 1-7)
- II. Cupbearer remembers Joseph (vs. 8-13)
- III. Joseph before Pharaoh (vs. 14-40)
 - A. Joseph gives credit for power of interpretation to God (vs. 14-16)
 - B. Pharaoh relates his dreams (vs. 17-24)
 - C. Joseph's interpretation (vs. 25-36)
 - D. Joseph put in charge of the project (vs. 37-40)
- IV. Joseph elevated by Pharaoh (vs. 41-45)
- V. Joseph's action in regard to the project (vs. 46-49)
- VI. Joseph's family (vs. 50-52)
- VII. The famine is worldwide (vs. 53-57)

Questions to Probe: I wonder if Joseph ever grumbled while he languished in jail for those two years, or if he remained faithful to his work there? After his promotion, I wonder if Joseph ever felt like saying, "Ah, now my brothers will pay! The dreams have come true!"

Thoughts to Ponder: "I cannot do it...but God..." Joseph's statement is not very twentieth century-like. We live in an age of radical individualism: I can do it myself. We have worshiped the god of self-esteem to the point where we feel we do not need any help from anyone, certainly not from God. Yet Joseph, as successful as he had been in the past in interpreting dreams, realized that he could not help Pharaoh, but God could. I cannot preach that sermon, but God can through me. I cannot counsel that couple whose marriage is falling apart, but God can through me. I cannot give encouragement to that family whose home has been shattered by the death of a child, but God can through me. I can't...but God can. Those are not demeaning words. Really those are the only words that bring success.

God not only revealed the dream's meaning to Joseph but also the way to respond to its meaning. For those two years Joseph was in prison, he could have moped around feeling sorry for himself like I might have done. But I think Joseph was cultivating his relationship with God during that time. God used those two years to prepare Joseph for the position of power and influence he would hold for the rest of his life. The prison years prepare us for the throne years.

Ah, now the story of Joseph gets very interesting, as we approach Genesis 42. The young man who had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, then cast into an Egyptian prison through the false accusations of a jealous woman, and then left in that prison through the thoughtlessness of an ungrateful butler, has now risen to sit alongside of the Pharaoh of Egypt. He has been put in charge of Pharaoh's entire agricultural and welfare programs, preparing the nation for the upcoming years of famine. Suddenly, life is not too bad for Joseph. Married and with a growing family, Joseph is recognized as one of the most powerful and influential individuals in the kingdom. We might say that Joseph has finally arrived. Yet, I believe he is still bothered by what happened nearly twenty years previously. He thinks to himself, "I wonder what happened to Father? I wonder if my brothers were honest with him? I wonder if they have changed any?"

Well, in Genesis 42, we, along with Joseph, are reintroduced to those brothers. It is a reunion that is unknown to them, and that is probably as it should have been. So Joseph uses this opportunity to see if his brothers have changed. Let's look at the text together.

Genesis 42

Key Words: "honest"

Key Verses: Verses 21 and 28 share with us the consciences of the brothers as

being pricked and their memories of the past dealings with Joseph now return to haunt them. God has now gotten their attention.

Purpose Statement: The first step in the process of healing between Joseph and his brothers was their conviction of wrong doing.

Outline: Joseph is Confronted by His Brothers

- I. Joseph's brothers go to Egypt (vs. 1-5)
- II. Joseph's encounter with them (vs. 6-24)
- III. The brothers return home (vs. 25-38)

Thoughts to Ponder: Guilt is an awful chain to wear. For over ten years Joseph's brothers had woven the chain. Although they perhaps never talked about it, it was still there. Now, in a moment of crisis, that scene at that empty well-pit came back to haunt them. God was finally going to punish them. So they did what came so naturally for all of us - they began to cast blame. Guilt - oh it is so ugly!

