

Creative Living Bible Study

New Beginnings

Studies on the Book of Genesis

A Creative Living International Publication

NEW BEGINNINGS
STUDIES FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

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Studies from the Book of Genesis

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Before you begin . . .

Genesis is where most people begin when they decide to read through the entire Bible. It is one of the most moving and exciting books in the Scriptures. The first book of the Bible, its events lay the foundation for the main theme running throughout the Bible: God's loving redemption of mankind.

The purpose of our study of Genesis is to get a simple overview of its events, understand why it is important to the rest of the Bible, and to derive biblical principles from its pages to help us live healthier and happier lives today.

What you discover in the weeks to come may be new to you, or maybe review, but my hope is that it will refresh your understanding of God's greatness, His great love for you, and His wise principles for living. Our lives are always changing . . . there are many new beginnings. May the pages of this study give you hope as you see the unchanging faithfulness of God through every change of life.

Diana Schick
Author
Creative Living Bible Studies

PART 1

THE BEGINNINGS OF HISTORY

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

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

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

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

Easy Breakdown of Genesis

I. Beginnings of Mankind (Chapters 1-11)

Creation

Fall

Flood

Babel

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

Abraham

Isaac

Jacob

Joseph

Lesson 1

CREATION

Genesis 1:1-2:3

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

First, God prepared the earth to be life sustaining. Then He made plant and animal life and finally man. The process involved six stages described as days.¹ One brought light, another atmosphere, another the establishment of

land, sea, and plants, yet another the functioning of the sun, moon, and stars, another fish and birds, and finally animals and other land life. When the earth was ready God created man, the crown of His work, and gave him rule and dominion over all the earth.

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

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3.

1. What was the earth like in the beginning (1:1-2)?
2. What did the commands of the first three days produce (1:3-13)?
3. What was the result of God's commands in the next three days (1:14-25)?
4. How were man and woman different from the rest of creation (1:26-27)?
5. What did God commission the man and woman to do, and how did He provide for them (1:28-30)?
6. How was the seventh day of creation unique (2:1-3)?

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

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Order in Our Lives

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

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

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

1 Corinthians 14:33a

1 Corinthians 14:40

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

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

Marriage, family, and other relationships

Meaning in life

Work

Sexuality

Mental and emotional stability

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

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

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

Proverbs 3:5-6

Isaiah 48:17

Psalm 48:14

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

Proverbs 12:15a

Proverbs 28:26a

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

Exodus 23:12

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

S U M M A R Y

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

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

LESSON 1 NOTES

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

- a. Each day is a 24-hour period. This interpretation has the problem of man and woman being created over a longer period of time in Genesis 2. It also conflicts with facts of geology (studies of the history of the earth and its life).
- b. The days represent long periods of time that can be correlated with contemporary scientific theories of geological epochs (dates that begin different geological time periods). The problem here is that modern geological studies and time periods are changing all the time.
- c. The days are arranged in a literary structure that is not designed to show time frames or duration of creation. It is not necessary to take the days literally as God's work week any more than we should take God having ears and eyes literally because He hears and sees in biblical accounts. Rather, the account shows a progression and order in creation, and at the same time a 6/1 model for human work and rest.
- d. The creation account was revealed to the author in six days, each day giving a vision of another part of God's creative work.

Some points to consider are:

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

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

Lesson 2

ADAM AND EVE

Genesis 2:4-25

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

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

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

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

Read Genesis 2:4-17.

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

Reference: Note 2, *the breath of life*, p. 14.

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

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

Read Genesis 2:18-25.

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

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

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

Reference: Note 4, *suitable helper*, p. 14.

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

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

How's Your Self-Image?

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

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

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

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

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

our relationships with other people?

our daily tasks?

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

Reference: Note 5, *man*, p. 14.

4. What do these verses say about your uniqueness and worth to God?
Psalm 139:13-18

Luke 12:6-7

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

Jeremiah 31:3

Romans 8:38-39

John 3:16

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

1 Samuel 16:7

Proverbs 31:30

Note: fear means reverent trust.

Micah 6:8

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

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

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

Philippians 4:13

2 Corinthians 12:9

S U M M A R Y

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

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

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

LESSON 2 NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

Lesson 3

THE BIG MISTAKE

Genesis 3

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

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

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

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

Life became very different for Adam and Eve, reminding them continually of their poor choice in not trusting their Creator. Difficulties the Lord

predicted would trouble them are still part of our lives today. For the woman, there would be difficulty in childbirth, parenting, and marriage. The man's greatest struggles would relate to making a living.

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

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

Read Genesis 3:1-6.

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

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

3. In Genesis 3:4-5, what statements did Satan make about:

the purpose of God's command?

the results of God's command?

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

b. What did she risk in making this decision?

Read Genesis 3:7-13.

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

to each other?

to God?

Read Genesis 3:14-19.

6. What was the outcome:

for the serpent (3:14-15)?

for the woman (3:16)?

for the man (3:17-19)?

Read Genesis 3:20-24.

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

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Dealing With Bad Habits and Temptation

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

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

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

James 1:13-14

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

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

Psalm 19:7-11

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

b. In contrast, what does God's Word say is emotionally healthy for us?

Galatians 5:22-23

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

Psalm 103:8-14

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

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

Proverbs 24:6

James 5:16

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

1 Corinthians 10:13

Ephesians 3:16, 20

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

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

Philippians 4:6-7

Psalms 27:14

S U M M A R Y

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

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

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

LESSON 3 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 3, *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, p. 14.

2 *realized they were naked* (3:7). “Adam and Eve’s response to their nakedness has nothing to do with sexual guilt or shame. The Bible has a high view of sex, despite certain church teachings throughout the centuries. Just as their nakedness was a sign of innocence and lack of self-consciousness, it now becomes a symbol of guilt to be covered up so they can still appear presentable.” Charles & Anne Hummel, *Genesis God's Creative Call*, p. 98.

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

Lesson 4

CAIN AND ABEL

Genesis 4 & 5

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

The Lord's gracious judgment on this action was to make Cain a protected fugitive criminal. Cain complained that God's punishment was too severe.

The account that follows in Genesis 4:17-24 records the lineage of Cain.² His son Lamech, who married two wives and became a killer himself, had no regret for his actions.

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

Read Genesis 4:1-16.

1. a. What new beginning does Genesis 4:1-2 describe?
 - b. What are we told about Cain and Abel?
-
2. What transpired between the Lord, Cain and Abel (4:3-5)?

Reference: Note 1, *Cain's offering*, p. 28.

3. What was the Lord's explanation and counsel to Cain (4:6-7)?
4. What was Cain's attitude toward God (4:5,9,13-14)?
5. What was Cain's attitude toward his brother (4:8)?
6. How did Cain's attitude affect his behavior?

Read Genesis 4:17-24.

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

Read Genesis 4:25-5:32.

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

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

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Dealing With Anger

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

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

Psalms 103:8-10

Psalms 30:5

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

James 1:19-20

Proverbs 15:1

Proverbs 19:11

Ephesians 4:31-32

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

3. What results from giving way to an angry disposition?

Ecclesiastes 7:9

Proverbs 15:18

4. What warnings do these verses give regarding being with an anger-oriented person?

Proverbs 22:24-25

Proverbs 21:19

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

b. What do these verses suggest?

Proverbs 27:4a

Colossians 3:21

Proverbs 27:15-16

Proverbs 14:1

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

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

S U M M A R Y

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

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

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

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

LESSON 4 NOTES

1 *Cain's offering.* Cain brought some of the fruits. . . But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock (4:3-4). "The contrast is not between an offering of plant life and an offering of animal life, but between a careless, thoughtless offering and a choice, generous offering (cf. Leviticus 3:16). Motivation and heart attitude are all-important, and God looked with favor on Abel and his offering because of Abel's faith (Heb. 11:4)." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 11.

"Abel went out of his way to please God (which meant he had faith in God, Heb. 11:6), whereas Cain was simply discharging a duty." John Walvoord & Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 34.

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

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

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

Lesson 5

THE FLOOD

Genesis 6 & 7

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

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

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

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

Read Genesis 6.

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

Reference: Note 4, *sons of God*, p. 36.

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

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

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

Read Genesis 7.

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

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

Reference: Note 3, *springs...rain*, p. 36.

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

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

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Taking God Seriously

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

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

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

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

in marriage and family?

in society?

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

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

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

Ecclesiastes 10:3

Proverbs 16:18

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

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

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

Psalms 1:2-3

Proverbs 2:7-8

Proverbs 2:9-11

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

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

Romans 12:2

Psalms 119:105

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

Psalms 111:7

Numbers 23:19

Psalm 84:11

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

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

1 Peter 4:19

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

Philippians 2:13

Ezekiel 36:26-27

Reference: Note 6, *Holy Spirit*, p. 36.

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

Isaiah 55:7

1 John 1:7,9

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

Romans 8:31b,34

S U M M A R Y

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

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

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

LESSON 5 NOTES

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

2 The eleventh book of the famous Assyrian-Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, unearthed at Kuyunjik (Nineveh) in 1853 gives an account of a man (Utnapishtim) who was divinely instructed to build a huge boat five times the size of the ark, using pitch, as Noah did, to close its seams. Of all extrabiblical parallels that have come down from the vast cuneiform literature of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley of ancient history, the most striking is the Babylonian account of the flood. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 49.

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

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

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

NavPress Life Change Series, *Genesis*, p. 66.

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

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

Lesson 6

THE RAINBOW PROMISE

Genesis 8:1-9:17

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

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

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

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

Read Genesis 8:1-14.

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

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

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

Read Genesis 8:15-22.

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

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

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

Read Genesis 9:1-17.

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

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

Reference: Note 2, *lifeblood*, p. 43.

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

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Hope in a Crisis

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

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

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

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

1. What kinds of crises do we face?

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

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

b. What is God's provision for this universal human problem?

Romans 6:23

Romans 5:8

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

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

1 John 5:11-13

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

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

Psalms 37:39

John 16:33

Psalms 91:14-16

Isaiah 42:16

6. What do these verses suggest we do in times of crisis?

Psalms 46:10a

Isaiah 26:3-4

James 1:5

Proverbs 3:5-6

Philippians 4:6-7

S U M M A R Y

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

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

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

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

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

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

LESSON 6 NOTES

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

Tim LaHaye and John Morris, in their book *The Ark on Ararat*, collected several hundred stories of an ancient worldwide flood. The book contains 14 flood stories from Africa and the Middle East, 38 from the Pacific Islands, 21 from the Far East, 13 from Europe and Asia, 21 from Greece, 58 from North America, 21 from Central America, and 24 from South America.

Among these accounts, 88% record a favored family saved for its righteousness, while many others name unrelated survivors. Animals are saved in 67%. Seventy percent say that the survivors spend the flood in a boat, and 57% say that the survivors end up on a mountain. Human wickedness leads to the flood in 66%. Smaller percentages mention birds sent out, a rainbow, and exactly eight people saved.

The accounts in the Middle East are most like the biblical one, while the stories vary more and more the further they are from the Middle East. This fact leads LaHaye and Morris to conclude, "The universal Flood traditions can only have come from a common source, embellished with local color and culture, but retaining enough pertinent data to convey both historical and moral concepts." James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis, An Expository Commentary*, volume 1, pp. 282-288.

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

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

Lesson 7

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Genesis 9:18-11:32

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

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

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

Shem was placed last in the account since it was through his lineage that the nation of Israel would come, the origins of which are the focus of Genesis. Japheth's descendants moved north and west to become the progenitors of the Caucasian races of Europe and Asia. The Shemites (Semitic peoples) moved south and east and would be the spiritual leaders of men who would teach the religion of Jehovah to the world. The Hamites moved south and west and would settle Canaan (now Israel) on the Mediterranean, Arabia, Egypt, and the east coast of Africa.

Nimrod, a grandson of Ham, became the first great leader on the earth (10:8-12). He is believed to have built the great cities of Babylon and Nineveh and probably was responsible for the Tower of Babel enterprise (10:10; 11:9).³

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

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

Read Genesis 9:18-29.

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

Reference: Commentary paragraph 2 and Note 1, *Ham*, p. 51.

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

Read Genesis 10:1-11:9.

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

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

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

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

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

Read Genesis 11:10-32.

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

b. What have you observed about new beginnings?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Help for the Tongue

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

In Genesis, collective communication led to total rebellion and independence from God. The miracle of different languages kept man from quickly destroying himself again and sent him back to the task of populating the earth. The difficulty in communication actually allowed the people of the world to exist longer without God's judgment in order to allow time for God's plan of redemption to come.

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

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

b. Where do you see this happening today?

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

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

Proverbs 12:18

Proverbs 15:1

Proverbs 15:4

Proverbs 15:7

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

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

James 3:3-8

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

7. What do these verses suggest about controlling the tongue?

Luke 6:45

Philippians 4:8

8. What principles regarding the use of the tongue do you see in the following?

James 1:19-20

Ephesians 4:29

Ephesians 5:4,19-20

Psalm 34:13

Colossians 4:6

9. How does God strengthen us to tame the tongue?

Ephesians 5:18b

Galatians 5:22-23

Galatians 5:25

Reference: Note 6, *Holy Spirit*, p. 36.

S U M M A R Y

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

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

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

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

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

LESSON 7 NOTES

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

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

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

Today's equivalent to this type of action would be astrology, fortune telling, or New Age channeling.

4 *Shem's descendants*. Ten generations are noted, perhaps to match the ten named from Adam to Noah in Chapter 5. The growth of nations in Chapter 10 makes it clear that great intervals lie between names (see Note 2, *genealogies*, p. 29). The life span steadily declines toward the 175 years of Abraham.

5 Reference: Note 6, *Holy Spirit*, p. 36.

PART 2

ISRAEL'S BEGINNINGS—

ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB

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

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

Lesson 1

THE CALL OF ABRAM

Genesis 12-13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read Genesis 12:1-8.

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

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

Read Genesis 12:10-20.

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

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

Reference: Note 2, *protect Abram's life in Egypt*, p. 59.

Read Genesis 13:1-18.

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

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

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

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

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Perspective on Possessions

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

1. According to the Bible, what are true riches and poverty?

Proverbs 15:16-17

Amos 8:11

Ephesians 2:12

Matthew 16:26

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

3. What does God see when He looks at our possessions?

1 Samuel 16:7

Psalm 50:10-12

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

b. What do the following suggest?

Proverbs 15:27a

Proverbs 28:25

5. What do these verses say about generosity and greed?

Proverbs 23:4-5

Luke 12:15

Matthew 6:19-21

6. What guidelines for generosity are given in these verses?

Proverbs 22:9

Luke 6:38

2 Corinthians 9:7

7. a. What guidelines has God given those who are materially rich?

1 Timothy 6:17-19

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

8. Our attitude toward our possessions ultimately depends on whom we serve. What do the following verses state?

Luke 16:13-15

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

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

Philippians 4:19

Joshua 1:8

Matthew 6:28-33

S U M M A R Y

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

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

LESSON 1 NOTES

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

2 *protect Abram's life in Egypt*. Abram told Sarai to tell Pharaoh she was his sister rather than wife because to take a woman into his harem who was married, Pharaoh would first have to kill the husband. According to Genesis 20:12, Sarai was Abraham's half-sister, the daughter of his father, but not of his mother. Marriage with half-sisters was not uncommon in ancient times. Even so, half-truth was still a lie in the Egyptian culture where absolute truthfulness was an emphasized ethic. Abram was no doubt very uncomfortable when exposed before these people as a liar.

Lesson 2

CRISIS AND COVENANT

Genesis 14-15

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read Genesis 14:1-16.

1. Briefly describe the events of Genesis 14:1-12.
2. What did Abram do to rescue Lot and his family (14:13-16)?

Read Genesis 14:17-24.

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

Reference: Note 2, *Melchizedek*, p. 65.

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

Read Genesis 15:1-21.

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

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

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

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

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

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Conquering Impulsiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Psalm 37:7a

Psalm 37:34a

Psalm 62:5-6

Micah 7:7

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

Jeremiah 29:11

2 Samuel 22:31a

Isaiah 55:8-9

Ecclesiastes 3:1

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

Isaiah 40:31

1 Peter 5:6

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

S U M M A R Y

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

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

LESSON 2 NOTES

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

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

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

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

5 *Abrahamic Covenant* (15:9-21). This covenant resembles an ancient royal grant and is an unconditional grant of land to Abram's descendants. The parties in such a covenant would take an oath by cutting animals in half, walking between the pieces (15:17) and invoking a curse: "May I be cut in half if I don't keep my oath." In Genesis 15:9-21, only God passed between the pieces showing that the land grant did not depend upon Abram keeping any promises. In ancient times, this rite was equivalent to signing a contract and filing it with the local authorities today.

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

Lesson 3

ISHMAEL IS BORN

Genesis 16-17

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read Genesis 16.

1. Ten years had passed in Canaan. What was Sarai's problem, and how did she seek to solve it (16:1-2)?
2. Even though having an heir by a maid was an acceptable practice in the ancient Near East, what did Sarai's and Abram's action say about their faith? What do you think caused this?
3. Describe the relationship between Sarai, Abram, and Hagar (16:4-6)?
4. a. What promises and encouragement did the angel give Hagar (16:7-12)?

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

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

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

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

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

Reference: Note 2, *Circumcision*, p. 73.

Read Genesis 17:15-27.

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

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

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

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

What Price Impatience?

The events of this lesson span 14 years and exhibit clearly the importance of trusting God's Word and waiting for its fulfillment. Anyone who walks by faith for any length of time will face situations similar to Abraham's and Sarah's. Waiting and trusting are hard for us. Impatience is much more natural and often leads, as it did for them, to taking matters into our own hands. The mess they made is the typical result. The grace of God and His redemption of the situation in spite of our human failures always emerges as we again turn to Him in faith.

What does impatience cost? Having an answer etched in our minds can help us avoid impatient choices. Let's make some observations about the biblical principles related to this important subject.

1. What did impatience cost Abraham and Sarah?

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

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

in decisions?

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

Proverbs 29:20

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

Proverbs 19:21

Hosea 14:9

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

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

c. What rewards of patient faith can be found in the following?

Luke 21:19

Romans 5:3-5

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

Romans 12:12

James 1:2-4

Galatians 6:9

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

Psalm 103:13-14

Psalm 37:23-24

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

Psalm 55:22

Psalm 34:4-5

Hebrews 12:2-3

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

S U M M A R Y

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

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

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

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

LESSON 3 NOTES

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

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

Lesson 4

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Genesis 18-19

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (18:14a). “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (18:25). These two rhetorical questions ring out in the events of this section of Genesis.

The text begins with the early afternoon visit of the Lord¹ and two angels to Abraham’s tent near the great trees of Mamre. Abraham hurried to make preparations for a meal, after which the Lord announced to Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son by the same time one year later.

Sarah laughed to herself in unbelief; it was no longer physically possible for her to have children at 90 years of age. But even her laughter to herself was not missed by the Lord. He addressed her unbelieving attitude, assuring her of His faithfulness and ability to do what seems impossible to man.

Before ending the visit, the Lord walked with Abraham to a spot overlooking the Jordan valley where the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah lay. The two angels walked on toward the cities while the Lord lingered to tell Abraham His plan to bring judgment on the corrupt culture in the valley below.² Abraham responded with a series of questions probing into the character, mercy, and justice of God. He asked if the Lord would destroy the cities even if righteous people were living there. The Lord assured Abraham that if even ten people were righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah, He would not destroy the place.

As the two angels arrived in Sodom, they were met at the gate of the city by Abraham’s nephew, Lot, who begged them to come to his house. While Lot

recognized the men as angels, they looked like ordinary people to the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:1,5). Word of two new men in town got around, and later that night Lot's home was surrounded by men of the city who wanted to sexually assault the angel guests. Lot's pleas and even the incredible offer of his own daughters³ were refused by the men outside the house. The angels brought control to the situation by striking all the men around the house blind, giving Lot time to gather his family, and finally bringing quick destruction to the entire area.⁴

As Lot, his wife, and two daughters fled, his wife looked back in disobedience and was instantly turned into a pillar of salt.⁵ Lot and his daughters fled to Zoar, a city the angels agreed to spare for them, and then moved to the mountains where they lived in a cave. Fearing they would never marry or conceive children, Lot's daughters schemed to continue the family line through incest with their father after getting him drunk. The resulting tribes of their offspring, Moab and Ammon, would become bitter enemies of the descendants of Lot's uncle, Abraham.

These chapters show the onward march of Abraham toward God's promises of blessing. Simultaneously, we can observe the miserable failure of Lot, who compromised with the world around him. Finally, as in past accounts in Genesis, we see once again that indeed "nothing is too hard for the Lord," and "the Judge of all the earth will do right."

Read Genesis 18:1-15.

1. Briefly explain the events of Genesis 18:1-8.

Reference: Note 1, *the Lord*, p. 80.

2. a. What promise did the Lord make, and what was Sarah's response (18:9-12)?

b. How did the Lord reprove as well as assure Sarah (18:13-15)?

Read Genesis 18:16-33.

3. a. Why did the Lord confide in Abraham (18:16-19)?

b. What did He disclose (18:20-33)?

Reference: Note 2, *"I will go down..."* p. 80.

Read Genesis 19:1-29.

4. How would you describe the society around Sodom and Gomorrah? Why would it have been under God's judgment according to Genesis 19?

5. How would you describe Lot and his family in the midst of this society (19:1-14)? What does 2 Peter 2:7-8 add to the Genesis account?

Reference: Note 3, *"I have two daughters,"* p. 81.

6. Describe the Lord's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (19:23-29).

Reference: Note 4, *destruction*, and Note 5, *Lot's wife*, p. 81.

Read Genesis 19:30-38.

7. How did the society in which they were raised affect Lot's daughters (Genesis 19:30-38)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Current Events Speak

Lot's experience certainly reflects the importance of not compromising with the ungodliness in the world around us. But we can also learn from his story how to become involved in the solutions rather than the problems in the world around us. The Bible warns us of corruption that takes place before complete ruin of a society. It also gives us godly principles we can practice as we try to provide solutions to the needs of our society.

1. a. What sobering truths do you see in the Lord's dealings in Genesis 18-19?

b. How does Proverbs 16:18 give a general warning to a society?

2. What do you think the emotional, physical, social, and spiritual experience of children and teenagers might have been in this society? What about women?

3. In light of this, why might God's judgment on this culture have been gracious after all?

4. What destructive forces do you see at work around you today?

5. What observations do you make about the steps toward depravity of a culture described by Paul in Romans 1:18-32?

Step 1 (1:18-21): Result:

Step 2 (1:22-25): Result:

Step 3 (1:26-27): Result:

Step 4 (1:29-32): Result:

6. What separated Abraham from the society around him?

7. What godly principles can we practice in the midst of the growing instability of the society around us?

a. Personally:

2 Chronicles 7:14

Romans 12:2

Joshua 1:8

b. With those around us:

Ephesians 5:11

Matthew 5:16

1 Peter 3:15

8. What does Joel 2:25a say about the individual or family or nation that turns to God?

9. What encouragement and warning is found in the rhetorical questions of Genesis 18:14a and 18:25?

S U M M A R Y

10. God's desire for each of us is a healthy, constructive lifestyle. What have you learned in this study that allows you to have this?

11. What is your prayer for the society around you and for yourself as you seek to be part of the solution?

LESSON 4 NOTES

1 *the Lord appeared...*(18:1). A visible appearance of God in the Old Testament is called a *theophany*. In Genesis 18, this appearance was in human form. There is reason to think that theophanies before Christ's incarnation were visible manifestations of the Son of God. Theophanies ceased with the incarnation of Christ. Examples: Genesis 3:8; 4; 5:24; 6:9; 28:10-17; Exodus 33:11.

2 *"I will go down..."* (18:21). As in the story of the Tower of Babel (11:5-9), God *comes down* to survey a situation. This is not a denial of God's infinite knowledge but a figurative way of stating that He does not act out of ignorance or on the basis of mere complaints. *NIV Study Bible*, p. 33.

The *outcry* or *outrage* is a cry of righteous indignation like the blood of Abel in Genesis 4:10. The Hebrew root word indicates the anguished cry of the oppressed as well, the agonized plea of a victim of some great injustice. Charles & Anne Hummel, *Genesis God's Creative Call*, p. 103.

3 *I have two daughters* (19:8). Ancient hospitality obligated the host to protect his guests at any cost, but offering his daughters to the increasingly angry mob was against the spirit of the tradition. Certainly the Lord's angels would have stopped such action had the men been interested, but they were not.

4 *destruction of the entire area*. The five cities of the plain of the Jordan (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, Zoar) were located at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Now covered with water, this area in 2065 B.C. was fertile and populous until the events of Genesis 19.

The natural ingredients of destruction were present in this region with its bitumen, petroleum, sulfur and salt. A great system of rift valleys run north and south, so the destruction may well have been caused by one of the last earthquakes that shaped the lower Jordan Valley. If so, the violent explosion would have hurled the salt and sulphur into the air red-hot so that it literally rained fire and brimstone over the whole plain (19:24,28). Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 69.

Although the conflagration may have had some natural causes, the event was not a chance disaster, but clearly a judgment of God for specific reasons at a specific time. Charles & Anne Hummel, p. 103.

5 *Lot's wife...pillar of salt*. Whether because of curiosity, love for her things in Sodom or perhaps her family (she may have been from Sodom), Lot's wife disobeyed the angel's orders not to look back at the city. Her body instantly became a pillar of salt, encrusted with deposits from the raining brimstone, that remained for many years. Even today pillars and peaks of salt are visible in the area south of the Dead Sea.

Lesson 5

ISAAC IS BORN

Genesis 20-21

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

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

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

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

At a feast held on the day of Isaac's weaning,² Sarah saw Ishmael, the son of Abraham and her maid Hagar, mocking Isaac. Sarah demanded and God concurred that Abraham should send Ishmael and Hagar away. By faith,

Abraham sent them off with only food and water. As God had promised, He followed them, staying with Ismael as he grew and blessing him as a son of Abraham.

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

Read Genesis 20.

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

Reference: Note 1, *king wanted her*, p.87.

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

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

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

Read Genesis 21:1-20.

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

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

Reference: Note 2, *Isaac's weaning*, p. 87.

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

Read Genesis 21:22-34.

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

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

The Gift of Joy

Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." Although she made some big mistakes in her impatience with divine delays, Sarah followed her husband in God's callings on his life. Her experience became a picture of the promise, "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5b).

God desires joy to be a part of our lives. The Bible has a lot to say about how and why God brings joy and what its benefits are for us.

1. What brought Sarah joy and why?

2. a. How would you define joy?

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

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

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

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

6. What do these verses suggest joy gives us?

Proverbs 15:13

Proverbs 17:22

Nehemiah 8:10c

7. What do these verses suggest bring joy?

Psalms 33:21

Psalms 89:15-16

Psalms 16:11

Psalms 37:4

8. According to these verses, what can God's joy overrule and why?

Habakkuk 3:17-19

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

Galatians 5:22,25

Reference: Note 6, *Holy Spirit*, p. 36.

Ephesians 3:16-17a

Romans 8:38-39

10. What does Christ promise about the joy of knowing Him?

John 16:22

S U M M A R Y

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

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

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

LESSON 5 NOTES

1 *king wanted her.* At 90, it was probably no longer Sarah's beauty but rather the possible alliance with her wealthy and powerful "brother" that motivated Abimelech's action of taking her into his palace. NavPress Life Change Series, *Genesis*, p. 133. See also Note 2, *protect Abram*, p. 62.

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

Lesson 6

ISAAC ON THE ALTAR

Genesis 22-23

Isaac was probably in his teens or older when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son on an altar. This was an incredible demand upon Abraham, but God knew this man's faith would stand. God also proved *His* faithfulness and bestowed great blessing because of Abraham's resolve.

Through circumcision of himself and the males of his household, Abraham had both covenanted himself to obey God and dedicated his son to the Lord. Now came the test of these commitments. Would Abraham obey, and would he give back his son to God? The answer to both questions was "yes." As Abraham raised his hand to take Isaac's life, he believed God would either provide another sacrifice or bring Isaac back from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). Whatever He did, Abraham knew God would fulfill His promise to give him descendants through Isaac, numerous as the sand on the seashore (15:4-5; 17:19-21).

The angel of the Lord stayed the hand of Abraham, and a ram in the thicket became the substitutionary offering for Isaac. This sheep became a picture of the substitutionary "lamb of God" (John 1:29) to come in Jesus Christ.² The sacrificial love of Abraham was analogous to the Father's love in sacrificing His only Son for the sins of the world (John 3:16; Romans 8:32).

The Lord responded to Abraham's incredible faith: "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me" (22:16-18).

Abraham and Isaac had seen the amazing working of God. They could be sure all He promised through their lives for the generations to come would come true.

In Genesis 23, the author records the death of Sarah, Abraham's faithful wife of probably more than 100 years. In his grief, Abraham buried Sarah in a cave at the end of a field that he purchased in Canaan³ for an exorbitant price. His purchase of this plot showed Abraham's commitment to follow the Lord in making Canaan a homeland for him and his children's children.

Read Genesis 22.

1. What command did God give Abraham? What words point to the enormity of this sacrifice (22:1-2)?

Reference: Note 1, *God tested Abraham's faith*, p. 93.

2. What amazes you about Abraham's response (22:3-10; also Hebrews 11:19)?

3. How did God prove worthy of Abraham's trust (22:11-12)?

4. *Fear* of the Lord (22:12) in the Old Testament refers to "reverential trust" in God. How did Abraham show this in his thinking and actions?