I also find in this text a contrast. Joseph's brothers, when accused of being spies, proclaimed that they were honest men. But in the relating of their family background to Joseph, they stated that they had a brother who "was no more," that he was dead. Over the years these brothers had come to believe the lie they had told their father. They had recited it so many times that it became truth for them. Isn't that Satan's plan - to accept lies as being the truth? When we begin to believe the lie, oh the hurts we cause in others.

Before reconciliation can take place there must first be the admission of wrongdoing. To date, the brothers had covered up their actions with Joseph and had forgotten about them. But now, when they were being so harshly treated, they remembered. A pricked conscience never harmed anyone. If we listen to it only good can come.

I might have thought that Joseph's remark in verse 18 that he feared God might have caused his brothers to ponder who this man really was. After all, this was Egypt the land of a thousand gods. I believe they were so enshrouded with their own feelings of fear and guilt that they missed this clue as to the identity of their brother.

Genesis 43

Key Words: "Judah"; "Benjamin"; "Israel"; "Joseph"

Key Verse: Israel, not knowing the situation, was correct in his prayer for mercy to be given to his sons; they deserved justice - verse 14.

Purpose Statement: All the players are now in Egypt. It was important that Benjamin was there so that Joseph could discern how his brothers treated him, another one dearly loved by his father. Would they hold contempt for Benjamin as

they had for him?

Outline: Joseph is Confronted by His Brothers (cont.)

- IV. A planned second trip to Egypt (vs. 1-14)
 - A. Judah's warning (vs. 1-5)
 - B. Israel's concern (vs. 6)
 - C. Judah's pledge (vs. 7-10)
 - D. Israel's reluctance (vs. 11-14)
- V. The brothers meet Joseph again (vs. 15-34)
 - A. The brothers are taken to Joseph's home (vs. 15-17)
 - B. Their fears expressed (vs. 18-23)
 - C. They prepare to meet Joseph (vs. 24-25)
 - D. The meeting (vs. 26-34)

Thoughts to Ponder: A by-product of sin is fear. It was with fear Joseph's brothers returned to Egypt. It was with fear they approached his home. It was with fear they related the saga of the returned money to Joseph's steward. It was with fear they sat at the table for dinner. No peace here. No quiet spirits here. They awaited the order for their arrest and expected to die and not live. Their hearts were troubled with fears that their web of deceit and lies had created. You know, when you get right down to it, sinning is not enjoyable for very long.

Jacob was clinging to his possessions, namely his son Benjamin. It was only after his sons had convinced him that he allowed Benjamin to travel to Egypt. But, according to his statement found in verse 14, I am not convinced that Jacob expected to see his son again. It seems to me that Jacob was still clinging to the remnants of his problem of wanting to control matters. Now he was going to have to trust God. It think that was still difficult for him.

Notice the change of heart in Judah. In Genesis 37:26, he was the spokesman for selling Joseph into slavery. Now, years later, he is the one offering a guarantee for the safety of his brother Benjamin. I do believe that God was already at work in the lives of Joseph's brothers.

Genesis 44

Key Words: "Joseph"; "Judah" (great dialogue between these two brothers)

Key Verse: Verse 16 depicts the true words of Judah for they went far beyond what he knew. They were guilty before God for their treatment of Joseph.

Purpose Statement: This was the final testing of Joseph's brothers. They had grown up since their petty jealousies with him.

Outline: Joseph is Confronted by His Brothers (cont.)

- VI. The plot with the silver cup (vs. 1-13)
 - A. The plot described (vs. 1-2)

- B. The plot carried out (vs. 3-13)
- VII. The brothers reappear before Joseph (vs. 14-34)
 - A. Joseph's command (vs. 14-17)
 - B. Judah pleads for Benjamin (vs. 18-34)

Questions to Probe: Verses 9 and 10 don't seem to coincide. Verse 9 talks about a penalty of death and slavery, while verse 10 describes slavery and freedom. Why the difference?