5. What did Abraham predict that God fulfilled (22:5,7-8,13-14)?

1. a. Where do we tend to put our trust?

Proverbs 11:28

Proverbs 28:26

b. In what other things do modern men and women trust?

2. Why do these things prove untrustworthy?

3. Why can we trust in the Lord according to the following?

Jeremiah 29:11

Romans 8:32

Hebrews 13:5b

2 Corinthians 4:18

4. What benefits of trusting God are found in Proverbs 30:5?

5. How does God encourage us to trust Him to meet our needs in the following areas?

a. When facing temptation: 1 Corinthians 10:13

b. When we are fearful: Isaiah 41:10

c. When we are anxious: Matthew 6:31-34

d. When we feel inadequate: 2 Corinthians 9:8

e. When we are tired and discouraged: Matthew 11:28-30

Optional:

f. When we fail: Psalm 37:24

g. When we need strength: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

h. When we need courage: Joshua 1:9

i. When we need stability: Psalm 40:1-3

j. When we need peace: John 14:27

6. a. What is integral to trusting God, according to Philippians 4:6?

b. What is the result, according to Philippians 4:7?

S U M M A R Y

7. a. Where do you need to trust God right now?
- b. What principles or promises from this study apply to your situation today?
8. Is there anywhere you are placing trust besides God? Are there any decisions you would like to make in this regard?
9. Is there something you need to put on the altar in order to fully trust God? How does Abraham's story encourage you?

LESSON 6 NOTES

1 *God tested Abraham's faith.* Abraham was tested, not tempted, for God does not tempt according to James 1:13. Satan tempts us (1 Corinthians 7:5b) in order to make us fall; God tests us in order to affirm our faith or prove our commitment. The desired outcome is that we find God faithful, draw closer to Him, and experience Him more deeply as our greatest comrade in life and eternity.

2 *picture of the "lamb of God" to come.* The resemblances between Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac and God's sacrifice of His Son are many. Mount Moriah is even located near Calvary where Jesus Christ was sacrificed for the sins of the world (see John 3:16; 2 Chronicles 3:1).

3 *field Abraham purchased in Canaan.* This historic event marks the first actual possession of land in Canaan by an Israelite.

Lesson 7

REBEKAH

Genesis 24:1-25:11

Abraham was 140 years old, and God blessed him in every way. The people of the area called him a “mighty prince;” and he was held in high esteem by all. Abraham had become very wealthy. He gave generous gifts to the children of Keturah, his second wife, and to his son Ishmael. But Abraham's son Isaac would be the sole heir of Abraham’s great estate. More importantly, Isaac was the heir to God's promises that had directed Abraham’s life for the past 70 years (12:1-3;17:19).

But Isaac at 40 was still not married. In light of his spiritual heritage, Abraham was concerned that Isaac find a wife from his own people, rather than from Canaan.¹ With a solemn oath,² Abraham's chief servant was commissioned to travel several hundred miles northeast to the Euphrates River valley where his brother Nahor’s family lived and find a wife for Isaac. Abraham believed the Lord would send an angel ahead of his servant to give him success in his mission.

After the long journey, the servant stopped at a well and prayed fervently for the leading and provision of God. Before he finished praying, Rebekah, a beautiful young girl, approached and served him by offering him a drink and watering his camels. As he interacted with her, he found her to be the granddaughter of Abraham’s brother Nahor, Isaac’s second cousin. Through a series of events and interactions with the family, everyone realized that it was the Lord's will for Rebekah to marry Isaac. She journeyed back with Eliezer and the entourage to become Isaac’s wife. Isaac loved her.

Genesis 25 briefly tells of Abraham’s second wife, or concubine,³ Keturah, who had six sons. At the age of 175, outliving Sarah by almost half a century, Abraham died, and Isaac and Ishmael buried him. His body was placed with Sarah's in the cave of Machpelah in Canaan where Abraham had

purchased a burial place for his family. A man of renowned faith, he would forever be known as “the friend of God.”⁴

Read Genesis 24:1-27.

1. What were Abraham’s main concerns (24:1-9)?

References: Note 1, *instead of [a woman from] Canaan*, and Note 2, *commissioned...chief servant*, p. 100.

2. In 24:12-14, we see the first prayer in the Bible for specific guidance. What did Eliezer ask of God?

3. a. Summarize how God began to answer this man’s prayers (24:15-25).

b. What was the servant’s response (24:26-27)?

Read Genesis 24:28-67.

4. After Abraham’s servant recounted his amazing story (24:33-49), how did Rebekah’s family respond (24:50-53)?

5. What was Rebekah’s part in the decision (24:54-60)?

6. Describe Isaac's reception of Rebekah (24:61-67).

Read Genesis 25:1-11.

7. What does this account say about Abraham's last years?

Reference: Note 3, *concubine*, p. 100.

8. Optional question: How would you sum up Abraham's life in a phrase or sentence?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Knowing God's Will and Prayer

How can we discover God's leading? Abraham and his servant model some principles that can help us to seek godly wisdom and guidance. As we continue our study on *New Beginnings*, let's look at some of biblical principles that instruct us in seeking God's best for our lives.

1. Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything . . . present your requests to God . . ." God encourages us to pray about any situation, great or small.

a. List everyday decisions in which we need God's direction.

b. What are some major decisions which confront us from time to time: personal, family, social, vocational?

c. Why are many of these decisions difficult? Why do we need God's help?

2. In the story of Rebekah, what were the most important elements in seeking God's leading and provision?

3. As we seek God's leading and provision, why should we pray? What do the following suggest?

James 1:5

Matthew 7:7-8

4. Why is it important to seek God's will and provision?

Proverbs 14:12

Proverbs 20:24

Jeremiah 10:23

5. What is outstanding to you about the way Abraham and his servant sought God's will? What motivated them to have the attitudes they did regarding the situation?

Optional question: Abraham's servant had not asked for guidance through miraculous signs but through clear signs in natural circumstances. What part do natural reasoning and circumstances often play in discerning God's leading?

6. a. What counsel should we seek in finding God's will, and why should we seek this counsel?

Proverbs 15:22

Psalm 1:1-3

b. How did Abraham's servant do this?

7. What does God promise the one who seeks His will?

Proverbs 3:5-6

Psalm 32:8

Psalm 48:14

8. What might we pray as we seek God?

Psalm 86:11

Psalm 143:10

9. For Abraham's servant, God's leading and provision were almost instant. But Abraham did not see other promises God had given him fulfilled in his lifetime. If God's provision seems slower in coming than we would like, what should we do according to Psalm 27:13-14?

S U M M A R Y

10. a. What major decision or pressure are you facing right now?

b. What part does prayer play in seeking God's provision or leading in this situation? Have you taken time to pray? What specifically would you ask God for?

11. What two principles from this lesson are most encouraging to you in your circumstances right now?

12. *Optional question:* What is the most important lesson you have learned from studying the life of Abraham?

LESSON 7 NOTES

1 *instead of [a woman from] Canaan.* Noah had prophesied the inevitable outworking of the lascivious tendency in his son Ham (Genesis 9:20-25) especially through his descendant Canaan. Canaan's descendants occupied Palestine (10:15-19) before Israel's conquest documented in the book of Joshua.

"*The Canaanites* were enslaved by one of the most terrible and degrading forms of idolatry, which encouraged their immorality. Discovered in 1929-37, Canaanite religious literature from Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit in North Syria) reveals the worship of the immoral gods El and Baal and the sacred courtesans Anath, Asherah and Astarte. This literature fully corroborates the Old Testament notices of the religious debauchery and moral degradation of the Canaanites. Cult objects, figurines and literature combine to show how sex-centered was Canaanite religion, with human sacrifice (especially infant), cult of serpents, sacred courtesans and eunuch priests excessively common. The sordid depths of social degradation to which the erotic aspects of Canaanite cults led can scarcely be imagined." Merrill Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 51.

2 *commissioned...chief servant.* Placing a hand on or under the thigh (a symbol of the reproductive organs) in Genesis 24:2 when taking an oath in connection with the last wishes of a superior symbolizes an involvement of posterity in the results of the agreement. The continuance of Abraham's godly line through Isaac depended on his servant's keeping of the oath. The *chief servant* of Abraham is thought to be Eliezer (15:2)

3 A *concubine* was a woman lawfully married to a man in a relation inferior to that of the regular wife. In Abraham's times, the immediate cause of concubinage was the barrenness of the lawful wife. No moral stigma was attached to being a concubine. It was a natural part of a polygamous social system. A concubine had no authority in the family or household affairs, and their husbands could send them away with a gift, as well as send their children away with a gift, to exclude them from the inheritance (Genesis 25:6). Prominent Old Testament figures who had concubines were Nahor, Abraham, Jacob, Eliphaz, Gideon, Saul, David, Solomon, Caleb. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 180.

Although polygamy was practiced by godly men in ancient times, it was a cultural compromise. Monogamy was God's divine intention (Genesis 2:23-24).

4 *Abraham... "the friend of God,"* Isaiah 41:8; 2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23b.

Lesson 8

JACOB AND ESAU

Genesis 25:19-27:40

Isaac prayed for Rebekah, and after 20 years of barrenness, she became pregnant. It was a difficult pregnancy, and she prayed about the jostling going on inside. The Lord informed her that the twins she would have would father two nations, and the older son would serve the younger.

When the boys were born, Esau came out red and hairy, and Jacob followed hanging on to his brother's ankle. As they grew, the boys became very different. Esau loved to hunt, and Isaac, who liked the taste of wild game, favored Esau. Jacob was quiet and stayed closer to home. He became Rebekah's favorite.

One day, Esau came in famished, and flippantly, but under oath, sold his birthright¹ to Jacob in exchange for some bread and lentil stew. Since the promises of God that Isaac had inherited from Abraham were at the heart of the birthright, Esau's attitude showed that he was godless.² Esau did not care about God's purpose to bless the world through Abraham's offspring. As God had informed Rebekah, Jacob would naturally have been the one to inherit the birthright and carry out the spiritual purposes of the family.

Things became complicated when Isaac's and Rebekah's favoritisms got in the way of waiting for God to work out His plans in His own way. Isaac, while knowing Esau's heart attitude toward God and the prediction given Rebekah, insisted on giving the spiritual blessing³ to Esau. Rebekah overheard as her husband told Esau to go to the field to kill fresh game for a special meal before Isaac gave Esau the family blessing. Immediately, Rebekah contrived a plan whereby her favorite son, Jacob, would fool Isaac

into thinking he was really Esau.⁴ The plan worked, and Isaac unknowingly gave the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau.

When Esau came home and the truth became known, he wept and begged his father to bless him, too. Although Esau was ignorant of the sacredness of the blessing, he regretted missing its advantages. Esau hated Jacob for robbing him of both his birthright and his father's blessing, and from that point on his relationship with his mother could not have been good. The story continues in our next lesson.

Genesis 26 recounts three other significant happenings. First, Isaac tried to duplicate his father, Abraham's, scheme of protection in foreign lands. To protect his life, Isaac did as Abraham had done; he told the Canaanite king that Rebekah was really his sister. As with Abraham, God once again intervened to bring protection to the chosen family line.

The second event of Chapter 26 is God's encounter with Isaac to give him the promise of his father Abraham. Isaac responded with worship, the first personal response to God recorded about this patriarch.

The last part of Chapter 26 records the problems Isaac had with the surrounding farmers' jealousy of Isaac's prosperity. They continuously either stopped up or claimed Isaac's water wells. Isaac finally found relief as he settled near the well at Beersheba.

Read Genesis 25:19-34.

1. What problems did Isaac and Rebekah have with the birth of Esau and Jacob (25:19-24)?

2. What does Genesis 25:25-34 tell us about these two sons?

3. Esau despised his birthright (which gave him the greatest part of the inheritance and the headship of the family). He gave up something spiritually valuable for something of comparatively little value. How is this a common human error?

Reference: Note 1, *birthright*, p. 108.

Read Genesis 26.

4. How did Isaac follow in his father's footsteps (26:1-11; see also Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18)? What principle of parenting do you see here?

5. What promises did God give Isaac (26:2-5, 23-25)?

Read Genesis 27:1-40

6. How did the parental partiality of Genesis 25:28 work itself out (27:1-17)?

7. What blessing did Jacob receive, and how did he obtain it (27:18-29)?

Reference: Note 3, Blessing, and Note 4, *Jacob...selfish interest*, p. 108.

8. What was Esau's reaction (27:38-40)? What prediction did Isaac make?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Building Love: Overcoming Prejudices

Sibling rivalry is common, but add to it parental partiality and the struggle can destroy the family. Isaac and Rebekah's story began with the joyful birth of twins. However, because of insensitivity toward God's leading in raising their sons, Isaac and Rebekah followed their own prejudices and ended up in a web of deceit, malice, and shattered family relationships.

If we are to create and enjoy an environment of love around our lives, we must guard against natural prejudices and favoritisms. Let's observe some guidelines that the Bible offers on the subject of building love by overcoming prejudices.

1. What do you observe about the prejudices or partiality in this story?

2. Why do prejudices cause tension and discourage good relationships?

3. What motivates prejudice and favoritism in our families, workplace and friendships?

4. a. What do the following tell us about God's character regarding partiality?

Romans 2:11

Acts 10:34-35

2 Chronicles 19:7

Job 34:19

b. What was said about Jesus, whom Hebrews 1:3 describes as "the exact representation" of God's character?

Mark 12:14a

5. What does God care about according to 1 Samuel 16:7?

6. What do the following tell us about God's perspective on partiality?

James 2:1,4

Leviticus 19:15

1 Timothy 5:21

7. What biblical principles related to love can help us rise above prejudice?

1 Peter 4:8

1 John 4:20-21

Romans 13:8

8. What other biblical principles have the power to neutralize prejudice?

Colossians 3:13

Luke 6:37

Deuteronomy 25:15

Proverbs 24:17

9. When we invite Christ to come into our lives, His Spirit comes to dwell within us. What specific fruits of the Holy Spirit help us overcome prejudice?

Galatians 5:22-23

Reference: Note 6, *Holy Spirit*, p. 36.

S U M M A R Y

10. Children learn what they see. If you have children, what specific prejudices do you *not* want your children to learn from you or others?

11. How has prejudice hurt you or those you love?

12. As a result of this lesson, what prejudices would you have God's Spirit help you overcome?

13. What have you learned from this lesson about prejudice? About building love around you?

LESSON 8 NOTES

1 Birthright. From the beginning of time, it seems that the firstborn son in the family has been given privileges above other family members. This is seen in successions to thrones in kingdoms throughout history. In Israel, God had a special claim on the firstborn. The birthright included a double portion of the inheritance and, in Esau's time, representation of the family before God (priesthood). Because God had allowed Esau to be born first, it was he that would receive the covenant blessings God had promised to Abraham and to his descendants. Although Esau regretted his move to sell his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage, he could not undo the contract he had made under oath. Other examples of loss of birthright: Reuben through sin, Simeon and Levi through violence, all lost birthrights to Judah (Genesis 49:3-10).

2 Esau also married two Canaanite women, as is recorded in Genesis 25:34b; 26:34-35. This further demonstrated his disregard for things of God. See also Note 1, *The Canaanites*, p. 100.

3 Blessing. In Old Testament times, godly men under inspiration bestowed prophetic blessings on their offspring as in Genesis 27:27-29,39,40. Other examples are Jacob in Genesis 49 and Moses in Deuteronomy 33, both giving prophetic statements on the tribes of Israel.

4 Jacob showed only selfish interest in the spiritual treasures as well. Jacob wanted rule over his brother. His name connotes deceiving and supplanting characteristics in this man. God would make Jacob into a godly leader, but it would take years and some hard lessons.

Lesson 9

JACOB IN EXILE

Genesis 27:41-30:24

Jacob had succeeded in securing all of Esau's rights as firstborn, and Esau's frustration and disappointment quickly turned into a determination to kill Jacob as soon as their father died. To protect Jacob, Rebekah urged him to journey several hundred miles northeast to her homeland. Rebekah and Jacob told his father, Isaac, that Jacob was going to find a wife among Rebekah's relatives rather than in Canaan. Isaac blessed Jacob, who left for Paddan Aram with Rebekah's promise to send for him when Esau had cooled off.¹

The first night en route, the Lord visited Jacob in a dream. He promised to protect and bless Jacob, and to bless the world through his descendants as He had promised his grandfather, Abraham (cf. 12:2,3,7). When he awoke, Jacob was in awe that God had so appeared to him. He marked the place with a pillar and named it Bethel, meaning *house of God*. He made a vow that if God would provide for and protect him, and return him to his father's house safely, he would give him a tenth (tithe) of all he received from God.

Upon arriving at a well in Paddan Aram, Jacob met his cousin, Rachel, and instantly fell in love with her. She was the daughter of his mother's brother, Laban. To get Rachel as his wife, he agreed to work seven years for Laban. The time went fast, but Laban pulled off a master deception by having the usual wedding feast for Rachel and Jacob, only to give his eldest daughter, Leah, to Jacob for the consummation. When Jacob discovered this the morning after, Laban's explanation was that it was not the custom to give the youngest daughter in marriage first. He agreed to give Rachel to Jacob, too, after the usual bridal week for Leah was over, and in return for another seven years of work. Jacob, who had been deceptive himself in getting his brother's birthright, had now ironically become the son-in-law of a master deceiver.

Probably because she was not attractive to him as well as because he had been tricked into becoming her husband, Jacob did not love Leah. Rachel, on the other hand, was not able to give Jacob the children that Leah bore him. The women had a vicious competition over who could have the most children, either by maid or by self, in order to gain the most valuable position to Jacob. The naming of their children reflected their bitterness and rivalry toward each other.

Finally, Rachel was able to conceive. She named her son Joseph. Over seven years, Jacob's wives had eleven sons and one daughter: six sons and a daughter by Leah, two sons by her maid Zilpah, one son by Rachel, and two sons by her maid Bilbah.²

Understandably, Jacob longed to escape Laban and return to his homeland. However, Laban schemed to keep Jacob longer. Through it all, God's promised protection and provision for Jacob were unailing.

Read Genesis 27:41-28:9.

1. What plan did Rebekah design to protect Jacob from Esau's threats (27:41-46)?

Reference: Note 3, *both of you*, p. 115.

2. What encouragement and blessing did Isaac give Jacob before he left (28:1-5)?

Read Genesis 28:10-22.

3. What happened to Jacob at Bethel, and how did he respond to this first encounter with God?

Reference: Note 4, *stairway*, p. 115.

4. Even though Jacob had fallen far short of God's ideal man, what do you observe about God's grace towards him?

Read Genesis 29.

5. After Jacob agreed to work seven years to get Rachel, what trickery did Laban employ (29:14-24)?

Note: It is interesting that blindness played a part in both Laban's scheme here and Jacob's scheme to steal his brother's blessing (cf. Genesis 27).

6. How did Laban and Jacob settle the issue (29:25-30)?

7. What do the names Leah chose for her children tell us about her (29:31-35)?

Read Genesis 30:1-24

8. Describe the relationship between Leah and Rachel.

References: Note 5, *Leah*, Note 6, *mandrakes*, and Note 7, *or I'll die*, p. 115.

9. What suffering might Leah, Rachel and Jacob have experienced?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Building Love: Dealing With Jealousy and Comparison

Jealousy and comparison cover the pages of Jacob's life. Jacob was jealous of Esau; Rebekah was jealous for Jacob; Esau became jealous of Jacob; Leah was jealous of Rachel, then Rachel of Leah; finally, Laban became jealous of Jacob. Rebekah, Esau, Rachel, Leah, Laban, all join Jacob in the parade of victims of jealous thoughts.

We have all seen and perhaps experienced the destructive nature of envy and comparison around us. Jealousy can develop into seething hatred, causing fractured relationships and sometimes even murder. When jealousy is allowed to control a heart, it causes strife in a family, neighborhood or workplace. How can we control this common vice? In this lesson, we will look at what the Bible has to say about jealousy and comparison.

1. What was the result of jealousy and comparison in Jacob's life and family?
2. What results of jealousy have you seen or experienced in your life and relationships?
3. How do coveting and comparison contribute to problems with jealous thoughts?
4. How do the following verses address the issues of coveting and comparison?

Deuteronomy 5:21

Galatians 6:4

5. a. Jealousy often results from a poor self-image. What do these verses say about our worth to God?

Psalm 139:13-18

Luke 12:6-7

b. What difference will this knowledge make in us?

6. Contentment with what we have can counter jealousy in our lives. What instructions are found in the following?

Philippians 4:11

1 Timothy 6:6-8

Hebrews 13:5

7. What wrong focus dominated Isaac's family? What should have been their focus?

8. What warnings do these verses contain about jealousy and comparison?

Proverbs 27:4

James 3:14-16

9. If jealousy has caused a broken relationship, what can we do about it?

a. If we have been at fault?

1 John 1:9

Matthew 5:23-24

b. If we have been hurt?

Colossians 3:13

c. What will be the result?

Proverbs 14:30

S U M M A R Y

10. What important warnings and instructions have you seen regarding jealousy in this lesson?

11. In what relationships would you like to eliminate jealousy? You might want to take time now to ask God for help in these situations, whether in someone else's life or your own.

12. In what areas are you most prone to be envious of others? What encouragement do you find in our study of Jacob?

LESSON 9 NOTES

1 *promise to send for him*. Jacob did not return home for another 20 years. Rebekah and Jacob never saw each other again before her death.

2 **Reference:** Note 3, *concubine*, p. 100. (Part 2, Lesson 7)

3 *both of you* (27:45). Rebekah may have been referring to the loss of Jacob and Isaac, whose death may have seemed imminent, but actually was not. (Isaac outlived Rebekah. He died more than 20 years later at 180 years old; cf. Genesis 35:28-29). Or, Rebekah may have been referring to the loss of both Jacob and Esau, as Esau's murder of his brother would have invoked the laws of blood revenge described in 2 Samuel 14:6-7.

4 *stairway* (28:12). The description is of a stairway at the top of which Jacob saw the Lord, with angels ascending and descending on the steps below Him.

5 *Leah*, although unloved, was given the privilege of being the mother of Levi, whose descendants eventually had the honor of being the priests of Israel. Her son Judah's descendants included King David and his royal line, and ultimately, Jesus Christ.

6 *mandrakes* (30:14). Rachel wanted the mandrakes because they have a root shaped like the lower parts of the body, and were superstitiously believed to aid fertility when eaten. Her statement about God's taking away her disgrace in 30:23 referred to the assumption of the day that inability to conceive was correlated with divine displeasure. Overall biblical doctrine does not support this rule of thinking.

7 *or I'll die* (30:1). Rachel's statements in Genesis 30:1,24 were sad predictions of her death in childbirth in Genesis 35:16-19.

Lesson 10

JACOB AND LABAN

Genesis 30:25-31:55

Although Jacob longed to go home, his father-in-law, Laban, had managed to keep him in Paddan Aram and impoverished. In fact, Laban did not want Jacob to leave because he had learned through a fortune teller that his own prosperity was the result of God's favor towards Jacob. To persuade him to stay longer, Laban asked Jacob to name his wages.

Jacob requested the off-colored animals which Laban's flocks produced as compensation. Laban readily agreed, and *that day*, while Jacob was working, Laban took every such animal out of his herds. He removed them to a safe distance and put them under the care of his sons. This low trick gave Jacob almost nothing with which to start his earnings.

In response, Jacob employed superstitious schemes having to do with prenatal influence and selective breeding in an effort to build his estate. In the end, however, the off-colored animals which the herds produced were so strong and numerous that only God could have been responsible.

Jacob's prosperity provoked the growing hostility of Laban and his sons, and in a dream, the Lord informed Jacob that it was time to return to his homeland. When Jacob told Leah and Rachel of the dream, they readily agreed to the move. They had long since lost respect for their father, who had charged Jacob 14 years of work for them, as well as deprived them of their rightful bridal inheritance.

So Jacob proceeded to leave Laban's territory without telling him. To add to her father's fury, Rachel stole the household gods¹ as she left.

When Laban discovered these things, he and his relatives pursued Jacob and his party 300 miles, overtaking them in the hill country of Gilead. However, during the journey God warned Laban in a dream not to speak “either good or bad” to Jacob. This was so much as to say, “Don’t say anything.”²

While his dream persuaded Laban not to harm Jacob, he still took the opportunity to complain. Why was there no “farewell party,” and who stole his household gods? After a futile search for the gods that Rachel had well-hidden in her camel saddle, both men aired their feelings. Jacob recalled Laban’s unreasonable treatment over the past 20 years and gave God credit for his own prosperity in spite of the impossible circumstances. Laban, in his usual foul logic, said that everything—daughters, grandchildren and flocks—was rightfully his. Even so, he stated, he couldn’t stop them from going (especially with the warning from God).

The two men then made a covenant, inviting the Lord to judge between them and promising never to harm the other. After a final meal and night together, Laban kissed and blessed his daughters and grandchildren and returned home.

Jacob was finally free of Laban and heading for home at last. Only one obstacle remained: meeting his brother Esau.

Read Genesis 30:25-43.

1. What were the desires and motivations of Laban and Jacob (30:25-30)?

2. How did Jacob ask to be paid (30:31-33)?

3. How did Laban deceive Jacob (30:34-36)?

4. What scheming did Jacob do (30:37-43)? From where did Jacob's prosperity really come (31:9)?

Read Genesis 31:1-21.

5. a. What developments caused Jacob to approach Leah and Rachel about leaving (31:1-13)?

b. What was their response (31:14-21)?

Reference: Note 1, *household gods*, p. 122.

Read Genesis 31:22-55.

6. Describe the two sides of the argument between Laban and Jacob.

Laban (31:26-30)

Reference: Note 2, *not to say anything*, p. 122.

Jacob (31:31-42)

7. How did Laban and Jacob settle the issues (31:43-55)?

Reference: Note 3, *Jacob's oath*, p. 122.

8. How did God bless Jacob in spite of Laban's mistreatment?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Dealing With Resentment

Few of us escape having at least one person in our lives who treats us with injustice while claiming integrity. Such behavior can be the most exasperating to deal with, and resentment is almost invariably our response.

Though resentment can seem our just due, this little attitude feeds unhealthy emotions and actions. As in the story of Laban and Jacob, resentment can and should be brought to an end. As we continue our study of *New Beginnings*, we will observe keys to successfully coping with resentment.

1. How did Jacob respond to Laban's low trick of removing all the animals which could start Jacob's flocks (wages)?

2. Jacob's deceitful response did not accomplish anything that God was not already going to bring about in an even greater way for Jacob. What does this tell us about responding to unfair treatment?

3. What finally brought an end to the differences between Laban and Jacob? What healthy components of resolving issues are seen in their resolution?

4. If we are faithful to God, what provision does He promise, regardless of the ill treatment of those around us?

Isaiah 41:10

Isaiah 46:4

Proverbs 2:8

5. What does 1 Peter 5:7 encourage us to do that can help us rise above resentment?

6. What do the following say about some common responses to resentment?

a. Judging

Romans 14:13

1 Corinthians 4:5

b. Hatred

Leviticus 19:17

1 John 2:9-11

Proverbs 10:12

c. Slander

Ephesians 4:29-30

James 1:26

Proverbs 13:3

7. What, in your opinion, is the most freeing position to take with difficult people in our lives?

8. What was Christ's response to unfair treatment according to the following?

Luke 23:34a

1 Peter 2:23

9. If we make the unnatural choices to forgive and pray for the one who has treated us unreasonably, what is the outcome in our lives?

S U M M A R Y

10. What stands out to you from the story of Laban and Jacob and from our study on resentment?

11. What by-product of resentment is the most challenging for you to fight? (Refer to Building Question 6.)

12. Is there a situation in your life or the life of a close friend that you would like God's help with today? How would you like Him to help?

Consider your answer a prayer.

LESSON 10 NOTES

1 *household gods* (31:19). The possession of the *teraphim*, or household deities, implied family leadership. "In the case of a married daughter, they assured the husband the right to the property of her father. Since Laban evidently had sons of his own when Jacob left for Canaan, they alone had the right to their father's gods. Accordingly, Rachel's stealing the teraphim was a serious offense aimed at preserving for her husband the chief title to Laban's estate." Merrill Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 75.

2 *not to say anything...good or bad* (31:29). When Laban was instructed by God in the dream not to speak "either good or bad" to Jacob, it meant "don't say anything" because opposites are frequently used in the Bible to indicate totality. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 34.

3 *Jacob's oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac* (31:53) possibly uses *fear* as a surrogate word for God. It is also possible that the Hebrew for the word *fear* means "Kinsman," stressing the intimacy of God's relationship to Isaac. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 54.

Lesson 11

JACOB MEETS ESAU

Genesis 32-33

It had been 20 years since Jacob left his homeland in Canaan, alone and empty-handed, fleeing from the hostility of his older twin brother, Esau. Jacob had schemed to take all his brother's rights as firstborn away from him, and Esau had planned to kill Jacob as soon as their father died. Jacob fled to Rebekah's homeland 300-400 miles northeast, hoping to find safety and a wife among his mother's family.

Upon returning to Canaan, he was the husband of not one, but two wives and two concubines, all of whom, with the exception of Rachel, he had not wanted. He had eleven sons and one daughter, and, because of God's blessing, he had become very wealthy.