Thoughts to Ponder: What a change of heart Joseph's brothers now take toward their younger brother Benjamin. They are fully aware that he is their father's favorite. But over the years God had removed their spirit of jealousy. Maybe it was the daily sorrow they saw in the eye of their father that reminded them how hurtful jealousy could be. Maybe it was in knowing that although Joseph was gone their lot in life had not improved. Now, when Benjamin's life is threatened, they did not sell him to the slave merchants. Instead, Judah was willing to sell himself in the place of his brother. Oh the transformation that occurs when God works within a heart.

One can almost hear the anguish in the voice of Judah as he pleads for the freedom of his brother Benjamin. Gone is that arrogant attitude he had concerning Joseph. Then he gladly sold his brother into slavery; now he begs to be a slave himself in the place of his brother. It was this attitude of repentance that signaled Joseph that his brothers, at least Judah, had changed. Perhaps it was for this reason that Judah was chosen to be the one through whom the ultimate substitute for our slavery would come.

Joseph was a political figure in his day, and a very important one at that. We might say that he held the equivalent role of Secretary of State and Chief of Staff all rolled up into one office. Egypt's daily life did not function without his say-so. Politically, there was only one person greater than he - the Pharaoh himself. And, as we have seen, here was a politician that was not afraid to give credit to God for what he did. He did not wear his faith on his sleeve, but modeled it with his life.

Just to recapture that moment. Joseph's brothers have appeared the second time before Joseph to buy food. They have brought Joseph's brother Benjamin with them this time, much to the sorrow of and aging Jacob's heart. Now, Benjamin has been accused of stealing Joseph's royal cup and stands condemned to be sold into slavery. Finally, the brothers plead for Benjamin's life. Now we come to that moment when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.

Genesis 45

Key Words: "God sent me"

Key Verse: Verse 7 summarizes the reason for Joseph's being in Egypt. Oh the trouble we would save ourselves if we would only see our lives and their events

from this perspective.

Purpose Statement: The final step in God's plan to get Israel to Egypt is now completed with Joseph's revelation of himself to his brothers.

Outline: Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers

- I. Joseph reveals himself to his brothers (vs. 1-15)
- II. Pharaoh invites Israel to come to Egypt (vs. 16-20)
- III. The brothers return with bounty to their father (vs. 21-28)

Questions to Probe: Why was Pharaoh so favorable to Joseph's family? Was it because of the testimony of Joseph?

Thoughts to Ponder: What a glorious family reunion there in that palace of Pharaoh. Fears were replaced with celebration. And Joseph did something very special for his brothers - he forgave them. He did not accuse them. He did not seek to punish them. He forgave them. His brothers were stunned, yet soon accepted that forgiveness and joined heart to heart with their brother. Forgiveness brings beauty from ashes. It turns mourning into dancing.

One can only imagine the terror Joseph's brothers felt when Joseph finally revealed himself to them. For all those years they had lied enough that they had convinced themselves that Joseph was truly dead. That is the great danger in telling a lie...you come to believe it is true.

This chapter demonstrates the great respect that Pharaoh had for Joseph. He could have provided for them without inviting them to Egypt. Or, he could have invited them to Egypt but put them in a place that was less than favorable. But Pharaoh really opened not only his wallet (verse 18), but also his heart to Joseph's brothers and their families. This could only have happened because of the relationship of respect and trust he had built over the past nine years with Joseph. Pharaoh may never have become a believer, but at least he knew that Joseph was different from the others who served him.

Joseph has shared himself with his brothers. Much rejoicing has taken place. Now it is time for Jacob to come to Egypt to spend the remainder of his days with all of his family present.

Genesis 46

Key Words: "I will"

Key Verse: In verse 3 the purpose of the trip to Egypt is stated.

Purpose Statement: This chapter relates the coming of Jacob's family to Egypt. There is a careful recounting of the numbers who come.