He left the hostile region of his father-in-law, Laban, at peace with his wives' family. However, now he had to face what he assumed would be a hostile brother who had driven him away 20 years earlier.

When he initially left Canaan, the Lord and His angels appeared to Jacob to promise God's safekeeping and blessing on his sojourn in Aram (28:12-15). As Jacob traveled home, angels once again met the patriarch with the promise of God's protection. Encouraged by this encounter, Jacob sent messengers to tell Esau that he was coming, only to receive word that Esau was headed toward him with 400 men. In spite of God's promise, Jacob became fearful and distressed. He arranged to protect his family as much as possible, prayed fervently for God's help, and set aside huge gifts of livestock for Esau. Jacob's herdsmen went ahead of Jacob and his family in hopes that the offering might appease Esau and soften his heart.

After sending everyone else across the river, Jacob spent the night wrestling with a man who renamed Jacob *Israel*, and crippled him in the hip joint. The man would give no name but said, “You have struggled with God and with man and have overcome” (32:28). He blessed Jacob as he left at daybreak, and Jacob recognized his encounter to have been with God Himself.¹

Jacob and Esau met, and separated, in peace.² Esau *ran* to meet Jacob, and embraced him with kisses and tears. After meeting Jacob’s family, and, at Jacob’s insistence, taking the livestock gifts, Esau offered to accompany Jacob until he got home. Jacob encouraged his brother not to be bothered with the slow trip with all the women and children, and promised to come to Esau’s home in Seir. With that, Esau started toward home that day. Jacob never went to Seir,³ but instead bought some land for his tent outside of the Canaanite city of Shechem.

Jacob had learned about working with God through a struggle. Even so, greater challenges awaited him with his children, who had learned the art of deceit.

Read Genesis 32:1-23.

1. What was Jacob’s first experience after leaving Laban, and of what would this remind him (32:1-2;28:12-15)?

Reference: Note 4, *the camp of God*, p. 130.

2. What attitudes characterized Jacob in his approach to Esau and God (32:3-7,9-12)?

3. a. How did Jacob pray at this crisis point (32:9-12)?

b. What is exemplary about Jacob's prayer?

4. How did Jacob prepare to meet Esau (32:13-23)?

Read 32:24-32.

5. What did Jacob's wrestling match with the unknown being show about him (32:24-32)?

6. How were Jacob and his descendants forever affected by this struggle (32:28,30-31)?

Reference: Note 1, *God came to Jacob*, p. 130.

Read Genesis 33:1-16.

7. Esau had obviously forgiven Jacob completely. What results of forgiveness are evident in Esau's reunion with Jacob?

8. How did Jacob model reconciliation with someone wronged?

Reference: Note 2, *Jacob's bowing*, and Note 3, *Jacob never went to Seir*, p. 130.

Read Genesis 33:17-20.

9. What is the first thing Jacob did after settling near Shechem (33:20)?
What brought him to a worshipful level of spirituality?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Dealing with Stress

All of us can relate to the desperate feelings that Jacob experienced as he prepared to face Esau again. The encounter could have spelled disaster for him and his family.

Many of our stresses are small daily ones. Sometimes, however, they are life-threatening. Regardless, we can learn from the story in our lesson today, as well as from other biblical sources, about how to work through stress successfully.

1. a. What natural stresses are involved in daily living?

b. What are some severe stresses that come into our lives periodically?

2. What effects can stress have on:

Our physical well-being?

Our emotions?

Our spiritual life?

3. How did Jacob deal with stress in this story?

4. a. Esau's forgiveness and Jacob's humility before one wronged relieved the stress in their relationship. How might forgiveness or asking forgiveness play a major role in stress relief?

b. How does God give us security and freedom from guilt in our relationship with Him?

Micah 7:18

Psalms 103:8, 11-14

Ephesians 1:3,7

5. How does God's forgiveness help us to forgive or to have the courage to ask forgiveness as Jacob did?

6. How does prayer relieve stress according to the following?

Philippians 4:6-7

James 1:5

7. Slowing down to relax can help us deal with stress. How do the following encourage us to make rest a priority?

Exodus 34:21

Mark 6:31

Psalm 127:2

8. What are the stress producers addressed in these verses, and what are the biblical principles that bring relief?

Proverbs 17:9

Proverbs 17:14;20:3

Proverbs 22:24

Proverbs 28:25

Proverbs 29:11

Proverbs 29:25

9. What *absolute statements* are made in the following verses that relieve stress?

Proverbs 3:5-6

1 Peter 5:7

S U M M A R Y

10. What, if any, are the greatest sources of stress on you today?

11. What actions on your part might be helpful in dealing with the stress(es) you are facing?

12. a. What grounds for hope in the midst of stress do you see from the story of Jacob and Esau?

b. Claim this hope for your own situation.

LESSON 11 NOTES

1 *God came to Jacob* in such a form that he could wrestle with him, but he showed Jacob that he could disable him at will when he touched his hip and crippled him. As he changed Jacob's name, meaning *supplanter*, to Israel, meaning *he struggles with God*, the nation of Israel was given her name. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 56.

In this wrestling match, Jacob realized his own weakness and the superiority of God. When he finally yielded, he became a new man, who could receive God's blessings and assume his place in God's plan as a God-governed man instead of an unscrupulous supplanter. It was a turning point in Jacob's life, one which his limp would remind him of. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 36.

2 *Jacob's bowing to the ground seven times* was symbolic of total submission, documented also in texts found at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt and dating to the 14th century B.C. *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 56.

Evidently God had so blessed Esau that he no longer held a grudge against Jacob (33:8,9).

3 *Jacob never went to Esau's home in Seir* as he promised. Some commentators attribute Jacob's never fulfilling as yet another example of Jacob's deceitfulness. Others think he may have been reluctant to fully trust Esau in spite of their reconciliation.

4 *the camp of God* (32:2). Jacob named the place where the angels assured him of God's protection *Mahanaim*, meaning *two camps*. This name described an inner camp, made up of Jacob's group, and an outer company, made up of the messengers, or angels, of God. The circle of protection around Jacob and his family is a beautiful picture of the security and protection of God around each believer. *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 35.

Lesson 12

MORE ABOUT JACOB

Genesis 34-36

Although God had blessed Jacob and his family, their heritage was filled with deception on the part of Jacob, Rebekah and Laban. It is not surprising that deceit would emerge in Jacob's children. Genesis 34 records a horrible illustration of the predominant family weakness in action.

Rather than keep his promise to travel to Esau's home at Seir, Jacob settled near the Canaanite city of Shechem. Jacob and Leah's daughter, Dinah, was beautiful. Consequently, when she made a visit to the nearby city of Shechem, the son of the ruler there fell desperately in love with her. He forced Dinah to have sexual relations with him, an act which was, in Israelite terms, an outrage against the honor of Jacob's family.

Hamor, the young man's father, asked that the girl become his son's bride at any price, and welcomed intermarriage with Jacob's family. The marriage agreement required that all the men in Shechem be circumcised.

On the third day while the men of Shechem were still recovering from the circumcision, Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi killed every man in the city, then seized their families and possessions. It was an incredible act of violence for God's people to commit. Jacob's sons had acted like cruel pagans before the people of the land. Jacob rebuked them and prepared to move, having now become odious to his neighbors.

God commanded Jacob to return to Bethel and build an altar there to the Lord. Jacob had his household rid themselves of all foreign gods, purify themselves, and prepare to return to Bethel where God met with the

patriarch many years before. There Jacob built an altar and worshiped. God once again affirmed his promises to build a nation from Jacob's descendants and give them the land of Canaan.

Bethel marked a turning point in Jacob's life. Rachel died while giving birth to Jacob's youngest son, Benjamin. She was buried near Bethlehem. After this, Reuben slept with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah, which cost him his birthright as the eldest son.¹ Then, after Jacob returned to Hebron where he had grown up, his aged father Isaac died, and together Esau and Jacob buried him.

The focus of the story now turns from Jacob to his sons, whose descendants were to become the twelve tribes of Israel.²

Read Genesis 34:1-12.

1. What transpired between Dinah and Shechem (34:1-4)?

2. What did Shechem and his father try to do about the situation (34:5-12)?

Read Genesis 34:13-31.

3. a. How did Jacob's sons act deceitfully (34:13-29)?

- b. What was Jacob's rebuke and his son's reply (34:30-31)?

Read Genesis 35:1-15.

4. a. What did Jacob do before moving his family to Bethel (35:1-7)?

b. How were they protected as they traveled (35:5)?

5. a. Jacob's return to Bethel was a turning point in his life. What promise did God reiterate to Jacob (35:9-12; cf. 28:13-15; 32:28)?

b. How might Jacob have viewed God and His Word in a different light than he had in his youth?

Read Genesis 35:16-29.

6. What sad events in Jacob's life are recorded in Genesis 35:16-29?

References: Note 1, *Reuben...slept with Bilhah*, and Note 2, *twelve tribes of Israel*, p. 137.

7. What does Genesis 35:29 and 36:6-8 reveal about Jacob and Esau's relationship?

4. How does total commitment to God strengthen us as we face disappointment and loss? What do the following suggest?

Psalm 62:5-8

Proverbs 2:7-8

1 Timothy 4:8

5. Where is God when disappointments and losses come?

Psalm 34:4,18

6. What is God able to do with the disappointments and losses of our lives?

Romans 8:28

2 Corinthians 1:4

7. What does the Lord promise as we cope with daily disappointments?

2 Corinthians 9:8

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

8. If we are dealing with depression caused by a loss, what promise for the future do these verses give?

Psalm 40:1-3

1 Peter 5:10

9. What hope do we have in facing death when we are committed to Christ?

Proverbs 14:32

John 11:25

S U M M A R Y

10. What disappointment or loss are you facing right now?

11. What strength and comfort can be found in commitment to Christ? Have you asked Him for His strength and comfort in your situation?

12. What truths about God's redeeming and patient love are demonstrated in His dealings with Jacob?

LESSON 12 NOTES

1 *Reuben...slept with Bilhah* (Genesis 35:22). Reuben was arrogantly and prematurely claiming his right as firstborn to inherit his father's concubines. This act cost him his birthright as Joseph, through his two sons, received the double portion of the firstborn (Genesis 49:3-4;

1 Chronicles 5:1). See also Note 3, *concubine*, p. 100.

2 *twelve tribes of Israel*. Jacob's polygamous family, with many shameful things to their credit, was accepted by God, as a whole, to be the beginning of the twelve tribes of Israel. That nation would produce the Messiah, the Savior who would bless the world. This shows:

- a. That God uses human beings as they are, to serve His purposes, and, so to speak, does the best He can with the material He has to work with.
- b. It is no indication that everyone that God in this way uses will qualify for eternal life on the day of judgment (Romans 1:16,17; 2:12-16).
- c. It is a testimony to the truthfulness of Bible writers. No other book narrates with such utter candor the weaknesses of its heroes, and things so contrary to ideals that it aims to promote. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 104.

PART 3

BEGINNINGS IN EGYPT

Part 2 of our study ended with Jacob again living in Canaan. God had given him twelve sons, great wealth and a new name: Israel. His sons would become the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

The focus of Part 3 is on Jacob's sons and particularly on Joseph. As Moses, the author of Genesis, continued to explain the Israelite heritage to those who had come through the exodus from slavery in Egypt, Joseph's experience was pivotal. Through his story, they would come to understand exactly how and why Jacob and his sons began their difficult sojourn in Egypt.

Although not mentioned as much as in earlier Genesis accounts, the hand of God is clearly seen in the historical drama of Genesis 37-50. As He sovereignly worked to save Jacob's offspring from famine, He also accomplished the task of reuniting them as a family. It is one of the most moving documentaries in the Bible.

Lesson 1

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

Genesis 37-38

As each of his parents had done, Jacob demonstrated open favoritism toward one of his children. The favored son was Joseph, the older son of Rachel. Jacob made Joseph a beautiful robe that announced his partiality to everyone in the family. Adding insult to injury, Joseph flaunted two prophetic dreams he had experienced in which the entire family bowed down to him. Furthermore, Joseph was a "good" boy, obedient, honest and dependable. It is not surprising that many of his eleven brothers, two of which were brutal enough to massacre an entire town of innocent men (Genesis 34), were ready to kill Joseph, too.

One day Jacob sent Joseph, only 17 years old, to check on his brothers in the fields. When he finally reached them near Dothan, they had seen him coming and plotted his death. Reuben tried to save Joseph by suggesting that they put him in a cistern, hoping to return later and rescue him. Judah, also trying to save Joseph, finally convinced his brothers to sell Joseph as a slave to a passing caravan en route to Egypt.

With this, Joseph found himself in the company of Ishmaelites (distant cousins) and soon became a slave in the Egyptian family of Potiphar. Back at home, Reuben (who as eldest was responsible for Joseph) and his brothers faced their father with Joseph's coat smeared with goat's blood. They told a tale that broke their father's heart and once again duplicated the deceit of Jacob in his youth.¹

The story of this rowdy bunch continues as Judah chose to leave home and marry a pagan Canaanite woman. They had three sons, two of which, Er and Onan, died without leaving children. As was the levirate marriage custom,² Judah promised Tamar, the wife of Er and then Onan, that she could marry his third son, Shelah, when he became old enough.

With time, however, it became evident that Judah did not intend to keep his promise to give Shelah to Tamar. Desperate to obtain offspring, Tamar posed as a Canaanite religious prostitute and tricked Judah into having relations with her. Now Tamar was still considered part of Judah's family,

and when he learned of her pregnancy, he ordered her death. He retracted the sentence, however, when she produced evidence that he was the father. Tamar had twins, who continued Judah's line.³

In our next lesson, we will resume following Joseph and his experiences in Egypt.

Read Genesis 37:1-11.

1. What caused trouble between Joseph and his brothers (37:1-4)?
2. What further aggravated the problems (37:5-11)?

Read Genesis 37:12-36.

3. What happened as Joseph approached his brothers in the field (37:12-22)?
4. What saved Joseph's life (37:26-28)?
5. a. How did the brothers report to their father about Joseph's disappearance (37:29-35)?

b. Favoritism, arrogance, and envy had fractured Jacob's family. Where did Joseph find himself as a result (37:36)?

Read Genesis 38:1-11

6. What did Judah choose to do, and what resulted (38:1-5)?

7. After the death of both sons, Judah did not intend to give Shelah to Tamar in marriage, too. Even though Tamar was now considered permanently a part of Judah's family, what did he instruct her to do (38:11)?

Reference: Note 2, *levirate marriage*, p. 146.

Read Genesis 38:12-23.

8. Realizing Judah had no intention of keeping his promise, how did Tamar arrange to obtain children (38:13-18)?

Read Genesis 38:24-30.

9. a. How would you describe Judah's response to Tamar's pregnancy (38:24)?

b. How did his response change (38:25-26)?

c. To whom did Tamar and Judah give birth (38:27-30)?

Reference: Note 3, *Perez*, p. 146.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Handling Broken Relationships

Jacob's favoritism, Joseph's insensitivity, and his brothers' jealousy worked together to shatter this family. Deceit also breaks the strongest relationship bonds, and so the brothers lived with their lie to their father.

One of the most difficult things we can experience is a close relationship that is somehow broken. Thus far in our study, we have looked at many biblical principles related to building healthy relationships. In our lesson today, we will make a broad sweep of many of these principles as we discover some causes of broken relationships, and how to handle broken relationships with integrity.

1. List some causes of broken relationships we have already seen in Genesis. (*a.-c. optional*).

a. Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16:1-6)

b. Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27:34-41)

c. Rachel and Leah (Genesis 29:30-35;30:1)

d. Joseph and brothers (Genesis 37:3-4,8,11)

2. What would you say are the foundational causes of broken relationships?

3. What do you think are the main ingredients necessary for the healing of broken relationships?

4. a. Pride can be a major factor in broken relationships. The biblical definition of pride involves conceit, arrogance, a sense of superiority, and boasting. What warnings against pride are found in the following?

Proverbs 16:18

Isaiah 5:21

John 5:44

b. How do you see the truths of James 3:13-16 illustrated in the story of Joseph and his family?

5. a. What role does humility play in resolving conflict?

b. What do these verses say about humility as a strength?

Proverbs 11:2

Proverbs 13:10

Proverbs 15:33

6. What is characteristic of the integrity needed in mending broken relationships?

Philippians 2:3-4

Matthew 7:12

Romans 12:16-21

7. What else can help us reconcile our hurt feelings?

Colossians 3:12-14

8. In the midst of hurt and conflict, it is sometimes hard to discern true wisdom. How is wisdom described in the following verses?

James 3:17-18

Proverbs 18:2

9. If we have sought to reconcile a broken relationship and not succeeded, what is the healthy response and why?

1 Peter 3:9-13

10. As we will see in Joseph's life, the broken relationships with his family continued. But God was with him as he made the best of his situation. If we have opened our lives to Christ, of what can we always be sure?

Romans 8:38-39

S U M M A R Y

11. What attitudes can lead to broken relationships?

12. What principles do you feel are most important in handling broken relationships?

13. a. Is there a relationship in your life that you would like to heal, or a person you would like to develop a healthier attitude toward?

b. What principles from our lesson offer you the most help in dealing with this situation?

14. If you feel you have been at fault in some way in a broken relationship, you might want to take a moment now to ask God's forgiveness and His help in possible reconciliation.

LESSON 1 NOTES

1 *deceit of Jacob's youth.* Jacob and Rebekah had also used the meat and skin of a goat to deceive Isaac (Genesis 27:9,16).

2 *levirate marriage custom.* Tamar's experience exemplified the law of the levirate marriage custom of the day described in Deuteronomy 25:5-6. A deceased man's brother or nearest male kin was required to marry his brother's widow and continue the family lineage *in his brother's name*. Onan's failure to follow this custom was a refusal to allow the family line to continue through his brother. Onan's action jeopardized God's plans for the nation of Israel (the Messiah was to come from the line of Judah) and resulted in Onan's death. Even though the deaths of Er and Onan resulted from evil actions and God's judgment, Judah may have been afraid that somehow Tamar was the reason. Thus he would fear giving his youngest son Shelah in marriage to Tamar lest he die, too.

3 *Perez.* The redeeming grace of God is seen in the fact that Perez, the twin who continued the line of Judah, was in the line of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1-6). See also Note 2, *twelve tribes of Israel*, p.137.

Lesson 2

JOSEPH IN BONDAGE

Genesis 39-40

While Joseph may have lacked diplomacy in dealing with his brothers, he proved to be one of the Bible's most unblemished characters. He was unusually handsome, exceptionally gifted at leadership, able to make the most of any situation, and steadfastly committed to God. There is much to be learned from Joseph's perseverance, faith, and forgiveness. His life proves that God honors those who honor Him, and that God is sovereign over the worst events in our lives.

In Lesson 1, we saw Joseph kidnapped by his brothers and sold to a passing caravan of Ishmaelites en route to Egypt. He was forced to give up the richly ornamented robe his father had made for him and wear slave clothes in the home of an Egyptian royal official named Potiphar. When it became obvious to Potiphar that the Lord was with Joseph, blessing everything he did, he put Joseph in charge of managing his entire household.

Problems began when Potiphar's wife became obsessed with the desire to sleep with Joseph. Day after day, she approached him, only to be ignored. Joseph explained to her that he could not betray Potiphar's trust, nor could he sin against God in that way.

Nevertheless, one day when no one was in the house, Potiphar's wife begged Joseph to come to her, grabbing his cloak, which he left with her as he fled. In a rage, she called all the servants and tried to lead them

and her husband to believe Joseph had tried to abduct her. Potiphar was enraged at the report but may not have been altogether convinced of its truth because rather than put Joseph to death, he had him confined to one of the better prisons in the area.

In prison, the Lord gave Joseph favor with the warden, who entrusted Joseph with oversight of the whole prison.

After some time, the royal cupbearer¹ and the baker, both of whom had offended Pharaoh, ended up under Joseph's care in the prison. While confined, the cupbearer and the baker both experienced very disturbing dreams. Upon seeing their downcast state, Joseph offered to obtain God's help in interpreting their dreams.² He predicted that the cupbearer would go back to work and that the baker would be hanged. Joseph asked the cupbearer to help get him out of prison when the man returned to his position next to the king.

Joseph's predictions did come to pass, but the cupbearer forgot Joseph's plight in the prison.

Read Genesis 39.

1. What was the first sequence of events in Potiphar's home (39:1-6)?

2. What temptation did Joseph continually face, and how did he deal with it (39:6-12)?

3. How did Potiphar's wife try to get back at Joseph (39:13-20)?

4. What were the similarities between Joseph's experiences in Potiphar's home and in prison (39:20b-23)?

Read Genesis 40.

5. a. Of whom did Joseph find himself in charge while in the prison (40:1-4)?

Reference: Note 1, *cupbearer*, p. 153.

b. What help did Joseph give these men (40:9-19)?

Reference: Note 2, *interpreting their dreams*, p. 153.

6. How did this story end (40:20-23)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Performing Under Pressure

Many of us have faced times when we just “couldn’t seem to win for losing.” Joseph went from the heights of favor in his father’s home to the humiliation of imprisonment, and there was no foreseeable end to the situation.

Joseph’s life depended on his decisions and attitudes in the midst of the pressures. Let’s observe his right choices as well as some biblical principles that direct us in performing under pressure.

1. Name as many pressures as you can--spiritual, physical, and emotional--that Joseph faced.

2. What seemed to be his response:

spiritually?

physically?

emotionally?

3. What was the result of Joseph's responses? Why do you think he kept making the same choices?

4. a. What typical pressures do we have to perform under in our lives today?

b. What wrong choices and negative responses can result from pressure in our lives?

5. In order to receive the Lord's relief under stress, what does He encourage us to do?

Matthew 11:28-30?

6. a. What is another rule Christ encourages us to follow in Matthew 6:34?

b. From your own experience, why is this principle important in relieving stress?

c. What reason did Jesus give for this principle in Matthew 6:27, 31-33?

7. a. When we are under pressure, who must we seek to perform for according to Ephesians 6:7?

b. Why is there hope in this focus, according to Ephesians 6:8?

8. When we feel inadequate to deal with the pressure within our situation or circumstances, what does God promise to give if we ask?

2 Corinthians 12:9

2 Corinthians 9:8

Philippians 4:13

9. What does the Holy Spirit provide in the midst of stressful situations?

Galatians 5:22-23

Romans 8:26-27

Reference: Note 6, *Holy Spirit*, p. 36.

10. a. What positive results can pressure produce in our lives?

Romans 5:3-5

James 1:2-4

b. What leads you to believe that Joseph's character was developing in these ways?

c. How have you seen this in your own life?

11. What is important to remember in the midst of pressure if we have committed our lives to Christ?

Hebrews 13:5b

Psalms 118:6

Romans 8:28

Psalms 37:23-24

S U M M A R Y

12. What positive outcomes of having to perform under pressure have you observed in this lesson?

13. What biblical principles help us to offset the potential negative results of having to perform under pressure?

14. In the pressures you are under now, what biblical truth is most helpful to you?

15. Is there a new way that you want to trust God as you perform under pressure?

LESSON 2 NOTES

1 *The cupbearer* of the king had a prominent position at the king's right hand. This person tasted the king's wine before he drank in order to assure it was not poisoned. He had intimate access to the king and often freedom to speak.

2 *interpreting their dreams.* Egyptians made a popular art of dream interpretation, taking pride in their various systems of interpreting the expression of the gods via dreams. The Lord used dreams to speak to Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and other biblical characters, but only in two cases did He communicate through dreams that needed interpretation to understand. Both incidences involved pagan cultures that were fascinated by dreams: Daniel in Babylon and Joseph in Egypt. Daniel and Joseph both carefully attributed their interpretation to revelations from God, not their own wisdom.

Lesson 3

JOSEPH THE PRIME MINISTER

Genesis 41-42

Joseph had been in prison for some time when he helped the imprisoned cupbearer and baker interpret their dreams. The cupbearer had promised that after his release and reinstatement to position next to the king, he would use his influence to help Joseph. Instead, the cupbearer forgot about him.

Two years later, Pharaoh had a dream that none of his wise men could interpret. The cupbearer then remembered Joseph's incredible ability and recommended him to Pharaoh. Immediately Joseph was taken from the prison, made presentable, and brought before the king.

As with the cupbearer and baker, Joseph gave credit to God for any accurate interpretation he might be able to give Pharaoh. The dream, he declared, was a prediction of seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of severe famine in the land. This warning from God was accompanied by a plan: Joseph recommended that Pharaoh place a wise and discerning man in charge of the land to oversee the storage of food during the period of plenty and the distribution of food during the period of famine.

Pharaoh had observed God's Spirit in Joseph, so he and his officials chose Joseph to be the overseer.¹ Joseph was inaugurated with fanfare, many gifts, an Egyptian name, and a wife named Asenath. He was 30 years old when he became an Egyptian prime minister and had been away from home for 13 years. With his wife Asenath, Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. The famine Joseph had predicted affected not only Egypt but also the entire known world. Countries everywhere came to Egypt to buy corn. So twenty years after Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (37:2;41:46), ten of them

faced Joseph again, now in desperate need of food. Jacob had sent all except Joseph's true brother, Benjamin, to buy grain in Egypt. They bowed down before Joseph, now the most powerful figure in the land of Egypt apart from Pharaoh. He recognized his brothers, but because of his language, dress, and official bearing, his brothers did not recognize him.

Remembering his dreams (Genesis 37:5-9), Joseph devised a plan to test their trustworthiness and to see his younger brother, Benjamin. He accused the men of being spies and held Simeon, traditionally believed to be the cruelest of all the brothers, in prison. He sent the other nine home to get Benjamin as proof that their story was true and that they were not spies.² In their own language, which they did not know Joseph understood, the brothers discussed their remorse over their hostility toward Joseph years before. They felt they were being recompensed for the evil they had done by this difficult turn of events. When he saw their repentant hearts, Joseph turned away to weep. When he came back, he had Simeon bound before them and sent them on their way. As his men were loading the grain purchased by his brothers, Joseph ordered them to put each brother's silver back in his sack.

When they stopped for the night, Joseph's brothers found all the money they had paid for grain and were puzzled and afraid. Upon returning home, they told their father, Jacob, all that had happened with the "lord over the land" in Egypt. Jacob was overwhelmed and refused to let Benjamin go with them³ to retrieve Simeon and obtain additional grain.

Read Genesis 41:1-36.

1. What turn of events allowed Joseph to get out of prison (41:1-14)?

2. What do you learn about Joseph from the interpretation and proposal he gave Pharaoh (41:15-36)?

Read Genesis 41:37-57.

3. a. What were Joseph's new responsibilities as prime minister (41:37-49)?

Reference: Note 1, *in charge of the palace*, p. 161.

b. How had God used Joseph's experiences over the past 13 years to prepare him for his new position?

4. What feelings were reflected in Joseph's naming of his two sons (41:50-52)?

5. What happened over the next 14 years (41:53-57)?

Read Genesis 42.

6. What finally brought about the fulfillment of Joseph's earlier dreams (37:5-8; 42:1-9)?

7. What was Joseph's response to his brothers (42:9-20)?

Reference: Note 2, *spies*, p. 161.

8. What change did Joseph see in his brothers, and what was his response (42:21-24)?

9. What obstacles did Joseph place before these men (42:24-35)?

10. What happened when they returned home that further complicated the situation (42:29-38)?

Reference: Note 3, *Jacob refused to let Benjamin go*, p. 161.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

In the World, Not of It

Although Jacob's twelve sons were split by jealousy and selfishness, God had His hand on them to bless them just as He had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12:2,3; 26:2-5; 28:13-15). Regardless of how they responded to God, they all knew of their calling as His chosen family.

While it is difficult to discern the individual character of many of the brothers, the character of Joseph is becoming clearer as we follow his life in Egypt. Even though his experience in this foreign land seemed hopeless for

many years, he finally began to see the fruits of his faithfulness to God's purposes.

If we have opened our lives to God through Christ, we, as Joseph, are set apart for God's purposes. The biblical word for this concept is *sanctification*. Let's make some observations from Joseph's life regarding how we can successfully pursue God's purposes in the world around us.

1. a. Besides the interpretation of his dream, what do you think impressed Pharaoh about Joseph and led him to believe in the existence of his God?

b. What can the nonbeliever appreciate about a person who has personal faith in God?

c. What characteristics of Joseph's brothers gave a negative testimony about their God to the unbelieving world around them? (See also p. 131 commentary on Genesis 34.)

d. What can we learn from this about our witness as believers?

2. The Bible says believers are *set apart* or *sanctified* for God's high purposes in the world. How are Christians set apart?

Hebrews 10:10

John 17:17

Romans 12:1-2

2 Corinthians 3:18

Galatians 5:22-23

3. a. Power, greed, selfishness, ambition, and pleasure are motivations around us that can stand in opposition to the character qualities by which God sets the believer apart. What disappointments had Joseph suffered because of these worldly motivations?

b. Although sometimes very appealing, what happens in our lives if we submit ourselves to these motivations?

4. What initiates the fulfillment of God's purposes in our lives, and what is our "set apart" status and responsibility?

John 1:12 (*him* refers to Christ)

Matthew 5:13-16

Philippians 2:15

2 Corinthians 5:19-20

5. What further instructions do these verses give about being God's person in the world around us?

1 Peter 3:15

1 Peter 3:3-4

Note: A *gentle and quiet spirit* does not refer to a quiet personality, but to the peaceful spirit inside which comes from fully trusting God.