Outline: Jacob Travels to Egypt to Meet Joseph

- I. God's promise to Israel at Beersheba (vs. 1-4)
- II. Jacob and his family travel to Egypt (vs. 5-7)
- III. Jacob's family (vs. 8-27)
- IV. Joseph meets his father (vs. 28-34)

Questions to Probe: I wonder if any of Jacob's wives were still alive when he entered Egypt? The text seems unclear but the answer is probably "no."

Thoughts to Ponder: One can almost feel the overwhelming emotion of an aged Jacob as he gazed on the face of his son whom he had mourned for so many years as being dead. Could this actually be Joseph? It was too good to be true. God often delights in bringing surprises into our lives. That for which we had given up hope becomes a reality. The impossible becomes the possible. Oh what a great God we serve!

As the chapter begins God calls out to Jacob and Jacob is listening. Those two words - "Jacob! Jacob!" - remind of those two words - "Abraham! Abraham!" (Genesis 22:11) - as God called to Abraham as he was about to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham was fully listening to God's voice, and now so was Jacob.

Years after his death, the family of Abraham had grown to seventy. The multiplication process had begun. God was indeed creating a mighty nation whose roots would be grounded in the faith of three great men: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Genesis 47

Key Words: "famine"

Key Verse: The hand of God was upon Jacob and Joseph so truly Pharaoh was blessed (verse 10)

Purpose Statement: The chapter tells how Joseph protected his people during the famine. The future of Israel was spared because of him.

Outline: Joseph Deals with the Famine

- I. Joseph presents his family to Pharaoh (vs. 1-12)
- II. Joseph deals with the famine (vs. 13-26)
 - A. He collects all the money for food (vs. 13-15)
 - B. He exchanges food for livestock (vs. 16-17)
 - C. He exchanges food for land (vs. 18-26)
- III. Jacob approaches death (vs. 27-31)

Questions to Probe: I wonder which five of his brothers Joseph took with him to Pharaoh? I am sure that one of them had to be his own fleshly brother Benjamin.

Thoughts to Ponder: What Joseph required the Egyptians to do to obtain food would be severely criticized today. Where was his sense of compassion? Why not just give the people the food? This was not a good system of welfare. But Joseph did not want a system of welfare. Welfare produces dependency. It almost produces a worse kind of slavery than that which Joseph required of the people. Yes, these people were now servants of Pharaoh. But the life-saving food they had received had become theirs by sacrifice. They still had their integrity. They still could look at themselves in the morning in the mirror and feel good about who they were. Although what Joseph did may seem cruel to us by today's standards, he really showed wisdom and kindness toward the people and was able to help them prepare for the future when things would be restored.

Jacob blessed Pharaoh. One wonders whether this was just an expression for a greeting, such as "I am glad to meet you," or was it a blessing from God bestowed upon Pharaoh by Jacob? I think it might have been the latter. Surely Jacob must have recognized the hand of God working not only through the life of his son, but also through the actions of this Gentile ruler. Yes, God had blessed Pharaoh and he was deserving of the blessing.

Genesis 48

Key Words: "blessed"; "bless"; "Ephraim and Manasseh"; "Jacob"

Key Verse: Verses 15 and 16 are an affirmation from Jacob of how God had worked in his heart. What a difference from the Jacob we saw earlier.

Purpose Statement: This chapter relates the maturing of Jacob and the blessings of sonship bestowed upon Ephraim and Manasseh.

Outline: Jacob Blesses Joseph's Two Sons

- I. Jacob promises to include Joseph's two sons in the blessings as if they were his own (vs. 1-7)
- II. Jacob blesses Manasseh and Ephraim (vs. 8-20)
- III. Jacob gives an inheritance to Joseph (vs. 21-22)

Thoughts to Ponder: In his old age, Jacob fully realized that God had been his shepherd. It was God who had led Jacob to Laban's home in order to obtain a family. It was God who had guided him back to the land of his fathers. And now God had provided for him through his son whom he had given up as being dead. Another shepherd, centuries later, would write also of God, "The Lord is my shepherd." What a wonderful picture of God! I trust that I can look back upon my life in those moments before I die and acknowledge how the Lord has been my shepherd all the days of my life.