Colossians 4:5-6

6. What is our source of power to carry out God's purposes?

Acts 1:8

John 15:5

Colossians 1:27b

Reference: Note 6, *Holy Spirit*, p. 36.

S U M M A R Y

10. As you reflect on the life of Joseph in Egypt, what principles of being a witness, set apart for God's purposes, stand out to you?

11. In time, Joseph was greatly rewarded for his faithfulness. How is Joseph's story an encouragement as we seek to remain faithful "in the world, but not of it"? (See also 1 Corinthians 15:58; 1 Peter 5:10.)

12. Where has it been difficult for you to be set apart for God in the world around you?

13. What do you see in Joseph's life as he lived for God in Egypt that you want for your own life today?

14. Have you ever made Romans 12:1-2 a prayer for your life, giving yourself completely to fulfilling God's desires for you? Maybe you would like to establish or reaffirm that commitment right now.

LESSON 3 NOTES

1 *overseer in charge of my palace* (41:40). The Hebrew terminology here signified the title for the person in charge of the royal estate and revenues as well as the prime minister or "ruler over Egypt" (See also Acts 7:10; Psalm 105:21). The prime minister or First Minister reported each morning to the Pharaoh for instructions. "All the affairs of the land passed through his hands, all important documents received his seal, all the officials were under his orders. He really governed in the Pharaoh's name and acted for him in his absence." Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Volume 1: Social Institutions*, pp. 129-130.

2 *you are spies* (42:9). Egypt was constantly vulnerable to its neighbors to the east, so the accusation against them that they came as spies to observe holes in Egypt's walls of defense was a reasonable one.

3 *Jacob refused to let Benjamin go with them*. Jacob had lost Rachel, Joseph's and Benjamin's mother, and thought Joseph also was dead (37:33). Jacob was afraid of losing, Benjamin, too.

Lesson 4

REUNITED FAMILY

Genesis 43:1-45:15

When Jacob and his family had eaten all the grain they bought in Egypt, Jacob instructed his sons to go back to Egypt to buy more food. The men reminded their father that they could not go back without Benjamin, who the governor, alias Joseph, had demanded to see to prove they were not spies. Only when Judah pledged his own life to guarantee the safe return of Benjamin did Jacob finally consent to letting his youngest son go.

They left with twice the silver they had taken before (to repay what had been put back in their packs when they left Egypt before and to buy more food). They also took gifts of honey, nuts, and spices for the governor. When they arrived in Egypt, they found themselves invited to the governor's house to dine. They didn't know what to expect from the grand vizier of Egypt, and when Joseph entered the room, they bowed low before him. Joseph was so moved by the sight of his younger brother, Benjamin, that he had to leave the room to cry and compose himself. Joseph dined apart from them according to Egyptian custom,¹ and had the brothers seated before him in order of their age, which amazed them. Curiously, Benjamin was served five times as much food as the others.

The next morning, as they were preparing to leave, Joseph devised a final test for his brothers. He had his silver cup put in Benjamin's sack, framing him as a thief in order to take him prisoner. As they set out, Joseph had all of them arrested, and when the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack, they were speechless with fear and despair. Judah spoke for himself and his brothers. Offering no excuse or denial, he simply plead with this great Egyptian

official for the life and freedom of Benjamin. He explained the story of his father's grief over the loss of Benjamin's brother, and assured him that grief would kill Jacob if Benjamin did not return. Judah begged to stay in Benjamin's stead to save him from seeing their father in misery once again.²

In a moment, Joseph sent all attendants from the room, and in his boyhood tongue revealed himself to his brothers. He opened his heart and wept so loudly that word about it spread to Pharaoh's house. Joseph calmed his brothers' fears and relieved their guilt about the terrible deed of selling him into slavery. He helped them see that God had allowed him to go to Egypt to prepare a way of deliverance for Jacob's family during the terrible famine to come. God was preserving this family that He had promised would one day be a source of blessing to the whole world.

After this, Joseph instructed his brothers to bring their father and families to the land of Goshen³ in Egypt where he could take care of them, explaining that the famine would last another five years. Joseph sent wagons with them for the return trip to Egypt, and filled them with grain, gifts and supplies of all kinds.

This story stands as one of the most dramatic biblical accounts as well as a vivid picture of God's ability to redeem the worst of situations. The sovereign hand of God used the ugly crimes against Joseph to ultimately reunite and restore Jacob's fractured family and deliver His chosen people from famine.

Read Genesis 43:1-14.

1. What transpired before Jacob allowed his sons to return to Egypt (43:1-10)?

2. How did Jacob send off his sons? Where was his confidence in their safe return (43:11-14)?

Read Genesis 43:15-34.

3. a. When Joseph had his brothers over to dine at his home, what was their fear (43:15-22)?

b. What was the steward's gracious response (43:23-24)?

4. What verses reflect Joseph's character in Genesis 43:26-34?

Reference: Note 1, *dined apart from them*, p. 169.

Read Genesis 44.

5. What final test did Joseph put before his brothers (44:1-17)?

6. What did Joseph learn about the attitudes of Judah and his brothers from Judah's appeal (44:18-34)? What had changed in 22 years?

Reference: Note 2, *Judah did not want to see the misery*, p. 169.

Read Genesis 45:1-15.

7. What explanation did Joseph give his brothers for God's allowing them to sell him into Egyptian slavery (45:1-11)?

Reference: Note 3, *Goshen*, p. 169.

8. What can we learn about God from Joseph's story?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Controlling Those Emotions

Undoubtedly, Joseph had lots of mixed emotions as he saw his brothers for the first time since they sold him into slavery 20 years earlier. Yet his response opened the way for God's purposes to continue to unfold.

All of us deal with various emotions and at times experience overwhelming circumstances. In this lesson, we will look at biblical truths that can help us control our emotions and express our feelings in a positive way.

1. What emotions can be the most difficult to handle?

2. If uncontrolled, what effects can these emotions have on us: spiritually?

physically?

in relationships?

3. a. What emotions do you think Joseph experienced as he saw his brothers for the first time in 20 years?

b. Joseph's emotional stability came from his commitment to God and a godly lifestyle. How does a relationship with God produce emotional stability?

4. It is healthy for us to express our emotions constructively. When and how did Joseph express emotion in a positive way?

5. a. What is the difference between a reaction and a response?

b. What was necessary in order for Joseph to respond rather than react? What can we learn from him?

6. a. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he." What thoughts produce positive emotions?

b. What keys to controlling our thoughts are found in the following?

Romans 12:2

Philippians 4:6-8

Psalm 1:1-2

7. What disposition does God desire us to have in any situation?

2 Timothy 1:7

Philippians 2:3-4

8. How does God build this mature disposition?

John 14:16-17,26

Reference: Note 6, *Holy Spirit*, p. 36.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Romans 5:3-5

9. a. Emotional disturbances have many root causes. What are some root causes of emotional disturbances according to Galatians 5:19-21?

b. What effects do overcommitment, fatigue, and poor physical health have on our control of emotions?

10. What healthy choices do we continually need to make in order to resist negative pulls on our emotions?

Galatians 5:16,25

Ephesians 4:22-24

Matthew 11:28-30

11. *Optional question:* How do the following instruct us to respond to those who are overcome with negative emotions?

Romans 15:1

Galatians 6:1-2

Hebrews 13:3

12. *Optional question:* It is good to have memorized Scripture which we can call to mind when we come to times of emotional distress. The following are good verses to have memorized at such times. What are the main ideas?

Psalms 23

Romans 8:35-39

John 14:27

1 John 5:4

S U M M A R Y

14. What do you appreciate about Joseph's emotional strength?

15. What are the most important elements of emotional control for you?

16. What emotional challenges are you dealing with today? What thoughts have been helpful to you from your study of Joseph's life and this lesson?

LESSON 4 NOTES

1 *dined apart from them*. Egyptians did not eat with Hebrews, most probably because of ritual or religious reasons (see Exodus 8:26). *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 72

2 *Judah* did not want to see the misery his father had experienced 20 years earlier when told Joseph was dead (37:34-35).

3 *Goshen* was about 40 miles from present-day Cairo and situated in the delta of the Nile. It was the best land in Egypt for herds and flocks and was near Memphis, where Joseph lived.

Lesson 5

JACOB IN EGYPT

Genesis 45:16-47:31

When Pharaoh and his officials heard that Joseph's brothers had come to Egypt, he graciously invited them all to move from Canaan to enjoy every comfort Egypt could give them. The brothers, loaded with gifts and provisions, returned to tell their father Jacob the whole truth.

Jacob was at first stunned, then overjoyed by the news that his much loved son Joseph was not only alive, but prime minister in Egypt. He immediately set out for that land with all his offspring¹ and possessions, stopping only to worship at Beersheba.² There, in a vision, God promised to greatly increase Jacob's descendants in Egypt and return them someday to Canaan.³ He also revealed that Joseph, whom Jacob had not seen in 23 years, would close Jacob's eyes when he died.

When they all approached Goshen, where they had been directed to go, Joseph arrived in his chariot to meet his father. All Joseph could do was embrace his father and cry for a long time. It was a day of comfort and rejoicing that ended many years of grief for Jacob. Obvious to all was the fact that God had guided their family through difficult and baffling times to a good end.

After this, Joseph helped his brothers approach Pharaoh to request Goshen, the best grazing land in Egypt, where they were permitted to settle. In the remaining years of the famine, people all over Egypt and Canaan bought grain from Joseph, first with money, then with livestock, then with land. Finally they sold themselves into slavery to Pharaoh. It became a truly

feudal system where serfs paid 20% of their produce in exchange for more seed. In the midst of this, Joseph's relatives thrived and multiplied. God was building Israel's nation in Egypt as He had promised.

In his old age, after 17 years of peace and plenty in Egypt, Jacob called Joseph to himself and had Joseph promise to take him back to Canaan for burial. Obviously, he fully believed that in time God would fulfill his promise to take his family back to Canaan to inherit that land. As Jacob "worshiped God as he leaned on his staff," there was joy in his heart as he contemplated the faithfulness of God. Years of life and growing in faith had made great changes in this man's character.

Read Genesis 45:16-28.

1. How did Pharaoh and his officials respond to Joseph's family in Egypt (45:16-24)?
2. What was Jacob's reaction to the incredible news his sons brought him (45:25-28)?

Read Genesis 46:1-27.

3. What prediction did Jacob receive from God at Beersheba, his father Isaac's former center of worship (46:1-4)?

Reference: Note 2, *Beersheba*, p. 177.

4. God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would become a great nation. What does Genesis 46:5-27 show regarding this promise?

Reference: Note 3, *return to Canaan*, p. 177.

Read Genesis 46:28-47:12.

5. Describe Joseph's reunion with Jacob (46:28-30).
6. How did Joseph manage the assimilation of Jacob's family into the Egyptian arena (46:31-47:12)?

Reference: Note 4, *all shepherds are detestable*, p. 177.

Read Genesis 47:13-31.

7. a. Israel is referred to as a nation for the first time in Genesis 47:27. What was God's purpose in allowing Joseph to be taken to Egypt, and how does it become clearer here (47:13-27)?
- b. *Optional Question:* How is Joseph similar to Christ in His role as Savior?
8. What did Jacob request of Joseph, and what did this show about his faith (47:28-30)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

The Beauty of Age

We have followed the life of Jacob from the day he was born hanging onto his twin brother's heel. Through years of deceitfulness and selfishness, painful growth and hardship, spiritual immaturity and then maturity, we finally see him enjoy 17 years of peace in Egypt. As he approached his

death, he was a man of faith, clearly committed to God's good purposes and ready to meet his heavenly Father.

Most of us follow a similar pilgrimage through life and one day realize our time left in this world is short. There are no easy answers for the complex problems that can come with aging. But if we face the challenges of our last years with a godly spirit, we can continue to create a healthy and constructive atmosphere around us.

In many ways, western culture puts a premium on being young. Certainly youth has its advantages, but Jacob's final years show that some inner qualities come only with age. Let's look at some of the qualities that can give us increased beauty as we get older.

1. a. What character traits does the older Jacob have over the younger Jacob? In what ways did he change over his lifetime?

b. What brought about these changes?

2. a. Proverbs 20:29 speaks of gray hair being the splendor of the old. What does this symbolize?

b. Compare young people with old people in terms of character development.

3. a. What is the basis for lasting beauty according to Proverbs 31:30?

Note: *Fear of the Lord* refers to *reverent trust*.

b. What nurtures lasting beauty in young or old according to Psalm 119:9-16?

4. a. Ironically, what mindset makes us fit to live a godly life at any age according to Luke 18:16-17?

b. What characteristics are being referred to here?

5. a. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit gives us *life* at any age. What does Romans 8:6 say about this?

b. Why is this important to know in our later years?

6. To follow after the Spirit means enthusiastic pursuit of His work. What examples do you see in the lives of these older biblical characters?

Caleb: Joshua 14:10b-12

Anna: Luke 2:36-37

Paul: Philippians 3:12-14

7. a. How was Moses' life described at the end after leading the nation of Israel for 40 years? Deuteronomy 34:7,10-12

b. What was the prayer of Moses' life according to:

Psalm 90:1-2

Psalm 90:10

Psalm 90:12

Psalm 90:17

8. What attitudes can create an unpleasant disposition in old age?

9. What choices can overcome negative attitudes and exude inner beauty?

Philippians 2:4

Philippians 4:8

Proverbs 18:15

Colossians 3:13

Colossians 3:16-17

10. What biblical promises can overcome fear of illness or death?

Isaiah 41:10

Isaiah 46:4

John 11:25

11. What does God care about wherever we are in life?

1 Samuel 16:7

Micah 6:8

S U M M A R Y

12. a. Why might your greatest potential for beauty develop in your final years?

b. What can keep you young at heart?

13. a. What character qualities do you want to possess as you grow older?

b. Perhaps you might want to take a moment to ask God to help you develop these.

LESSON 5 NOTES

1 *offspring*. Jacob had 70 direct descendants (46:26-27), quite a number for one grandfather!

2 *Beersheba*. Both Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac, had also worshiped at Beersheba (Genesis 21:33; 26:23-25). In addition to worship, Jacob probably was acknowledging the family calling and asking God's consent to leave Canaan and go to Egypt. God gave this in a vision at night (Genesis 46:2-4).

3 *return to Canaan*. God had revealed the 400-year exile in Egypt and the return to Canaan to Jacob's grandfather Abraham many years earlier (Genesis 15:13-14).

4 *all shepherds are detestable* (46:34). The Egyptians looked on shepherds as gypsies. The segregation that took place here allowed the Hebrews to maintain their own language, traditions and cohesion during their 400 years in Egyptian bondage. See also Note 3, *Goshen*, p. 169.

Lesson 6

THE BLESSINGS OF JACOB

Genesis 48-49

Before his death, Jacob adopted Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. In essence, this gave Joseph the double portion birthright in the family and instantly gave Joseph's sons equal status with Jacob's first two sons, Reuben and Simeon. It also protected Joseph's sons from being absorbed into their native Egyptian culture, which would have precluded Joseph from inheritance in the promises of God for Israel.

As Joseph brought his sons to be blessed by Jacob¹ before his death, Jacob predicted Ephraim would be superior to his older brother Manasseh. Jacob then blessed Joseph, referring to the God of his forefathers, the God who shepherded him, and the "Angel" who had delivered him from all harm. Later in Joseph's blessing, Jacob spoke of "the Mighty One of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel." Through the many mistakes and heartaches of his life, Jacob had grown to know God in ways his forefathers perhaps had not.²

Jacob then called each of his twelve sons in turn to his bedside for final words of blessing, censure, or curse. Each of the twelve would be a founding father of the twelve tribes of Israel, and Jacob prophesied to each one something about the future of their tribe that in many cases had to do with their present character. Most of these prophecies³ were fulfilled several hundred years later after the Israelites had taken over the promised land of Canaan.

Reuben, his firstborn, had forfeited his birthright because of his immoral act in Genesis 35:22. Reuben's descendants would experience turbulence and indecisiveness rather than excelling as they might have done. Simeon and Levi were cursed for their fierce anger and violence and would be dispersed in Israel.⁴ Judah's tribe would be superior, enjoying wealth and producing many kings in Israel.⁵ Zebulun would have access to the sea and trade. The tribe of Dan would be very dangerous to its foes, but would never be strong spiritually. Gad would continually be attacked by desert tribes in the land of Canaan and would protect the nation of Israel. Asher would be prosperous and produce delicacies for kings' tables. Naphtali would love freedom and bear some eloquent spiritual leaders of Israel. Benjamin, described as a fierce and cruel wolf, had descendants such as Ehud and Saul who were warlike and ruthless.

Jacob's greatest praise was given Joseph (49:22-26), whose vision and moral and spiritual strength were exemplary. As a son, brother, slave and administrator, he demonstrated an unwavering loyalty to God. Jacob predicted that bitter jealousy and hostility would be directed toward him and his offspring, but that God would give them certain victory. Joseph would always be "a prince among his brothers," meaning "one set apart."

In his last words, Jacob instructed the rest of his sons, as he had Joseph earlier, to bury his remains in Canaan alongside Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah in the place Abraham had purchased. Jacob then breathed his last, as had his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham, with the assurance that the God who had faithfully directed his life would continue to build a nation from Abraham's offspring, a nation that would someday inhabit Canaan and bring blessing to the entire world.

Read Genesis 48.

1. What did Jacob do with Joseph's sons, and how did this affect their share of the inheritance promised Jacob by God (48:1-7)?

2. a. What references to God's character did Jacob make as he blessed Joseph and his sons (48:8-16)? What had produced these understandings in Jacob?

Reference: Note 2, *Jacob's faith*, p. 185.

- b. What did God lead Jacob to do that Joseph initially protested (48:17-20)?

Reference: Note 1, *Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh*, p. 185.

3. As with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God now chose Ephraim over his older brother to carry out His purposes. What might this tell us about God's choices?

Read Genesis 49:1-21.

4. What precluded blessing on Jacob's first three sons: Reuben, Simeon, and Levi (49:3-7; 34; 35:22)?

References: Note 3, *Jacob's prophecies*, and Note 4, *Simeon and Levi dispersed*, p. 185.

5. What predictions were made regarding Judah's offspring (49:8-12)? How was the Messiah alluded to here?

Reference: Note 5, *a lion's cub, O Judah*, p. 185.

Read Genesis 49:22-33.

6. What past actions brought a special blessing on Joseph (49:22-26)?

7. a. In his blessing, Joseph was described as stable yet flexible. Where did we see this in his life?

b. How did Jacob describe God as he pondered Joseph's life (49:24-25)?

8. What faith was demonstrated by Jacob's last request (48:21; 49:29-32)?
What present circumstances made this an issue of faith?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Confronting Death and Pain

Joseph hurt deeply over the death of his father. Jacob had probably shown him the greatest love of anyone over his lifetime, and had no doubt introduced him to faith in God. At any rate, nothing could have prepared Joseph for his death.

Most of us will grieve at some point over the loss of a loved one or when facing our own death. The Bible speaks about the pain of death. Genesis 2 and 3 explain death's origin in the rebellious choices of man. The good news is that God has provided full redemption for our rebellion and a life to come where death is "swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:53).

Let's look at some biblical perspectives that offer relief and hope when confronting death and pain.

1. What did Joseph do upon the death of his father (Genesis 50:1)?
2. What emotions have you experienced when coping with the loss of someone you loved?

3. Although it can seem we may never get beyond the pain of the loss, what do these verses promise?

Psalm 34:18

1 Peter 5:10

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

4. What perspectives on death are recorded in the following?

Psalm 23:4 (David)

Philippians 1:21-23 (Paul)

5. What fact is stated in the following?

Hebrew 9:27

Romans 14:10c-12

6. In light of the judgment we will all face, what encouragement is offered in these verses for those who have put their faith in Christ?

John 11:25

John 14:1-3

Romans 5:1

Romans 8:1-2

7. How is our life on earth described in these verses?

Hebrews 11:13,16 (referring to men of faith)

8. What *phrases* about our victory over death through Christ are recorded in the following?

1 Peter 1:3-4

1 Corinthians 15:53-57

9. Often we fear a long illness or the loss of a child or spouse more than we fear death. What choices do the following verses encourage us to make?

Proverbs 3:5-6

Matthew 6:34

1 Peter 5:7

10. God also hates death because it cost Him his only Son's life to overcome it. What do the following verses reveal about God's feeling toward death?

John 11:35-38

Psalm 116:15

S U M M A R Y

11. What realities about death in this lesson are most meaningful to you?

12. Is there a loss you are facing now? What biblical principles help you cope with this loss?

LESSON 6 NOTES

1 *Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh* is recorded in Hebrews 11:21 as a great act of faith which showed he believed in God's promises for his

descendants. He was making sure Joseph's sons received a part in the promised land of Canaan.

Several hundred years later, in line with Jacob's prophecy, Ephraim became the most powerful tribe in the northern kingdom of Israel, which was sometimes referred to as Ephraim in Old Testament writings.

2 *Jacob's faith.* "One aspect of Jacob's faith is seen in the names he uses to refer to God (48:15-16). *The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked* (48:15) recalls that the Lord steadied Jacob's faith in many crises (28:13-15; 32:9; 46:3). Jacob's long years as a *shepherd* described in 31:38-40 made him appreciate God's shepherding care for him (48:15). The term *angel* (48:16) recalls God's visible encounters with him at important turning points, especially at Peniel (32:22-32)." Charles & Anne Hummel, *Genesis God's Creative Call*, p. 111.

In this passage, Jacob showed his faith in the ancestral, personal, and redemptive aspects of God.

3 *Jacob's prophecies* came to pass in specific ways more than 400 years later after the nation of Israel took over the promised land of Canaan around 1880 B.C. Their fulfillment also took place *after* the writing of Genesis by Moses around 1450 B.C. Here we have one of the clear indications of the divine inspiration of the Bible.

4 *Simeon and Levi dispersed.* The prophecy of Genesis 49:5-7 was fulfilled when the Simeonites were later swallowed up into the tribe of Judah in Canaan. The Levites served as priests for the nation, having no territory assigned to them.

5 *a lion's cub, O Judah* (49:9). The term describing Judah is symbolic of sovereignty, strength, and courage. Judah did, in fact, become predominant among the twelve tribes; David and Solomon were his offspring. His greatest descendant, Jesus Christ, is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" in Revelation 5:5. The prophecy of Genesis 49:10 cannot be clearly translated but is traditionally understood to be Messianic, initially fulfilled in David and ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. *NIV Study Bible*, p. 79.

Lesson 7

JOSEPH'S LAST YEARS

Genesis 50

After drawing his sons near for final words, Jacob breathed his last. Joseph threw himself on his much loved father in grief, weeping and kissing him. After the embalming, Joseph arranged with the Pharaoh to take Jacob, as he had requested, to be buried in the cave of Abraham in Canaan. Mourning followed for 70 days, and Jacob's family and all of Pharaoh's officials went to Canaan for the burial.

After returning to Egypt, Joseph's brothers feared what he might do to them now that their father was dead. Joseph wept when he received a contrived message from them claiming that their father had requested Joseph forgive them for their cruel act of selling him into Egyptian bondage years before. After this, they came and threw themselves at his feet, offering themselves to be his slaves. It seems they still did not comprehend his forgiveness.

In response, Joseph spoke kindly to them, assuring them of his continued care and reminding them that the hand of God had been in all that had happened. "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (50:20). His statement held a description of the redeeming grace of God in the midst of human error.

At 110 years old, Joseph died in Egypt. He had made his brothers promise to keep his coffin and carry it back with them when they returned to Canaan. Four hundred years later, as the Israelites journeyed back to Canaan some

three million strong, Joseph's coffin was kept in the camp. It was a constant reminder of God's sovereign hand working out His purposes for Israel.

After Joseph's death, a new pharaoh would come to power who, not knowing Joseph, would bring cruel slavery upon the rapidly growing Israelite nation in Egypt. But after 400 years, God would raise up a man named Moses to take the burden of leadership and guide these people out of Egyptian tyranny.

The eternal God, who stands outside of time and holds all power and wisdom, would continue to move toward His promise to make Abraham's offspring a nation that would one day bring blessing to the whole world.

Read Genesis 50:1-14.

1. How did Joseph show adoration and esteem for his father Jacob (50:1-14)?
2. What do you see in this story about Joseph's way of dealing with the Pharaoh's court? What continued to be their response to Joseph?

Read Genesis 50:15-26.

3. What did Joseph's brothers fear, and what did they try to do about it (50:15-18)?
4. What do you think might have caused Joseph to weep about their message?

5. What was Joseph's attitude toward his brothers and their past history (50:19-20)?

6. How did Joseph show forgiveness and love (50:21)?

7. What blessings did Joseph experience before his death (50:22-23)?

8. a. How was Joseph's last request similar to that of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob before him (50:24-26)? What did all these men believe?

b. How does Hebrews 11:1 describe their faith, and what example is here for believers today?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

The Power of Forgiveness

Genesis closes (37-50) with one of the most moving stories in the Bible. After Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by hostile and jealous brothers, a famine reunited the family after 23 years of separation. Joseph, who had become Pharaoh's right hand man, had all his father's descendants move to Egypt where he could care for them. He freely forgave his brothers, believing God had used their actions to put him in a position to help many people—especially his family—through the famine.

After his father's death, however, his brothers still did not trust Joseph or appreciate his kindly spirit toward them. In the face of this attitude, Joseph again chose to forgive them and abundantly meet their needs.

So it is with God's love. In spite of our mistakes, rebellion, lack of trust, or ungratefulness, God continues to pursue us. The pages of Genesis show God moving patiently and steadily toward creating a nation that would bring blessing to the entire world. Israel would preserve the Scriptures and the knowledge of the one true God. Most importantly, from their midst would come Jesus, the Messiah, who would take the death penalty for the rebellion of man that originated in Genesis 2 and 3. Because of God's forgiving spirit, we can know Him personally as we choose to open our hearts to Him.

In concluding our study of Genesis, it is appropriate that we make some final observations about one of the most powerful biblical principles--forgiveness.

1. What hardships had Joseph's brothers inflicted on his life?
What caused him hurt in Genesis 50?

2. What focus did Joseph have in his life that allowed him to forgive his brothers?

Genesis 45:2-8; 50:19-21

3. God's perfect love is described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Which characteristics of this unconditional love are evident in Joseph's dealings with his brothers?

4. As you think back over your study of Genesis, what have you observed about God's love and character?

5. What do the following verses say about God's forgiveness?

Psalm 103:8-12

1 John 1:9

6. What did God's freedom to forgive sinful man cost Him according to the following? What is the benefit to us who believe?

Romans 3:22-25a

Romans 6:23

Romans 5:8

7. How does God's forgiveness affect our lives? In what ways is God able to meet needs in your life because of His forgiveness in Christ?

8. At times it seems impossible for us to forgive the hurts inflicted on us by others. What sources of power to extend God's love and forgiveness are found in the following verses?

Romans 5:3-5

Ephesians 3:16-21

Ephesians 4:32-5:1

9. a. What positive results did Joseph's forgiveness bring about?

b. What positive results can our forgiveness bring to our lives and the lives of those around us?

S U M M A R Y

10. What stands out to you the most about God and your relationship to God as you look back over your study of Joseph's life?

11. What stands out to you the most about God and your relationship to Him as you think back over your study of Genesis?

12. What is your greatest desire for your own life as you complete this study? Make this your prayer.

Afterward

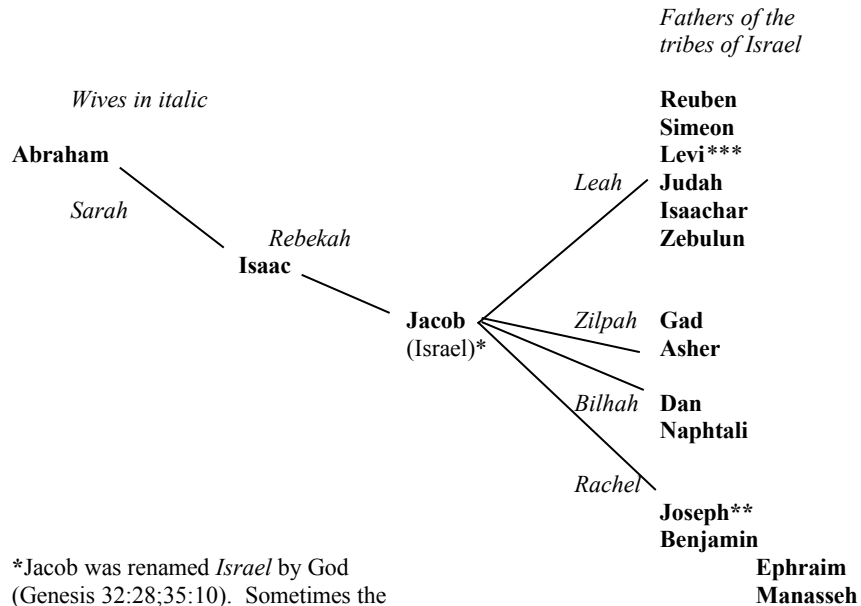
Moses wrote Genesis to explain to the Israelites their roots as they journeyed back to the promised land of Canaan from Egypt after 400 years of bondage. Genesis helped them understand, as we can today, how man fell, but how God immediately began to work out a plan to bring people back to Himself. God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

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

Easy Breakdown of Genesis

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

The Tribes of Israel



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

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

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

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