Sometimes God does things that are not exactly what we think to be correct. Joseph was somewhat frustrated that his father was bestowing the blessing upon Ephraim, although he was younger than his brother Manasseh. But God knew

what He was doing. All we see is the present moment, but God does see into the future, a concept that is difficult for our finite minds to comprehend. As Joseph questioned his father's actions, so we question God's actions. But we must trust Him even as Joseph trusted Jacob.

Genesis 49

Key Words: "he blessed them"; "he was gathered to his people"

Key Verse: The phrase "blessings appropriate for him" stands out in verse 28. Is that not how God's blessings are for all of us?

Purpose Statement: Although difficult to understand, these blessings given by Jacob to his sons are prophetic in nature. What insight God gave to Jacob in his old age.

Outline: The Blessings of Jacob to His Children

- I. Jacob blesses his sons (vs. 1-28)
 - A. Reuben (vs. 1-4)
 - B. Simeon and Levi (vs. 5-7)
 - C. Judah (vs. 8-12)
 - D. Zebulun (vs 13)
 - E. Issachar (vs. 14-15)
 - F. Dan (vs. 16-18)
 - G. Gad (vs. 19)
 - H. Asher (vs. 20)
 - I. Naphtali (vs. 21)
 - J. Joseph (vs. 22-26)
 - K. Benjamin (vs. 27-28)
- II. Jacob's death (vs. 29-33)

Thoughts to Ponder: Many of Jacob's blessings were couched in terms of animals: Judah (lion's cub), Issachar (raw-boned donkey), Dan (serpent), Naphtali (doe), and Benjamin (ravenous wolf). What kind of animal would describe me?

Jacob bestowed a particular blessing appropriate upon each of his sons. In order to do that a father must know his family well. That means spending time with them to know, not just their likes and dislikes, but their personalities, their temperaments, their disposition toward God. It is hard for dads to give blessings upon their children today because they simply do not spend quality time with them. Lord, help me to learn from the model of Jacob so that, as a Christian father, I might give the right blessing to my children.

Reuben forfeited the blessing of the firstborn because of sin. Simeon and Levi, the next in line, also forfeited any opportunity of receiving the blessing because of their sin. Judah then received that blessing and became that tribe through which the Messiah would come.

Genesis 50

Key Words: "the Egyptians mourned for him"; "don't be afraid"

Key Verse: Verse 20 is a great statement on the sovereignty of God. Oh to have that kind of confidence in Him.

Purpose Statement: This chapter chronicles the death of two patriarchs: Jacob and Joseph. Sandwiched in between is a reassuring of forgiveness.

Outline: Jacob's Funeral and Joseph's Death

- I. Jacob prepared for burial and mourned (vs. 1-3)
- II. Jacob is buried in Canaan (vs. 4-14)
- III. Joseph's brothers are reassured of their being forgiven (vs. 15-21)
- IV. Joseph's death (vs. 22-26)

Questions to Probe: Why did the embalming process take forty days?

Thoughts to Ponder: Guilt is so very hard to lay aside. After all the years of life in Egypt, Joseph's brothers had not really forgiven themselves for their actions of the past. Yes, Joseph had forgiven them, or at least they hoped he had. Perhaps the words were just because of his father and, now that Jacob was dead, Joseph would seek his revenge. The brothers, although forgiven by their brother, could not really live forgiven until they accepted that forgiveness and then forgave themselves. The key to the removal of guilt is forgiveness.

Verses 3 and 7 share the deep feelings of loss the Egyptians expressed after the death of Jacob. It was a great sign of the respect that they had for Joseph. Joseph's integrity became a great avenue of ministry for him and that character trait touched many lives. Perhaps a great portion of those Egyptians who would later follow Israel into the wilderness were the descendants of those who now showed respect for Jacob.